

Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances: Consulting on a New Approach

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15
February 2011

Your comments must reach us by that date.

THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online response facility available on the Department for Education e-consultation website: (<http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>).

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

Reason for confidentiality:

Name Oliver Standing
Organisation (if applicable) Adfam
Address: 25 Corsham St
London
N1 6DR

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can telephone: 0370 000 2288 or email:

Childpoverty.strategy@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or e-mail:

consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk

Please select ONE the box which best describes you as a respondent

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local authorities and organisations of local authorities | Families and organisations x representing families and children | <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and community sector organisations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research bodies and academics | <input type="checkbox"/> Public bodies and named partners in the Child Poverty Act | <input type="checkbox"/> Employers and business organisations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practitioners working with children, young people and families | <input type="checkbox"/> Central Government | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Enterprises |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | |

Please Specify:

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. We do this by working with a network of organisations, practitioners and individuals who come into contact with the families, friends and carers affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use. We provide direct support to families through publications, training, prison visitors' centres, outreach work and signposting to local services, and work extensively with professionals and Government to improve and expand the support available to families.

Building our Approach

1 What do you think are the key points from the [Frank Field Review](#) which the Government needs to incorporate into the child poverty strategy?

Comments:

- Adfam welcomes Franks Field's emphasis on the importance of the early years of children's lives – *'we have found overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicted on their development in the first five years of life'*. This emphasis should be broad in focus and concentrate on the developmental needs of children who live with social and economic inequalities, including children affected by parental substance use. Effective and well-targeted interventions may maximise the protective factors in these children's lives and improve their outcomes.
- Adfam also supports the emphasis on using interventions with strong evidence bases and rigorous evaluation processes. The development of a robust evidence base around interventions that have been proven to be successful is key, but it is also important that this evidence is shared and disseminated nationally. Adfam, as a national infrastructure organisation, works with organisations across the country, has a strong network of practitioners and services and would therefore be well placed to support the dissemination of such evidence and best practice. Alongside recognition of existing interventions, newer emerging and innovative work also needs to be supported. The Government has a key role, working alongside infrastructure organisations, in locating, supporting and strengthening areas of promise and using this learning to inform and educate others in the field.

2 What are your thoughts on the best way to incorporate early intervention into the child poverty strategy? (Note: We expect that the Graham Allen Review's interim report will be published before our consultation closes on the 15th February 2011. Respondents are welcome to include any reflections on the report in their responses).

Comments:

- Early intervention is an effective way to target vulnerable children most at risk. Children affected by parental substance use are often a very vulnerable and under-supported group. Evidence suggests that children living in a family affected by substance use may have less positive outcomes – low attainment and attendance at school, exposure to criminal behaviour, increased likelihood of substance use later in life, financial insecurity and sometimes poverty. It is estimated that in the UK there are up to 350,000 children affected by parental drug use¹ and 2.6m by parents drinking hazardously².

There is a clear moral and, importantly in the current financial landscape, economic argument for supporting children and young people earlier. There are a wide number of services including treatment services, family support and Sure Start centres that have important roles to play in implementing early intervention, but the importance of the interventions must first be recognised and the potential devastating cost, both financial and social, of disinvesting in support for the most vulnerable of families and children appreciated.

Unfortunately the imperative to support children and young people affected by the harms of drugs and alcohol does not dissipate at the school starting age. There is a real fear that services for teenagers and young people may well be marginalised in this difficult economic climate. Services that work with young people affected by parental substance use are struggling to translate their essential therapeutic work reducing harm to vulnerable young people into cost savings that hold some currency. The needs and experiences of pre-school children are important factors in children becoming healthy, happy adults but they are not the only factors to be considered – young people may have support needs which develop as they get older and these deserve attention too.

- Early interventions, by their very nature, have positive outcomes which may not be apparent for many years. Therefore, long term vision in policy-making is needed to successfully incorporate the evidence-based commissioning of early intervention into the child poverty strategy.

¹ Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Hidden Harm, 2003

² Alcohol Concern, Swept under the carpet: Children affected by parental alcohol misuse, 2010

The Child Poverty Act 2010

3 Do you agree with our working definition of socio-economic disadvantage?
(paragraph 4.2 and 4.3)

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

- Adfam supports this broad definition. Disadvantage can take many forms and disadvantage stemming from parental substance use can sometimes include: financial insecurity, lack of secure, safe and clean home, exposure to criminal behaviour, lack of support and encouragement around school and learning, neglect, poor nutrition and social stigma.

4 Are these the right areas for the child poverty strategy to cover?
(paragraph 4.4)

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

- Adfam believes that these four topics are valid areas to focus on and represent a good opportunity to improve the outcomes of children affected by poverty and social inequality, including those affected by parental substance use. Supporting effective early intervention as well as looking at the needs of older children and young people will be key in improving life chances and we believe that effective support will save the state money in the long term by decreasing the demands children and young people affected by substance use make of statutory services.
- Adfam also welcomes the devolution of power and the empowerment of local voluntary and community organisations to work with and for the communities

they exist in. The grass-roots support organisations which work with families affected by substance use are often flexible, efficient, routed within the experience of individuals and effective in working with local networks. Steps should be taken to ensure local groups are supported and empowered to work in partnership with statutory services as well as families and children to help decrease the impact of child poverty.

