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**DCYA Briefing 25/05/20 [GP]**

**Department of Children and Youth Affairs  
Questions for Government Formation Briefing**

**Monday May 25<sup>th</sup> 2020**

**National Emergency Coordination Centre  
Agriculture House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2**

**The Green Party – An Comhaontas Glas**

**The following paper contains the questions issued to the DCYA in advance of meeting on Monday 25 May. Responses and additional information are listed under each of these questions.**

**In addition, and to illustrate the robust policy and service infrastructure in place, as well as a current account of the work of the DCYA and Tusla in supporting children, young people and their families in the current Covid-19 crisis, a detailed paper on the foregoing is attached in appendix 1 which will provide context to the questions posed.**

**1. What is the total cost in 2019 (and 2017, 2018) by Tusla on outside counselling and therapeutic supports?**

The following extract from Tusla’s Annual Financial Statement indicates:

	2017 ‘€000	2018 ‘€000	Draft 2019 ‘€000
Therapy/Psychology	3,707	3,991	4,834

**2. What is the total spend on private foster care companies?**

	2017 ‘€000	2018 ‘€000	Draft 2019 ‘€000
Private Foster Care	21,513	21,309	22,119

**3. The current target headcount of social workers in Tusla, the projected case load that each would carry. Are we graduating enough social workers to reach that number?**

As at the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Tusla has a total of 1,679 WTE in Social Work working in the Agency. The target headcount for social work within the funded allocation has not been determined at this time; it will be examined further under workforce planning (see below) and with particular regard also to issues of retention.

▪ **Caseload Number with regard to Child Protection and Welfare**

Country	Title	Time period	Rate per 1,000 of the child population
Ireland <sup>1</sup>	Child protection and welfare social worker	y/e Dec 2017	1.2

▪ **SW Graduating**

On the numbers of social workers graduating this is approximately 250 per annum – 50% who go to work in Tusla.

▪ **Caseloads**

Tusla SW numbers have increased in the years 2017-2019/20 and currently have 1649 (April 2020) plus 30 agency SW – total 1679 as set out above.

Caseloads that social workers carry are estimated on a workload weighting system.

The number of cases will depend on the area in which the social worker is working.

Example 1. For a SW in duty this could be a through put of 40 cases in a week depending on the cases, but it could also be 1 if that case was complex and required immediate assistance. A rough estimate might be 30.

<sup>1</sup> Tusla (2018) Tusla Child and Family Agency Business Plan 2018, Version 1.0 (p.39)

Example 2. For a SW in children in care it could be 15 if they are all long term settled cases but this could also be 2/3 depending if one of the children are in special care of it's a sibling group. A rough estimate would be 15.

This would be different again for aftercare or fostering.

Preliminary assessment of this caseload weighting system suggests that of the 17 areas, 13 of the areas seem to manage reasonably well, while there are difficulties with about 4 areas.

**4. Can the department provide information in relation to any work in relation to children's safety online and any future plans?**

- DCYA is one of the 6 government departments participating in the Sponsors Group overseeing the implementation of the Government's Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019.
- DCYA published an addendum to the Children First National Guidance in January 2019 clarifying the need to consider online safety in the preparation of Child Safeguarding Statements.
- As part of the Government's response to Covid-19, in late April, the Minister launched a range of supports for parents and children – 'Parents Centre' and 'Let's Play Ireland' which include links to online safety advice for parents.
- The Department of Children and Youth Affairs provides funding to three national youth organisations which provide online safety resources for the youth sector. The National Youth Council of Ireland provides the Web Safety in Youth Work Resource, SpunOut has developed an Online Safety Hub which provides guidelines for young people on online safety and Youth Work Ireland, in conjunction with McAfee Security, has developed a digital safety programme which highlights the risks associated with online activity.
- In January 2020 the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment published the general scheme of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2019. The Bill sets a clear expectation for online platforms to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the users of their service, including children. The Bill provides for the appointment of an Online Safety Commissioner as part of a wider Media Commission to oversee the new regulatory framework for online safety.
- The DCYA will continue to collaborate in all efforts at improving online safety for children and young people through continued participation in the Sponsors' Group overseeing the implementation of any new Action Plan for Online Safety.
- It is also anticipated that the theme of Online Safety will feature prominently in the next iteration of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020. Preparatory work has commenced on developing this next cross-government and whole of society framework for children and young people aged 0 – 24 years.

**5. What is the department in a position to deliver in terms of supports for children in need of community services currently facing lengthy waiting periods - e.g. CAMHS, assessment of need, speech and language, OT services?**

While the DCYA does not have a direct role in the delivery of these services, the department is involved in a range of innovations to improve access to and in-reach from these services. For example:

- Pre-school and In Schools Therapy Demonstration Project in CHO7

At present the DCYA is engaged as a partner with the DES and Department of Health in the In Pre-school and In Schools Therapy Demonstration Project in CHO7. This pilot project aims to explore the use of therapists and in setting therapies and therapy supports using the three tier model of universal supports. These are supports for all, supports for some children in need of

limited support and supports for the small numbers of children who need specific Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy supports.

The Pre-school and In-school Therapies Demonstration Project moved into a second full year as a pilot in September 2019. The aim of extension of the project was to continue the pilot to enable an in-depth evaluation of the impact of the interventions with schools and pre-schools. The project has been halted by the Covid emergency with a limited number of therapists not redeployed engaged in the development of resources including supports for language and literacy. These new resources were included in the CPD offer to Early learning and Care staff during the shutdown period.

▪ City Connect Pilot project as part of the NEIC Initiative

The Department has played an active role in the North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative since its inception in 2017. Funded through the NEIC Initiative, the Department and the Department of Education and Skills with Tusla are collaborating on implementing the City Connects Programme founded by Boston College. The City Connects Programme is in place in 90 schools across 6 states in the US.

The City Connects Programme is strengths-based and works to the principle of progressive universalism. This approach means that the strengths of each individual child within a school setting are identified and a set of supports identified which can build on these strengths, while addressing areas of need. This approach provides the child with confidence and positive reinforcement which can assist with getting buy in of the child to the programme.

The City Connects model utilises services and organisations in the area to support the strengths and needs of a child. The City Connects Coordinators can refer children to universal supports such as after school programmes, music programmes or sports activities. However, for some of the more vulnerable children in need of more intensive supports the Coordinator will link directly into CAMHS, SLT, OT or other intensive services.

The Department and the Department of Education and Skills are aware of the lengthy waiting lists currently facing children in need of these services. As part of the NEIC funding, the HSE will be rolling out a pilot of in-school SLT, OT and psychological supports in the NEIC. The HSE pilot will provide one to one and universal supports. This will work alongside the City Connects pilot and the existing National Educational Psychological Services in the primary schools in the NEIC. Both the City Connects pilot and the HSE pilot are due to begin in the new school year. The City Connects model will systemize and enhance connectivity of the range of supports for children and it is envisaged that this will support the repurposing of the School Completion and Home School Liaison Programmes.

**6. The future of Fostering in Ireland (fostering recruitment is down, and this is a serious risk to the ability of child protection to be able to operate)**

Tusla's Corporate Plan and Business Plan 2020 provide an outline plan relating to fostering, which is: "Provide well led, safe and child-centred Foster Care services that comply with statutory regulations and promote better outcomes for children" (Corporate Plan action 1.5).

Business plan actions for 2020:

- 1.5.1: Continued implementation of Alternative Care Strategy and support the development of alternative care supports

- 1.5.2: Prepare a Media Strategy and Implementation Plan (relating to alternative care strategy).

The plan for fostering also has shared dependencies on Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Strategy; the PPFS Programme and Creative Community Alternatives.

All efforts are made to prevent a child requiring foster or residential care. Actions included in the Child Protection and Welfare strategy, Prevention Partnership and Family Support programme and Creative Community Alternatives are aimed at supporting children to remain in the care of their birth families and communities. In the event that a child cannot be cared for safely with their birth family, all efforts are made in first instance to place children with their relatives/extended family. There are for example 5461 (91%) [Q4 2019] children placed with relative foster carers.

There has been a global reduction in general (not related to child) foster carers and the reason for this is considered to be due to changes to demographic profile and family living i.e. both adults in the home out working full time; less space in houses for an additional child. The number of Tusla approved foster carers on the panel in December 2019 was 4201, 3% (123) less than December 2018.

The number of children in care has also decreased a little – this is attributed to improvement in the Signs of Safety model and increased family support.

Tusla had developed a new national recruitment strategy for foster carers – but this was put on hold as Covid 19 arrived.

The DCYA has introduced emergency foster care Regulations to ensure that Tusla would be able to care for children if there was an upsurge in demand during Covid19.

