



Children **in** Northern Ireland

Response to
Executive Department Draft
Framework Programme for
Government

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1 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.

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the draft framework for the Programme for Government (PfG).

2 COMMENTS

During 2015/2016 Northern Ireland Government Departments seen a reduction in real terms in budget allocation. This meant there was a wide variation in the choices which were made by each Department on what programmes and funding to cut. International evidence from the OECD notes that children's learning outcomes are very much determined primarily by the socio-economic circumstances in which they are born in to. We believe it is imperative therefore that any PfG takes an innovative approach to protect existing spend and align future expenditure to ensure services for children and young people are protected. It is also our view that the PfG must align with community planning and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership priorities to ensure an easier path to improving outcomes and maximising investment for all children and young people.

We strongly recommend that the current draft is amended to ensure a better alignment between the partners mentioned above which will provide a clear direction for everyone to move to outcomes based policy making.

Children in Northern Ireland believe it is helpful that outcomes based accountability has been used. However, it is less obvious how progress towards achieving these outcomes will be scrutinized. Equally we are not aware of how the Children's Services Co-operation Bill will be implemented within the Programme for Government.

The inequality agenda is of central importance to Children in Northern Ireland therefore measures which show progress on how children and young people are affected should be a major component of the PfG.

Children and young people are directly affected by a range of societal issues e.g. poverty, housing, play, health inequalities, etc. We are therefore disappointed that only a few indicators which specially refer to children and young people are present within the draft framework. It is our view that these are seriously incomplete and what is contained does not present a full picture of what children and young people are experiencing in Northern Ireland.

Our view is that the data and indicators presented are limiting and lack the available information from a wide range of service providers, notably the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership.

While we recognise the major challenge in identifying indicators and data relating to children and young people we have significant reservations as to whether those currently contained within the framework are sufficient to show if outcomes for children and young people are being delivered. Moreover, the indicator around healthy birth weight is certainly useful but it is effectively a proxy measure. We are not convinced that these statistical snapshots tell us enough to take a view on whether an outcome has been

achieved or is 'turning the curve' for children and young people, particularly in the early years of a child's life.

We hope the Executive accepts the benefits of using data that currently exists, that is consistent and also acknowledges the need to collect data which does not currently exist. The Executive must develop and implement gathering systems that allows for the collation and monitoring of disaggregated data on all aspects of the lives of children and young people, particularly those with a disability. Such data would allow for a comprehensive assessment of the level and extent of inequalities faced by children with disabilities. The Executive has obligations under Article 31 of the UNCRPD (Statistics and data collection) which states that countries must collect information about people with disabilities, with the active involvement of people with disabilities; so that they can better understand the barriers they experience and ensure full implementation of the UNCRPD. The UN Committee in General Comment No 9 (2006) The Rights of Children with Disabilities indicated that it is necessary for State parties to "set up and develop data gathering mechanisms, which are accurate, standardized and allow disaggregation, and which reflect the actual situation of children with disabilities." (Para 19) The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has commented on data collection in relation to children and expressed concern at the absence of a nationwide mechanism to collect and analyse data on the areas covered by the UNCRC.

We would ask the Executive to include indicators which specifically outline how progress will be made for children and young people with disabilities in relation to outcomes.

Children in Northern Ireland considers it both feasible and sensible to use measures and indicators already in circulation by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership as the foundation for reporting not just at the

locality level, but at local government and central government levels. This would provide a much needed 'bottom-up' approach and would ensure successful delivery of overall outcomes.

It is our view that the above will see a more meaningful and streamlined framework that better aligns between this, community planning and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership outcomes.

3 CONCLUSION

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation, while we welcome the introduction of a Programme for Government based on outcomes based accountability, it must not be a watered down version, and it must be meaningful to ensure all children are valued, are treated fairly and are able to flourish.