



**Northern Ireland
Executive**

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DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE

DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH CHILDCARE

**A Ten Year Strategy for Affordable and
Integrated Childcare
2015-2025**

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1. MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

We are pleased to launch for public consultation this, the full draft version of the Executive's Childcare Strategy.

The present draft builds upon the work now well underway in relation to the first phase of the Strategy, which we launched in 2013. That first phase aimed to address the most pressing childcare needs brought to our attention through extensive survey research and during an earlier round of consultation with parents, children and childcare stakeholders. More low cost school age childcare places, more childcare places for children with a disability and better and more accessible information on available childcare services were among the principal needs identified. We believe we have gone some distance towards addressing those needs by, for example, creating or sustaining, to date, more than 2,000 school age childcare places, and by enhancing the childcare information available through the Family Support NI website.

Since launching the first phase of the Childcare Strategy, we have worked closely with the childcare sector and childcare stakeholders to develop this, the full version. This has included one-to-one interviews with the principal stakeholder and sectoral organisations and longer workshop sessions. This engagement has enabled us to review how well the Strategy has been performing to date, to identify where improvement is needed and, most important, to single out the key remaining childcare challenges, and determine how best to address them.

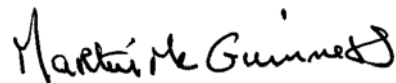
This document sets out proposed aims and objectives for the full Childcare Strategy along with a proposed 22 interventions on which we would like your views. We are, for example, considering extending the support currently being given to school age childcare providers to cover all childcare services for all age groups. We are also exploring how best to make childcare services more responsive to the needs of parents, including the need for more flexible care, available outside of conventional working hours. Ways of making the

financial assistance available with the costs of childcare more widely known and used are also being examined.

Consultation will run for 16 weeks until 13 November 2015, and will include a series of regional consultation events in Belfast and other cities and towns. Details of these events will be advertised on the OFMDFM website and publicised by our partners in the childcare sector. We would encourage everyone who has an interest in this priority policy area to participate in the consultation process by responding to the consultation questionnaire and/or by attending a consultation event. All opinions received will be taken into account when finalising our Childcare Strategy for publication.



RT HON PETER D ROBINSON MLA
First Minister



MARTIN MCGUINNESS MLA
deputy First Minister

2. HOW TO RESPOND

2.1 We would welcome your views on our policy proposals for a final Childcare Strategy. A consultation questionnaire has been developed to assist you in commenting on the content of the draft Childcare Strategy. The questionnaire can be accessed online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Childcare-Consultation> and should be completed in association with this consultation document. It should take about twenty minutes to complete.

2.2 A copy of the questionnaire is also available on our website www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/childcare. Written responses to this consultation should be submitted in writing or by email to:

Address: Childcare Strategy Consultation
Room E3.18
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SR

Email: childcare.consultation@ofmdfmni.gov.uk

2.3 All responses must be received by **5pm on Friday 13 November 2015**.

2.4 When responding to this consultation, please state whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents and, where applicable, how the views of members were assembled.

2.5 During the consultation period we will meet with groups and individuals who are particularly interested in these policy proposals. Details of these consultation events will be made available on our website www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/childcare or by using the contact details below.

Queries about this document/alternative formats

2.6 Any queries about this consultation document or requests for alternative formats should be addressed to:

Address: Childcare Strategy Consultation
Room E3.18
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SR

Email: childcare.consultation@ofmdfmi.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 9052 8659

Fax: 028 9052 3272

Textphone: 028 9052 2526

2.7 Please contact us using the details above if you need printed copies, or if you need any further assistance to make a response.

Freedom of Information

2.8 The Freedom of Information Act gives the public the right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ("the Department). This includes access to information provided in response to a consultation exercise.

2.9 The Department can not automatically consider information supplied to it during consultation as confidential if that information is subsequently requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. However, if there is a Freedom of Information request submitted during this present consultation, the Department will consider whether it should be made public, or treated confidentially.

2.10 If we are asked to disclose responses under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we will take any requests for confidentiality into account. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. We will handle any personal data provided during the consultation in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

2.11 For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office or visit their website at:

http://ico.org.uk/about_us/our_organisation/northern_ireland

After the consultation

2.12 Following the consultation period, we will consider all responses received and take these into account in developing our final policy proposals. A summary of the consultation responses received, along with our final policy proposals, will be published on the Department's website (www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk).

3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXECUTIVE'S CHILDCARE STRATEGY

Aims

3.1 The Childcare Strategy has two main aims:

- **Developmental**: To give all our children the best start in life, preparing them for lifelong wellbeing and achievement, thereby creating the basis for a better, more prosperous future.
- **Employment**: To enable parents to join the workforce thereby enhancing prosperity, and to improve gender equality by enabling mothers to join the workforce, return to work, remain in work, work the hours they want and progress in their careers.

Objectives

3.2 To achieve these aims, the Childcare Strategy will, over the coming decade, work towards the following seven key objectives:

- Childcare services that are **available** to all children, regardless of where they live, their needs or circumstances with a registered and appropriate childcare place for every child that requires one;
- Childcare services that are **affordable**—no longer taking a disproportionate share of average household incomes;
- Childcare settings that aim to become **sustainable**, able, eventually, to cover their costs from the fees they charge;
- Childcare settings that foster lifelong respect for **diversity**, thereby laying the foundations for a more tolerant and inclusive future;
- Childcare services that are of high **quality**, meeting or bettering the current minimum standards and with all staff and managers trained to the appropriate level;
- Detailed and up to date information on the childcare sector that is readily available to parents, allowing them to make **informed choices** regarding the childcare services they use; and

- Childcare services that are **integrated with**, and complementary to, educational and youth services.

Actions

- 3.3 Delivering the Childcare Strategy and achieving its aims and objectives will require coordinated action across a range of government departments and services.
- 3.4 Back in September 2013, we launched the first phase of the Strategy, including a set of 15 Key First Actions to address the most immediate childcare needs and priorities identified during consultation and research. These initial steps focused on: increasing the types of childcare provision most in need; building the skills base of the childcare workforce; providing parents with more detailed and user-friendly information; and establishing a partnership approach between government departments and the childcare sector.
- 3.5 In this, the full, ten year Childcare Strategy, we will now examine how we might build on those preliminary actions, making good any gaps via a two stage process. Firstly we are replacing our initial 15 actions with the 22 areas of development set out in this document. We will, for example, look at the options for extending the support we currently provide to school age childcare to cover, going forward, the full range of childcare services and childcare providers. We will consider how to make childcare services more responsive to the needs of all parents, regardless of where they live, including the need for more flexible care, available outside of conventional working hours. Ways of making the financial assistance available with the costs of childcare more widely known and used will also be examined.
- 3.6 Building on this and working with the childcare sector and with childcare stakeholders, we will roll out the selected and affordable interventions to scale and thereafter continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of our Childcare Strategy and report on our findings.

By 2025...

- 3.7 We intend, through ten years of coordinated action to develop and deliver childcare services, thereby ensuring that this Strategy achieves its aims—that children receive the best start in life, that parents are not prevented from joining the workforce, that a fundamental and positive change in our society is achieved.

4. OUR VISION FOR THIS STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Executive's Vision for Affordable and Integrated Childcare is that, by 2025:

Every child, parent and family will have access to affordable, integrated, quality childcare. Through childcare, we will support the transformation of our society, promoting equality, social inclusion and social mobility. We will use childcare as a stepping stone to lifelong achievement, from formal education into adult life. Through childcare, we will instil lifelong respect for diversity. By making affordable childcare services more widely available, we will enable all parents, but especially mothers, to join the workforce. In this way, childcare will contribute to greater gender equality. Finally, by developing local childcare services, we will create childcare jobs and develop the skills of people working in the childcare sector.

Critical Elements

- 4.2 Childcare is the safe supervision of children in an environment that supports and enriches their development, education and well-being. All children, we believe, can benefit from the childcare experience by engaging with other children in a safe, stimulating environment. Early years interventions and good quality childcare, including school age childcare, can be critical factors in children's development. They can prepare children for learning, complementing the opportunities available in the home and in formal education. Quality, child-centred activity in a safe, formal setting can also teach cooperation and sharing, as well as fostering lifelong respect for difference and diversity.
- 4.3 In time, quality childcare services can also play an important role in countering the effects of disadvantage and deprivation. Generally, childcare services can help deliver fundamental and lasting social

change by improving children's health and well-being, building their life chances and enabling them to achieve their full potential. In this respect, childcare can be regarded as the current generation investing in the next.

'US and UK evidence shows that the cognitive development of children, particularly from the most deprived backgrounds, is improved by attending high quality childcare from the age of two. Longitudinal studies demonstrate that attendance in formal childcare also leads to improved educational attainment, lower criminality and higher earnings at a later stage.'

Ian Mulheirn and Ryan Shorthouse, *The Parent Trap*, Social Market Foundation, 2011.

Wider Impact

- 4.4 Children must be central to the Childcare Strategy. That is what stakeholders, parents and children themselves advised us during the development of the first phase of the Childcare Strategy. Our Strategy is therefore first and foremost about children. It sets out to prepare all our children for positive, lifelong achievement such as better performance at school, leading on to better employment prospects in adulthood. Childcare services that are high quality and available to all have the potential to contribute to lasting social change, notably increased living standards and greater social inclusion. In this way, quality childcare can help break the cycle of inter-generational deprivation.
- 4.5 However, children are not the only beneficiaries of childcare. Childcare is also crucial to allow parents to remain in employment and also a critical enabler for parents who wish to enter employment, education and training. This, too, can assist in moving families out of poverty. Supported by an affordable, flexible and accessible childcare sector, parents can access work, improve their workplace skills and

employability, and continue to be economically active.

- 4.6 Recent research published by the Equality Commission identified the availability of affordable and appropriate childcare as a fundamental part of the process of mothers participating in the labour market. Therefore, as well as facilitating child development, this Strategy will also enable parents, particularly mothers, to enter or remain in the labour force, to progress in their chosen career, to train for work, or to study. All of this will contribute to enhanced levels of economic activity, greater gender equality, and reduced child poverty.

The 1997 Quebec childcare programme cut childcare fees to \$5 per day. Between 1998 and 2008, the proportion of children in childcare increased from 16% to 43%. Over the same period, there was an estimated 70,000 increase in maternal employment attributable to the programme. Between 1998 and 2008, the poverty rate for single mothers decreased from 36% to 22%.

A Shared Approach

- 4.7 While this Strategy advocates universal quality childcare, it also acknowledges that the needs of children and their parents are diverse, and that a 'one size fits all' approach will not be adequate. We therefore intend to build upon the many excellent and diverse childcare services that already exist to create a system that can offer flexibility and choice; one that can both promote and respond to change. For example, in a rural context we are proposing to look at a more flexible approach to childminding services including childminding shared service models and childminder networks. These models may help to assist with the sustainability and affordability of rural childcare provision, and provide opportunities to develop all important social skills in young children.
- 4.8 Government cannot, on its own, bring about the type of long-term, lasting social transformation envisaged in the Childcare Strategy. In

developing the Strategy, we have engaged fully with the childcare sector and with childcare stakeholders. The content of this Strategy has been informed by the opinions of the childcare sector and other interested parties, by research and by public consultation with parents, stakeholders and children. Childcare policy in other countries has also been considered. In delivering the Strategy, and monitoring and evaluating its performance, we will continue to work with stakeholders. We will also keep in view the policies and practice of other jurisdictions.