In response to the continued need for foster carers Tusla is advancing the following actions:

- National group established with dedicated focus on fostering recruitment (this group has input from across all regions and also the Irish Foster Care Association [IFCA] sits on this group).
- A needs analysis was completed in 2019 relating to foster care. This included an international literature review and engagement with Tusla and IFCA staff about what is most effective in terms of fostering recruitment.
- This group led and coordinated Tusla's first national fostering recruitment campaign in October 2019 aimed at challenging common misconceptions about foster care eligibility, and encouraging people from all walks of life to consider providing a loving, stable home environment to a vulnerable child. This campaign resulted in 384 enquiries being received by the Agency.
- A national email and phone line was established also in Oct 2019 to respond to enquiries from people interested in fostering.
- Another fostering recruitment campaign is planned for October 2020. Planning for this is already in progress with a workshop held with Tusla fostering staff in Q1 2020.
- A dedicated working group has been established with regard to possible increased need for foster placements during the Covid 19 pandemic. Since the establishment of this group, a national emergency panel of emergency foster carers has been established to increase supply of emergency foster care both to local Tusla areas and also to Tusla out of hours service.
- In addition to recruitment there is a need to also focus on retention of existing foster carers. The establishment of an emergency out of hours fostering support service in 2019 in order to ensure that support is available to foster carers over weekends and out of day service hours is an important step towards this.

- Supports provided through Tusla's Creative Community Alternatives, includes provision of intensive supports to foster carers in continuing to care for children where the placement is at risk of ending.

In addition to the above, other plans relating to fostering include:

- Increased stakeholder involvement in service delivery. This includes the establishment of child in care forums in each Tusla area to increase participation of children in care in having their views heard on how services are delivered and what improvements are required.
- Continued engagement and consultation with EPIC and IFCA to ensure views of children and young people in care and foster carers are heard and responded to.
- Development of implementation plan relating to Tusla's Alternative Care Strategy (many actions of which have commenced)
- Launch of Tusla's handbook relating to permanency planning, which identifies pathways for permanency for children in care, which can include family reunification, long term fostering or adoption.
- To ensure better sharing of learning and service improvements across Tusla areas, each region has developed a dedicated working group relating to alternative care. The focus of these groups is to promote best practice, improved compliance with national fostering standards and sharing of learning.
- Procurement process has commenced relating to procuring private foster care. It is planned however with increased activity taking place with regard to fostering recruitment within Tusla that reliance on the need for private foster care will reduce.

**7. Tusla supports for children – why is there not more in-house supports for children and can this be developed?**

There is a wide range of family supports in place via Tusla and their commissioned NGO agencies. Some very good examples of parental supports and home visitation programmes exist (such as Early Learning Initiative, NCI) where supports are in-reached into homes by home visitation workers. This is an ABC project funded by Tusla under the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme, which is applying the learning from such areas to the wider service infrastructure. Significant work has been led by the DCYA in this regard over recent years in supporting PPFs, the alignment with the ABC programme and also in the development of the What Works initiative focusing on enhancing prevention and early intervention evidence based supports to inform the broader system.

In addition, the Home School Liaison Programme which comprises 424 teachers under Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) also are directly involved in home visits.

**8. Tusla staffing – retention is an issue, what is being done here? What is the target staffing level they would see as sufficient?**

Staff retention has continued to improve year on year with overall with increases in retention rates in social work. In April 2020, the Social Work retention figure was 93.19% and increase from 92.27% on the same time the previous year. Tusla has a target retention figure of 95% for the Agency as a whole and 93.39 % for Social work in 2020.

Tusla has established a Targeted staffing level of 4784 wte within its funded pay budget. Target staffing levels at grade category level is not established, however at 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020 the Agency had a staffing level of 4669 of which 1679 were social workers.

In Q4 2019/Q1 2020 Tusla undertook to reduce its reliance on agency staff and ensure more stable workforce. By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 the agency conversion had been achieved with 408 agency staff converting to Tusla employment. This enhanced stability in the work force should also enhance retention rates and early indicators for this are encouraging.

SW retention nationally is in line with international figures. There are pockets of concerning retention figures – in child protection teams in areas that are under stress. There are no retention issues in PPFS or Foster Care.

As Tusla hires graduates, and most other services require experience, it is to be expected that some will move on to preferred areas of work.

Research by UCC showed that if a Social Worker remains for 3 years, this improves retention rates. Team spirit, support and good supervision are the crucial issues in improving retention. Exit interviews showed difficult court experiences and critical HIQA reports impact on professional morale.

It is important to note that in terms of staffing levels, the desire is to ensure skills mix of social care, business expertise as well as social workers. This is important in terms of Tusla's work along the continuum of care, from prevention to intervention.

The DCYA led Social Work Education group is examining workforce planning to see what number of social workers will be needed – across all sectors – over the coming years. However, there is also a supply issue in that third level institutions need to increase throughput and qualify more social workers.

## **Tusla Governance and Child Policy Division**

**DCYA**

**23 May 2020**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Supporting Vulnerable Children, Young People and their Families**

##### **– DCYA and Tusla Services responding to COVID-19**

### **1. Introduction**

In this crisis it is critical that we mobilise around the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. This paper outlines the service and support infrastructure that is in place through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. These include those services that have been designated as essential front-line services in the current COVID-19 crisis (those addressing child protection; children in care; domestic, sexual and gender based violence; and certain youth work services), other key



supports (youth, community, and family services) and coordinating or governance structures (Children and Young People's Services Committees; Education and Training Boards).

This paper illustrates the innovative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provided by these services, supports and structures. All of these are working to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. It demonstrates how policy and provision is responding in an integrated manner to emerging needs through an overview of the system of supports. It centralises an agenda to improve our responses for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

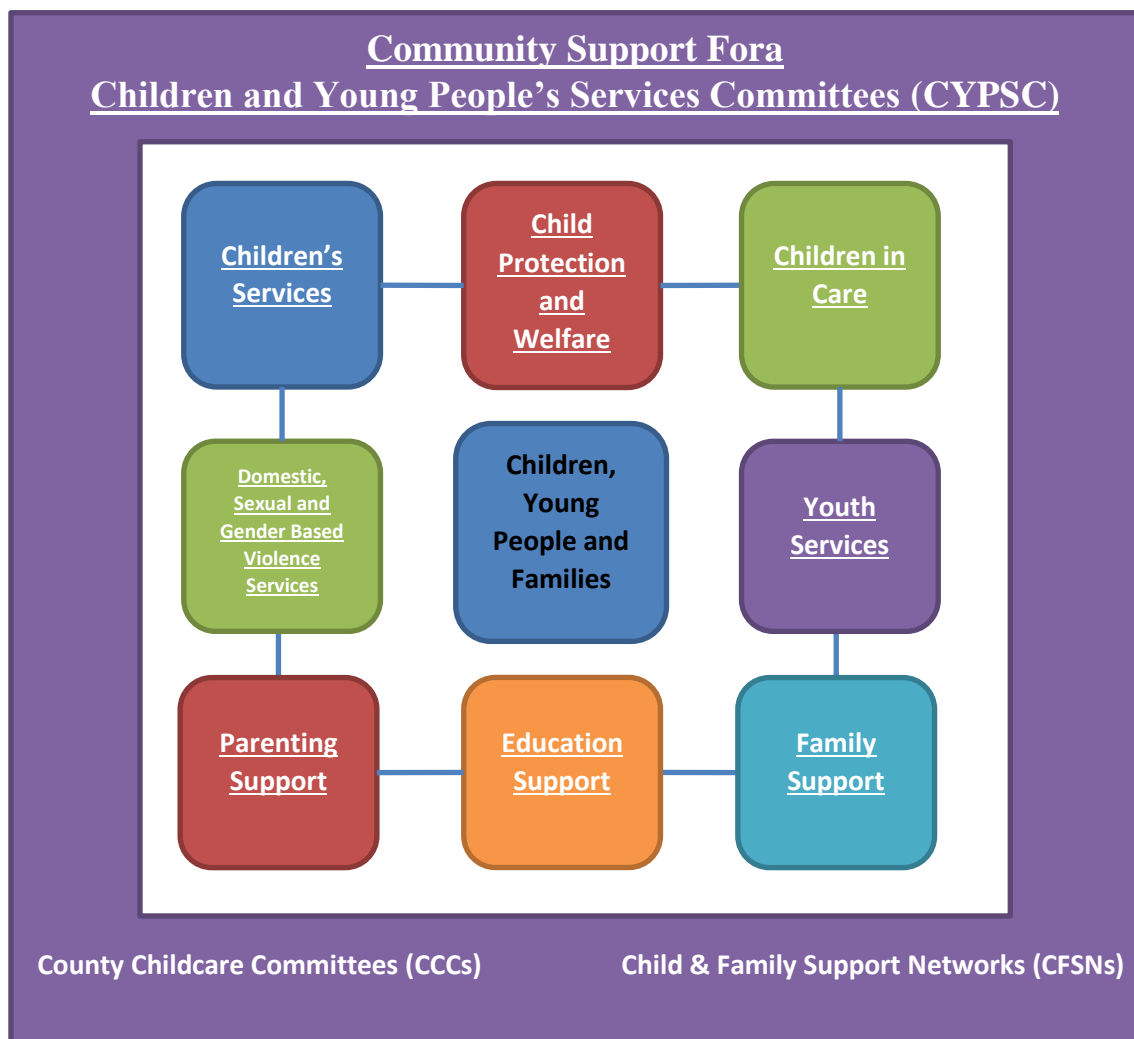
Optimising this system of supports is essential so that all services are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, and responsive to emerging issues during the various phases of the COVID-19 crisis. DCYA, Tusla and constituent sectors are fully committed to this.

