

# HERTFORDSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST PARTNERSHIP

## CONSULTATION DRAFT

### PARENT SUPPORT AND INFORMATION STRATEGY

January 2008

**“Parents and carers in Hertfordshire will receive the information, services and support they need to help them care for their children and equip them with the skills they need to ensure that their children are healthy, safe and have the best opportunities in life.”**

We want to hear the views of all those with an interest in parent support and information on this strategy.

Reply between 21<sup>st</sup> January and 29<sup>th</sup> February 2008 online at:

[www.hertsdirect.org/csfconsultations](http://www.hertsdirect.org/csfconsultations)



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## Introduction

1. This strategy has been formulated by the Parent Support and Information Strategy Steering Group, a multi-agency steering group, led by the Parenting Commissioner (Strategy Manager for Parenting Support) and reporting to the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership.
2. The Strategy will be linked to the Hertfordshire Children and Young People's Plan and will support the key themes and priorities within that plan.
3. The Strategy is informed by a full consultation with a wide range of partners from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. Following this process and endorsement by the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership, the steering group will oversee the implementation of the Strategy at a County level, and will work with partner agencies, parents, service providers and other stakeholders to ensure its successful implementation at a local level.
4. In Hertfordshire, much has already been achieved through partnership working and there is a long history of good practice across the County. We see this as an opportunity to bring together this good practice to promote effective and positive parenting across our County.
5. The strategy will be a dynamic, working document that will be supported by an action plan and a list of contact details and resource information that will continue to develop and change over time.
6. We will continue to consult with parents, children and young people, and with agencies and staff working with families in Hertfordshire, to ensure the continued development of the Strategy and ongoing improvement of services. We will work with individual providers and practitioners to identify how the parenting strategy can reflect, strengthen and build upon their work. We will collect the views of parents, children and young people through children's centres, schools and other local consultation processes.

## **Background - Why we need a strategy.**

### ***National context***

7. There are compelling arguments, both nationally and locally, for a strong, multi-agency approach to supporting parents and good parenting.
8. Nationally, the Government, in “Every Child Matters”, has set out five outcomes for all children. Every child must be enabled to:
  - Be Healthy
  - Stay Safe
  - Enjoy and Achieve
  - Make a Positive Contribution
  - Achieve Economic Wellbeing.
9. The role of parents in achieving these outcomes is vital. There is a growing body of research and evidence which demonstrates the role that good parenting plays in achieving positive outcomes for children. This role has been emphasised in a raft of Government legislation and policies, including:
  - National Service Framework - Children, Young People and Maternity Services
  - 10 year childcare strategy
  - Childcare Act 2006
  - Respect Action Plan
  - Parenting Support Guidance for Local Authorities in England
  - Every Parent Matters
  - Every Child Matters
  - The Children’s Plan
10. The National Service Framework includes a detailed standard on ‘Supporting Parents or Carers’. This requires services to work together to ensure that parents and carers are enabled to receive information, services and support to help them care for their children and equip them with the skills they need to ensure their children have optimum life chances and are healthy and safe.
11. Section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to provide information to parents on the provision of childcare and other services. Provision of high quality information in appropriate locations and formats is crucial to support parents and each of the Every Child Matters outcomes.
12. The Government is committed to making parenting contracts and parenting orders more widely available in order to engage with families much earlier in order to prevent anti-social behaviour.
13. The Government’s Parenting Support Guidance requires Local Authorities to develop parenting support strategically within the framework of the Children and Young People’s Plan.
14. In addition, every authority is required to identify a *Parenting Commissioner* with responsibility for assessing need, identifying gaps in services and

ensuring that parenting support is appropriately reflected in the Children and Young People's Plan. In Hertfordshire this is the Strategy Manager for Parenting Support.

