

Belfast City Council Corporate Response

Consultation on Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People Strategy

March 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Belfast City Council (BCC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the OFMDFM's consultation on the draft Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People Strategy document.
- 1.2. The Council welcomes the general desire and direction to provide a clear focus on child poverty and improving children's lives as well as the attempt to integrate a joined up approach across the Executive departments.
- 1.3. This response reflects BCC's desire to work in partnership at every opportunity and to integrate resources in order to ensure effective and collaborative delivery across Belfast for children and young people (CYP). With this in mind there are areas where greater detail is welcomed to provide further clarity and inform how best Council can become involved.
- 1.4. BCC has existing work streams and an agreed position and vision for children and young people and tackling poverty and disadvantage. Collaboration is welcomed between central and local government to ensure the work is integrated and shown to make a measurable difference. Some of the key areas of work currently influencing the shape of the DSC CYP document include:
 - Children and Young People are a corporate priority and an outcomes framework is being embedded in the development of the council's CYP services, refining implementation for transition through local government reform (LGR) and transformation corporately towards community planning in 2017. In so doing, the council's approach is aligned with the global and regional direction for promoting the rights of the child;
 - The Investment Programme for Belfast sets out BCC's commitment to deliver for the city, through a prospectus for partnership, to help its citizens realise their potential and focus on reducing inequalities and tackling disadvantage;
 - As part of the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge which focused on the issue of persistent deprivation and poverty, BCC is committed to creating a collaborative environment (and management system) with clear accountability and leadership to implement an evidence-based decision-making model;
 - BCC is an active partner in addressing poverty and disadvantage through the Belfast Strategic Partnership and the delivery of the Framework for Tackling Life Inequalities. The Council is a key partner in the development of an action plan to tackle health inequalities and promote an active Belfast;
 - BCC recognises that a strategic and inclusive approach is essential to maximise the level of impact and resources required to tackle elements of poverty. This was endorsed at a Civic Forum on Poverty hosted by The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir in January 2014. Key themes discussed included: employment & jobs, fuel poverty, food poverty and finance. The feedback from this event is currently being analysed to inform the way forward and provides the opportunity to revisit the Council's existing Framework on Tackling Poverty and Social Inequalities.
 - As part of its Leisure Transformation Programme, BCC is committed to investing £105 million over the next ten years, to transform the leisure centres across the city to ensure that they are modern fit for purpose, attractive and welcoming. The transformation programme marks the biggest change to the council's leisure provision since the 1970s and is a unique opportunity to provide services that will help drive health, social and economic outcomes for the city. The Leisure Transformation Programme will therefore contribute

greatly to the strategy's third outcome, 'Children and families thrive and have a healthy future' and further collaboration is welcomed in this area.

- BCC is the key delivery agent within the Together; Building a United Community strategy where an Action Plan for 2014-15 is in development;
- BCC is the lead partner with Policing and Community Safety Partnerships for a safer city;
- Member led local area working has been implemented within BCC in the last year and focuses on collaborative working to address all issues, primarily in areas of disadvantage and deprivation.

2. Vision and outcomes

- 2.1. The draft Strategy proposes a new vision which is "*That all children have the support and nurturing required to allow them to have a healthy, safe and active childhood and have access to quality education, which will provide them with the skills to gain employment to gain employment and fulfil their potential as active engaged citizens*". BCC recommends a reference to the rights of the child is included in the vision (this is already in the 10 year pledge). This is a fundamental tenet in the BCC's approach to support children and young people in Belfast.
- 2.2. Council is a fully committed member of the current Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) Belfast Outcomes Group set up to deliver on 'Our children Our People Our Pledge 10 year strategy for children' (2006-16) and its 6 regionally agreed children and young people outcomes. We welcome further detail on the future status and governance hierarchy on this.
- 2.3. Given the broad remit proposed we welcome clarification on the level of accountability, roles and responsibilities and level of capacity being resourced to support the roll out of the approach across 11 new council districts in order to develop local government ownership of the outcomes and approach.
- 2.4. BCC generally welcomes the outcomes in the document which can be traced back to the 6 regional outcomes in the CYPSP 10 year strategy however would note there is no hierarchy and some of the proposed outcomes suggest targeted benefit for all (Children and families thrive and have a healthy future) whilst others target those most in need (Children in poverty achieve good educational outcomes).
- 2.5. A focus on family is welcomed however further detail is sought to fully understand the implications of this on successfully delivering on the outcome of 'Families have adequate income and work that pays' and 'children and families thrive and have a healthy future as well as 'children and families live in a safe and secure environment'. Council's role is essential in understanding and interpreting that in Belfast.

3. Report on progress

- 3.1. The feedback on performance progress on child poverty identifies that absolute poverty continues to increase in spite of the interventions listed to date. BCC welcomes the opportunity for further involvement for greater alignment of efforts in Belfast to make a measurable difference.
- 3.2. BCC agrees completely on closing the gap it is unclear however where the link is those children that 'do better' to continue to be supported on their life course. This is relevant even to understand it as a contributory factor to the gap in the first place and greater analysis is encouraged in this area.

