

About the RCPCH

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) is responsible for training and examining paediatricians. The College has over 20,000 members in the UK and internationally and sets standards for professional and postgraduate education. We work to transform child health through knowledge, research and expertise, to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people across the world.

The voices of children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. Guided by the UNCRC, the RCPCH &Us Network facilitates children and young people to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them (Article 12) and work with them to help shape services, so they have the best healthcare possible (Article 24).

Respondent Details

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Who are you answering this consultation on behalf of?

- Yourself
- An Organisation Please specify: (optional)
- Voluntary and Community Sector Please specify: (optional)
- Private Company Please specify: (optional)
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Consultation Questions

1. The Delivery Plan demonstrates how Government actions will support the achievement of the eight Children and Young People's Strategy Outcomes:

1.1 Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy (Outcome A)

1.1.1 Implementation of 'A Strategy for Paediatric Healthcare Services Provided in Hospitals and in the Community (2016 - 2026)'

The RCPCH fully welcomes the commitment to modernise and further improve the standard of treatment and care provided in hospital and community settings, as well as palliative and end-of-life care for children and their families. We also welcome that the Delivery Plan states that the implementation of *A Strategy for Paediatric Healthcare Services Provided in Hospitals and in the Community (2016 - 2026)* will be advanced within the Plans' 3-year lifespan. The RCPCH have called for full implementation of this Strategy for some time, most recently in our manifesto for the upcoming NI Assembly elections.¹

However, the Delivery Plan makes no further comment on how implementation will be achieved, most notably, planned projects to deliver on the 12 improvement themes and the 23 objectives and, fund bidding / allocation. The RCPCH appreciates that this is a time of great uncertainty in terms of capacity to allocate resource and/or a multi-year budget, nonetheless, implementation of this important Strategy requires a ring-fenced funding plan. The Strategy, when originally published, stated that "progress on the Implementation Plan will be monitored through new transformation accountability arrangements",² we assert that enhanced transparency around accountability is needed, particularly as we move toward a new Integrated Care Model.

Moreover, the Strategy, as published, stated that "implementation of the objectives will be subject to available resources against the background of competing priorities for new investment across health and social care".³ Further detail on the hierarchy of priorities and how they compete with one another would be welcome to facilitate dialogue and agreement on said priorities. The recent report *More than a Number* highlights that whilst initiatives that have been able to progress under the Strategy are welcome, the lack of planned and sustainable funding to deliver regional transformation against the strategy's objectives significantly hampers progress.⁴ The September 2021 Strategy Progress report⁵ sets out some detail where strides have been made using transformation monies. Given that no actions were taken to advance this Strategy until 2019 when transformation money became available,⁶ we call on the Department of Health as the Lead and the incoming NI Executive to prioritise the implementation of this Strategy as a matter of urgency.

It should also be noted that there does not seem to be a related 'area of greatest focus' pertaining to the physical health of all children in NI within the Delivery Plan which makes it difficult to comment on this Strategy at question 3 (does the Delivery Plan adequately address all the Areas

¹ RCPCH (2022) Health and wellbeing of children and young people; A manifesto from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Northern Ireland, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/manifesto-rcpch-northern-ireland-2022>

² Department of Health NI (2016) A Strategy for Paediatric Healthcare Services Provided in Hospitals and in the Community (2016 – 2026) pp.10.1, available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-hscb-paediatric-care-prog-report-sept-2021.pdf>

³ Ibid

⁴ NICCY (2021) More than a number, available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-hscb-paediatric-care-prog-report-sept-2021.pdf>

⁵ Department of Health NI (September 2021) A Strategy for Paediatric Healthcare Services Provided in Hospitals and in the Community (2016 - 2026); Progress Report, available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-hscb-paediatric-care-prog-report-sept-2021.pdf>

⁶ Ibid

of Greatest Focus identified in the Executive Children and Young People's Strategy?). This should be considered by the Lead Department and the incoming NI Executive.