This paper is intended to provide a composite overview of the service infrastructure in place for children, young people and their families provided by DCYA, Tusla and their key sectors. It includes summary information on the range of service responses in place, with each area web-linked for more detail. This will be live and dynamic, updated to ensure that new innovations developed in response to emerging needs during this COVID-19 pandemic are identified and shared across the infrastructure working with and for children, young people and their families.

The development of this paper has been informed by relevant divisions in DCYA, service directorates in Tusla, and the work of the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People under Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.

## **Overview of Welfare and Wellbeing Infrastructure**

The diagram below illustrates the services, both directly provided and indirectly supported by the State. It is important to see these not merely as stand-alone services, but part of an integrated system of supports which make up the service infrastructure of children, young people and their families. This infrastructure involves services focusing on targeted responses, including others which are more universal and/or open-access.



*Figure 1 DCYA and Tusla Service Infrastructure for Children, Young People and their Families*

## 2. Planned Communications Focus on Vulnerable Children

On foot of this paper, it is envisaged that a communications campaign will be explored with GIS focusing on addressing the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. This campaign will operate on a thematic basis, highlighting supports and services across a range of children and young people’s sectors and illustrating the coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **purpose** of the campaign will be to

- I. Centralise a shared message to citizens, in particular vulnerable children, young people and their families on the infrastructure of supports and their adaption to the crisis;
- II. Demonstrate the role of this robust, mutually reinforcing system in supporting resilient and cohesive communities;

- III. Stimulate service integration and innovation across the system in response to COVID-19 by sharing/building on good practice.

### **Target Audiences**

This campaign will target vulnerable children, young people and their families; service providers and managers; and key decision-makers in associated sectors. Key messages for children, young people and families will center the robust service infrastructure, providing a thematic breakdown of the system of provision with key statistics and highlighting major adaptations to service the needs of vulnerable groups. For service providers, managers, and key decision-makers the campaign should demonstrate good practice in meeting the needs of children and young people and demonstrate innovations that statutory, community and voluntary services are making to improve their offering.

### **Key Voices**

This campaign will marshal key figures in children and young people's sectors in statutory and non-statutory roles and make particular use of the expertise of the National Advisory Council under Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. Taking the paper by sections, it is proposed to nominate an individual with expertise in this area in a short video demonstrating what the supports are, how they can be accessed, what additionality these are providing in this crisis, and how it links to the wider system. This would include policymakers and providers in DCYA, Tusla, and independent experts/sectoral representatives from the National Advisory Council. It would also involve the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and could also include the Taoiseach and other key ministers.

## **3. Child Protection and Welfare**

Tusla has a primary responsibility to promote the safety and well-being of children. All Child Protection and Welfare referrals or concerns about children are being screened and assessed in line with normal practice and where a child is at immediate risk, they receive an immediate response. Anyone with a concern about a child's safety or welfare should contact their local duty social work office, details are available on the [Tusla website](#) or use the [Tusla online portal](#).

### **Actions**

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Guidance issuing to all staff engaged in child protection and welfare to ensure service continuity that is safe, supportive and responsive.
- Information and guidance disseminated to all A&E hospital departments, Gardaí and on-call doctors that the Tusla National Out-of-Hours team continues to operate during this period.

- Ensuring a proactive media presence highlighting the importance of child protection, welfare and wellbeing during this period where support structures (schools etc.) are not in place.
- Information and direction to all government departments and agencies of their responsibility to keep children safe and to comply with Children First obligations for any new services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Information and direction to all government departments and agencies to encourage take up of relevant training such as the Children First eLearning Programme available on [the Tusla website](#).
- Ensuring ongoing engagement from social workers through access and digital means.
- Supporting CYPSCs in the dissemination and reiteration of the Tusla procedures and pathways regarding Child Protection and Welfare.
- DCYA, Tusla and the Department of Education and Skills have reached out to schools and teachers who are continuing online classes to encourage these teachers to report their concerns to Tusla and let teachers know that social work offices remain open to respond to children at risk.
- Securing 'essential services and worker' designation for some Tusla staff (Children in Care, Child Protection, TESS and DSGBV).
- Enhanced communication and collaboration between DCYA and Tusla.

#### **4. Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**

The purpose of Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence Services is to assist individuals, children, and families who experience domestic violence and abuse. Tusla identified domestic violence as a critical service area the agency and its partners will focus on during this public health emergency. [Further information about Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Services, including a list of national services, is available on the Tusla website.](#)

#### **Actions**

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Active and direct engagement with DSGBV organisations in planning and implementation of supports, mitigations and identification of emerging needs.
- Ensuring that staffing resources are adequate and enable services to manage both demand and contingency due to impact of COVID-19 on staffing through additional funding for staff replacement.
- Working with providers to identify additional accommodation capacity to respond to individual cases/needs.
- Providing additional financial support, PPE equipment and direct ICT resources to enable safety and continuity of service provision.

- Leading at local and national levels in seeking to identify transition pathways for all residential social care facilities.
- Supporting a proactive information and media response from Tusla highlighting stepped up service provision in the Child Protection & Welfare, Care, education and DSGBV.
- DCYA is inputting into a cross-departmental action plan and campaign on DSGBV issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and support to Tusla in the ensuring enhanced refuge service provision and implementation of mitigations.

## 5. Children in Care

Tusla aims to provide safe, reliable and effective services for children in Care and to develop a range of placement options for children with additional needs. Tusla is committed to ensuring that children and young people are supported to live at home with their families, near their friends and schools and within their own communities. Children who require admission to care are accommodated through placement in foster care, placement with relatives, or residential care. [Further information about care services is available on the Tusla website.](#)

### Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Increasing the number of foster carers through the implementation of emergency measures to allow swift recruitment and approval of foster carers.
- Liaising with stakeholders including HIQA and the Irish Foster Care Association regarding a potential amendment and temporary suspension of certain aspects of the regulations relating to the placement of children in foster care, to ensure that family based care remains as the main form of alternative care in Ireland.
- Supporting Tusla to draft a proposal outlining an alternative, remote assessment of potential foster carers to join an emergency panel of carers.
- Suspending the National Standards for Foster Care 2003 to allow for more than two unrelated children to be placed with approved foster carers, if necessary.
- Redeploying Youth Workers into the Children's Residential Care Sector in order to supply a potential shortfall in care staff. This will allow Youth Workers to voluntarily redeploy into the children's residential care sector for the period of emergency measures.
- Maintaining contact between children in care and their families in line with HSE guidance and GDPR.

## 6. Education Supports

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention for children and young people. TESS has three strands, the Educational Welfare Service (EWS), the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP). TESS works with schools, families and other relevant services to achieve the best educational outcomes for children and young people. [Further information and updates about TESS is available from the Tusla website.](#)

## Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 420 HSCL Coordinators are working with and supporting parents of children who attend DEIS schools. Since the closure of schools, HSCL Coordinators have been in regular contact with families, ensuring families have access to and can use online learning platforms, distributing hard copies of school work, providing games and books in addition to other resources.
- Information and guidance has been developed by DCYA and TESS to schools to ensure ongoing access and engagement with vulnerable students in their learning and transitions.
- Maintaining ongoing contact with vulnerable families and their children remotely to support parents and the wellbeing of the young people including families in direct provision accommodation, homeless accommodation/hubs and DSGBV settings.
- Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are maintaining contact with all students and families in open cases, and TESS staff are continuing to make home visits in certain emergency cases in compliance with HSE guidelines.
- Maintaining the School Meals Programme. The Programme will be used to support schools to identify pupils unlikely to receive nutritious meals during the current crisis and provide for these children while schools are closed. [Further information about the School Meals Programme is available from Gov.ie.](#)
- [Identifying best practice innovations from the TESS service strands to support knowledge exchange and replication.](#)
- DCYA is supporting TESS in the identification and dissemination of coordinated best practice responses to COVID-19.

## 7. Family Support

The main focus of Family Support services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of children, young people and their families, with attention to those who are vulnerable or at risk. Key structures for the delivery of family support include the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Service, Tusla ABC Programme, Family Resource Centres (FRCs), and Community and Voluntary Sector Family Supports. [Further information about family support services is available on the Tusla website.](#)

## Actions

Measures and innovations being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- ABC sites ensuring that the needs of some of their targeted families from the Traveller community, families living in homeless hubs and Direct Provision are identified and met.
- ABC sites delivering Speech and Language services using tele-therapy and home learning packs.

- FRCs identifying local responses to locally expressed needs of children, families and communities.
- Community and Voluntary Family Support Services are coordinating support in respect of food poverty in conjunction with SCPs, and with Gardaí and other services to assist in the distribution of essential goods.
- Supporting families through signposting in collaboration with Tusla's PPFS and Social Work Services. Services have been delivered remotely and young people are supported to maintain contact with one another online. Tusla have issued guidance and advice [online](#) for the delivery of frontline services.