- 4.9 This is an ambitious Strategy. It aims to support child development and promote parental employment, with all of the individual and societal benefits these can bring. This level of change will require the expansion and transformation of childcare provision here. Not only do we wish to increase the provision of childcare places where this can be shown to be needed, we also aim to enhance the quality of the childcare services provided. At the same time, we want to keep childcare services affordable.

Delivery

- 4.10 Changing our childcare landscape will require strategic interventions to encourage and facilitate affordable, sustainable childcare settings of high quality to start up and expand over the coming decade. Specifically, we want to see a robust childcare sector that can deliver in line with the objectives set out in Figure 1 on the next page. While this will inevitably require public funding, government's ability to support the expansion of the sector is currently constrained. While childcare is a priority area, the Childcare Strategy will need to use existing resources more efficiently as well as develop new resources.

Figure 1: Childcare Strategy Objectives

An Integrated Approach

Childcare services and other, related types of service such as nursery schools, nursery classes, Sure Start services and extended schools will be complementary.

Diversity

Childcare services will help children to acknowledge and respect diversity, promoting positive cooperation between children regardless of their gender, religious community background, nationality or ethnicity, and regardless of whether they have a disability.

Informed parental choice

Parents will have ready access to detailed information on the registered childcare services available in their area, and on existing financial support with the costs of childcare. This will include access to inspection reports. We will also examine the feasibility of developing a system of star ratings for childcare settings.

Quality

All registered childcare settings will offer a quality service that is, at least, compliant with current minimum standards. Childcare work will be promoted as a respected and valued profession.

Affordability

The average household will spend a realistic percentage of its income on childcare services.

Sustainability

All childcare settings assisted under the Strategy will aim to be sustainable—covering their costs from the fees they charge for their services.

Availability

Childcare services will be available and physically accessible to all children and parents that require them, regardless of their location, needs or circumstances.

- 4.11 In developing our Childcare Strategy, we have, as noted, taken account of childcare policy in other countries. We have considered, in particular, the well regarded childcare services that operate in Northern Europe. These deliver universal childcare services at a relatively low cost to parents. However, this is achieved through significant allocations of public expenditure to the childcare sector.
- 4.12 The financial resources available to support childcare services here are more limited. Any additional financial assistance for childcare may well need to come from our block grant, at the expense of other publicly funded services. Therefore, we will not achieve this Strategy's aims and objectives solely through grants and subsidies. We will also need to ensure that parents maximise the financial support available to them, for example through the new Tax-Free Childcare initiative, and draw on the significant non financial resources that are available to us. These include, for example, the experience and expertise of community-based childcare providers working in some of our most disadvantaged areas. These providers have shown significant social entrepreneurship, leveraging social enterprise capital and developing, over time, excellent childcare services that can meet local need. There is a model here that we believe can be shared with other, similar communities that currently lack adequate childcare services. There are also many people who are unemployed or economically inactive who could, with training and support, become childcare workers and providers.
- 4.13 We note that conventional private sector childcare providers have also, over time, developed excellent services that meet local need. We will look at ways of supporting and developing these services.
- 4.14 The school estate is a resource with the potential to be used as a base for childcare services. Some schools already provide childcare services on site, or have invited external providers to do so. The preliminary research we have undertaken in this area has indicated that school estate-based childcare is popular with parents and schools alike. The Childcare Strategy aims to continue to encourage and assist the

development of the school estate as a venue for childcare services.

4.15 The workplace is a further potential location for childcare services. The Childcare Strategy will review options for increasing childcare provision in the workplace, beginning with the public sector estate. Anywhere that has a significant number of public sector workers—a hospital, a university, the Stormont estate—is also a potential market for childcare services. We will look at ways of making existing public sector buildings available to prospective childcare providers.

4.16 With regard to private sector employers, we believe that there is similar potential to encourage on-site childcare provision. Larger employers, particularly those that require their staff to work flexible hours, might benefit from providing suitably flexible childcare services in the workplace.

4.17 Finally, we will promote the financial assistance currently available with the costs of childcare, by supporting existing advice services within programmes, to ensure that all parents eligible for this support are benefiting from it. This will include both the Child Tax Credit and childcare element of Working Tax Credit for which many low and middle income families are eligible, and the new Tax Free Childcare scheme due to be launched in the autumn. We aim to maximise the amount by which local parents benefit from the support available.

4.18 These are just some of the approaches we are looking at with a view to enhancing and expanding the provision of childcare services locally.

5. CONTEXT AND AIMS

5.1 The Programme for Government, 2011-15, commits the Executive to '*publish and implement a Childcare Strategy with key actions to provide integrated and affordable childcare*'. The Childcare Strategy is aligned with the primary focus of the Programme for Government, which is 'to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage'. It is also fundamental to other Executive policy initiatives—the anti-poverty agenda; the Strategy to Improve the Lives of Disabled People, 2012-15; the Child Poverty Strategy; the Children and Young People's Strategy; the Gender Equality Strategy.

5.2 In addition, because quality childcare has the potential to redress many of the negative developmental consequences of disadvantage and deprivation, the Childcare Strategy is a significant element of the Executive's Delivering Social Change framework. Delivering Social Change aims to bring about:

- a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues, across all ages; and
- an improvement in children and young people's health, wellbeing and life opportunities, thereby breaking the long-term cycle of multi-generational problems.

Childcare Strategy—First Phase

5.3 Initial public consultation on the Childcare Strategy took place from December 2012 to March 2013. Six public consultation events were held (one of which was aimed at children) and written submissions were received from a range of individuals, groups and bodies. Development of the Strategy was also informed by ongoing research, including a survey of parents and childcare providers.

5.4 Following this three month consultation, the first phase of the Childcare Strategy was published in September 2013. This comprised a framework for the ongoing development of the full Childcare Strategy

and a set of 15 Key First Actions intended to address the main needs and priorities highlighted during consultation and research. These included:

- More School Age Childcare Services (breakfast clubs, after school clubs, and summer schemes).
- More detailed information for parents on the childcare services available where they live.
- More childcare provision for children with a disability.
- More childcare provision for rural communities.
- Development of the childcare workforce.

5.5 The full list of these Key First Actions is set out at **Annex 1**.

5.6 Since the launch of the first phase of the Childcare Strategy, OFMDFM has, via the Childcare Strategy Programme Board, coordinated the implementation of the 15 Key First Actions and the development of the full Strategy. Development of the present consultation document has been undertaken on a co-design basis with ongoing involvement with the relevant Government Departments, the childcare sector and childcare stakeholders. Full account has also been taken of the Key First Actions, including their current and projected performance. We have, in addition, noted childcare policy and practice in other countries, our own commissioned research undertaken by RSM McClure Watters and the National Children's Bureau, and other, relevant research reports commissioned elsewhere, including analyses published by the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), NICEM/Barnardo's and Employers for Childcare.

Our High Level Aims

5.7 This Strategy, the Executive's Childcare Strategy, has two, high level, long term aims as noted—it aims to promote child development and it aims to enable parents to join the workforce.

Child Development

5.8 The child development aims of the Childcare Strategy are long term; they seek to bring about a generational change in equality, life chances and opportunities. Nonetheless, even in the first years of implementing the Strategy, we would expect to see initial signs of the type of change we are aiming to bring about such as an improvement in the performance of children in their first years of formal education. In monitoring and evaluating the Strategy, we will develop an approach that can capture and record that achievement.

Parental Employment

5.9 With regard to the effects of more accessible and affordable quality childcare services on parental employment, we expect to see signs of positive change in the first years of implementing the Strategy. These will include increased parental employment, increased maternal employment, increased employment of single mothers, an increase in the average incomes of low income families and an increase in the average incomes of single mothers. All of these will be critical indicators when we come to monitor and evaluate the Strategy.

5.10 We note, also, that parental employment can be supported through the right that exists under employment legislation for all parents to request flexible working arrangements. Increasingly, this right is being exercised by both mothers and fathers to enable workforce participation. It can therefore enhance gender equality and allow parents to achieve a balance between work commitments, parental childcare and formal childcare. We believe that employers who respond sympathetically to employee requests for more flexible working hours will, in time, benefit from a workforce that is more motivated, flexible and productive. This will, in turn, protect their investment in staff recruitment, training and development.

6. OBJECTIVES, PROVISION AND NEED

6.1 Section 1, Figure1, sets out the seven objectives of the Childcare Strategy:

- Availability
- Affordability
- Sustainability
- Informed Parental Choice
- Quality
- An Integrated Approach
- Diversity

In the paragraphs below, we will clarify what we mean by these terms, what current provision looks like, and what we believe successful performance on each might look like.

Availability

6.2 Childcare services need to be available and accessible to the parents and children that need them. Both consultation and survey research undertaken to inform the development of the Childcare Strategy indicated that parents would like to use formal childcare to a greater extent than at present and that they are deterred from doing so, primarily, by a lack of childcare places in their area and/or by the cost of those services.

6.3 RSM McClure Watters report that nearly half of all parents surveyed cited availability as a barrier to their being able to use childcare services. A quarter said that childcare was not available where they lived; 15% said that local providers did not operate at the times of day when they needed childcare; and 8% stated that the childcare setting they wished to use had a waiting list.

6.4 The Childcare Strategy will aim to make available, region-wide, childcare services that are at least as accessible as existing school services. Longer term, however, the Strategy will ensure that no child is without ready access to childcare – a registered and appropriate place for every child that needs one. Where possible, parents and children will not have to complete long journey times to and from childcare settings. Where possible, settings will be accessible by foot; where necessary (in rural areas, for example) appropriate transport services will be available. To achieve this objective, we will begin by detailing the current levels of childcare provision, assess their adequacy, and examine ways of filling any gaps.

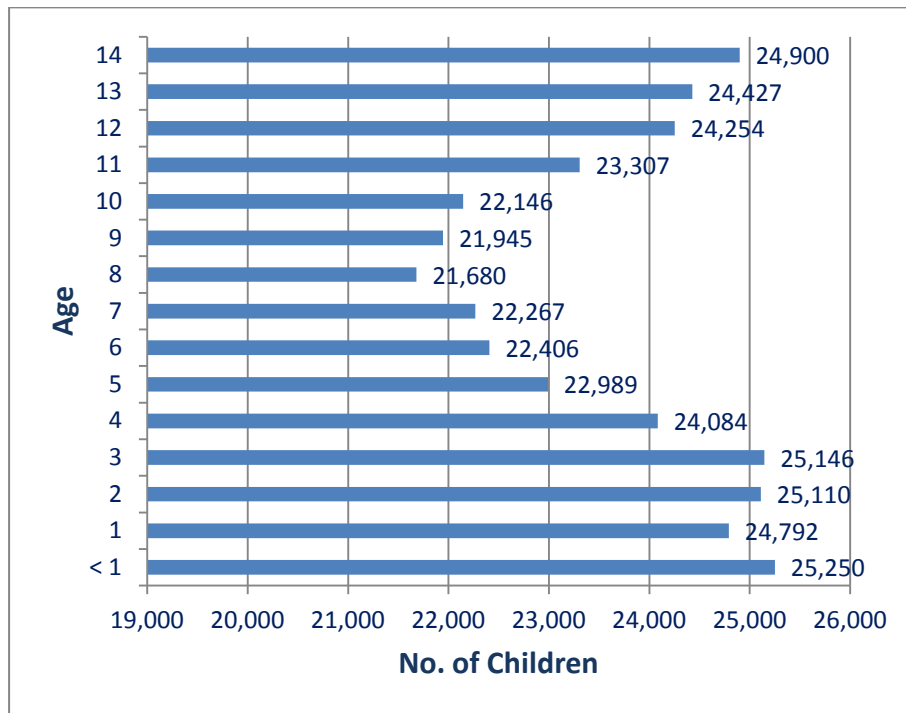
Current Provision

6.5 In 2013, there were almost 56,000 registered childcare places and some 355,000 children in the 0-14 age range—6 children for every registered childcare place. This overall ratio varied at the sub-regional level—approximately six children for every place in the Belfast, Northern and South Eastern Trust areas and around eight per place in the Southern and Western areas.

