

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: as an individual
 On behalf of an organization X

Name: Siobhan Fitzpatrick
Job Title: Chief Executive
Organisation: NIPPA – the early years organization
Address: 6c Wildflower Way
 Belfast
 BT12 6TA

Tel: 028 90662825
Fax:
Email: siobhanf@nippa.org

Supporting Families

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

YES

NO X

If no, please state the reasons why.

The aims for parents should also include that parents should be able to have their voice heard and their wishes for their children articulated and taken into account.

Include aim in relation to partnership working.

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

YES

NO X

If no, please state the reasons why.

The vision should also state that we value childhood in its own right.

The vision should also state that children / young people lead happy lives.

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

YES

NO X

If no, please state the reasons why.

No2: change to:

Approaches to developing policies and services for children, young people **and families** should be holistic and integrated recognising the positive potential of parents as first carers and educators of their children

No 3: change to:

The needs and perspectives of the children and families are **of primary importance** in the planning and shaping of service delivery decisions.

No 8: change to:

Encourage **support** and empower communities to have a say in the design and delivery of services.

Add in:

The participation and voice of the child should be central in all decision making.

The definition of family should come earlier in the document and should be more explicit. It should clearly state that the term “family” is used to cover all groupings of children and adults including children in care, lone parents, step-families, children looked after by grandparents, siblings or other relations, adopted families and children with same-sex parents

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 X

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

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 X

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

There needs to be a greater focus on early intervention; this intervention requires to be planned and coordinated to ensure focus, continuity, less confusion for families. Early intervention is not necessarily short-term crisis response but may require longer-term intervention.

Priority Themes

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

YES X

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 X

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

Agree promotion of awareness of HV is good, but what about hard to reach families / families that do not have access to Sure Start? There needs to be universal provision / access for parents from all areas, but particularly families in rural areas or perceived 'affluent' areas.

We support your aims in relation to parenting, the provision of parenting empowerment programmes, quality standards and the establishing of parenting networks. We would also urge you to support existing parenting networks through the development of the services they provide. For example parent and toddler groups which provide excellent opportunities for the development of mutually supportive and reciprocal relationships between parents

We support the aims in relation to family mediation and would urge you to ensure that appropriate funding is made available to support these services.

NIPPA recognises the importance of promoting the development of parenting education programmes within a quality standards framework, however the focus should be on promoting better outcomes rather than on addressing deficits.

It is not appropriate to link parenting education solely to better outcome in terms of educational achievement and a reduction in problem behaviour.

There need to be appropriate ways of engaging with "hard-to-reach" families whose parenting styles and approaches do not support positive outcomes. It is our view that the actions on Positive Parenting and the alternatives to physical punishment should be incorporated under a single Parenting Education heading.

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

YES X

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 X

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

We agree that parents need to be able to access up-to-date and accurate and evidence based information. Any information that is to be made available needs to be available to all parents, including those who do not have access to the internet.

Any regional helpline should not supersede work that has already been undertaken in this area by the voluntary sector.

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

YES X

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 X

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

In terms of helping families engage appropriately with early intervention services and to monitor effectiveness, it is our view that a key-carer service is required which will help families to access services, monitor their use and assess their quality and usefulness. This service should be based on a regionally agreed model.

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

YES X

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 X

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 X

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 X

NO

If no, please state the reasons why.

NIPPA supports the development of new Children's Centres, we believe that the services offered within them should be based on international models of good practice and build upon the existing Sure Start and pre school provision already in existence. NIPPA would urge you to ensure that services are made available to as many families as possible. The investment in Children's Centres should not be solely in terms of a capital investment in terms of new-builds.

What needs to be better defined is the integration of services in a more planned and coordinated way at a local level building on existing infrastructures in Health/Social Services, Education and Community sectors. The link to £61 million investment is misleading given the amount of funding directly available under both Renewing Communities (4 Children Centres) and Families Matter (2 Children Centres).

It is our view that the location of responsibility for SureStart, Early Years and Child Care with Education to one Department may be a positive step. There remain concerns about the culture of collaboration experienced to date with the Department of Education which may hinder the development of real and meaningful process of collaboration.

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 X

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 X

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 X

If no, please state the reasons why.

There needs to be adequate resorting for all elements of this work.

Additional Comments

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

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS