

**Barnardos Briefing:
Report of the Special Group on
Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes**

August 2009

Introduction

Barnardos acknowledges the serious nature of the economic situation facing Ireland at present and the difficult decisions facing Government as they try to bring current expenditure closer in line with the diminishing revenue available and has long called for efficiencies in public services that could have been implemented with service users in mind when resources were more readily available.

However, we are seriously concerned that the majority of savings contained in the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (McCarthy) Report target the least well-off in society and have particularly negative implications for children and young people who already live in considerable disadvantage and poverty. While we understand the pressures facing Government and the need for savings to be made in order to keep the State afloat, we believe that the McCarthy report ideologically slants towards cuts in state supports and services as a short-term solution to the immediate problem. Barnardos believes that while reasonable efficiencies and savings can be made, they must be done so with due consideration to the very real impact they will have on the lives of those affected and in particular to the futures of the children concerned. As a society, we did not do enough to put in place adequate public services to ensure the best interests of children, particularly the most vulnerable children, are protected and their needs met when we had the resources to do it. To now roll back on the social welfare, educational and health/social supports for children indicates that child welfare, rights and protection are not a priority in Ireland. If children are the first to suffer the worst impacts of the recession, we cannot maintain that as a society we have their best interests at heart or have truly taken children's rights seriously.

This is simply unacceptable. At the height of our economic success we continued to allow 76,000 children live in consistent poverty¹. It is likely that this figure will have risen again by the time the 2009 figures become available in 2010. 1 in 3 children living in disadvantaged areas continue to leave school with severe literacy difficulties². We have developed an unequal society where property developers were allowed to run up loans of billions of euros yet where, when the going gets tough, those already living in disadvantage are the first targets of spending cuts. The recession provides an opportunity to think about our society and re-think our priorities. Efficiencies have to be made and can be made but can be done so with a focus on improving public services rather than simply slashing them. Childhood is precious and short, yet the impact of it can last a lifetime. If the majority of the measures proposed in the McCarthy report go ahead, we condemn another

¹ CSO (2007) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in Ireland

² Barnardos (2009) Written Out, Written Off, pg 4

generation of Irish children to poverty and disadvantage and cement intergenerational cycles of poverty. Barnardos is realistic about the measures that need to be taken to ensure Ireland does not collapse under the weight of the financial catastrophe facing the country. However, we ask that Government continue to bear in mind the real impact of each cut proposed and do their utmost to protect vulnerable children from the worst ravages of the recession.

Social Welfare

Key McCarthy Report Recommendations:

- Reduce social welfare rates should be reduced generally by 5%. Alternatively reduce rates by 3%, reversing the increase of October last.
- Introduce a new, standard rate of *Child Benefit* for all children €136 per month. This is a reduction of €30 per month for the first two children and €67 per month for each subsequent child.
- Do not reinstate the Christmas bonus for welfare recipients in 2009 or 2010.
- Change the eligibility conditions of social welfare schemes to eliminate second welfare payments, so that claimants already in receipt of a primary weekly social welfare payment should not qualify for payment under another scheme. Schemes where “double payments” are involved include the *Carers Allowance*, *Illness Benefit*, *Jobseekers Benefit*, the *Family Income Supplement scheme* (FIS), and *Community Employment Schemes*.
- Consider further reductions in rents payable by Rent Supplement claimants, consistent with real rent decreases in the market to ensure maximum value for money for expenditure in this area.
- Transfer claimants for Rent Supplement to RAS after six months instead of 18 months.
- Treat the Household Benefits Package as taxable income.
- Discontinue the *Family Support Agency* and most of its programmes. However, the Report recommends retaining a proportion of community and voluntary funding and unifying with other State-funded community and voluntary programmes to facilitate more effective targeting of resources and more coherent administration of the various schemes.

