



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Consultation response to the NICCY Draft Corporate Plan 2008 - 2011
Date:	7 March 2008
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### **Relevant Background Information**

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People role is defined in the legislation setting up the Office – The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The Commissioner’s principal aim is described in the legislation as “to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons”. The Commissioner has to report to the Assembly and Parliament about his work and how the budget is spent. The Commissioner has three main responsibilities:

Promoting children’s rights: The Commissioner is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Complaints and legal action: The Commissioner can deal with individual complaints from children and young people, or their parents/guardians about any government service that impacts on those under 18, and those with a disability, and those leaving care, up to the age of 21.

Research and inquiries: The Commissioner wants the Office to base all its work on helping children and young people on thorough research.

The Commissioner aims to be more focused on strategic work that will help children and young people which is the purpose of this draft corporate plan that sets out the vision for the years 2008 -2011.

## Key Issues

The draft corporate plan identifies five main priority and action areas:

- 1) Play and leisure which is about children and young people having places to go and things to do:
  - Safe places
  - Affordable activity
  - Accessible activity
  - Age
- 2) Having your say which is about children and young people having a say about important decisions in their lives:
  - More of a say for children and young people
  - Being heard and making a difference
  - Marginalised voices sought and heard
  - Making policy a reality
- 3) Wellbeing and mental health protection which is about the service children and young people receive to help their physical, emotional and mental health:
  - Getting the right mental health services
  - Improving wellbeing
  - Acceptance and understanding
  - Social inclusion
- 4) Equal treatment is about making sure that children and young people are treated fairly:
  - Discrimination
  - Equal access to appropriate services
  - Stereotyping
  - And Government keeping its promises
- 5) Protection is about making sure that children and young people are protected from risks:
  - Child abuse
  - Road safety
  - Community safety
  - Bullying

The attached **Appendix 1** is a copy of the response outlining that the Belfast City Council in general welcomes the proposal, but some specific comments are expressed.

## Recommendations

Members are asked to note the content of the attached consultation response.

## Documents Attached

**Appendix 1** - Consultation response – NICCY Draft Corporate Plan 2008 -2011.

# APPENDIX 1

## Response to NICCY Draft Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011

### 1. Introduction

1.1 Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation of the NICCY draft corporate plan. As a key priority the council has identified the need to improve services for children and young people.

1.2 In addition to our response to this document we have distributed voting cards amongst the members of our Youth Forum and play centre after school clubs to enable the children and young people who use our services to give their comments.

1.3 The council recognises that all areas identified within the corporate plan are essential to the overall well being and development of children and young people.

Considering the specific areas of the draft plan we would suggest the following:

### 2. Play & Leisure

2.1 Accessible play is crucial in enabling all children and young people access to play and leisure facilities close to where they live. This must be appropriate to their needs, including children and young people up to the age of 18.

2.2 Play must not only be accessible in terms of walking distance but be part of the community planning process. There can still be the perception that children should be seen but not heard and play areas (if any are provided) are built on the peripheral of the community. This not only isolates children but also poses safety issues. When play areas are in the heart of the community adults can keep an eye on what is happening thereby creating a feeling of belonging to the community and a safe place to live. The facilities should also be accessible not only in location but affordability and provide a range of activities to challenge different age groups.

2.3 The council feels that NICCY draft The main priority though which has not been mentioned in your options is to ensure that the NI Play Policy is not only published but becomes a reality. It is essential that the document leads to actions that will enable children and young people the right to 'engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child' as enshrined by **Article 31** of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

### 3. Having Your Say

3.1 Consultation with children and young people is gradually being undertaken. However feedback is often not provided as to how their input has been incorporated or the reasons it has not been possible. All consultations need to be meaningful and undertaken for the right reasons.

3.2 To ensure that the voices of children and young people have the most impact we must prioritise the need to make policy a reality through ensuring that government and public bodies are involved and listen to children and young people when making

laws and policies about them. Only then we will embed the culture of involving children and young people in the decision making process in our society.

3.3 Mechanisms need to be developed to enable government to listen to different needs of children and young people. This needs to include organised structures, possibly including the establishment of a NI Youth Assembly. Additionally, the council feels that all local government authorities should have a shadow youth council. Technology can be utilised to help reach children and young people who are marginalised and hard to reach, for example SMS text, e-mail and the internet.

#### **4. Wellbeing and Mental health**

4.1 Mental health is an increasingly major issue for children and young people who face a dearth of play facilities and trained professionals. The age of children committing suicide is getting younger. There has also been an increase in the numbers of children and young people self-harming and committing suicide.

4.2 NICCY needs to ensure services are provided for all children and young people who require support from the health service and this must include prevention programmes aimed at the overall well being of children and young people.

4.3 There is still the belief within our society that children and young people are not susceptible to conditions such as depression and that their illness is just part of growing up. Again there must be recognition and resources dedicated to supporting our children and young people.

4.4 The council advocates that the first priority NICCY needs to concentrate on is improving the well being of children and young people through ensuring that they have the opportunity to develop, be supported and acquire the skills to help them grow as people and cope when times are difficult.

#### **5. Protection**

5.1 Community safety is central to this area, as it enables children and young people to live, play and grow in a safe community. This includes a range of issues from children being safe when they cross roads, to preventing threats such as bullying, others harming them, adult abuse and not as commonly recognised - peer abuse.

5.2 Community safety must address these issues through providing programmes aimed at preventative work that seeks to develop children and young people as individuals and as part of the community.

5.3 Community safety must not be seen as 'policing' the neighbourhoods, for example tackling anti-social behaviour through measures such as ASBOs. We must look more at the causes of anti-social behaviour and look at programmes that can positively support children and young people.

#### **6. Equal Treatment**

6.1. Children have the right to be protected and to be encouraged to develop. This must be done in an atmosphere where they do not face discrimination or stereotyping and have equal access to appropriate services.

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