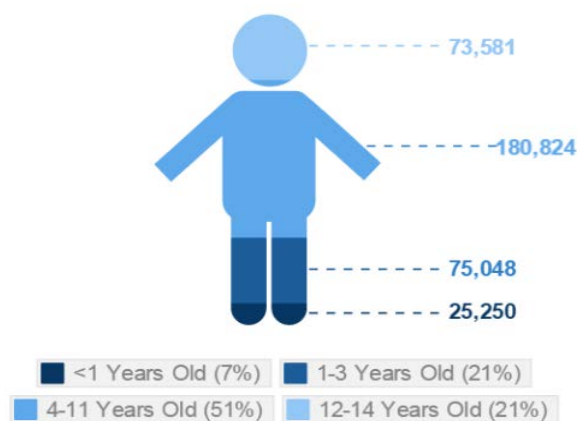
6.6 Economists advising on the development of the Strategy stated that this ratio—six children for every registered place—suggested ‘extreme under provision.’ However, they also noted that, in the local context, the care of 0-14 year olds in formal, registered settings outside the family home is highly under developed by international standards. Locally, for example, there remains a high reliance on informal childcare (childcare generally provided free of charge by relatives and friends) and on unregistered childcare.

6.7 The figures below show the 0-14 age group categorised by age. The graph shows age by year and the infographic shows age groups of children, including pre-school and school age.

Number of children by age



Number of children by age band



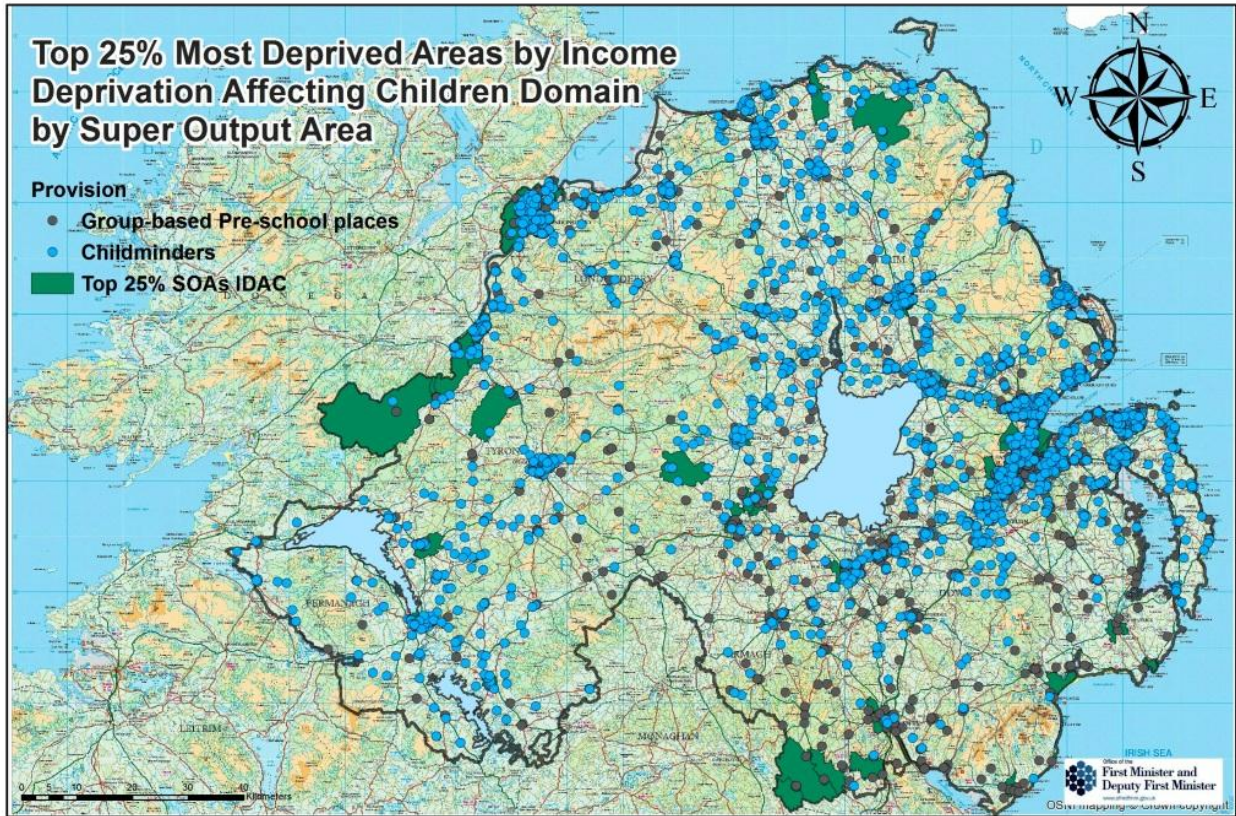
6.8 The 56,000 registered childcare places currently available are being provided in a range of childcare settings.

	No.	Places	% of total places
Childminders	4,076	21,315	38
Day Nursery/Creche	312	13,613	24
Playgroups	504	11,885	21
School Age Childcare	267	6,075	11
Other	161	3,025	5
	5,320	55,914	

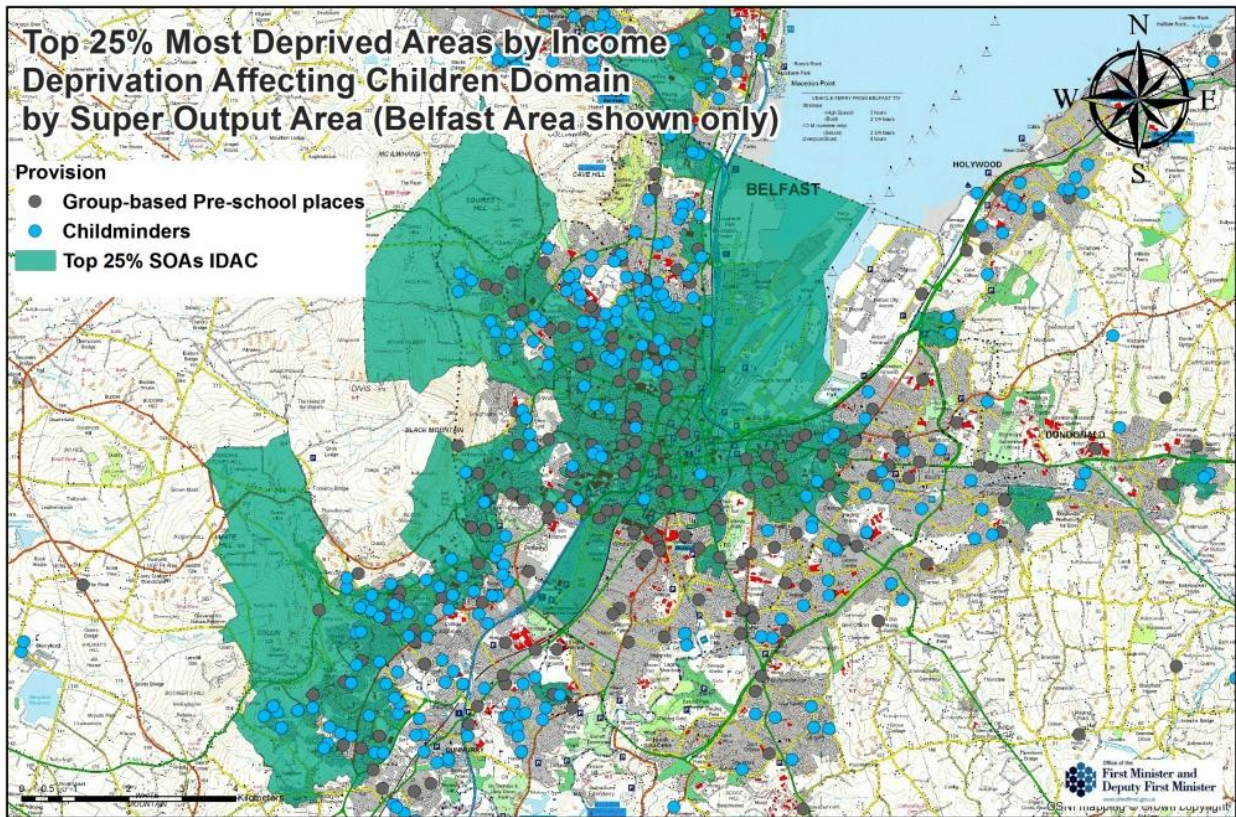
Provision for 0-4s

6.9 Approximately 125,000 children are aged 0-4 and have yet to begin primary education. We estimate that around 44,000 of the 56,000 childcare places currently available (in playgroups and day nurseries or with childminders) are aimed at this age group. There are therefore potentially three children of pre-school age for every registered pre-school childcare place, a high level of provision compared with the 6:1 ratio for children of all ages. Moreover, if we exclude children under the age of 1 and children likely to be in formal pre-school education, there is close to a 1:1 ratio, 50,000 children compared with 44,000 places, a very high level of provision. Correspondingly, when we surveyed parents, the availability (as distinct from the cost) of pre-school childcare services tended not to be an issue.

6.10 The following maps show the location of childminder and group-based pre-school places (day nurseries and playgroups) at regional level and in Belfast. Provision is more limited in the west, in rural areas and in disadvantaged areas.



