Memorandum submitted by Novas Scarman (E 75)

Parents and the Foundation Years

We submit that this Bill is an opportunity for Parliament to recognise the fundamental importance of parents, families and the Foundation Years for educational attainment by giving local authorities a duty to make adequate provision for the Foundation Years and to support parents as a child’s first and most enduring educators in Part 1 of the Bill. (“parents” includes everyone with significant responsibility for the care and up-bringing of a child and the Foundation Years are from pregnancy to six years of age. Annex 3 outlines what the duty would mean in practice).

Evidence

1.1 Novas Scarman is a national social justice charity which prevents people from becoming socially excluded, relieves the needs of those people who are socially excluded and assists them to integrate into society (our charitable objects). Much of our work supports people who are homeless, recovering from addiction, escaping domestic violence, released from prison or otherwise facing challenging circumstances, particularly in London, the North West and South West.

1.2 Many of the people we support have no or few educational qualifications and a high proportion had a difficult childhood. This submission draws attention to

- the large body of evidence which shows that support for parents and children in the early years, particularly age of three, is more important for educational attainment than formal schooling;
- the relatively low priority given to parents and the Foundation Years in Departmental Plans;
- the risk that we may have to wait another Parliament before effective action is taken.

We would be willing to provide more detailed evidence to support each of these points.

2. Importance of home background and parental involvement

2.1 Recent reports by Frank Field on The Foundation Years and Graham Allen on Early Intervention: The Next Steps, published by the Cabinet Office, present compelling evidence that investment in early intervention and the Foundation Years can significantly improve life chances, reduce poverty and generate potential saving of £24bn or more a year.

2.2 Data from the 1970 Birth Cohort Survey (BCS), analysed by Leon Feinstein, showed that children with low socio-economic status (SES) which show high ability at 22 months fell behind low ability children with high socio-economic status by primary school (see Fig. 2)¹

2.3 The Desforges Report on The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment, published by the Education Department (2003) showed that “parental involvement in the form of ‘at-home good parenting’ has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement” and “In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.”

¹ http://cep.lse.ac.uk/centrepiece/v08i2/feinstein.pdf
2.4 Evidence presented in *The Spirit Level* by Professors Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson (Penguin, 2009) shows a strong correlation and likely causal link between income inequality and negative outcomes across a wide range of indicators. This strongly implies that material poverty is not the main factor holding children back. If people’s sense of self-worth is undermined by low social status, then improvements in parenting and early intervention may have less benefit than would otherwise be possible.

2.5 We conclude from the extensive evidence analysed by these and other studies that home background is more important for attainment than school; that “good enough parenting” during the Foundation Years and support for education at home can overcome the disadvantages of social class; but that the persistence of wide social and economic inequality could reduce the impact of early intervention.

2.6 We also conclude that research evidence has less influence on education priorities and spending than institutional inertia or politics.

3. **Parents and the Foundation Years in Departmental Plans**

3.1 The Prime Minister strongly welcomed the reports by Frank Field and Graham Allen, but the Foundation Years are still a relatively low priority in both the current Business Plans for every Department, including Education (see Annex 1) and current plans for public spending.

3.2 Because support for parents and the Foundation Years are not statutory, many local authorities are cutting provision before a coherent approach is developed. The Cabinet Office is developing imaginative proposals for financing early intervention through Social Impact Bonds, which we welcome, but this could take several years to develop fully.

3.3 However, evidence from the benefits of early intervention and the Foundation Years is so great that we have proposed that the Treasury should consider a special bond issue to accelerate investment. This could be called a Family Bond or Big Society Bond.

4. **The Parents’ Amendment and Parliament**

4.1 During the 1990s, a coalition of children’s and parenting organisations advocated “the parents’ amendment” to successive Education Bills, to “support for parents as a child’s first and most enduring educators”. This was welcomed by Government Ministers, but the amendment was not adopted and it took a change of Government in 1997 before there was significant investment in provision for parents and the early years, through Sure Start, family learning and parenting programmes. Nevertheless, this is not enough to enable every child to achieve their educational potential. However much schools are improved over the next five years, it is unlikely to raise attainment of children who lack effective support at home.

