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Chair
Cabinet

GREEN PAPER ON CHILDREN

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet agreement to the development of a Green Paper on Children as the first step towards the development and implementation of a Children's Action Plan. It provides details of the background, focus, components, processes and timeframes associated with the Plan's development.

Executive summary

- 2 An independent report from the Office of the Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman, that is about to be released, identifies ways we can better ensure children get off to a good start in life. The development of a Children's Action Plan will provide an opportunity to address the issues this report raises and to provide a child-focused underpinning to a range of other initiatives across Government.
- 3 The Children's Action Plan will focus on children aged 0 to 18 years with a particular focus on those under five. It will address the fundamental question of how New Zealand society can be transformed to achieve better lives and better outcomes for our children. The Plan will provide a child-focused foundation for the Government's current cross-sector priorities; and will consider how we can prevent poor outcomes for children, and the issues we need to address in our systems, practices and legislation.
- 4 There will be two phases to the development of the Plan: a Green Paper on Children will be developed, followed by a White Paper setting out the Children's Action Plan. Development of the Green Paper on Children will be led by a public policy specialist whom I will appoint. This specialist will work with a multidisciplinary team which I will establish in consultation with relevant Ministers. This team will be supported with advice and peer review from an independent academic and scientific reference group whom I will appoint, and with input and advice from a frontline forum which I will convene. The Green Paper on Children will be available in August 2011.
- 5 The Green Paper on Children will reflect relevant Ministers' portfolio priorities and pose specific questions for public consultation which will take place between September 2011 and April 2012. Meetings will be held with communities throughout New Zealand. This will include consultations with Māori, Pacific peoples, other ethnic groups, children, and people with disabilities. Written submissions will also be sought.
- 6 Following consultations, a White Paper setting out the Children's Action Plan will be released in August 2012. This will include any policy, practice, service delivery and legislative changes required, and timeframes for action.

Background

- 7 Agencies across government and non-government sectors know the importance of nurturing children and safely transitioning them through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. And we all share the consequences when things go wrong.
- 8 Helping children get a good start in life by ensuring responsible parenting and access to coordinated, child-focused and evidence-based services, provides the best opportunity to maximise children's potential and improve health, educational, justice and social outcomes throughout life. For our most vulnerable children, intervening early before developmental outcomes are compromised, improves lives and is more cost-effective than intervening later.
- 9 In late 2009, Government commissioned the Office of the Chief Science Advisor to review the scientific literature on issues surrounding the high rate of social morbidity associated with being an adolescent in New Zealand. The resulting report, "Improving the Transition: Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity During Adolescence", is soon to be released. It identifies important risk and resilience factors, including those that arise ante-natally and in early life. It also describes scientifically-based interventions that can help address these.
- 10 Government's immediate responses to this report will address many of the issues raised, but a more planned and longer-term approach, one that could be achieved through the development of a Children's Action Plan, can tackle a wider range of issues, engage a broader range of people, and has potential to make greater progress on improving the lives of our children.
- 11 New Zealand already has a strong foundation of services and supports for children, families and whānau. But we know we can do better, and that we can tilt the balance from remedial action to upfront investment. The development of a Children's Action Plan provides opportunities for us to do this.
- 12 Cabinet's Social Policy Committee has agreed in principle that \$0.8 million in the 2011/12 financial year and \$0.8 million in the 2012/13 financial year from savings options be used to develop and implement a Children's Action Plan [SOC Min (11) 5/5 refers].

Comment

Focus of the Children's Action Plan

- 13 The Plan will cover children aged 0 to 18 years,¹ with a particular focus on children under five. It will focus on achieving better outcomes for those with fewer opportunities.
- 14 The goals will be aspirational, but the actions in the Plan will be practical and achievable. I want all those who engage with children, including parents, educators, health workers and social service providers, to have a clear understanding of what we are working towards, and the role each will play in achieving it.
- 15 The Plan will be child-focused, in that it will consider all aspects of children's lives and circumstances. It will also recognise that children need to be seen in the context of their families and whānau, and that their wellbeing is dependent on effective family relationships. While the Plan will have a strong focus on keeping children safe, it will reflect our

¹ The Plan will use the definition of "children" provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years."

understanding that this can not be separated from a broad set of issues affecting children, families and whānau.