Barnardos Response

Overall Rates

In 2007, children of 7.4% were living in consistent poverty. This amounts to over 76,000 children and accounts for nearly 40% of all those living in consistent poverty. Children also continue to be the age-group most at risk of poverty, with a rate of 19.9%. This compares with an at risk poverty rate of 15% among people of working age.³ Child poverty does not happen in isolation; poor children live in poor households and the impact of poverty affects them more than adults especially in the early years.⁴

Despite the reported 5.4% fall in prices as of June 2009⁵ the McCarthy report recognises that the reduction in mortgage interest plays a roll in the extent of falling

³ CSO (2007) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in Ireland

⁴ Duncan, G.J. et al, (1998) ‘How much does childhood poverty affect the life chances of children?’ *American Sociology Review*, Vol 63, No. 3

⁵ CSO, Consumer Price Index, June 2009. This increased to 5.9% in July 2009

costs. Indeed, when the July CSO figures are examined, the yearly percentage reduction in the Consumer Price Index excluding mortgage interest is just 2%, closer to the yearly reduction in prices as that reflected in the EU wide Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) analysis for Ireland, which stood at 2.6% in July.⁶ The Report acknowledges that the HICP is more relevant to those dependent on social welfare and this is particularly true when looking at the impact of the mortgage interest reductions on the CPI. The majority of families dependent on social welfare or in low income employment are not affected by mortgage interest and so experience little relief in overall household costs due to falling interest rates.

While acknowledging that overall costs have begun to fall in 2009, Barnardos is concerned that reductions in social welfare now will push vulnerable families further into poverty, particularly those experiencing unemployment and redundancy. Many families struggled to make ends over the past number of years, when increases in social welfare failed to match the overwhelming increases in the cost of living. The impact of this for children can mean going 24 hours without a substantial meal or being cold because parents are unable to afford to heat the home. Families living in disadvantage are often unable to take full advantage of falling food prices as they lack the transport to do big weekly shops in supermarkets where best value is available. Falling costs in energy related products are also deceptive - the CSO reports that the 26.8% fall in costs under the grouping '*Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas & Other Fuels*' fell due to the decrease in average mortgage interest repayments and while prices in relation to electricity and gas have come down, this should be noted in the context of the 17.5% in ESB prices in August 2008 and the 20% increase in natural gas bills in September 2008.⁷

Barnardos does not concur with the McCarthy report analysis that states that the real value of weekly and monthly social welfare payment rates would have risen in real terms since October even if no increase had been granted. We believe that what little gain families living in poverty may get from slowly falling costs provides minor relief from the very real disadvantage they experience in everyday life. Cutting social welfare payment rates for unemployed families or those in low paid employment will further exacerbate difficulties faced by children living in these families and continue the cycle of poverty. Given that measures to reduce child poverty will undoubtedly stall while the economic situation of the country remains uncertain, Barnardos believes that at the very least social welfare rates should remain static to ensure that children are supported through the worst of the recession and not further pushed into poverty while families struggle to cope. This is particularly significant if payments are curtailed to one weekly primary payment and cuts in extra supports targeted at children (addressed below), the cumulative affect of which is likely to have a significant impact on families already struggling to make ends meet.

Child Benefit

Child Benefit represents the only payment in Ireland that is specifically targeted at children and as such is an important indication of the value we place on childhood. The universality of the payment is a significant factor in this. Barnardos believes that in the current climate, resources must be targeted at those most in need and most at risk of poverty and disadvantage. Given this we believe that if there must be cuts to Child Benefit, the rate should be lowered universally but the savings from the cut must be put towards supporting children living in disadvantage through increases to

⁶ CSO, Consumer Price Index, July 2009

⁷ Irish Times 'Fresh rises in energy prices signalled', 1 October 2008

the Qualified Child Increase, the Family Income Supplement and extra payments at particularly expensive times of the year such as Christmas and back to school. This will protect the fundamental principle of universality of Child Benefit while also ensuring that children living in poverty are targeted directly to receive much needed extra support.

Rent Supplement

Barnardos recognises the overall drop in rents and the benefits this can provide to those living in private rented accommodation. However, many families with children who are dependent on social welfare or in low paid employment are often not in a position to move and therefore not always able to negotiate with landlords for appropriate reductions in rent. There have already been significant cuts to the Rent Supplement, as outlined in the McCarthy report, and Barnardos would recommend that a review of the impact of these cuts on families be carried out before decisions are made for further changes in this area. Barnardos supports the recommendations in the McCarthy report that claimants for Rent Supplement be transferred to the Rental Accommodation Scheme after six months rather than 18 months as it currently stands.

Family Support Agency

Barnardos is concerned that a number of key supports for vulnerable families will be lost if the Family Support Agency is discontinued. The Agency provides a number of crucial services to vulnerable families including the Family Mediation Service, Family Resource Centres and Counselling services. Many of these are a vital support to families struggling with difficult circumstances and their removal could pose a threat to children and families.