1.1.2 Developing a Sport and Physical Activity Strategy and Fitter Future for All

The RCPCH welcome the commitments in the Delivery Plan around physical activity and are glad to see that the Department of Communities published the 10-year Sport and Physical Activity Strategy this month as we called for this in our State of Child Health Report.⁷ The benefits of regular physical activity for emotional and mental wellbeing among children and young people is well known. We welcome the goals but reserve comment on how demonstrative these are in terms of Government achieving the associated CYP Strategy Outcomes until action plans are developed. Our manifesto for the May 2022 election highlights that the most recent Department for Health data showed that 26% of 2–15-year-olds were overweight or obese.⁸ Creating a society in which children and young people grow up a healthy weight, by focusing on difficult issues on a cross-departmental basis is needed.

The RCPCH also acknowledge that the Delivery Plan commits to implementing the current obesity prevention strategy, A Fitter Future for All (AFFFA), with a focus on preventing and addressing obesity among children and young people and beginning the development of a new strategy to when it comes to an end. AFFFA expires this year, ideally actions plans, reporting and monitoring currently under development within this Delivery Plan should be linked to all associated initiatives and strategies including the successor to AFFFA. In the same vein, the commitment to update and maintain *Nutritional Standards for School Food* to ensure that all food provided in schools is in keeping with government guidance on healthy eating must be brought about through secure funding.

1.1.3 Development of the NI Executive's Anti-poverty Strategy (also Outcomes C and E)

The RCPCH understand that the NI Executive's actions to address child poverty will be contained within the new Anti-Poverty Strategy under development by the Department of Communities. The current Child Poverty Strategy extended until May 2022 sets out 4 specific outcomes with measurable actions. The RCPCH calls for clear, bespoke children and young people outcomes and indicators within the upcoming, overarching Anti-poverty Strategy with clear pathways to monitor and report on the health impact of poverty on children, young people and their families and target intervention where it is needed most. Ideally health services should be designed and commissioned in such a way that barriers to achieving equitable health outcomes for children should be removed. The Executive and Lead Department must also ensure children and young people's rights are taken into account in decision-making processes for policy development within this context.⁹

Our State of Child Health 2020¹⁰ report identified that in 2017/18, 24% of children in Northern Ireland were living in poverty after housing costs. Poverty and inequality impact a child's whole life, affecting their education, housing and social environment and in turn impacts upon their health outcomes. RCPCH members see and treat children who are at the sharp end of the impact of poverty, thusly their expertise should be utilised in subsequent action plan development.

⁷ RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health Report, available at: <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/nations/northern-ireland/>

⁸ RCPCH (2022) Health and wellbeing of children and young people; A manifesto from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Northern Ireland, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/manifesto-rcpch-northern-ireland-2022>

⁹ RCPCH (2022) Health and wellbeing of children and young people; A manifesto from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Northern Ireland, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/manifesto-rcpch-northern-ireland-2022>

¹⁰ Ibid

The Delivery Plan also states that there will be continuity of oversight for the implementation of the Family Nurse Partnership Programme with reporting continuing through the Child Poverty Strategy, detail on how this will be reported on once this Strategy expires in May 2022 would be welcome.

1.1.4 Formation and implementation of an inclusive Participation Network to empower and support children and young people to participate in decision-making which impacts on their lives (also at Outcome B and E and G)

The RCPCH support actions which provide for the recognition of UNCRC Article 12 and indeed support the incorporation of UNCRC into domestic law as the Scottish Parliament has sought to do. This is in line with the UN Committee request for detail on how parties are bringing their domestic legislation into line with the Convention and ensuring that the principles and provisions of the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto are directly applicable and justiciable under domestic law in jurisdictions including Northern Ireland.¹¹ The RCPCH &Us platform hosts a range of resources which support children and young people to meaningfully engage.¹²

1.2 Children Live in safety and with stability - Outcome D (Outcomes B, C and G)

1.2.1 Online Safety Strategy (2020-25)

The RCPCH welcome the commitment to implement the Online Safety Strategy (2020-25) and associated action plan. Again, we note this is subject to necessary funding being acquired. The Strategy's vision to enable all children and young people to make best use of the educational, social and economic benefits of the online world, while staying safe from potential harm online while taking a child rights approach is commendable. This is a hugely important issue which spans across several UNCRC rights and requests for parties to update on actions taken to advance protection of those rights online is detailed in the UNCRC LOIPR.¹³ The RCPCH asserts that the NI Executive must ensure the prioritisation of funding to allow the enabling activity and actions associated with this policy aspect of the Delivery Plan to be brought to fruition.

