

## Family Policy



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# A briefing paper from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

## February 2010

### 1. Introduction

In January 2010, the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) published its Green Paper *Support for All: the Families and Relationships Green Paper*<sup>1</sup>. The Green Paper sets out Government's measures 'to support all families as they bring up their children and to help families cope with times of stress and difficulty.'

In the same week the Conservative Party published the family section of the Conservative Party's Draft Manifesto *Making Britain more family-friendly*<sup>2</sup>, and the Centre for Social Justice published its *Green Paper on the Family*<sup>3</sup>. (The Centre for Social Justice is 'an independent think tank established by [the former Conservative Party leader] Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP'<sup>4</sup> which has been described in a recent journal article on Conservative policy as 'closely allied to the Conservative Party'<sup>5</sup>.)

This briefing paper summarises and compares the three Family Papers, but first highlights potential issues for the voluntary and community youth sector arising from the documents.

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<sup>1</sup> DCSF (2010) *Support for All: the Families and Relationships Green Paper*, and supporting information, is available via: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/supportforall/>

<sup>2</sup> Conservative Party (2010) *Making Britain more family-friendly*  
[http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/01/~media/Files/Draft%20Manifesto/DraftFamiliesManifesto.ashx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/01/~media/Files/Draft%20Manifesto/DraftFamiliesManifesto.ashx)

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Social Justice (2010) *Green Paper on the Family*  
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/CSJ%20Green%20paper%20on%20the%20family%20WEB.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Social Justice: About  
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/default.asp?pageRef=44>

<sup>5</sup> Crisp, R et al, 2009. Continuity or Change: what a future Conservative government might mean for regional, housing and welfare policies. *People, Place & Policy Online*, 3(1), 58-74

## **2. Potential issues for the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS)**

These Family Papers make little direct reference to the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS), however as family is a crucial part of the young people's lives, it is important that the VCYS is aware of developments in this area. The information will also be directly relevant for NCVYS members who work with young parents.

## **3. Support for All summary**

This section provides a summary of the Government's Green Paper, highlighting key, relevant points for the VCYS.

### **3.1 Introduction**

Government believes that family policy must: support families to build and sustain strong relationship and be respecting of and responsive to diverse family forms. Policy should not intervene in private life, but support family relationships indirectly, by giving families support and advice which they can draw on if and when they need. Families are built on having 'a job, a stable income, a solid education, a decent home and good health'. Some families may require more help than others (e.g. when there are disabled family members), and extra help may be needed at 'crunch times', such as around childbirth.

### **3.2 Chapter 1 – Families today**

This chapter describes the nature of the family today, and outlines some of the economic, social and demographic changes over recent decades. Family forms, family life and public attitudes have changed significantly: marriage rates have declined; divorce rates have grown and started to fall again; there is greater recognition of same sex relationships. Two key themes typify the changes of the last few decades:

- relationships have become more fluid and families more complex;
- economic, social and demographic trends are marked by inequality – i.e. some young people have seen their opportunities grow, while others still have limited horizons.

### **3.3 Chapter 2 – What government is already doing to support families and family relationships**

This chapter summarises the family policy measures that Government has introduced over the past 12 years. This includes:

- family friendly employment policies;
- increased childcare provision;
- investment in play;
- the Every Child Matters programme;
- Sure Start Children's Centres;
- the extended schools programme.

There has been additional support for those with complex needs, including:

- help for families on low incomes;
- a strategy to lower teenage pregnancy;
- investment in services for those with educational needs or disabilities;
- Parenting Early Intervention Programmes;
- the establishment of Children's Trusts.

### **3.4 Chapter 3 – Bringing up children**

This chapter looks at good parenting and its importance for children and young people. Services and policies should respond to the needs of all kinds of families – and all members within families – and should help families to sustain good relationships. Extra support is promised for those with the greatest needs, as well as at transition points – such as when a child starts at a new school.