The closure of Resource Centres could lead to a diminution of supports and early intervention for families. The cessation of funding for counselling services supported by the Family Support Agency could mean that support for families who have experienced bereavement or abuse trauma or the trauma of suicide would not be able to continue and few of the families that Barnardos is concerned about would have the resources to access therapeutic services independently. This would have a particularly severe impact on children trying to cope with significant emotional and psychological upset.

Barnardos Recommendations:

- Maintain social welfare payments at current levels.
- Consider the realistic impact of any changes to so called “double payments” on children and families before considering rationalising them, being particularly cautious not to cut back payments for one parent families. One-parent families continue to be among those at greatest risk of poverty.⁸
- Protect the poorest children from proposed changes to Child Benefit by ensuring that the rate of payment to children in receipt of Qualified Child Increase and also children in families in receipt of Family Income Supplement remains unchanged or in the event of a decrease in Child Benefit that the QCI payment and also the FIS payment is increased proportionate to the cut in Child Benefit;
- Maintain some measure of universality of the payment in recognition of the extra costs of raising children.
- Increase the Qualified Child Increase from €26 per week to €30.

⁸ CSO (2007) Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in Ireland

- No further cuts to the Rent Supplement. Claimants should be moved to the RAS after six months instead of the current 18 months.
- Do not dissolve the Family Support Agency.

Education

Key McCarthy Report Recommendations:

- Reduce the overall number of primary schools through amalgamations and mergers of smaller schools.
- Absorb the *National Education Welfare Board* and *National Council for Special Education* into the Department of Education and Science.
- Target savings of one-third in the overall cost of substitution arrangements, or €100m a year, at the very minimum, with further savings of €50m in management allowances.
- Reduce the number of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) by up to 2,000.
- Further reduce the number of English language support teachers by 1,000 from September 2010, to a figure of approximately 500
- Slow down the planned recruitment of additional psychologists under the National Educational Psychological Service.
- Increase the “staffing schedule” from 28:1 to 29:1
- Reduce the capitation for schools by 10% in 2010 followed by a similar reduction in 2011.
- Greater mainstreaming of Traveller education.
- Introduce charges in respect of the primary school transport system and charge pupils, at both primary and post-primary level, for 50% of the full economic cost of providing the service. This would be likely to be of the order of €500 per annum per child though an exemption for social welfare recipients would continue to apply. There is also scope to change the eligibility conditions for the general scheme by providing transport only to the nearest schools instead of the nearest school of choice.
- Introduce charges for students using the free special needs school transport services.

Barnardos Response

Overall Cuts

In general, Barnardos supports changes to teaching practice which would improve the educational outcomes and experience for children and teachers. However, such changes cannot be made with only budgetary considerations in mind and Barnardos is concerned that the proposed changes in the McCarthy report would cause considerable upheaval if not adequately researched and thought through ahead of any action. This also applies to proposals for the reduction in the numbers of primary schools through the amalgamation and mergers of smaller schools. It is imperative that the best interests of the children and families involved is put at the heart of any decisions made in relation to amalgamating or merging schools and that their educational opportunities are not negatively impacted by any changes as a result of such measures.

Barnardos cannot support the proposed further change in the staffing schedule for schools which would see class sizes increase to 29 pupils to every teacher. Bigger

class sizes are particularly detrimental to the educational attainment of children living in disadvantage who face a number of obstacles in achieving in education and benefit from the attention that can be achieved in smaller class sizes. A further increase in class size would continue to renege on commitments made in the Programme for Government to reduce the average class size 24 pupils per teacher by 2010/ 2011. Overcrowded classrooms impact negatively on a child's ability to learn and this proposal would put further pressure on already stretched school resources.

Cuts in Educational Supports

Education is a proven route out of poverty and can give children the best start possible in life allowing them to create opportunities for their future. However, without the proper supports, many children living in disadvantage simply don't have the resources they need to get an adequate education.

Educational inequality remains stark in Ireland with a child's educational outcomes still largely determined by their family's social and economic status. 1 in 3 pupils from disadvantaged areas continue to leave school with severe literacy difficulties and significantly more children from disadvantaged backgrounds leave school before the Leaving Certificate than those from better off families⁹.

Barnardos 2009 Written Out, Written Off report highlights the continuing inequalities in the education system and the impact cut backs already made in Budget 2009 and Supplementary Budget 2009 will have on children experiencing educational disadvantage¹⁰.