1.2.2 Fund the use of 'navigators' in emergency Hospital Departments

It isn't wholly clear which 'navigators' are being considered. Clarity on whether 'navigators' are being considered in the context of 'patient navigators' or indeed 'youth navigators' as commenced in some Boards in Scotland which help children and young people to navigate through some of the complex issues that sometimes bring them to hospital¹⁴ would be welcome. In the same vein it isn't clear if said navigators will be positioned in the children's ED at the RBHSC, clarity and engagement with staff working with children and young people in EDs is required.

¹¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021) List of issues prior to submission of the combined sixth and seventh reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland available at:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGBR%2fQPR%2f6-7&Lang=en

¹² RCPCH &Us available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/work-we-do/rcpch-and-us>

¹³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021) List of issues prior to submission of the combined sixth and seventh reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland available at:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGBR%2fQPR%2f6-7&Lang=en

¹⁴ Edinburgh and Lothians Health Trust Foundation; *Youth Navigator: Supporting Young People Across Lothian When They Need It Most*, available at: <https://www.elhf.co.uk/about-us/youth-navigator-supporting-young-people-across-lothian-when-they-need-it-most/>

2. Are there any Actions missing from the Delivery Plan which would further support children and young people's well-being (as per the eight CYP Strategy Outcomes)?

2.1 Grant payments during school holiday periods up to Easter 2022 to the families of children who are entitled to free school meals when at school

Food insecurity is a problem which existed long before the pandemic. The Trussell Trust, the UK's largest network of foodbanks, seeks to provide food to those in need and stop UK hunger. From 2011 to 2019, it increased its three-day food parcel output from 61,000 to 1,583,000. Infancy and childhood are critical periods for growth and development, and good nutrition is important to obtain the best outcomes.¹⁵ Considering and imbedding methods to ensure 'holiday hunger' is ameliorated would further support children's wellbeing.

2.2 Provision of a range of targeted Early Years interventions to improve the well-being of children in Northern Ireland.

The RCPCH welcomes the commitment to deliver and develop the Sure Start Programme to children aged 0-3years (and their families) within areas of greatest disadvantage in Northern Ireland as well as continue to administer core funding to support and sustain the wider Early Years sector. Work must be done to ensure that deprivation measures are matched to boundaries. These programmes should be expanded and core funding enhanced so that all children can benefit from early years services. Our State of Child Health Report details that focusing on prevention and delivering early intervention services for parents, children and families can lead to economic savings for the NHS and wider public services, as well as supporting children and young people to enjoy good health across their life course.¹⁶

2.3 Developing a new cross-Departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy (Also Outcome D and H)

The RCPCH very much welcome this planned initiative to improve family life for parents, children and young people. As there is no further detail at this point, we would move to say that in the outworking, children, young people and their families as well as paediatricians and the broader child health workforce must be consulted regarding health and wellbeing aspects of this planned strategy.

2.4 Deliver programmes and services to support the Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework (also Outcome E and G)

The RCPCH welcomes the planned promotion of emotional health and wellbeing at a universal level through holistic, multi-disciplinary approaches, and through providing early and enhanced support for those children and young people who may be at risk or showing signs of needing further help. We assert that the planned collaboration between health and education partners to oversee the Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework Implementation Plan is meaningful. Our Facing the Future Standards; Together for Child Health highlights the importance of collaboration.¹⁷ Delivery of proposed projects including enhancement of RISE Team support and School Nursing services including Text-a-Nurse and a new CAMHS Emotional Wellbeing in School service are welcomed, however, cognisance should be paid as to *how* children and young people actually want to receive services in manner which benefits them.¹⁸

¹⁵ RCPCH Insight (2020) How can we eliminate child food insecurity in the UK? Available at: <https://medium.com/rcpch-insight/how-can-we-eliminate-child-food-insecurity-in-the-uk-3cedffc0187>

¹⁶ RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health Report, available at: <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/nations/northern-ireland/>

¹⁷ RCPCH and RCGP (2015) Facing the Future – Together for Child Health, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/facing-future-standards-paediatric-care>

¹⁸ RCPCH (2020) Paediatrics 2040, available at: <https://paediatrics2040.rcpch.ac.uk/>

3. The Delivery Plan adequately addresses all the Areas of Greatest Focus identified in the Executive Children and Young People's Strategy.