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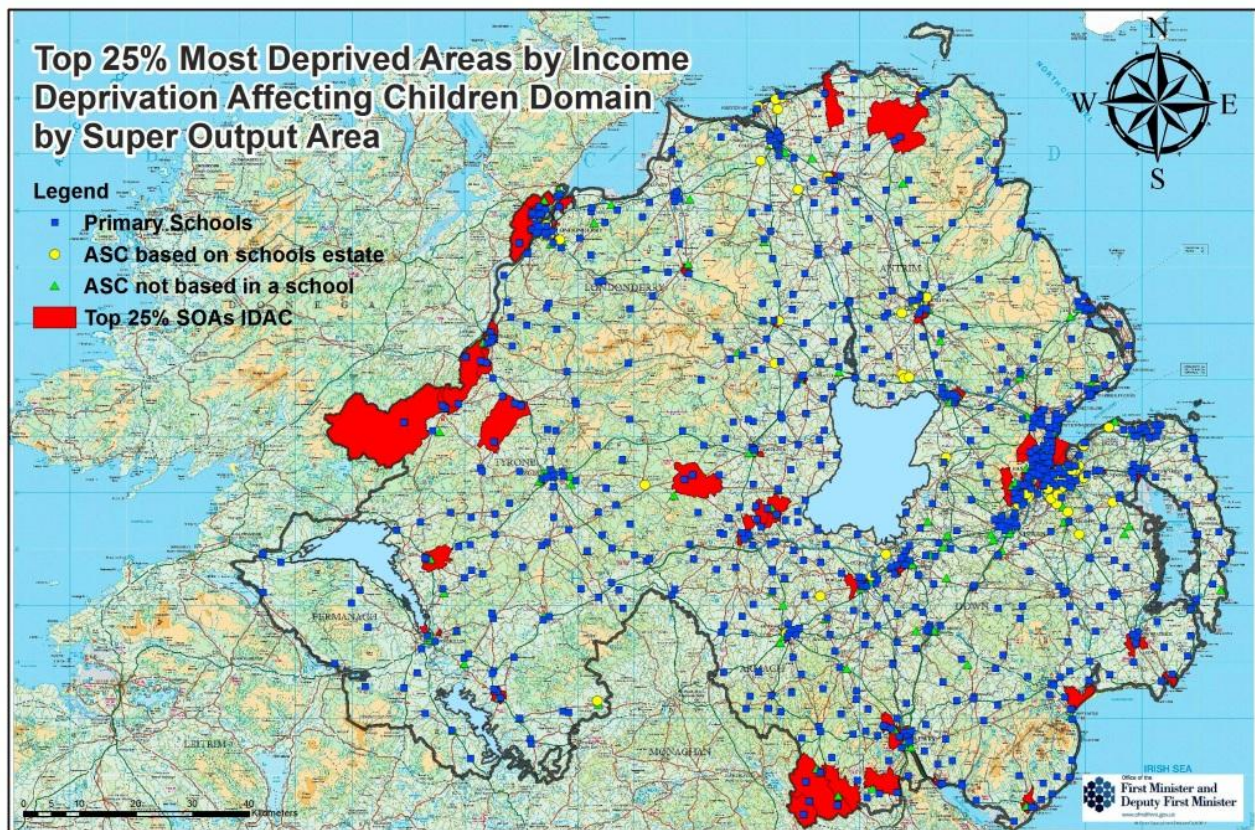
School Age Childcare

- 6.11 With childcare services focused primarily on the pre-school age group, there is correspondingly lower provision for children of school age. The lack of centre-based School Age Childcare provision in three out of every four Super Output Areas further suggests that more school age childcare might be needed. The findings of recent survey research are also supportive. Parents responding to the RSM McClure Watters survey identified school age childcare as the most prevalent area of unmet demand, citing the lack of school age childcare services, rather than cost, as the principal barrier.
- 6.12 There are around 12,000 School Age Childcare places (some 6,100 in formal School Age Childcare settings and the remainder with other forms of childcare provider, typically childminders and day nurseries). With approximately 230,000 children in the target population for school age childcare (5-14 year olds), there are therefore 19 school age children for every registered School Age Childcare place. Economists working on the development of the strategy have advised that this is evidence of a 'high degree' of under provision.
- 6.13 Naturally, this 19:1 ratio does not mean that 18 out of every 19 school age children are in need a childcare place. Some school age children have a non-working parent that can look after them before and after the school day and some are cared for informally by relatives. Nonetheless, when compared to the other headline ratios for childcare provision—six children for every place for children of all relevant ages and three children for every place for the pre-school 0-4s—it does suggest that School Age Childcare is an area where provision might need to be increased, particularly if we agree that most, if not all, children can benefit developmentally from formal childcare services.

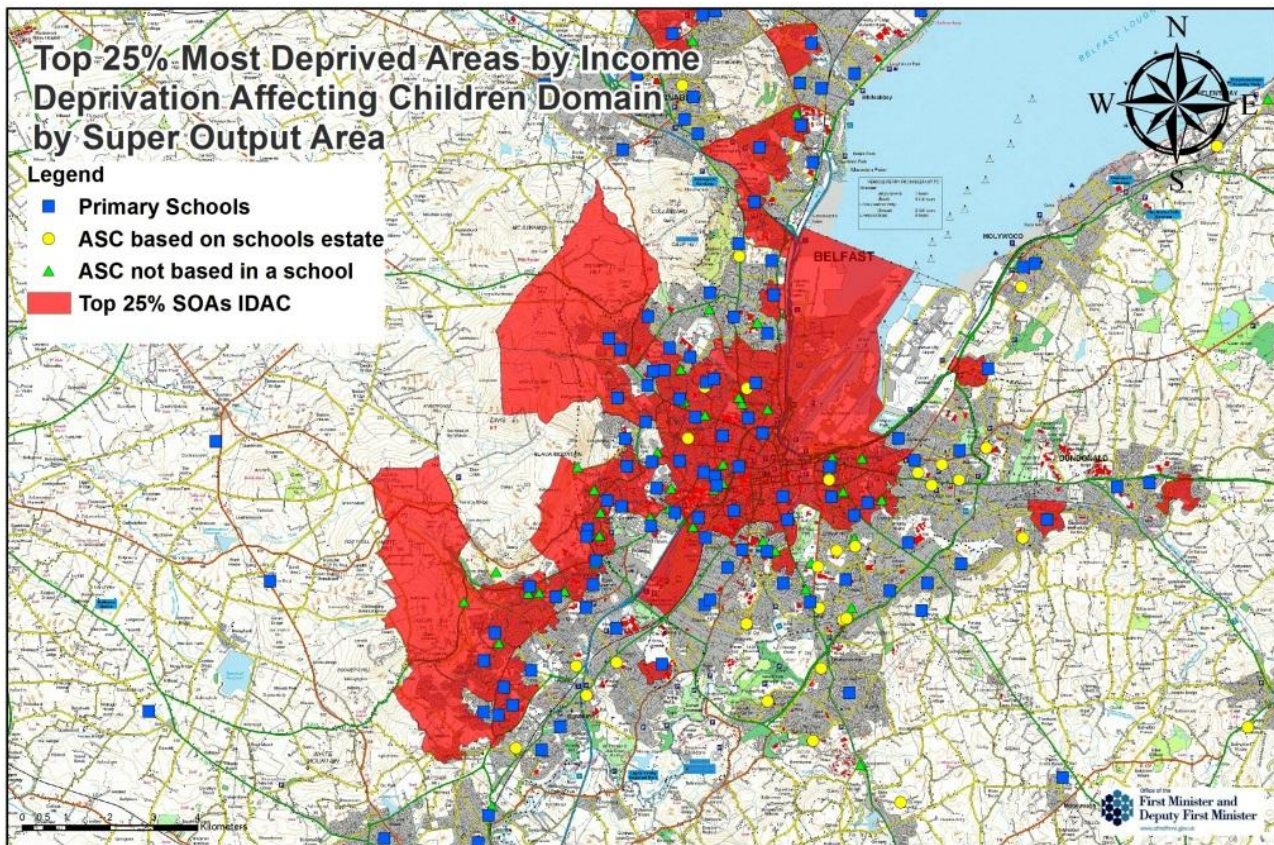
6.14 Also relevant is that the numbers of children in the 0-4 age group are likely to decrease in the period up to 2023, the numbers of school age children will increase to around 250,000 over the same period. If there is no change in the current supply of registered school age childcare places, the ratio of children to places will increase to approximately 21:1.

6.15 Looking solely at centre-based, out of school services, current provision is generally low, but relatively better in the Belfast area than elsewhere.

6.16 The following maps suggest that School Age Childcare services are more likely to be available in the east, in urban areas and in areas with relatively higher income levels.



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6.17 Economists advising on the development of the present Strategy identified the childcare needs of children with special needs or a disability as an emerging priority area. There are an estimated 12,000 – 15,000 children under 16 with a disability or special needs. Survey research indicates that around 40% of childcare providers can provide places for children with a disability.

Flexible Childcare Services

6.18 A further type of childcare that parents increasingly require is childcare that is available outside of conventional working hours. Many parents work unconventional hours, or at weekends, or on public holidays. During consultation we were advised of a growing need for childcare services that operate more flexibly. As noted, 15% of parents surveyed stated that childcare was not available at the times they required it.

Informal Childcare

6.19 Grandparents are the most common providers of informal childcare accounting for 71% of all informal childcare providers. Our commissioned survey research found that around 70% of households made some use of informal childcare services.

6.20 The 2013 Employers for Childcare Cost of Childcare survey found that informal childcare was the principal form of *additional* childcare for 44% of households and the *main* form of childcare for 15%. Single parent households were the most likely to use informal care as their main form of childcare; a quarter of all single parent families did so. Employers for Childcare noted that use of informal childcare had increased in recent years.

6.21 Evidence from our commissioned survey indicates that parents greatly value informal childcare. It is a flexible, free and trusted form of care. We believe that informal childcare that is complementary to formal provision has an important role to play in the Childcare Strategy. However, we also aim to assist the many parents who would like to use formal childcare, but are experiencing barriers in doing so. As noted, formal childcare is associated with long-term developmental benefits. For this reason, this Strategy aims to ensure that all children who require it can access both formal and informal childcare.

6.22 In time, formal childcare may become the only option available to many parents. As retirement ages increase, and we experience greater life expectancy, many older people will work longer and/or may themselves have caring responsibilities for adults. This could mean that the numbers of grandparents able to act as informal carers decreases.

Unregistered Childcare

6.23 Unregistered childcare is childcare by providers who are not formally registered but who charge a fee for their services. It is the commercial

aspect of unregistered provision that distinguishes it from informal childcare. It is illegal to operate as a childcare provider without being registered with the local Health and Social Care Trust.

6.24 Survey research undertaken by the Northern Ireland Childminders' Association (NICMA) found that more than a third of childminders surveyed knew of at least one unregistered childminder operating in their area while 17% reported that unregistered providers were having a negative impact on their business.

6.25 Registration and inspection offer reassurance to parents that childcare services and those who provide them are safe, reliable and of good quality. There is a concern that unregistered providers, by in part compromising on standards of service, are able to charge lower fees, thereby displacing registered provision.

Vacancies

6.26 Not all evidence supports the need for increased childcare provision. Our commissioned survey of childcare providers indicated that around 60% were operating with vacant places. Only 11% had waiting lists. Vacancy data maintained by the Northern Ireland Childminders' Association (NICMA) shows under occupancy of 22% for children below compulsory school age and 25% for children of school age.

6.27 We acknowledge these relatively high levels of under occupancy. Under occupancy is something we wish to address through this Strategy. However, the fact that 60% of childcare providers are reporting vacancies does not, of itself, mean that there is no need for additional childcare places. It is possible, for example, that the settings that report vacancies are not located in areas where the need for childcare services is greatest. As noted previously, three quarters of all super output areas have no centre based school age childcare. Similarly, there tends to be

relatively less childcare provision of any kind in rural areas, disadvantaged areas and in the west of the region.

