

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)

Response to

**Northern Ireland Draft Priorities
and Budget 2006-08**

December 2005

Introduction

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) is the regional umbrella body for the voluntary child care sector in Northern Ireland.

CiNI represents the interests of its 90 member organisations, providing policy, information, training and support services to members in their work with children and young people.

CiNI welcomes the concept of a mainstream, ring-fenced, cross-cutting funding package for children and young people. Despite the lasting disappointment with the outcome of last year's Budget and Priorities campaign CiNI does note that this year's prioritisation of children and young people is influenced by last year's process (para. 110).

While welcoming the prioritisation of children and young people CiNI does have a number of issues/concerns that we wish to raise with Government and would ask Government for its response to these issues/concerns. Many of these issues/concerns arise due to the fact that the detailed proposals for spending of the Priority Funding Package are absent from the consultation document.

- **Consultation on Priority Outcomes and Associated PSA Targets**

One of CiNI's fundamental concerns with the current consultation process is that there is no detail in the document as to how the funding package is to be allocated to departments and subsequently delivered by departments. The document states that the Department of Education, as lead department, will liaise with other departments in identifying, prioritising and costing relevant activities and actions that meet the objectives of the programme (para. 72). The document goes on to state at Para. 87 'Further priority outcomes for the three priority funding packages, and associated PSA targets, are being developed and will be included in the final budget document. At Para. 89 the document states 'In addition to the allocations shown in departmental resources tables departments may receive further allocations by way of new cross cutting Priority Funding Packages ... details of how these are allocated to departments will be set out in the final budget'. Therefore these details are not available for consultation and do not form part of the current consultation process.

We are particularly concerned that to our knowledge these details are not being consulted on given that we are aware that proposals/plans for the Funding Package are being advanced by Departments at present.

CiNI would call on Government to consult directly with children, young people and their families, and the children's sector on future proposals on how the funding package is to be allocated and delivered in an open and transparent way.

- **Children and Young People as a Priority beyond 2006-08**

CiNI would highlight that it is unlikely that the Government's objective as outlined will realistically be delivered by a two-year funding package. Our real concern is that this funding package would replicate the experience of the Executive Children's Fund, where much of the emphasis was on preventative interventions to achieve outcomes in the long-term for children and young people, yet the Fund is being axed after just three years. However, we do note from the 'Summaries of Equality, Good Relations and New TSN Considerations' that the additional resources that would become available from the

proposed increases in the Regional Rate will contribute specifically to the new Funding Packages (p.6).

While the Funding Package is a welcome first step in ring-fencing mainstream monies for children and young people, we would ask that Government seek to ring-fence **all** monies for children in an overall children's budget.

CiNI would request that Government confirm that the Funding Package is mainstream recurrent funding and that this Funding Package represents the beginning of a commitment to long-term funding for children and young people, which would see the ring-fencing of all mainstream monies for children and young people in a children's budget.

We would highlight that a long term commitment to funding for children and young people is in line with Government's commitment to long-term outcome focused planning and resourcing, a commitment made in 'Positive Steps' the Government's response to 'Investing Together' the TaskForce Report on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland. CiNI would request that Government through Budget and Priorities commits itself to the full and effective implementation of the Investing Together recommendations.

- **Children and Young People's Funding Package and the Children and Young People's Strategy**

CiNI is concerned that there is no discussion in the consultation document as to how the funding package links to OFMDFM's over-arching Children and Young People's Strategy for Northern Ireland. Like the Funding Package the Strategy is a 'cross-cutting' Government initiative and we trust that the Funding Package is intended to fit with the delivery of some of the Strategy's defined outcomes. The Strategy, in all its aspects, is to be underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and in so doing the Strategy can look toward the implementation of the UNCRC.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly raised the issue of insufficient allocation of resources towards the implementation of children's rights. In 2002 the Committee recommended that the UK Government:

'... undertake an analysis of all sectoral and total budgets across the State party and in the devolved administrations in order to show the proportion spent on children, identify priorities and allocate resources to the maximum extent of available resources'.
(CRC/C/15/Add. 188 para. 11)

We are also concerned that there is no discussion on indicators that are vital in measuring progress toward PSA targets. We would highlight the work that has been done by Save the Children and the Children's Law Centre on Child Rights indicators to inform the development of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy (CLC/SC Briefing on Child Rights Indicators, 2005). We would advocate that child rights indicators should be used to monitor progress toward the achievement of PSA targets.

CiNI would advocate that any proposals for the Funding Package are developed with a view to implementing the UNCRC through the Children and Young People's

Strategy. We would also request further information on the outcome(s) of the strategy which the funding package will deliver on. Progress toward achieving PSA targets should be monitored by indicators and these should align with the children's rights indicators being developed as part of the overall development of the Children and Young People's Strategy.