The Consumer Price Index in June showed a 4.4% yearly increase in the cost of education¹¹. If introduced, the suggested further cuts in education included in the McCarthy report would put increased pressure on schools, children and families and make meaningful educational achievement increasingly difficult for those living in poverty. Children experiencing educational disadvantage face a range of obstacles in schools and need particular supports to get the most from their classroom experience.

Barnardos is opposed to any cuts in the capitations grants for schools. Many schools already struggle to provide the most basic supports for students and most require additional "voluntary contributions" from parents to pay for resource materials. This undermines the very notion of the "free" education system we have in place and we cannot expect parents already under severe financial pressure on a number of fronts to pay increased contributions if schools are forced to make up funds as a result of capitation cuts.

School Transport Scheme

Barnardos is seriously concerned at the lack of understanding shown by the McCarthy report in relation to suggested increases in the School Transport Scheme. The increase of School Transport fees to €500 per child (both primary and post-primary) is shockingly high at a time when many parents are already concerned about the increased cost they face with the Department of Education's increased fee of €300 for post-primary children in September 2009.

⁹ Barnardos (2009) Written Out, Written Off

¹⁰ Barnardos (2009) Written Out, Written Off, pg. 17

¹¹ CSO (2009) Consumer Price Index, July 2009

While acknowledging the fact that the Report does not extend these charges to those on social welfare, Barnardos believes that these fees will have a serious impact on families in low paid employment who do not have a car and have no other means of getting children to school. Rural families who are likely to be hit by proposals to shut down and merge schools with between 50–100 pupils will also be particularly affected as more families need the service to ensure children can get to school. Families will struggle to pay the combined costs of sending children to school, particularly in the context of other cuts such as the loss of the Book Grant Scheme for non-DEIS schools which will mean more parents will have to pay the full costs of books. 61% of young people from semi-skilled manual backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools and just two-thirds of children from these families stay in school to complete the Leaving Cert¹² indicating that any additional costs could make it difficult for these children to stay in school, undermining NAPSIncl goals to ensure that 90% of 20-24 year olds will complete second-level education by 2013¹³.

Many parents dependent on social welfare or in low paid employment simply cannot afford the hidden costs of our “free” education system and Barnardos recommends that no further cuts be made to the education budget over the next year.

Special Needs Assistants

Barnardos is concerned about the proposal to cut the numbers of Special Needs Assistants by 2000, particularly in the context of recent cut backs in this area in the Supplementary Budget 2009. While acknowledging that there may be a possibility for efficiencies to be made in the allocation and management of Special Needs Assistants, it is not acceptable to simply cut numbers without first analysing the needs of pupils who require special needs support and who cannot attain their full educational potential without it. Looking at the numbers is not sufficient – any reforms to the system of special needs support provision must be done only in the context of children’s needs. Barnardos recommends that the Department of Education examines the needs of children who have applied for or are receiving special needs supports and establish what is required to serve the best interests of this vulnerable group.

Barnardos is against the charging of school transport fees for special needs students.

English Language Support

A respondent to Barnardos online survey for the Written Out, Written Off campaign highlighted the issues around English language support for students whose first language is not English:

“The loss of language support teachers in our school will be a great loss. These students struggle as it is and without this much needed extra support they will be unable to keep up to the level in the classroom. It also puts huge pressure on the class teacher to assist these children while also trying to maintain a high standard of English language with the rest of the class.”

Barnardos has real concerns that a new generation of children living in Ireland will experience educational disadvantage as a result of cuts in English language support teachers. Any further cuts to the provision of this support will seriously impact on the future lives of these children, who will most certainly fall behind in their education if supports are removed.

¹² Barnardos (2009) Written Out, Written Off

¹³ Government of Ireland (2007) National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007- 2016

National Education Psychological Service (NEPS)

Assessing the needs of children experiencing difficulties in relation to special needs, behavioural difficulties and general mental health in a timely and decisive manner is crucially important to supporting children past such difficulties and allowing them to get the most from their education. For those children who do not have access to NEPS, services must be hired for them from a panel of private practitioners approved by NEPS¹⁴. In this context, it does not make sense to slow down the recruitment of NEPS psychologists to save money when children have a right to the support that is being paid for by NEPS in any case.