### **Local Context**

15. Hertfordshire covers 643 square miles. It is the most densely populated Shire County in the country, with over one million residents. Over a quarter of Hertfordshire's residents are children. Just over 20 per cent of the population is made up of parents with dependant children. One in ten residents belongs to a minority ethnic group, though this is subject to considerable local variation. Approximately 6% of children in the county are identified as having special educational needs and disabilities.
16. Hertfordshire is a county council with 10 district councils, two Primary Care Trusts, over 550 schools, 38 extended schools consortia and will have 82 Children's Centres by April 2010.
17. Hertfordshire has a mix of urban areas, rural villages, market towns, garden cities and new towns. Transport links to London and intercity routes are good, but it is difficult to travel across the county by public transport.
18. The apparent affluence within Hertfordshire masks pockets of disadvantage, and 8 per cent of the county's population live in income deprivation.
19. The majority of parents achieve positive outcomes for their children, sometimes in very challenging circumstances, using their own resources and informal networks of support. However there are parents and families who do need additional support perhaps due to more complex problems such as domestic violence, mental health issues, or special needs of the child or parents. If we are to improve outcomes for our children we need to support parents to face these challenges and meet their responsibilities as carers.
20. The Hertfordshire Children's Trust has emphasised the need for a robust evidence-based and outcome-focused approach to the development and provision of services, with continuous monitoring and evaluation including feedback from service users.
21. Hertfordshire's Children & Young People's Plan consists of two key themes:
  - a. Safeguarding all children and young people in Hertfordshire and
  - b. Narrowing the gap between vulnerable children and the majority of children in the County.
22. The Children & Young People's Plan goes on to identify 10 key priorities:
  - Children and young people are safe from abuse and neglect
  - Children and young people in care are well equipped to make the transition to adult life
  - Children and young people are confident to respond to bullying
  - Children and young people with emotional and mental health problems are well supported
  - Children and young people have a healthy weight
  - Vulnerable children aged 0 to 5 years are well prepared for life

- Vulnerable children and young people do as well at school as others
  - Children and young people with disabilities reach their full potential
  - Children and young people have opportunities to learn outside school
  - Children and young people contribute to decisions about services
23. The Parent Support and Information Strategy will take specific steps to address the above priorities, as well as targeting support on the needs of particular groups of parents whose children might be vulnerable. This might include parents with learning disabilities, mental health problems, substance misuse issues, teenage parents, parents of young people in the criminal justice system, support for fathers, the needs of ethnic minority groups, and access to support early on to prevent anti-social behaviour. These priorities have formed the basis of this draft strategy, as required by Government priorities highlighted in “Every Child Matters,” “Every Parent Matters” “The Children’s Plan” and other policies and guidance.

## **Our Vision for Parent Support in Hertfordshire:**

### **Support for Parents – Positive Outcomes for Children**

24. The vision of this Strategy is that “Parents and carers in Hertfordshire will receive the information, services and support they need to help them care for their children and equip them with the skills they need to ensure that their children are healthy, safe and have the best opportunities in life.”

### **Definitions and Scope of the Strategy**

For the purposes of this strategy:

25. **“Parent”** refers to any individual with caring responsibilities for children from birth to eighteen, or older in the case of children with special needs. It includes biological parents, step parents, foster parents, residential care workers, adoptive parents and other family members or friends who have taken on the role of main carer.
26. **“Parent Support”** refers to any form or provision of services, resources or assistance which will support parents in their role.
27. **“Parenting Support”** is defined as any formal activity or programme whose specific purpose is to assist parents or carers in promoting positive outcomes for their child. These may be individual or group-based, but are normally focused and short-term. They are aimed at developing parenting skills (e.g. play, behaviour management, communication skills) and enhancing the quality of the parent-child relationship by improving family functioning, parent self-esteem, wellbeing and mental health, and the emotional and behavioural development of children.
28. **“Parent Information”** refers to the requirement in the Childcare Act (Section 12) to provide information to parents of children/young people aged up to 20, and to ensure that we reach parents who might have difficulty accessing information. This extends the role currently performed by Children’s Information Services (CIS) and includes: Information on local childcare provision, with the addition of a brokerage service for individual parents; Information on local services, statutory & voluntary agencies, education, health, sports and leisure, parenting classes etc;

Information on national services, signposting to national umbrella bodies / web sites representing specific topics/ issues/ support groups etc.

