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POLICY BRIEFINGS

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THE CHILDREN'S FUND

Foreword

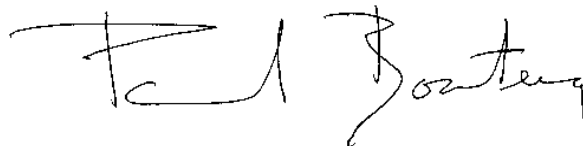
The experiences of childhood, the presence of poverty, discrimination, and the absence of work and skills in the home can crucially shape and determine the experiences of adulthood and may contribute to continued poverty, long-term unemployment and criminal behaviour. If in childhood all too often obvious early signs of trouble are missed, children can go on to experience very serious problems and crisis that have to be tackled through costly interventions when it is too late to avoid lasting disadvantage. They enter adulthood with little hope of a decent job or being able to play a fulfilled role in society.

The Children's Fund has been established as a new part of the Government's strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. It will form a key part of a range of measures to ensure that vulnerable children get the best start in life, remain on track in their early years, flourish in secondary school and choose to stay on in education and training at 16.

We have made a good start with Sure Start for pre-school age children and the new Connexions Service for the over 13s. This Fund will address the gap in preventive measures for children, particularly helping children between 5 –13 and supporting their parents, as well as helping local community groups more widely to find local solutions to child poverty. Together these measures will increase educational attainment and participation, cut crime, and tackle the inter-generational cycle of child poverty and worklessness.

Since the Children's Fund was announced in the Spending Review the new Children and Young People's Unit has been working to develop proposals for making the aims of the Fund a reality. The Government's plans are set out in this document. To make a success of the Fund will require a new way of working - across traditional institutional boundaries, involving the voluntary sector and community organisations as full and equal partners and listening to the views of children and their families. There is a great willingness among the public and the voluntary sectors to do more for children and parents and to stop vulnerable children slipping unnoticed into every increasing problems. By working together we can make a real difference.

Paul Boateng

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Boateng', with a stylized, cursive script.

Minister for Young People

Services to children and young people – a new approach

1 The report of the Policy Action Team on Young People¹ looked at how Government can improve the way policies and services work for young people and how they could be developed to help prevent social exclusion. It showed that a great deal is known about how children and families at risk of running into severe difficulties can be identified early and that effective interventions can often improve their prospects. It argued for better local coordination in identifying the needs of young people and a shift of resources into prevention activities, both to help parents and children deal with problems before they become acute and to promote effective cross-cutting interventions for children and young people facing the most acute risks.

2 The Spending Review announced a new Children's Fund worth **£450 million** over three years to lead the Government's policy on preventing poverty and disadvantage for children and young people. It announced:

- The majority of the Fund would be targeted on **preventive work** with children (primarily in the 5 to 13 age group) and their families, helping them before they hit crisis;
- £70 million of the Fund would be distributed directly to local community groups through a **network of local funds**, administered by the voluntary sector itself.

Children's Fund Objectives

1 To ensure that the Children's Fund provides a focused programme of services which will make a real difference there will be a clear *mission statement*, *overarching objective* and *key principles* to underpin the work of the Fund.

Mission statement

The Children's Fund is intended to provide a flexible and responsive approach of meeting needs and developing good practice for services for vulnerable children, supporting them and their families in breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

Overarching objective

The objective of the Fund will be to provide additional resources over and above those provided through mainstream and specific programmes and through the specific earmarked streams to engage and support voluntary and community organisations in playing their part and enable services to work together to help children overcome poverty and disadvantage.

Key principles

The Fund will seek to:

- encourage inter-agency work, based within the neighbourhood community, through stimulating imaginative and innovative work as well as reinforcing local co-operation;

¹ Policy Action Team 12: Young People. Social Exclusion Unit, 2000

- provide support for children showing early signs of difficulties, and address the causes of such risk, in the family, in the wider community, or both;
- support good evidence-based existing projects, as well as new innovative services;
- secure long term improvement through building capacity within individual families and broader communities, as well as direct support to individual children;
- when providing support to children and their families pay particular attention to those who face discrimination or have particular needs because of ethnic origin, disability or gender;
- operate with the minimum of bureaucracy and complexity;
- achieve an equitable geographical spread, both as the Fund is introduced, and when there is national coverage although higher levels of support will be provided to areas of greater need;
- complement and bridge the gap in preventive services between Sure Start and Early Years programmes, and the development of the Connexions Service for the 13+ age group; and
- engage voluntary and community groups, including groups serving particular needs such as those of ethnic minorities or people with disabilities, both through earmarked funding and through ensuring that they are key players in drawing up local proposals for improved services.

