



northern ireland commissioner  
for children and young people

# **Draft Corporate Plan 2011 – 14 and Consultation October 2010**



The Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) is currently preparing a Corporate Plan for 2011 – 14 and as part of this process, we have developed this draft Corporate Plan for consultation.

We are keen to hear from you and have your views on this plan and would ask that you consider this and feed back your views. We are particularly keen to hear from children and young people and have developed a downloadable package which includes a facilitators' guide and associated resources to enable children and young people to feedback to the Commissioner. Further details can be found on our website [www.niccy.org/consultation](http://www.niccy.org/consultation)

Please use the 'Response pages' (found on pages 18 - 23) to make your responses and send to NICCY, Millennium House, 17-25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7BA or by email to [siobhan@niccy.org](mailto:siobhan@niccy.org).

Responses can also be made online on our website [www.niccy.org/consultation](http://www.niccy.org/consultation)

The deadline for receipt of consultation responses is **Friday 7 January 2011**.

We look forward to hearing your views.

**Please contact the Communications team  
([communications@niccy.org](mailto:communications@niccy.org)) at NICCY if you require  
alternative formats of this material.**



## **MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER**

This Corporate Plan for the period 2011 – 14 is a framework document which will guide NICCY's work for the next three years. It builds on the successes of NICCY to date and the corporate objectives are designed to achieve real and measurable success in delivering outcomes for our children and young people.

This plan outlines the broad direction our work will take over the next three years, and is written both to provide focus as well as to allow NICCY to be flexible, dynamic and responsive to emerging issues. The plan will also shape the annual business plans throughout the 2011 – 14 period, in which we will plan in more detail the actions we will take to deliver on our objectives.

The previous Corporate Plan for 2008 – 11 highlighted 5 key priority areas that we focussed upon over this period. This Corporate Plan will link more closely to the legislative remit of my office and specifically, my duties and powers as enshrined within the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

In practice much of our work requires us to be responsive to the work of the Northern Ireland Executive and Departments. While an aspect of NICCY's work must remain proactive, allowing us to investigate issues as we determine, much of our work involves the scrutiny of how government is delivering for children and, as such, must be reactive to political developments.

Over the next three years, we will focus our powers and duties on improving and making children and young people's lives better with the resources available to us. We will work towards ensuring that the rights children and young people have, as contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), are realised and respected.

It is clear that the context in which we will be working over the next three years will be challenging, not least due to the economic recession. There will be many threats to services, and too often children's services can be the easiest to cut. Now more than ever it is important that there is a strong voice for children, who will hold government to account on how it delivers for children. I am committed to being that strong voice and to using our resources effectively to champion children's rights and best interests with government.



NICCY will strategically focus the work outlined in this plan within the resources with which we are provided. As we develop our annual business plans, we will identify the areas that we will work on according to the following criteria:

- Where there are significant political developments – new policy proposals and draft legislation that will have a significant impact on the rights and/or best interests of children in Northern Ireland;
- Where we have evidence of significant violations of children’s rights, particularly in relation to groups of marginalised and vulnerable children; and
- Where structures and mechanisms are not in place to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard.

In determining these priorities each year for the business plan we will take account of the views of children and young people, as well as other individuals and organisations. We will also consider what other agencies are working on and ensure that we are adding value.

I remain committed to working with those public policy makers and others in the voluntary and community sectors to ensure that children and young people can be happy, valued and respected in society.

This document is the beginning of a fourteen week consultation period on our draft Corporate Plan. The closing date for comments is **Friday 7 January 2011**.

The draft Corporate Plan will be revised in light of this consultation and shall be submitted to our sponsor Department, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, for approval in the New Year.

I look forward to hearing your views.



Patricia Lewsley  
Commissioner for Children and Young People  
4 October 2010



## **WHO WE ARE**

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland (NICCY) was established under the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (hereafter 'the 2003 Order').

The Commissioner was established in recognition that, among the new devolved political structures, there needed to be both structures to coordinate delivery for children across government as well as an oversight body, able to hold the devolved government to account in its delivery for children.