4.2 Given the complexity and sensitivity of these issues, we have suggested a Family Policy Forum, jointly chaired by back-bench MPs from different parties, with an responsibility to Parliament for:

- advice on the development and implementation of policy affecting families and children;
- early scrutiny of proposed legislation that affects children, parents and families; and
- evaluation and review of the impact of the policy and other legislation affecting families.

5. **Conclusion**

5.1 Children spend less than 15% of waking time in school between birth and 16. To raise attainment, we can help families and carers give every child the love, support and encouragement to learn by giving local authorities a duty to make adequate provision for the Foundation Years and to support parents as a child’s most enduring educators. Annex 3 shows what this might look like.

*March 2011*

**Annex 1**

The Government’s strategy for Foundation Years: a summary
The Foundation Years (pregnancy – 6) are the most important for the life-chances of each child, ending child poverty and creating a cohesive, successful society. However, despite strong statements of support by the Prime Minister, the Foundation Years are a low priority in the all Departmental business plans and monthly updates. This suggests that the Government does not yet have a coherent strategy for the Foundation Years.

A seamless plan for the Foundation Years needs input from all relevant Departments, including BIS (family learning, informal learning, early years workforce development, learning champions, parental leave), DWP (benefits), DCLG (local funding and coordination), Cabinet Office (civil society engagement, social investment), DCMS (arts, culture, libraries, media and sport for families), Home Office (crime prevention, domestic abuse) and Ministry of Justice (family courts, prisoners’ families) and Treasury (financing).

If Parliament wants to make an impact on attainment in education by 2015, support for the Foundation Years should be led by a Cabinet Minister with a high level cross-departmental team supported by the Prime Minister and all Secretaries of State, and informed by a broad-based policy forum of people experienced in work with children and families.

Overview

The Foundation Years appear mainly in the Department for Education, although not by name and as its lowest priority. The Department’s priorities are schools, which have less influence on attainment than home background and the Foundation Years.

BIS needs to recognise family learning and parenting education as essential strands of adult, community and further education, more important even than basic skills. Foundation Years professional training is also a key responsibility of BIS (for which an apprenticeship with high levels of skills and knowledge is more appropriate than academic study).

In Health, the enhanced role for local authorities to promote integration across health and care and to influence NHS commissioning (§ 3.3), “health premiums” for local authorities that tackle public health challenges among disadvantaged communities and those with poorest health, and the recruitment of 4,200 extra Sure Start health visitors (§ 4.7) have a critical role, but need to be part of wider, democratically accountable provision.

Communities and Local Government (DCLG) need to ensure that spending cuts and the Localism Bill do not allow local authorities to undermine the Foundation Years through cuts or carelessness. Without being prescriptive about means, the Localism Bill should include duties to provide adequate support for the Foundation Years, including provision for parenting education and support, domestic abuse and preventative child protection.

DWP will introduce a new child poverty strategy focused on eradicating child poverty by 2020 (§3) and contribute to the cross-government work tackling child poverty (§3.2) and can play an important role in influencing behaviour to support parental responsibilities through the Universal Credit, but we are deeply concerned that a centralised, IT-driven approach will create more problems for claimants and run-away costs, like the Child Support Agency on a massive scale. Instead, an integrated approach based on local contact points would embed benefits advice, support and allocation into local services with the local knowledge and relationships.

DWP and BIS also need to take account of the evidence presented in the Spirit Level, which shows that more equal societies always do better, to narrow income inequalities as a contribution to the overall objective of eliminating child poverty.

The Foundation Years in Departmental Plans: a summary
This paper lists references to the Foundation Years in Departmental Plans on which a coherent strategy could be built, with commentary in italics.

The **Prime Minister** is “strongly committed to improving the life chances of every child, but especially those who come from troubled backgrounds” and made “intergenerational mobility the principal goal of our social policy. … The Coalition Government is keen to stimulate a national debate about the nature of poverty in the UK” (Dec 2010). But the Foundation Years are only one of many priorities and a debate about poverty is not the same as doing something about it.

The **Deputy Prime Minister** has joint responsibility for carrying out the Coalition’s [Programme for Government](#) and chairs the Home Affairs Committee which coordinates domestic policy, including constitutional and political reform, migration, health, schools and welfare. The DPM leads on social mobility and appointed Alan Milburn MP to make an independent, annual reviews of progress. A Social Investment Strategy promised [but funding depends on the City](#) (see [speech](#) 19 Jan 2011).

**Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)**

8.6 Extend the right to request flexible working and develop a new system of shared parental leave  
Secondary legislation in place to extend the right to request flexible working to parents of children up to age 18  

The omission of family learning from the BIS plan is an oversight, although it is part of informal adult learning. BIS’s role in supporting apprenticeships and training (EYPS) for Foundation Years practitioners is also critical.

**Department for Communities and Local Government**

1.4 Implement Community Budgets in 16 places as part of a national effort to tackle problem families  
This shows no commitment, particularly when the local government spending settlement has hit poorer areas harder and many councils are cutting funding for Sure Start centres, Supporting People and other provision for parents and children.

**DCMS:** No reference to families or parenting, although the media, arts, sports, libraries and museums are vitally important places of informal family learning and recreation, where there is a great deal of good practice on which to draw. Perhaps BIS should take responsibility for this.

**DECC:** The number of households in ‘fuel poverty’ (subject to independent review of fuel poverty target and definition) Fuel Poverty (the latest statistics on fuel poverty, with trends and analysis

**Department for Education (DfE),** is supposed to lead on the Foundation Years, but they appear at the bottom of the Department’s list of priorities, after schools.  
Coalition priority 6: Improve support for children, young people and families, focusing on the most disadvantaged

**Vision:** We will reform early years education and Sure Start so that all children and families receive the support they need, particularly the most vulnerable. Where there is a role for government to play, we are committed to using every means at our disposal to empower families and ensure that all children are protected from harm and neglect.

4.3 Recruit, train and improve the capacity of social workers who work with children and families  
i. Support the development of new standards for employers

5.1 Retain a national network of Sure Start Children’s Centres with a core universal offer, while also ensuring that they deliver proven early intervention programmes to support families in the greatest need  
i. Develop a Sure Start Children’s Centres reform programme  
ii. Work with local authorities to develop a plan to increase voluntary and community sector involvement within Sure Start Children’s Centres, improve accountability arrangements, increase the use of evidence-based interventions, and introduce greater payment by results
iii. Introduce a new Early Intervention Grant to provide local authorities with the funding they need to support Sure Start and other intervention programmes

5.2 Ensure access to sufficient and high quality Early Years provision
i. Implement the new Early Years Single Funding Formula for 3 to 4 year olds
ii. Develop proposals to improve the quality of the Early Years workforce
iii. Explore options for allowing parents greater flexibility to use their early education entitlement

5.2 Explore options for allowing parents greater flexibility to use their early education entitlement

6. Improve support for children, young people and families, focusing on the most disadvantaged

6.1 Review and reform provision for children with special educational needs, disabilities and mental health needs
i. Develop and publish a Green Paper on special educational needs and disability
ii. Work with the Department of Health to develop and publish a mental health strategy, including improved support for children and adolescents

6.2 Improve arrangements for protecting children from harm
i. Assess feasibility of a signposting service to help front-line practitioners support children at risk of harm
ii. Ensure all Serious Case Review overview reports commissioned after 10 June 2010 are published, taking account of the welfare of the children involved
iii. Develop and publish new models for learning from serious child protection incidents
iv. Publish Professor Munro’s child protection review and begin to implement reforms

6.3 Improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of the care system
i. Publish streamlined regulations, guidance and national minimum standards for fostering services, children’s homes and adoption services
ii. Develop and implement programme to improve practice in children’s residential homes
iii. Support local authorities to roll out evidence-based practice in foster care in 20 new sites

6.4 Improve opportunities for, and support available to, young people
i. Work with the Cabinet Office in establishing pilot National Citizen Service (NCS) programmes
ii. Develop proposals to support vulnerable young people by refocusing youth services on early intervention
iv. Establish an independent review to advise on how to address the commercialisation and premature sexualisation of childhood

6.5 Take steps to end child poverty and improve the life chances of the poorest
i. Develop a new child poverty strategy, taking account of the conclusions of Frank Field’s Review on Poverty and Life Chances

6.6 Increase support for families experiencing difficulties
i. Develop a new approach to turning around the lives of chaotic and dysfunctional families
ii. Put funding for relationship support services on a stable footing through continued central government investment
iii. Develop implementation plan in response to the Family Justice Review report