- **Vulnerable Young People**

The commitment to improving education provision and support for Looked after Children and vulnerable young people is welcome. However we are concerned that vulnerable children and young people outside of the mainstream education system, particularly children and young people in the criminal justice system may not benefit from the funding package. CiNI believes that a priority funding package that identifies vulnerable young people as one of its target groups should look to address the recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its Concluding Observations on the UK and Northern Ireland's Implementation of the UNCRC(2002). These recommendations seek redress for the most vulnerable children and young people, identifying egregious breaches of their fundamental rights as children and young people and therefore these recommendations require prioritisation for immediate action.

CiNI would advocate that in developing proposals for the Funding Package Government looks toward addressing the UN Committee's Concluding Observations.

- **Integrated Framework for Service Delivery**

The commitment to 'developing and implementing an integrated framework for service delivery involving a range of providers, that delivers high quality, cost effective and flexible provision that meets the needs of children and young people and their parents' is welcome. An integrated framework for service delivery is regarded as a necessary development of the Children's Services Planning process and fits with the identified need for Children's Services Planning to have joint commissioning powers.

CiNI would advocate that children's services planning should be the vehicle by which to take forward the proposed integrated framework for service delivery.

- **Targeting Funding**

CiNI notes that the funding is to be taken forward on a phased basis 'targeted initially on children and young people who are disadvantaged, marginalised or have the most limited access to current services'.

CiNI believes that any targeting should be based on an analysis of child and family poverty in Northern Ireland and should rely on robust indicators of poverty.

We note that in relation to disadvantaged and marginalised children and young people there is a priority outcome and associated PSA target relating to reducing poverty and disadvantage. While this outcome and its associated targets are to be welcomed we note that the indicator is children living in *relative low income households* (p.37 and 131). CiNI believes that this is not the most appropriate indicator to use.

The Department of Work and Pensions document 'Measuring child poverty' (2004) recommended a new 3 tier measure of child poverty. It involves the following:

- Absolute poverty measure
- Relative low income measure
- Mixed income and deprivation measure (including debt)

It determined that child poverty would be reduced only when all three are moving in the right direction.

We believe that a mixed measure should be used in Northern Ireland in PSA targets – not relative low income and would support the DWP model. If relative low income is used, then the poverty rate is 20% and so the target to reduce this by half would be 10% of children – i.e. around 44,000. If a mixed measure is used, including a deprivation measure, then the poverty rate would be around 38% - to reduce this by half 19% of children must be targeted – i.e. around 75,000. Both DWP and the authors of forthcoming OFMDFM research on Child and Family Poverty in Northern Ireland recommend the use of a mixed measure.

We note that target 4 of the DSD PSA refers to Anti-Poverty. We are disappointed and concerned that there is no mention of the Anti-Poverty Strategy here and indeed that no budget has been allocated for such a strategy.

CiNI would advocate that any targeting should be based on an analysis of child and family poverty in Northern Ireland using the mixed measure of child poverty as recommended by both DWP and the OFMDFM research on Child and Family Poverty in Northern Ireland.

- **Department of Education and Children's Minister**

The Department of Education has been identified as 'lead department' in relation to the funding package, therefore the assumption is that the Minister for Education is ultimately responsible for the allocation and distribution of the funding package. Given that the funding package has been described as 'cross-cutting' it would appear more appropriate that the Children's Minister, who has responsibility for 'cross-cutting' children's issues, would have ultimate responsibility for this funding package. Further, we believe that the Children's Minister should have overall responsibility for all mainstream monies for children and young people in a ring-fenced children's budget.

CiNI would advocate that the Children's Minister assume overall responsibility for this cross-cutting funding package.

- **Appropriate Delivery Mechanisms**

CiNI notes that 'appropriate delivery mechanisms' for the funding package have yet to be agreed. The consultation document does refer to Government supporting voluntary sector service provision and makes specific mention of children's services (para. 26).

CiNI would advocate that the delivery mechanisms should include statutory and voluntary sector delivery partnerships. We would again highlight that Government in 'Positive Steps' its response to the TackForce Report on Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector has made a commitment to long term outcome focused

approaches to programmes *that significantly involve the voluntary and community sector.*

- **Education Action Zones**

CiNI notes that the Children and Young People's Funding Package is not new money, rather the Funding Package is a reallocation of funding to a new priority area (para. 71 and 104). CiNI is concerned that the Funding Package, in repackaging monies that have already been allocated for defined areas of work will result in other pieces of work being set aside in the interest of meeting the Government's new priority outcome. Again, we would highlight that these concerns arise from the fact that we are not being consulted with in regard to the detailed outworking of the Funding Package.

We would point to the example of Education Action Zones. The 'Summaries of Equality, Good Relations and New TSN Considerations' state that 'the Education Action Zone concept will be expanded right across Northern Ireland through the development of extended schools, providing for structured activities before and after school, which will form a key element of the new funding package for children and young people' (p.10). We note that £6 million has already been allocated for Education Action Zones.

CiNI would ask Government to clarify the situation with regard to Education Action Zones, are these to be subsumed within the development of extended schools? Is the £6 million that has previously been made available for Education Action Zones part of the overall £50 million Children and Young People's Funding Package? CiNI believes that this £50 million should be in addition to the £6 million already allocated for Education Action Zones.

