



NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCILS

Response to DHSSPS Consultation

***‘A Strategy for Children in Need:
Developing the Strategy’***

November 2003

A Strategy for Children in Need; Developing the Strategy

Response to the DHSSPS Consultation

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The four Health and Social Service Councils (Councils) welcome this opportunity to make initial comments on the Department's plans to develop a strategy for children in need. We note the plan to hold a number of consultation seminars as part of the next stage of the consultation process and anticipate that individual Councils will wish to participate in those seminars, particularly where the topics relate to the organisations' current work programmes.

2 PROPOSED STRATEGY

- 2.1 The Health and Social Services Councils see the production of this strategy as a welcome development, and agree that it should complement the broader strategy for children being brought forward by OFMDFM. While the OFMDFM strategy deals with the needs and rights of all children and young people we believe the strategy for children in need should have significant influence on the overall strategy. The relationship between the Children in Need Strategy and the emerging 20-Year Strategy for the HPSS also needs to be considered.
- 2.2 Councils welcome the proposal to develop models of best practice for the involvement of children and young people in planning processes. In this respect the Department may wish to draw on the expertise developed as part of the Boards' Children's Planning Process (CSP), and the innovative work of voluntary organisations such as Save the Children NI and the NI Children's Law Centre on young people's participation in decision making processes.
- 2.3 We believe that involving young people in decision making should relate to all HPSS services and not just to decision making regarding children's services. We also take the view that processes to support young people's involvement should be integrated with mechanisms for involving service users generally. The anticipated restructuring of local HPSS bodies will result in

- new arrangements to carry out the functions currently included in the remit of the Councils. It is important that the new structures should allow for an improved focus on involving young people as service users. A number of the Councils are currently seeking funding to develop a programme of work focusing on young service users.
- 2.4 Reference is made to the comparison between the levels of expenditure per head of the under 18 population in Northern Ireland and England. The strategy should address the issue of the overall lack of investment but should also take cognisance of the disparities, for reasons other than assessed need, between different Board areas within the region. In some Board areas expenditure on childcare services is close to 50% of the English figure.
- 2.5 We support the notion that the strategy should be underpinned by a core set of regional objectives and a consistent approach to the assessment of need and planning of services. The variation in investment levels referred to above may point to a lack of consistency among commissioning bodies with regard to assessing the need for children's services.
- 2.6 While we accept that a precise definition of the circumstances where a child or young person should be considered to be 'in need' is neither possible nor desirable. However, we strongly support the need for an agreed assessment model and the suggestion that this should be central to the strategy for children in need.
- 2.7 The *Hardiker et al* framework referred to is a useful model for illustrating the different levels of need for childcare services. The strategy must recognise the inter-relatedness of the range of services which meet these needs and the fact that children in need and their families will be supported by services from across the spectrum. We believe that the full potential of the CSP processes has not been realised because the local interagency approach was not supported by inter-departmental action, and there were few examples of innovative projects attracting joint funding. While the DHSSPS has the lead role in relation to children in need we believe this strategy should also emphasise the inter-Departmental dimension to meeting the overall needs of this group of young people.

- 2.8 Councils support the proposal for a Regional Forum for Children in Need, but in line with our comments above believe it needs to incorporate a strong cross-departmental perspective to be fully effective.

CONCLUSION

The Health and Social Services Councils welcome the approach to developing the Strategy for Children in Need as outlined in the consultation document. We strongly support the proposal to involve young people in the development of the strategy but believe this can be best achieved as part of process of involving young people in HPSS decision making processes generally. We believe that services for children in need should be planned as part of the spectrum of services for all children and their families. This relationship of this strategy to the broader OFMDFM strategy should be emphasised thus highlighting contribution which Departments other than the DHSSPS can make to meeting the needs of children in need.

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On behalf of the four NI HSS Councils
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