6.28 The affordability of childcare services, which will be considered in the paragraphs below, is also likely to affect the uptake of childcare services, particularly in the context of the present economic downturn. Although parents surveyed generally stated that they would like to make more use of formal childcare services, since formal childcare is perceived as costly, it will be difficult for it to attract parents, particularly those with the option of using informal or unregistered childcare.

6.29 We believe that current childcare provision does not always meet need due to a combination of location and cost. This may be why surveys are producing apparently contradictory findings of many parents wanting more childcare and some providers stating that they cannot fill places. We believe that there is significant unmet need for childcare services and that this will increase over the coming decade. The increase will come on account of factors such as economic growth and other incentives to work and the decreasing availability of informal childcare providers (on account of, for example, higher retirement ages).

6.30 At the same time, we recognise the risk of duplicating or displacing existing childcare services. This is why, in aiming to create new childcare places, we have relied primarily on grant-aiding our childcare providers. Our current School Age Childcare Grant Scheme seeks to create additional school age childcare places and sustain existing places but only where these can be shown to be needed. All applications must demonstrate that they are meeting need and not simply duplicating or displacing existing provision.

6.31 Naturally, vacant childcare places are a matter of concern. This strategy will review options for minimising the number of vacant childcare place. This will include working with employers who wish to purchase or discount childcare places for their employees.

Affordability

- 6.32 The cost of childcare services is the other main factor affecting uptake. Employers for Childcare's 2013 Cost of Childcare Survey reported that 24% of parents surveyed found it generally challenging to pay for childcare services while 39% stated that paying for childcare was a challenge at least some of the time. Our own survey research found that more than half of parents saw cost as the main barrier to using childcare services. Many parents said they struggle to meet the costs of childcare. They stated that the cost of childcare prevents them either from using registered childcare services at all, or from using these services as much or as often as they would prefer. This is a particular challenge for parents seeking full-time childcare for children of pre-school age, where childcare is seen as being particularly expensive.
- 6.33 In 2012, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported expenditure on childcare services ranged from 52% of household income in Switzerland to around 5% in Belgium and Sweden. The UK figure was 25%, second highest after Switzerland. The average across all 34 OECD member states was 12%.
- 6.34 We estimate that households here spend around 25% of their average incomes on childcare services, more than twice the OECD average. This means that, in proportionate terms, local households are spending more than twice as much on childcare as their counterparts in France, Germany or the Netherlands, and more than five times as much as those in Spain, Belgium and Sweden.
- 6.35 This Childcare Strategy will work to reduce the percentage of local household income that goes on childcare. To date, the Strategy has aimed to achieve this by: increasing the numbers of low cost childcare places; promoting increased local uptake of the financial assistance currently available with the costs of childcare and by supporting low cost childcare providers with a view to consolidating and increasing the

provision of places. Other policy options for reducing the costs of childcare will be discussed further in the next section.

Sustainability

6.36 Sustainable childcare services are those that can cover their costs from the fee income they receive. We have, through the first phase of the Childcare Strategy, provided grant aid to childcare providers in order to enable them to start up or expand, or to maintain the services they provide. This support is time-limited; our aim is that all of the providers we support will progress towards full sustainability and that most will achieve this within the period of grant aid. As grant-aided childcare providers achieve sustainability, this will free up public funding that could be allocated to support other childcare providers to progress towards sustainability.

6.37 We recognise that some childcare providers, such as those serving disadvantaged communities, and those serving the needs of children with a disability, may take longer to achieve sustainability. In these situations, it may be necessary to maintain financial and other forms of support for a longer period.

Informed Parental Choice

6.38 Consultation and research, including the annual Cost of Childcare Surveys published by Employers for Childcare, have identified a lack of information on the location, availability and cost of childcare services as a key concern.

6.39 The Childcare Strategy will continue to ensure that parents have ready access to detailed information on the childcare services available in their area including the range of services on offer and the cost and quality of these services. We will also work to ensure that parents are kept informed of the financial assistance available with the costs of childcare.

Finally, we will consider the feasibility of a system of evidence-based star ratings for all registered childcare settings.

Quality

6.40 We will continue to ensure that all registered childcare settings offer a high quality service that is at least compliant with current minimum standards but at best superior. The quality of the childcare workforce is a major determinant of the quality of childcare services. That is why the Strategy is focusing on developing the skills of our childcare workforce. Through workforce training and increasing the numbers of qualified staff required by minimum standards, we believe we can deliver a continuously improving quality childcare service. By building the skills of our childcare workforce, we will reinforce childcare provision as a respected and valued profession.

6.41 Compliance with minimum standards and trained childcare staff will be our—and parents’—initial indicators that a particular childcare setting offers a quality service. In the longer term, however, we will aim to assess each setting and the system of childcare provision, in terms of its outcomes for the children concerned—how well they perform at school, and into adult life.

6.42 Separately, we will continue to inform parents of the risks of using unregistered childcare, and the benefits of using only registered providers. We aim, over the ten years of the Executive’s Childcare Strategy, to end unregistered childcare.

An Integrated Approach

6.43 We will ensure that childcare services and the wide range of early years services provided by health, social services and education are complementary.

6.44 It is essential, for example, that childcare services and education are complementary. In developing the final version of the Childcare Strategy, we will consider how the developmental aspects of childcare can be better aligned to children's overall learning and development.

6.45 Some consideration also needs to be given to the interaction between childcare, parental employment and the school day. We understand that the practice here of a staggered end to the formal school day (the older the children the later the end of the school day) is much less common in England and Wales, where schools typically open from 9:00 to 15:30 for all age groups. Were this latter approach to be adopted here, it could make the provision of after school services more straightforward and less costly and also promote more extensive use of the school estate. However, the full impact of any such change would need to be researched and costed in detail as it has a number of significant implications including for the teaching workforce, for school transport and, most important, for the children themselves.

Diversity

6.46 We live in a post conflict society. The current generation of children—the so-called 'Generation Peace'—has had little experience of the conflict and division that characterised our recent past.

6.47 We believe that childcare services can enable children to acknowledge and respect diversity. Childcare can promote positive cooperation between children regardless of their gender, religious community background, nationality or ethnicity, and regardless of whether they have a disability.

6.48 We believe childcare services that are shared across all communities will enable us to build and consolidate peace. Accessible, affordable and universal childcare is a contributory step towards consolidating a united, post-conflict society.

6.49 As a minimum, the Childcare Strategy will require all childcare settings to promote sharing and diversity. In the longer term, we expect all childcare services to reflect our society's diversity in the make-up of the children who use their services and the staff that deliver these services.

7. INTERVENTIONS IN THE CHILDCARE SECTOR

Context

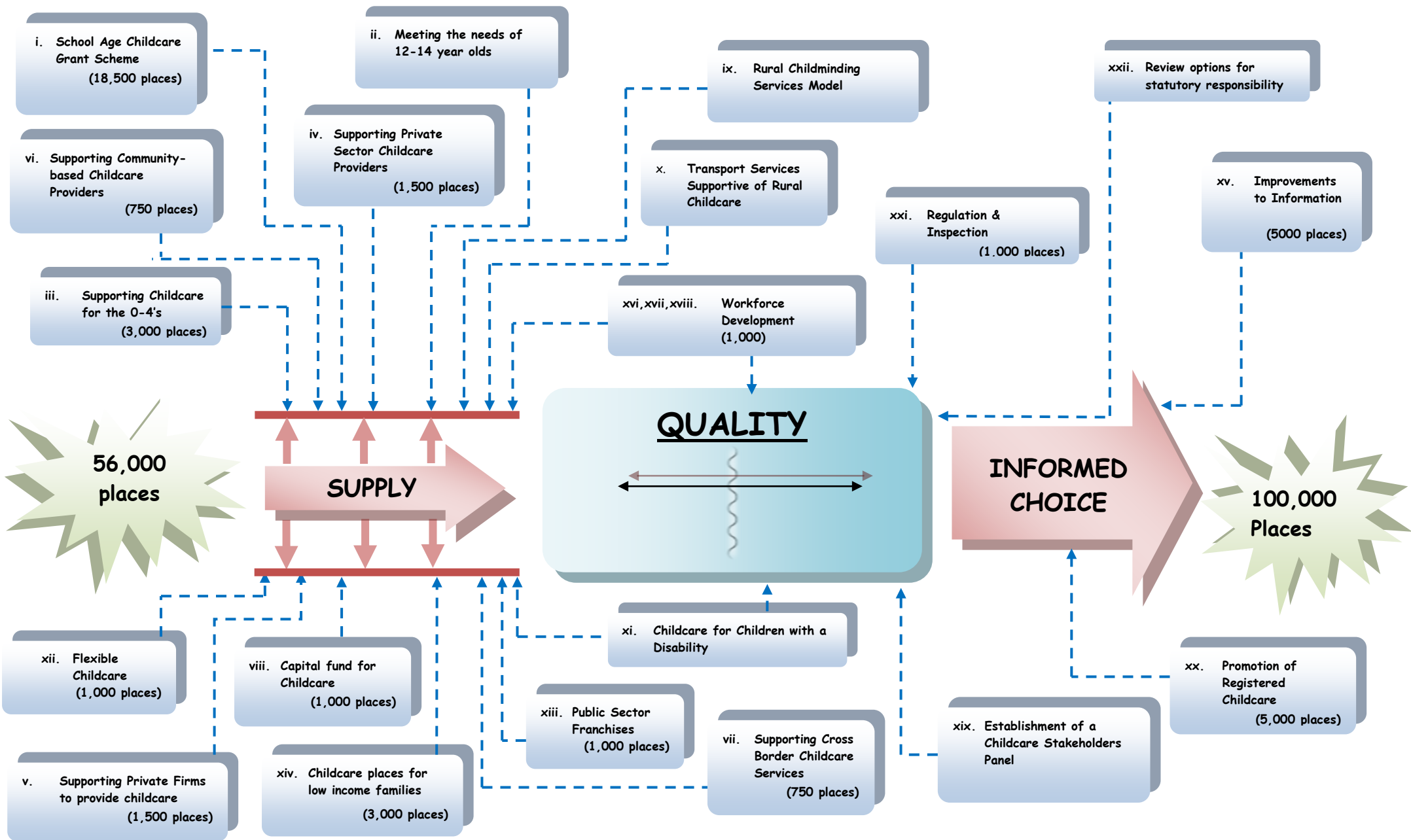
- 7.1 The previous section noted evidence of a possible shortfall in the current provision of childcare services. During consultation and research, many of the parents we surveyed said that the type of childcare services they needed did not exist in their area. In particular, School Age Childcare and childcare services in rural and disadvantaged areas appeared to be underprovided.
- 7.2 Parents also said that the cost of childcare services deterred them from making as much use of formal childcare as they would like. As noted, a full week of childcare costs many families between a fifth and a third of household income, markedly more than in most other developed countries, including some of the most affluent countries in the world.
- 7.3 The Strategy will, where needed, aim to intervene to increase both uptake of existing childcare places and the supply of affordable, quality childcare places. It will, thereby, ensure that there are enough affordable, quality childcare places to meet demand, and to maximise the numbers of children benefiting.
- 7.4 We will, as an initial action, engage the five Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) Childcare Partnerships to undertake regular (twice yearly) needs assessment in their respective areas to identify any shortfall in current provision compared with local need, and the type and location of service that is required. This will include establishing unused capacity among existing providers, examining why this exists (e.g. due to cost, type of childcare service being offered, location of setting) and looking at ways in which vacant places might be filled.

