

Part 1

Background and Context

1.1. Background

The issue of Childcare has been under review in Ireland for a considerable period of time. The most recent references to the issue have been in the National Development Plan and the National Childcare Strategy.

The National Childcare Plan makes a brief reference to the issue of Childcare but does acknowledge its importance and its role in the social, economic and cultural life of the Country.

The National Childcare Strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to the delivery of Childcare in Ireland. As part of the strategy it proposes the establishment of County Childcare Committees that would oversee the issue at a local level. These Childcare Committees would have the preparation and implementation of a County Childcare Strategy as one of their primary purposes.

It is against this background that the Tipperary Institute (TI) was appointed to assist the North Tipperary County Childcare Committee (NTCCC) in drawing up the strategy for its area.

This strategy document is divided into 3 parts. This section provides a background and context to the strategy on childcare for North Tipperary. Part 2 outlines the strategy itself with a series of Visions, Objectives and Actions developed to meet the needs identified in part 1. Part 3 outlines an action plan for the NTCCC for 2002-03 and details costing for these actions for 2002.

1.2. Context

The Childcare Strategy for North Tipperary has been drawn up in the context of a number of reports that provide a philosophical and factual framework, as well as in the context of the views of the NTCCC regarding the range and scope of such a strategy.

The documents that have assisted the committee are as follows –

- *That National Childcare Strategy*
- *The Childcare Census of North Tipperary*
- *The Thurles Childcare Forum Report*
- *The Nenagh Childcare Report*

1.3. Structure of the Strategy

The North Tipperary County Childcare Strategy is structured in a number of different ways to reflect the way in which its various elements were developed and in order to provide a structure that would enable each element to be understood.

The introductory part of the strategy sets the context within which it has been written and outlines the various elements that were considered in its development.

The second part of the strategy reflects the approach to the data gathering and analysis that informs the visions, goals, objectives and actions. This research element is divided into a number of major themes that cut across a number of areas of focus within the strategy.

The third part of the strategy is the visions, goals objectives and actions. This is structured in accordance with the range of issues that arose in the early deliberations of the Committee and reflects the views of the Committee as to what were the critical issues facing childcare in the County.

The fourth part of the strategy is the action plan. This part of the strategy is structured to reflect the major themes of the data analysis but the individual actions are reflective of the third part of the strategy.

The final part of the strategy is the operational plan. This plan has grouped actions that are similar in nature and that may be steered by the same sub-committee of the Childcare Committee or that may form a single body of research or other work. This is done in order to avoid fragmentation and to facilitate the integration of the work of the Committee in an operational sense.

These various approaches have been taken in order to preserve the logic of the process within each part of the plan, in order to integrate actions where appropriate and in order to preserve clarity of the purpose of actions with regards to goals and objectives.

2. National International Context

2.1 *The National Childcare Strategy*

This strategy was prepared at National level and addressed the issue of childcare under a variety of headings.

The principal recommendations of the Strategy are as follows –

1. Changes in the system of notification
2. Development of national minimum standards
3. Garda clearance procedure
4. National qualifications framework
5. Male childcare worker quota
6. Ethnic childcare worker appointment
7. National Pay scale
8. Development of training programmes
9. Focus on the needs of families experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion
10. Expansion of Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
11. Enhanced capital allowances to group-based childcare
12. Grant scheme for small-scale private providers
13. Special tax allowance for childcare earnings
14. Grant assistance for employment of new childcare workers
15. Tax allowances for employers who assist employees with childcare
16. Establishment of local childcare networks
17. Linkage of childcare provision with the physical planning system
18. Support childcare costs of low-income parents participating in training schemes
19. Raising of income limit for FIS in respect of receipted childcare costs
20. One Parent Family Payment Scheme expansion
21. Tax relief on Childcare Expenses
22. Childcare assistance should not be treated as benefit-in-kind
23. Establishment of County Childcare Committees
24. Establishment of National Childcare Management Committee
25. Designation of DJELR as lead Department

These are outlined in some detail in order to demonstrate the acknowledgement of the National Strategy that a great many of the issues that lie within childcare must be

addressed at national level, since they require changes in the law or in national income and income support schemes.

It will not be possible for the NTCCC or its strategy to directly effect the changes needed in these areas though it may influence them through the provision of information and experience to the central decision-making bodies. The North Tipperary Childcare Strategy does not, therefore, address matters that are the remit of National Government.

It is clear, however, that if the issues outlined in the National Childcare Strategy with regard to the funding of Childcare are not addressed, actions at local level will be of limited effect and will not be able to address the fundamental issues of ensuring the provision of an adequate number of affordable childcare places.

2.2 County Childcare Strategies

The National Childcare Strategy suggests that a County Childcare Strategy should contain the following –

- *Terms of reference*
- *A demographic profile of the area*
- *Analysis of current trends and supply*
- *Analysis of future demand*
- *Priority objectives for the area*
- *Specific special needs and social inclusion measures*
- *Quality statements and targets*
- *Information strategy*

The inclusion of these elements in its strategy has been accepted by the NTCCC, though there are some significant limitations on the quality of such inclusions at present. These include –

- *Poor and out-of-date demographic data*
- *Limitations in the survey of existing facilities and, therefore, supply*
- *Analysis of future demand limited by poor base data*

In response to this, the strategy includes steps to address the data limitations as part of its initial priority actions.

In the absence of good data, it is also difficult to set clear quantitative targets, though some are included in the strategy where it is considered appropriate.

2.3 North Tipperary county Childcare Committee (NTCCC)

One of the first meetings of the committee to address the strategy, considered what its range and scope should be. A number of approaches were reviewed and the following agreed –

- *That the strategy should be wide-ranging in its focus*
- *That the needs of children up to the age of 18 should be addressed*
- *That a wide range of stakeholders should be considered*
- *That the focus should be on childcare outside the home but that account should be taken of the needs of parents and children at home*

Following this, a range of the issues facing childcare in North Tipperary was identified and these issues formed the basis on which the visions, objectives and actions for the plan were identified.

