



Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

Wednesday 3rd May 2017

Opening Statement by Ms. Oonagh Fleming and Ms. Karen McCarthy

Introduction

Good Morning Chairperson and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to address the Committee in my capacity as Chairperson of Childcare Committees Ireland (CCI). I am joined this morning by my colleagues, Karen McCarthy and Karen O'Sullivan. We are here to represent our national network of 30 City & County Childcare Committees and we welcome the opportunity to discuss the work of the City and County Childcare Committees.

Background

The City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were assigned by the National Childcare Strategy (2000) as the key local component in the development of a co-ordinated approach to quality childcare.

The CCCs are funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and act as a local agent for DCYA in the delivery of the national early education and childcare programmes and the implementation of Irish Government policy at CCC level. The CCCs are positioned as the first port of call for both parents and early years providers when trying to access many of today's early years care and education initiatives (e.g. TEC¹, ECCE², CCS³, Better Start⁴, AIM⁵, Learner

¹ Training & Education scheme

² Early Childhood Care and Education scheme also known as the Free Pre-school Year

³ Community Childcare Subvention scheme, CCS P – Private, CCS – R – Programme Refugees, CCS – T – Transitional – Homeless and CCS Plus – A scheme which encapsulates all the variables of the other CCS schemes

Funds⁶, CMDG⁷ and Parent and Toddler Group grants). Having a local focus and knowledge ensures that CCCs are well positioned to support the development and future sustainability of early years services that cater for the needs of local parents and children.

The functions and roles of the Childcare Committees are aligned to support the implementation of national policy at local level. In addition, the CCCs play a key coordinating role and have been and are still actively involved in various co-ordinating bodies who support the delivery of supports to Children & Families such as Children & Young People Services Committees (CYPSCs). As the established local delivery structure for the Early Years, CCCs play a crucial role in supporting the ongoing development of the Early Years sector in each CCC area, identifying local needs, and developing and implementing plans to address these needs. This has been a core function of the CCCs since their establishment.

Developing and Supporting the Childcare Infrastructure in Ireland

Over the decade 2000 to 2010, the State, initially in partnership with the EU, invested €425 million capital funding to create childcare places throughout Ireland. From the years 2006-2010 the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) was the State's vehicle for investment in the sector. The NCIP succeeded and built further on the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000-2006 which provided capital funding, staffing grants and quality programmes. Over the period 2000-2010, CCCs were key to the success of these programmes which led to the creation of over 65,000 childcare places in the early years sector.

The role of the CCCs has continued to expand and it is both the national reach and the unique relationship with the early years providers that makes possible the implementation of national policy in an effective and efficient manner to over

⁴ Quality Development Service

⁵ Access and Inclusion Model

⁶ DCYA support to the Professional Development of the sector

⁷ Childminding Development Grants

4,000 early years services. As well as the ongoing work of supporting the capacity of the sector, CCCs have been tasked with the local management of the processes required to deliver the various national funded programmes. The work of the CCCs is independently evaluated on an annual basis and the last published⁸ report showed that 95% of services reported a high satisfaction rating from childcare providers to the supports provided to them by CCCs. The CCCs as the local delivery agent and business partner of DCYA are a key component of the development of early years provision nationally. This approach is effective and provides value for money of the circa €260 million investment, into the sector, the funding of the CCCs accounts for only 4% of this budget. This national delivery structure has been further strengthened through our national network Childcare Committees Ireland, which provides a coherent structure for various bodies in particular the DCYA to plan and implement its policy brief. CCI, as the national network, works closely with a range of other government departments, agencies and organisations to ensure our systems are strong and effective. These partners include DCYA, Tusla, DES, DSP, Pobal, Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service; National Early Years Children First Service, and AIM with the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) Service.

Not only have the CCCs remained very focused on responding to local need, but have been equally responsive to the implementation of a range of national programmes and their work supports the realisation of the objectives and targets of DCYA. This will be further enhanced in 2017 with additional supports being developed and delivered by CCCs to all early years services, to support new initiatives and the new regulatory regime.

What role does the CCC's have in supporting the delivery of the Governments national policy framework for children & young people, 2014 – 2020 - BETTER OUTCOMES BRIGHTER FUTURES (BOBF)?

Five National Outcomes

The work of the CCCs is aligned with the five outcomes of this national policy framework.

⁸ Pobal annual beneficiary questionnaire 2015

Outcome 1: Active and healthy

The aims for this outcome include that all children and young people are physically healthy and able to make positive health choices; have good mental health; and that their lives are enriched through the enjoyment of play, recreation, sports, arts, culture and nature. The CCCs support early years services and those working with and caring for children to play a role in promoting children's health and well-being using the national curriculum framework, Aistear. This is achieved through a partnership approach with the early years service providers and other stakeholders such as the Sports Partnerships, HSE Health Promotion Unit and the National Childcare Network - Smart Start. Further supports through CCCs under this would be in the area of supporting early years services settings to deliver experiences to children that build on development protective factors, such as emotional resilience, a sense of self-esteem and good social networks. In addition the CCCs deliver the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training courses under the Access and Inclusion Model. These courses commenced in November 2016 and taking into account the courses delivered in 2016, those that are currently underway and those planned for in the coming months we will have delivered 80 courses to nearly 1000 Providers in the first half of 2017.