Government proposes a number of additional ways to support families:

- publish a Dads Guide, through the popular Bounty packs, to give tailored advice and tips for fathers ahead of their child's birth;
- support plans by The Royal College of Midwives to produce new guidance to their members on how to better engage dads before, during and after the birth of a child;
- extend key worker support to families with a disabled child up to the age of 19;
- free parenting support booklet for parents of young people;
- bring together online information available for families of teenagers;
- commission free materials to help guide children on how to deal with commercial messages;
- publish for consultation a new statutory guidance framework;
- produce a support pack for relatives who are caring for children;
- explore with stakeholders the difficulties experienced by family and friends carers;
- strengthen the National Minimum Standards for foster carers so that family and friends foster carers receive training, development and financial support.

### **3.5 Chapter 4 – Building strong family relationships and dealing with relationship pressures and breakdowns**

This chapter sets out Government's measures to help young people and families understand the importance of strong, respectful relationships and to help them with the process of family transition.

Government will:

- publish for consultation new Sex and Relationship (SRE) guidance for schools<sup>6</sup> and produce information for parents about the benefits of SRE;
- fund specialist relationship counselling services for families with disabled children;
- explore various methods of providing information, advice and guidance to families and young people;
- produce materials to support couples and guide young people during separation;
- promote mediation and piloting Parenting Together Apart sessions. There is recognition of the work of voluntary sector providers of relationship support and the need for Government to learn from their experiences;
- launch a comprehensive review of the family justice system with the principle that 'the interests of the child should be paramount' to be at the heart of this review. It will look at alternative ways for family conflicts to be dealt with out of the courts and will consider management and leadership of the family justice system;
- give grandparents more recognition and aim to improve the information available for grandparents, and to remove the requirement for grandparents to obtain the leave of the court before making an application for a contact order.

### **3.6 Chapter 5 – Family relationships and employment**

This chapter explores the Government's position on employment and childcare and its 'enabling role – helping to extend the choices that families are able to make'.

Government will:

- review the notice period for the two week paternity leave period, and explore financial barriers to taking paternity leave;
- allow fathers to take up to six months of additional paternity leave if the mother returns to work with maternity leave outstanding (from April 2011);
- consult on extending parental leave, and whether to extend it to parents with children older than five;
- launch an online eligibility checker to help parents assess the financial guidance they may be entitled to;
- raise awareness of and support family-friendly employment rights and practices, by:
  - producing a new guide to family friendly employment;

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<sup>6</sup> Consultation on Sex and Relationships Education Guidance

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1637&external=no&menu=1>

- joining up existing information and advice through the new Family Information Service;
- ensuring that advice on employment options is included in materials for new parents;
- publishing a Think Fathers practice guide to promote father-friendly working practices;
- using Businesslink.gov to provide advice to help employers introduce family friendly practices;
- encourage all Sure Start Children's Centres to offer a walking bus service where feasible;
- encourage providers of out-of-school and holiday childcare for the over-8s to register on a voluntary basis with Ofsted, enabling families to reclaim costs through tax credits.

### **3.7 Chapter 6 – The role of public services**

This chapter considers the place of public services in supporting families and good family relationships. There is a need to make services friendly and welcoming not just to mothers, but to fathers and grandparents. The focus is on mainstreaming good practice, making information more accessible and training professionals.

Government will:

- work with the Family and Parenting Institute to help services become more family friendly;
- broaden Parent Know How to provide help to other family members, and will launch BeGrand.net to provide information for grandparents;
- improve training for professionals so that they can develop the skills necessary to work with families;
- train professionals in adult services to be alert to the implications of their clients' problems for other family members;
- ensure every local authority can offer an intensive family intervention service and will publish refreshed guidance for local authorities on commissioning family friendly services;
- continue to fund the pilot Family Drug and Alcohol Court until March 2012 so that lessons can be learnt from it.

There is recognition of the work of voluntary organisation in delivering services, and the fact that 'their services are often felt to be less stigmatising and more friendly and accessible than those run by local authorities or other statutory agencies.' Reference is made to the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning<sup>7</sup> and its aim to improve commissioners' understanding of the potential of the third sector.

Government promises a paper on early intervention, which will contain more information on how it will support families with profound needs before problems become entrenched.