The approach to the creation of the plan, therefore, was informed by the issues identified in the National Childcare Strategy and the issues identified for North Tipperary County Childcare Committee.

3. Data

3.1 Natural Data

The resources that were primarily used in this process were –

- *The Childcare Census of North Tipperary*
- *The Thurles Childcare Forum Report*
- *The Nenagh Childcare Report*

Some data was also gathered from the statistical survey of North Tipperary carried out for the North Tipperary County Development Board.

Much of the data in all these documents is useful but limited and the strategy for North Tipperary must be assessed in the light of these limitations. The principal limitations that were identified were as follows:

- Much of the data is based on information gathered in the 1996 Census of Population. There have been considerable changes in population size, structure and distribution during the ensuing six years and the demographic data, particularly at sub-county level, must, therefore, be regarded as unreliable.
- The data regarding the provision of childcare relies largely on surveys of notified providers only. It also only deals with children less than 12 years, not up to 18 as the

NTCCC recommends. While the data available in respect of this segment of providers is relatively good, and while there are some findings that relate to children up to 14 years, it does not address the very large segment of the supply that is made up of family providers and those childminders that are not in the notified sector. A strategy for childcare to include proposals for these sectors as well as for the more formal notified sector is needed.

- The data for Childcare demand is unclear. Childcare is undoubtedly one of those areas where there is a hidden demand and where supply would be likely to generate its own demand. Supply, in this context, however, refers to a supply of appropriate childcare at an affordable price. The aspects of price and capacity to pay are so bound up with National policies regarding support for childcare workers, for business and for those seeking childcare, that it is difficult to estimate the demand at a local level in the absence of clear national proposals regarding these matters.
- Most of the data used in the compilation of the quantitative aspects of the strategy was taken from data compiled in 1999. The childcare census compiled in that year gave very useful details regarding the type of provision, the age profiles of children attending, geographical location of care and details of the level of training of staff. As these details have not been updated it is not possible to compare the lists of facilities compiled by the health board annually with the level and scale of provision as measured in 1999. Given the particularly dynamic nature of childcare provision and the diverse locations where care is provided, it is difficult therefore to accurately chart developments in the nature of provision of childcare over the past 2/3 years in the area. However it is the conclusion of the NTCCC that the situation has not changed substantively since the childcare census was compiled.

As a result of these considerations, a significant part of the initial work of the strategy will be the development of a good database of information on which actions for the future provision of childcare can be properly based.

3.2 *International Comparisons*

In the preparation of the strategy the NTCCC has examined the international patterns and costs of childcare in order to identify the range and scale of issues that exist. The situation in the United States of America, the UK and Europe has been briefly addressed.

3.3 *United States of America*

It is clear from this examination that there are issues around childcare throughout the world. In the United States of America there is a wide range of childcare provision both in-home and out-of home. There are issues around the regulation and training of childcare workers in the United States as well as issues around costs.

It is estimated that the average family in the United States spends approximately £5,500 a year or 7% of their income on childcare. The cost of childcare is greater in rural areas where provision is low and in urban areas where demand is high.

3.2.2 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom it is acknowledged that there is a severe shortage of childcare places. The Government has undertaken to spend £200m. (Ir£240m.) on 1.6 million childcare places by the year 2004. It has established a local planning and delivery system for the provision of childcare and has also targeted areas that are subject to particular deprivation. Part of the objective is to ensure that each single parent within these areas has a childcare place available to him or her. The approach of the policy in the UK also acknowledges the need for after school clubs and out of school facilities.

In the United Kingdom the average cost of a full-time nursery place for a two-year old is £5,700 (Ir£6,900) rising to over £7,000 (Ir£8,400) in the more expensive areas. In addition the average weekly cost of a childminder is £90 (Ir£95)

Surveys in the United Kingdom have also suggested that the number of childminders is falling and that grandparents carry out a large amount of childminding - not always willingly. One survey suggested that 36% of grandparents spend more than 21 hours a week caring for their grandchildren.

Of particular note in the UK approach to this issue is the extent of partnership between national and local government and between the various stakeholders involved in the development of early learning and childcare. Also of particular note is the linking of early education and childcare and the extent to which the education authorities are included in the management of the service.

3.2.3 Europe

The situation in Europe varies widely from country to country. Overall, however, as noted by Meyers and Gornick in an international comparative study, European States can be categorised as liberal, social democratic and conservative in social policy terms. Liberal states address residual social need and often include means testing as part of their approach; conservative states focus on work performance and the subsidiary of responsibility; social-democratic states draw on the universal rights of social citizenship and focus on equality of rights and equal male and female access to employment. In Ireland, the government tradition would be to follow the liberal model but the approach outlined in the National Childcare Strategy and that adopted by the NTCCC is more like the Social democratic model.

4. Process

The preparation of this strategy has been carried out by the NTCCC with the facilitation and assistance of Tipperary Institute.

At the beginning of the process, it was agreed that the committee was broad-ranging in its composition and that it adequately represented the various providers, regulators and consumers of childcare in the county. As a result, it was considered appropriate that this group would be the participatory element of the creation of the strategy.

The process involved in the creation of the strategy used a series of workshops facilitated by TI at which the approach was agreed, the issues for childcare in North Tipperary identified and the visions, objectives and actions created. The data available was then reviewed in order to test the range and scale of the objectives in the strategy. Finally, a monitoring and implementation programme was developed and an action programme for the first year of the strategy was put in place.

Within the time frame available, this process was considered to offer a reasonable balance between participation and consultation and to give an opportunity to a range of stakeholders to have an input to the process. It was also acknowledged that the participatory process is one that will need to continue over the period of the strategy. While a strategy has been developed this has been done on the best information available at the time of development. As better information becomes available through the process, amendments will be made that will reflect a clearer view of the needs and capacities of a wider range of stakeholders.