29. **“Family Learning”** refers to activities where adults and children learn together and there are clear learning outcomes for both children and adults. There are two definitions of family learning determined by the Learning and Skills Council funding guidance: 1) **Wider Family Learning (WFL)** where children and adults learn together through a variety of activities and where the development of literacy, language and numeracy skills may be embedded into the activities but are not the main focus and aim of the programme and 2) **Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN)** where the main aim of the programme is the development of literacy, language and numeracy skills. Within FLLN programmes there is the opportunity for adults to be taught without children. However as part of these programmes parents/carers are given activities to share with their children at home. Some Family Learning activities are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and are targeted toward for more vulnerable families, whilst some are not.

## Key Principles and Values

30. Support for parents and families is crucial in strengthening communities and achieving the five outcomes for children and young people in Hertfordshire. Parents and carers are not the only influence on a child's life chances, but effective parenting is one of the strongest protective factors for a child.
31. Support for parents must build on parents' and carers' strengths as well as offering support when needed. There should be no stigma to receiving support.
32. There should be a range of interventions to meet different family circumstances and levels of need.
33. Interventions should have a clear rationale and, ideally, a significant evidence base, and should be rigorously evaluated and quality controlled.
34. We must develop targeted interventions to address the needs of those who most need parenting support but may be unwilling or unable to access it easily.
35. We are committed to a twin track approach to antisocial behaviour, putting prevention and support work on an equal footing with enforcement action through parenting orders.
36. Parenting support is not the responsibility of just one agency or organisation. It is a multi-agency issue, and each partner agency has a role to play in working together for the benefit of children and families.
37. It is important for all agencies to promote equality of opportunity, to acknowledge and respond to the diverse needs of children, families and communities.

38. It is important for agencies to consult and engage with all parents, carers and young people so that they can give us feedback on how services are received by them.

### Supporting Families at different levels of need.

39. This strategy identifies and outlines four levels of need. Families may use a range of services that cut across different levels or may need different types of support at different stages in their children's lives. These levels do not stand alone; some work may impact on more than one level at a time.

Below is a framework for Hertfordshire, which shows the type of information, support and provision which is available to address each level of need.

Framework for Information and Parent Support Services in Hertfordshire			
Level of Need	Definition of Need	Type of Support	Suggested Provision
<b>Level 1. Universal Needs</b>	Children are safe, developing well, achieving and enjoying general well being. Need for advice and information regarding childcare, local services etc. and in dealing with concerns about behaviour, development etc. as they arise.	<b>Universal information</b>  Information and / or family/community support for all parents and carers on their request before problems have been identified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents website / Children's Service Directory</li> <li>• Parent helpline</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Notice-boards</li> <li>• Informal parenting support and advice</li> <li>• Drop-in / advice surgeries / info sessions</li> <li>• Transition Information Sessions</li> <li>• Toy Libraries</li> <li>• Children's Information Service</li> <li>• Leaflets and other information on specific topics</li> <li>• Access to family learning (non-LSC funded)</li> </ul>
<b>Level 2. Additional Needs</b>	Children and families requiring extra support in addition to universal provision on a short-term basis, as a preventative course of action. This can be accessed through self-referral or through professionals working with families. Children have increased vulnerability and their health and development may be affected without support	<b>Targeted Information and Parenting Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual advice on specific areas of development / behaviour management</li> <li>• Outreach home visiting</li> <li>• Voluntary attendance on facilitated, evidence-based, structured parenting programmes</li> <li>• Intensive individual and family support</li> <li>• LSC funded Family Learning</li> <li>• CAF Assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3. Complex needs</b>	Children and families with complex needs who are prepared to work with a service on a voluntary basis and may have longer term needs. Children are unlikely to maintain satisfactory health and development without support	<b>Intensive or specialist interventions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted support through specialist services – Voluntary attendance on facilitated, evidence-based parenting programmes</li> <li>• Intensive individual and family support</li> <li>• Parenting Contracts</li> </ul>
<b>Level 4. Acute needs</b>	Children and families in crisis, with complex, acute and often long term need, where parents refuse or are unable to engage with voluntary services. Children are at risk of significant harm, serious enduring health problems	<b>Statutory Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforced attendance on facilitated evidence-based parenting programmes</li> <li>• Parenting Orders</li> <li>• Threat of custodial sentences</li> <li>• Intensive Interventions</li> <li>• Child Protection Proceedings</li> </ul>

## **Making It Happen – Implementation of the Strategy**

40. An Action Plan aligned to this strategy will be developed to outline how the strategy will be implemented, including key deliverables, timescales and persons responsible and how its success will be monitored and evaluated.

