



Response to

**Department of the Environment
Draft Statutory Guidance for the
Operation of Community Planning
(Local Government Act NI 2014)**

Introduction

Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) are the regional umbrella body for the children's sector in Northern Ireland.

CiNI represents the interests of its 160 member organisations providing policy, information, training and participation support services to members in their direct work with and for children and young people. CiNI membership also includes colleagues in the children's statutory sector recognising that the best outcomes for children and young people are increasingly achieved working in partnership with all those who are committed to improving the lives of children and young people in NI.

CiNI welcomes this opportunity to provide some feedback Draft Statutory Guidance for the Operation of Community Planning consultation. We trust that our comments will be positively used to inform the next step in the process.

Comments

CiNI fully support the introduction of a council led and facilitated community planning process. It is particularly important that guidance is explicit in requiring engagement with all those various stakeholders including councils, departments and statutory community planning partners including the community and voluntary sector or other bodies and individuals in the planning process.

We would also strongly recommend the guidance makes reference to the need for councils to recognise the arrangements and partnerships already in existence and working effectively. For example, within children's services planning, the cross-sectoral and multi-agency ***Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership*** which is led by the Health and Social Care Board is one such mechanism. There should be a presumption towards using or building upon mechanisms already established to help avoid duplication and consultation / meeting fatigue.

We are delighted that under 'Community Involvement' the Community Planning Partnership will work to ensure that all section 75 groups have the opportunity to participate from the early stages of the process including the commitment to ensure the involvement of children and young people.

Again we would highlight the obligations which exist both internationally and domestically and the imperative for compliance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on Respect for the Views of the Child, and article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities on Children with Disabilities.

We would highlight the Ask First principles which have been endorsed by Government departments. The principles are underpinned and informed by the UNCRC and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). Ask First principles are the Northern Ireland standards for children and young people's participation in public decision making. The standards were developed by the Participation Network to assist public authorities to establish effective direct engagement with children and young people. The standards set out the various elements, which together, ensure that the involvement of children and young people in public decision making is both meaningful for them, and effective for the public authority with whom they are engaged.

We would welcome the inclusion of wording that ensures **effective and genuine engagement with children and young people**, consultation alone is not a sufficient means of effective community engagement. To ensure effective and genuine engagement there must be a process in place which builds social capital of the community including children and young people. This must be an integral part of effective engagement. We ask that additional measures are placed within the guidance that includes support, learning and development targeted towards communities for effective engagement.

We would like to see further recognition of the Child Poverty Act within the guidance and a commitment to meet the aim of reducing it. Further scope therefore remains within the Guidance to address child poverty targets within local areas. For example there is a real need to ensure all plans are poverty-proofed so that their impact on child poverty can be addressed, particularly those in high levels of need. The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services report¹ noted that 'at least two years is required to develop whole-area child poverty strategies.' This is reason therefore that evidence of best practice is utilized when plans are developed and considerable effort is required by Councils in committing to achieving a reduction in the overall child poverty figures.

Conclusion

CINI trusts that this submission can usefully inform the on-going development of community planning. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this response please get in touch.

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¹ C4EO (2010). Child Poverty: Key Messages. Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Service.