

The logo for TUSLA, featuring the word 'TUSLA' in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'T' is blue, 'U' is green, 'S' is yellow, and 'L' and 'A' are blue. The letters are slightly shadowed to give a 3D effect.

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Tusla Commissioning Strategy 2019-2023

To ensure that the total resources available to children and families are applied to improving outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way.



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Foreword	iii
Chapter 1	1
1.1 Structure of this Strategy Document	2
1.2 Who is this Strategy for?	2
1.3 Context of this Strategy?	2
1.4 Methodology for the Development of this Strategy	5
Chapter 2	7
2.1 Our Understanding of Commissioning	8
2.2 Tusla’s Commissioning Principles	9
2.3 Tusla’s Commissioning Priorities	9
2.4 Rationale for this Strategy	9
Chapter 3	11
3.1 Tusla’s Strategic Intentions to Advance Commissioning Practice	12
3.2 Conclusion	17
References	19

Foreword



Tusla – Child and Family Agency is committed to using the total resources available for children and families in the most efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. Tusla’s Commissioning Strategy was developed to support Tusla management, staff, providers, and partners to deliver on this important objective.

It’s important to note that commissioning relates not just to the contracting of external providers, but also happens internally within the organisation. So this Commissioning Strategy applies equally to internally commissioned services.

Tusla commissions over €300 million per annum in services for children and young people from external agencies, in addition to those services provided by Tusla. Together with capital and human resources, these financial resources are used to commission the delivery of services that help to fulfil Tusla’s statutory responsibilities, and to deliver on the strategic objectives and key actions as identified in the Tusla Corporate Plan so as to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

This Commissioning Strategy and the related Commissioning Toolkit outline a new approach to commissioning which will require Tusla to shift the way it works presently to focus with children, families and partners, on a cyclical, outcomes-based process that identifies communities needs and strengths and responds to those needs and strengths in a cost-effective, evidence-informed, and evidence-based manner.

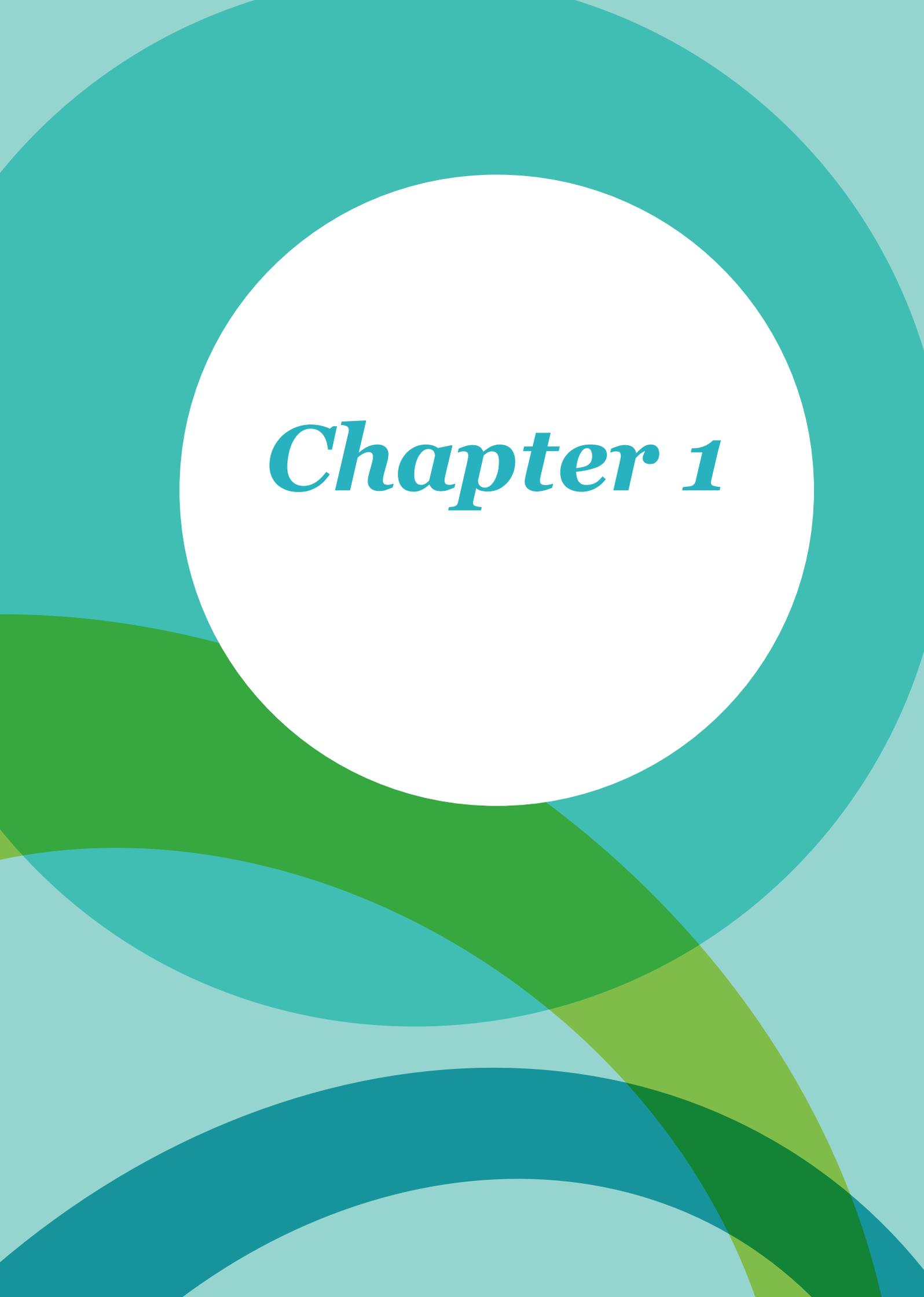
This strategy outlines Tusla’s commissioning principles and priorities and it sets out Tusla’s strategic intentions to advance commissioning practice over the next five years to deliver on these key drivers.