## 8. Meitheal

[Meitheal](#) is the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model that identifies a child's and their families' needs and strengths, and brings together a team around the child to deliver preventative support. Practitioners in different agencies can use and lead on Meitheal so that they can communicate and work together more effectively to bring together a range of expertise, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the child and family within their community. Meitheal is delivered as part of the [Prevention, Partnership and Family Support \(PPFS\) Service](#).

### Actions

- Tusla has issued guidance to Senior Managers for PPFS in ensuring business continuity within the Meitheal process during this time.
- Guidance has also been given on meetings and home visits for practitioners maintaining the Meitheal process for vulnerable children and families who may need additional help and supports at this time.

## 9. Parenting Supports

Parenting Support is both a way of working and a set of activities that provides information, advice and assistance to parents and carers in relation to raising their children, in order for the children to reach their full potential. Continuing to support parents during COVID-19 is a key focus for DCYA, Tusla and its partner agencies.

Services across Ireland continue to provide information and printed advice for parents. [Parentline](#) is a free national confidential helpline which provides support, guidance and information to parents. The Genesis Programme, which operates through the Tusla ABC Programme, has produced a resource document aimed at [supporting parents and families through the weeks ahead](#).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tusla has engaged with a large number of the agency's funded organisations, many of which provide parenting supports. Organisations including FRCs are adapting the way they provide their support services for parents and their families so that both universal and targeted support remains accessible to parents. One-to-one services are being provided over the phone and many group-based parenting supports

are available online. This is in addition to the existing helpline services for parents, details of which can be found at [gov.ie/parents](https://gov.ie/parents).

### **Parents Centre**

Parents are faced with a large volume of information from different government bodies and agencies. It is important that parents can easily navigate the high-quality information produced by trusted sources.

A new online resource for parents developed by DCYA – Parents Centre on [gov.ie/parents](https://gov.ie/parents) – brings together information for parents in one easy to navigate portal. Parents Centre provides trusted high-quality information and online resources for parents and their families at this time on a range of topics including learning, parenting and information on supports for parents.

### **Actions**

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Launch of Parents Centre on [gov.ie/parents](https://gov.ie/parents) which will be updated as new resources become available by DCYA.
- Developing online resources for parents of babies and young children including learning/play plans for younger children.
- Provision of phone and email support to parents by some local parenting support services including FRCs and community and voluntary organisations.
- Adaption of services to ensure both universal and targeted support is still accessible for parents by community organisations. Home-visiting services are using phone and video calls to maintain contact with and support parents. Online delivery of group-based parenting support services and parenting seminars has been introduced.

## **10. Youth Services**

Through DCYA, a range of universal and targeted funding schemes and programmes support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work organisations, services and programmes throughout the country offering non-formal learning and development opportunities for young people to help them overcome adversity and reach their full potential. Within this funding, specific supports for LGBTI+ young people across the country are provided.

### **Actions**

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:



- Adopting innovative or technology based solutions including use of digital meeting platforms to engage with vulnerable young people. Through this youth work support, online learning, life coaching and counselling is being provided.
- DCYA is supporting communication with young people in relation to COVID-19, and with Comhairle na nÓg across the country who are working on developing local messaging for young people.
- Launching a new Digital Youth Information Online Chat Service - an online information service directed at young people aged 16-25 who can ask questions to a trained youth information officer on live chat.
- Creating 'resilience packs' and 'positivity boxes' distributed to vulnerable young people.
- Foróige are running a series of digital campaigns rooted in youth development supporting young people to successfully navigate through the next weeks and months, with a specific focus on minding their mental, physical and social health and learning new life skills.
- Redeployment of appropriately skilled staff to support other bodies and agencies.
- Participating in a range of 'community response' initiatives both locally and nationally.

## 11. Children's Services

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tusla has engaged with a large number of the agency's funded organisations. Many of these organisations provide welfare and wellbeing services to children, young people and their families. Tusla's commissioning approach is the process to ensure that the total resources available to children and families are applied to improving outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way. Further information about commissioning is available on [the Tusla website](#).

### Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Tusla has developed a guidance to all its funded services to ensure community mobilisation of resources in response to COVID-19. Information on this can be found [online](#).
- DCYA has provided funding to support Childline until July 2020 under the [What Works](#) initiative in response to the sharp increase in calls to Childline and to allow the service to implement planned innovations. This will allow the service to deal with specific COVID-19 related inquiries and to test new service response innovations.
- The [What Works](#) information platform is continually being developed as a source and resource to support best practice responses for those working with children and young people in the area of prevention and early intervention.

## 12. Coordinating Structures

### Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland, with 27 CYPSC established nationwide. CYPSC improve outcomes for children and young people by enhancing interagency co-operation at a local and national level. Further information about CYPSC, including your county CYPSC, is available [online](#).

CYPSC offer supports to children and young people who may feel isolated and worried during the COVID-19 pandemic and work with homelessness and direct provision services to provide supports. CYPSC are continuing to respond to the pandemic, documenting their response online. To access this response, copy and paste the following link **directly into your web-browser**: <https://www.cypsc.ie/fileupload/Documents/Resources/Co-ordinators%20Network/COVID-19%202020/FINAL-CYPSC-PAPER-in-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>

Local CYPSC Coordinators continue to actively lead the coordination of work locally and have been advised to allocate up to 50% of their programme budget to emerging COVID-19 needs as appropriate up to June 2020, if required. Some CYPSC have been active with regard to food provision, while others are supporting provision of hard copy education materials. DCYA is supporting CYPSCs in the identification and dissemination of coordinated best practice responses to COVID-19 and CYPSC are engaging with their Local Authority in respect of the Community Response Fora below.

Each CYPSC is also informed by the work of local structures and networks such as [Child and Family Support Networks \(CFSNs\)](#) and [County Childcare Committees \(CCCs\)](#).

CFSNs consist of all services that play a role in the lives of children and families in a given area, with 115 networks nationwide. In this crisis, CFSNs are raising awareness of the services that are currently operating within communities. Care is being taken to ensure that families are getting the support they need, while also ensuring that families are not unduly burdened with different services offering similar supports. CFSNs are working to identify and support families which have not previously availed of services but who require additional support at this time. Information on this can be found [online](#).

CCCs offer a wide variety of services locally including advice on setting up a childcare business, childcare information sessions, and training courses for those considering a career in childcare, and advice and support on applying for government funding. CCCs also offer services to parents, such as providing information on local childcare facilities and information on parent networks.

### **Community Response Fora**

In the current crisis, Local Authority Community Response Fora has been established in every local authority area to help ensure vulnerable community members affected by emergency

arrangements are supported. These fora will lead the co-ordination of COVID-19 community supports and resilience in each area. For a full list of fora and with contact details for each, see the following [online resource](#).

As CYPSC operate on local authority boundaries and have senior local authority representation in the role of CYPSC vice-chair, there is a clear alignment and CYPSC have been encouraged to contact their Local Authority in respect of the recent Community Response Framework.

### **13. Summary of Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla COVID-19 Responses**

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs' mission is to lead the effort to improve outcomes for children and young people in Ireland. DCYA and Tusla has taken a leading role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, working to ensure all services are fully capable and mobilised to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people. This includes leading on significant actions and innovations which will improve in the lives of service users across the system of provision, and working in collaboration with other departments and agencies to deliver service re-orientation responsive to emerging issues in the various phases of COVID-19.

#### **Actions**

DCYA and Tusla are leading the following measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigate its impact for the most vulnerable. The following represent an account of many of these actions achieved and being advanced as of the 27 April 2020.

- Securing 'essential services and worker' designation for some Tusla staff (Children in Care, Child Protection, TESS and DSGBV).
- Enhanced communication and collaboration between DCYA and Tusla.
- Guidance to all staff engaged in child protection and welfare to ensure service continuity that is safe, supportive and responsive.
- Supporting a proactive information and media response from Tusla highlighting stepped up ongoing and enhanced service provision.
- Information and direction to all government departments and agencies of their responsibility to keep children safe and to comply with Children First obligations for any new services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Information and direction to all government departments and agencies to encourage take up of relevant training such as the Children First eLearning Programme available on [the Tusla website](#).
- Supporting CYPSCs in the identification and dissemination of coordinated best practice responses to COVID-19.
- Supporting TESS in the identification and dissemination of coordinated best practice responses to COVID-19.

