

Introduction

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to feed into the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure. While Barnardos is fully aware of the current fiscal environment and Ireland's obligations to the EU/IMF/ECB bailout plan, we welcome the Government's commitment to 'far-reaching reforms to ensure the delivery of quality public services that meet the needs of citizens'. To this end, Barnardos recommends a shift in public investment towards a prevention and early intervention model operating at a local level to tackle and eradicate poverty and disadvantage. The model outlined in this submission does not necessarily warrant the development of new services but rather the more efficient structuring and use of services already working in communities across Ireland.

Rationale

If this review's mission is to make savings to the exchequer, then this model has proven to be effective in guaranteeing long term savings. Through tackling poverty and social inequality at a local level, it breaks the intergenerational cycles of deprivation and yields benefits to the individual and the wider society. At an individual level, it means greater educational attainment and better employment prospects along with improved health outcomes. At a societal level, the benefits can include savings yielded from less reliance on social welfare, fewer early school leavers and reduced criminal activity. Additional public revenue is also generated through higher taxes paid as a result of more people engaged in higher skilled employment.

In the UK, the Action for Children¹ report examined the investment benefits of preventative services for children and young people on addressing social problems and delivering wider benefits to society. It found that an investment of £191 billion in targeted interventions would deliver a net return of £269 billion (almost double), and that, if the UK invests in targeted interventions, universal childcare and paid parental leave, a saving of £486 billion would be made over 20 years; this is compared with the £4 trillion expenditure on continuing with the current policies and services and meeting the costs of addressing existing problems.

Ireland's recovery from recession will only occur through economic and social development as they are two sides of the one coin. Economic development is required to provide resources for social development. On the other hand social development is essential if economic development is to be successful. There will be no lasting, substantial economic development without the provision of social services and infrastructure². It also builds on the framework as proposed by NESC's *Developmental Welfare State* that should underpin Ireland's future growth and development, namely access to services, income supports and innovative measures that would secure active inclusion.

Over 91,000 children are already living in consistent poverty in Ireland and this figure is likely to rise. Given that our children are our future, this situation is not acceptable. It is imperative that any savings generated through cost cutting measures are redirected in an effective way to give all children the best start in life and enable them to reach their full potential both as children now and for the adults they will become.

Local Area Based Hubs – What should they look like?

The development of local area based approaches to eliminating poverty and inequality is multi-faceted as such supports and services or hubs must be responsive to local needs while synchronising with national policy. Such an approach builds on the Family Support Network model that is being developed to respond

¹ Action for Children (2009) *Backing the Future: why investing in children is good for us all*, in conjunction with the New Economics Foundation, England

² Social Justice Ireland (2011) *A New Agenda for Ireland – Socio-Economic Review 2010*, Dublin

to children and families at all levels of needs. It builds on a number of theories that complement preventative and early intervention approaches all indicating that local responses are more sustainable at eliminating poverty and inequality. These include:

- Capitalising on the strengths and protective factors within the community, family and individual child to offset problems becoming entrenched.
- Emphasising the critical role of the child's early years for their development and the importance of forming secure attachments that guarantee careful nurture, maintenance and stimulation of the child.
- Recognising that later remedial interventions are more costly and less effective at addressing the effects of living in poverty including early school leaving, unemployment and criminal behaviour. By investing early, the benefits to the child and wider society are enjoyed over a longer period of time, increasing the returns on the investment.

National Level

The development of local area based hubs should be governed by a lead agency at the national level that can set out the national parameters for services to tackle disadvantage. This lead agency will need to set out the guidelines for services including national standards for service provision, needs assessment frameworks for local areas and coordination of good practice across services and providers, including coordination of research, training, service design and dissemination of information. Leadership and co-ordination roles and structures must be put in place through an effective governance and oversight function, analogous to the role of the Children's Services Committees applied at a local hub level. This is a critical, as well as complex and challenging role if local area based hubs are to be implemented successfully. The role must carry adequate authority and be accountable for success, reflecting an important lynchpin between national programmes / policy and effective implementation.

Local Level

Although an aim of central Government is to protect the most vulnerable, national policy cannot be too prescriptive. The benefits of locally developed initiatives are that they are sector-led, with increased buy-in and cooperation between communities and the agencies that work with them. Local level initiatives should link with the Children's Services Committees so that these initiatives can become part of the area based plan for children.

