

# CiNI

Children **in** Northern Ireland

## **An ambition for children**

Improving outcomes for children  
in the new Northern Ireland

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# Executive Summary

**CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND WILL ENHANCE THE LIVES OF ALL CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND BY PROMOTING THE WORK OF THE CHILDREN'S SECTOR TO MAXIMISE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1** Represent the children's sector increasing its influence on policy and service development to achieve better outcomes for children.
- 2** Provide enhanced participation support services to allow meaningful engagement with children, young people and their families.
- 3** Provide a learning and development programme to develop knowledge/ skills of staff and raise standards in practice for children, young people and their families.
- 4** Develop a research function to enhance members' capacity to influence policy and service development effectively.
- 5** Promote effective partnership and working relationships with bodies which affect children's lives.
- 6** Promote sustainability and accountability within CiNI.



# Introduction

**1.1** CiNI (formerly known as Child Care Northern Ireland) was set up in 1986 as a response to requests from the child care sector for an umbrella organisation to facilitate networking and act as a single point of contact. It has grown to become the regional umbrella organisation for the children's sector in Northern Ireland. CiNI's membership includes national and regional organisations, large voluntary and community groups, statutory agencies, independent organisations and individuals.

**1.2** CiNI provides a range of services:

## POLICY SERVICE

CiNI provides a policy service to support members to use their knowledge and expertise, gained from direct work with and for children and young people, to inform and influence public policy development drawing on the rights and needs of children and young people. The services provided include policy briefings, discussion forums with policy makers, consultation workshops and responses, and an online policy probe to facilitate direct communication with CiNI members so that policy positions are developed from the bottom up.

## PARTICIPATION NETWORK

CiNI supports the work of the Participation Network in its primary focus on empowering and engaging the statutory sector to involve children and young people in policy development. This is done by

offering training and consultancy support to the statutory sector so that it can engage directly with children and young people, and develop and promote standards of good practice in relation to child and youth participation.

## PARTICIPATION PORTAL

CiNI is expanding its existing online Participation Portal to support the Participation Network to deliver on its aims. The Portal is a web-based resource which will provide those working with and on behalf of children and young people, with the opportunity to exchange ideas and develop their own practice. The Directory contains information on web-based resources, paper resources and projects / initiatives carrying out participation work.

## PARTNERSHIP

CiNI works in partnership with a range of bodies to influence and inform change for children and young people on key issues and in key fora. This includes six specific initiatives: All-Party Group on Children and Young People, Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance, Joint Government Voluntary and Community Forum, Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance, Early Years Strategic Alliance and the Putting Children First Alliance.

## TRAINING

CiNI develops, designs and delivers a comprehensive training service which promotes child-centred practice.

The primary focus is to ensure that workers in the sector have the knowledge and skills they need to deliver quality services and promote positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

## INFORMATION

CiNI provides a range of information services through a variety of media, including policy briefings, consultation responses, quarterly newsletters, an online Child Policy Information Service and fortnightly Email Briefing, Press Releases, a Training Calendar and Annual Report to politicians, civil servants, statutory agencies, local government and the voluntary and community sectors. CiNI is also a regular contributor to the Children Order Advisory Committee newsletter, and UK wide children's publications including Children Now magazine and the National Council for Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) Outlook magazine.