National Education Welfare Board

Barnardos recently welcomed the streamlining of services, including the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), the School Completion Programme and the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers under the National Education Welfare Board in the interests of greater coordination in the provision of services to children. These services have proved invaluable to children living in disadvantage, as highlighted in Written Out, Written Off:

“The School Completion Programme was my lifeline. It helped fund practical things for me like uniforms and books and enabled me to go back to school. Without its help I would have had to drop out and now I am in college studying nursing.”¹⁵

The existing plans to roll out services under the remit of the NEWB have not yet been outlined or implemented. Barnardos urges Government to assess the impact of this change before considering making any further changes in service provision.

Barnardos Recommendations

Education is a right, not a privilege. Barnardos urges the Government to consider the following recommendations:

- Prevent any further cuts to education spending and services.
- Cap school transport charges at €250 per secondary pupil with a family max of €500 and keep the service free for primary school pupils and for those with medical cards.
- Maintain capitation grants at current levels.
- Ensure that all children who have a demonstrated need for a Special Needs Assistant access this service in a timely way.
- Do not cut the numbers of Language Support Teachers any further, retaining the 1,500 teachers currently in the system.
- Roll out a compulsory national book rental scheme in all schools across the State.
- In the interim, reinstate the book grants for non-DEIS schools to support families on low incomes or on social welfare.
- Ensure NEPS has funding to provide adequate psychologist coverage to all schools.
- Bring the Traveller Capitation Grant back to pre- Budget 2009 levels.

¹⁴ “In the case of schools that do not currently have dedicated NEPS psychologists assigned to them, as I already mentioned, such schools have access to psychological assessments through the SCPA. Under this Scheme, schools can commission assessments from a member of the panel of private practitioners approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the fees directly to the psychologist concerned.” Minister for Education and Science, Batt O’Keefe, Written Answer Reference Number: 1734/09 to Parliamentary Question 1563

¹⁵ Barnardos (2009) Written Out, Written Off, pg 19

- Reinstatement of the Library Grant for all schools in recognition of the critical importance of encouraging reading among children, particularly those who struggle with literacy; The savings from this cut are small compared to the impact it has on children's education, particularly those living in disadvantage.

Health

Key McCarthy Report Recommendations:

- Revise income guidelines for the Medical card to the basic rate of social welfare (Jobseekers Allowance) and introduce a co-payment of €5 for each prescription under the Medical Card.
- Remove all existing non-medical allowances and HSE discretion be removed and replace with a set of clearly defined factors based on medical needs.
- Reduce the existing entitlement of a person who has been unemployed for a minimum of 12 months to retain their medical card for 3 years after commencing employment (irrespective of means or medical need) to 1 year.

Barnardos Response

The Consumer Price Index for July shows that health costs on the year have risen by 3.4% despite the recession and decreases in costs in other areas. This is a reflection of ongoing rises in costs including the increase in the health levy in the Supplementary Budget 2009 and the increases in A&E charges from €66 to €100 in Budget 2009. Such costs have serious implications for families on low incomes who do not currently qualify for the medical card. Barnardos fears that many more families will be impacted if the McCarthy report recommendations in relation to the medical card are introduced.

Revising the medical card income guidelines to the basic social welfare rate and introducing a fee of €5 on each prescription will mean more families on low incomes who have to think twice about taking a sick child to A&E or lose valuable time in seeking medical assistance because of a lack of ability to pay the high costs of health care in Ireland.

Despite the increased wealth in Ireland over the 'boom' years, health inequalities remained stark in Ireland with 40% of people at risk of poverty suffering from a chronic illness compared with 23% of the general population¹⁶. Barnardos considers the proposed changes to the medical card as a serious threat to the well-being of vulnerable children in Ireland with very real implications for the health outcomes of children in low income households. There is also a considerable risk that the combined changes, specifically the reduction of the time a person can keep a medical card after returning to work, will create a poverty trap that fails to make work pay for parents.

Barnardos Recommendations:

- Retain current medical card income guidelines and disregard, and allow those who find work to keep their medical card for two years;

16 Institute of Public Health and Combat Poverty Agency (2008) Tackling Health Inequalities – An All-Ireland Approach to Social Determinants, Dublin

- Refrain from imposing a €5 charge for prescriptions for medical card holders and exempt those on the Long Term Illness Scheme on up to FIS income levels from this co-payment;
- Leave the monthly Drug Payment Scheme threshold at €100, do not administer this payment quarterly;

Child Welfare/ Protection

Barnardos welcomes the recognition of the false economy involved in cuts to the HSE's children and families programme by the Special Group and values that the Report leaves the programme budget intact in order to maintain services that promote and protect the well-being of children and families, particularly those at risk of abuse and neglect. It is crucial that funding should not be reduced during the recession and that services strive to operate early intervention and prevention programmes that support families before situations reach crisis point which can have a lasting and damaging impact on children's lives.