- Inputting into a cross-departmental action plan and campaign on DSGBV issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and support to Tusla in the ensuring enhanced refuge service provision and implementation of mitigations.
- Ensuring that staffing resources are adequate and enable services to manage both demand and contingency due to impact of COVID-19 on staffing through additional funding for staff replacement.
- Leading at national level in seeking to identify transition pathways for residential social care facilities and DSGBV accommodation.
- Development of emergency measures to increase the number of foster carers through swift recruitment and approval of foster carers.
- Suspending the National Standards for Foster Care 2003 to allow for more than two unrelated children to be placed with approved foster carers, if necessary.
- Development of project seeking the redeployment of Youth Workers into the Children's Residential Care Sector in order to supply a potential shortfall in care staff. This will allow Youth Workers to voluntarily redeploy into the children's residential care sector for the period of emergency measures.
- Information and guidance developed by DCYA and TESS and issued to schools nationwide to ensure ongoing access and engagement with vulnerable students in their learning and transitions.
- Ensuring that TESS supports maintain and develop contact with vulnerable families and their children remotely in direct provision accommodation, homeless accommodation/hubs and DSGBV settings.
- Supporting EWOs to maintain contact with all students and families in open cases, and TESS staff are continuing to make home visits in certain emergency cases in compliance with HSE guidelines.
- Working with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Tusla to maintaining the School Meals Programme. The Programme will be used to support schools to identify pupils unlikely to receive nutritious meals during the current crisis and provide for these children while schools are closed.
- Ongoing support for community and voluntary supports via PPFS Service (including Tusla ABC Programme) to maintain and outreach to children and families via virtual home visiting, Speech and Language services using tele-therapy, delivery of home learning packs and the distribution of essential goods.
- Continuing to support families through signposting in collaboration with Tusla's PPFS Service and Social Work Services. Services have been delivered remotely and young people are supported to maintain contact with one another online.
- Developing a comprehensive online information platform of resources and advice via Gov.ie [for parents](#) during COVID-19 and delivered as a key part of the Government Information Services (GIS) 'Wellbeing' thematic focus in media.

- DCYA has provided funding to support Childline until July 2020 under the [What Works](#) initiative in response to the sharp increase in calls to Childline and to allow the service to implement planned innovations. This will allow the service to deal with specific COVID-19 related inquiries and to test new service response innovations.
- The [What Works](#) information platform is continually being developed as a source and resource to support best practice responses for those working with children and young people in the area of prevention and early intervention.
- Supporting the youth sector to adopt innovative or technology based solutions including use of digital meeting platforms to engage with vulnerable young people. Through this, youth work support, online learning, life coaching and counselling is being provided.
- DCYA is supporting communication with young people in relation to COVID-19, and with Comhairle na nÓg across the country who are working on developing local messaging for young people.
- Launching a new Digital Youth Information Online Chat Service - an online information service directed at young people aged 16-25 who can ask questions to a trained youth information officer on live chat.
- Youth services creating ‘resilience packs’ and ‘positivity boxes’ distributed to vulnerable young people.
- Foróige are running a series of digital campaigns rooted in youth development supporting young people to successfully navigate through the next weeks and months, with a specific focus on minding their mental, physical and social health and learning new life skills.
- Redeployment of appropriately skilled youth work staff to support other bodies and agencies.
- Youth work organisation participating in a range of ‘community response’ initiatives both locally and nationally.

## Appendix A: Indicative Services and Funding Provision

### Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

<b>Services/staff</b>	59 organisations
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	€ 25.3m

### Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)

<b>Services/staff</b>	SCP: 327 staff EWO: 100 staff HSCL: 420 staff
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	SCP: €24.7m

### [Family Support](#)

<b>Services/staff</b>	121 FRCs 12 Tusla ABC areas
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	Family Resource Centres €17.5m PPFS Service (including Tusla ABC) €9.5m

### Youth Services

<b>Services/staff</b>	1,400 youth work staff
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	€61.79m

### Children’s Services

Please note that the below funding provision represents the total Tusla allocation to outside agencies in Tusla’s Business Plan 2020. It counts provision which is also presented in other sections such as funding directed towards FRCs, DSGBV, SCP, Counselling and Family Supports.

<b>Services/staff</b>		and organisations
<b>Existing funding prov</b>		58m

**Supporting Vulnerable Children, Young People and their Families**  
– DCYA and Tusla Services responding to COVID-19

**1. Introduction**

In this crisis it is critical that we mobilise around the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. This paper outlines the service and support infrastructure that is in place through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. These include those services that have been designated as essential front-line services in the current COVID-19 crisis (those addressing child protection; children in care; domestic, sexual and gender based violence; and certain youth work services), other key supports (youth, community, and family services) and coordinating or governance structures (Children and Young People’s Services Committees; Education and Training Boards).

This paper illustrates the innovative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provided by these services, supports and structures. All of these are working to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. It demonstrates how policy and provision is responding in an integrated manner to emerging needs through an overview of the system of supports. It centralises an agenda to improve our responses for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Optimising this system of supports is essential so that all services are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, and responsive to emerging issues during the various phases of the COVID-19 crisis. DCYA, Tusla and constituent sectors are fully committed to this.

This paper is intended to provide a composite overview of the service infrastructure in place for children, young people and their families provided by DCYA, Tusla and their key sectors. It includes summary information on the range of service responses in place, with each area web-linked for more detail. This will be live and dynamic, updated to ensure that new innovations developed in response to emerging needs during this COVID-19 pandemic are identified and shared across the infrastructure working with and for children, young people and their families.

The development of this paper has been informed by relevant divisions in DCYA, service directorates in Tusla, and the work of the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People under Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.

### Service Coordination

#### Children and Young Pe

<b>Services/staff</b>		7 Local Co-ordinators
<b>Existing funding prov</b>		

### County Childcare Com

<b>Services/staff</b>		
<b>Existing funding prov</b>		

## DCYA Youth Services and Youth Climate Justice Fund Note 25/05/20 [GP]

### Youth Services and Youth Climate Justice Fund

#### Youth Sector

- With regard to the youth sector, we hugely value the important work of the sector in supporting the wellbeing and development of young people, especially vulnerable young people, so that they can overcome adversity and achieve their potential. We also recognise and appreciate the way in which the sector has adapted, innovated and mobilised rapidly to respond to the crisis so that it can continue to support young people in different ways- by phone, online, through 'resilience' or 'positivity' boxes, through the new online chat service launched in April, and in a myriad of other ways.
- Since March, we have issued a series of formal letters to the sector recognising and thanking them for their work and, on Friday last, the Minister issued a press statement for young people which also recognised and shone a spotlight on these valuable services, as well as on current innovations and initiatives.
- With regard to funding, the overall allocation from DCYA to the youth sector stands at €61.79m which is an increase of 2.3% overall between 2019 and 2020. In the first weeks of the crisis, the sector was understandably anxious regarding continuity of funding and service provision. The Department formally wrote to the sector on 12<sup>th</sup> March pledging our intention to maintain funding allocations, while acknowledging the service constraints imposed by the crisis and the need to adapt and innovate. We reiterated that commitment a few weeks later and this has been welcomed by the sector.
- We also proceeded to launch the Youth Climate Justice Fund in March which is a positive initiative for young people but also a source of funding for national organisations. Finally, the Youth Capital Fund is open at present. This year, it has been adapted so that, for the first time, it provides grants towards ICT projects which support good governance and data protection for national youth organisations. While this adaptation was identified prior to the current Covid crisis, it is now more relevant than ever as service delivery, management and governance functions move online. Indeed, some areas of online activity are likely to become the new normal, not just in the months ahead, but also in the long-run.
- Some youth organisations are experiencing loss of income from fundraising and commercial sponsorship. Departmental officials participated in the COVID-19 Senior Officials Group on the C&V sector which contributed to the development of the Stability and Innovation Funds for the C&V sector. Once launched by Government, we ensured that the availability of these Funds was brought to the attention of the sector.
- The sector is currently working with DCYA in relation to guidance for re-opening physical services in line with the Government roadmap.

### **Youth Climate Justice Fund**

- The Youth Climate Justice Fund was launched on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The fund supports support youth-led action and innovation on Climate Justice at community, regional and national level.
- The Youth Climate Justice Fund totals almost €500,000 in 2020 and was open to all national youth organisations. It closed to applications on Friday, with 20 of the 31 national youth organisations applying to the Fund.

## **DCYA and Tusla Vulnerable Children Note 25/05/20 [GP]**

### **Supporting Vulnerable Children, Young People and their Families**

#### **– DCYA and Tusla Services responding to COVID-19**

### **1. Introduction**

In this crisis it is critical that we mobilise around the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. This paper outlines the service and support infrastructure that is in place through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and Tusla – the Child and Family Agency. These include those services that have been designated as essential services (those addressing child protection; children in care; and domestic, sexual and gender based violence), other key supports (youth work; family support) and coordinating structures (Children and Young People’s Services Committees).

This paper illustrates the innovative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provided by these services, supports and structures. All of these are working to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. It demonstrates how policy and provision for children, young people and their families is responding in an integrated manner to emerging needs through an overview of the system of supports, and centralises an agenda to improve our responses for vulnerable children and young people.

Optimising this system of supports is essential so that all services are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, and responsive to emerging issues during the various phases of the COVID crisis. DCYA, Tusla and constituent sectors are fully committed to this.