- 7.5 There are five Partnerships, one for each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas. The Partnerships, which were established under the previous Children First childcare strategy, bring together a range of local childcare stakeholders and are therefore well-placed to assess local childcare provision, local need and any disparity between these two. Their assessments will inform how this Strategy targets its interventions, both thematically and geographically.
- 7.6 Pending these more detailed analyses of the demand for childcare services, the Childcare Strategy will work towards an indicative target of 44,000 low cost childcare places to be created over the next ten years. In other words, the Strategy will aim to increase the current supply of childcare places from the present 56,000 to 100,000. This will reduce the ratio of children per registered childcare place from the present six children per place to around three children per place.
- 7.7 Three children per place is the current ratio of children per place for 0-4 year olds. The parents we surveyed have raised few issues regarding the supply of childcare places for the 0-4 age group. On this basis, we take a ratio of three children per place as approximating universal provision.
- 7.8 We aim to focus any additional childcare places created on areas where there is currently little or no provision, meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities and rural communities in particular.
- 7.9 The remainder of this section will outline a series of proposed actions to increase and improve the provision of childcare services by increasing uptake of existing capacity and increasing existing provision where this is required. All of these actions will be considered in detail during Phase 2 of the Strategy and some will be piloted. The diagram below summarises the actions and our initial assessment of the contribution each might make to the achievement of the indicative 44,000 places. It must be emphasised that the figures in brackets beside each of the

interventions are indicative only, and will be subject to testing. For ease of reference, each action (or intervention) has been given a roman numeral identifier that is also used in the main text. These 22 actions have also been grouped under themes:

- Supporting increased childcare provision
- Improving childcare services
- Joined up childcare
- Changing the childcare context

7.10 The original Key First Actions will, where appropriate, continue over the life of the full Strategy, amended to reflect any lessons learnt during development and implementation as well as comments received during the production of the present document.



Supporting Increased Childcare Provision

7.11 The Childcare Strategy has already, through its first phase, intervened to stimulate the local childcare market with, for example, actions to sustain and increase the provision of low cost School Age Childcare and childcare services for children with a disability. In addition, the Strategy is acting to increase parental awareness and uptake of the financial support available with the costs of childcare and make parents more informed on the range and diversity of childcare services that exist in their areas. Through continued workforce development, the Childcare Strategy aims to improve the quality of local childcare services thereby encouraging parents to use formal childcare in preference to informal or unregistered care. This will complement the Strategy's work to promote registered childcare and highlight the risks of unregistered provision.

7.12 The paragraphs below review the actions that the Strategy has undertaken to date to build local childcare services and some additional actions that could contribute to the achievement of this Strategy's objectives.

School Age Childcare Grant Scheme

7.13 The School Age Childcare Grant Scheme is the most ambitious initiative under the first phase of the Childcare Strategy. The Grant Scheme is a pilot initiative that aims to create or sustain¹ up to 7,000 School Age Childcare places over a three and half year period ending in 2017. It is seeking funding applications from current and prospective School Age Childcare providers. The Scheme is being delivered by the Childcare Partnerships.

¹ A sustained (or safeguarded) childcare place is one that might be discontinued in the absence of government intervention. Typically, childcare places at risk are those serving disadvantaged communities where income levels are insufficient to cover the costs of childcare.

7.14 The emphasis of the Grant Scheme is on meeting unmet need, not the duplication or displacement of existing, established service providers. The Childcare Partnerships bring detailed local knowledge to the assessment process and ensure that the need for each prospective project can be thoroughly tested.

7.15 Although the School Age Childcare Grant Scheme has a single application process, it has three separate strands corresponding to the aims of Key First Actions 1, 2 and 5.

- Strand 1 aims to address the School Age Childcare needs of disadvantaged communities by sustaining or creating 3,000 School Age Childcare places targeted on low income families.
- Strand 2 aims to create between 2,000 and 3,000 new School Age Childcare places in new School Age Childcare settings based on the school estate.
- Strand 3 aims to create up to 1,000 new School Age Childcare places based in new School Age Childcare facilities and serving the needs of rural communities.

7.16 Much of our support to date has been school age childcare services delivered by the community and voluntary sector. These social economy settings have been developed over time by dedicated local actors and have grown into key services in their respective areas. Our grant scheme has helped sustain childcare places in areas where there was some risk they might otherwise be lost and helped existing providers to increase significantly the number of low cost places they can offer.

7.17 Going forward, we want to help community based providers to continue to operate and to expand their services. However, we also wish to support the development of new community-based school age childcare settings.

7.18 In addition to continuing to support and expand the valued school age childcare places already provided by the community and voluntary sector, we are keen to see progress with regard to the development of new childcare services based on the school estate. Because schools are strategically located throughout the region and serve the needs of all areas—urban and rural, affluent and disadvantaged—locating School Age Childcare services on the school estate could potentially address much of the current unmet need for School Age Childcare.

7.19 Our survey of schools currently using their premises as a base for School Age Childcare services identified a number of benefits for the children using these services. For example, the location of a childcare setting on the school estate meant that children did not have to be transported to and from the setting. In addition, school estate based settings often gave children access to the school grounds and the large and safe play areas that these provide. School Age Childcare provision on the school estate also offered scope for children to work their extracurricular activities such as music and sport around School Age Childcare provision.

7.20 Schools also benefited. Because their premises were occupied for longer periods, there was a lower risk of vandalism during holiday times and after school hours. More than 80% of the schools surveyed said that their School Age Childcare facility attracted a proportion of their children from a range of local schools, not just from the school in which the facility was based.

7.21 With most of our schools attended by children from one or other of the main religious communities, it is important that childcare services based on the school estate do not reinforce such divisions. It is therefore encouraging that nearly two thirds of the schools we surveyed stated that they were cross community in terms of current service users.

7.22 The social economy model was the prevalent business model for school estate based School Age Childcare services. Some 70% operated as social economy businesses, compared with around a quarter that operated conventionally.

7.23 We will continue to promote the School Age Childcare Grant Scheme to prospective applicants and work with all who express an interest in the Scheme to enable them to develop their proposals. We will also liaise with colleagues in Invest NI and DEL to ensure that the various advice and support schemes available to start-up businesses are accessed by prospective Grant Scheme applicants.

Evaluating the School Age Childcare Grant Scheme

7.24 The School Age Childcare Grant Scheme will be formally evaluated in 2016. This will include an assessment of its performance in terms of sustaining and creating affordable childcare places in line with its stated objectives. We will also use the evaluation to consider whether the Grant Scheme needs to be expanded to become a more comprehensive initiative covering all types of childcare (i.e. childcare for children below primary school age) and open to all types of provider and all sectors. Interventions of this kind are inevitably costly. The current grant scheme, in 2014, allocated around £2 million over a three year period to create or sustain 1,500 places in some 50 settings. A key aspect of our evaluation will be to estimate the cost of any future interventions, and thereby, their feasibility in the current economic climate.

INTERVENTION I: SCHOOL AGE CHILDCARE GRANT SCHEME (18,500 PLACES)

7.25 Conditional on a positive evaluation, we envisage the Grant Scheme continuing to 2025. **We estimate that, if the Scheme continues to 2025, it could create as many as 18,500 School Age Childcare places.**

The 12-14 Age Group

7.26 The Grant Scheme focuses on children aged 4-14. However, only a small proportion of children aged 12-14 (around 3.5%) are currently in childcare. We recognise that this is largely because conventional childcare is rarely the best arrangement for children of secondary school age.

INTERVENTION II: MEETING THE NEEDS OF 12-14 YEAR OLDS

7.27 As part of the evaluation of the School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, we will examine options for meeting the childcare needs of the 12-14 age group.

Sustaining Childcare, especially in Areas of Need

7.28 While all childcare settings assisted under the Grant Scheme are expected to progress towards full sustainability with a view to achieving it within the period of their grant assistance, we recognise that not all settings will be able to do so. We recognise that some childcare settings, particularly those addressing the needs of our most disadvantaged communities, may find it difficult to become fully sustainable before their grant funding ends. Where settings have genuinely made progress towards sustainability but cannot yet cover their costs from the fee income they receive, we will aim to continue to support the services they provide, including financially, thereby enabling them to maintain the progress they have made.

Childcare for the 0-4s

7.29 To date, the Childcare Strategy has targeted assistance primarily on sustaining or creating School Age Childcare provision. This is because, in developing the Strategy, the availability of services for the 0-4 age group did not appear to be as pressing as for the 4-14 age-group. As noted, with regard to the headline indicators of potential need and actual current provision, there are around 19 school age children for every registered School Age Childcare place, the equivalent figure for the 0-4s is three children for every registered place.

7.30 However, we are aware that, while regional childcare provision for the 0-4s might be relatively positive, at the sub-regional level there are likely to be pockets of under provision, notably in disadvantaged areas or in rural areas. We also know that some current provision is dependent on funding schemes such as DSD's Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF), which provides low cost childcare focusing on unemployed parents in personal, vocational or educational training, and the childcare support provided by DEL to parents training for employment and via DSD's Neighbourhood Renewal funding. We wish to see this funding, and the childcare services it makes possible, continue.

7.31 Childcare for the 0-4s is a priority for many parents. Despite the relatively high cost of the relevant services and the pressure this puts on household budgets, many parents nonetheless continue to pay for day nurseries and childminders, if often at some sacrifice. We believe that many more parents would purchase this type of childcare—or would purchase more of it than at present—if childcare services for the 0-4s were less costly or if parents had more financial assistance.

7.32 The Coalition Government's Tax Free Childcare Scheme is intended to be launched in the autumn. It will replace the current childcare vouchers scheme with a system of support that we believe will be generally more advantageous to parents here. Many more parents will be eligible for the new scheme than for its predecessor and, for most, the amount of

support they receive will be greater than under the voucher scheme—up to 20% of eligible childcare costs.

7.33 In addition, families with household incomes of up to £50,000 are potentially eligible for support with their childcare costs via Child Tax Credit and the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The support available for those who are eligible—up to 70% of the costs of childcare—is potentially higher than that available under either childcare vouchers or Tax Free Childcare.

7.34 We believe that with more parents able to access generally higher levels of support with the costs of childcare, more parents will be able to afford childcare and the demand for childcare services will increase. Additional, quality childcare places will therefore be required.

INTERVENTION III: SUPPORTING CHILDCARE FOR THE 0-4s (3,000 PLACES)

7.35 We will, in 2016, as part of the evaluation of our School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, evaluate the need for, and feasibility of, a grant funding scheme to support childcare services for the 0-4s. As with the current Grant Scheme, any assistance will be targeted on areas where current provision is insufficient. The emphasis will be on quality childcare services that aim to become sustainable in the long term.

7.36 We estimate that expanding the Grant Scheme beyond School Age Childcare provision, coupled with the impact of Tax-Free Childcare, could create up to 3,000 childcare places.