### **3.8 Chapter 7 – Consultation questions**

To help shape the next phase of family policy Government seeks responses to the following questions:

- What more can we do to help create a culture in which seeking help for relationship or parenting problems, or other family difficulties, is considered socially acceptable?
- Which issues should be prioritised by Government in seeking to strengthen families and support family relationships in this country?
- Which services need the most urgent development to make them truly family-friendly?
- Do you consider that compulsory mediation assessment would improve the take-up of mediation in family law cases, and what more could be done to improve the take-up of family mediation as an alternative to court action?
- How far does the need to seek leave of court act as a barrier to prevent extended family members applying for contact with a child? Is there a need to remove this requirement for some other family members, beyond grandparents? (Note: Parents are already exempt.)
- Would a comprehensive advice service on family issues based on the successful models like NHS Direct and the NHS Carers Direct service make it easier for families to find the help they need? This could consist of a national online service coupled with a single telephone number.

<sup>7</sup> National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=6583598>

To respond to the consultation, visit

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1685&external=no&menu=1>

#### **4. Making Britain more family-friendly summary**

This section provides a summary of the family section of the Conservative Party's Draft Manifesto, highlighting key, relevant points for the VCYS. The paper explores the Conservatives' approach to family policy and sets out the Conservatives' plans for the taxation system, early intervention, and supporting families.

##### **4.1 Introduction**

The Conservatives believe that family policy is vitally important, but that the Government's 'child-centred approach has ignored the importance of strengthening the relationships between all family members'. Policy should ensure the right structures are in place: 'strong and secure families, confident and able parents, an ethic of responsibility instilled from a young age'.

##### **4.2 Chapter 2.9 – Reforming the tax and benefits system to help families**

A Conservative government will:

- end the couple penalty in the tax credit system – this is 'the change in entitlements (usually a fall) to benefits and tax credits that occur when two single people (with or without children) start to cohabit'<sup>8</sup>;
- recognise marriage and civil partnerships in the tax system in the next Parliament;
- signal that it values the commitment that people make when they get married;
- freeze council tax for two years and reform the administration of tax credits.

##### **4.3 Chapter 2.10 – A new approach to early intervention**

A Conservative government will:

- increase Sure Start focus on the neediest families and early intervention and involve organisations who will be paid by the results they achieve;
- bring all funding for early intervention and parenting support into one budget, to be overseen by a new Early Years Support Team within the Department for Children, Schools and Families;
- provide 4,200 more Sure Start health visitors guaranteeing parents support before and after birth until their child starts school.

##### **4.4 Chapter 2.11 – Helping families to balance their lives**

A Conservative government will:

- support the provision of free nursery care for pre-school children through a diverse range of providers (including the voluntary sector);
- extend the right to request flexible working to every parent with a child under the age of eighteen;
- allow parents to share maternity leave between them, including taking some of the leave simultaneously;
- 'ensure that the public sector becomes a world leader in flexible working';
- give couples greater encouragement to use existing relationship support and ensure support is well-funded.

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<sup>8</sup> A descriptive analysis of the "couple penalty" in benefits and tax credits <http://zippy.ifs.org.uk/projects/320>  
Further information can be found in Centre for Social Justice (2009) Dynamic Benefits: Towards Welfare That Works  
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/CSJ%20Dynamic%20Benefits%20exec%20WEB%20NEW.pdf>

## 5. *Green Paper on the Family* summary

This section provides a summary of the Centre for Social Justice's (CSJ) *Green Paper on the Family*, highlighting key, relevant points for the VCYS. The paper summarises key research over the past few years, including CSJ publications such as *Breakdown Britain*<sup>9</sup> and *Breakthrough Britain*<sup>10</sup> and a number of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports<sup>11</sup>. It then explores the CSJ's approach to family policy and sets out their proposals.

### 4.1 Chapter One – The importance of family

The CSJ believe that strengthening families is necessary to create a fairer, more socially mobile society. This chapter presents research showing that children in married couple families do best across a wide range of indicators, and concludes that policy must recognise and support this as the most stable family form.