Department of Health
Coalition priority 5. Reform social care: Enable people needing care to be treated with dignity and respect, and reform the system of social care to provide much more control to individuals and their carers, easing the cost burden that they and their families face
3.3 enhanced role for local authorities to promote integration across health and care and to influence NHS commissioning

4.2 iii. Establish local public health allocations in shadow form and introduce “health premium” for local authorities that tackle public health challenges among disadvantaged communities and target public health resources on those with poorest health
iv. Allocate local public health budget to local authorities

4.3 Establish the Public Health Responsibility Deal

4.7 Recruit 4,200 extra Sure Start health visitors
i Develop goals and scope of implementation programme
ii Develop full implementation plan, including details of: (a) numbers of health visitors needed to achieve a net increase of 4,200 above 2010 levels; (b) initiatives and incentives to drive return to practice; (c) plans to increase health visitor training places; (d) appropriate commissioning structure; and (e) a new module for health visitors in practice and those in education to refresh/ provide skills in building community capacity
iii Develop plans with strategic health authority partners to ensure increased placements, trainers, course availability and clinical placements

Ministry of Justice
Make family court services accessible, transparent and planned around the needs of the most vulnerable children and families
i. Develop proposals for reform of family court services, following the interim report of the Family Justice Review
ii. Consult on reform of family court services, following publication of the Family Justice Review’s final report
iii. Analyse consultation responses and develop final proposals
iv. Introduce legislation in the second session of Parliament

3.6 Develop proposals to promote wider use of alternative dispute resolution, including mediation, in the civil courts and make it easier for people to get advice and guidance

Department of Work & Pensions
1.6 Introduce household cap so that no workless family can receive more in welfare than median after tax earnings for working households

3.2 Contribute to the cross-government work tackling child poverty
i. Develop a new child poverty strategy, taking account of the conclusions of the Field Review, working with HM Treasury and the Department for Education

Treasury: commits itself to
2.4 i Work with BIS to publish a cross-Government growth framework and develop policies that remove barriers to growth
2.8 Promote growth and poverty reduction in the developing world and its participation in global affairs
But does not mention the rewards from investing in the Foundation Years or cross-departmental work with DWP and the Department for Education on a new child poverty strategy

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Annex 2
Citizens’ Policy Forum for Families
Improving public policy and support for families

Principles
Almost every Government policy and service has an impact on family life, but Government cannot solve the many problems faced by families. Employers, community groups, voluntary organisations, public services, the media, neighbours, friends and family members themselves are all part of the complex web of social relationships which enable families flourish or fail. Government needs to work with and learn from all sections of society to ensure that its policies improve conditions for families and do not unintentionally make them worse.

For Government to be effective, people also need to feel that they are part of society and have a voice in decision-making. Our national political life is enriched by active citizens tackling issues, highlighting problems, proposing solutions and challenging politicians and service providers. Parliament and Government need to ensure that the diversity of experience in civil society, the voluntary sector, professions and private sector has a voice in policy making, not just the charmed circles of civil servants, think-tanks, lobbyists and advisers. Policy development and scrutiny should be conducted through Parliament, rather than the networks of Quangos and working groups organized by Whitehall. New structures of participation are therefore needed to engage all stakeholders concerned with children, parents and carers in the development and implementation of public policy affecting family life.

Key Facts
- Every week, two women die as a result of domestic violence and a tenth of all women experience domestic violence each year
- One or two children die at the hands of their parents every week
- 63 per cent of the 20,000 children in care are there as a result of abuse or neglect
- 30,000 children are on waiting lists for mental health services
- 5.7 million people care for sick or elderly relatives, a figure likely to rise to 9.3m by 2037 to cope with a 3m increase in people over the age of 75. This is a largely unsupported sector of voluntary public welfare that is barely recognised by society or politicians.
- Less than 2% of Britons belong to political parties, but 30% are members of voluntary organisations, about 14 million people.
- Two thirds of people volunteer informally, about 30 million people. Voluntary associations actively involve greater diversity of people than conventional politics. Every age group, community, culture and interest takes part in civil society, often at a local level, and are engaged in a huge variety of issues, from childcare and to global warming.
- When given the opportunity to use new media to communicate with government, people use it. Over 4 million people signed petitions on the Downing Street website within its first year.