### **Recommendations:**

41. The Children and Young People's Plan in Hertfordshire contains the twin themes of safeguarding children's welfare and narrowing the gap between vulnerable children and the rest of the population. This strategy will enable us, through universal and appropriately targeted and specialist information and support, to promote stronger families and communities which enable children and young people to reach their maximum potential. This is reflected in the ten recommendations below, which form the basis for the Action Plan:

1. **Locally accessible universal provision of information and support:** A wide range of information, parent support and family learning programmes will be available and accessible universally to parents and carers through children's centres, extended services in schools and other locally accessible outlets.
2. **Locally accessible, high quality evidence-based parenting support for vulnerable families:** Specific targeted evidence-based parenting support programmes will be available and accessible locally to more vulnerable children and their families through children's centres, extended services in schools and other local venues.
3. **A comprehensive needs-led commissioning strategy:** A commissioning strategy will be developed to ensure that parenting support is targeted according to identified needs and gaps in provision and that effective commissioning mechanisms ensure high quality, evidence-based provision and value for money. In order to achieve this, a Preferred Supplier List will be maintained, consisting of providers from the statutory and voluntary, private and independent sectors, who meet the required quality criteria.
4. **Multi-agency communication and dissemination of good practice at the local level:** Parenting Forums for professionals will be established and promoted in each District. Alternatively, parenting support will be included in the agenda of the District Children's Centre and Extended Schools Forums.
5. **A trained and skilled workforce:** A trained workforce will be developed and their skills enhanced to deliver Parenting Programmes across the County. Nationally recognised training will be made available for practitioners across the county, in line with the National Occupational Standards for Work with Parents.

6. **Evidence of outcomes:** Evidence will be gathered to evaluate the effectiveness of specific activities. This will include the use of nationally recognised questionnaires which measure parenting effectiveness and, more importantly, outcomes for children.
7. **Raising the profile of parenting support and information:** A communications strategy will be developed, which raises the profile of information and parent support, externally and internally, and emphasises the importance of good parenting in achieving positive outcomes for children.
8. **Ensuring Quality in parenting support provision:** Quality guidelines will be maintained and kept under review in line with national standards. Commissioned services will be expected to adhere to these guidelines and inclusion on the Preferred Supplier list will be dependent on this.
9. **Ensuring that parents are regularly consulted and engaged with so that they can have a direct influence on services they receive. In particular, ensuring that information and support are responsive to diverse needs of local communities, minority groups and parents who find services hard to reach:** Regular, meaningful consultation will take place through children's centres, schools, parent forums and advisory groups for parents of children with additional needs. Results of these consultations will contribute to continuous improvement of services. The Strategy will be subject to an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment. This will require that parent support and information provision demonstrates how it will meet diverse needs and avoid direct or indirect discrimination.
10. **Ensuring that the priorities of the strategy are reflected within District Children and Young People's Plans:** District interests will be represented on the Strategy Steering Group. All District Plans will be expected to include parent support priorities and actions. County priorities will reflect local district realities.

Each of the above recommendations will form an objective within the Action Plan to accompany this Strategy.

## **Conclusion**

42. The role of parents is vital to the safety, wellbeing and life chances of all the county's children, and particularly those who, for whatever reason, are especially vulnerable.
43. This strategy, linked to the priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan, is intended to ensure that all parents and carers receive the information and support that they need, that this is of the highest quality and locally accessible, and that more intensive support is targeted towards the needs of those families and communities which are most vulnerable.

44. The provision of accessible information and the promotion of effective and positive parenting will enable us to achieve our vision:

**“Parents and carers in Hertfordshire will receive the information, services and support they need to help them care for their children and equip them with the skills they need to ensure that their children are healthy, safe and have the best opportunities in life.”**