

Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge

A TEN YEAR STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
IN NORTHERN IRELAND 2006 - 2016



Office of the
**First Minister and
Deputy First Minister**

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- There are approximately 383,300 children in Northern Ireland under 16 years (around 22% of the population) and approximately 464,000 under 19 years.¹
- The total number of births has been falling steadily since 1974, resulting in a decline in the number of children under 16 years. This downward trend is likely to continue with the number of under 16s being projected to fall to 352,000, and the number of under 19s being projected to fall to 418,000 by 2019.²
- In 2004, 34.5% of all live births occurred outside marriage. In 2004, 96.8% of births to mothers under the age of 20 were outside marriage, 74% of births to mothers aged between 20-24 were outside marriage, while for those aged 25 and over, only 20.9% of births were outside marriage.¹
- Although there has been a reduction in the number of births to teenage mothers³ in Northern Ireland and we have the lowest teenage birth rate within the UK at 26 per 1000 women under 20, compared to the UK average of 29 births per 1000 women under 20,⁴ Northern Ireland has a history of one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe.



Foreword

We want all children and young people in Northern Ireland to fulfil their potential. We must help them get the best possible start in life and do as well as they can. That is our aim in bringing forward a ten year strategy. I want to thank all of those who helped us develop this strategy, in particular children and young people.



What do we want to deliver? Over the course of the next ten years we will strive to produce improved outcomes for **all** children and young people. We also want the gap in outcomes between those who do best and those who do worst to narrow. This will mean the provision of high quality universal services, supported by more targeted responses for children and young people who fare worst. We want to see significant improvements in their health and in education outcomes. We want them to acquire a thirst for lifelong learning. We want them to be safe and feel safe, free from poverty, living in decent homes, in communities that are free from distress and in environments that are welcoming. Of course, children and young people have so much to offer to society and to the communities in which they live. We want to help them make positive contributions to their local communities and to society generally. Above all, childhood should be an enjoyable time. We must strive to make an enjoyable childhood a reality for all, not just for some. We must also recognise the inter-connectedness of children's lives; for example, the links between good health and good education outcomes; the links between poverty and poor health outcomes either as children or adults.

How will we know that we are in fact delivering? Over the course of the coming months we will develop Northern Ireland's first Children and Young People's Action Plan and we will monitor and track the

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progress of actions against the set of performance indicators, which have been developed and published in this document. The actions identified will be linked to one or more outcomes.

As Minister for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland. I will have a key role in driving the strategy forward across departments and closely monitoring progress. I will be assisted by a number of other implementation groups, including a Strategy Planning and Review Panel, which I will chair, a Practitioner's Group and a Parents' Advisory Group. Access to good research and quality information will also be integral to the success of the strategy and, as a result, a Research and Information Group will also be established. All groups will be up and running over the course of the next few months.

Success will depend on other stakeholders – not just on government action. Partnership working will be key. **We must also ensure that children and young people are involved every step of the way, that their voices are heard and their views and opinions given due weight.**

Together we can transform outcomes for all our children and young people. The future of Northern Ireland will depend on how well we can do.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria Eagle".

**The Honourable Maria Eagle, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Minister for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland**



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- Although teenage birth rates have fallen in all areas of Northern Ireland, the rate in deprived areas relative to the Northern Ireland average has remained approximately 70% higher. The teenage birth rate in deprived areas was 28.6 per 1000 females aged 13-19 compared to the Northern Ireland average of 16.7 per 1000 females aged 13-19.⁵
- Teenage pregnancy and early motherhood can have negative consequences for both mother and baby. It is often associated with poor educational achievement for the mother, poor physical and mental health, social isolation and poverty. The teenagers most at risk of becoming parents are those already disadvantaged with a history of poverty, low educational achievement, sexual abuse, mental problems and offending behaviour. Children in care and those with low self esteem are also at increased risk. Areas experiencing higher rates of teenage pregnancies also demonstrate a higher level of deprivation.³
- Previous studies⁴ have shown that females under 20 years demonstrated the lowest level of breastfeeding incidence, were more likely to smoke before, during and throughout pregnancy and were more likely to drink at the same or increased levels during pregnancy.

