

NICCY Summary: NI Assembly Written Answers for Week Ending 14th March 2014

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Bright Start: Childcare Places

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail

(i) the

(a) type and

(b) number of additional childcare places that will be created by Bright Start;

(ii) when they will be created; and

(iii) what work has been undertaken to establish whether they will address adequately the lack of access to affordable quality childcare for families.

(AQW 31475/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The key first actions of the first phase of the Bright Start Childcare Strategy aim to sustain or create up to 8,000 registered childcare places. Up to 7,000 of these will be school age childcare places within day care settings and up to 1,000 will be childminding places in rural areas. The school age childcare places will be delivered through a grant scheme to be launched shortly. The additional school age childcare places will be created over the lifetime of the grant scheme, which will run until 2017. School age childcare and rural childcare were highlighted during consultation as types of childcare where increased provision was needed. Childcare providers who are assisted under the proposed new school age childcare grant scheme will be required to demonstrate that they are delivering an affordable and quality childcare service.

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Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will finalise the scope of the provision of goods, facilities and services legislation.

(AQO 5671/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Once consideration of the scope of the legislation and the implications of the various options available has been completed.

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School Attendance Rates

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the initiatives to improve school attendance rates in each Education and Library Board.

(AQW 31498/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the Education Welfare Service (EWS) delivers initiatives to improve the attendance of all pupils and targeted interventions for more vulnerable pupils. The EWS has Service Level Agreements with all schools which outline the working arrangements. EWS receives regular feedback from schools, parents and pupils which inform service provision. Audits are undertaken in all schools to identify pupils whose attendance is below 85% and to discuss with their schools appropriate action. Across the ELBs there are a number of initiatives to improve school attendance rates. For example:

- The Primary Attendance Matters (PAM) programme in primary schools assists pupils in making the transition to post-primary schools.
- The Belfast Education and Library Board and South-Eastern Education and Library Board have a joint multi-disciplinary Looked After Team which provides support to looked after pupils to enable them to achieve the maximum from their education. This team is engaged in capacity building in schools through work on the Attachment Project which identifies key adults to work with individual children to support them through their educational placements and keep them engaged in education.
- The School Age Mothers programme.
- Children’s Early Support Service (ChESS).
- The Metamorphous (META) project.
- The North-Eastern Education and Library Board, through the Residential Study Support Project have been facilitating homework and study support in residential units in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area during the evenings.

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‘A for Autism: Make every School a Good School’ Report

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the recommendations contained in the ‘A* for Autism: Make every school a good school’ report.

(AQW 31559/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: I remain committed to ensuring that every child, including those with autism, receives a high quality education that enables them to fulfil their full potential. To this end I agree with the overall aim of the A* for Autism report that not only should every child with autism have access to a high quality education but that parents should also have access to a system that works with them to help achieve this. To this end my Department is continuing to put in place a range of policies aimed at raising standards for all pupils, including those with autism. These include the Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion which aims to strengthen the system and end delays in intervention and assessment for all children. I want a more equitable system in which all SEN children should be able to get the support they need through a comprehensive range of measures. There has been significant investment by my Department in support for those with autism since publication of the Task Group Report on Autism in 2002. Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have dedicated Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Support Teams providing tailored support to match the individual needs of each child to ensure that each child reaches their full potential.

The cross-Departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan was launched in January 2014 by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and my Department is currently working closely with the ELBs and the Middletown Centre for Autism on implementation of the education-related actions. The Middletown Centre for Autism also continues to expand its multi-disciplinary learning support and assessment to directly support children with complex autism that have been referred to it by the Inter-Board Autism Group. In addition, the Centre continues to provide a broad range of training support to educational professionals and parents that are available free of charge.

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Educational Psychology Services: Waiting Times

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the performance of the Educational Psychology services in relation to the average length of time it takes for a child to be seen by a psychologist.

(AQW 31629/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have responsibility for the provision of educational psychology services to children and young people. I am content that the ELBs are performing well in relation to the provision of educational psychology support in the delivery of the statutory assessment process for children with special educational needs. I am, nonetheless, aware of the issue of some cases of prolonged waiting times for children to see an educational psychologist following their initial referral for an appointment. It is for this reason that each ELB has a target in their annual Resource Allocation Plan which states that educational psychology support should be provided to children at Stage Three of the Code of Practice within six months. Whilst in the majority of cases the waiting time is considerably less than six months, I have however reminded some Boards of my desire to see their waiting times reduced as far as possible and I will continue to closely monitor this situation.