- 16 The Plan will provide a means of aligning work across government and non-government organisations, and is likely to have implications for policy, practice, service delivery and legislation. It will include our expectations of parental responsibilities, the responsibilities of families, whānau and communities, the responsibilities of Government in supporting families to improve children's lives, and the lines between the responsibilities of these groups. It will also cover how government and non-government agencies can better collaborate to help families at risk, and ways we can improve the identification and protection of at-risk children.
- 17 An important component of the Plan will be identifying the most effective interventions to address these issues. If we want to be able to do more of what works best, we need to stop what we know doesn't work. The Plan will contribute to a national discussion of targeting resources to effective programmes and the need to cease funding interventions where outcomes are not demonstrable.
- 18 The Plan will provide an important child-focused underpinning to other initiatives across Government, including addressing the drivers of crime, reforming welfare, increasing participation in early childhood education (and other issues addressed by the Early Childhood Education Taskforce), increasing maternity and early parenting support, and targeting services for those with behavioural problems.

Components

- 19 I want the Children's Action Plan to address the fundamental question of how New Zealand society can be transformed to achieve better lives and better outcomes for our children, especially those who are vulnerable to damaged childhoods and poor life outcomes. This will involve us thinking about how we can ensure all children get off to a good start in life, how we can keep them safe, and how we can support parents, families and whānau whose children need help.
- 20 This will involve us considering how we prevent risk factors arising, address them when they do, and what our expectations are of parents, families and whānau. We will also need to consider our current systems and practices for identifying children at risk, and how we can best share information about children to prevent the most vulnerable falling through the cracks. Important too, will be considering the practices of people who work with children, the extent to which they work together, and the nature of the interventions they provide. And we must also consider whether our current legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks help ensure children thrive and are kept safe.

Process

- 21 Adapting a consultation process that has been used successfully in the United Kingdom, I propose two phases to the development of the Plan: first, a Green Paper on Children, to provide the basis for consultation, followed by a White Paper setting out the Plan.

The Green Paper on Children

- 22 The multidisciplinary team developing the Green Paper on Children will be led by a public policy specialist whom I will appoint. I will consult with relevant Ministers to establish the multidisciplinary team of public servants and others. This Green Paper on Children will outline the issues and recommended ways forward and will be used as the basis for nationwide consultation.

- 23 Advice on, and peer review of, the development of the Green Paper on Children will be provided by a reference group of independent academic and scientific experts whose expertise will cover health, education and welfare domains. This group will be chaired by the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman, whom I will consult in appointing members. I will also convene a frontline forum, including the Children's Commissioner, to provide input and advice. These groups will include Māori, Pacific peoples, and people with disabilities. Government agencies will respond to requests for information to support this work.
- 24 I want the Green Paper on Children to be written in a way that makes the science around evaluation of programmes and child development accessible to communities, and which serves to stimulate nationwide debate on these important issues. In the past, we have largely received advice from Government agencies on how best to nurture children and keep them safe. But others have views too. Experts in child development and parenting, researchers, parents, families, whānau, communities and those delivering child and family support services, see these issues from a variety of perspectives, and can help us think of better ways to address them. The Green Paper on Children will also build on the work of the Whānau Ora Taskforce.
- 25 Widening the sources of advice we receive, and supporting opportunities for national conversations on these important issues, provide us with a means of developing a shared vision for New Zealand's children which we can all work towards achieving. These conversations will occur in, and across, the diverse mix of communities that make up New Zealand, and will recognise that while one size does not fit all, there are some non-negotiable, minimum standards that must apply to all children in New Zealand. And in fiscally constrained times, it can help focus resources on initiatives that are based on evidence of effectiveness, and to disinvest in those that aren't.
- 26 I want the Green Paper on Children to provide the basis for national consultations on a concise set of proposals and questions in meetings with communities throughout New Zealand, and for online and other forms of written submissions. This will include meetings with Māori, Pacific peoples and other ethnic groups on marae and in other community settings. The views of children, and of people with disabilities, will also be sought. In order to ensure focused consultation, the Green Paper on Children will need to clearly outline specific proposals on which we are seeking feedback. These will reflect the priorities of this Government for children.

The White Paper

- 27 Following the consultation period, submissions will be analysed and a White Paper setting out the Children's Action Plan will be prepared. This will include policy, practice, and service delivery implications, any legislative changes required, and timeframes for action.
- 28 After the release of the Children's Action Plan, there will also be processes for disseminating the Plan, holding follow-up conversations with communities and sector groups, and other work that will help embed the Plan in communities.
- 29 This process will occur in the context of Government's existing priorities for children. Until the Children's Action Plan is endorsed by Government, there will be no change to existing directions or programmes. The Ministry of Social Development will consult relevant agencies where there are any legislative, policy or service delivery implications as the work progresses.