- 3.3. The level of comment on the range of other strategies and initiatives linked to children and young people in this section seems imbalanced in comparison to the wealth of impact this document will have on them.
- 3.4. Child Poverty Outcomes Framework: BCC broadly welcomes the focused approach for a child poverty outcomes framework and further involvement in its practical implementation at a local level.
- 3.5. Play and leisure plan: BCC welcomes the investment in the Delivering Social Change 7th signature projects and hopes to influence its impact on the city. It has a clearly defined mandate both through its play and leisure service to do so and seeks an update on the current position on £1.6 million resources attached to it for the region to influence and inform its delivery in Belfast to meet the needs most closely.
- 3.6. United Youth: Through its CYP Unit, BCC has been involved in the scoping of the United Youth Programme and is aware of the development of family support hubs. Further involvement is welcomed in shaping these initiatives for local implementation.
- 3.7. Together: Building a United Community Strategy: BCC has a lead role in the delivery of this strategy and its plan incorporates a series of targets relating to CYP. This and the various other CYP strategies would benefit from all being illustrated in the actions to reflect the new outcomes address all these cross departmental needs.
- 3.8. Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge, a ten year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006 - 2016: BCC is currently and actively represented in the DHSSPS Belfast Outcomes Group and was embedding the 6 regional outcomes in its standard business. Throughout the response comment is made on the need for more information and involvement in understanding the future governance, accountability and resourcing arrangements in this strategy and the proposed one.
- 3.9. United Nations convention on the rights of the child: The first right under the convention is that children and young people have rights and throughout the response Council reflects on the need for full involvement in this process by children and young people and also the need to revisit the proposed vision to fully capture this fundamental right.
- 3.10. Child rights indicator report: The UK was asked to submit a report on how they are implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As part of the NI report, the OFDFM were seeking opinions from children in disadvantaged areas and from ethnic backgrounds. The Council's play service facilitated opportunities for children to be part of this and welcomes an integrated approach to developing children's voices in this exercise.

4. A proposed way forward using an outcomes based approach

- 4.1. There is reference within the Strategy document that data used within baseline is not directly comparable. A cautious approach to changing outcomes and measurement tools is therefore encouraged. Furthermore it is recommended the existing CYPSP outcomes model is exhausted to ensure learning is fully captured in the transition.
- 4.2. An Outcomes approach is welcomed in principle however further involvement and information on whether or not the model meets the needs of **all** children and young people is recommended. For example, there is no detail as to how the strategy will successfully deliver the key actions for those groups or communities in greatest need, in particular children and young people from the traveller community or young people with disabilities etc. A robust equality screening of the strategy should raise some issues as to how the outcomes and derived key actions would affect such communities.

- 4.3. There is a need to identify how and where the region and city's social historical position is applied as a contributory factor in the scorecard to ensure effective collaborative action to successfully 'turn the curve'.
- 4.4. Health equity is an area of growing interest for BCC and its partners in the Belfast Strategic Partnership. It would be useful to explore issues like good nutrition as contributory factors on the scorecard and the need to link it to play and leisure, summer camps and confidence initiatives named in the actions of the scorecard or to all the signature programmes.
- 4.5. There is a need for the outcomes model to reflect the nature of households and families, including the role of grandparents within children's lives and impact on the perception or relative poverty a child experiences.
- 4.6. There is also an opportunity to explore indicators associated with physical activity levels and the rights of the child.

5. Service delivery and the approach

- 5.1. It is unclear how the strategy can practically be implemented into mainstream service delivery and the impact and resources involved. There is a heavy referencing of signature projects and other DSC initiatives which does not illustrate how planning or accountability of all partners will be achieved.
- 5.2. Whilst the proposed outcome model is welcomed there is a need to test how the framework is effective in service delivery and how simple the reporting and recording of evidence can be for practitioners delivering the service.

6. Governance, Monitoring and Reporting

- 6.1. Successful implementation of the strategy, particularly in the context of partnership working, will depend on effective leadership and clear lines of accountability. It is less clear how the existing DSC governance structures that will coordinate, monitor and oversee the strategy will also provide the necessary accountability with government departments and other delivery partners.
- 6.2. With the broad remit proposed and changing nature of the focus on children and young people outcomes in the document, clarification is sought on accountability and responsibilities it brings, the level of capacity to roll out the outcomes approach in the 11 new council districts and develop the local government ownership which is a key principle with the outcomes model.

7. Integrated Data Management

- 7.1. BCC would welcome clear guidance on how partners should effectively capture, record and report the data to measure differences and performance at both a population and project level. A "data dictionary" would enable all delivery partners to ensure that information is collected in a consistent fashion.
- 7.2. Further commitment is encouraged on sharing data and making it publicly available and disaggregated down to a local government district level (LGD2014). BCC is working with OFMDFM on the development of a shared common metric around wellbeing which may be appropriate to be adopted as part of the strategy.