5. Issues

At its early meetings the NTCCC considered the range of issues that faced Childcare in North Tipperary. These issues were to form the basis of the visions, objectives and actions of the strategy as outlined in Part 2 when further informed by the data gathering exercise that would be undertaken.

The following is the range of issues that were identified –

5.1 *Service Availability*

- Distribution of service
- Gaps in service
- Sustainability of small services
- Equity of distribution
- Hours of provision
- Care and developmental focus

5.2 *Staff recruitment and training*

- Availability of trained staff
- In-service training – support and funding
- Availability of trainers
- Availability of training for trainers
- Promotion of childcare as a professional service
- Self awareness of childcare providers of nature of their role and service

5.3 *Access*

- Physical access
- Special needs access
- Rural access
- Availability of space in declining rural schools
- Availability of development land or buildings
- Insurance

5.4 Cost and Ability to Pay

Cost
Affordability
Availability of funding
Co-ordinating of funding
Scale of resource availability

5.5 Information

Gathering, co-ordination and dissemination of information on availability
Promotion of availability
Promotion of issue of childcare
Promotion of work-based childcare

5.6 Registration

The role of notified and non-notified child-minders
Encouragement of registration by private providers
The role of home based and institutional care
Quality control to agreed standards
Balancing the provision of quantity versus the achievement of quality

5.7 Social inclusion and support

Special needs access
Family support
Child poverty
Ongoing participation of parents
Integration of provision across the social spectrum

5.8 Networking

Developing links within the county
Linking existing childcare development work to work of committee
Forum for providers
Engagement of teachers in the programmes

5.9 Promotion

Promotion of plan and committee
Ownership of the plan

6. Purpose of strategy

The committee also considered the purpose of the strategy. The agreement on this purpose was ultimately reflected in the visions and objectives adopted by the committee.

- *Free people for the work force*
- *Give parents freedom to make a range life choices*
- *Help to ensure that children are cared for in a manner that meets their specific needs, having regard to variations in ethnicity, culture, language, age and minority group needs*
- *Help to ensure that the development needs of children are included as part of the care provided*
- *Help to ensure that a range of high quality childcare opportunities are available in the community*
- *Encourage the formalisation of the childcare sector in order to raise standards*
- *Help to ensure that childcare providers are fairly rewarded*
- *Help to ensure that childcare providers are properly trained and monitored*
- *Help to ensure equity of treatment in the availability of childcare having regard to the specific needs imposed by area of residence, class, family status etc*

7. Role of NTCCC and its Strategy

It was in the context of the issues and purposes outlined above that the strategy was developed. It was noted that many of the issues could not be addressed directly by the committee itself in its strategy since, as noted above, they essentially lay within the remit of Central Government. This particularly applied to the issues of capital funding and the provision of on-going financial support for service providers and for those availing of childcare services. In addition, the registration of childcare providers and the development of a national system of training lie within the remit of national government and agencies.

The role of the NTCCC and its strategy, therefore, was seen as being five-fold –

- *To create the environment in which maximum use can be made of any developments in childcare support at National level*
- *To promote the issue of childcare, its availability and its importance in North Tipperary*
- *To provide the information on which decisions regarding childcare provision and management in North Tipperary can be based*

- *To support individuals and groups that wished to provide or improve the provision of childcare facilities in their area in accordance with an overall strategic approach*
- *To create a system of mutual support and learning amongst childcare providers, workers and users in North Tipperary.*

8. Projecting future demand

8.1 Theme: Meeting the demand for childcare places in the various areas of North Tipperary

It is extremely difficult to ascertain the exact picture relating to childcare provision in North Tipperary. The main body of work completed on the area was a census survey of all group based childcare providers who cater for children aged 0-12 in the area. However the study did not include childminders because, the report states:

“... It was recognised at an early stage that a different kind of methodology which would take into account the sensitivities that exist in relation to family day care would be required to survey them” p.5.

However as the report itself states the reality is that childminding by childminders and relatives plays a significant part in the care of children in the area. Given this caveat the survey revealed that there were 1,074 children attending the 56 childcare facilities participating in the census in North Tipperary. This accounts for just 10.2% of the total under 12 population in the area. This is in line with figures for the mid-west as a whole with Limerick city (11.7% attendance), Limerick county (5.8%) and Clare (7.2%) all having low numbers of children attending childcare facilities. The census also revealed the following:

- Only 199 of those in childcare facilities are in full-day care with 875 in sessional care
- A very small number of infants under one year are in childcare
- The majority of those attending childcare are aged 3-6 years
- Again very few children aged 6-12 years attend post-school sessional childcare

Table 1, is taken from the census and provides figures on attendance at childcare facilities in the county compared with 1996 population figures:

Age Group	Population 1996	Number attending childcare facilities	% of total population attending childcare
Under 1 year	756	37	4.9%
1-3 years	1,524	169	11.1%
3-6 years	2,560	633	24.7%
6-12 years	5,688	235	4.1%
Totals	10,528	1,074	10.2%

Key Findings:

- Childcare rates are poor for the area overall with only 1 child in 10 attending childcare facilities in North Tipperary.
- Childcare provision is particularly poor for children under one year and for children in the after-school age groups.

Table 2 describes the types of childcare available in North Tipperary

Service	Sessional	Full Day service
Drop in crèche	3	1
Playgroup pre-school	25	1
Montessori	10	2
Naíonraí	4	1
Workplace crèche	0	1
Afterschool group	1	-
Homework club	4	-
Parent & Toddler	3	-
Other	2	1
Total	52	11

Key Findings:

- There are very few full-day childcare services available in North Tipperary
- Most of the sessional facilities operate in the mornings only and therefore cannot facilitate care for children whose parents wish to work full-time or avail of training opportunities.
- There was only one workplace childcare facility reported to be in operation in the area in 1999.