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Youth Service Activities: Funding

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been allocated in support of youth service activities in each Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 31632/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The following table provides details of the funding allocated to support youth service activities in each Education and Library Board in each of the last five years:

(£000s)

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14 (forecast spend)
BELB	6,012	7,231	8,166	7,204	8,770
NEELB	5,909	5,645	5,701	5,679	6,507
SEELB	5,853	5,277	5,118	5,508	6,674
SELB	5,583	6,358	5,211	6,274	7,567
WELB	4,590	5,190	4,443	5,181	6,229
Total	27,947	29,701	28,639	29,846	35,747

The above figures include allocations for capital works in the controlled sector. Details of funding for capital works for the voluntary youth sector are not kept by the Department according to Board area. A breakdown of these by year is provided below:

Year	Total (£000s)
2009/10	3,975
2010/11	2,025
2011/12	658
2012/13	1,329
2013/14 (spend year-to-date)	38
Total	8,025

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Dickson Plan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education, in light of the Southern Education and Library Board's rejection of Option A of Updating the Dickson Plan, what assurances he can give that he will not enforce this option on the area.

(AQW 31659/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB), at its meeting on 12 February 2014, decided to stop the consultation on the Board's preferred option in respect of 'Updating the Dickson Plan: the SELB proposals', and to move forward with a more wide ranging consultation process.

I have written to the Board to express my concern that, despite recognition for several years that all pupils in the controlled sector in the Craigavon area do not have access to equitable educational provision and despite the Board's pronouncement in June 2013 that retaining the status quo is not an option, the Board has failed to come forward with a strategic plan to address the fundamental inequality at the heart of this matter. I have sought robust assurances aligned to a timeframe as to how they intend to eradicate education inequality for the controlled sector in the Dickson plan area.

As Minister for Education, I reserve the right to take any steps deemed necessary to ensure all the young people in the Craigavon area are provided with access to a quality education.

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Dickson Plan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the responses to the Southern Education and Library Board's consultation on Option A of Updating the Dickson Plan; and what proportion of the responses from the controlled sector was in favour of retaining the current operation of the Dickson Plan.

(AQW 31663/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that a summary of consultation responses was reported to the Board at its meeting on 12 February 2014 and a copy of the report has been published on the SELB website. The report includes details of the proportion of the responses in favour of retaining the current operation of the Dickson Plan. I have not assessed the responses to the consultation; this is a matter for the SELB.

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Pathways to Success Strategy

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the progress of the tracking system for young people who are in or might enter the NEET category as outlined in the 'Pathways to Success' Strategy.

(AQW 31424/11-15)

Dr Farry: As part of its commitment to the Executive's Pathways to Success NEET Strategy, my Department is establishing a tracking system for those who are in or might enter the NEET category. To this end, the Department is taking forward a range of work to consolidate existing DEL data systems and make use of a Unique Learner Number (ULN) which should support the tracking of individuals' employment, training and educational progress. The ULN has already been adopted across the Further Education and Training sectors here, with approximately 270,000 ULNs having been generated for Northern Ireland to date. The ULN is already well established in England and is being implemented in Wales. The Department of Education has commenced a pilot to introduce ULN for year 11 pupils from September 2014 in a number of schools. It is anticipated that a full roll out of the ULN to all learners in Year 11 and above will be implemented from the 2015/16 Academic Year. This will allow alignment with Awarding Organisations as they move towards its use as a replacement for the Unique Candidate Identifier (UCI) which is used currently for examination entries. ULNs will be the preferred identifier within the A2C

project (the new system being put in place for the electronic distribution of examination results). UCAS will also use ULNs and they will be used along with resulting Personal Learner Record to support progression for learners to FET and Higher Education. The Careers Service, using information available from schools, FE Colleges, Training for Success and other training programmes also case manage young people aged 16 and 17 who drop out of provision or do not have a positive destination when they leave, thus supporting and signposting young people to provision that meets their needs.