### 4.2 Chapter Two – The need for reform

Family stability has been in decline over the last few decades and according to OECD data Britain has the highest divorce rate and teen pregnancy rate in Europe. Policy has been neutral to the structure of families, yet research has shown that different structures have different outcomes and children do best if their parents are in a married relationship. Children of co-habiting couples do better than those of single parents, but less well than those of married couples.

Family breakdown has an adverse effect on all members of the family. It is linked to poverty, incidences of child abuse, lower levels of educational achievement, the development of behavioural problems and increased likelihood of offending and substance misuse.

### 4.3 Chapter Three – The importance of parenting and the early years

The nature of the parent-child relationship, particularly in the early years, also determines a child's development. When an infant's brain is developing in its first few years, positive experiences, such as a loving family environment, promote the development of pro-social systems in the brain. Negative experiences make individuals unable to cope with stress and more disposed towards anxiety, violence and disruptive behaviour.

The CSJ recognises the importance of multi-agency practice, brought about by the Every Child Matters Agenda, the 2004 Children's Act and the 2007 Children's Plan. But Sure Start Children's Centres have not always sufficiently supported parents or focussed on the importance of relationships. Their child-focussed approach has also ensured that necessary collaboration with adult services has been stifled.

### 4.4 Chapter Four – Strengthening families, improving lives: the CSJ agenda for reform

There is a need to deliver social policy across a multitude of departments and all ministers should 'publicly articulate the importance of family form and structure to the outcomes for adults and children.'

To do this, a National Council for Social Justice should be created, and there should be a Secretary of State with overarching responsibility for delivering cross-cutting policies. The Department for Children, Schools and Families should be divided into the Department for Families and the Department for Education. Children's outcomes are best served by a move from child-focused services to family-focused ones. To do this, local authorities should introduce the post of Director of Family Services to co-ordinate the work of Children's and Adult's Services in family issues.

Various areas are highlighted as in need of reform.

- Recognising that family matters

<sup>9</sup> Centre for Social Justice (2006) *Breakdown Britain: Executive Summary*  
[http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/CSJ%20FINAL%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/CSJ%20FINAL%20(2).pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Social Justice (2006) *Breakthrough Britain: Chairman's Overview*  
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/overview.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2009), *Doing Better for Children*; OECD (2009), Family Database

## *Marriage*

Government should support marriage by:

- sending 'a clear message that family and marriage matters' by reintroducing 'marital status' into government literature;
- recognising marriage in the tax system through a transferable tax allowance, which would support marriage as an institution and support spouses in unpaid caring roles (a staggered implementation of the allowance is recommended given the economic climate)

## *Tax*

The 'couple penalty' in the Working Tax Credit costs low-earnings couples £1,336 a year because they live together. By enhancing the couple element in the WTC low-income families could increase their weekly income, increasingly family stability and alleviating poverty.

- Strengthening families

## *Services*

Sure Start Children's Centres should be absorbed into Family Hubs to ensure that communities deliver joined-up, family-focused services. These Family Hubs should strengthen families through helping with relationships and parenting; prevent family breakdown by providing relationship support and support separating families to achieve workable parenting arrangements. These Hubs should be relevant to local needs, so the exact details should be left to local commissioners – who should 'be proactive in engaging the third sector which is often more trusted in deprived communities.'

## *Relationships*

There is a need for relationship and couple support as well as parenting courses. Support should be available to couples at key moments in their relationship, and for couples vulnerable to breakdown (such as where one parent is in prison, military couples, parents with significant caring responsibilities). Marriage registrars, midwives, health visitors and providers of parenting classes should signpost couples towards relationship support.

- Early Years

## *Health visitors*

The health visitor role should be expanded and enhanced as they have a vital role to play to support families. All families should receive a core minimum guarantee of ten home visits. To raise the profile of health visitors it should be officially recognised as a discrete profession, and a Health Visiting Council should be introduced, allowing the profession to be opened up to non-nurses. Training should be enhanced, and provisions should be made to attract former health visitors back into the profession.