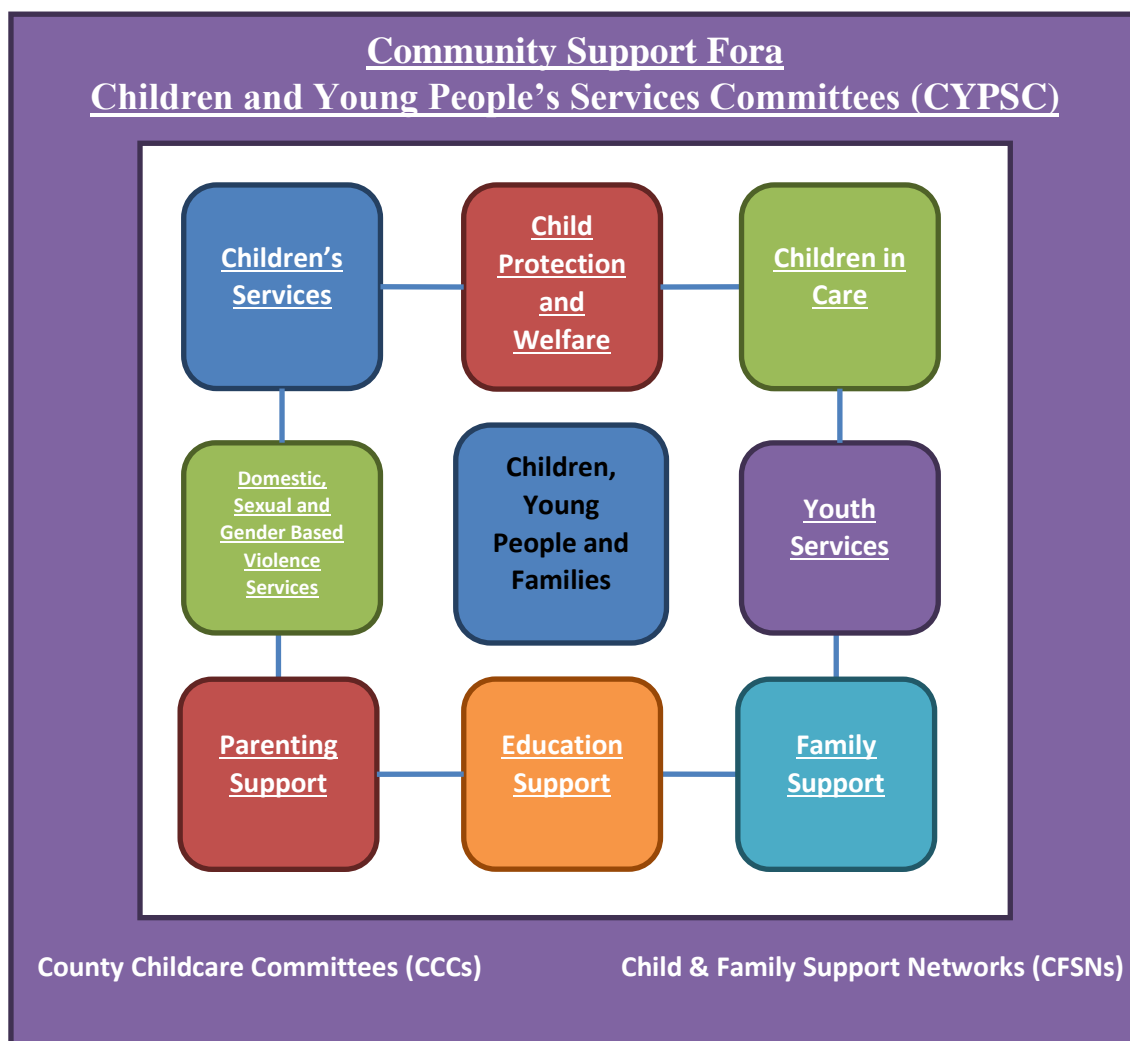
This paper is intended to provide a composite overview of the service infrastructure in place for children, young people and their families provided by DCYA, Tusla and their key sectors. It includes summary information on the range of service responses in place, with each area web-linked so that more detailed information can be found. This will be live and dynamic; updated to ensure that new innovations developed in response to emerging needs during this Covid period are identified and shared across the infrastructure working with and for children, young people and their families.

The development of this paper has been informed by a range of relevant divisions in DCYA, service directorates in Tusla, and the work of the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People under Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020.



## 2. Overview of welfare and wellbeing infrastructure

The diagram below illustrates the services, both directly provided and indirectly supported by the State. It is important to see these not merely as stand-alone services, but part of an integrated system of supports which make up the service infrastructure of children, young people and their families. This infrastructure involves services focusing on targeted responses, including others which are more universal and/or open-access.



*Figure 2 DCYA and Tusla Service Infrastructure for Children, Young People and their Families*

## 3. Planned Communications Focus on Vulnerable Children

On foot of this paper, it is envisaged that a communications campaign arranged with GIS will focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. This campaign will operate on a thematic basis, highlighting supports and services across a range of children and young people's sectors and illustrating the coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign will be based on the larger DCYA paper on Supporting Vulnerable Children, Young People and their Families, and this paper highlighting key service responses in place.

The **purpose** of the campaign will be to

- I. Centralise a shared message to citizens, in particular vulnerable children, young people and their families on the infrastructure of supports and their adaption to the crisis;
- II. Demonstrate the role of this robust, mutually reinforcing system in supporting resilient, and cohesive communities;
- III. Stimulate service integration and innovation across the system in response to COVID-19 by sharing/building on good practice.

### **Target Audiences**

This campaign will target vulnerable children, young people and their families; service providers and managers; and key decision-makers in associated sectors. Key messages for children, young people and families will center the robust service infrastructure, providing a thematic breakdown of the system of provision with key statistics and highlighting major adaptations to service the needs of vulnerable groups. For service providers, managers, and key decision-makers the campaign should demonstrate good practice meeting the needs of children and young people and demonstrate adaptations statutory and community and voluntary services can make to improve their offering.

### **Key Voices**

This campaign will marshal key figures in children and young people's sectors in statutory and non-statutory roles and make particular use of the expertise of the National Advisory Council. Taking the paper by sections, it is proposed to nominate an individual with expertise in this area in a short video demonstrating what the supports are, how it can be accessed, what additionally it is providing in this crisis, and how it links to the wider system. This would include policymakers and providers in DCYA and Tusla where required, and independent experts and sectoral representatives from the Advisory Council. I would, of course, also involve the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, and may also include the Taoiseach and other key ministers.

## **4. Child Protection and Welfare**

Tusla has a primary responsibility to promote the safety and well-being of children. All Child Protection and Welfare referrals or concerns about children are being screened and assessed in line with normal practice and where a child is at immediate risk, they receive an immediate response. Anyone with a concern about a child's safety or welfare should contact their local duty social work office, details are available on the [Tusla website](#) or use the [Tusla online portal](#).

## Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Guidance to all staff engaged in child protection and welfare to ensure service continuity that is safe, supportive and responsive.
- Information and guidance disseminated to all A&E hospital departments, Gardaí and on-call doctors that the Tusla National Out-of-Hours team continues to operate during this period.
- Ensuring a proactive media presence to highlight the importance of child protection, welfare and wellbeing in during this period where support structures (schools etc.) are not in place.
- Information and direction to all government departments and agencies of their responsibility to keep children safe and to comply with Children First obligations for any new services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Information and direction to all government departments and agencies to encourage take up of relevant training such as the Children First eLearning Programme available on [the Tusla website](#).
- Ensuring ongoing engagement from social workers through access and digital means.
- Supporting CYPSCs in the dissemination and re-iteration of the Tusla procedures and pathways regarding Child Protection and Welfare.
- The Department and the Department of Education and Skills have reached out to schools and teachers who are continuing online classes to encourage these teachers to report their concerns to Tusla and let teachers know that social work offices remain open to respond to children at risk.

## 5. Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence

The purpose of Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence Services is to assist individuals, children, and families who experience domestic violence and abuse. Tusla identified domestic violence as a critical service area the agency and its partners will focus on during this public health emergency. [Further information about Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Services, including a list of national services, is available on the Tusla website.](#)

## Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Active and direct engagement with DSGBV organisations in planning and implementation of supports, mitigations and identification of emerging needs.
- Supporting services to ensure that staffing resources are adequate and enable services to manage both demand and contingency due to impact of COVID-19 on staffing through additional funding for staff replacement.
- Working with providers to identify additional accommodation capacity to respond to individual cases/needs.
- Providing additional financial support, PPE equipment and direct ICT resources to enable safety and continuity of service provision.
- Leading at local and national levels in seeking to identify transition pathways for all residential social care facilities.