Barnardos Recommendation:

- Recruit staff for the 270 social work posts in child protection and children in care currently vacant as a matter of urgency, as outlined in the Office of the Minister for Children's Ryan Report Implementation Plan; ensure that this translates into 270 new social workers on the ground rather than simply changing the status of existing posts.
- Ensure that all children in care have a care plan and a social worker assigned to their case.

Rationalisation of State Agencies

Key McCarthy Report Recommendations:

- Merge the Office of the Children's Ombudsman and the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner with the Office of the Ombudsman, in a newly-constituted Ombudsman Commission.
- Discontinue the NESF, NCPP and the NESDO overarching structure leaving the NESC intact.

Barnardos Response

Barnardos believes that the subsuming of the Ombudsman for Children's Office into a restructured Office of the Ombudsman would effectively abolish a crucial distinct and independent advocate and voice for children in Ireland. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children is the only independent statutory body with legal entitlement to ensure that the best interests of the child are upheld across policy, law and services affecting children in Ireland. The Office also has a unique value in its accessibility for and visibility to children and the special space it has created for allowing children to make their voices heard and air concerns they have about issues that affect them.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children has built up considerable expertise and is internationally recognised for the quality and value of its work. In light of the recent

child protection scandals that have shocked Ireland, Barnardos considers it inconceivable that Government would effectively dissolve an Office it set up in 2002 to demonstrate Ireland's commitment to child protection and children's rights.

Barnardos Recommendations:

- Maintain the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in its current form.
- Extend the remit of the Office to allow it do deal with complaints from children in certain places of detention and clarify the functions the Office can carry out in relation to children in the asylum, immigration or citizenship processes.

Early Childhood Care and Education

Key McCarthy Report Recommendations:

- Abolish the transitional provisions for the *National Childcare Investment Programme*

Barnardos Response

While welcoming the introduction of the free pre-school year for every child in Ireland announced in the Supplementary Budget 2009, Barnardos urges caution under the proposal to remove the transitional arrangements in place to support crèches. The sustainability of early childhood care and education services and the impact any changes will have on children should be paramount in any decision making affecting this sector.

Barnardos Recommendations:

- Do not make any changes until the necessary provision of high quality services can be assured for children across the State.

Youth Services

Key McCarthy Report Recommendations:

- Reduce staffing levels in the youth detention centres by 20%.

Barnardos Response

Children in the juvenile justice system are amongst the most vulnerable in Ireland. While Barnardos supports greater efficiency in the delivery of services to children in the Irish Youth Justice Service and specifically Youth Detention Centres, we would urge an analysis of children's needs in these services before any action is taken to ensure that efficiencies are in the best interests of these children.

Barnardos recommendations:

- Audit the IYJS and Youth Detention Centres to identify efficiencies that reflect best possible service delivery and outcomes for children.

Conclusion

While understanding that the remit of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes was purely economic in its analysis of public expenditure, Barnardos is concerned that many of the cuts proposed in its report have huge implications for the lives of those affected, particularly children and families on low incomes or social welfare. Barnardos recognises the need for and indeed welcomes opportunities for improvements in the efficiency and value for money delivery of public services. However, it is clear to us that many of the proposals put forward by the McCarthy report would not address the underlying strategic challenges facing public service provision but in fact represent a slash and burn, easy option approach to cutbacks, targeting some of the most vulnerable groups in the State.

Barnardos has serious concerns about the lasting impact such proposals would have on children and families if implemented. The cuts outlined in education, social welfare and health will all hit the same children and combine to have a severe impact on these children's well-being and lives, limiting their options and damning them to cycles of poverty and deprivation. The recommendations of the McCarthy report blatantly target the very children and families who struggled to survive even when Ireland was among the wealthiest countries in the EU. It is hard to fathom how it can be deemed acceptable that those who struggled in the best of times should be made to bear the brunt of cut backs in the worst of times. Barnardos urges the Government to strongly consider the real life impact of the McCarthy report proposals on children in Ireland and refrain from making decisions that will push children and families further into poverty and disadvantage.