

Key Issues for Heenan Anderson Commission

Collaboration and Integration

CiNI believes an integrated and joined up working approach on children and young people's issues should be championed by the Heenan Anderson Commission.

Across Government there is a need for co-operation and joint working on strategic policy initiatives, planning, commissioning and delivery arrangements to ensure positive outcomes for all children and young people.

We ask the Heenan Anderson Commission to call for the introduction of the Children's Bill – a statutory duty to co-operate - which would compel all government departments to co-operate in achieving better outcomes for children and young people; compel relevant government departments and agencies, public bodies and local councils to work together in planning, commissioning and delivering services for children and young people; and help government departments pool budgets, share staff and other resources, as well as jointly commission services for children and young people.

Investment in children and young people and families

CiNI is fully aware of the current budget challenges and subsequent reduced public spending, however investment in children and young people must be maintained to ensure their protection and appropriate access to services.

It is against the background of a sharp increase in child poverty levels that we voice our concerns over investment for children and young people and their families. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) predicts that relative child poverty will increase to

30.9% Before Housing Costs (BHC) and absolute child poverty to 38.5% (BHC) in Northern Ireland by 2020-21.¹ It is clear that the 2020 statutory targets to end child poverty will be missed by a huge distance.²

The public expenditure cuts as part of the UK government's austerity measures since 2010 have had a disproportionate impact on the Northern Ireland economy due to the heavy reliance on the public sector.³ Moreover, many women are employed in public sector jobs and their unemployment has an adverse impact on levels of child poverty. Youth unemployment at over 24%, underemployment of many graduates and the phenomenon of precarious work are changing the shape of the labour market, with many young people experiencing downward social mobility.

CiNI recommend the Heenan Anderson Commission call for children and young people and families to be made a priority in budgetary allocations. Investment in children and young people makes sense. It is key to overcoming social and economic inequalities, and achieving child poverty reduction.

Children with Disabilities

There is a need to recognise the importance of reaching out to those individuals and groups who are dispersed throughout the whole of the country, and who are further away from the support and services that would be targeted within a particular deprived area.

The circumstances and situation of children and families with a disability must be given priority. Children with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty than their non-disabled peers. It is estimated that 57% of disabled children are living in poverty compared to 37% of children without disabilities.⁴ Children with disabilities and their families are at great risk of social exclusion. Many need additional services to support them and this can lead to further isolation. A wide range of evidence shows that early intervention and the provision of appropriate support can reduce the impact of these pressures.

¹ <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/child-working-age-poverty-update-jan-2014.pdf>

² The latest figures show that in 2011/12 there were almost 95 thousand children (22%) in relative poverty and 109 thousand children (25%) in absolute poverty before housing costs. The latter represents a 4 percentage point increase from the previous year.

³ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/ni-economic-strategy-revised-130312.pdf> p 25

⁴ Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance Manifesto 2012

We recommend the Heenan Anderson Commission call for investment in programmes and services that support children with disabilities and their families which will underscore a commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and addressing the inherent inequalities faced by children with disabilities.

Early Intervention

Early intervention must be recognised as one of the aspects of tackling systemic issues linked to deprivation. It is essential that government have a sense of clarity and an agreed understanding of the concept of early intervention which must embrace early age and early stage intervention (irrespective of age).

There is a large volume of evidence to illustrate the positive outcomes for children and young people when investment is targeted during the very early years, it is also important to note that some children and families will need additional supports and interventions at different points in a child's life.

CiNI would recommend the Heenan Anderson Commission call for a sustained increase in early intervention investment.