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SECTION 1

The aim of the ten year Strategy for Children and Young People

Introduction

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that by 2016 all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential. We want those who are doing well to continue to do well. However, there is evidence that despite significant investment by government over many years, there is insufficient progress being made to improve the lives of our most marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people. Some of that evidence is present in the statistics throughout this document.

Our key challenge is to ensure that this strategy delivers for all children and young people. We must, however, take actions to improve the lives of those children and young people and their families who need our help most. We will deliver for the majority of children and young people through the provision of high quality universal services. Where targeted interventions are needed to remove or narrow the gaps for particular groups of children and young people, they, too, must be available.

This is a long-term strategy. We recognise that there are no quick fixes and that meaningful and sustained change will take time. **Our overall pledge is to deliver on a shared vision for all our children and young people¹ over the next ten years. Our success will be measured by improved outcomes in key areas of our children and young people's lives.**

¹ For the purposes of the ten year strategy, a child/young person is defined as someone under/up to 18 years of age. For children who are/have been in care or children with a disability, the age limit extends to 21 years.

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The Northern Ireland Vision and Outcomes Framework are set out in section 1. These will be underpinned by a number of key supporting themes, also described in this section. To each theme we have attached a number of linked pledges.



A shared vision

Government's overall pledge to children and young people living in Northern Ireland is that we will deliver a shared vision for them over the next ten years.

Our vision is that all children and young people living in Northern Ireland will thrive and look forward with confidence to the future.

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- In 2002/2003, although 75.6% of pupils in Northern Ireland achieved level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 in English and 78.2% achieved level 4 or above in Maths, lower percentages of pupils in the most disadvantaged primary schools achieved the same levels (63.4% achieving level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English and 67.1% in Maths).¹²
- In 2003/2004, 60% of Year 12 pupils obtained five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A*-C and 58% of Year 14 pupils achieved three+ A levels at grades A to C (or equivalent).¹²
- Overall in 2003/2004, 5% of school leavers in Northern Ireland achieved no qualifications. However, a higher percentage of children (12%) who were entitled to free school meals (generally seen as an indicator of disadvantage) left school without qualifications. Similarly, 6% of all school leavers did not obtain any GCSEs, compared to 14% of pupils entitled to free school meals.¹²

