



Southern Health and Social Services Board

Office of the Chief Executive
Direct Line: 028 37 414600

12 April 2007

Mrs Marna Bell
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Family Policy Unit
C4.22 Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3SF

Dear Mrs Bell

Re: 'Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland'

I refer to your letter of 29 January 2007 and attach a response in respect of the above. Apologies for the delay in responding. These comments represent the view of both the Southern Health and Social Services Board and the Southern Childcare Partnership.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Sean McKeever in black ink.

Sean McKeever
Acting Chief Executive

Handwritten signature of Tony Rodgers in black ink.

Tony Rodgers
Chairman, Southern Childcare Partnership



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Chief Executive: Mrs Fionnuala Cook

Chairwoman: Mrs Fionnuala Cook, OBE

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. It may be more appropriate to 'strengthen families to the benefit of children, parents and society' and to encourage parents and carers to value better outcomes for their children.

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

The vision could include childhood being valued, recognition of diverse needs of children and the need for parents and carers to support their children to thrive and be confident.

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

We would suggest that the principles should include children's rights being promoted and that children also need an element of risk in their lives.

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 more emphasis placed on parents and children and young people understanding their rights, knowing them and taking responsibility for them.
- Children achieving their full potential needs to consider barriers faced by parents and should involve them in the planning process.

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 a greater focus on early intervention and may be long or short term.

There needs to be ongoing support for families after a crisis.

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?

Sure Start is targeted at the under 4s in deprived areas, the needs of older children are not addressed in the strategy.

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?

These actions do not adequately address this theme. We believe this will not adequately give parents access to information. The issue of rurality is not addressed.

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

Yes

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

UNOCINI will provide a Common Assessment framework, in order for this to be most effective all workers need to be skilled up appropriately. Families will need facilities to signpost and help them to access services and should be regionally agreed.

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?

The plan to develop children's centres is positive, although it must be stated that this is not a capital investment to producing new buildings.

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?

The needs of children with a disability could have more emphasis.

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?

- Ethos of Community Development needs to be further highlighted
- Early intervention needs to be given its proper place
- Too many references to Every Child Matters
- Family support workers need to be properly trained and qualified