Prevention

1 Problems in early years, if unattended, develop into serious and intractable difficulties in adolescence. £380 million of the Fund will be spent on developing services to identify children who are showing early signs of difficulty and provide them and their families with the support they need to enable them to overcome barriers and disadvantage.

2 Children and their families need to receive joined-up support for their problems which are often multi-faceted. Services will need to work together and build in the expertise of the voluntary sector. Set out in this section are proposals to make this happen.

Target children

3 The Fund aims to prevent poor outcomes through working with children who are showing early warning signs of being vulnerable. The report of the Policy Action Team showed that it was possible to identify the risk factors which lead to problems later on. The Fund primarily intends to identify and support children who are currently below the threshold of statutory services and so are often not identified and do not receive support until they hit crisis.

4 The work of the Fund will complement the work of existing statutory services and initiatives such as Quality Protects and truancy and exclusion initiatives to improve statutory services to children already experiencing serious problems. It will fund additional services and will not be used to replace, or fill the gaps, for inadequate local statutory service provision.

5 The Fund will primarily concentrate on supporting 5-13 year olds, filling the gap between Sure Start and Connexions. However children's services do not always fit neatly into this age range. Local areas will be able to include in their proposals services for children of slightly different age ranges where this is appropriate to respond to local needs.

Services

6 Proposals will need to be built from the bottom up, responding to what the local community wants, enabling local people to feel ownership and ensuring services are responsive to local needs.

7 Local areas will need to put in place services that:

- **identify children** showing early signs of difficulty and refer them to support, for example, through integrated assessment approaches, improved data sharing or common referral systems;
- **support children and their families** in overcoming difficulties, for example through mentoring support, counselling and advice services, parenting education, support for children of separated families, out of school activities and work with individual children through multidisciplinary teams in schools or health centres.

1 It will be particularly important that difficulties arising from different experiences because of race and disability are addressed by the Fund and local areas will be expected to cover these issues in their proposals.

2 To help areas in developing the right kind of services to meet local need the Children and Young People's Unit will issue best practice guidance setting out services that have been proven to work and promising approaches.

Areas

3 The Fund will be available to support some activity in all areas of England by April 2004 as children in need of help are not limited to only certain localities. Improved prevention is needed across the country. However, children in need of help are disproportionately concentrated in certain areas and the Fund will reflect this by providing much higher levels of support to areas of high need. Areas with the highest need are the priority for early action. The government will announce in the new year the areas to be covered in the first wave (April 2001-2) of the Fund. These areas will be chosen so that collectively they:

- cover the highest levels of need and disadvantage as indicated by data on child poverty; and
- cover the needs of different types of areas and around the country.

Developing local proposals

1 An absolute priority is avoiding imposing fresh bureaucratic procedures or getting bogged down in planning detail. The aim is to get the funds as quickly as possible to the point of need and enable the Fund to be responsive to changing local needs.

2 To ensure quick action and avoid bureaucracy the Children and Young People's Unit:

- will require local partnerships to include the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector, children and their families as **equal partners**;

- will **not require a bidding process**. Areas selected will receive money as soon as the Unit is satisfied that their proposals will improve preventive service for vulnerable children and fully involve all key providers;
- will **invite Chief Executives** of local authorities in the first instance to draw together key local providers and identify which local partnership can best plan for and manage services to be funded. Experience suggests that the most effective way of ensuring rapid progress is to ensure the Chief Executives takes a personal interest, but this does not mean that the local authority should lead the partnership. Other sectors must be equal partners;
- will place a strong expectation on areas that the local partnership for delivery of the Fund should be based on strengthening or modifying an **existing local partnership** that is already delivering services to vulnerable children rather than creating a new partnership.

1 Local areas will be invited to draw up proposals showing how they can use existing funding and additional money from the Fund to expand preventive services in their area. Proposals will need to include services that areas currently offer as well as additional services they want to provide and demonstrate how this fits together to provide the joined up support that vulnerable children and their families need. Proposals will need to show how services will be delivered and how providers will work together. There is an expectation that there will be an emphasis on delivery through the voluntary sector or partnerships, including imaginative, not-for-profit activity. Once an area's proposals reach the quality standard required the proposals will be approved.

Support to areas

2 The success of initiatives such as Sure Start has been based on supporting areas in developing and delivering services. The Children's Fund will be providing support to areas at all stages of the process both from the Children and Young People's Unit and from regional support workers. It will support areas in developing the best possible proposals and putting them into practice.

The Local Network

3 The aim of the local network is to help children in poverty achieve their potential by investing directly in the work of **local community and voluntary groups** that provide local solutions to the problem of child poverty. The funds will empower communities, families and children to help themselves, giving them support to increase the opportunities available to them.

4 Consultation with the voluntary and community sector has highlighted that to support solutions which come from children themselves, their families and their communities, money must be channelled to the most local level. Many of the groups which the network could help are small and embryonic. They may not be registered charities. Reaching these groups is very hard and is an expert task. This is why delivery is envisaged through voluntary sector intermediaries with expertise of small grant-giving in their area.

Target children

5 The local network will support local voluntary and community groups helping vulnerable

children aged 0-19. The local network covers a broader range of support and ages than the prevention stream of the children's fund as small local voluntary and community groups often support a range of ages with a mixture of services.

What the network will fund

6 The consultation undertaken earlier this year considered how to make the greatest impact on children's lives and arrived at the following four broad themes. Grants will be made to local community and voluntary group proposals under the four themes:-

- **economic disadvantage:** imaginative schemes to enable families to improve their living standards;
- **isolation and access:** prevention and crisis work with hard-to-reach groups;
- **aspirations and experiences:** bridging the gap between the childhood experiences of children in poverty and their contemporaries; and
- **children's voices:** giving children a chance to articulate their own needs.

1 No final decisions have yet been taken on the size of grants to be awarded. However, most grants are likely to be small, in the hundreds and low thousands of pounds, in line with the likely scale and demands of the small local groups, which the network will aim to reach.

Areas

2 By April 2004 the network will consist of around 50 local funds covering the whole of England. 50 funds will create a manageable national network which can benefit from economies of scale and enable each fund to be big enough to serve communities of interest as well as poor neighbourhoods. Such communities of interest may include, for example, disabled children, children in remote rural areas, ethnic minority children and children of travellers who may not have close links with any particular small neighbourhood. This size will also give every local fund area a reasonable private sector base from which to build wider support for the network.

3 It is intended to roll-out to one third of the country in the first year (from April 2001-2). Areas chosen to be covered in the first year will be announced early in 2001. These areas will be chosen, in the same way as the preventive stream, so that collectively they:

- have high levels of need and disadvantage as reflected by child poverty
- give a good spread between different types of areas and around the country

However, with only 50 local funds each local fund area will not always be coterminous with local authority areas covered by the prevention stream.

How the local network will be delivered

1 Each local fund will be administered by a local voluntary sector grant-giving body. This will help get money directly to small groups that would not normally find it easy to access Government funding.

2 Administration of the local network aims to build on existing voluntary sector networks, rather than create new ones. The Children and Young People's Unit has therefore invited

voluntary organisations that have a nationwide perspective, local “branches” and experience in grant giving to make proposals for delivering the local network of funds. They will need to show that they can administer grants from small voluntary and community groups speedily and with minimum bureaucracy. The chosen delivery agents will be announced early in 2001.

3 Local community and voluntary groups who want to do something which falls under the four themes of the local networks set out above will be able to apply to their local fund for a grant. The local “branch” of the delivery agent will work quickly to check each application against clear criteria and award grants to suitable applicants, subject to overall guidelines.

Outreach

1 Reaching some groups may be particularly hard even for a voluntary sector delivery agent practiced in small grant giving. This is often the case with groups serving ethnic minorities. The Children and Young People’s Unit will support the delivery agent in using local voluntary groups working with children and families, or national organisations with a strong presence in a particular area, to help with outreach, mentoring and training small hard to reach community groups to encourage them to apply for grant.

Conclusion

2 The Children’s Fund will improve the life chances of the most vulnerable children through providing earlier support to them and their families and enabling them to overcome barriers and disadvantage to succeed in life. The Fund will build the capacity of local voluntary and community groups to contribute to local solutions. The plans set out in this document are intended to ensure that national and local government, statutory services, the voluntary sector and local communities can work together to secure better futures for deprived children.

3 The Children and Young People’s Unit will continue to develop these plans with the aim of publishing detailed guidance on the Fund in the new year. It will be consulting with a range of organisations at local and national level as it draws up its guidance, based on these plans. If you have views on these plans that would inform the detailed guidance you can comment:

- **by post** to Ailish King-fisher, Children and Young People’s Unit, Level 4E, Department for Education and Employment, Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA
- **by email** to CYP.U.MAILBOX@dfee.gov.uk