In 2002 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child had produced a General Comment on the role of Independent Human Rights Institutions for children, noting that it 'considers the establishment of such bodies to fall within the commitment made by States parties upon ratification to ensure the implementation of the Convention and advance the universal realisation of children's rights'.

A number of NGOs formed an alliance, 'Putting Children First', which lobbied political parties to support the establishment of a Children's Commissioner, and a subsequent private members bill received broad support across the Assembly.

NICCY was established as an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Commissioner's full designated powers took effect from 1 October 2003. Commissioners with similar roles have also been established in England, Scotland and Wales, whilst an Ombudsman for Children exists in the Republic of Ireland.

The Commissioner is Patricia Lewsley, and she is guided in her work by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). She is supported by a Senior Management Team (SMT). This team is comprised of the Commissioner, Chief Executive, Head of Communications and Participation, Head of Legal and Casework and Head of Policy and Research. The Commissioner is also supported by a NICCY Youth Panel (NYP) made up of young people who share and contribute their experiences and thoughts to the organisation in order to help NICCY make decisions about issues that affect children and young people in Northern Ireland.



## **AIM**

Article 6(1) of the 2003 Order established the Commissioner's principal aim as:

**“To safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons”.**

## **STATUTORY DUTIES AND POWERS OF THE COMMISSIONER**

### **Article 7 of the 2003 Order outlines the duties of the Commissioner as:**

- To promote an awareness and understanding of the rights and best interests of children and young persons.
- To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the rights and welfare of children and young persons.
- To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for children and young persons by relevant authorities.
- To advise government and relevant authorities on matters concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons.
- To communicate effectively with children and young persons and their parents and raise awareness of the function and location of the Commissioner and how they can contact her.
- To seek the views of children and young persons in exercising her functions.

### **Articles 8-15 outline the Commissioner's general powers where she can:**

- Undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for, research or educational activities concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons or the exercise of her functions.
- Issue guidance in relation to any matter concerning the rights or best interests of children or young persons.
- Conduct investigations as she considers necessary or expedient to meet her duties listed above.
- Compile information, provide advice and publish any matter (including research, educational activities, investigations and advice) concerning the rights and best interests of children and young persons.
- Make representations or recommendations to any body or person relating to the rights and best interests of children and young persons.
- Assist with complaints to relevant authorities.
- Bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings.



## **VISION**

Our vision is for a society in Northern Ireland where all children and young people flourish, are valued and their views are respected.

## **MISSION**

To safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people.

## **VALUES**

All of our work is underpinned by a number of core values. We use these in our day to day work and we seek outcomes based on the fulfilment of these values.

They are:

Child centred -	Children are at the centre of all we do and we will encourage and value their participation.
Rights focused –	Our work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
Independent -	We will challenge Government and relevant authorities and hold them to account.
Dynamic -	We are a forward thinking organisation, innovative and open to change.
Transparent -	We are open, honest, accountable and responsive in all our work.
Collaborative -	We will work together with others, while maintaining our independence, to deliver more effectively for children.
Enabling -	We will work to build support and capacity to help children, young people and others to act and promote children’s rights.



**Discussion:**

Our vision outlines the long term aspirations of the office, the ultimate goal towards which we are working. The mission reflects our specific role in delivering on the vision, and replicates our aim as laid out in the 2003 Order.

**Questions:**

**(NB. This is for reference only – please use response pages on page 18 for your actual responses)**

**Q1.** Do you broadly agree with our vision, mission and values? Please provide details of any changes you would suggest.





## **THE CONTEXT IN WHICH NICCY OPERATES**

### **A. Legislative and policy context**

NICCY was established on 1 October 2003 under the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. NICCY's detailed powers and duties are set out in this legislation. The Commissioner is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), an international agreement setting out how children should be treated and the rights that they have. The Commissioner's duties and powers may be grouped under 3 main areas as follows:

- Promoting children's rights – In promoting children's rights the Commissioner must communicate effectively with children and young people, and their parents, and must raise awareness of her function, location of her office and how she can be contacted. She is also required to seek the views of children and young people in her work.
- Advising Government on children's rights and best interests - both in response to requests from Government and proactively as the Commissioner determines. The Commissioner will base all her work on thorough research and evidence. The Commissioner has the power to undertake general inquiries, research or investigations into issues where she believes children and young people are being adversely affected.
- Supporting children's complaints and legal action – the Commissioner can deal with individual complaints from children and young people, or their parents/guardians about any services from relevant authorities that impact on those under 18 years of age(or under the age of 21 for those with a disability or leaving care); and

### **B. Political and Administrative**

We anticipate that this Corporate Plan will be delivered in a period of considerable political and administrative change.