If you Disagree or Strongly Disagree, which Area(s) of Greatest Focus does it not address and why?

3.1 Outcome A – Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy

3.1.1 Provision of traffic calming measures such as traffic signs and speed ramps in housing developments (also Outcome D).

It is most welcome that traffic calming measures form part of the Delivery Plan and the action to assess requests taking into account traffic volumes, collision history, built environment, etc is sensible. However, these life-saving interventions need to be prioritised rather than be “dependent on availability of funding for works of this nature” as detailed in the Delivery Plan. Globally, road traffic accidents are a leading cause of death among young people.¹⁹ This would support the prioritisation of ‘improving the quality of the environment in which they live, learn and play’ area of greatest focus.

3.1.2 Implementing 'Protect Life 2 - Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Strategy',

The RCPCH notes that half of adult mental health problems start before the age of 14 and 75% before the age of 24. Improving children and young people's mental health is everyone's responsibility and professionals should be able to identify concerns to signpost to services and resources before they reach crisis or suicide. Moreover, NI have disproportionately high levels of suicide in the age 15-24 cohort.²⁰ The Delivery Plan commits to delivering a range of programmes and initiatives to prevent suicide and self-harm and support emotional health and wellbeing. The RCPCH recommends commissioning a digital mental health and wellbeing app that provides timely, evidence based, clinically supported resources and interventions for children and young people awaiting or in between referrals and appointments for mental health treatment.²¹

The Strategy itself recognises that a wide range of existing and developing policies are relevant, including strategies designed to reduce poverty and unemployment, improve family support and enhance child development, restrict harmful use of alcohol, improve educational attainment, reduce crime and antisocial behaviour and promote social inclusion. Ensuring a child and young person-centred approach congruent with UNCRC rights is taken in delivering planned initiatives is essential. Similarly, meaningful consultation with children and young people as well as the child health workforce and all other key stakeholders is needed to ensure the planned initiatives have the potential for the greatest impact. Clear linkages with the Regional Mental Health Strategy pertaining to CAMHs must also be established. This would support the ‘mental and emotional wellbeing’ area of great focus.

3.1.3 Establish a Children's Oral Health Options Group which will develop recommendations to improve the oral health of children

The RCPCH welcomes the focus on children and young people's oral health, however, we support the NI British Dental Association's call for an updated, overarching Oral Health Strategy which we hope the proposed children's oral health options group will feed into. The updated strategy should include: a review into the factors affecting access to primary, secondary and emergency dental care, with a view to addressing inequalities; a public health messaging campaign on children's oral

¹⁹ RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health Report, available at: <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/nations/northern-ireland/>

²⁰ Ibid (correct at time of publication)

²¹ RCPCH (March 2022) Health and wellbeing of children and young people - A manifesto from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Northern Ireland, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/manifesto-rcpch-northern-ireland-2022>

health which raises awareness of factors contributing to poor oral health and; increased access to support programmes for children and families to enable them to take up positive oral health habits.²² More recently, the BDA NI have detailed that children are three times as likely to have multiple teeth extracted under General Anaesthetic in NI than in England, and that children in our most deprived communities are 17% less likely to be registered with a dentist than those from our most affluent communities. Proposed solutions include doubling down on prevention for children with programmes which cover activities such as supervised tooth-brushing. The BDA NI also call for investment of the proceeds of the Sugar Levy to improve children's health and a commitment to a feasibility study on fluoridation.²³

The NI Executive and NI Water should also consider fluoridation of public water supplies, particularly for areas where there is a high prevalence of tooth decay. Recent research findings from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and the UK Health Security Agency show children and young people in areas in England with higher fluoride concentrations were up to 63% less likely to be admitted to hospital for tooth extractions due to decay than those in areas with low fluoride concentrations. The difference was greatest in the most deprived areas as children and young people in these areas benefitted the most from fluoridation.²⁴ This would support the element of establishing 'health and wellbeing from the outset' area of greatest focus.