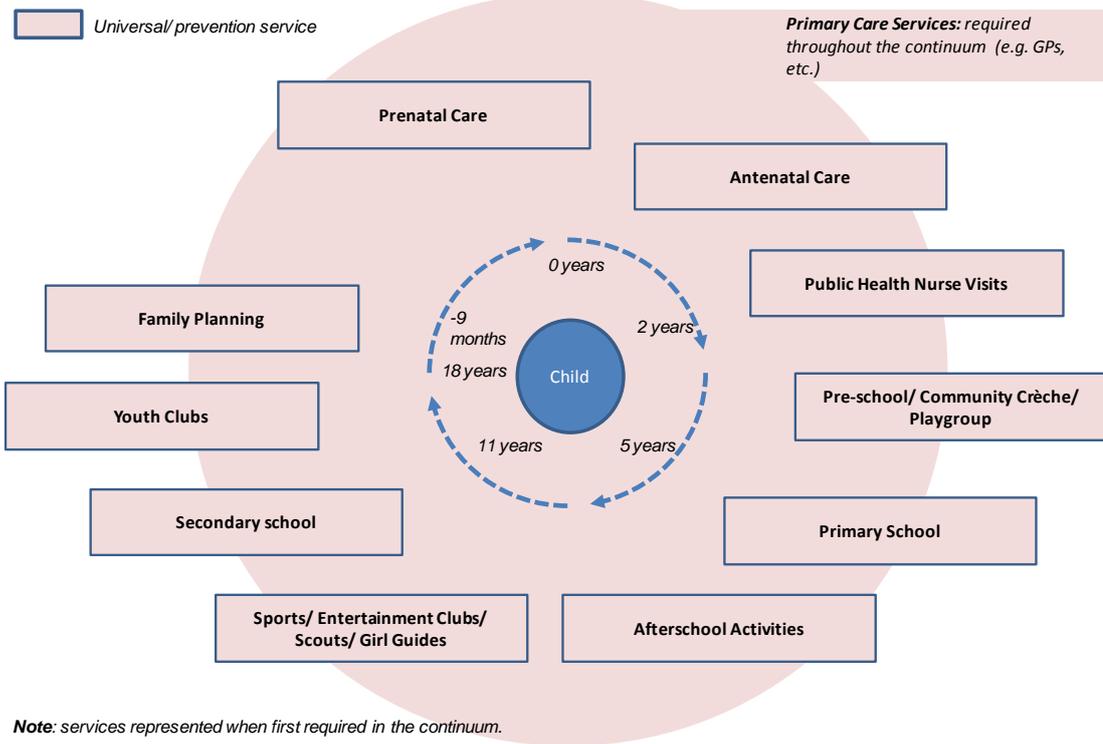
The development of the services within these hubs must be holistic, child centred, designed to meet the needs of the children and families they seek to serve, culturally reflective and evidence based. Services should be delivered in the home, school or on site in the hub premises. They need to be flexible, available and delivered through a co-ordinated response from inter-disciplinary statutory and non-statutory agencies working together with families.

The first step in mapping out a robust profile for service delivery within a disadvantaged community is to recognise that services do not operate in isolation. Services must be able to meet child and family needs across the age continuum and level of need. Below is an outline of the continuum in terms of 'level of need' across three categories of intervention, depending on need:

- **Universal / prevention interventions:** these would be available to all children and families within the community and are similar to Hardiker level 1 services.
- **Early interventions:** these would be available for parents and their children to opt-in, delivered through universal channels and via referral from other agencies. These services would map to Hardiker levels 2 and 3 services.
- **High risk interventions:** these would be mainly accessed via referral from another agency or statutory sources. These services would mirror to Hardiker levels 3 and 4 services.

It is important to note that the service delivery model outlined here is aimed at providing a 'core' of services that would ideally be available within a disadvantaged community across the age continuum and the 'level of need' continuum. In addition to the services outlined each location or community will have its own specific needs and the specific form of the service delivery model should be appropriately adapted to reflect these local needs.