Problems
Family policy presents government with many complex, long-term challenges that cut across all areas of policy. However, our national political system makes it difficult to give sustained attention to family policy and to draw on the extensive experience, expertise and opinion in the country about what families need to flourish. Priorities and funding tends to fluctuate according to Ministerial interest, rather than evidence of need. Policy development and debate takes place outside parliament, among officials, think tanks and pressure groups. Large areas of public spending and policy are conducted though quangos with little democratic scrutiny or accountability. Many people feel alienated from politics and unable to have a say about the problems they experience or contribute to their solution. Our parliamentary system also fails to make the best use of new technologies and active methods of public participation.

Solutions
In order involve parents and other stakeholders in securing effective policies for families, parenting and early intervention, Parliament or an independent agency should

- Set up a network of non-partisan family policy forums, chaired by back-bench Members of Parliament from all parties, to give people from all sections of society a real say in the development, scrutiny and implementation of family policy using the internet, public meetings and imaginative forms of public engagement;

- Conduct all processes of policy development, public consultation and advice to government about families through policy forums organised by Parliament, not Whitehall;

- Strengthen public scrutiny and accountability of national services to families

A prototype Family Policy Forum could be set up by an independent organisation in advance of any initiative by Parliament, to trial different approaches and show the benefits in practice. For the longer term, an independent Family Policy Forum with statutory powers is needed to ensure sustained improvement in public policy for children, parents and carers.

Government cannot solve the many problems faced by families. Employers, voluntary organisations, public services, the media, neighbours, friends and family members themselves are all part of a complex web of social relationships which enable families flourish or fail.

The challenge for government is to develop policy and practice which improves conditions for families and does not unintentionally make them worse. To do this, government needs to work with and learn from the constant innovation and research about support for families in Britain and abroad.

This paper proposes that Parliament should set up a Family Policy Forum to involve all sections of society concerned with families in the development of policy, scrutiny of legislation and review of delivery to improve policy and delivery across government.

The Family Policy Forums could be developed as a new form of parliamentary process with three parts:

1. local and regional forums, using imaginative forms of participation to involve a wider range of people in discussing issues that concern families, building on existing networks for family learning, children and young people, including Local Strategic Partnerships;

2. a national Forum with named representatives elected or nominated from the ‘whole system’ concerned with family policy;

3. an internet forum to make the process more open and accessible, to engage those who do not take part in meetings, to capture the debate at all levels, and to distil key proposals for decision.

The national Forum would include representatives of the “whole system” - family members, service users, staff, researchers, community groups, voluntary organisations, employers, unions and other tiers of government (parish, local and EU). Members could be appointed or elected through democratic associations of civil society and local forums. The national Family Policy Forum could be chaired by backbench members of Parliament to provide a direct link between the legislature and the broader debate across society.

This three tier structure of local and regional meetings, internet forum and a more formal, national forum is designed to make the Family Policy Forum an accessible and inclusive process for improving policy and action at all levels.

**Functions and powers**

The purpose of the Family Policy Forum is to improve public policy and services for children, parents and carers by drawing on the experiences and views of all concerned with families in ways that neither Government nor Parliament can do at present.

The Forum could have a statutory role in developing policy, securitizing legislation and reviewing provision of family support by all public services, including quangos. It could take responsibility for public consultation exercises, advisory groups and task forces concerned with family policy, thus strengthening the role of Parliament as a forum for public accountability and debate. It could also have statutory rights to report directly to the House of Commons, conduct investigations and present petitions,

In summary, it could have the following tasks:

a) suggest or clarify priorities;

b) promote dialogue round important issues;

c) assist in policy research and development;

d) receive and reflect on public petitions on family matters;
e) organise public consultation on proposals by the Government or House of Commons;
f) pre-legislative scrutiny of bills before they are presented to the Commons;
g) scrutinise and revise legislation by the Commons;
h) contribute to consensus building, where appropriate;
i) advise and assist on policy implementation;
j) monitor implementation;
k) review and evaluate the impact of legislation;
l) scrutinise the work of Quangos in their policy area;
m) nominate or approve membership of Quangos.

Advisory and deliberative functions would be largely carried out by the more open, participative parts of each forum, while formal functions would be restricted to elected forums. A separate document describes how this could work in more detail.