Private Sector Childcare

7.37 Thus far, the Childcare Strategy has focused primarily on assisting social economy providers. It has offered relatively little assistance to either current or prospective private sector childcare providers, whether centre based or childminders. We recognise the valuable contribution that the private sector makes to the provision of childcare services here, the high

quality of those services, the positive experiences of the children who attend them, and how much these services are valued by parents.

INTERVENTION IV: SUPPORTING PRIVATE SECTOR CHILDCARE PROVIDERS (1,500 PLACES)

7.38 As part of the 2016 evaluation of the School Age Childcare Scheme, we will look into the feasibility of assisting, through grants or loans, private sector providers to train and develop their staff and to start new services or expand existing provision where these can be shown to have real potential for sustainability. We will, in particular, look at options for assisting childminder networks and extended childminder services (two childminders in a single setting offering up to 8 places). We will take account of Invest NI support packages for existing and start-up businesses and how these might be promoted to private sector childcare providers. If feasible, **we would aim to assist up to 50 private sector providers offering 1,500 places.**

INTERVENTION V: SUPPORTING PRIVATE FIRMS TO PROVIDE CHILDCARE (1,500 PLACES)

7.39 We will look at how private firms might meet the childcare needs of their employees through onsite childcare or by purchasing childcare services from existing providers, especially those with spare capacity. With regard to onsite childcare, we will assess the feasibility of providing some initial assistance with running costs and small capital works. We will also review how private sector providers might provide childcare on behalf of the statutory sector. **We believe this could create up to 1,500 new childcare places.**

Community based childcare services

7.40 We acknowledge and commend the excellent childcare services that are currently provided on a community basis, typically in our most disadvantaged areas. These services have been built up over time, with often limited resources, by committed groups and individuals with strong, social entrepreneurial skills. These services offer children a positive start in life and complement formal educational services. In recent years, many community-based settings have played an important role helping children from new communities adapt to life here. In parallel, these settings have, subtly but effectively, encouraged respect for diversity among all communities.

7.41 We believe that the experience and expertise of people who have established and managed community-based childcare services is a valuable resource, one which we intend to use to achieve the aims of the Strategy. We will facilitate the sharing of experience between established, community-based childcare providers and those hoping to develop similar services in their own areas. We are particularly interested in opportunities for cross community sharing of expertise as well as for cross community sharing of actual childcare services and settings. EU PEACE funding is a potentially significant source of funding for this type of activity. We believe that the development of quality childcare services that are open to all communities could be a lasting and powerful legacy of what may be the final EU PEACE Programme.

INTERVENTION VI: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED CHILDCARE PROVIDERS (750 PLACES)

7.42 Conditional on funding, up to 25 new community-based childcare centres will be supported, creating 750 childcare places.

Cross Border Childcare Services

7.43 Rural childcare needs are often challenging to address, particularly for communities in relatively remote or sparsely populated areas. Communities of this kind exist on both sides of the border and the childcare services they require often struggle to become established or to remain viable. We believe that childcare services that might not be sustainable on one or other side of the border might be sustainable on a cross border basis. The Childcare Strategy will work with the Childcare Partnerships and with childcare stakeholders, north and south, to establish proposals for cross border childcare services for potential funding under the EU PEACE Programme.

INTERVENTION VII: SUPPORTING CROSS BORDER CHILDCARE SERVICES (750 PLACES)

7.44 Conditional on funding, 25 new cross border settings will be supported, providing around 750 places.

Capital Fund for Childcare

7.45 Many childcare providers do not require support with their running costs, but could make good use of capital support to expand their premises and, thereby, the services they offer.

INTERVENTION VIII: CAPITAL FUND FOR CHILDCARE (1,000 PLACES)

7.46 We will look at options for assisting childcare providers with the capital costs of expanding their services. Assistance could be provided in the form of loans rather than grants. **We estimate that this kind of support could create up to 1,000 places.**

INTERVENTION IX: RURAL CHILDMINDING SERVICES MODEL

7.47 Although the first phase of the Childcare Strategy aimed to create 1,000 new childminder places in rural areas, research has identified affordability of childminding services in rural areas as a bigger problem than availability of childminding services. In a rural context there is merit in looking at a more flexible approach to childminding services and to consider support structures such as:

- i. Childminding Shared Service Model (hub); and
- ii. Childminder Networks.

7.48 Such models may help to improve the sustainability and affordability of rural childcare provision and, by so doing, enhance their accessibility to rural families. There are also opportunities for integration and for community relations as well as for adding to the quality of childcare provision in rural areas. It is proposed that work is undertaken to look at the needs and rationale of progressing either the centre-based childminding hub or the childminding network approach to support the needs of rural families and to consider developing a pilot in rural areas. This would be evaluated to help inform the provision of sustainable childcare services in the long term. It is also intended that rural childcare needs will be mainstreamed across the full range of actions in the Childcare Strategy.

INTERVENTION X: TRANSPORT SERVICES SUPPORTIVE OF RURAL CHILDCARE PROVISION

7.49 The development of transport services supportive of rural childcare provision is a key first action of the first phase of the present Strategy. It continues to be taken forward in parallel.

Childcare for Children with a Disability

7.50 Key First Action 6 of the first phase of the Childcare Strategy aims to address the childcare needs of children with a disability. DHSSPS has therefore delivered the Improving Outcomes for Children with a Disability initiative. Projects have been funded to enable childcare providers to provide childcare services that are responsive and accessible to children with a disability. Work here has included funding awareness raising training, grant-aid to enable the purchase of specialist equipment or to adapt premises, an initiative to develop peripatetic childcare and a holiday grant scheme. As part of the evaluation of the first phase, we will review the performance of these actions, assess current need, and look at the feasibility of continuing this assistance to 2025.

INTERVENTION XI: CHILDCARE FOR CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

7.51 We will ensure that every child with a disability that requires a childcare place can access provision appropriate to his or her needs.

Flexible Childcare

7.52 Childcare provision tends to be available during regular business hours. We recognise the growing need for flexible childcare services—services that are affordable and accessible, but that can also meet the childcare needs of people who work unconventional hours.

7.53 Many parents depend on the availability of flexible working hours and parental leave to meet childcare needs. The Strategy will encourage employers to adopt family friendly working conditions.

7.54 We note, as well, that childminders could help meet some of the demand for more flexible childcare services. NCB research has indicated that childminders typically worked a seven hour day. A third worked later

than 6 p.m, two thirds worked before 8 a.m. and 12% provided overnight care.

INTERVENTION XII: FLEXIBLE CHILDCARE (1,000 PLACES)

7.55 We will also consider developing, on a pilot basis, a cohort of centre-based staff who can work either centre-based or, when required, outside of a centre, as childminders. This would include providing childminding services outside of conventional business hours. We will also review options for amending the opening hours of childcare settings to allow earlier starts and later closing times, and weekend and holiday opening to increase the availability of childcare services outside of conventional working hours. Options here will include financially supporting centres to open outside normal business hours. **We believe that this could create as many as 1,000 childcare places over the life of the Strategy.**

INTERVENTION XIII: PUBLIC SECTOR FRANCHISES AND PRIVATE MANAGED PROVISION (1,000 PLACES)

7.56 The public sector estate is a potential location for childcare service providers, one that offers a potentially significant customer base. We will consider making available, on a pilot basis, unused rooms and buildings on the public sector estate and ask existing and prospective childcare providers to bid to provide childcare services to employees from all sectors, based in the immediate catchment area. **We estimate that this could create up to 1,000 childcare places.**

INTERVENTION XIV: CHILDCARE PLACES FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES (3,000 PLACES)

7.57 Many low income families struggle to afford the costs of childcare and give their childcare the developmental benefits quality childcare can bring. Many of our current interventions are benefiting or will benefit low income families—the School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, promoting

financial assistance with the costs of childcare, flexible childcare. In addition, however, we will look at ways of enabling childcare settings to offer places to very low income families on a low fee or no fee basis. **We believe that this could create up to 3,000 childcare places.**

Improving Childcare Services

7.58 The Key First Actions also include a range of actions aimed at improving childcare services.

Information

7.59 The Childcare Strategy has supported a range of improvements to the Family Support NI website to enhance it as a central source of information on childcare and providers operating at local levels. The Childcare Strategy's first phase also made the same information available to parents via a social media app. Ongoing improvements include making information in languages other than English and making the full inspection reports on childcare settings available to parents online. We will also examine the feasibility of developing a system of star ratings for childcare settings.

7.60 Other means of communicating information will also be used, such as conventional leafleting and the inclusion of information on childcare in bounty packs. Again, this will be made available in a range of languages.

7.61 We will also consider a promotional campaign highlighting, for parents, the long term, child developmental benefits of quality childcare services.

7.62 The new Tax Free Childcare initiative will greatly increase the amount of assistance available to parents to enable them to purchase the childcare services they need. More parents will be eligible than under the previous, childcare vouchers scheme, and the amount they receive will be greater. We aim to promote the new support scheme as well as other

forms of assistance with the costs of childcare. We will also review the best options for directly advising parents on the support available.

INTERVENTION XV: IMPROVEMENTS TO INFORMATION (5,000 PLACES)

7.63 Improvements to the information available to parents regarding both the availability of childcare services, the benefits of quality childcare and the financial assistance available to them will, we believe, stimulate demand for formal, registered childcare services and result in additional childcare provision—around 5,000 places over the life of the Strategy.

Workforce Development

7.64 We recognise the very important role that childcare workers play in the lives of the children they care for. The development of a skilled childcare workforce, including well qualified managers and deputy managers for all childcare settings, is critical to the provision of high quality childcare services, services that can ensure positive outcomes for the children involved. The Childcare Partnerships are currently undertaking a skills audit of the childcare workforce in each of their respective areas. In addition, four of the Key First Actions (Actions 11-14) focus on developing the skills of all current childcare professionals, whether childminders or centre-based providers.

7.65 These Actions are being taken forward by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and will lead to continuous improvement of the childcare workforce, increasing the quality of childcare services and the ability of these to deliver positive, child development outcomes. The Actions will also increase the number of local, qualified childcare professionals thereby ensuring that new childcare settings can be appropriately staffed. Finally, they will promote childcare as a pathway to employment for people currently unemployed or economically inactive and aim to increase the proportion of childcare

from groups currently under-represented on the childcare workforce such as men and people from ethnic minority communities.

7.66 We will continue working with DEL and the Childcare Partnerships to ensure that the childcare workforce is sufficiently large and sufficiently skilled to deliver a quality childcare service and to offer childcare workers career progression and professional development. We will work with DEL to review the funding opportunities currently available to existing and prospective childcare workers to enable them to pursue training and obtain qualifications.

INTERVENTION XVI: THE CHILDCARE STRATEGY WILL SUPPORT A TRAINING PROGRAMME TO IMPROVE AND ENHANCE SKILLS ACROSS THE WORKFORCE

INTERVENTION XVII: THE STRATEGY WILL WORK WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES TO ENSURE GOOD QUALITY TRAINING OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE AS A PATHWAY TO WORK IN CHILDCARE

INTERVENTION XVIII: IT WILL SEEK TO ALIGN AND PROMOTE EXISTING INITIATIVES TO ENCOURAGE GREATER DIVERSITY IN THE WORKFORCE – WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MALES AND INDIVIDUALS FROM ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

7.67 We believe that, by building on the skills of the existing childcare workforce and increasing the numbers of trained childcare professionals, we will enhance the quality of childcare services here. This will enhance the ability of local childcare services to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children. We believe that better quality childcare services will be more attractive to parents, thereby increasing uptake. **We believe this could increase demand for childcare, stimulating the market to deliver a further 1,000 childcare places.**

Management

7.68 Responsibility for childcare policy and its delivery falls to a number of government departments. In view of this, a Childcare Strategy Programme Board was established to scrutinise and review how the first phase of the Strategy was working. The Programme Board comprises representatives of all Government Departments with a policy interest in childcare as well as the chair of the Childcare Partnerships.