On a wider front DEL has also begun work on a formal interim evaluation of the Pathways to Success strategy and is also currently undertaking a further work on estimating the numbers of young people in the NEET category using data from the 2011 Census of Population which will provide more detail on the characteristics of young people within Northern Ireland. This census work is expected to report later this month.

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Youth Training

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his review of youth training.

(AQO 5717/11-15)

Dr Farry: The aim of the youth training review is the development of a youth training offer at level 2, of sufficient breadth and depth to enable young people between the ages of 16 and 18 to progress to an apprenticeship programme at level 3, a level 3 further education programme, or into sustained employment. The review has progressed over the past few months, through both research and stakeholder engagement activities.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, I recently chaired a meeting of the review's expert panel, to discuss findings and emerging issues to be addressed as part of the review. The Department also held a series of stakeholder engagement events to hear the views of employers, young people, and training providers. These events coincided with a call for submissions, which was hosted on the Department's website.

Officials in the department have also carried out research and engaged with experts in the OECD to investigate models of best practice in the delivery of vocational education and training. Following the OECD's recommendations, I recently carried out a study visit to the Netherlands as part of the review process. A key element of best practice observed through the visit was the flexibility of providers in the Netherlands to match training and qualifications to the needs of local employers. Also to the fore was the willingness of employers to integrate those on work placements into their wider business operations, both through adopting a project-based approach to the young person's placement, and through tying engagement in vocational training to their wider recruitment strategy. The feedback from the call for submissions and the stakeholder events will be combined with these research findings to inform the review's interim report, which is due for publication in Summer 2014.

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Youth Unemployment: Rural Areas

Mr Wilson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any departmental initiatives to deal with youth unemployment in rural areas.

(AQO 5719/11-15)

Dr Farry: Youth unemployment has been a consistent problem over the past seven years, and it is one that we are now tackling effectively. Although the Labour Force Survey indicates that 23% of economically active 18-24 year olds are unemployed, this excludes students from the calculation. An alternative measure for the whole population of this age is the claimant count which shows that fewer than 1 in 10 of our young people is claiming unemployment related benefits. All of my Department's programmes for addressing youth unemployment are available across Northern Ireland, irrespective of urban or rural settings.

My Department leads on the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' strategy which targets young people not in education, employment or training, known as NEET. The Local Employment Intermediary Service has been refocused with an emphasis on young people who are NEET. In total, more than £25 million to deliver these initiatives over the 2012 to 2015 period.

The Youth Employment Scheme provides help to unemployed young people aged 18 to 24 years, to obtain work experience, develop additional skills and gain employment. In order to increase participation in rural areas, the Youth Employment Scheme intends to run a pilot offering 12 free driving lessons, one theory test and one practical driving test, for those completing 8 weeks work experience or moving into full time employment during a work experience placement.

A JobClub initiative is delivered in partnership with LibrariesNI and community organisations. Travel expenses are reimbursed and this may be particularly beneficial for individuals in rural areas.

Steps to Work, the Department for Employment and Learning's main adult return to work programme, is available throughout Northern Ireland.

Through its Training for Success programme, the Department provides a guarantee of a training place to those who are unemployed and in the 16 and 17 year old age group, with extended eligibility for those aged under 22 with a disability; and under 24 for those young people who qualify under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) (2002). The programme is designed to enable young people to progress to higher level training, further education, or employment Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-2013, assists unemployed and economically inactive people, including young people, by helping them to improve their employability and ultimately enter sustained employment. The Programme supports projects with a specific focus on rural young people, and a wider range of projects available to young people across the region, including in rural areas.

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Unemployment: Young People

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given one in four young people are unemployed, to outline the resources and measures he has put in place to deal with this crisis.

(AQO 5726/11-15)

Dr Farry: Youth unemployment has been a consistent problem over the past seven years, and it is one that we are now tackling effectively. Although the Labour Force Survey indicates that 23% of economically active 18-24 year olds are unemployed, this excludes students from the calculation. An alternative measure for the whole population of this age is the claimant count which shows that fewer than 1 in 10 of our young people is claiming unemployment related benefits. All of my Department's programmes for addressing youth unemployment are available across Northern Ireland, irrespective of urban or rural settings.