## *Support for vulnerable families*

There is need for programmes, such as the Family Nurse Partnership, for vulnerable families which provide intensive home-visiting during pregnancy and infancy. Consideration should be given to expanding the FNP programme to a broader range of families.

## *Training for early years professionals*

The many professionals who work with parents and infants should have more training around the areas of infant neurological development and mental health; the role of parenting and relationships; and identifying parenting deficits and parents suffering depression.

## *Parenting programmes*

The parent-child relationship is of fundamental importance and there should be programmes able to offer support, advice and guidance to all families if necessary. Family Hubs should be the principal source of these programmes.

## *Family fostering*

More should be done to support vulnerable and dysfunctional families to care for their children and prevent them going into care. Family fostering would offer residential support to families with children

at immediate risk of entering care for preventable reasons. 'Local authorities should, where possible, commission third sector providers to deliver family fostering initiatives.'

- Family Law

*Principles and process*

Family law needs clear, underlying principles, including 'support for marriage, married couples and the institution of marriage', 'support for family life' and 'looking after the best interests of the children'. There is a need for better information about the consequences of legal proceedings, including information on out-of-court settlements. Alternative Dispute Resolution methods should be encouraged. The requirement in the 1996 legislation for a three month period of reflection and consideration at the beginning of the divorce process should be reinstated, giving couple time to think through issues and access mediation and counselling services. There needs to be legal aid available to those who need help.

*Children*

If parental separation is unavoidable, every effort should be made to minimise disruption to children and prioritise their welfare. The Children Act 1989 'should be amended to make it clear that the best interests of the child are invariably served by the 'significant involvement' of both parents in the child's life.'

Grandparents should have more recognition, and so the requirement for them to obtain permission of the court should be removed in the case of contact applications.

*Finance*

Pre-marital agreements should be available to those who wish to enter into one, and they should be legally binding. The current law on financial provision on divorce is confusing and needs to be clarified.

## 6. Comparison chart of key proposals

Policy Area	Government	Conservatives	Centre for Social Justice
Marriage	Will not interfere with marriage because it is considered to be a private matter	Recognise marriage and civil partnerships in the tax system	Recognise marriage in the tax system through a transferable tax allowance; reintroduce 'marital status' into government literature
Tax		End the couple penalty in the tax credit system	End the couple penalty in the tax credit system
Relationships	Promote mediation; produce materials to support couples; free parenting support booklet for parents of young people; produce materials to support couples and guide young people during separation; more support for fathers	Give couples greater encouragement to use existing relationship support and ensure support is well-funded	Promote relationship and couple support as well as parenting courses; make support available to couples at key moments in their relationship
Services	Work to make services more family friendly, with professionals in adult services trained to be aware of family issues		Absorb Sure Start Children's Centres into Family Hubs
Early Years	Reviewing importance of early years provision and further information on the vision for maternity and early years support is forthcoming	Increase Sure Start focus on the neediest families and early intervention; bring all funding for early intervention and parenting support into one budget;	Train early years professionals; ensure existence of parenting programmes for all and specific programmes for vulnerable families
Health visitors	Boost the role and capacity of health visitors with Action on Health Visiting Programme	Provide 4,200 more Sure Start health visitors	Expand and enhance health visitor role
Family law	Launch a comprehensive review of the family justice system with the principle that 'the interests of the child should be paramount';		Give family law clear, underlying principles, including 'support for marriage, married couples and the institution of marriage' and 'looking after the best interests of the children';
Grandparents	Give grandparents more recognition; improve the information available for grandparents; remove the requirement		Give grandparents more recognition; remove the requirement for grandparents to obtain the leave of the

	for grandparents to obtain the leave of the court before making an application for a contact order		court before making an application for a contact order
Employment	Review the notice period for the two week paternity leave period; allow fathers to take up to six months of additional paternity leave	Extend the right to request flexible working to every parent with a child under the age of eighteen; allow parents to share maternity leave between them	
Governance		Bring all funding for early intervention and parenting support into one budget, to be overseen by a newly created Early Years Support Team	Create a National Council for Social Justice; appoint a Secretary of State with overarching responsibility for delivering cross-cutting policies

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