As CEO, I see this strategy as a key enabler for the transformation of the way services for children and young people are delivered in Ireland and encourage everyone to embrace the strategy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Smyth'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Pat Smyth
Interim Chief Executive,
Tusla



The background features several overlapping, curved shapes in various shades of teal and green. A large white circle is centered in the upper half of the page, containing the chapter title. The overall design is modern and clean.

Chapter 1

1.1 Structure of this Strategy Document

This document is divided into three chapters:

1. Information on the structure of this document, the target audience and the methodology for development of the Strategy.
2. Contextual information is provided outlining what the Child and Family Agency understands by commissioning and highlighting the Agency's Commissioning Principles and Priorities.
3. Tusla's strategic intentions to advance commissioning practice over the next five years to deliver on its principles and priorities and to action its drivers of change are outlined.

1.2 Who is this Strategy for?

This Commissioning Strategy is relevant to all staff of the Agency as well as the organisations and practitioners funded or seeking to be funded by the Agency to provide services to children, young people and their families. Additionally, this strategy seeks to complement the existing momentum in relation to joint commissioning through Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) under the DCYA's *Working Together for Children* initiative and so is relevant to commissioners within other statutory bodies.

1.3 Context for this Strategy

- » Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014, DCYA) is the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people in Ireland (aged 0-24 years). Some of the main aims of the framework include earlier intervention and prevention; supporting parents; listening to children and young people; quality services (*Resource allocation within services will be based on the evidence of both need and effectiveness, and services that are not working will be decommissioned*); effective transitions; and cross-Government and interagency collaboration and coordination. This Policy Framework specifically states that Tusla must:
 - *Provide and commission both universal and targeted evidence-informed parenting supports and ensure early identification of 'at risk' children and families to strengthen families and reduce the incidences of children coming into, and remaining in, care. (G7).*

- *Introduce the commissioning of services.....by moving away from a grants system..... and offer support to build capacity within the children and youth sector to respond to the new approach effectively. (G 69).*
- » Following the enactment of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla Child and Family Agency was established on 1st January 2014 and is responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for all children and families. In addition, it is also responsible for a range of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (DSGBV) services, primarily providing services to adults. It represents one of the most comprehensive reforms of services for the development, welfare and protection of children and the support of families ever undertaken in Ireland. It is an ambitious move which brings together some 4,000 staff who were previously employed within Children and Family Services of the Health Service Executive, the National Educational Welfare Board and the Family Support Agency and an operational budget of approximately €600m in 2014. The Act also creates a new framework for accountability for the use of resources; for financial arrangements between the Agency and other organisations including the not-for-profit providers; and for non-financial service provision arrangements with other statutory bodies. It is now incumbent on the Child and Family Agency to use the total resources available for children and families in the most efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way in order to improve outcomes.
- » Tusla's Corporate Plan (2018-2020) states that the new Commissioning Strategy will assist Tusla in identifying potential gaps or overlaps in services provision across the country. The strategy establishes a new framework within which the Agency will work with its partners to ensure improvement and availability of services for children, young people and families across the statutory and voluntary sectors (p15).
- » Tusla has produced a Commissioning Toolkit (2019), to ensure a nationally coherent and consistent approach to commissioning within Tusla. The Toolkit is primarily aimed at those making commissioning decisions within Tusla but will also help to create transparency and to engage effectively with all partners.

- » The Health Information and Quality Authority's (HIQA) National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2012) Standard 1.4 requires that resources are effectively planned, deployed and managed to protect children and promote their welfare. The Agency, when independently inspected by HIQA, will be required to provide documentary evidence of its compliance with this standard. *The Tusla Quality Improvement Framework, A Tusla Approach to Improving the Quality and Safety of Services* (2016) also provides context for this *Commissioning Strategy*.

