



Response to
Department for Communities Consultation
on Proposals for the Provision of Strategic
Support to the Voluntary & Community
Sector in Northern Ireland

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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 on the **Proposals for the Provision of Strategic Support to the Voluntary & Community Sector in Northern Ireland**. We trust that our comments will be positively used to inform the next step in the process.

Vision

Given the significant work undertaken by the VCS we believe the vision is limiting, we agree that we must all work to deliver the outcomes within the Programme for Government, however the uniqueness of the VCS to deliver is also based on its ability to adapt quickly to need within an area. We believe the vision must be reworded to take account of this and the vision must also look beyond the current Programme for Government.

It is also our view that the vision must include both the VCS and Government making best use of evidence-informed practice.

Outcomes

The commitment to Outcomes Based Accountability is to be welcomed. However, we believe the outcomes are extremely narrow. We need outcomes that will support all infrastructure organisations, including the children's sector, as well as targeting resources to organisations with specific roles. There is a danger that narrowing outcomes will also limit the uniqueness of the CVS in general.

Furthermore, we would like to know how the Department is going to deliver on the outcomes within the Children's Services Co-operation Act. We recommend strongly that the strategic support arrangements could do far more to align to these high level outcomes.

Proposed Support arrangements to facilitate an efficient and effective VCS

Given recent trends in reduced Government funding we believe strongly that the Department for Communities should not be funding a drafting service for VCS organisations nor delivering road shows / training on charity regulation and good governance. Such support should be delivered by the Charities Commission.

Proposed Support Arrangements to facilitate a sustainable VCS that has navigated and implemented change

It is our view there will always be a need for grant funding although how grants are currently being serviced needs to be looked at as it is often piecemeal and therefore vulnerable. We think it is imperative that innovative approaches are identified which seek to protect existing core funding and potentially lever in and align wider resources including tender opportunities.

We very much welcome DfC's response to supporting the Voluntary & Community Sector in Northern Ireland, however we are somewhat puzzled that the Department omits how it will support strategic organisations that support children, young people and families, considering the Department now has responsibility for child poverty and the new Social Strategy.

CiNI is fully aware of the current budget challenges and subsequent reduced public spending, however investment in children, young people and their families must be maintained to ensure their protection and appropriate access to services. The concept of investing in children has been accepted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as the best guarantee

for achieving equitable and sustainable human development and a fundamental requirement for social and economic priorities of any government.¹

Child poverty can seem complex and multi-faceted, however much can be done to lift children and their families out of poverty such as implementing a comprehensive mix of programmes, accessible quality services, allocating adequate resources and working in collaboration.

CiNI recommend DfC make children, young people and their families a priority by funding the infrastructure of the children's sector.

Proposed Support Arrangements to facilitate an inclusive VCS

We fully support the Department's commitment to facilitating volunteering. Many people gain experience, acquire new skills, meet new people and give back to society. The value of volunteering is immense to creating a vibrant society. However, it must be made clear that volunteer work should not replace paid labour.

To ensure a robust volunteering society we fully support the recommendations contained within the consultation with the proviso that there is clear commitment from the Department that it recognises that volunteering should not replace paid labour.

¹ CRC (2007) Day of General Discussion "Resources for the rights of the child – Responsibility of States"