- 7.3. The council appreciates being acknowledged as a partner, however to meet the principles of outcomes based accountability (OBA), partners must take ownership of outcomes and indicators and further information on how this capacity will be invested in, trained and built is requested (along with the timeframe involved).
- 7.4. Further input into the scorecard is welcomed to ensure it is holistic in terms of summarising the contributory factors and implications are integrated as well as refining who is responsible and developing it as a functional tool for front line use. This would facilitate the strategy's commitment to sharing data and making it publicly available.
- 7.5. The data collection process for identifying and measuring population indicators has been outlined, however there is little detail on the processes and support required to allow delivery partners such as the council to monitor project performance and contribution (and share the data).

8. Collaborative working

- 8.1. The Council welcomes every opportunity to work collaboratively and its desire to work in partnership and integrate resources to ensure effective and collaborative delivery across Belfast is captured in its corporate plan and Investment programme in order to move towards its community plan by 2017. The strategy document presents an opportunity to redesign how we work, to break through silos, to integrate our collective energy and resources, and to create a new collaborative partnership between central and local government.

9. Capacity building

- 9.1. Further detail is required on the level of capacity required to deliver this approach especially if it is in every walk of life for a child. How will it be practically piloted, how will it be resourced.

10. Involvement of children and young people

- 10.1. Whilst the young people and children's versions are welcomed, the Council has been developing a sustained engagement with young people in particular on the youth forum and there was limited opportunity to have effective engagement with this document. There are pathways available through the council's children and young people unit to develop this in future.
- 10.2. Similarly there is comment within the document like 'being NEET' which may be better served by referring to young people's situation rather than the young people themselves.
- 10.3. Further information on the engagement of children and young people in the shaping of the strategy and its performance management is requested at both a central and local government level as well as through localised area working.
- 10.4. There is a need for a fully participative engagement suitable to the target audience and its diversity both in age and needs.

11. Role of Local Authorities

- 11.1. By 01 April 2015, the reform of local government will reduce the number of councils in Northern Ireland from 26 to 11. The new councils will be stronger, more efficient, will deliver more effective services and will have new statutory duties of Community Planning and a new General Power of Competence. Community planning will provide a framework within which Councils, departments, statutory bodies and other relevant agencies and sectors will work

together to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area based on effective engagement with the community.

- 11.2. The new strategy will be operating at a time when all 11 new councils will be the lead organisations for a shared outcomes based plan for their council area. It would therefore be that, where possible outcomes and measures are shared. By way of previous example – BCC are working with OFMDFM on developing a shared common metric around wellbeing. It may be appropriate that this is adopted as part of the strategy.

12. Good Relations

- 12.1. Councils have been identified as key delivery agents within the Together; Building a United Community strategy and BCC is currently developing its Action Plan for 2014-15 within which the following specific actions will be undertaken:

- BCC will be delivering an intervention programme in the summer of 2014 for children and young people from interface areas who are at risk of becoming involved in conflict during times of heightened tension. As part of the project delivery, we are targeting 4,000 young people from 45 different organisations within this programme;
- BCC will support community groups to engage in Good Relations work through the provision of grants to 100 groups across the City to involve Children and Young people in meeting the aims of the Priority on Children and Young People;
- BCC will involve around 200 hard to reach young people in projects to support them in the positive expression of their cultural heritage through work around bonfires.
- BCC will involve young people in consultations and events that will look to address the continued existence of physical barriers (Peace Walls) within the City; and
- BCC will work with organisations seeking to ensure that young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are supported to participate and be included in civic life.

- 12.2. All of this work makes an important contribution to improving the life chances and opportunities of CYP across Belfast. Young people have an important role to play in the outworking of issues such as community tensions, disputes regarding flags, parades and protests and cultural heritage and its expression. In many ways, these are priorities for some young people. BCC is keen that these voices are heard within the Good Relations agenda of the city and that their involvement in such projects will divert them from becoming involved in disorder, improve their attitudes and assist them in developing positive pathways for their future. This area of work would benefit from being pronounced more fully in the final proposed outcomes framework.

13. City wide council opportunities for children and young people

- 13.1. BCC is a lead partner in the provision of services for children and young people to be active and has a keen interest in addressing the obesity issue. Both through the Council's parks, leisure and community facilities and the programmed activities children and young people are engaged through summer schemes; coaching sessions; swimming programmes; try it events; fun days out to local attractions, such as Belfast Zoo, Barnett Demesne Mountain Bike and Jumps Track, Ulster Hall, Grove Soft Play and so on often with subsidised rates or for start off or targeted activities free of charge.
- 13.2. BCC operates a 'Park life' education programme throughout its parks at a low charge. The community centres operate at a community rate to encourage community involvement in their neighbourhood asset at an affordable rate.
- 13.3. BCC is also a key provider of grant aid in the city for community groups to provide activities for children and young people. The council is at the forefront of reviewing its business in

order to provide the best universal as well as targeted services to those in greatest need and is willing to be involved in the future scoping in developing services in this way.

14. Family support and intervention

- 14.1. BCC currently operates a range of services to support families from the generalist advice services to oil stamps and would be keen to be fully involved in the development of targeted approach to family income and poverty.
- 14.2. In conclusion there are a series of challenging issues the Council has highlighted in its response in the spirit of effective collaboration and ownership which is proposed in the new document and looks forward to developing the local approach to delivering social change for children and young people in the near future.