Outcome 2: Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development

This outcome aims to ensure that all children receive the best foundation in learning and development, experience social and emotional wellbeing, and are engaged and achieving in education.

CCCs work with early years services to ensure that the quality of the educational experience delivered supports very young children to achieve the best foundation in learning and development. This includes supporting the implementation of Síolta (The National Quality Framework) through our Síolta mentor supports and Aistear (The National Curriculum Framework) through participation currently in an Aistear pilot which is running in many CCC areas. During 2016 56 of our staff completed a Síolta Training of Trainers and are now actively implementing Síolta with Early Years Services across the Country.

The introduction of the ECCE Programme better known as the Free Pre School Year in 2009 was a milestone and represented an important step in the provision of universal Early Childhood Care & Education to children aged 3 – 6 years. The CCCs support the administration of this programme. In 2015/2016, 4,178 early years' services were contracted to offer the ECCE programme nationally⁹ Approximately 95% of eligible children participate in ECCE and have done so from the outset (DCYA, 2016). 2016 saw the launch of the Access and Inclusion Model which provides a range of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Free Pre-school Year. The CCCs play a crucial role in this model in relation to information and supports to both parents and early years services and the delivery of the EDI training as noted above.

Outcome 3: Safe and protected from harm

One of the tenets of this outcome is that all children and young people need safeguarding and it requires a whole-of-society response. BOBF notes that in particular those working directly with children or in a position of authority have responsibility to protect children from abuse. The Government commitment to Children First has been evidenced over recent years with focus on the implementation of sectoral plans. The CCCs have been at the forefront of this for the early years sector. The CCCs have responsibility for the roll out of the Always Children First child protection and welfare training programme to early years settings with a stated aim of ensuring that relevant staff from every service throughout the country receive accredited child protection and welfare training. The roll out of this training is coordinated and delivered at city and county level by CCCs and to date

- 10,000+ Early Years Practitioners have completed the training

Outcome 4: Economic security and opportunity

This outcome aims to protect all children from poverty and social exclusion; to have them living in child/youth-friendly sustainable communities; to provide opportunities for ongoing education and training; and to offer pathways to

⁹ Pobal, Early Years Sector Profile 2015-2016

economic participation, entrepreneurship, fulfilling employment and independent living. The CCCs work with early years services to support access for children whose emotional, social and intellectual development may be challenged through experiences of poverty and social exclusion. This is achieved through the implementation of the Community Childcare Subvention Schemes in early years services who provide for our most vulnerable children and families. In addition, the CCCs promote and administer a suite of supports that enable parents to avail of subsidised childcare available to facilitate their labour market participation and education and training opportunities.

The CCCs further support the community providers in relation to sustainable service provision including financial advice and individualised plans for their delivery of Service. The CCCs have well established systems in place to provide this type of support. For example, the ongoing work with community services to address the issues of reliance on community employment (CE) participants. This work involves intensive one to one supports for those services identified with this issue. This has involved CCC staff teams conducting in depth business analysis reviews to support the service to work towards sustainability and operation of their businesses without having to rely on CE participants to meet their regulatory requirements of staff/child ratios and qualification requirements. One million in funding has been allocated by the government to support these services and to date 47 services have received funding under Strand A, Recruitment/HR Supports and are now working with their CCCs to submit for 'once off funding' under Strand B.

Outcome 5: Connected, respected and contributing

This national outcome sets out to ensure that measures are put in place to create a society in which all children and young people are valued and respected for who they are, so that they can freely express their identity and that all children and young people have a sense of their own identity and are free from discrimination.

CCCs support this outcome through their work supporting equality, diversity and inclusion with the delivery of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). The activities being delivered by CCCs under AIM go a long way to support this

national outcome and include the EDI training noted earlier and supports to develop inclusion policies within each early years services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Childcare Committees would like to acknowledge the Governments continued investment to the early years sector and have welcomed the opportunity to be part of its fast and expanding evolution. It's also important to acknowledge that there is cross party support where Party manifestos demonstrated recognition for early years investment in terms of supports to working parents and the positive effect that quality early years experiences can have on a child's development.

Research has stated that the early years of a child's life has an impact on their lifelong learning and development, a time when rapid growth and development occur. This sector is the first rung on the education ladder and it is therefore critical that investment continues to grow in supporting children and their families, laying quality foundations for children with the hope of reducing interventions in later years. With our success to-date we also welcome the opportunity to have a continued role as the local delivery mechanism for DCYA and the opportunity to maintain and build on the important relationships that we have established over the last 16 years.

We thank you for your attention and welcome any questions you may have.