

# Children in Northern Ireland

## **Survey Shows Organisations and Services Supporting Children and Families Will Collapse if Core Grant Funding is Not Restored**

Policy Briefing – October 2023

*Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) issued a Policy Briefing Paper to all MLAs in May 2023, urgently seeking the restoration of Core Grant funding for Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) organisations providing services to children and families in NI. At that time, CiNI stated clearly that the decision by the Department of Health to cut Core Grant funding from the end of September 2023 posed a serious threat to the sustainability of these organisations and the essential services that they provide.<sup>1</sup> In order to demonstrate the negative impact of the loss of this funding, CiNI conducted a survey of Grantees in August-October 2023 and the results show that services will be reduced, organisations will cease to exist, and our children and families will suffer.*

**Core Grant funding represents approximately 0.05% of the Department of Health’s 2023/24 Budget.<sup>2</sup>** Yet, despite being such a small proportion of overall spending, the scheme supports Community and Voluntary Sector organisations to deliver a wide range of essential services that support our Health and Social Care system, including: early intervention/help and family/parental support; counselling and mental health support; support for foster carers and adoption services; advocacy and programmes for care experienced and disadvantaged young people; education and training (including child protection and safeguarding); research, policy development and delivery of government strategies; care and support for older people, disabled people and those with substance abuse issues; support services for people with specific health conditions; and palliative care for babies, children, young people and adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health (NI), 22 May 2023, ‘Department details 2023/24 Budget measures’: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/department-details-202324-budget-measures>. This estimate was calculated using the total cost of the scheme, £3.6m, as a percentage of DOH’s Resource DEL allocation for 2023/24, £7.3bn.

<sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Act 2023.

Our survey of Core Grantees, completed by 34 organisations (55% of total) shows that this funding is primarily used for salaries and staff costs. Those who responded to the survey told us that the reduction in funding for 2023/24 will affect recruitment, lead to reduced services, redundancies, and some organisations no longer operating in NI. **Two thirds (68%) of respondents anticipated challenges in sustaining their current level of service due to the reduction in Core Grant funding for 2023/24.** Approximately one in four (27%) indicated that the reduction in funding would threaten the sustainability of their organisation this financial year.

We asked respondents to assess the sustainability of their organisations **if Core Grant funding ceased in 2024/25 and 62% indicated that they would risk collapsing.** They told us there would be loss of experienced staff, reduced services and that some organisations would likely cease to exist. Nearly all (85%) of organisations were able to identify specific consequences for the individuals and communities they serve. These comments included **needs not being met, worse health outcomes, fewer people supported, increased pressure on statutory services and direct harm to vulnerable groups.**

Organisations that received Core Grant funding strongly refuted the claim that the impact of ceasing the scheme would be minimal (97% disagreed/strongly disagreed) and that some organisations use the funding inappropriately to undercut competitors when bidding for contracts (91% disagreed/strongly disagreed). There was also clear consensus that most contracts to provide services do not include sufficient funding to cover core costs. Respondents to the survey agreed overwhelmingly that **the end of the scheme would threaten the existence of some organisations, and leave a significant gap in relation to the strong advocacy role played by the Community and Voluntary Sector.**

It is clear that organisations that receive Core Grant funding play a crucial role in addressing health and social care needs and that the loss of the scheme would critically undermine CVS infrastructure, as one respondent put it, 'the social partners of government in terms of service delivery and policy development.' Those who responded to the survey told us that reductions in funding takes no account of the added value that recipient organisations bring to the Health and Social Care Sector and that the Department did not seem to understand the value of the regional services provided by grant recipients and how **they divert many people from needing more intensive health services.**

CiNI reiterates the urgent call for cross-party political support to reinstate Core Grant funding and protect the well-being of children and families in Northern Ireland. **We are asking all parties to engage directly with the Department of Health to find a solution to restore this funding for 2023/24** and seek a commitment to **prioritise allocation of resources to the Core Grant Scheme in 2024/25 and beyond.**