7.69 We will retain the Programme Board to manage and monitor the performance of the full Childcare Strategy. This will include: agreeing a final set of performance indicators, targets and outcomes against which the Strategy's progress can be assessed; producing and publishing an annual report on the performance of the Strategy; and undertaking a formal evaluation of the Strategy's performance at the mid-term (in 2020). The Programme Board will also maintain detailed and up to date information on government department expenditure on childcare services and on related services such as nursery schools.

INTERVENTION XIX: CHILDCARE STAKEHOLDERS' PANEL

7.70 In parallel to the Programme Board, a Childcare Stakeholders' Panel comprising representatives of the childcare sectoral and stakeholder organisations will be established. The Panel will meet quarterly to review the progress and performance of the Strategy and current, cross-departmental expenditure on childcare and related services. The Panel will make recommendations to the Programme Board.

Joined Up Childcare

Informal Childcare

7.71 Most parents meet their childcare needs through a combination of formal and informal provision. Informal provision offers flexibility and the

reassurance that children are being cared for by a trusted family member. It is also a means of maintaining valuable inter-generational contact.

7.72 This Strategy will review options for supporting informal carers such as providing information and guidance and establishing local networks to enable informal carers to meet and share experiences.

7.73 The RSM McClure Watters survey found that 70% of parents made some use of informal childcare. Employers for Childcare's 2013 Cost of Childcare Survey found that informal childcare was the main form of childcare for 15% of all households, and the main form of childcare for 25% of all lone parent households. The RSM McClure Watters survey reported that 35% of couple households and 37% of lone parent households wanted to make greater use of formal childcare. As noted, the two main barriers were cost and availability.

7.74 The Daycare Trust has researched informal childcare in England and Wales. It found that low income and single parent families tended to be more reliant on informal care than higher income and couple families. Grandparents were the main providers of informal care, averaging 8-9 hours of care per week. While most grandparents who provided informal care were retired, around a third were employed. Grandparents were generally positive regarding the informal childcare they provided. There was some evidence that informal care brought fewer developmental benefits than formal care.

7.75 We note that informal childcare is sometimes the main or only form of childcare accessible to parents, particularly those on low incomes. We note, too, that informal care might not bring all of the developmental benefits of formal care. An over reliance on informal care by low income families could risk continuing rather than countering inter-generational disadvantage.

7.76 The Strategy will look closely into local use of informal childcare, the experience of local informal carers, and the developmental benefits of the care provided.

Childminders

7.77 Registered childminders account for almost two fifths of all childcare places. The majority of these are pre-school childcare places. Research undertaken by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) found that both childminders and the parents that used their services saw the childminder's role as being to provide both care and education. The same research indicated that childminding was sometimes seen as a less professional form of childcare, partly because childminders were not required to have formal qualification, but also because registered childminders faced competition from unregistered providers.

7.78 We recognise the important contribution of childminders to the provision of local childcare. The Strategy will support childminders by establishing local networks to enable childminders to meet and share experiences. The possibility of providing training and induction packages to attract new entrants to childminding will also be examined.

Unregistered Childcare

7.79 We acknowledge the unfair competition some registered childminders face from unregistered providers. We are aware that this damages the financial viability of childminders and thereby undermines the safe and professional service they provide. We recognise, too, that, if unregistered childminders operate in the childcare market, this can be detrimental to the professional image of legitimate, registered childminders.

7.80 The Childcare Strategy will continue to use information and promotion to alert parents to the risks of using unregistered childcare, and the benefits of registered services. In parallel, we will examine the reasons why people use unregistered childcare providers and why the providers do not register. Over the ten years of the Childcare Strategy, we will work to persuade unregistered providers to become registered.

INTERVENTION XX: PROMOTION OF REGISTERED CHILDCARE (5,000 PLACES)

7.81 Through a combination of public information, awareness raising, and enforcement of the current regulations concerning unregistered childminding, the Childcare Strategy aims to end unregistered childcare by 2025. **Through promotion and persuasion, we would hope to encourage enough unregistered providers accounting for some 5,000 childminder places to become registered.**

Early Childhood Education and Care

7.82 Childcare settings such as day nurseries and after school clubs operate alongside nursery schools and extended schools services. The Strategy will work to ensure greater complementarity between childcare and formal education. All childcare services will offer children a stimulating developmental experience in a safe and trusted environment. All will prepare children for education or complement ongoing education.

Changing the Childcare Context

INTERVENTION XXI: REGULATION AND INSPECTION (1,000 PLACES)

7.83 Some childcare providers have been critical of the current minimum standards and associated regulation and inspection arrangements. Regulation and inspection play a key role in ensuring high standards of safety, quality and parental confidence in the childcare sector. We are working towards a partnership approach between providers and inspectors. It has also been suggested that a more flexible or holistic

approach would enable existing settings and providers to expand their services and encourage new providers to enter the childcare market. **If this is achieved, we believe that up to 1,000 further places could be created.**

7.84 In England and Wales, there is a statutory requirement that local authorities ensure that parents in their areas have access to childcare services. Article 20 of the Children Order (NI) 1995 requires authorities here to review the provision of childminding and daycare every three years. This duty has been delegated to the Childcare Partnerships.

INTERVENTION XXII: REVIEW OPTIONS FOR STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITY

7.85 We will review the options for statutory responsibility here. This will include examining the potential empowerment and resourcing of the Childcare Partnerships or local government to address local childcare needs by purchasing the relevant services from public and private sector providers.

8. DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH CHILDCARE: SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Intervention i:	School Age Childcare Grant Scheme (18,500 places)
Intervention ii:	Meeting the needs of 12-14 year olds
Intervention iii:	Supporting Childcare for the 0-4s (3,000 places)
Intervention iv:	Supporting Private Sector Childcare Providers (1,500 places)
Intervention v:	Supporting Private Firms to Provide Childcare (1,500 places)
Intervention vi:	Supporting Community-Based Childcare Providers (750 places)
Intervention vii:	Supporting Cross Border Childcare Services (750 places)
Intervention viii:	Capital fund for Childcare (1,000 places)
Intervention ix:	Rural Childminding Services Model
Intervention x:	Transport services supportive of rural childcare provision
Intervention xi:	Childcare for Children with a Disability
Intervention xii:	Flexible Childcare (1,000 places)
Intervention xiii:	Public Sector Franchises (1,000 places)
Intervention xiv:	Childcare places for low income families (3,000 places)

- Intervention xv: Improvements to Information (5,000 places)
- Intervention xvi: The Childcare Strategy will support a training programme to improve and enhance skills across the workforce
- Intervention xvii: The Strategy will work with other programmes to ensure good quality training of unemployed people as a pathway to work in childcare
- Intervention xviii: It will seek to align and promote existing initiatives to encourage greater diversity in the workforce – with particular reference to males and individuals from ethnic minority communities
(1,000 places across interventions xvi, xvii and xviii)
- Intervention xix: Childcare Stakeholders' Panel
- Intervention xx: Promotion of registered childcare (5,000 places)
- Intervention xxi: Regulation and Inspection (1,000 places)
- Intervention xxii: Review options for statutory responsibility

ANNEX 1 – PREVIOUS KEY FIRST ACTIONS

Policy area	Description	Responsible Department
School Age Childcare (School Age Childcare)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="499 371 1042 741">1. It will sustain and create 3,000 places for school age childcare targeted at families in need. The extended and new facilities will be rolled out as social enterprises across areas in 25% of highest deprivation. The places offered may increase if demand can be demonstrated as the programme rolls out. <li data-bbox="499 775 1042 1043">2. Across the region, it will pilot a new approach to wrap-around care in the schools estate based on initial funding to create a minimum of 2,000 places. This could potentially rise to 3,000 places dependent on demand. 	<p data-bbox="1058 371 1358 763">OFMDFM</p> <p data-bbox="1058 775 1358 1043">OFMDFM</p>
Rural Childcare	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="499 1070 1042 1267">3. It will support, on a phased basis, a Rural Child-minder Start-Up Package creating up to an additional 1,000 places in rural areas as part of the first actions. <li data-bbox="499 1290 1042 1487">4. It will reinforce the above programme through supporting locally based transport schemes in rural areas, servicing networks of childminders in rural locations. <li data-bbox="499 1509 1042 1733">5. It will also support a social enterprise programme to roll out facilities in rural areas, with the potential to create up to 1,000 new affordable school age childcare places. 	<p data-bbox="1058 1070 1358 1279">DARD</p> <p data-bbox="1058 1290 1358 1503">DARD</p> <p data-bbox="1058 1514 1358 1727">OFMDFM</p>
Childcare for Children with a Disability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="499 1771 1042 2029">6. It will fund two further phases of the DHSS&PS led pilot – Improving Outcomes for Disabled Children - already underway through the Childcare Fund – which provides small capital grants enabling 	<p data-bbox="1058 1771 1358 2029">DHSSPS</p>

	<p>registered childcare settings to adapt to cater for children with a disability reinforced by training provision.</p>	
<p>Better Access to Information on Childcare and Related Financial Support</p>	<p>7. It will implement a range of improvements to the Family Support Website (www.familysupportni.gov.uk) to further enhance it as a central source of information on childcare and providers operating at local levels.</p>	DHSSPS
	<p>8. It will develop a social media application (App) to provide better search functionality, more information channels and ultimately better and more accessible information at the touch of a button for parents.</p>	DHSSPS
	<p>9. Within the framework of the Executive's position on advertising campaigns, it will seek to promote both of the above through a publicity campaign which will also explain the benefits of registered childcare and the risks of unregistered childcare so that parents can make informed choices.</p>	DHSSPS
	<p>10. Within the framework of the Executive's position on advertising campaigns, it will seek to promote the financial assistance available to the many parents who find the costs of childcare a challenge, with the explicit aim of increasing uptake. This may involve an awareness raising campaign and associated practical advice for the two forms of financial assistance currently available through the tax and benefits system to help parents with the affordability of childcare.</p>	DHSSPS

<p>Workforce Development</p>	<p>11. It will support a training programme to improve and enhance skills across the workforce.</p> <p>12. It will work with other programmes to ensure good quality training of unemployed people as a pathway to work in childcare.</p> <p>13. It will seek to align and promote existing initiatives to enhance the skill base and support continuing professional development in the childcare sector.</p> <p>14. It will support initiatives to encourage greater diversity in the childcare workforce - with particular reference to males and individuals from ethnic minority communities.</p>	<p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p> <p>DEL</p>
<p>Management Arrangements</p>	<p>15. It will establish a Childcare Strategy Management Forum that will meet quarterly to scrutinise and review how the early actions are being implemented.</p>	<p>OFMDFM</p>