As a result, the national debate on how legislation and policy affects families will draw on a much wider range of experience than Ministers, officials and parliament can do now, with the best will in the world. This will help to identify problems and develop solutions, making the resulting legislation much more effective. The process of debate would also help to build a broader consensus round key decisions and make implementation easier and more effective.

How would a Family Policy Forum work?

The Forum should be created bottom-up, using active methods of public participation and the internet to involve people in discussing issues that impact on family life. A Forum could be run by an independent organisation or by a government department, but ideally it would be organised through Parliament, to take the process of policy development and public consultation from unelected advisory groups, officials and lobbyists into the open. The Forum itself would work through a mixture of open public meetings, online forums and a standing body representing different interests (stakeholders) from the ‘whole system’ concerned with family policy.

At a local level, Forums could join up and strengthen the proliferation of consultation bodies such as Local Strategic Partnerships or the proposed Well-being and Health Boards, building bridges between local and national policy development. Participation would be voluntary and unpaid, although expenses should be available to ensure under-represented and disadvantaged groups are able to have an effective say. Local forums might meet three to six times a year for half a day or evening.

Nationally, Forums would be more structured, with named representatives of different stakeholders.

The work of Forums could be broadly divided into three parts –

1. discussion of concerns raised by members: this would promote local problem-solving and early warning of issues which need to be addressed elsewhere in the system;
2. scrutiny of national policy, commenting on policy proposals, Green and White Papers as well as draft legislation, from both Government and opposition parties;
3. review of service delivery and the impact of legislation in practice. This could draw on inspection reports, feedback from advice agencies, independent research and views of service users.

For example, local forums might raise concerns about drinking by young people; debt and financial problems among young families; or an increase in bullying outside schools. In many cases, they will find local solutions. In some cases, local discussions will highlight the need for action at a regional or national level. This may call for legislation or for joint action between stakeholders – for example, the drinks companies, licensees, supermarkets and media could develop a shared strategy to eliminate underage drinking. Or the financial industry, advice agencies, education providers and the media could work together on financial literacy and assistance for families in debt.

The national Forum would meet as required, including both plenary and workshop sessions. Each meeting could be in a different part of the country, with opportunities for public hearings, visits to projects, open sessions with members of local policy forums and fringe meetings. Its members would have to receive expenses and compensation for loss of earnings, much as jurors and magistrates do at present.

The online forum would provide links to local, regional and national discussions, as well as specialist areas of family policy, such as children in care, carers, domestic violence, support for prisoners’ families, and the many other dimensions of family policy. It would aim to reflect the diversity of views and experience; to identify emerging issues as well as potential solutions to problems; to share experience and models of good practice; and to focus debate on policy or legislation moving towards a decision.
These three elements all should be seen as part of the Family Policy Forum as an ongoing process of shared learning about how to make life better for all children, parents and carers.

**What about the cost**

Many people will argue that the Family Policy Forum is simply another expensive talking shop. However, there are many benefits of involving representatives of all concerned with families in a regular, systematic and in-depth discussion of family policy –

1. **1st**, it will ensure that family matters remain high on the policy agenda and do not disappear when the priorities of political parties or ministers shift: families will always be with us and all legislation will benefit from scrutiny by people who are more deeply involved in family matters;

2. **2nd**, it will ensure that representatives of different stakeholders develop a deeper understanding of each other’s positions and seek workable compromises or solve problems together, so that difficult issues like flexible working, paternity leave, support for carers etc., are addressed jointly by representatives of employers, family organisations and professionals who deal with the issues from different angles;

3. **3rd**, above all, it should help to minimise problems and expense which result from not taking into account the full complexity of initiatives, such as the Child Support Agency, Family Credit, or the ContactPoint child protection database now under development.

Many government departments and agencies have a wide variety of consultation processes and bodies to address different aspects of family policy. No one knows how much they cost at present, but bringing them into the Family Policy Forum process will make them more coherent, cost-effective and transparent.

Society pays a very high price for failing to take the diverse needs of families into account in all areas of policy. In particular, unintended consequences of policies for social security, employment and the economy have created significant problems and costs for society. Systematic scrutiny of both the impact of new policy proposals and of implementation of existing policies will help to identify and solve problems earlier, as well as lead to better legislation and provision. The benefits of avoiding major policy mistakes and of creating better policy will greatly outweigh the cost of a Family Policy Forum.

