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NCT Document Summary: The Children and Young People's Plan for England

Published in December 2007, the *Children's Plan for England*¹ sets out the government's plans for supporting families and children over the next ten years under each of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' strategic objectives. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales do not have new plans for children.

The objective to 'Secure the wellbeing and health of children and young people' is highly relevant to the NCT.

The NCT can contribute towards the vision 'of all families being confident in their ability to achieve the best for their child'. Commitments include:

- information, advice and support to be easily accessible and available when parents need it;
- meeting the challenge to provide services which are flexible and meet the needs of all families, in whatever shape or form;
- encouraging and supporting fathers so that they can play a bigger role in their children's lives;
- ensuring that all public services act to help families help themselves;
- forums in all areas for parents of disabled children so that they can participate in shaping local services;
- supporting strong couple relationships and stable, positive relationships within families (recognising that in the normal course of events for every family there are times when the demands on parents can be especially acute and lead to tension in their relationship, and that at times of additional stress people need support).

Further key points from the Children's Plan:

- New research into brain development, attachment and the impact of stress in pregnancy confirms our view that pregnancy and the first years of life are the most important formative stage. Good health in this stage and services that work with parents, are critically important.
- DCSF and DH will work together to secure improvements in health, wellbeing and child development in pregnancy, infancy and the first years of life.
- In April 2008 the DH and the DCSF jointly issued the Child Health Promotion Programme² (CHPP) as guidance for primary care trusts (PCTs), local authorities, practice-based commissioners and providers of services in pregnancy and the first years of life. This will aim to improve access to ante-natal services and more tailored and accessible support for

parents. (For more information you can refer to the NCT's document summary on the CHPP³).

- In children's early years, health services are often the service parents use most. Locating General Practice (GP) surgeries near focal points of the community (for example shopping centres or schools) means that families can more easily find the services they want, and that children are more likely to get the health support they need and when they need it.
- Alongside GPs, Sure Start Children's Centres are providing fully integrated services to local children and their families, with multi-agency teams made up of midwives, nursery nurses and a range of early years and family support staff.
- Emotional wellbeing and good mental health are crucial for every aspect of a child's life, now and in the future. These capabilities are derived from a loving and supportive family and a breadth of positive experiences in childhood. Strong social and emotional skills are essential to success in life and work, but the evidence shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to possess them to a lesser extent than their more advantaged peers.
- The Government wants all children to develop strong social and emotional skills from the early years on. Policies are working towards promoting attachment and bonding in the first years of life, including through extending maternity and paternity leave, operative from April 2008. The Early Years Foundation Stage, which will be fully operational from September 2008, looks at the whole range of a child's cognitive and non-cognitive development.
- The DCSF will set up a new national Parents' Panel with links into a full cross-section of parental opinion, so these perspectives are better reflected in government policy making. In addition, we will measure the confidence and satisfaction of parents in the services they use.

The DCSF will:

- set high expectations for Children's Trusts to deliver measurable improvements for all children and young people and have in place by 2010 consistent, high quality arrangements to provide identification and early intervention for all children and young people who need additional help;
- monitor the difference Children's Trusts are making and examine whether Children's Trust arrangements need to be strengthened to improve outcomes, including by further legislation; and
- publish a Children's Workforce Action Plan in 2008, covering everyone who works with children and young people, which will strengthen integrated working across all services.

0–7 partnerships will enable early years providers, health services and primary schools to work together to provide a more seamless local service for children and parents.

Bringing different services together in places that children, young people and families visit often offers a number of advantages: a one-stop shop (convenient and avoids stigma), joined-up support (smooth transition between antenatal and postnatal periods); co-operative working practices (informal day-to-day contact); making the most out of existing resources; more responsive to local needs.

At local level, the lead lies with local authorities, working with other partners as Children's Trusts. The 2004 Children Act put one person in charge locally, the Director of Children's Services (DCS). We look to the DCS working with their elected counterpart, the Lead Member for Children, to bring together all relevant local agencies and wider interests as a strong and dynamic Children's Trust.

A new Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (CFEO) will begin work in July 2008, and a new programme to improve commissioning practice will be developed with local authority, health and voluntary sector partners to support Children's Trusts in building world class systems.

NCT Comment

The NCT welcomes the publication of the Children's Plan for England as it provides a strategic guidance for supporting children and their families over the next ten years. The NCT is pleased that the DCSF is making practical commitments that we feel will improve the health, wellbeing and happiness of both parents and children.

All parents should feel supported in caring for their children. The NCT thinks that the vision of all families being confident in their ability to achieve the best for their child will make a real difference to children and their carers. In particular, the government has recognised that services need to be flexible to meet the needs of all families; information and advice to help families help themselves needs to be easily accessible and available.

We would like the government to focus on health inequalities at this fundamental stage in a child's development and tailor some services to disadvantaged groups. We believe that this will make a real difference to health outcomes.

More generally, the NCT believes that the policies related to the Children's Plan, such as the Child Health Promotion Programme, policy on Children's Centres, extended maternity and paternity leave and the Early Years Foundation Stage will build on these commitments to deliver better services for parents and young children.

References:

1. Department for Children SaF. *The Children's Plan: building brighter futures*. London: TSO; 2007. Available from: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/>
2. Department of Health, Department for Children SaF. *The Child Health Promotion Programme Pregnancy and the first five years of life. Update of Standard One (incorporating Standard Two) of the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (2004)*. London: Department of Health; 2008. Available from: www.nsc.nhs.uk/ch_screen/child_ind.htm
3. National Childbirth Trust. *NCT Document Summary: The Child Health Promotion Programme – Pregnancy and the first five years of life. DS21*. London: NCT; 2008.

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The NCT wants all parents to have an experience of pregnancy, birth and early parenthood that enriches their lives and gives them confidence in being a parent.

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