The purpose of the framework is to introduce a systematic method for embedding quality improvement into organisational practice and culture for the ultimate benefit of children and families. The Framework defines what a quality service looks like, provides a system to assess quality and a mechanism to make improvements. The implementation of the Framework also positions the Agency as a self-evaluating organisation. The successful implementation of the Framework will ensure that the Agency is not solely reliant on external regulatory and inspection activity to provide assurance that its services are safe and being delivered to a high standard. Three principles characterising high quality services have been identified for Tusla. These are child-centred; well-led; and safe.

- » All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. Therefore Tusla is required to commission in a manner that promotes equality, prevents discrimination and protects human rights in line with its Public Sector Duty.

This Strategy outlines Tusla's commissioning principles and priorities and sets out Tusla's strategic intentions to advance commissioning practice over the next five years to deliver on these principles and priorities. The intent is to have a national standardised approach to commissioning practice embedded organisationally from the national, to regional, to local area level.

1.4 Methodology for the Development of this Strategy

This strategy has been informed by:

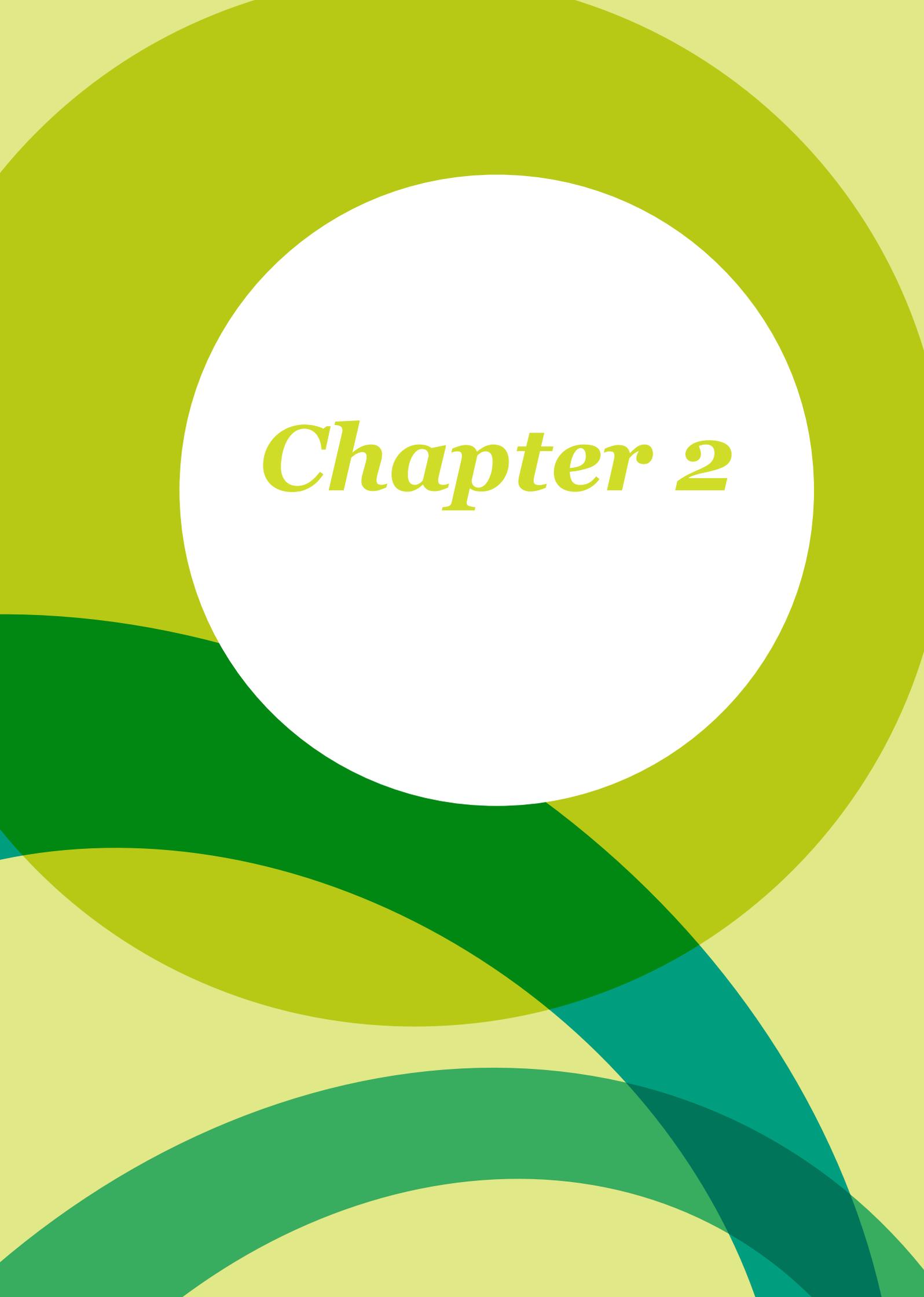
- » *The Tusla Commissioning Guidance (2013); the Tusla Commissioning Priorities: Discussion Document (2016) and the Tusla Commissioning Toolkit (2019);*
- » National Policy and legislation e.g. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014); The High Level Statement on Parenting and Family Support (2015) and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013;*
- » The work of the Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University, who were commissioned by Tusla to assist with the development of Area Commissioning Plans and National Thematic Commissioning Plans;
- » The learning from developing the first five Area Commissioning Plans¹ and the first national thematic Commissioning Plan².
- » Extensive national and regional consultation through the ongoing National Commissioning Advisory Committee and national and regional consultation events.

