

Families Matter: Response document

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

We broadly agree with the aims however we feel the emphasis is placed specifically on parents, to in some ways control children without due consideration of wider social and environmental factors and impacts as reflected in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory Appendix 1. Lester & Russell's Manchester Circles, also based on ecological theory extends the perspective to look at the play needs of children.

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

There is need to acknowledge that Principle 1 'safe and secure' should also take into account the importance of the need for children and young people to experience risk in their childhood.

4. The document lists 7 outcomes from 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?

There needs to be a more direct focus on family support and link services. There are also many other policy links which need to be incorporated e.g 'shared future', neighbourhood renewal, mental health, rather than focusing specifically on the children and young peoples strategy.

"Making a positive contribution" outcome focuses on the negative aspects of anti-social behaviour - a suggestion would be that this is reworded to focus on positive attributes of children's contribution to society instead of labelling factors.

The focus needs to give a holistic approach rather than an educational focus there needs to be emphasis placed on personal and social development and life skills and also families contribution to the community in which they live.

Children 'achieving their full potential' needs to take full consideration of barriers faced by families. Also for children to reach their full potential then strategies need to include them and truly listen to their voices and involve them in planning.

The 'being healthy' outcomes should be more positive to include enjoyable ways you as a family can lead healthy lifestyle e.g. social aspects of keeping fit, benefits of play as a family.

There needs to be more emphasis placed on parents and children and young people understanding their rights, knowing them and taking responsibility for them.

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?

There needs to be family support also available after a crisis to help families recover through times of stress - incidents such as suicides within peer groups; after criminal activities and court visits etc. Families also need support to recover from impacts which can happen at different stages in children and young people's lives.

There needs to be ongoing support and advice for parents through different stages in their child's life. There needs to be direct services for children at risk and in need. There needs to be investment in these specialist services.

The children centres being introduced need to focus on not only early years but needs to provide services to all ages. It should be the 'hub of the community' to offer support and advice to the community. The children's centres should offer a more therapeutic approach where children's play needs are being met and parents receive specialist support and advice.

7. Do you agree the actions suggested in theme 1 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?

It is important to recognise that children learn resilience through play in helping them to deal with many issues. It is also important to recognise that both go hand in hand, the needs of the children need to be met as the parents receive support which will aid effective therapeutic support.

We would suggest when developing a quality standards framework that the quality accreditation scheme needs to take consideration of existing quality frameworks in the childcare sector.

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

These actions do not adequately address this theme. We believe this will not adequately give parents access to information. Regional information services may lose some of the very local information that parents are more likely to access.

10. Do you agree that theme 3 – assessment of need is an appropriate theme?

The assessment of need needs to take into account issues to do with middle childhood.

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

A concern would be that a family may feel labelled if this assessment of need is not carried out appropriately. Also there would need to be assurances that no families miss out in this process. The content of the form would also need to be developed by a steering group with relevant expertise and appropriate terminology would need to be developed.

Consideration needs to be given to transitions of different stages in a child's life, health impact assessment

13. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 4 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?

The childcare partnerships referred to in the document are under threat with the Review of Public Administration. Will this therefore impact on this action and is there an alternative mechanism?

15. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 5 are appropriate actions to take under this theme?

The plan to develop children's centres is positive, although we feel that 6 is an inadequate number for the region of Northern Ireland. There is also a role for school aged childcare and open access play provision that should be incorporated when implementing appropriate services for children. A more appropriate name for these centres is 'Family centres' to incorporate support services and become the 'hub of the community'.

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

- The strategy needs to include issues relating to middle childhood
- Importance of play to support children and families needs to be highlighted
- Continuous support is required through transition periods for families
- Support the introduction of alternative therapies to support parents during times of stress
- Ethos of community development needs to be further highlighted

- Children's centres-representative of all those they serve in the community 'from cradle to the grave'. Consideration needs to be given to intergenerational work to develop communities
- Family support workers need to have appropriate skills and qualifications. Need to ensure that volunteers are not in families where specialist help is required.