

4Children response to consultation on the draft Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17

1. To what extent do you agree that the draft Strategy achieves a good balance between tackling poverty now and tackling the drivers of intergenerational poverty?

4Children believes that, in its current form, the draft Strategy will not be sufficient to meet the scale of the challenge to tackling and eradicating child poverty. As it stands, the consultation document reads largely as a re-statement of existing policy commitments, rather than setting out the far more ambitious approach we believe is needed.

“Tackling poverty now” and “tackling the drivers of intergenerational poverty” are two inter-related and interconnected problems that need to be addressed in a holistic and co-ordinated way. Early action needs to be at the heart of this, as tackling problems at an early stage to prevent them from becoming far more significant crises later on not only has a beneficial impact now, but also improves outcomes over the long-term. 4Children has been at the heart of developing work and research around early intervention, including being responsible for establishing the Early Intervention Foundation¹.

The most effective interventions tackle both poverty today and its intergenerational drivers alongside each other, and adopt a “whole family” approach. We believe that children and families should be at the heart of our society and actively involved in shaping the decisions about the services they need. This has been developed and delivered by 4Children, and involves the provision of co-ordinated help for families to tackle the problem they face in an integrated way, as opposed to the piecemeal approach more usually experienced.

4Children has a unique perspective in delivering family services in a holistic, life-changing way. The “whole family” model developed by 4Children sets out the approach that we believe will make a real difference to the lives of these vulnerable children:

1. By ‘breaking the cycle’ of intergenerational problems through holistic family support
2. Through early intervention, before problems turn into crisis
3. By offering “turnaround” support for those families and individuals in crisis (which is an inevitable point, even with early intervention measures in place, some will reach)

There is strong evidence of the social and economic benefits of this approach and we believe it should be firmly embedded in final published Strategy, identifying, implementing and appropriately resourcing specific early action and early intervention measures which have the capacity to drive reductions in the level of child poverty.

¹ Early Intervention Foundation www.eif.org.uk

2. Considering the current fiscal climate, what is your view of the actions set out in the draft Strategy?

We welcome the Strategy's continued commitment to the goal of eradicating child poverty in the UK by 2020. However, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's 2013 *"State of the Nation"* report estimates that on current trends the targets set in the Child Poverty Act 2010 for eradicating child poverty by 2020 will not be achieved, with as many as two million children remaining in relative poverty² by that time. As we set on in answer to Question 1, the draft child poverty strategy as presented does little to reassure that this trend will be reversed.

By the time this Strategy ends in 2017 there will be only three further years to deliver the objective of eradicating child poverty. The final published Strategy for 2014-17 therefore must retain the flexibility to enhance and build-in additional actions, particularly as the fiscal climate improves and allows additional measures for which additional, and new, Government expenditure would be needed and could be allocated in future years. For example, this could include increasing the value of the Early Years Pupil Premium (first announced in Budget 2014, aimed at providing additional funding for the 20% most disadvantaged children in pre-school from 2015 to improve their school readiness and development) up to at least the same level per child as provided for primary school children. The Child Poverty Strategy for 2014-17 should therefore provide a much clearer roadmap, with a clear timeline and targets, but allowing for flexibility to add to and strengthen policy measures in future years. It should also frame these more clearly in relation to the goal of eradicating child poverty, and what might be expected to follow from what would be a final strategy covering the period 2017-2020.

Yet, even as the economy recovers, we acknowledge that Government spending, including that allocated for local authorities, remains restrained. Research from the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University³ estimates that current levels of child poverty – 2.4million in relative income poverty according to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission – costs today's economy something of the order of £29bn (2.5% of GDP). That is why we make a strong case for including those early intervention measures which can provide the biggest 'spend to save' cost-benefits.

Some estimates put the financial costs of dealing with complex family problems at around £46bn a year⁴. The Early Intervention Foundation has calculated the cost from failing to tackle problems before they arise as being as high as £5,485 per young offender per month, £46,389 per child taken into care per year, and £4,528 per 18–24 year-old not in employment, education, or training (NEET) per year.

3. At a local level, what works well in tackling child poverty now?

The Child Poverty Act 2010 placed a duty on all local authorities to "cooperate to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local areas", with duties on responsible local authorities (those with top-tier functions) to "a) put in place arrangements to work with partner authorities named in the Act to

² Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013) [State of the Nation 2013: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain](#), p.4

³ <http://www.donaldhirsch.com/costofpoverty.pdf>

⁴ Relationships Foundation <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/Web/>

reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their local area; b) prepare and publish a local child poverty needs assessment to understand the characteristics of low income and disadvantaged families in their area, and the key drivers of poverty that must be addressed; and c) prepare a joint child poverty strategy for their local area.”