The strategy is a document which will be further developed and refined over time as the strategy is implemented within the coming five years. This is consistent with the consultative approach Tusla has adopted to underpin the translation of the Commissioning Strategy into practice.

¹ The first five Tusla Areas involved were Donegal; Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan; Waterford/Wexford; Dublin North City and Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow.

² The first national thematic Commissioning Plan was for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Services.





Chapter 2

2.1 Our Understanding of Commissioning

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has used the following definition identified by the Centre for Effective Services as an overarching definition of commissioning as *a strategic planning process linking resource allocation with assessed current and future needs, in order to achieve best outcomes for citizens and service users in line with policy objectives.*³

Tusla's definition of commissioning, as per the Commissioning Guidance (2013)⁴ is: *the ... use of ... the total resources available for children and families in the most beneficial, effective, efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable manner in order to improve outcomes for children.*

These definitions provide Tusla commissioners with the necessary foundation to develop our Commissioning Cycle, below, to support the National Service Delivery Framework (NSDF).

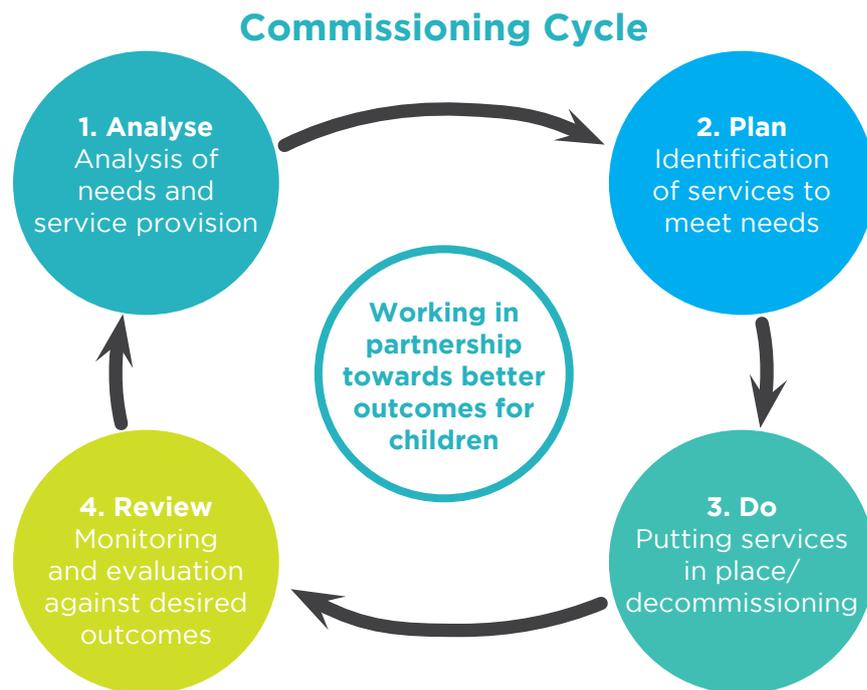


Figure 1: Tusla's Commissioning Cycle, adapted from the Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (DFES, 2006)

³ Commissioning in Human, Social and Community Services - a Rapid Evidence Review (CES, 2015) cited in What we heard A summary of the key messages from the responses to the public consultation: Commissioning Human, Social and Community Services, Reform and Delivery Office, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2016.

⁴ Tusla Commissioning Guidance (2013).

2.2 Tusla's Commissioning Principles

Tusla has agreed six key principles to underpin its commissioning cycle:

- » Early intervention/prevention will be prejudiced at all levels of service delivery – low, medium and high.
- » Priority will be given to programmes and services that are evidence based or evidence informed.
- » Commissioning will use a partnership approach, with the full participation of all partners including providers, other commissioners, children, young people and parents/carers.
- » Commissioning will take account of and actively address the specifics of the local context, e.g. rural and urban.
- » Commissioning will support both small highly targeted services and large scale local, regional and national services.
- » Commissioning should incorporate key capacity-building measures for the local community and voluntary sector in order that it can respond to the local context and the service requirements of Tusla.

Each of these principles must be reflected in all commissioning work and it is essential that commissioners apply these principles in all commissioning. A Commissioning **Decision Support Tool**⁵ has been developed to ensure that the principles are fully embedded in all Tusla commissioning processes.

2.3 Tusla's Commissioning Priorities

Tusla's Corporate Plan 2018-2020 identifies a range of core deliverables and priorities for the Agency.

Many of these deliverables will be underpinned by the new approach to commissioning. Priorities will change in line with Tusla's corporate and business planning cycle.

2.4 Rationale for this Strategy

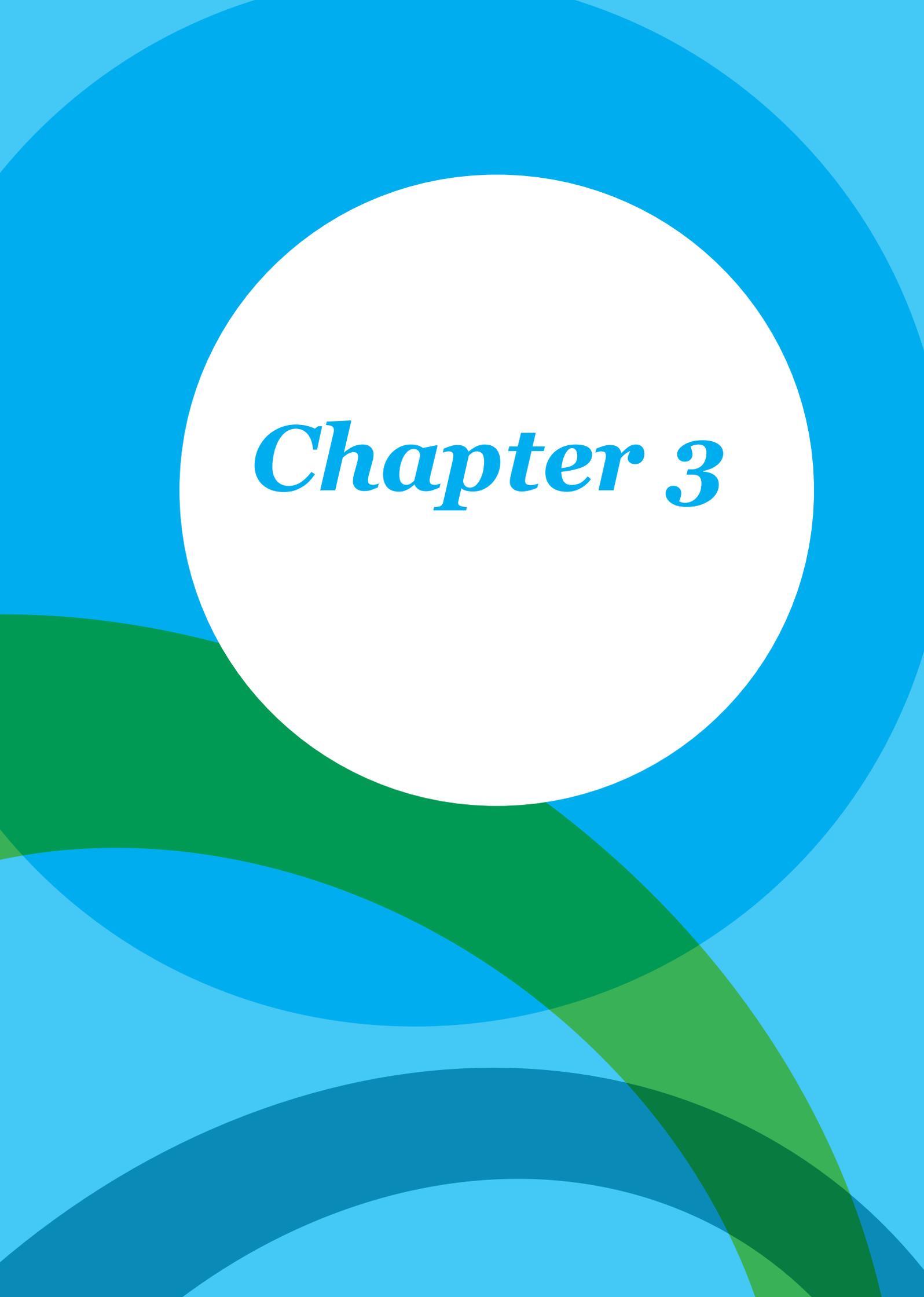
This Strategy outlines Tusla's commissioning principles and priorities and it sets out Tusla's strategic intentions to advance commissioning practice over the next five years to deliver on these principles and priorities. The aim of the strategy is to have a national standardised approach to commissioning practice embedded

⁵ See *Commissioning Decision Support Tool*, in *Tusla Commissioning Toolkit* (2019).

organisationally from national to local level, using the agency defined principles to ensure quality, fidelity and value for money, such that there is no duplication or gaps in service provision.

The new approach to commissioning will require the organisation to shift the way it works by focussing on the following drivers of change in our commissioning practice:

1. Using a Resource Allocation Methodology to distribute national development funding to areas to promote equity of service provision nationwide.
2. Adopting and embedding new approaches such as Commissioning Planning to support the identification of need and cost-effective, evidence-informed and evidence-based responses to these needs whilst also seeking to shape the interaction of need and provision; and build capacity to respond appropriately.
3. Further advancing nationally agreed practice models for Tusla on an optimum continuum of care framework, e.g. Meitheal, National Early Intervention Practice model; Signs of Safety; and Creative Community Alternatives.
4. Further developing data capacity to support children and families services planning and advancing the Tusla *Outcomes for Children National Data & Information Hub*.
5. Improving fidelity monitoring and governance frameworks so that true impact can be measured.
6. Ensuring quality and consistency in commissioning practice.
7. Exploring and examining opportunities for joint commissioning on a bi-lateral or multi-lateral basis with other statutory organisations and through the structure of Children and Young People's Services Committees.
8. Expanding innovative practice through co-creation of solutions with other organisations and partners including children and families.



Chapter 3

3.1 Tusla's Strategic Intentions to Advance Commissioning Practice

The following section sets out Tusla's strategic intentions to advance commissioning practice over the next five years to deliver on its principles and priorities and to action its drivers of change:

-
- 1. Tusla will adopt and embed new approaches e.g. Commissioning Planning to support the identification of need/strengths and cost-effective, evidence-informed and evidence-based responses. Tusla will also intervene to shape the interaction of need and provision and engage in capacity-building to ensure there is sufficient capacity to respond appropriately.**

Actions:

- » Tusla will adopt the methodology of Local (and National) Commissioning Plans as the basis of its approach to commissioning within the framework of its statutory responsibilities, the Tusla Corporate Plan and its National Service Delivery Framework. *Based on a good understanding of need and assets, Need and Provision Shaping is the process by which commissioners ensure there is sufficient, appropriate and value for money provision available to meet needs and deliver effective outcomes both now and in the future*⁶.
- » The Institute of Public Care (IPC) of Oxford Brookes University, U.K. is providing technical support to Tusla through Area and National Commissioning Plans/Frameworks and through master classes to managers, who are supporting practice change.⁷
- » Area Commissioning Plans will be developed by all Tusla Areas. Commissioning Plans will also be developed by National Service leads as necessary.
- » Tusla will work with the DCYA Quality and Capacity Building Initiative on Prevention and Early Intervention to explore opportunities to train staff on evidence-based and evidence-informed programmatic activity.
- » Tusla will build towards funding of more evidence-based activity across its service delivery framework, utilising the *four levels of evidence* framework to determine how services are commissioned in the future. Tusla has set targets which commissioners will aim towards as they commission services using the new approach.

⁶ Adapted from the Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University, 2016.

⁷ The five Tusla Areas that undertook a new approach to commissioning in 2017 are the Midlands, Dublin South Central, Cork, Cavan/Monaghan and the Midwest. This builds on the existing five sites noted earlier and the remaining seven Tusla Areas began the new approach in 2019 so that all Areas will have completed an Area Commissioning Plan. A National Commissioning Framework will be launched in 2019 in respect of Parenting Support.

The Four Levels of Evidence

Level of Evidence	What this means in relation to commissioning?	Target % of commissioned service by level of evidence starting 2019
Level 1 – Describes the goals, activities and target groups for a particular service.	Does this meet Agency priorities and intended outcomes for service users?	Year 1 60% Year 2 80% Year 3 100%
Level 2 – Identifies the sound theory which underpins the intervention, as well as an identification of how and why this particular intervention will lead to specific outcomes.	Does this meet Agency priorities and intended outcomes for service users?	Year 1 15% Year 2 30% Year 3 50% Year 4 70% Year 5 100%
Level 3 – Involves systematic evaluation to show desired changes have occurred with the clients engaged with the intervention.	Are there proven measures of effectiveness?	Year 1 5% Year 2 10% Year 3 15% Year 4 20% Year 5 25%
Level 4 – With this level of evidence, it is possible to judge if a particular intervention is efficacious or not. This level of evidence can answer whether the intervention itself has caused the outcome.	Are there proven measures of effectiveness linked to outcomes?	Year 1 2% Year 2 3% Year 3 5% Year 4 8% Year 5 10%

Figure 2: The Four Levels of Evidence, adapted from Veerman and Yperen, 2007

2. Tusla has and will further advance nationally agreed practice models for Tusla on an optimum continuum of care framework.

Actions:

- » Tusla will continue to refine the proposed continuum of care, which describes service provision across three categories e.g. Low, Medium and High Prevention.
- » Tusla will advance its Early Intervention, Child Protection and Welfare and Alternative Care Strategies to clarify optimum practice models.
- » Tusla has developed a National Service Model for *Creative Community Alternatives*⁸, which is being applied through service commissioning approaches in all Tusla areas.
- » Tusla has implemented the Meitheal National Early Intervention Practice Model nationwide and is implementing the Signs of Safety Practice Approach.

3. Tusla will ensure quality and consistency in commissioning practice:

Actions:

- » Tusla has developed, with the support of IPC and others, a **Toolkit** on Commissioning to disseminate learning on the Commissioning Planning approach. Workforce learning and development has developed a commissioning standardised briefing. This will support a learning and development plan for staff in close collaboration with the National Commissioning Unit, based on the Commissioning **Toolkit**.
- » The Commissioning Unit will monitor and assure the quality of commissioning practice across the country and will support, oversee and review all commissioning plans produced. The unit will support the development of fidelity monitoring frameworks to support the reviewing of commissioning plans.
- » The Commissioning Unit will establish business processes to ensure that commissioning plans will begin to influence the estimates process from 2019 onwards.

⁸ This high level prevention project is aimed at those children who are either on the edge of alternative care or currently in alternative care due to complex factors that may include neglect, parental separation, attachment issues, alcohol and /or drug misuse, mental health and economic disadvantage. Creative Community Alternatives (CCA) refers to a holistic service Alternative designed to meet the identified needs of children, young people, caregivers and siblings and to address a range of life areas through the team-based planning and implementation process, within the community. CCA also aims to develop the problem-solving skills, coping skills, and self-efficacy of the young people and family members. Finally, there is an emphasis on integrating the young person/child into the community and building the family's social support network.

4. Tusla will further develop data capacity to support children’s services planning and will advance the Tusla Outcomes for Children National Data and Information Hub⁹:

Actions:

- » Tusla will utilise various data sources such as but not restricted to Tusla Commissioning Portal, *Measuring the Pressure* reports; Performance and Activity Data; HIQA inspection reports; Child Care Law Review Reports; internal audits; Meitheal data; Gap analysis, *Tell us at Tusla* feedback and complaints, to aid needs assessment/asset mapping and support a strategic approach to commissioning.
- » Using the *Outcomes for Children, National Information and Data Hub Project* Tusla will develop a national standardised framework for mapping outcomes, indicators and services for children and young people based on the CYPSC geographical areas to underpin Tusla commissioning processes and all multi-agency children’s service planning. It is envisaged that through the development of this open platform and the related extensive training and capacity building provided by Tusla that the Tulsa area managers and children and young people’s services committees across the country will utilise the outputs from this system to optimally plan children services.

5. Tusla will explore and examine opportunities for integrated commissioning on a bi-lateral or multi-lateral basis with other statutory organisations and through the structure of Children and Young People’s Services Committees:

Actions:

- » Tusla will explore working opportunities in 2019 for integrated strategic commissioning with the HSE, to increase reach and access of parenting supports and learning opportunities in relation to the hidden harm to children and young people from parental drug and alcohol use, mental health problems and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.
- » Tusla, in its lead role with the CYPSC, will explore opportunities for integrated commissioning to develop new creative responses to service user needs. All Tulsa areas will explore joint commissioning opportunities via CYPSC in 2019.

⁹ Tusla and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) have embarked on a new project, Outcomes for Children, National Data and Information Hub. This project involves the building of an interactive area based geo mapping system to provide information for policy makers, service providers, Tusla management, practitioners, information managers and local communities so that planning and delivery of services are informed by the best available data.

6. Tusla will use the Resource Allocation Model to distribute national development funding to areas to promote equity of service availability and distribution nationally:

Actions:

- » Tusla's Finance department will utilise the Trutz Haase¹⁰ Resource Allocation Model (RAM), which uses an algorithm based on the Deprivation Index to weight various agreed criteria, to inform the allocation of total available development resources within Tusla. This tool will be utilised to address historic broad anomalies in equity of resource distribution between areas whilst retaining a focus on weighting towards disadvantaged areas. This approach will be augmented by needs analysis, asset mapping and shaping activities conducted through utilisation of commissioning plans and need identification and provision shaping as explained in the *Commissioning Toolkit* (2019).

7. Tusla will improve fidelity monitoring and governance frameworks:

Actions:

- » Tusla has set up a dedicated Commissioning Unit and appointed a Head of Commissioning to support national standardised and innovative practice in commissioning with specialist fidelity monitoring staff to support the implementation of Tusla's approach to commissioning.
- » Tusla will develop new templates for service development requirements and will utilise the *Commissioning Decision Support Tool* to standardise service approvals against agency priorities, evidence of *What Works?* and the continuum of care.
- » Tusla will apply these templates in monitoring the service contracts it has with the organisations it funds as well as to internal services and will monitor and review these regularly.
- » Fidelity monitoring processes will be further developed to track impact. The new commissioning approach will require all commissioners to develop effective tools to monitor fidelity; measure outputs using *Indicator Sets* and to track outcomes to establish the extent that commissioned services are achieving the agreed outcomes.

¹⁰ This is the model Tusla uses as the basis for resource allocation nationally across geographical areas.

8. Expanding innovative practice through co-creation of service solutions and practice models with other organisations and partners.

Actions:

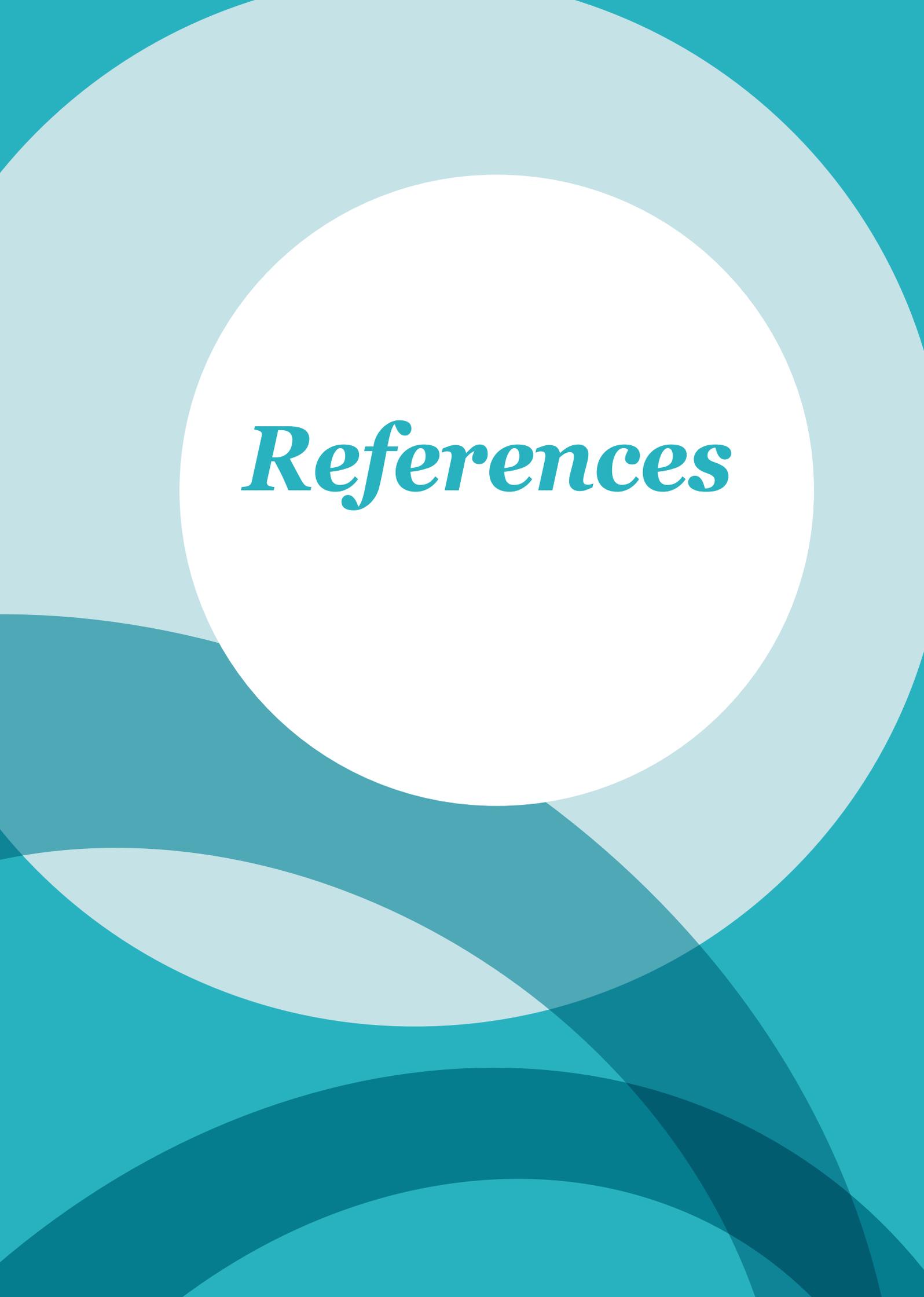
- » Tusla will explore innovative models of practice provided by the child and family services sector in Ireland and internationally by hosting showcase events for low, medium and high prevention, to explore and share learning on models of best practice. Current and potential providers from the community and voluntary, statutory and private sectors will be encouraged to participate.
- » Tusla will examine opportunities through European and philanthropic funding strands to develop and co-create innovative service solutions.
- » Tusla will work in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to build the capacity of the sector through targeted training and development. A partnership approach will be taken at all times, engaging all partners *and* respecting the unique role of community and voluntary organisations, including small scale providers.

3.2 Conclusion

This Commissioning Strategy has clearly outlined the intention of Tusla, as Ireland's national Child and Family Agency, to adopt a new approach to how resources are used to achieve outcomes for children, families and communities. A newly adopted definition, key principles and a commissioning cycle have been outlined. A series of clear actions have also been committed to, the implementation of which will be supported by the Commissioning **Toolkit**.

Overall this new approach will empower Tusla to work more effectively with all our partners to proactively and strategically manage the resources at its disposal. It will also allow Tusla to identify need and shape provision in communities rather than to simply react. It will also allow Tusla to appropriately influence how other Agencies utilise their resources and to leverage resources towards the common goal of creating and sustaining resilient children, families and communities.





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Note: The Commissioning Toolkit is available at <https://www.tusla.ie/about/commissioning/>