Community hub – Universal / prevention services³



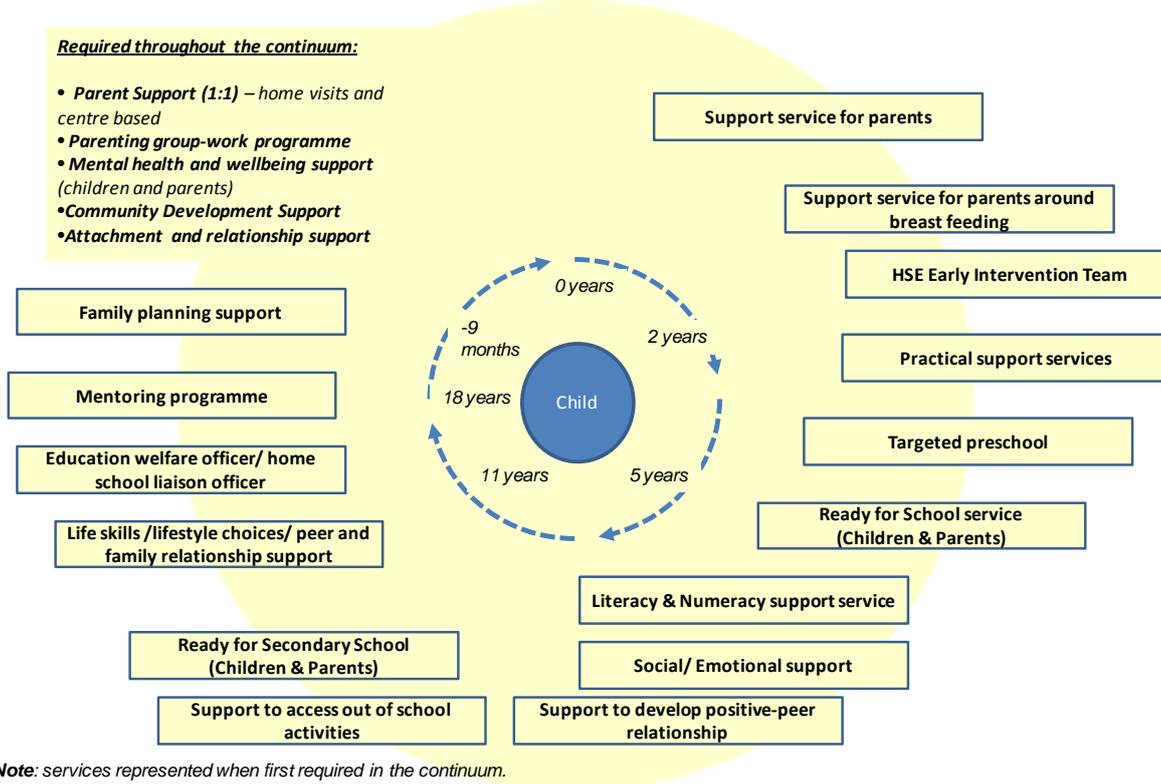
The provision of **universal services** should be a key feature in the local area based hubs. Universal services that are well connected and have established relationships with early intervention service providers provide a non-stigmatised and easily accessible entry and / or 'step up' point for families in need of some additional supports. Furthermore, these universal services can help to:

- Promote the acceptability of other early intervention or intensive services in a community
- Identify the needs of children in a local area through engagement with children and families and local community leaders and activists
- Advocate for and promote the overall development and welfare of children and families at a local and/or regional level

Universal services can also act as 'step down' services where they can provide some ongoing support to children and their parents who have availed of an early intervention or high risk service and who still require some support albeit at a lower level.

³ Barnardos (2011) Blueprint for Children – Strategy 2011-2016 (Internal)