The number of children attending each facility varies. The majority of facilities in North Tipperary cater for between 10-20 children. 14 facilities have less than 10 children attending. 9 facilities had between 20 and 30 children attending, 5 facilities had 30-40 children and a further 4 cater for over 40 children.

Table 3 gives the number of places for each age group available in the 4 Electoral Areas of North Tipperary.

Area	No. of children under 15 years 1996	No. of children in Childcare 1999	% of total in childcare
Borrisokane	1835	41	2.2 %
Nenagh	4972	394	7.9 %
Templemore	3221	403	12.5%
Thurles	3951	236	5.9%

The 1999 census revealed that childcare provision is therefore very uneven. Templemore is the best served though still low at 12.5% of all children in the area attending childcare. Borrisokane is particularly badly served with just 2.2% of children or one child in every 45 accessing childcare. Thurles and Nenagh are also poorly served with one child in every 16 and 13 respectively accessing childcare.

When the age groups of children in childcare for the 4 electoral areas were examined there is a marked difference between the numbers attending in the different parts of the county. In the over 6 years age group, there were significantly higher numbers (160 children) attending in the Templemore electoral area than in the rest of the county where only 75 children in this older age group attend these facilities. Likewise the census reported that there were slightly more children (22) aged one year or under in childcare facilities in Templemore and in Nenagh (11) as only 4 babies under one year were in facilities in the whole of the rest of the county. It has since emerged that the situation regarding care of babies in North Tipperary has in fact deteriorated since the census was taken. In all areas except Templemore Electoral area, there were more children in the 3-6 year age group attending childcare facilities than children of any other age. This age group represented 612 of the total 1,074 places for the county as a whole.

Table 4 identifies in detail the numbers of children attending by age category in each area:

Area	0-1 years	1-3 years	3-6 years	Over 6 years	Total
Borrisokane	0	20	21	0	41
Nenagh	11	55	279	49	394
Templemore	22	64	157	160	403
Thurles	4	30	176	26	236
Total	37	169	633	235	1074

Key Findings:

- There is a predominance of sessional and small-scale services and facilities spread unevenly across the county.
- Childcare facilities are particularly poor in the Borrisokane area. As this is largely a rural area, special provision will need to be made to meet the needs of rural dwellers in relation to childcare.

In line with national trends, there is a low level of rural childcare service provision and less choice of childcare available in rural areas of North Tipperary. Each childcare facility was asked to estimate the maximum distance that parents/children travel to their service. The findings showed that in only 5 cases did parents and children have to travel less than 1 mile. In 20 cases the maximum distance travelled is 1-3 miles and in a further 9 facilities the maximum distance is estimated at 5-9 miles. It is significant to note that in 8 of the facilities the majority of parents have to travel over 9 miles. These are concentrated in the east of the county with 4 being situated in the Templemore electoral area. Distance factors coupled with lack of rural coverage means that rural services are less able to meet the needs of particular groups such as lone parents, the unemployed, children with disabilities and special needs. Also low population density and scattered population increase the cost of providing services in many areas. The remoteness of some rural areas and the lack of childcare services may inhibit parents from undertaking training, education, or seeking employment and recreation outside the home. Even policies that encourage childcare facilities to be developed exclusively in large towns can contribute to the shrinkage of rural communities.

Key findings:

- In many cases parents and children are travelling long distances to access childcare. This has implications both for childcare provision within reasonably accessible distances to children's homes and for transport provision, particularly in rural areas.

8.1.1 Anticipating future demand for childcare:

The principle factors influencing demand for childcare places are:

Population trends, particularly increases or decreases in the number of children in need of childcare. Therefore an increase in the birth rate, for example, will be significant for projected needs. Economic trends, particularly changes in the workforce and the participation of mothers in the workforce

Population Growth

According to the National Childcare Census report on North Tipperary there were 15,240 children under 15 years living in the county in 1996. This number is projected to decrease overall by 2016 (15,215) but in terms of childcare provision there are major

population changes due in the younger population with the under-6 population due to increase from 5,702 in 1996 to 7,116 in 2016.

Overall the population of North Tipperary is projected to increase by 10,000 by 2016. Within the youngest age cohort there are projected increases in the baby/infant group of 251 while the population aged 1-3 years will increase by 769 and those aged 4-6 years set to increase by 394 persons

Table 5 details these population projections 1996-2016:

Year	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Total population	58,021	60,167	62,394	64,886	67,602
Age 0-1	756	779	824	926	1,007
Age 1-3	2,317	2,388	2,524	2,837	3,086
Age 4-6	2,629	2,419	2,517	2,723	3,023
U/6 Sub-total	5,702	5, 586	5, 865	6, 486	7,116
Age 7-12	5,959	4,996	4,725	4,935	5,393
Age 13-14	3,579	3,151	2,665	2,582	2,706
Age 0-14	15,240	13,733	13,254	14,003	15,215

Labour Force projections

As at a national level, there has been a significant upswing in the economy of the mid-west region since 1996. Significant labour force expansion has similarly occurred at regional and county level and the unemployment rate for June-August 2000 for the mid-west region was 4.3% (Quarterly National Household survey 3rd quarter 2000). In Nenagh there has been a reported increase in participation by women in the labour force (Feasibility study for development of the childcare service in Nenagh: 2001). Childcare providers reported an increase in the demand for childcare from those seeking work. Similarly in Thurles, (Childcare Feasibility study 2000) the demand for childcare has increased significantly due to parents, particularly women, going back to work because of financial pressures at home. Employers report that they have difficulty employing staff and that childcare provision would support more parents going back to work.