The development of a local child poverty strategy is therefore a first key step to tackling child poverty at a local level, and an opportunity for local authorities to take a leadership role within their communities. However, in 2012 a desk-based review by 4Children showed that just 87 (out of 152) responsible local authorities in England had a high profile and visible child poverty strategy in place. Repeating this exercise in May 2014, 4Children has found that although more local authorities (97 out of 152) now have a visible strategy in place, over one-third (36%) were still not readily available. Though we acknowledge this does not of course mean that those local authorities do not have a strategy in place, this is an indication that some local authorities are giving actions relating to child poverty a higher focus and priority than others.

4Children believe that child poverty can only be effectively tackled at the local level if services work collaboratively together, taking a holistic “whole family” approach as outlined in answer to Question 1. We highlight the specific role that Children’s Centres can play as community hubs offering across a broad range of services to establish an infrastructure to support the widespread delivery of early intervention programmes. Following on from this we go on to highlight how centres can be used to better integrate Jobcentre Plus advisers with families, and also the additional role they can play to help to deliver universal childcare, including the role of Community Childcare and Early Learning Hubs (as developed by 4Children).

The role of Children’s Centres

4Children has been heavily involved in formulating policy around Children’s Centres since their inception, and we now currently runs approximately 100 Centres across the country. We are currently engaged with a number of local authorities who are consulting on their Children’s Centre provision, and as part of our policy work around Children’s Centres, 4Children produces an annual Children’s Centre Census which tracks trends and developments across the Centre network.

Children’s Centres have, over the last decade, created a new approach to support for young children and their families with a particular focus on vulnerable children and families. Recognising their current status, particularly in the context of cuts in budgets, but acknowledging increasing numbers of parents using their services, 4Children has set out recommendations that could be taken to maximise the potential of Children’s Centres at the heart of a wider commitment to build a universal system of holistic and intergenerational support for children and families. This would see Centres bringing together and co-ordinating a broad range of services, encompassing health, early education, childcare, early identification and specialist support, from midwives and health visitors to childcare, out-of-school clubs and youth support. However, realising this vast potential requires continued investment in Centres, as well as the co-ordination and integration of wider funds including health.

4Children estimates there are currently around 3,400 Children’s Centres, and according to our “Children’s Centre Census” 75% of Centres reported increased use by families over the last year.⁵ The Census also found that more than one million families benefit from support from Children’s Centres, and around two-thirds of “vulnerable” families with young children are registered with their local centre. Additional

⁵ 4Children (2013) [Children’s Centre Census](#)

internal research by 4Children has found that there has been no reduction to the number of Centres in half of all areas although the level of services may have been reduced or changed: 50% of areas have kept all their Centres open; 40% have closed some; and 10% are consulting (at the time of writing May 2014). Many local authorities have protected Children's Centres budgets at the expense of other services. Cuts to Children's Centres are less than the average cut across services. Within this we estimate a growing number of authorities are now developing Children's Centres as part of a wider integrated, early intervention, universal and targeted support approach across the age range of children, and many more are working towards this.

4Children believes that the key measures necessary to realising the full potential of Children's Centres, and enabling them to drive effective early intervention at a local level, are to:

- Place Children's Centres on a statutory footing: making sure they grow at the heart of every community, acting as a 'hub' for support and advice, and bringing together and co-ordinating services, from midwives and health visitors to childcare and out-of-school support, from conception to school and beyond
- Maintain and increase investment: by finding a way of guaranteeing funds for early years expenditure. This could include pooling and integration of budgets and resources with other services, including health
- Maintain both universal and targeted services: maintain centres as a universal offer but deliver and co-ordinate targeted support to reach the most disadvantaged families. This includes family support for families with complex needs, safeguarding and child protection
- Place Children's Centres at the heart of "whole family", integrated approach to support: making centres pioneers of a wider "whole family" approach bringing together and coordinating a wide range of support including domestic violence and housing to enable wider services to work with the whole family in a coherent and joined-up way of providing help and support
- Align Children's Centre support with support for children as they grow up: 38% of Children's Centres are now extending the reach of their centres to children over five
- Put centres at the heart of a shift towards a culture of "Early Intervention": Children's Centres achieve most at the heart of an early intervention strategy, with targeted support linked in when crisis hits, working with troubled families, child protection and social care. Centres should provide specialist help on hand for families with greater needs, tackling many of the underlying causes of illness and family crisis early: help with parenting, debt and housing, as well as support to tackle many of the underlying issues of family crisis such as domestic abuse, alcohol and drug addiction and poor mental health for families. They should also be used as a way of providing a wider community base for health. By intervening early to prevent problems escalating and tackling family crisis head on, centres can begin to reduce the tens of billions we spend annually in dealing with the crises after they occur. Children's Centres are an investment to save – but, by definition, to achieve those savings some 'up front' investment is required