The forthcoming elections to the NI Assembly in May 2011 will result in a new Northern Ireland Executive. Any new directions established by Ministers will need to be incorporated into NICCY's business planning processes to ensure that NICCY maintains its role of monitoring Government's actions and commitments to children and young people. In addition, NICCY will take cognisance of the local government elections, which also take place in 2011



The outcomes of the review of administrative arrangements for Northern Ireland including education and local councils, which have faced delays, will also have a bearing on our work.

NICCY continues to advise the Northern Ireland Executive and NI Assembly to promote the rights and best interests of children and young people and to ensure that any legislative and/or policy changes do not lead to children and young people being disadvantaged.

NICCY's relationship with individual Committees of the NI Assembly is ongoing and positive. We aim to maintain a high level of mutual understanding in relation to the key issues that affect children and young people.

We will continue to build on the excellent working relationships that we have with our fellow Commissioners and Ombudsman in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Together, we constitute the British and Irish Network of Ombudsman and Children's Commissioners (BINOCC). In addition, we will continue to play a leading role as a member of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

NICCY will build on the positive working relationship with the children's organisations within the non-government sector (NGO) and will work closely with other statutory organisations in the public sector, particularly the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) with whom we have a shared services arrangement for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services and support. We will also continue to seek opportunities with other organisations to share services in order to reduce cost and maximise service resilience (for example with the Older People's Advocate Office, with whom we share office accommodation and some shared facilities).

NICCY continues to develop and review Memoranda of Understanding with statutory, inspectoral and monitoring bodies. We will continue to undertake shared work on matters of mutual interest with a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations.

### **C. Economic and Social Context**

Social exclusion arising from sectarianism, racism, homophobia, and discrimination against those with a disability, remain significant factors in children's and young people's lives in Northern Ireland. Our 2009 Children's Rights Review outlined that, while many children in Northern Ireland have a positive experience of growing up, for too many the experience is considerably different. We want to ensure that a consistent



and co-ordinated effort is made across the statutory, public, voluntary and private sectors to improve the lives and well-being of children and young people.

We are concerned at the demonising and negative stereotyping of children and young people in Northern Ireland, and at the way too often children's views are not sought, or not considered. We are also aware of the limited support for children's rights within society and are committed to working to explain their importance and how a rights based approach can deliver effectively for children and society.

Plans to reduce public sector expenditure will undoubtedly have an effect on frontline children's services. This will require NICCY to monitor very closely how the potential impact of these cuts affect individual children, groups of children and their families. We will particularly seek to ensure that provision to the most vulnerable groups of children in Northern Ireland is protected.

NICCY will continue to advise and where appropriate, challenge government and other statutory organisations when policy, legislation and services are ineffective or inadequate.

## **D. Finance**

There are a number of financial considerations to be taken into account which will impact upon how much progress we will be able to make in taking forward the corporate objectives as set out in this corporate plan 2011-14. The United Kingdom economy has faced severe economic pressures which have, in turn, had an impact upon public expenditure in Northern Ireland. This is likely to have consequent implications for the resources that we receive from Government. NICCY will be required to make efficiency savings in line with the targets which will be set out in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period.

Currently, we receive in the region of £1.7 million in grant-in-aid from OFMDFM. The current staffing structure comprises 28 full time staff including the Commissioner. We will continue to work closely with OFMDFM to ensure that the level of resources is fit for purpose and enables us to deliver on our objectives as outlined in this Corporate Plan.

NICCY remains committed to being accountable for, and demonstrating value for money, in our work on behalf of all children and young people in Northern Ireland. We will coordinate our activities with other agencies to prevent duplication.