The childcare Feasibility Study in Thurles stated that:

- The population of the town is set to rise from 1996 levels of 6,603 to 7,435 in 2016. This population will have clear and definite childcare needs
- Thurles is projected to have 1,482 children under 15 years in 2016 and 926 of these will be under 4 years of age.
- At present there are eleven childcare services, nine of which are private providers and all of which operate on a morning-only basis
- Only 180 children attend these facilities
- There are no facilities for babies nor after-school care in Thurles
- There is no full-day childcare service operating in Thurles
- There is minimal monitoring of quality and standards of childcare

The number of women in the labour force in North Tipperary increased from 5,769 in 1986 to 7,986 in 1996. There was therefore a 38% increase in the number of females in the labour force in North Tipperary over that 10-year period. Females made up 34% of the workforce in 1996 as opposed to 39% nationally with national projections at 43% in 2011. One estimate of workforce expansion for North Tipperary (North Tipperary Housing Strategy) estimates that the Workforce in North Tipperary will expand to 27,766 persons in 2016. If females make up 38% of the Workforce by 2011, the greater part of this increase is likely to come from married women, according to the CSO national labour projections, with their participation rates up by up to 25%.

The recent increased migration to urban centres in North Tipperary was a feature of the last census and this trend is expected to continue thus creating a potential further demand for childcare places. The Feasibility Study For Development Of The Childcare Service In Nenagh: 2001 stated that only 13.5% or 228 children under 15 years out of a total of 1,682 children in the Nenagh Community group area attended childcare facilities. The remaining 1,454 are cared for by a parent, relative or childminder. Yet 36% of women were said to be 'at work' in the area in 1996. This means therefore that an additional 523 out of 1,454 children could potentially attend childcare facilities. This number is probably higher now given the increase of numbers of women in the workforce and projections for the town point to a consistent increase in the numbers of children who could potentially avail of childcare. There are approximately 500 of these children in Nenagh at present (p19) with an estimated number of 550 in 2016. Population projections for the town also point to consistently high numbers of children who could potentially avail of after-school care, approximately 450 in 2001 and 480 in 2006.

If we apply the same logic to the whole county we can project the following –

- The childcare census states that at present 10.2% of all children aged 0-12 attend formal childcare facilities.
- Therefore by 2011, with present population rate change, 990 children under 12 would require childcare. This would leave 8,710 children cared for by a parent, relative or childminder.
- If 36% of women remain at work in 2011 then an additional 3140 children (approximately) in the county could potentially require childcare facilities, meaning that an overall 4130 childcare places would be needed in 2011 just to cater for labour force generated childcare needs.
- If female participation rates rose by 10% to 46% of women participating in the workforce in the county then childcare places required to meet labour-force demands could be as high as 4990 places.

Key findings:

- It is estimated that there will be 1,414 more children aged 0-6 years living in North Tipperary due to normal population increases alone in 2016 than in 1996. This will have significant implications for childcare provision.
- Increased female participation rates in the workforce indicate that the demand for labour-force generated childcare could be as high as 5,000 places in 2016.

- The projected population figures indicate that over 15,200 children aged 0-14 will be in the childcare age range in 2016
- The recent increased migration to urban centres in North Tipperary was a feature of the last inter-censal period and this trend is expected to continue thus creating a potential further demand for childcare places.

8.1.2 Recommendations

In terms of meeting the demand for childcare places then one possible strategy is to divide North Tipperary into a series of childcare service areas. These areas are generally proposed to be based around population settlements of 200 or more people. This strategy recommends that appropriate childcare would be available within an accessible distance of home, workplace, educational and recreational facility to everyone in the County. This has a number of implications:

- That pre-school sessional, full-day care and after-school care is available in all service area nodes as defined above.
- That a phased programme of provision to address the shortfall in formal provision is put in place
- That resources are allocated for more childcare facilities in the urban centres of North Tipperary
- That transport availability is addressed as a key issue.

The settlements in North Tipperary with populations of 200 or more are as follows:

Town/Village	Population 1996
Thurles	6,603
Nenagh	5,645
Roscrea	4,170
Templemore	2,115
Borrisokane	850
Newport	873
Ballina	598
Borrisoleigh	564
Littleton	544
Holycross	447
Portroe	411
Silvermines	202
Toomevara	362
Puckane	235
Templetouhy	293
Two-mile-Borris	325
Cloughjordan	447
Birr Environs/Offaly	838

In addition the following settlements with populations of less than 200 are suggested as service nodes in order to ensure appropriate geographic coverage.

Town/Village	Population 1996
Birdhill	< 200
Ballycahill	< 200
Rearcross	< 200
Templederry	< 200

There are also settlements close to the boundary of the county that should be taken into account when the coverage of childcare is being considered. Finally, in this context, it should be noted that, while particular settlements have been identified for service provision, the nature of that provision will vary from place to place depending on need and may, in some instances, be small scale and associated with a home-based provider. In addition, while specific settlements have been identified, other locations in the vicinity of those settlements may be suitable but the onus will be on the proposers of those alternative locations to demonstrate that the locations proposed will be suitable to serve the relevant catchment in terms of access, availability, demand and so on.



8.2 Theme: Making childcare affordable

Good quality childcare is expensive. The National Childminding Association of Ireland estimates that the weekly cost of childcare ranges from a minimum of £50 per week per child for a private/family minder up to £135 per week for care of babies in registered urban facilities. Quality of care is similarly variable. The Association estimates that the average cost of childcare is between £70-£80 per child per week. This means that the cost of childcare is out of the range of many families. When compared with the rest of the Country gross incomes in North Tipperary are less than the average. Average gross income in Ireland was £17,016 with North Tipperary average gross income at just £15,647 in the 1998/99 tax year as reported by the Revenue Commissioners. This means that a family on 2 average incomes in Co Tipperary with 2 children could spend one third of their income on childcare. In reality, families often weigh up the cost of childcare against just one salary, that of the mother, and if there is no financial gain to the family then the incentive to work for mothers is low.