**“ CiNI remains the most important umbrella organisation in the voluntary child care sector ”**

Social Services inspectorate report 2006



# Development Plan

- 2.1** This development plan covers the three year period 2007-2010 at a key stage for the future of children in Northern Ireland
- 2.2** During the past twenty years the position of children has changed dramatically in society. However, the pace of change has never been more dramatic than in the last few years. There have been a range of initiatives to introduce new legislation, institutions, mechanisms and strategies all aimed at positively promoting the position of children in society. Most importantly there has recently been a focus on key outcomes as an aspirational goal for children and young people and as a standard for measuring progress.
- 2.3** CiNI has played a key part in working for this change on behalf of the children's sector. The new dynamic environment with enhanced responsibility at local level with local politicians means that CiNI needs to review how it should adapt to these changes.
- 2.4** The recent achievements of the children's sector have ensured that it now has closer access to decision-makers, stronger rights to representation and participation, stronger legal rights for children, and increased public awareness of children's issues. It also has achieved a basis for greater participation by children and young people in the issues affecting their lives.
- The inclusion of statutory representatives in CiNI's membership accords opportunities for effective engagement with all those who can have direct impact on the lives of children and young people.
- 2.5** There is less need now to present the case for some of the infrastructure which now exists; attention should increasingly move to working within the new framework to influence substantive change focussing on outcomes for children and young people, more than process.
- 2.6** The Development Plan is about providing support and leadership to the children's sector during the next three year period of change. It will be a time when CiNI will continue to deliver services, information and influence for its members. The challenge in this Plan is to maintain the high standards of delivery in existing areas whilst working effectively within the new government infrastructure and developing new capabilities to better meet members' changing needs. CiNI's systems will also have to ensure a strong focus on improved outcomes for children and young people.
- 2.7** The theme of the Development Plan is therefore - **AN AMBITION FOR CHILDREN** - 'improving outcomes for children in the new Northern Ireland'.



# The Environment

**3.1** A range of recent legislative, political, institutional and strategic changes makes the environment in which CiNI will operate over the next three years particularly important. The return to devolved government on 8th May 2007 provides a real opportunity to influence the new structures and policy makers for substantive change.

**3.2** A major element of the changing context comes from the Review of Public Administration (RPA). Amongst the key decisions which will affect the children's sector are:

Local Government reforms, with a proposed reduction in councils and of specific relevance, a statutory duty on councils to lead a community planning process. This will require councils to consult with all constituents about issues that affect their lives and will allow people to have a say in the way in which their area is developed. Education restructuring, with a new Education and Skills Authority combining the bodies currently undertaking the direct support functions of the 5 Education and Library Boards and a new Education Advisory Forum.

Health & Social Services restructuring, with a new regional Health and Social Services Authority which combines the existing Boards and works alongside seven Local Commissioning Groups, and five Health and Social Services Trusts. The implementation of these wide-ranging reforms will have a significant impact on the lives of children in Northern Ireland. Community planning will provide an opportunity for their involvement in

decisions affecting their communities; the challenge for services in health and education is to ensure that they are more streamlined, integrated, accessible and responsive.

**3.3** The responsibility for RPA is now expected to be taken forward by a new local administration, which will provide enhanced opportunities for influencing and informing at Executive, Assembly and local government level.

**3.4** The UK government will be submitting its consolidated 3rd and 4th periodic reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in July 2007 outlining progress towards implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This provides an opportunity for lobbying government against the international standards to which it has signed up.

**3.5** The Office of the Commissioner for Children & Young People for Northern Ireland (NICCY) established four years ago principally aims to promote and safeguard children's rights and best interests and takes this promotion and safeguarding work forward alongside complaints and legal action, as well as research and inquiries. The Office has a key role to play in monitoring Government's compliance with the UNCRC and this will require robust monitoring of Government's 10 Year Children and Young People's Strategy.

**3.6** The 10 year Children and Young People's Strategy Our Children and Young People Our Pledge 2006 - 2016 launched in June 2006 is being implemented across Government through the Children and Young People's Action Planning process. The strategy sets outcomes for progress in six areas – namely that children and young people are:

**HEALTHY**

- Enjoying, learning and achieving
- Living in safety and with stability
- Experiencing economic and environmental well-being
- Contributing positively to community and society
- Living in a society which respects their rights

The centrality of the sixth outcome on 'children's rights' was as a result of a successful lobby from the children's sector and requires that implementation of the Strategy must be guided and informed by the principles and provisions of the UNCRC. The Minister for Children and Young People and the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People has lead responsibility for driving forward cross government implementation of the Strategy. The two year Children and Young Peoples Funding Package launched in March 2006 has enabled the commencement of implementation of the Strategy.