We have consolidated and strengthened our governance processes and structures in line with best practice and will ensure that we maximise our limited resources over the period of this plan in pursuit of our corporate and business objectives.

## **E. Review of the Commissioner**

OFMDFM is required, as detailed within NICCY's management statement and financial memorandum, to commission a comprehensive review of the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland every three years. The current review commenced in 2010 and its main purpose is to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of NICCY's operations and to examine the delivery and validity of its functions in relation to Government policy objectives.

At the time of this Corporate Plan going out to consultation, NICCY is in the process of reviewing its response to the findings within the draft report.

### **Questions:**

**(NB. This is for reference only – please use response pages on page 18 for your actual responses)**

**Q2.** Do you broadly agree with our analysis of the external factors affecting our Corporate Plan? Please provide details of any other factors we should take into account.



## OUR KEY ASSUMPTIONS

NICCY has developed this plan and its corporate objectives based on the following key assumptions:

1. We will continue to receive the political commitment to carry out the functions of the Commissioner for Children and Young People by the Northern Ireland Assembly.
2. Recognising the difficult economic situation in the UK at present, we will receive adequate financial support through the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to effectively deliver on this Corporate Plan and acknowledge that we will be required to deliver greater efficiencies over the period of this plan.
3. We recognise that over the period of this plan, without the full implementation of the UNCRC into domestic legislation, there will be a continued need to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people.

### **Questions:**

**(NB. This is for reference only – please use response pages on page 18 for your actual responses)**

**Q3.** Do you broadly agree with our key assumptions? What other assumptions could be made in developing this Corporate Plan?



## **CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

These objectives have been developed from our statutory duties as contained within the legislation that established the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland.

### **Objective 1: Promote a better understanding of children's rights**

We will do this through:

- Promote an understanding of children's rights to children and young people, r parents, carers and our stakeholders
- Raising awareness of the UNCRC through education, facilitation and training
- Developing resources to enable a better understanding of children's rights

### **Objective 2: Review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services relating to children and young people**

We will do this through:

- Conducting or commissioning research, consultations and/or investigations
- Intervening in legal cases
- Taking or funding legal proceedings as appropriate
- Dealing with complaints regarding relevant authorities

### **Objective 3: Advise Government and relevant authorities on the rights and best interests of children and young people**

We will do this through:

- Producing reports to Government on matters affecting children and young people
- Providing responses to Government consultations in areas that impact upon children and young people
- Presenting evidence to NI Assembly Committees
- Promoting children and young people's participation in decision-making



**Objective 4: Communicate the functions of the Commissioner among children, their parents or carers and our stakeholders**

We will do this through:

- Developing effective and innovative ways to communicate with children, their parents or carers and our stakeholders
- Providing advice and information

**Objective 5: Ascertain the views of children and young people in relation to issues which affect their lives**

We will do this through:

- Seeking the views of children in gathering information on issues affecting them and in formulating advice to government
- Developing creative and accessible mechanisms to ensure children and young people can contact the Commissioner

**Objective 6: Maintain and further develop effective governance arrangements in line with best practice to maximise efficient, effective and economical use of our resources**

We will do this through

- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of our work
- Reviewing and revising key organisational strategies (Human Resources, Financial, and Accommodation).
- Producing annual business plans throughout the 2011 -14 period
- Maintaining and further developing other organisational strategies and policies that support the achievement of our corporate objectives



## Discussion:

In previous years, NICCY's objectives focussed on specific issues affecting children's lives in Northern Ireland. The first Corporate Plan listed 15 priorities and, in an attempt to provide more focus to our work, we identified five priority areas for our work in 2008-11.

In this Corporate Plan NICCY is taking a different approach by linking more closely to the legislative remit of the office and specifically, the Commissioner's duties and powers as enshrined within the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. This will ensure that all of our work is focussed on meeting our duties and will enable us to communicate clearly our remit and how we are delivering on it to stakeholders.

In practice much of our work requires us to be responsive to the work of the Northern Ireland Executive and Departments. While an aspect of NICCY's work must remain proactive, allowing us to investigate issues as we determine, much of our work involves the scrutiny of how government is delivering for children and, as such, must be reactive to political developments.

