

## Consultation Questions

Please respond to the consultation document by e-mail, letter or fax.

Responses should be sent to:

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Responses must be received no later than **30th March 2007**.

(Please tick a box)

I am responding  as an individual  on behalf of an organisation  
representing the Western Area Children and Young People's Committee and the  
Western Area Childcare Partnership

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## **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.

We would suggest that the aims should be linked to better Outcomes for Children and might read:-

- “To encourage all parents and carers to value better outcomes for their children.
- To empower and assist parents and carers to be confident and responsible in helping their children to reach their potential.
- To promote integrated partnership working and develop and deliver seamless and outcome focussed services for families and children”.

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

**YES**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

The vision should be linked to the shared vision outlined in the 10-year strategy, “Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge”. We would suggest that the vision might read,

*“All parents and carers in Northern Ireland will be able to support their children & young people to thrive and look forward with confidence to the future”.*

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.

Although we support the principles, we feel that they would need to be more clearly and succinctly described. We would also suggest that "Children's Rights being promoted and protected" should be included.

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.

The document refers to 7 Outcomes from the 10 Year Strategy (while there are only 6). We suggest that the document uses the 6 Outcomes as outlined in Our Children and Young People – Our Strategy.

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.

There needs to be a greater focus on early intervention. Intervention at an early stage 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

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.

The actions referred to appear to relate only to current initiatives and do not reflect the contributions of others and the need to forward plan eg Midwives whose input at a pre-natal stage is extremely valuable.

- It would be better to consider the actions in relation to a continuum of care from pre-natal on. The need to “promote awareness of the role of Health Visitors” is not a key action for this strategy. Their contribution overall in the context of other professionals needs to be balanced, reflecting the input from eg Speech & Language Therapists, Play Workers, Early Years Specialists
- We recognise the importance of promoting the development of parenting education programmes within a quality standards framework. The focus should be on promoting better outcomes rather than on addressing deficits. (The reference in 5.14 links parenting education to better outcomes solely in terms of educational achievement and a reduction in problem behaviour). It is recognised that there is a need to develop 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.
- We welcome the inclusion of specific support in relation to family mediation and relationship issues. It is our view that there should be a specific action plan in relation to the training of mediators and the time-scale should reflect the level of training required. The actions in relation to this and the development of Child Contact Centres need to be more specific in terms of planned targets with adequate resourcing.

**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.

- The actions identified are limited in terms of accessibility of services. The issue of rurality, as one example, needs to be seriously recognised in terms of the equality agenda.
  - We would suggest that the issue of fathers (5.29) would be better included under Parental Support (Theme 1) as a specific action.
  - The idea of a Regional Information Database is a useful one. We would refer to the current development of a geo-mapping system by one of the CAWT Projects involving the Western and Southern Boards. This system is being introduced in the CAWT Region and is being extended throughout the Republic of Ireland. It will capture need against agreed indicators and also a supply-side information system in relation to support services available for all children from electoral Ward to regional.
  - It is our opinion that the specification of a “fully responsive” help line needs to be clearly considered in terms of its role – signposting and/or counselling or advice.

**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.

- It is recognised that UNOCINI will provide a Common Assessment framework. This needs to be underpinned by a skilling up of workers at all levels in relation to early identification of need, neglect and risk.
  - 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**

**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**

**NO**

If no, please state the reasons why.

This development of Protocols needs to link with the review of Regional Safeguarding Policies and Procedures but with a particular focus on early intervention services and the role of community/voluntary sectors in supporting the protocols. The barriers to open communication based on fears of Data Protection and Human Rights legislation will need to be addressed with a child-centred, child-rights focus.

**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.

We understand that the requirement to cooperate will be statutorily defined. It is important to consider the development of a collaborative approach at two levels:-

- i) Integrated planning and commissioning of services and
- ii) Integrated planning for individual children/families.
- iii)

Paragraph 5.48 should be strengthened in terms of its context and references as it appears to be central to this theme. We would be concerned that the reference to Children's Centres is confusing and may be misconstrued. It is not, nor should it be 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

If yes, please state the reasons why.

However, it is our view that the explicit needs of children with a disability and young carers could be more strongly referenced.
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- 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.

However, the strategy will require to be adequately resourced.

### **Additional Comments**

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

The introduction is too protracted/drawn out – too much reference to Every Child Matters which relates to England and Wales. There is a need to include carers as well as parents.

There is a general welcome for the development of a strategy to support families in Northern Ireland in terms of Prevention and Early Intervention. However, we feel that the opportunity has been missed to give early intervention its proper place in terms of an integrated Family Support model, properly resourced with an agreed model of delivery across the Region.