## 6. Children in Care

Tusla aims to provide safe, reliable and effective services for children in Care and to develop a range of placement options for children with additional needs. Tusla is committed to ensuring that children and young people are supported to live at home with their families, near their friends and schools and within their own communities. Children who require admission to care are accommodated through placement in foster care, placement with relatives, or residential care. [Further information about care services is available on the Tusla website.](#)

### Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Increasing the number of foster carers through the implementation of emergency measures to allow swift recruitment and approval of foster carers.
- Liaising with stakeholders including HIQA and the Irish Foster Care Association regarding a potential amendment and temporary suspension of certain aspects of the regulations relating to the placement of children in foster care, to ensure that family based care remains as the main form of alternative care in Ireland.
- Supporting Tusla to draft a proposal outlining an alternative, remote assessment of potential foster carers to join an emergency panel of carers.
- Suspending the National Standards for Foster Care 2003 to allow for more than two unrelated children to be placed with approved foster carers, if necessary.
- Redeploying Youth Workers into the Children's Residential Care Sector in order to supply a potential shortfall in care staff. This will allow Youth Workers to voluntarily redeploy into the children's residential care sector for the period of emergency measures.

- Maintaining contact between children in care and their families in line with HSE guidance and GDPR.

## **7. Education Supports**

Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention for children and young people. TESS has three strands, the Educational Welfare Service (EWS), the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP). TESS works with schools, families and other relevant services to achieve the best educational outcomes for children and young people. [Further information and updates about TESS is available from the Tusla website.](#)

### **Actions**

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The 420 HSCL Coordinators and 122 School Completion Programmes are working with and supporting parents and children who attend DEIS schools. Since the closure of schools, HSCL Coordinators have been in regular contact with families and children, ensuring families have access to and can use online learning platforms, distributing hard copies of school work, providing games and books in addition to other resources.
- Information and guidance developed by the Department and TESS to schools to ensure ongoing access and engagement with vulnerable students in their learning and transitions.
- Maintaining ongoing contact with vulnerable families and their children remotely to support parents and the wellbeing of the young people including families in direct provision accommodation, homeless accommodation/hubs and DSGBV settings.
- Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are maintaining contact with all students and families in open cases, and TESS staff are continuing to make home visits in certain emergency cases in compliance with HSE guidelines.
- Maintaining the School Meals Programme. The Programme will be used to support schools to identify pupils unlikely to receive nutritious meals during the current crisis and provide for these children while schools are closed. [Further information about the School Meals Programme is available from Gov.ie.](#)
- [Identifying best practice innovations from the TESS service strands to support knowledge exchange and replication.](#)

## **8. Family Support**

The main focus of Family Support services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of children, young people and their families, with attention to those who are vulnerable or at risk. Key structures for the delivery of family support include the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Service, Tusla ABC

Programme, Family Resource Centres (FRCs), and Community and Voluntary Sector Family Supports. [Further information about family support services is available on the Tusla website.](#)

[An indicative breakdown of other funding provision for services including those providing Family Support and Parenting Support Services is provided in '9. Children's Services.'](#)

## Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- ABC sites are ensuring that the needs of some of their targeted families from the Traveller community, families living in homeless hubs and Direct Provision are identified and met.
- ABC sites are delivering Speech and Language services using tele-therapy and home learning packs.
- FRCs are identifying local responses to locally expressed needs of children, families and communities.
- Community and Voluntary Family Support Services are coordinating support in respect of food poverty in conjunction with SCPs, and with Gardaí and other services to assist in the distribution of essential goods.
- Continuing to support families through signposting in collaboration with Tusla's Prevention Partnership and Family Support Service and Social Work Services. Services have been delivered remotely and young people are supported to maintain contact with one another online. Tusla have issued guidance and advice [online](#) for the delivery of frontline services.

## 9. Meitheal

[Meitheal](#) is the Tusla-led early intervention national practice model that identifies a child's and their families' needs and strengths, and brings together a team around the child to deliver preventative support. Practitioners in different agencies can use and lead on Meitheal so that they can communicate and work together more effectively to bring together a range of expertise, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the child and family within their community. Meitheal is delivered as part of the [Prevention, Partnership and Family Support \(PPFS\) Service](#).

## Actions

- Tusla has issued guidance to Senior Managers for PPFS in ensuring business continuity within the Meitheal process during this time.
- Guidance has also been given on meetings and home visits for practitioners maintaining the Meitheal process for vulnerable children and families who may need additional help and supports at this time.

## 10. Parenting Supports

Parenting Support is both a way of working and a set of activities that provides information, advice and assistance to parents and carers in relation to raising their children, in order for the children to reach their full potential. Continuing to support parents during COVID-19 is a key focus for DCYA, Tusla and its partner agencies.

Services across Ireland continue to provide information and printed advice for parents. [Parentline](#) is a free, national, confidential helpline which provides support, guidance and information to parents. The Genesis Programme, which operates through the Tusla ABC Programme, has produced a resource document aimed at [supporting parents and families through the weeks ahead](#).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tusla has engaged with a large number of the agency's funded organisations, many of which provide parenting supports. Organisations including FRCs are adapting the way they provide their support services for parents and their families so that both universal and targeted support remains accessible to parents. One-to-one services are being provided over the phone and many group-based parenting supports are available online. This is in addition to the existing helpline services for parents, details of which can be found at [gov.ie/parents](http://gov.ie/parents).

### Parents Centre

Parents are faced with a large volume of information from different government bodies and agencies. It is important that parents can easily navigate the high-quality information produced by trusted sources.

A new online resource for parents developed by DCYA - Parents Centre on [gov.ie/parents](http://gov.ie/parents) – brings together information for parents in one easy to navigate portal. Parents Centre provides trusted high-quality information and online resources for parents and their families at this time on a range of topics including learning, parenting and information on supports for parents.

### Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Launch of Parents Centre on [gov.ie/parents](http://gov.ie/parents) which will be updated as new resources become available by DCYA.
- Developing online resources for parents of babies and young children including learning/play plans for younger children.
- Provision of phone and email support to parents by some local parenting support services including FRCs and community and voluntary organisations.

- Adaptation of services to ensure both universal and targeted support is still accessible for parents by community organisations. Home-visiting services are using phone and video calls to maintain contact with and support parents. Online delivery of group-based parenting support services and parenting seminars has been introduced.

## 11. Youth Services

Through DCYA, a range of funding schemes and programmes support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving youth work staff in youth services and communities throughout the country.

### Actions

Youth Services are taking a range of measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic including:

- Adopting innovative or technology based solutions including use of digital meeting platforms to engage with vulnerable young people.
- Being supported by DCYA to communicate with young people and relation to COVID-19, and with Comhairle na nÓg across the country who are working on developing local messaging for young people.
- Piloting of digital training sessions for staff and volunteers.
- Advancing protocols and procedures for engaging with young people through digital means. Creating ‘resilience packs’ which are distributed to vulnerable young people.
- Foróige are running a series of digital campaigns rooted in youth development supporting young people to successfully navigate through the next weeks and months, with a specific focus on minding their mental, physical and social health and learning new life skills.

## 12. Children’s Services

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tusla has engaged with a large number of the agency’s funded organisations. Many of these organisations provide welfare and wellbeing services to children, young people and their families. Tusla’s commissioning approach is the process to ensure that the total resources available to children and families are applied to improving outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way. Further information about commissioning is available on [the Tusla website](#).

### Actions

The following measures and innovations are being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:



- Tusla has developed a guidance to all its funded services to ensure community mobilisation of resources in response to COVID-19. Information on this can be found [online](#).
- In response to the sharp increase in calls Childline and to allow the service to implement planned innovations the DCYA has provided funding to support Childline until July 2020 under the What Works initiative. This will allow the service to deal with specific COVID-19 related inquiries and to test new service response innovations.

### 13. Coordinating Structures

#### Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland, with 27 CYPSC established nationwide. CYPSC improve outcomes for children and young people by enhancing interagency co-operation at a local and national level. Further information about CYPSC, including your county CYPSC, is available [online](#).

CYPSC offer supports to children and young people who may feel isolated and worried during the COVID-19 pandemic and work with homelessness and direct provision services to provide supports. CYPSC are continuing to respond to the pandemic, documenting their response [online](#). Local CYPSC Co-ordinators continue to actively lead the coordination of work locally and have been advised CYPSC Co-ordinators to allocate up to 50% of their programme budget to emerging COVID-19 needs as appropriate up to June 2020, if required.

Some CYPSC have been active with regard to food provision, others are supporting provision of hard copy education materials.

CYPSC are engaging with their Local Authority in respect of the Community Response Fora.

Each CYPSC is also informed by the work of local structures and networks such as [Child and Family Support Networks \(CFSNs\)](#) and [County Childcare Committees \(CCCs\)](#).

CFSNs consist of all services that play a role in the lives of children and families in a given area, with 115 such networks nationwide such as local statutory children and families service providers and local community and voluntary children and families services. In this crisis, CFSNs are raising awareness of the services that are currently operating within communities. Care is being taken to ensure that families are getting the support they need, while also ensuring that families are not unduly burdened with different services offering similar supports. CFSNs are working to identify and support families which have not previously availed of services but who require additional support at this time. Information on this can be found [online](#).

CCCs offer a wide variety of services locally including advice on setting up a childcare business, childcare information sessions, training courses for those considering a career in childcare,

and advice and support on applying for government funding. CCCs also offer services to parents, such as providing information on local childcare facilities and information on parent networks.