For families on low or moderate incomes, especially lone-parent families dependent on one income often via a social welfare payment, the cost of childcare can be so high that they cannot afford to work. Others have to use a substantial proportion of their disposable family income on childcare.

Many poor families, especially lone parents who on average have low levels of qualifications, need training or education to improve their employability. Lack of affordable childcare can be a barrier for them too. The commission on the family stated in 1996 that the development of childcare services for children under school-going age and the development of services to respond to the needs of families with additional needs are particularly relevant in the case of lone-parent families. In most lone parent families, domestic and childcare responsibilities are carried largely by mothers alone. Without formal childcare such parents find it hard to enter the labour market or to train to improve their chances of finding work. On national average figures, 4.8% of households are headed by lone parents, and their particular needs must be considered a priority in childcare provision.

This strategy recommends that childcare would be available at a range of prices that would reflect the range of abilities to pay to ensure that low income is not a barrier to accessing childcare. This would involve the state subsidisation of places through supporting childcare through the taxation and social welfare system. Details of this are outlined in the next section.

8.3 Theme: Supporting childcare for people in the Workforce.

This strategy recommends that no person in North Tipperary would be prevented from participating in the workforce solely by being required to care for one or more children. Despite the growing numbers in the workforce and the increasing numbers of parents particularly women in the workforce, planned provision of childcare to support this trend is practically non-existent. There appears to be little workplace childcare available. Most private facilities are full and do not take babies anyway even when vacancies arise. A snapshot of workforce trends *vis a vis* childcare for the 2 larger urban areas revealed some interesting findings.

In contrast to county trends, the total population increased in *Nenagh* for the period 1986-96 due to continued migration to urban centres in North Tipperary and the expansion of manufacturing industry. There was also a significant labour force expansion in Nenagh over the same period. (Feasibility study for development of the childcare service in Nenagh: 2001). In 1996, 36% of women were at work outside the home. Since that time the unemployment rate in Nenagh has fallen significantly. Childcare providers reported an increase in the demand for childcare from those seeking work. In the Nenagh survey 4 key employers were contacted and asked to participate in a survey regarding childcare and of these 4, 2 responded. One of these employed 580 staff, the other 100 staff.

The key findings were:

- There appears to be very little employer involvement in childcare in the area. While both employers recognised that childcare issues contribute to staff absenteeism, they had no plans to provide an in-house childcare facility.
- There was a perceived demand for full-day childcare however opening hours of childcare facilities do not facilitate people doing shift-work
- A requirement for afterschool care was identified
- Many staff have their children in sessional care. The children are collected by a relative or childminder and looked after until the parent finishes work.
- There was a perception that childcare facilities provide a baby-sitting service rather than providing developmental care for children
- One employer indicated an interest in discussing possible future sponsorship of childcare places
- One employer stated that recruitment may have suffered because parents were unable to make childcare arrangements to coincide with full-time work.

Similarly in *Thurles*, (Childcare Feasibility study 2000) the demand for childcare has increased significantly due to parents, particularly women, going back to work because of financial pressures at home. Employers report that they have difficulty employing staff and that childcare provision would support more parents going back to work. There is a complete lack of full-time facilities and the existing duration of services is impractical for many parents who wish to work.

As part of the study, Thurles Chamber of Commerce interviewed a number of employers in the town. Between them they employed 760 staff. The main findings were:

- The respondents acknowledged that childcare offers choices to parents in relation to returning to work or training.
- There is a need for childcare provision in Thurles
- The type of provision would depend on the age group and the gender of the majority of the employees
- The employers were open to having a representative on the Thurles childcare forum
- The employers contacted said that they were also open to exploring funding options at a later stage when more concrete proposals are on the table.

The strategy therefore aims to ensure that all employers of an appropriate size would provide childcare facilities within the workplace or provide subsidies for childcare. It is also important that employee-friendly practices that encourage good childcare practice exist in the workplace.

8.4 Theme: Supporting childcare to meet training, education and recreational needs

This strategy recommends that no person in North Tipperary would be prevented from engaging in training and education, from participating in social and recreational activities or from attending to their occasional personal needs solely by being obliged to care for one or more children.

The Vocational Education committee is the main provider of adult education in the County. VEC records show that there were 2,359 students enrolled on full-time VEC day courses for 2000/01 in North Tipperary. This is a similar figure to the previous year and this trend is expected to continue and probably increase due to labour market shortages in the coming years. In addition there were 112 people attending full-time second-chance education programmes and 2,905 people attending adult and community education last year. The VEC have stressed that there is a need for suitable and accessible childcare places for parents attending training. They find that private providers cannot cope with the demand created by trainees and are totally booked out. The VEC may be involved in an advisory or management capacity in any future intervention in the provision of childcare in this context.

Tipperary Institute is the largest third-level provider in North Tipperary with almost 300 students and a staff complement of 80 in Thurles alone. The Institute has a mature student participation rate of 30%. This is one of the highest levels in the country for any third-level institute. There are obvious childcare needs associated with a significant proportion of mature students. The Institute is itself concerned that all persons have fair access to educational opportunities and availability of quality childcare is an aspect in this accessibility.

8.5 Theme: Supporting childcare for social inclusion.

Childcare provision can act as a valuable support to families with particular needs. Investment in childcare in areas of disadvantage can produce positive, life-enhancing results and is thus an important priority. It can act as a support service to families with special needs children in terms of respite care. It should also be available and accessible to all children and support the principles of equality and diversity. In a childcare context all children should have equal opportunities for learning and enjoyment. The principle of inclusion involves access to childcare services in addition to respect and support for all children and their families, including those from marginalised groups.

This strategy recommends that no person would be discouraged or prevented from placing their child in any assisted childcare facility due to cost, class, ethnic background or any other reason. It also recommends that provision for children with special needs be made within all mainstream childcare facilities.