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- Give centres a core role in achieving high-levels of school readiness: good pre-school experiences are an essential preparation for school and for life. We know that far too many children, and particularly those from more disadvantaged background, are beginning school without some of these basic skills, setting their progress back right from day one at school. 4Children believes that the new Early Years Pupil Premium (as announced in the Government's 2014 Budget, and to begin in 2015) should be used to support specific programmes or work within Children's Centres around targeted early language, communication and social development
 - Make Children's Centres the 'go to' place for childcare: signposting childcare, as a 'hub' for advice on what flexible childcare support is available, where appropriate, providing childcare themselves, or opening up as a community-base from which other providers can operate

Integration of Jobcentre Plus advisers into Children's Centre settings

Between 2009 and 2011, the Department for Work and Pensions funded a pilot programme around delivering "*Work-focused services in Children's Centres*". This took place in ten local authorities (Blackpool, Ealing, Kingston-Upon-Hull, Lambeth, Nottingham City, Redcar and Cleveland, Sandwell, Somerset, Southampton and Westminster), and involved Jobcentre Plus and Children's Centre provision being co-ordinated by placing employment advisers in Centres.

Significantly, the Department's evaluation found that outcomes from these pilot programmes were positive, stating that: "Perceived, attitudinal outcomes achieved [by parents in the pilots] include increased levels of confidence, aspirations, better awareness of work-focused opportunities and options, and attitudinal change towards Jobcentre Plus and work. In this way, the pilot made significant progress in preparing parents for work, in getting parents to think about work and in linking them into wider support and provision which they might need in the interim period. There is also indicative evidence from both qualitative and Management Information (Mi) that the pilot moved parents closer to the labour market and moved some into paid employment."⁶

Universal childcare

The provision of affordable, high-quality childcare is a particularly effective policy lever for addressing child poverty, as it not only supports parents to return to employment, progress in work, or work more hours, but can also make an important contribution to children's development. In the Department for Education's recent "*Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents*" half of mothers said that having reliable childcare would be the most helpful factor in allowing them to go to work,⁷ while 54% of non-working mothers agreed that they would prefer to work if they had quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable.⁸ Lack of information on childcare was seen as a barrier to by 44% of lone parents and 38% of couples with dependent children⁹.

⁶ Department for Work and Pensions (2011) [Work-Focused Services in Children's Centre Pilot](#), p. 5

⁷ Department for Education (2014) [Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2012-13](#), p. 220

⁸ Department for Education (2014) [Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2012-13](#), p. 234

⁹ Department for Education (2014) [Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2012-13](#), p. 125

In our recently published policy paper “*The Childcare Guarantee*”¹⁰, 4Children has called for a radical change in the way that childcare is provided, to build a new system that is responsive to families, and helps underpin moves to reduce current and intergenerational child poverty in a holistic and integrated way. We believe there is a particular need for:

- A ten-year staged plan to deliver a universal and affordable guarantee of 0-14 childcare by 2025
- An extension of the number of free childcare hours over the next ten years, so that 25 hours of free early education is available for all children aged 1-4, with parents paying for extra hours if required
- The widespread adoption of 4Children’s model of Childcare Hubs (as set out in further detail in answer to this question below), which bring together all the childcare providers (schools, nurseries, childminders, out-of-school and Children’s Centres) in an area to provide co-ordinated and blended high quality early learning and childcare for children of all ages at times that parents need it

Community Childcare and Early Learning Hubs

Community Childcare and Early Learning Hubs are a model developed by 4Children, currently being trialled around the country, that help to address these concerns. Hubs work with Children’s Centres, schools and other existing local service providers to provide blended, high quality and flexible childcare to meet the rising demands of today’s parents, and encompass various types of childcare settings, including childminders and nurseries.

The Hubs project brings together early years providers and schools, to enhance learning and development to improve the outcomes of all children no matter what early years provider they attend. Each of the Hubs is working closely with its providers to improve quality through sharing best practices, targeted Continued Professional Development (CPD) and training on such vital areas as early communication and language, peer to peer learning and allowing providers to learn from each other. For example childminders in the Severn Primary Academy Hub in Stroud were motivated to join the Hub as they wanted to work more closely with the schools and early years settings in their local area to support a consistent quality offer for the children in their care.

4. At a local level, what works well for preventing poor children becoming poor adults?

The experience in the earliest years of life is known to have a strong bearing on a person’s long-term outcomes. The Chief Medical Officer has highlighted how mental health problems in children and young people are often persistent; and strongly linked to social disadvantage and adversity¹¹. Frank Field’s report from 2010 on the Foundation Years shows that the poorest 20% of children are more likely to display conduct problems at age five, and those from the lowest socio-economic quintile are more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as smoking, anti-social behaviours and playing truant¹² that are also known to persist into later life.