3.1.4 Update the Healthy Child Healthy Future Programme to reflect the content of *Health for all Children 5th Edition*

The RCPCH are glad that this is detailed in the Delivery Plan, the Executive and Lead Department must ensure that this is carried forward. The RCPCH in NI remain committed to supporting this action in any way we can. Expedious implementation and maintaining standards will support the 'health from the outset' area of greatest focus.

3.1.5 Maternity Strategy

The RCPCH welcome the commitment to develop a new Maternity Strategy for NI, we have called for this in our State of Child Health Report²⁵ and it is quite belated given the previous one has essentially expired. Vast interdependencies exist within paediatrics and formal alignment is required between maternity, neonatal and paediatric services. Our NI Assembly election manifesto calls for the formal linkage of the NI neonatal, maternity and paediatric networks within a regional integrated care system.²⁶ This would support the 'health from the outset' area of greatest focus.

3.1.6 Early Intervention Transformation Programme and Publication of a refreshed early years policy framework

The RCPCH welcomes the plan to launch a Trauma Informed project which aims to strengthen the culture of inter-professional working practice, with a particular focus on ACEs, by supporting professionals to train together as well as embedding commonality in prevention and early intervention approaches. However, NI must ensure that a bottom-up approach is taken when designing services with both the focus and ownership falling to the community it serves. We are glad to note that a prevalence study and the development of training to improve awareness of

²² RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health Report, available at: <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/nations/northern-ireland/>

²³ British Dental Association (March 2022) Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2022; Rebuilding and reforming dentistry, available at: <https://bda.org/news-centre/latest-news-articles/Documents/BDA-NI-2022-Manifesto-AW2-Web.pdf>

²⁴ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (21 March 2022) Water fluoridation: health monitoring report for England 2022, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-fluoridation-health-monitoring-report-for-england-2022>

²⁵ RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health Report, available at:

²⁶ RCPCH (March 2022) Health and wellbeing of children and young people; A manifesto from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Northern Ireland, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/manifesto-rcpch-northern-ireland-2022>

ACEs is planned. We note that delivery partners are the South-Eastern Trust and SBNI, we conclude that a wide net be cast to include collaboration with all key stakeholders engaged in the field. In the same vein, research should focus on the influence of ACEs upon the resilience of children and young people and testing of interventions to prevent and ameliorate ACEs should be supported by sufficient incentives and funding mechanisms.²⁷ This would support a significant proportion of the areas of greatest focus.

The RCPCH also welcomes the commitment to ensure the delivery of quality early years education and learning services by March 2023. The first 1000 days is a pivotal time which sets the trajectory of the life course in terms of health. Evidence has shown that early interventions in childhood will create healthier adult populations and significantly reduce NHS spending in the medium and long term.²⁸ Maternal health is vital to the outcomes of children, especially in their early years, thus, linkage should be made with the developing Maternity Strategy, again this would support the 'health from the outset' area of greatest focus.

3.1.7 Supporting young carers

The RCPCH welcome the commitment to continue to support young carers in NI, robust mechanisms must be in place for reporting on the quarterly monitored returns from partner organisations with the Trusts when the Health and Social Care Board dissolves. This would support the 'improving support for children and young people acting as carers' and 'mental and emotional wellbeing for all children' areas of greatest focus. Our State of Child Health Report called for the NI Executive to deliver on this commitment and to ensure that children and young people acting as carers receive the support they need to fully undertake their education and have opportunities to relax, socialise and have breaks from their caring responsibilities. Young carers should also be able to access annual health checks.²⁹

For queries regarding this consultation response, please contact anna.mcdaid@rcpch.ac.uk, Policy and Public Affairs Officer.

²⁷ RCPCH (2017) Adverse childhood experiences – consultation response to the Science and Technology Committee's inquiry into evidence-based early-years intervention, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/adverse-childhood-experiences-consultation-response>

²⁸ RCPCH (2018) Response to the Health and Social Care Select Committee's inquiry into the first 1,000 days of life consultation, available at: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/first-1000-days-consultation-response>

²⁹ RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health Report, available at: <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/nations/northern-ireland/>