### **Community Response Fora**

In the current crisis, Local Authority Community Response Fora has been established in every local authority area to help ensure vulnerable community members affected by emergency arrangements are supported. These fora will lead the co-ordination of COVID-19 community supports and resilience in each area. For a full list of fora and with contact details for each, see the following [online resource](#).

As CYPSC operate on local authority boundaries and have senior local authority representation in the role of CYPSC vice-chair, there is a clear alignment and CYPSC have been encouraged to contact their Local Authority in respect of the Community Response Framework launched last weekend.

## Appendix A: List of COVID-19 Specific Actions

1. Securing 'essential services and worker' designation for some Tusla staff (CIC, CP, TESS and DSGBV).
2. Significantly enhanced communication and collaboration between DCYA and Tusla.
3. Guidance to all staff engaged in child protection and welfare to ensure service continuity that is safe, supportive and responsive.
4. Supporting a proactive information and media response from Tusla highlighting stepped up service provision in the child protection & welfare, care, education and DSGBV.
5. Information and direction provided to all government departments and agencies of their responsibility to keep children safe and to comply with Children First obligations for any new services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Information and direction to all government departments and agencies to encourage take up of relevant training such as the Children First eLearning Programme available on [the Tusla website](#).
7. Supporting CYPSCs in the identification and dissemination of coordinated best practice responses to COVID-19.
8. Supporting Tusla Education Support Services in the identification and dissemination of coordinated best practice responses to COVID-19.
9. Active input to cross-departmental action plan and campaign on DSGBV issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and support to Tusla in the ensuring enhanced refuge service provision and implementation of mitigations.
10. Supporting Tusla to ensure that staffing resources are adequate and enable services to manage both demand and contingency due to impact of COVID-19 on staffing through additional funding for staff replacement.
11. Leading at national level in seeking to identify transition pathways for residential social care facilities and DSGBV accommodation.
12. Development of emergency measures to increase the number of foster carers through swift recruitment and approval of foster carers.
13. Suspending the National Standards for Foster Care 2003 to allow for more than two unrelated children to be placed with approved foster carers, if necessary.
14. Development of project seeking the redeployment of Youth Workers into the Children's Residential Care Sector in order to supply a potential shortfall in care staff. This will allow Youth Workers to voluntarily redeploy into the children's residential care sector for the period of emergency measures.
15. Information and guidance developed by the Department and TESS and issued to schools nationwide to ensure ongoing access and engagement with vulnerable students in their learning and transitions.
16. Ensuring that TESS supports maintain/develop contact with vulnerable families and their children remotely in direct provision accommodation, homeless accommodation/hubs and DSGBV settings.

17. Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are maintaining contact with all students and families in open cases, and TESS staff are continuing to make home visits in certain emergency cases in compliance with HSE guidelines.
18. Working with DES, DEASP and Tusla to maintaining the School Meals Programme. The Programme will be used to support schools to identify pupils unlikely to receive nutritious meals during the current crisis and provide for these children while schools are closed.
19. Ongoing support for community and voluntary supports via Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Service (including Tusla ABC Programme) to maintain and outreach to children and families via virtual home visiting, Speech and Language services using tele-therapy, delivery of home learning packs and the distribution of essential goods.
20. Continuing to support families through signposting in collaboration with Tusla's PPFS Service and Social Work Services. Services have been delivered remotely and young people are supported to maintain contact with one another online.
21. Developing a comprehensive online information platform of resources and advice via Gov.ie for parents during COVID-19 and delivered as a key part of the Government Information Services (GIS) 'Wellbeing' thematic focus in media.
22. Additional Childline funding to address elevated service demands.

## Appendix B: Indicative Services and Funding Provision

### Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

<b>Services/staff</b>	59 organisations
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	€ 25.3m

### Tusla Education Support Service

<b>Services/staff</b>	SCP: 327 staff EWO: 100 staff HSCL: 420 staff
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	SCP: €24.7m

### Family Support

<b>Services/staff</b>	121 FRCs 12 Tusla ABC areas
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	Family Resource Centres €17.5m PPFS Service (including Tusla ABC) €9.5m

### Youth Services

<b>Services/staff</b>	1,400 youth work staff
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	€61.79m

### Children's Services

Please note that the below figure represents the total Tusla expenditure to Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations from Tusla's DRAFT Annual Financial Statement 2019 and overlaps with spending in other areas including DSGBV, Tusla ABC, CYPSC and others. It is provided as an indicator of supports which exist.

<b>Services/staff</b>	Approximately 800 total funded organisations
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	Section 56-59 Arrangements (465 payees) €115.4m Family Support Service Counselling €6.4m

### Service Coordination

#### Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)

<b>Services/staff</b>	27 CYPSCs nationwide, with 27 Local Co-ordinators and 1 National Co-ordinator
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	€4.65m

### County Childcare Committees (CCCs)

<b>Services/staff</b>	30 CCCs nationwide
<b>Existing funding provision</b>	€11.1m

## **Responses arising from GP SF Discussions 05/03/20 [GP SF]** **D/CYA**

### **Q: Could greater subsidies for childcare be introduced via increases in child benefit?**

In the view of D/CYA increasing Child Benefit is an inefficient way of providing greater subsidies for childcare. Unlike the current supports, e.g. through ECCE and the National Childcare Scheme, payments through Child Benefit would not be specifically targeted at the cost of childcare, and the recipients could use it for any purpose they wished. Therefore, at best, it would not be possible to determine whether the subsidy was benefiting childcare and at worst, it might not ultimately benefit childcare at all.

There is also the question of targeting limited resources to the most vulnerable groups. A subsidy of this kind would make no distinction between higher and lower income groups.

## **Briefing Note on National Childcare Scheme 05/03/20 [FG]** **Overview of the National Childcare Scheme**

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS), which provides the first statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare, opened to online applications on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Paper based applications will be available in the coming weeks. The Scheme aims to:

- ✓ improve outcomes for children,
- ✓ reduce poverty,
- ✓ facilitate labour activation, and,
- ✓ tangibly reduce the cost of childcare for tens of thousands of families.

Over 29,700 applications, relating to over 38,800 children, have already been successfully submitted and over 33,600 awards have been made to parents. Parents must bring this award to their childcare provider and once their provider has registered the details, payments will begin to flow. Over 13,000 children have had a claim made against their award since programme launch.

To date, 3,646 childcare providers have contracted to provide the NCS.

In designing the NCS, extensive research and consultations have been carried out to ensure that this goal is achieved and that the Scheme can help as many families as possible.

The Scheme removes many of the restrictive eligibility requirements of the existing support programmes, whereby a parent must be in receipt of certain Social Protection payments or a Medical Card in order to receive targeted supports. This 'poverty-proofs' the Scheme by ensuring that families at or below the relative income poverty line will benefit from the highest subsidy rates under the Scheme.

Working families will also be able to avail of help with their childcare costs. Many will, for the first time, be entitled to subsidies which will reduce their childcare costs significantly. Others will see an increase in their level of subsidy. For example, a family with a child aged two in full-time care (40 hours) and currently benefiting from the maximum subsidy of €145 per week under at the highest level of the legacy schemes, would see their subsidy increase to €174 per week, an additional subsidisation of €1,500 per annum.

'Savers' arrangements under the Scheme ensured that any family wishing to remain on their previous entitlement could do so by registering for these schemes before the closing dates. This ensured that families could continue to access their current targeted supports, and so no one would lose out in the initial transition to the new Scheme.

The Childcare Support Act 2018 makes provision for referrals from sponsor bodies for children in certain disadvantaged or challenging circumstances. These arrangements are based on referrals from sponsor bodies against specified criteria. These bodies are the Minister for Education and Skills, the Minister for Justice and Equality, the Child and Family Agency, the HSE, and the Local Authorities. Sponsored applications are now being processed under the Scheme, with over 100 completed sponsor applications received to date.

This Department will continue to work from an evidence-base, and through engagement with all stakeholders, to consider changes to the NCS which might be required.

The Scheme was designed to be flexible, with income thresholds, maximum hours and subsidy rates which can be adjusted in line with Government decisions and as more investment becomes available. As such, any adjustments deemed necessary by Government can be carried out in a quick and responsive manner.

This flexibility has already been evidenced in changes introduced through Budget 2020, whereby changes to maximum hours have increased the potential subsidised hours available to parents (40 to 45 hours for parents in work or study) and by extension to support the sustainability of providers.

Arrangements are in place to monitor the success of the National Childcare Scheme in meeting its objectives. Section 26 of the Childcare Support Act 2018 provides for a review of the operation of the scheme to commence 12 months after the first payment

of subsidies under the scheme. A report of this review will be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

The stated policy intention of section 26 of the legislation was to ensure an early review of the Scheme to identify, in a timely way, any key issues or challenges which need to be addressed rapidly. A longer-term review will also be carried out after three years.

The Scheme has a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in place to support both ongoing and periodic assessment of the Scheme's success in meeting its objectives. It sets out the measures which policy-makers will use to monitor the Scheme on a continual basis, as well as to evaluate the Scheme at regular intervals.

### Early Years Projects

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

4/3/2020