¹⁰ 4Children (2013) [The Childcare Guarantee](#)

¹¹ Margaret Murphy and Peter Fonaghy (2012) [Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2012, Our Children Deserve Better: Prevention Pays; Chapter 10: Mental Health Problems in Children and Young People](#), p.4

¹² Frank Field (2010) [The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults](#), p. 28-30

As outlined in answer to Question 3, Children's Centres have, over the last decade, created a new approach to support for young children and their families with a particular focus on vulnerable children and families. Recognising their current status, particularly in the context of cuts in budgets, but acknowledging increasing numbers of parents using their services, 4Children has set out recommendations that could be taken to maximise the potential of Children's Centres at the heart of a wider commitment to build a universal system of holistic and intergenerational support for children and families. This would see Centres bringing together and co-ordinating a broad range of services, encompassing health, early education, childcare, early identification and specialist support, from midwives and health visitors to childcare, out-of-school clubs and youth support. However, realising this vast potential requires continued investment in Centres, as well as the co-ordination and integration of wider funds including health. This, we believe, will be one of the most effective interventions that can be made to contribute to both tackling poverty now and tackling the intergenerational drivers of poverty (as we have highlighted in answer to Question 1).

5. What more can central government do to help employers, local agencies and the voluntary and community sector work together to end child poverty?

The provision of affordable, high-quality childcare is a particularly effective policy lever for addressing child poverty, as it not only supports parents to return to employment or progress in work, but can also make an important contribution to children's development. This is something that central government, employers, local agencies and the voluntary and community sector will all have to work together to provide, and it is crucial to establish a shared vision for what provision would look like.

In our recently published policy paper "*The Childcare Guarantee*"¹³, 4Children has called for a radical change in the way that childcare is provided, to build a new system that is responsive to families, and helps underpin moves to reduce current and intergenerational child poverty in a holistic and integrated way. Further details are provided in answer to Question 3.

In addition, if parents are to be able to take advantage of a universal childcare offer to progress in work, it is crucial that central Government and employers should support the development of high-quality, well-paid flexible jobs. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have undertaken particularly significant work in this area, and in 2012 published a report on "*Building a Sustainable Quality Part-time Recruitment Market*". This found that part-time work was skewed towards low-paid work (i.e. jobs paying less than £20,000 FTE), and there is a need to correct this market failure and improve the availability of part-time work in skilled jobs, particularly for women with children.¹⁴

If we are to make work a genuine and viable route out of poverty, then we must ensure that the nature of the jobs available to those who are looking to return to the labour market, whilst also balancing childcare responsibilities do not simply lock parents into a low-wage economy. Ultimately, ensuring that high quality, part-time jobs are available to those looking to return to work is something that will demand action, and an element of culture change, on the part of employers themselves as well as central Government. Ensuring that employers understand the value of taking on and supporting skilled part-time workers should therefore be a key priority for central Government moving forward, as well as the implementation of measures which help facilitate this.

¹³ 4Children (2013) [The Childcare Guarantee](#)

¹⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) [Building a sustainable quality part-time recruitment market](#), p. 5-8

Finally, we would also highlight that there is a need to ensure local agencies and advice providers are able to provide effective support to those in need, despite the extreme financial pressures that they are currently encountering, and reiterate that our proposals for developing Childcare Hubs and a wider, enhanced role for Children's Centres (as outlined in more detail in Question 3) would be an effective mechanism for doing this.

Investment in housing and communities

Polling (by YouGov of 2000+ people in December 2013: see www.4Children.org.uk/manifesto) conducted for 4Children found that over a quarter of families say poor housing is a major factor, and the link between housing, poverty and children's life chances must be acknowledged. There is growing recognition of the need for high quality, more affordable, social housing, but we must also invest in housing that offers children the childhoods they deserve, with sufficient living space, a good communal area and open play areas nearby.

The final Child Poverty Strategy needs to include long term measures about re-designing our reshape this country's neighbourhoods, public services, housing, spaces and workplaces in response to the dramatic changes to modern family life, which needs to include a major building programme of affordable and social housing, as well as a commitment to all aspects of the local community, including planning, public spaces and parks, transport and policing, and intensive action to eradicate the issues behind so called 'problem estates' and build positive communities for children and families.

We know that places matter to people in poverty. It is unacceptable that in England in 2014, as the report highlights, people in the poorest neighbourhoods will die an average of seven years earlier than those in the richest neighbourhoods. That's why services and homes are so important. Both can provide the bedrock for a stable, secure and prosperous upbringing, and tackling child poverty.

6. Any other comments

In summary, 4Children believes the final child poverty strategy should include three core components:

- 1) Enhancing the role of Children's Centres: placing these at the heart of providing services and support for all children and families
- 2) "Breaking the cycle": adopting an intergenerational approach that underpins all interventions for children and families
- 3) Making life more affordable for children and families: over the next 10 years, establishing a universal childcare guarantee for all children aged 0-14, and developing a major programme of building to create affordable social housing

4Children
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