Timeframe

- 30 The process of developing the Children's Action Plan will begin this year, and be completed in 2013. An indicative timeframe is as follows:

Date	Action
April 2011	Confirmation of purpose, process and timeframes. Establishment of multidisciplinary team, appointment of reference group led by Sir Peter Gluckman, and convening of a frontline forum.
May - August 2011	Preparation of the Green Paper on Children by a multidisciplinary team.
Late August 2011	Release of the Green Paper on Children by the Prime Minister and Minister for Social Development and Employment (following Cabinet agreement).
September 2011 - April 2012	Community consultation on the Green Paper on Children.
May - July 2012	Analysis of results of consultation and report to Cabinet.
August 2012	Release of White Paper setting out the Children's Action Plan, and formal adoption of it.
September 2012 - June 2013	Dissemination of the Plan. Follow-up conversations with communities and sector groups, to help embed the Plan. Legislative changes in the House, if necessary to implement recommendations.

Next steps

- 31 Following Cabinet agreement to this proposal, I will:
- appoint a public policy specialist to lead the multidisciplinary team
 - appoint the independent academic and scientific reference group, in consultation with the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor
 - establish a multidisciplinary team of public servants and others as required, in consultation with relevant Ministers, to develop the Green Paper on Children
 - convene the frontline forum.
- 32 I will work with key Ministers and report back to Cabinet's Social Policy Committee by August 2011 seeking agreement to release the Green Paper on Children.

Consultation

- 33 Officials from the Ministries of Health, Justice, Education, Women's Affairs, Pacific Island Affairs, the Department of Internal Affairs, and the New Zealand Police were consulted in the development of this paper. The Children's Commissioner and the Chief Families Commissioner have also been consulted.
- 34 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Treasury were informed of the paper. Te Puni Kōkiri wishes to be included as having been informed of, rather than consulted on, the paper.

Financial implications

- 35 I estimate the costs associated with developing the Plan, consulting on it and implementing it will be \$0.8 million per year in 2011/12 and 2012/13 only. Funding for the Children's Action Plan has been agreed from reprioritised spending within Vote Social Development as part of the Budget 2011 process.

Human rights implications

- 36 The Children's Action Plan will enhance the human rights of New Zealand children, and support New Zealand's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Legislative implications

- 37 There are no legislative implications at this stage.

Regulatory impact and compliance cost statement

- 38 This paper does not require a regulatory impact and compliance cost statement.

Gender implications

- 39 The Children's Action Plan will support both women and men in their parenting roles. To the extent that women are more likely than men to have primary caregiving responsibilities, the Plan may have more impact on women, particularly in relation to their participation in paid work.

Disability perspective

- 40 The Children's Action Plan will include children with disabilities, their families and whānau, and others who support them. It will also acknowledge the needs of non-disabled children whose parents or caregivers are disabled.

Publicity

- 41 Officials will provide my Office with further advice on a communications strategy.

Recommendations

42 It is recommended that the Committee:

1 **note** that:

1.1 while New Zealand has a strong foundation of services and supports for children and families, there is more that can be done to achieve better lives and better outcomes for New Zealand children;

1.2 that the development of a Children's Action Plan will provide opportunities to do this;

2 **note** that a Children's Action Plan will provide an important child-focused underpinning to other initiatives across government (including addressing the drivers of crime, and reforming welfare) and could focus on prevention, systems, practice and legislation;

3 **note** that in March 2011, Cabinet's Social Policy Committee agreed in principle that \$0.8 million in the 2011/12 financial year and \$0.8 million in the 2012/13 financial year from savings options be used to develop and implement a Children's Action Plan [SOC Min (11) 5/5];

4 **agree** that the Minister for Social Development and Employment develop and implement a Children's Action Plan as a means of providing a child-focused foundation for the government's current cross-sector priorities;

5 **note** that the Minister for Social Development and Employment envisages adapting a consultation process that has been successfully used in the United Kingdom whereby:

5.1 the development of a Green Paper is led by a public policy expert, with advice and peer review by a group of independent academic and scientific experts, and with input and advice from a group of people with a frontline perspective;

5.2 following public consultation on the Green Paper, a White Paper outlining the Children's Action Plan is prepared that includes the policy, practice, service delivery and legislative changes required, and timeframes for action;

6 **invite** the Minister for Social Development and Employment to:

6.1 appoint a public policy specialist to lead the development of the Green Paper;

6.2 appoint the independent academic and scientific reference group in consultation with the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor;

6.3 establish a multidisciplinary team, in consultation with relevant Ministers, to contribute to the development of the Green Paper;

6.4 convene the frontline forum;

7 **note** that the multidisciplinary team will comprise a mix of public servants and others as required;

- 8 **invite** the Minister for Social Development and Employment to work with relevant Ministers and report to Cabinet's Social Policy Committee by August 2011 seeking agreement to release the Green Paper.

Hon Paula Bennett
Minister for Social Development and Employment

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