- **Departmental Public Service Agreements**

Beyond the Children and Young People's Funding Package Departmental we note the further information provided in the Public Service Agreements on Government's public expenditure commitments for children and young people.

We note the DHSSPS planned outcome of 'better life chances for children and support for families'; however at present this outcome has only one associated target - 'By March 2008, increase the number of foster carers in Northern Ireland from 1178 in 2002 to 1500.'

While an increase in the number of foster carers is a welcome and necessary target, as a stand alone target this is unlikely to deliver better life chances for **all** children and support for **all** families.

CiNI would highlight the need for additional target setting to meet this planned outcome and would highlight the absence of a target in relation to the ongoing development of the Strategic Framework for Children, Young People and their Families which in its commitment to both universal and specialist health and social services for children and young people could holistically deliver on the planned outcome.

We note that OFMDFM has again reiterated its commitment to putting in place a co-ordinated strategy to uphold the rights and meet the needs of Children and Young

People with a planned outcome of ‘a society where the rights, interests and contribution of children and young people are recognised, upheld and promoted’, and a specific target - ‘working with other departments, put in place an overarching, inter-departmental strategy, associated actions and indicators to uphold the rights and meet the needs of children and young people linked to support for the Office of Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Minister for Children and Young People.’

OFMDFM has stated that its ‘proposed budget allocation would enable the Department to implement key strategies’. We realise that the Department has a heavy workload in relation to strategic policy development i.e. anti-poverty, gender, children and young people and realise that there will be inter-linkages between these strategies and hence a more efficient use of resources.

- **Efficiency Gains**

CiNI remains concerned at the process of achieving efficiency gains. Over the past year the children’s voluntary sector has experienced substantial cuts to the priority frontline services which it delivers and we are concerned that these cuts are being made to help Government meet its efficiency gains. We note that it is intended that at least half of the efficiency gains are to release resources for reallocation to priority front line services (para. 61) and that implementation of these efficiency gains is now underway and will be monitored on a regular basis over the three year period to ensure actual delivery of the efficiency gains identified (para. 69).

CiNI would request that as part of this monitoring a tracking system is put in place to demonstrate the delivery of the efficiency gains to priority frontline services.

- **Equality, New TSN and Good Relations Considerations**

CiNI welcomes the work of DFP and the Equality Commission on high level impact assessments particularly as Government has previously stated that impact assessment of high level strategic policy is not possible. This is a positive benchmark for future impact assessment by Government of all high level strategic policy development.

However, we are concerned that the high level impact assessments (HLIA) are not detailed for consultation within the ‘Summaries of Equality, Good Relations and New TSN Considerations’ and therefore this limits the potential for informed comment on these considerations.

CiNI would request the publication of the high level impact assessments for consultation.

As the detail of the Children and Young People’s Funding Package is not contained within the consultation document we trust that the proposals that are being developed will be subject to full Equality Impact Assessment.

CiNI would request information on plans to Equality Impact Assess proposals relating to the Children and Young People’s Funding Package.

While we welcomed the opportunity to engage in pre-consultation with Government on the draft priorities and budget, our input and ability to usefully inform the pre-consultation stage was constrained due to the lack of any initial pre-consultation proposals on which to comment.

CiNI is disappointed that DFP declined our offer to facilitate Government to directly consult with the children's sector on proposals for the Children and Young People's Funding Package. In DFP's letter, dated 22 November 2005, responding to our offer to facilitate direct consultation with the sector, DFP indicated that the Children's Minister had met with the Commissioner for Children and Young People, local Political Parties and key interests from the children's sector and that the views received would inform budget decisions.

However, CiNI believes that in not publishing the detailed proposals for the Children and Young People's Funding Package for consultation and then declining to directly consult with the children's sector on Draft Priorities and Budget 06-08, DFP is in breach of its Section 75 duty to consult.

CiNI would request information on how DFP has or intends to consult directly with children and young people as one of the groups likely to be affected most by the implementation of the Children and Young People's Funding Package. CiNI would highlight that this consultation is essential not only in ensuring compliance with Section 75, but also in ensuring Government's compliance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, one of the principles of the UNCRC requiring respect for the views of the child.

CiNI would also request copies of the child accessible format of the consultation document and details of the system which you intend to use to analyse responses to this consultation process including the degree of weight which will be attributed to both individual and organisational responses. This is a vital element to drawing conclusions from responses and progressing with identified areas for immediate action. For this reason, we would appreciate information both on the system itself and on its operation for the purpose of analysis.

CiNI would strongly advocate that any proposals for spending of the Funding Package contained in subsequent Budget and Priorities documents are subjected to full public consultation and equality impact assessment in compliance with DFP's statutory obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Conclusion

CiNI trusts that the issues that we have raised can inform the ongoing development of proposals for the Children and Young People's Funding Package.

CiNI would welcome an early response to the issues which we have raised and would welcome the opportunity to engage in further consultation on proposals for spending of the Funding Package.