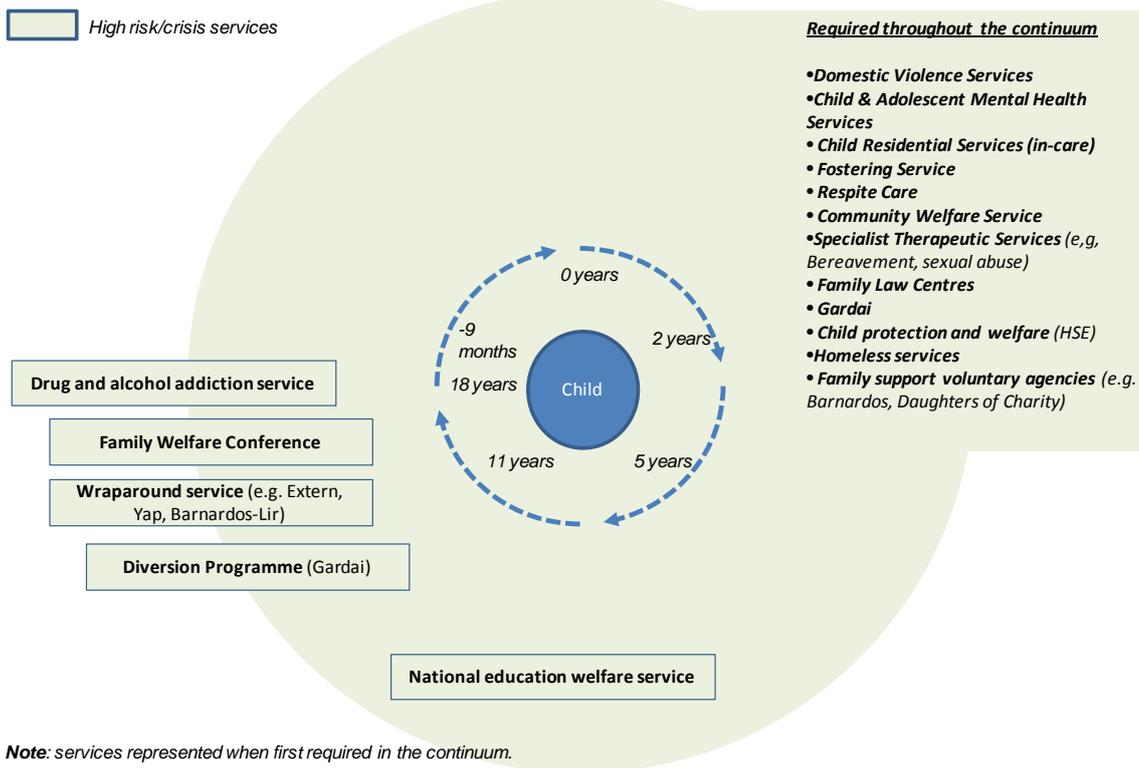
Community hub – Early intervention services



Early intervention approaches are those that prevent or arrest problems early in a child's life (early childhood interventions) or at the early stages in the development of difficulties. Research from the implementation of early childhood interventions have been shown to generate benefits in academic achievement, behaviour, educational progression and attainment, delinquency and crime and later labour market participation. Cost-benefit analysis of such programmes has shown that the investment made in the health and development of young children not only produces social benefits but also produces economic benefits, particularly associated with decreased needs for service later in life (Karoly et al, 2005).

Barnardos believes that early intervention, implemented as part of a holistic service model (i.e. the broader local area based hubs) is critical in terms of delivering effective support for children living in disadvantaged communities.

Community hub – High risk / crisis services



The provision of child protection services remains within the remit of specific statutory actors and the local area based hubs model must recognise the centrality of this role. However, the local area based hubs will need to integrate holistically with the work of the new Child and Family Support Agency to ensure seamless provision of service to children and families at risk or in crisis.

Interagency Coordination

Effective interagency working is crucial to the success of local area based hubs. It is dependant on all agencies and professionals striving toward the same end goal, namely to improve the lives of children and families. Interagency cooperation must be emphasised and encouraged at management and strategic levels because presently much interagency cooperation is reliant on personal relationships that can cease with any staff changeover. The ability to share information between agencies and professionals and to engage with the community through streamlined services will improve the effectiveness of any intervention.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Children did not cause this recession but are paying the price as their futures are blighted by continued poverty and inequality. Further withdrawal of essential public services and cuts to household incomes will exacerbate an already dire situation for many families. As noted by the OECD⁴ families with children are more likely to be poor now whereas previously it was more likely to be pensioners. It makes good economic sense to invest in their futures now by adopting a prevention and early intervention approach, operational at a local level, thereby increasing the chances of intergenerational cycles of disadvantage being broken. Reform of the public sector as per the Croke Park Agreement provides the opportunity to restructure services for children and families along these lines and should be expedited to this end. The Government must use the opportunity presented by the changes in terms for the EU bailout to protect children from the impact of cuts that have had profound effects on already vulnerable lives.

⁴ OECD (2011) Doing Better for Families