Childcare provision needs to take into consideration:

- The specific requirements of children with a disability in accessing childcare places and receiving support and adequate care in the childcare setting
- The role of parents, including those from minority groups, should be an active one in childcare provision
- The particular difficulties surrounding minority ethnic groups and the travelling community in accessing childcare places
- The differing family arrangements in today's society
- The importance of affirming and respecting the culture, religious beliefs, traditions and home languages of all families in the area
- The training of childcare providers, in particular that training courses should take due consideration of equality and diversity principles.

Regarding the North Tipperary area, data is scarce on these issues but the following information may be pertinent:

- For families in areas of disadvantage, private childcare is almost non-existent so there is a complete reliance on the community and voluntary sector to support childcare in these areas.
- The Thurles study maintains that there appears to be a large gap between the wealthy and the poor in the town. There is a huge need for more community groups with a specific emphasis on the more marginalised in society such as lone parents and refugees
- There is a lack of facilities and organisations with a strong anti-poverty focus
- Several housing areas in Thurles need childcare/family supports either on an outreach basis or by providing transport to a central location
- The Community Social services are constantly advocating the need for a Family Resource Centre in Thurles. They maintain that the people in greatest need of childcare are teenage parents and parents in crisis who need support. Services are probably under-utilised by those who need them most.
- In relation to families under the care of the probation and welfare service there are particular and specific childcare needs that need addressing in addition to support to parents in difficult circumstances.

8.5.1 Special Needs

In relation to children with special needs the following issues emerge:

- There are 198 children classified as having an intellectual disability in the North Tipperary area (Note: this includes parts of Limerick in the Health Board statistics)
- The Mid-Western Health Board Service Plan 2001 estimates that 555 children in the North Tipperary area have a physical or intellectual disability.
- There are special facilities in Roscrea, Nenagh and Thurles that cater for the learning needs of these children.
- The particular access needs of these children to mainstream childcare facilities is a consideration

- The special care needs of these children in any facility needs attention
- The positive developmental and stimulatory impact of childcare for children in these situations is a priority issue
- Parents of children with special needs find it extremely difficult to source suitable childminders.
- In many cases private providers will not accept children with special needs
- Some special needs children are not in a position to travel to access childcare.
- Transport is an issue in terms of accessing childcare

8.5.2 Travellers

A report from the traveller organisation *Pavee Point* states that among Travellers there are a relatively large number of infants and children and few older persons. This is because there is a high birth rate and low life expectancy. Traveller life expectancy is equivalent to that of settled people in the 1940s. The same report shows that the Traveller population is growing. The last official records show an average of 8 children per family. There is some indication of a decrease in the average family size in recent years but it is still higher than that of the settled population. Regarding traveller education and training there are still major obstacles to provision of services of all age groups from difficulties in accessing primary school places for traveller children on a consistent basis, to attracting traveller children to stay in school to developing appropriate courses for adult traveller learners.

The Monitoring Committee on the Status of Travellers notes that very little progress has been made on the integration of intercultural education into the education system as a whole. However some progress has been made in North Tipperary, as there is a traveller pre-school in operation in Roscrea under the auspices of the Roscrea 2000 programme. Models and strategies for inter-cultural education such as this one need to be developed and implemented at all levels including after-school care.

8.5.3 Ethnic Minorities

It is difficult to obtain figures relating to ethnic minorities in North Tipperary. Since 1995, the number of people seeking asylum in Ireland has increased from a few hundred per annum to nearly 11,000 in 2000. In terms of educational provision there are also difficulties. Few allowances for language differences have been made and it has been reported that young asylum seekers are having problems making friends and fitting into the school system. Schools have not been resourced to deal with these issues and the local education authorities have not as yet implemented pro-active policies in this regard.

In relation to ethnic minority and traveller groups the following factors may apply:

- There are currently 108 asylum seekers resident in North Tipperary
- There were 114 traveller families resident in North Tipperary in 2000. 72 of these families were in permanent housing, 12 were in serviced sites and 30 were on the roadside.
- Women from minority groups who wish to take up training or employment opportunities depend on the extended family to meet their childcare needs

- Many women cannot take up places on training courses and their attendance is severely affected when their babies are at a young age
- Private providers may not readily accept children from minority groups and the ability of traveller and asylum seekers families in particular to pay for this form of childcare may be limited.
- There is a need to ensure that childcare for all children allows them to participate fully in an inter-cultural and anti-racist educational environment
- Supports are needed to inform ethnic minority groups about the benefits and uses of childcare facilities
- Translation and other support services for parents is an issue to ensure that they are fully involved in the consultation process around childcare provision
- The participation of parents from minority groups on childcare planning fora needs to be addressed
- As with many other children, access to childcare is often related to transport facilities.

8.6 Theme: Ensuring Quality in childcare

The main issues relating to provision of quality childcare are

1. Training of childcare personnel
2. Payment of staff
3. The registration and formalisation of informal carers
4. The availability of suitable premises.

This strategy makes a number of recommendations regarding quality in childcare. First it recommends that all non-family childcare providers be included in the formal childcare structures to ensure quality control. It also recommends that all those working in or managing childcare facilities be suitably qualified.

The childcare committee believes that the better the pay, conditions, training and support to staff the better the childcare service will be. It also believes that such conditions will enable staff to meet the diverse and wide-ranging development needs of children at different ages and situations.

8.6.1 Training of childcare personnel

The national childcare strategy states that the knowledge that childcare workers have about child development and education is important if the full range of children's needs are to be met through the childcare service. The strategy also emphasises the importance of continuous updated training through planning and in-service training. However the reality is that training has not been an essential requirement for childcare workers in early-years services. This has led to a situation where there are many workers in the childcare sector with skills and knowledge that have been gained through experience rather than formal training processes. The situation is complicated by the fact that there is no one national common standard or benchmark against which to measure these skills and knowledge. Instead there is a plethora of courses available to those interested in a

career in childcare. The national strategy recommends that a national framework of qualifications in childcare should be developed to establish standards for the accreditation of providers of training and the certification of learners. This qualification framework would provide a progressive pathway of award and the accreditation of prior learning or APL.