**3.7** The impact of this investment is an important consideration in future funding decisions in respect of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review which will set public expenditure levels for Northern Ireland for the period 2008-11. Extended Early Years provision is one of six key themes of the funding package.

**3.8** The strategy will be reviewed against a set of indicators which, when appropriately child-rights proofed, will facilitate NICCY and other stakeholders to evaluate progress to achieving outcomes over time.

**3.9** The Children and Young People's Committees continue to work by bringing together senior representatives across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors with responsibility for the planning and review of services for children in each of their four areas. Their work continues to focus on co-ordination and planning of services at local level, incorporating the principles involved in advancing children's rights. Post RPA the Committees are seeking a stronger mandate to take forward the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people at a regional level through a Regional Strategic Partnership which would seek to take forward implementation of the 10 Year Strategy.

**3.10** A significant step forward in implementation of the Strategy has been the funding by OFMDFM of The Participation Network, a ground breaking innovation aimed at engaging and empowering the statutory sector to actively involve children and young people in their decision making processes. The Network offers training and consultancy to the statutory sector, and will be developing and promoting standards of good practice in relation to child and youth participation, as well as developing, as part of CiNI's website, an online bank of resource materials, and information in relation to child and youth participation.

**3.11** This environment is thus the context in which CiNI will operate in the next three years. It creates opportunities for CiNI to build on its capacity to influence change. In developing its Plan CiNI must maximise these opportunities to deliver leadership and support to its members in a timely, efficient and effective way.



# Vision & Values

**4.1** A Development Plan should not only identify the strategies and activities of the organisation for the forthcoming period, it should also outline the way in which the organisation aims to work.

**4.2** The following values, agreed at the last Development Plan review, are the standards by which CiNI will work over the next three years. These commit CiNI to act in a manner which :

- is child-focussed
- is representative
- is accountable
- works together and in partnership
- empowers
- is inclusive

**4.3** This set of values defines CiNI's approach to its work. It seeks to emphasise its role as a representative umbrella organisation, taking account of the needs of its members. It also seeks to ensure that it empowers its members to be effective advocates/representatives for children and their families. It reflects the changes in the children's environment recognising that change will now be increasingly achieved by working in partnership through cross sectoral and multi agency approaches with organisations who share CiNI's commitment to promoting positive outcomes for children.

**4.4** Each of the values are further clarified:

- CiNI will be child-focussed in its work, ensuring that its activities are oriented towards achieving positive outcomes for children
- CiNI will be representative of its members and the voluntary child care sector, taking account of their needs and views
- CiNI will be accountable to its members and funders, making decisions in a manner which conforms to standards of best practice and transparency and promotes confidence in the management of the organisation
- CiNI will work together and in partnership – working together within the sector and in partnership with external organisations to achieve its aims
- CiNI will empower its members, helping them to develop the capacity to effectively carry out their work
- CiNI will be inclusive, recognising and celebrating the diversity of its membership base, acting in a fair and just way for all, and in particular promoting the needs of minority groups

**4.5** A vision statement defines what the organisation wishes to achieve and where it would like to be in three years time. CiNI's key role is to provide support and leadership to the children's sector in Northern Ireland. It is therefore proposed that CiNI's vision should be:

**“Children in Northern Ireland will enhance the lives of all children in Northern Ireland by promoting the work of the children's sector to maximise positive outcomes for children' young people and their families.”**



# Strategy

**5.1** A proposed strategy to achieve this vision for CiNI and its members has been identified in 6 key priorities.

**5.2** The strategic priorities are to:

(a) Represent the children's sector increasing its influence on policy and service development to achieve better outcomes for children.

(b) Provide enhanced participation support services to allow meaningful engagement with children, young people and their families.

(c) Provide a learning and development programme to develop knowledge / skills of staff and raise standards in practice for children, young people and their families.

(d) Develop a research function to enhance members' capacity to influence policy and service development effectively.

(e) Promote effective partnership and working relationships with bodies which affect children's lives.

(f) Promote sustainability and account ability within CiNI.



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