



Children **in** Northern Ireland

Response to the DHSSPS Consultation

**‘A Strategy for Children  
in Need’**

October 2003

## Introduction

1. Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) welcome the draft Children in Need strategy and are pleased to be able to offer initial comments. As a membership organisation it would be our intention to consult widely on the draft strategy. We are particularly pleased to note the documents commitment (5.3) to base the strategy on ‘collaborative work with other statutory bodies and the *voluntary sector*’
2. We understand that it is the Departments intention to hold a number of consultation seminars and we would welcome the opportunity to make a case for one of the workshops to be organised with CiNI for voluntary sector organisations. The voluntary sector provides a range of key services for children in need and whilst it shares a common analysis on a wide range of issues with statutory colleagues the sector also has its own unique perspective to bring to the development of the strategy. In terms of the section on ‘Building on Current Services and developments’ CiNI has a range of member organisations with considerable practice and policy expertise in the areas discussed and we would be keen to facilitate their participation in this process.
3. In addition many of our members would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you potential approaches to involving children and families in the consultation process. The production of the strategy is a welcome development. We would, however, be of the view that the strategy needs to both influence and take account of the OFMDFM 10 year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland and the DHSS&PS 20 Year Strategy for Health and Well Being. The interconnectedness and complementarities of the

various strategies need to be articulated and their distinctiveness clearly identified.

4. We also believe that it is important that the developments in the English Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' are considered for their relevance to the circumstances in Northern Ireland.

### Children's Service Planning

1. The voluntary children's sector has invested a considerable amount of time in building effective partnership with statutory colleagues through the Children's Service Planning process. CiNI has taken a lead role in developing voluntary sector participation in the planning process and has undertaken capacity building with member organisations that are involved with the Children and Young Peoples Committees. From that perspective we welcome the acknowledgement of the role of Children's Services Planning has played in local needs based planning and the intention to build on that work.
2. We would support the development of a system that introduces a learning and reflective relationship between a regional body (that identifies cross-cutting themes and sets high level objectives and focuses on consistency) and local planning systems that are best able to feed 'upwards' the circumstances of their localities (and adapt high level objectives to their particular localities). The CSP process can address the dilemma of reconciling centrally driven change with the need for local flexibility and responsiveness. Anne Davies in an article entitled 'Structures and Accountability' makes the point that-

“The authority which social care must have cannot depend on the force of law but is instead derived from its democratic legitimacy, its ‘connectedness’ to the community it serves”.<sup>1</sup>

3. Whilst we acknowledge the importance of the list of high level objectives set out in the paper many of our members have expressed the view that such objectives for Children’s Services Planning need to reflect an evolving understanding of children in need and we would welcome the opportunity to debate this further.

We have some difficulty with the idea of separating what the document refers to as ‘social services to children in need’ from the provision of other services to the same children. This would appear to be at odds with the general thrust of the English Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’ with its focus on accountability and integration of services. The Green Paper notes that-  
“Radical reform is needed to break down organisational boundaries”.<sup>2</sup>

There is in the Green Paper recognition of the importance of improving universal services for all children and setting specialist services within that context. In a recent report ‘Growing Support-A Review of Services for Vulnerable Families with very Young Children’ the Scottish Executive argue-

“Health and education Services should encourage and support the most vulnerable children and families to make best use of their universal and mainstream services. This will require new and creative approaches to service delivery, and depend on closer collaboration with social workers”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Davies (2002), in Kendall and Harker ‘From Welfare to Wellbeing-the Future of Social Care’ ,IPPR

<sup>2</sup> ‘Every Child Matters’, 2003,p.9

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Executive, 2003,p.50

4. We would argue that the CSP process has begun to develop this approach particularly through its regional strategic theme of creating an integrated approach to family support. The voluntary sector has championed the development of effective family support for a long time. We have argued that investment in early years and preventative services is both cost effective as well as effective in preventing further and more intractable problems from emerging. We were encouraged to see the Green Paper identify 'Supporting Parents and Carers and Early Intervention and Effective Protection' as areas for action<sup>4</sup>

#### Regional Forum for Children in Need

1. It is in this context that we would support the idea of a Regional Forum for Children in Need. It is important however that such a forum learns from the experience of the CSP process. One of the strengths of the CSP process has been the development at local level of an understanding of the need to work collaboratively across sectors and agencies. The CSP process has many examples of this collaborative work in action. Many of the organisations involved in this process however, have not felt that the local interagency work has been reflected at departmental level. For this reason we would argue that the regional forum needs to have cross-departmental ownership if it is to deliver on the undoubted potential such a development holds.
2. We would be supportive on the development of a single assessment framework. Many of our members have commented on the difficulties they

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<sup>4</sup> 'Every Child Matters', 2003,p.7

face as regional organisations working across different assessment frameworks.

### Family Support Strategy

1. The development of an integrated approach to family support through a regional strategy is welcomed.
2. The Voluntary and Community Sector has played a key role in providing universal services to children and their families and have developed collaborative mechanisms with the statutory sector, particularly through Children Service Plans, to deliver these services in local areas.
3. CiNI and its member organisations would welcome further involvement with the development of a Regional Family Support. We are committed to an inter-agency and inter-sectoral approach which strengthens universal as well as preventative services to families and communities.

### Disability

1. The section on Disability needs to be strengthened, particularly in the area of needs assessment and service priority setting.

### Conclusion

Children in Northern Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to make initial comments on the draft 'Children in Need' Strategy. We would welcome the opportunity to consult more widely with the Voluntary Childcare Sector in a discrete workshop.