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Average Case Load for Social Workers

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average case load for a social worker in the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQW 31298/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not held centrally and has been sourced from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. It was not possible to give the information by constituency area; the following is therefore a Trust wide perspective. It is not possible to provide an average case load for all Social Workers across the operational Directorates as Social Work caseloads vary depending on the service. The Southern Trust has therefore provided the following information broken down into caseload in Children's, Adults and Acute settings. Caseload for part time staff are pro-rata to their hours of employment.

Children's Services

The average case load for a Social Worker within the Family Support & Safeguarding Division is 14 – 15 children, and this includes children who require Child Protection, Looked After and Family Support.

The average caseload for a social worker in Children with Disability services is 33 – 34 children, and this includes children who require Family Support, Looked After status and Children in Educational Transition.

From the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) service perspective a number of Social Workers are employed as Practitioners/Clinicians within both services. Within CAMHS, the average caseload for these Practitioners is 22 children and young people per Practitioner. Within our Autism services the average ratio is 40 – 45 children and young people per Clinician. Both services have a Trust wide remit.

Caseloads per Social Worker within the Corporate Parenting Division ranges from 12 – 19 children with an average of 15 children for full time social workers and this includes children who require Child Protection, Looked After, and Leaving and After Care Services.

Caseloads for Family Placement staff reflect work in recruiting, assessing, training and supporting foster carers and adopters, both non kinship and kinship cases, alongside a range of post adoption cases such as origins work and support to adoptive families. Full time staff therefore usually have around 2 – 4 assessment cases alongside approximately 18 link support/other cases. Staff also undertake office duty and may have involvement in training work which is not recorded as a case. On this basis full time staff within Family Placement would carry between 20 – 30 cases.

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Paediatric Congenital Heart Surgery

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to clarify the situation for planned or elective care in paediatric congenital heart surgery following his written statement of 24 February 2014.

(AQW 31357/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my written statement on 24 February 2014 I informed the Assembly that the arrangements for the interim service for elective paediatric congenital cardiac surgery in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to be provided by Dublin-based surgeons have been finalised; an SLA (Service Level Agreement) has been signed off by all parties and the first surgical session took place on 17 February 2014. It is an operational matter for the Belfast Trust and Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin to schedule surgical sessions.

In line with risk management arrangements currently in place, the Belfast Trust does not perform elective open heart surgery for children under 1 year and children whose procedure is considered to be more complex; those children will continue to be transferred to centres in England for surgery.

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Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following his recent statement on Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services how long does he estimate the assessment team from the USA and Scotland will spend in Northern Ireland. (AQW 31402/11-15)

Mr Poots: The three experts appointed to carry out this assessment are currently considering the length of time they will need to spend in Northern Ireland. My Department expects that the itinerary for this visit will be finalised in the near future.

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Family Fund: Funding

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the funding for the Family Fund has decreased; and if so, how will any decrease in funding be addressed. (AQW 31653/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department provides funding of approximately £1.57m per year to the Family Fund. In the current financial year, this funding allowed the Family Fund to help 2870 families in Northern Ireland with disabled children. Despite the challenging financial situation, I am hopeful of being able to continue this commitment again next year. Previously, this contribution was £1.77m. Unfortunately, due to budgetary constraints, this funding was reduced to £1.57m in 2011/12 from £1.77m. My officials met with representatives from the Family Fund very recently to discuss the current funding position and they are actively considering how best the Fund can help support families in NI.

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Aftercare Services for Children

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has he given to following the example set by Scotland in the Children & Young People Bill to provide all children in care with aftercare services until the age of 21 years and for those in full time education until the age of 26 years.

(AQW 31733/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department continues to support the Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Scheme in Northern Ireland. This Scheme provides foster carers with practical and financial support so that young people in employment, education or training can continue to live with their foster carers after they become 18. Support through GEM can continue beyond age 21 to those who are completing courses of education and training. At the end of December 2013 there were 241 young people availing of the Scheme. In addition, my Department is in the process of developing an Adoption and Children Bill, which we intend to consult on in the near future. As part of the consultation process, reference will be made to past and present legislative developments in other parts of the UK, including Scotland, and to see seek views on whether those developments are transferable to Northern Ireland.

Finally, work is ongoing to develop a strategic response to the needs of looked-after children in Northern Ireland and those responsible for their care. As part of that exercise, my officials have been engaging with key stakeholders. This extends to stakeholders in other parts of the UK. A meeting with Scottish officials has been scheduled for late March 2014, which will seek to clarify some of the proposals contained in the Children & Young People Bill, including the proposal to extend, for all children in care, aftercare services for those in full time education until age 26.