Reviewing the role of the Child Poverty Commission

5 Do you agree that the role and the remit of the Child Poverty Commission should be broadened to reflect the new approach?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

- We are happy with the report's call for '*a broader remit around poverty and life chances*' for the Commission and would like to see a comprehensive approach from the commission that considers not just the immediate reality of children living in poverty but also the wider social determinants such as parental substance use which contribute to it.

What is important in determining children's life chances?

6 What do you think makes the most difference to the life chances of children?

Comments:

- Evidence suggests that children living in families affected by substance use may be exposed to both sustained and intermittent hazards which can impact detrimentally on a child's life chances. These include poverty, physical and emotional abuse or neglect, inadequate accommodation, exposure to criminal behaviour and educational underachievement³. It is estimated that in the UK there are up to 350,000 children affected by parental drug use⁴ and 2.6m by parents drinking hazardously⁵.
- The ongoing impact of these hazards on a child's life chances are often multiple but may vary depending on the child's age and development. They may include emotional and behavioural problems, increased chance of substance use and offending. The effect of parental substance use on children is complex, and cannot be taken as an automatic indicator of negative outcomes, but it must be recognised that for a significant number of children parental substance use does lead to multiple disadvantages in later life. Adfam advocate an approach to child poverty which views parental drug and alcohol use as a significant determinant of a child's life chances and works to improve the support and early intervention provided to these very vulnerable families.

Emerging proposals for radical reforms to the system

7 Are there additional measures, compatible with our fiscal approach, which could help us combat poverty and improve life chances?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

³ Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Hidden Harm, 2003

⁴ Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Hidden Harm, 2003

⁵ Alcohol Concern, Swept under the carpet: Children affected by parental alcohol misuse, 2010

Comments:

- Although there have been significant improvements in the awareness and understanding of the needs of children affected by parental substance use, there is still some room for improvement. Many services and organisations come into contact with children and have a responsibility to act, however some agencies still do not sufficiently address the problem. Mandatory training for the mainstream workforce should be provided, to include a specific focus on the impacts of drugs and alcohol on children and families and how best to meet their needs.
- Grandparent carers, or kinship carers, of children affected by parental substance use deserve further recognition and support, including financial support. 47% of all Grandparent carers are looking after their grandchildren due to parental drug and alcohol use⁶. Many of these Grandparents report struggling with their financial situation and the lack of support received from statutory authorities. By supporting kinship carers both financially and practically, the Government would contribute to ensuring that children affected by substance use are provided with a caring, stable home with adequate financial resources which may reduce the impact of their multiple disadvantages.
- Ensure that drug and alcohol workers have a basic level of financial literacy. Worries around money can be difficult to talk about and doubly so if caused by drug and alcohol use and debts⁷. This financial instability can destabilise the recovery journey of drug and alcohol using parents, again extending and increasing the harm experienced by children. By working with families around debt and budget management this impact can be lessened.

8 What further steps can be taken to help local authorities to reduce poverty and improve life chances?

⁶ What If We Said No?, Grandparents Plus, 2010

⁷ Supporting the supporters: families of drug misusers, UKDPC,
http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/resources/UKDPC_Supporting_the_supporters_Policy_Briefing.pdf

Comments:

- An approach which encourages local authorities to target the wider social and economic determinants of poverty and addresses routes out of poverty will be the most successful in improving life chances for children. Adfam would support local authorities to consider and address the impact of drugs and alcohol on children and families, offering a programme of tailored support to build a better future.
- Local voluntary and community organisations are often best placed to work with statutory organisations to meet the needs of families and communities to lessen the impact of poverty. Voluntary and community organisations are often able to provide flexible and efficient services with local expertise and knowledge, reaching into some of the most disadvantaged communities and vulnerable families.

9 How can the voluntary, community and private sectors contribute most effectively to local approaches to tackling child poverty and improving life chances?

Comments:

- There are many local, voluntary services that currently work with some of the most vulnerable families and children. At their most successful they are cheap, effective, flexible, dedicated and led by experts of great experience. The local people that choose to work with them are likely to understand the subtleties of their own communities and therefore provide an excellent service. The people running these family support organisations have often themselves experienced substance use in their families or communities, something that can engender credibility, trust and understanding in the eyes of the families they support.
- Adfam believes that the government should *invest to save* by working with and investing in the voluntary sector because it is efficient and will save money over time. Given sufficient nurture, a strong and vibrant voluntary sector can help reduce the burden of the public sector and provide the on-going support and care that leads to improved outcomes for children, families and communities.

10 Please use this space for any other comments you would like to make.

Comments:

11 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, was it easy to find, understand, complete etc.)

Comments:

- Due to the release date being around the Christmas break this consultation may not yield as many responses as would be possible.
- The questions are easy to understand.
- An appropriate length - good to have structured questions and boxes for responses.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply X

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

X Yes No

All DfE public consultations are required to conform to the following criteria within the Government Code of Practice on Consultation:

Criterion 1: Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion 2: Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion 3: Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion 4: Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion 5: Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion 6: Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion 7: Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Donna Harrison, DfE Consultation Co-ordinator, tel: 01928 738212 / email: donna.harrison@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 February 2011

Send by post to: Consultation Unit, Floor GB, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2GJ.

Send by e-mail to: Childpoverty.strategy@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk