



NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCILS

RESPONSE TO

**CONSULTATION ON A DRAFT STRATEGY FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTHERN
IRELAND**

February 2005

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICE COUNCILS' RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON A DRAFT STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 1** There are four Health & Social Services Councils in Northern Ireland covering each of the Health & Social Services Boards. The Councils were set up in 1991 to represent the interests of the public and users of health and social services. As part of co-ordinated approach to ensuring that the voice of people who use services is heard, the Councils work collaboratively to respond to consultation documents.
- 2** The Health & Social Services Councils have a remit to monitor the planning and delivery of health and social care services and to support any service user wishing to make a complaint about a service. In 2001, the Councils carried out a joint piece of research undertaken by Queen's University, Belfast, on children as complainants in the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland. A copy of the research report was sent to the Children and Young People's Unit.
- 3** The Councils agree with the vision set out in the document.
- 4** The Councils agree with the underpinning values but suggest that the second bullet point should refer to rights and responsibilities in relation to young people as citizens.
- 5** The Councils agree that the operational principles are comprehensive but query the reference to 'evidence based' in relation to the role of young people in assessing what an appropriate evidence base actually is.
- 6** A rights based, whole child perspective is helpful. What is not reflected in this approach is the reality that the nature of the child's family, community, financial circumstances, etc, may skew their experience of the factors affecting their development. Poverty and social exclusion may mean that the impact of recreation and retail or law on their lives differs from that of other children.
- 7** The Councils are concerned that the document appears to take a blank page approach to the development of strategic outcomes and objectives. What is needed is a strategy that can integrate already successful initiatives. A number of policy statements/legislation is currently in place and is being implemented regional and area

partnerships/networks. Councils would want to see young people and parents on the Strategy Review Panel as of right in addition to other appropriate mechanisms. Whilst the strategy refers to existing structures in 7.7, it may be helpful to be more explicit about this approach. It is important that the strategy should provide some recognition of what is already in place and how this will be enhanced. It is helpful that the different focus of the Area structures is noted in 7.7. These services operate along a continuum that allow children, young people and their families to access services in a non stigmatising way.

- 8** The Associated Indicators in the document do not appear to be SMART. It may be that individual targets will be firmed up at departmental level but a high level outcome target may provide a baseline to aim at and, where more than one department is involved, provide a shared approach.
- 9** A large number of outcomes and actions are set out in the document. To avoid creating unmanageable expectations particularly amongst young people, it may be preferable to have fewer actions with clear targets that departments, service providers, communities, families and children can be mobilised behind eg bullying, vandalism.
- 10** The Councils are concerned that in a tight financial climate as set out within the Draft Budget 2005-2008, developmental targets that have a cost implication may not be viable.
- 11** The draft actions under rights and equality appear to be adequate. The UNCRC has been in place for some years. Associated training has been available (particularly in the community and voluntary sector) for a similar period. If training still remains a priority, the impact and targeting of existing training should be properly evaluated to allow the impact of any further training to be maximised.
- 12** In relation to the involvement of young people, the outcomes and actions are agreeable. Much of this information will be available through existing partnerships/initiatives. What is important is to rigorously assess the outcomes of these mechanisms.
- 13** Outcomes and actions against the built and natural environment are agreeable. One important action that does not appear is the full

utilisation of school buildings. School buildings provide a valuable resource to communities. Arrangements should be put in place to allow schools to become more integrated within the community and make buildings available for childcare, play activities, family support services, etc. Demographic changes and the falling roll of many schools is also a factor.

- 14** In relation to Family and Community Support, the Councils are concerned that many of the outcomes and actions will be impractical unless adequate funding is made available. A considerable amount of information on family support is currently available at Area level. It is important that the strategy should support and integrate this rather than duplicate.
- 15** Research & Information would certainly benefit from a good practice guide and this would be a very useful outcome. In relation to a website, a large number of these already exist. More useful maybe a mechanism for rationalising the information available to parents and young people possibly through a portal.
- 16** Physical, mental and emotional well being - the strategic outcomes appear to be appropriate.
- 17** Protection - the strategic outcomes appear to be appropriate.
- 18** Whilst the strategic outcome and objective in relation to poverty is appropriate, the draft actions appear to be limited. Poverty is not simply about lack of money. Issues of access and social inclusion magnify the impact of lack of money and need to be reflected in the strategy's high level outcomes. A number of existing strategies such as 'Children First' have a major impact on poverty. It would be important for the document to set out how there will be a more 'joined-up' approach to anti-poverty initiatives.
- 19** The additional cross cutting themes could fit within the existing strategic outcomes and objectives. To set them in a separate section gives the potential to see them as 'add-ons'.
- 20** Given the nature of the Councils work it would be appropriate to list the Councils under 7.6 External Monitoring Mechanisms.