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Chronic Childhood Obesity

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to combat chronic childhood obesity.

(AQW 31780/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department launched the ten year obesity prevention strategy, known as “A Fitter Future for All” in March 2012. This framework encompasses the actions set out in the original Fit Futures Implementation Plan (which dealt specifically with childhood obesity) and includes outcomes designed to tackle obesity throughout the entire life course of the population of Northern Ireland.

Outcomes specific to childhood obesity include:

- Health and Social Care Professionals identify, and provide appropriate interventions or signposting, for young children who are, or are at-risk of, overweight/obesity.
- Food and nutrition initiatives increase nutritional knowledge, practical nutrition and food skills in a variety of voluntary, community and private Early Years settings, including parent/carer and toddler groups. This should include healthy weaning and the use of non-sweet based reward systems.
- Every child in Northern Ireland over the age of 8 provided with the opportunity to participate in at least 2 hours per week of extra-curricular sport, physical recreation or play.
- Youth sector settings have healthy food policies in place. This framework also makes links to existing strategies and policies that can have a beneficial impact on childhood obesity including:
 - Start Active, Stay Active – Guidelines promoting physical activity from the four home countries’ Chief Medical Officers – DHSSPS
 - Breastfeeding: A Great Start – A Strategy for Northern Ireland 2013-2033 DHSSPS
 - A new Food in Schools Policy – Sport Matters – The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019 – Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Play and Leisure Policy – Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. The Public Health Agency is also working across a range of settings on the specific issue of childhood obesity. The key areas of work are:
 - Breastfeeding;
 - Early Years nutrition and physical activity;
 - Food in Schools;
 - Physical activity in schools; and

- Weight management programmes.

The PHA also fund a range of initiatives, programmes, and schemes delivered in local communities that seek to prevent and address obesity, these include: allotment schemes, programmes to support the development of cooking skills, and initiatives that promote walking, cycling and active play.

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Human Trafficking and Prostitution

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what steps his Department will take to review its opposition of the Nordic Model for tackling human trafficking and prostitution following the resolution passed by the European Parliament calling on Member States to implement such a model, as proposed in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill.

(AQW 31474/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has not reached a firm view yet on issues of criminality of the purchaser relating to prostitution. I have concerns about the unintended consequences such legislation might have on those vulnerable people involved in prostitution. The non-binding resolution, while pointing to the Nordic model, also made recommendations on wider issues such as exit schemes for women who want to get out of prostitution and measures to address the reasons that force women into prostitution. I have commissioned independent research to consider these wider issues. The research will provide a proper evidence base from which to make informed policy decisions on the future of prostitution regulation in Northern Ireland.

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Crime: Parental Discipline

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Justice, in light of his Department's recent crime study finding that drugs, alcohol and a lack of discipline from parents are the three main causes of crime, how he intends to address these factors, in particular, the perceived lack of parental discipline.

(AQO 5763/11-15)

Mr Ford: I welcomed the recent publication of the findings of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey. Whilst acknowledging that drugs and alcohol are a particular concern highlighted in these statistics, I also noted that progress is being made into how the public perceive crime in Northern Ireland and that improvements are evident in the areas of anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. The causes of crime and anti-social behaviour are often complex and varied. Offending behavior can be influenced by a range of individual, family and community risk factors and addressing the wider social determinants of crime and reducing offending requires a partnership approach across government.

My Department has published the Community Safety Strategy entitled 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities' which outlines our efforts to build a safer society by addressing the underlying causes and drivers of crime and anti-social behaviour. The Strategy recognises the links between alcohol and drug misuse and crime, together with the importance of intervening early to reduce the risk of individuals, especially young people, coming into contact with the justice system.

Regarding the perceived lack of parental discipline, government recognises the need for a greater focus on, and investment in, early intervention. Early intervention spans a range of Executive strategies and policies. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) brings together relevant agencies and departments, from health and social services, education and justice agencies, to lead on integrated planning and commissioning of support and services aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland. I and my Department remain committed to working with the wide range of stakeholders involved in tackling the wider social determinants of crime and implementing appropriate initiatives to respond effectively to these issues.

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