The strategy (p. 29: Recommendation 4) also recommends that the sector should aim to achieve the following target:

A minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children in collective services should have a grant-eligible basic training of at least 3 years at a post-18 level, which incorporates both the theory and practice of pedagogy and child development. All training should be modular. All staff in services (both collective and family day care) who are not trained to this level should have right of access to such training including on an in-service basis.

The childcare census for North Tipperary identified a number of key issues relating to the qualifications of childcare personnel in North Tipperary:

- Of the 136 staff involved in the survey, over one-third (48) have no formal qualification in childcare
- Full-time paid staff were more likely to have a qualification than part-time staff
- Only 3 of the 24 Community employment/Jobs initiative staff working in childcare had a qualification
- Of those with a qualification, the most frequently cited qualifications are those at NCEA Diploma level, followed by private colleges/agencies Certificate and Diploma levels.
- As reflects the national picture the range of training available to and completed by childcare workers is very broad ranging and varied.

8.6.2 *Payment of staff*

The national childcare strategy states that childcare is an occupation that is characterised by low status, poor working conditions and an absence of a career structure. Salary levels for the childcare sector are generally regarded as very low. Nationally, rates of pay show a wide range and variety with pay-levels at a reasonably well-developed level in the public sector and where there is public funding for projects. These trends were mirrored in the North Tipperary census where the following applied:

- The majority of staff in the North Tipperary survey (58%) are on salaries below £5000 per annum and a further 23% earn between £5001-£10,000.
- Only one staff member earns more than £22,000 per annum.
- Part-time staff are particularly poorly paid.
- There tends to be a high turnover of staff and employment is not regarded as high-status or secure (Thurles study)
- There appears to be a high dependence by the sector on both students and volunteers, particularly in sessional facilities.

The strategy recommends that a national pay scale should be established to reflect the social and economic value of the work undertaken by childcare workers.

8.6.3 The registration and formalisation of informal carers

It is extremely difficult to ascertain the exact picture relating to childcare provision in North Tipperary. The main body of work completed on the area was the census survey of all group based childcare providers who cater for children aged 0-12 in the area. However the study did not include childminders. However as the report itself states the reality is that childminding by childminders and relatives plays a significant part in the care of children in the area. Nationally the childcare strategy report states that childminding in the minder's home is the most commonly used childcare arrangement for mothers in paid employment.

8.6.4 Premises

With regard to premises in which existing childcare provision is operating in North Tipperary, one-third of the facilities are based in purpose-built or renovated buildings and 10 are based in school classrooms. Other types of building include parochial/church halls, community centres, local authority buildings and other facilities. Just over half are wheelchair accessible. Three-quarters of them have outdoor facilities. The census points to significant investment requirements in terms of improving premises and the physical environment where childcare is provided.

9. Implementation

The implementation of the strategy requires that an appropriate plan be put in place. As noted in the introduction to this document, many of the matters that need to be addressed can only be treated at central government level. The implementation of the county strategy will be guided, therefore, by the considerations at Section 7 above regarding the role of the NTCCC. These have been reflected in the Year One work programme outlined at Appendix One.

The implementation of the strategy will require –

Resources

- Financial
- Personnel

Authority

- Formal
- Informal

Management

- Inter-organisational
- Within the NTCCC

9.1 *Financial Resources*

The costs of these proposals have been costed in outline. The principal costs that will be involved in the implementation of the strategy will be personnel and ancillary costs as well as the costs of advertising and communication work. While there are no specific financial commitments by other agencies outlined in the template for the implementation of the strategy, the committee is confident that other organisations will be in a position to invest in its delivery through the involvement of personnel and resources.

9.2 *Personnel Resources*

The personnel resources that will be required to implement year one of the strategy are two-fold. On the one hand there is a requirement for a co-ordinator who will help to establish networks and inter-agency programmes, will liaise with government and voluntary organisations and will help the NTCCC to input to national policy development as well as supervising the design and implementation of research and project development.

In addition to this requirement there will be a requirement for a researcher in year one. This resource may be provided by the NTCCC member organisations, by the appointment of consultants or by the appointment of a research worker. Given the ongoing nature of the research required it may be that the latter approach is most suitable with the addition of some external guidance.

The committee also intends to employ a worker with the specific brief to work with childminders and who will take responsibility for the childminder actions in the strategy. This work will initially concentrate on strategies to identify and develop supports for non-notified and notified childminders in co-operation with the pre-school services section of the Mid Western Health Board

9.3 *Formal Authority*

The formal authority for some of the work of the NTCCC may be already vested in the Health, Social Welfare and Education and Training Institutes. However, a substantial amount of the work of the committee will not require any specific formal authority beyond that vested in the committee itself.

9.4 *Inter-organisational management*

The implementation of the strategy will require the establishment of mechanisms for ensuring co-operation between organisations that have a responsibility in this area. It will be an element of the implementation that a sub-committee of the NTCCC be established to ensure co-operation between the various relevant organisations.

9.5 *Intra-organisational management*

The management of the activities of the organisation must also be addressed, While it is suggested above that a number of personnel appointments be made, it is also important that the management of the organisation is appropriate to its functions. In order to

address these matters it is suggested that a number of sub-committees be established to oversee the specific activities of the NTCCC. The following are suggested –

- A training and education sub-committee
- A registration and standards sub-committee
- An information and dissemination sub-committee
- A social inclusion sub-committee
- A facilities sub-committee
- A Childminders Initiative sub-committee
- An evaluation sub-committee

This structure would allow for the inclusion of partners in the process other than those presently included on the NTCCC.