**Conclusion**

In the early 1980s, Sir Keith Joseph, as Secretary of State, commissioned the National Children’s Bureau to study the needs of parents in order to find ways of breaking the poverty cycle. This major study was published in 1984. It described the difficulties many parents faced, the support they needed and the many practical projects which helped parents. Most of the projects were in the voluntary sector or run by local authorities. At the time there was great hope that the needs of parents would be recognised, but political priorities changed and they were largely ignored. A follow-up study was published in 1995, the International Year of the Family, entitled “Confident Parents, Confident Children”. This time the voluntary sector was more politically active, through the All Party Group for Parenting Matters, the Parenting Forum and other initiatives, and it convinced the incoming Labour Government to give a much greater priority to parents and families. The Family and Parenting Institute documents ten years of government initiatives at www.familyandparenting.org/parentingPolicyTenYears This leaves out a great deal, such as funding and support for family learning, or the huge increase in work with families funded by the lottery and foundations. Nevertheless, the scale of provision is still not sufficient to meet the challenges recognised by Sir Keith Joseph in the 1980s.

If, at the same time as commissioning a study, Sir Keith had also set up a standing body of representatives of different agencies working with families, with statutory powers to debate family matters, influence policy and ensure that parliament and government were systematically informed of the impact their policies had on families, it is very likely that instead of publishing yet more research on the needs of parents, we would be celebrating over twenty years of improvement in family well-being and a break in the poverty cycle.

Titus Alexander, Head of Learning and Campaigning, Novas Scarman Group, *In personal capacity*
12 September 2008


**Annex 3**

What would the Foundation Years duty look like?
Most local authorities already make a variety of provision for the Foundation Years and support for parents through the Children’s Trust, Safeguarding Children Board and other agencies, so we do not propose a uniform model for what it should look like. The central test of the duty to make adequate provision is that numbers of children in need, families in crisis and youth offending are falling (when comparing like for like) while children’s attainment and well-being are rising.

To achieve this, the local authority needs to

1. **know the needs of children, parents and carers** from pregnancy on: that is, it has the professional staff and systems to keep track of births and need for ante- and post natal care; parenting information, education and support; crisis prevention and early intervention round domestic abuse, child protection and parenting; childcare and early years education;

2. **ensure there is sufficient local capability** to meet these needs, including informal care within families, voluntary provision and statutory services;

3. **measure impact**, that is, it enables providers to record demand and effectiveness of what they do, so that they can continuously improve provision, and it monitors incidence of domestic abuse, child abuse, youth offending, anti-social behaviour, educational attainment and other relevant indicators, so that it can identify need and recognise the impact of different provision.

Most of this is happening in some form. What may be missing is an intense focus on early intervention to prevent small problems becoming a crisis, as documented by Graham Allen’s report on Early Intervention, and consistent support for parents in their role as parents from before birth, including relationship education, counselling and parenting education.

It is not necessary for local authorities to have detailed plans, which are out of date as soon as they are written, but it is essential to have the skilled staff and capacity to respond to the needs of children and parents the moment they arise. This is likely to include:

- a comprehensive information service for families (FIS), with access points or publicity at all health centres, children’s’ centres and shopping centres, and information sessions
- specialist advice lines and support for domestic abuse, special needs, carers or other needs
- appropriate maternity and paternity support, including health visiting
- integrated provision of early years services and children’s centres, across health, education, social services, community safety, housing, recreation and the voluntary sector
- provision for intensive crisis-intervention and support for families with acute needs
- sufficient childcare for parents who want to work or learn
- provision of antenatal courses, parenting education and family learning
- training for staff and volunteers, with progression routes for personal and professional development
- appropriate data-sharing, inter-agency working and learning across disciplines
- active promotion of parenting support through a local and national parenting campaign
- adequate funding to meet the needs of children and parents

Much of this exists in some form at a local level or is proposed in Departmental Business Plans, but it does not have the funding, status or priority given to schools or other sectors of education. Making support for the Foundation Years a duty for local authorities will give it a better chance to survive and develop despite the current economic and financial difficulties.

Above all, the duty will give local authorities responsibility to ensure that people and services enable everyone in their area to learn, thrive and take part fully in society from the early years.