NICCY will strategically focus our work within the resources we are provided with. As we develop our annual Business Plans, we will identify the areas that we will work on according to the following criteria:

- Where there are significant political developments – new policy proposals and draft legislation that will have a significant impact on the rights and/or best interests of children in Northern Ireland;
- Where we have evidence of significant violations of children's rights, particularly in relation to groups of marginalised and vulnerable children; and
- Where structures and mechanisms are not in place to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard.

In determining these priorities each year for the business plan we will take account of the views of children and young people, as well as other individuals and organisations. We will also consider what other agencies are working on the issues and ensure that we are adding value, rather than duplicating the work of other agencies.





**Questions:**

**(NB. This is for reference only – please use response pages on page 18 for your actual responses)**

**Q4.** Do you broadly agree with the approach that NICCY has taken, in aligning our Corporate Objectives with our statutory duties? What changes, if any, would you suggest to the Objectives?

**Q5.** Do you consider the general activities listed after each objective to be appropriate ways for NICCY to deliver on its objectives? What other things could NICCY do to deliver on these objectives?

**Q6.** What issues do you think NICCY should work on during this Corporate Plan period?



## **RESPONDING TO THIS CONSULTATION**

We would welcome any comments on our draft Corporate Plan, and will take these into account when finalising this document. We have devised a number of questions, and where possible, we would encourage you to structure your feedback around these questions. This will allow us to consider the range of opinions together and make appropriate changes to our Corporate Plan. However, we are aware that individuals or organisations may wish to make comments on the document that go beyond the questions asked, and we will take into account all comments.

We are also keen to hear from children and young people and have developed a downloadable young person's package which includes a facilitators' guide and associated resources to enable children and young people to feedback to the Commissioner. Further details can be found on our website [www.niccy.org/consultation](http://www.niccy.org/consultation).

It would be helpful if you would provide information as to your role in responding to the consultation – as an individual (parent, child, professional etc) or on behalf of an organisation.

The deadline for responses to this consultation is **Friday 7 January 2011**. Please send submissions to NICCY, Millennium House, 17 - 25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7BA or by email to [siobhan@niccy.org](mailto:siobhan@niccy.org). You can also provide feedback on the questions through an online form at [www.niccy.org/consultation](http://www.niccy.org/consultation)



## **Response pages**

**Q1. Do you broadly agree with our vision, mission and values? Yes / No**

**Please provide details of any changes you would suggest.**

**Q2. Do you broadly agree with our analysis of the external factors affecting our Corporate Planning 2011-14? Yes / No**

**Please provide details of any other factors we should take into account.**



**Q3. Do you broadly agree with our key assumptions?** Yes / No

**What other assumptions could be made in developing this Corporate Plan?**

**Q4. Do you broadly agree with the approach that NICCY has taken, in aligning our Corporate Objectives with our statutory duties?** Yes / No

**What changes, if any, would you suggest to the Objectives?**



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**What other things could NICCY do to deliver on these objectives?**

**Q6. What issues do you think NICCY should work on during this Corporate Plan period?**



## INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

We need to ask for some information about you and/or your organisation to allow us to assess the range of respondents when analysing submissions.

At the end of the consultation we shall publish a paper summarising the outcomes of the consultation. Information you provide in your response to this consultation, including your name, may be included in this document, or published or disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

If you would prefer your name to be treated as confidential, please tell us, and we will not use it in our feedback document. However, you should be aware that, under the FOIA, we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

### PLEASE COMPLETE:

I am responding as an individual.

Please provide your name \_\_\_\_\_

- If you are a child or young person, please tell us what age you are: \_\_\_\_\_
- If you are an adult, please indicate in what capacity you are completing this response: ie as a parent / professional / other \_\_\_\_\_

I am responding on behalf of an organisation.

Please provide the name of your organisation \_\_\_\_\_

**ALL TO COMPLETE:** Contact details (either postal or email address):

We will not publish your contact details – these will be used solely to feed back to you on the outcomes of the consultation.

Do not use my name in relation to consultation feedback documents