See page 89 for references



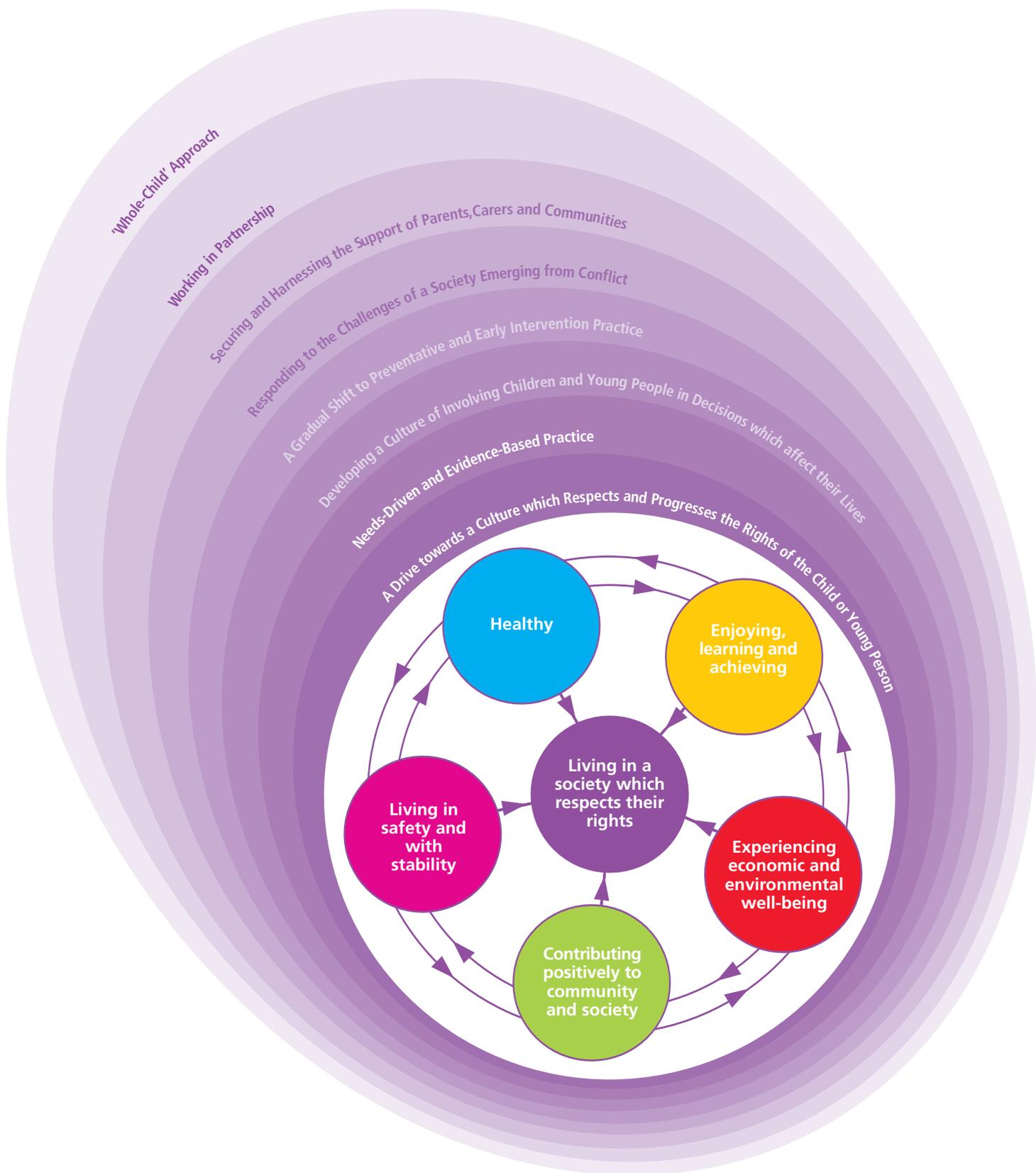
Outcomes framework

We will know that we have achieved our shared vision for our children and young people if, after ten years, we can report progress and evidence exists, which indicates that our children and young people are:

- **Healthy;**
- **Enjoying, learning and achieving;**
- **Living in safety and with stability;**
- **Experiencing economic and environmental well-being;**
- **Contributing positively to community and society; and**
- **Living in a society which respects their rights.**

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The outcome linked to the respect for rights is central to the outcomes framework and this is represented in the diagram.

The bi-directional arrows between the rights outcome and the others indicate that, for example, by delivering improved health outcomes for our children and young people, we are in fact demonstrating our respect for the rights of the child. Each of the outcomes is interdependent. The circular layout of the framework is intended to show this relationship.

A healthy child is more likely to enjoy, to learn and to achieve. Likewise, a child experiencing economic and environmental well-being is also more likely to be healthy. A child living in a society which respects the rights of the child should achieve in the other five outcome areas.

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- **Infant mortality (the number of deaths in the first year of life) has always been recognised as a good indicator of the health of the population. Between 1988 and 2003, the infant mortality rate in Northern Ireland fell from 8.9 per 1000 live births to 5.3 per 1000 live births³.**
- **Although there have been significant reductions in still births and infant death rates over past decades, in 1998/2002, the infant mortality rate for the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland was 23% higher than the Northern Ireland average.⁵**
- **The rate of births with a congenital malformation in Northern Ireland is over twice the level in England and Wales⁴.**
- **Although, in 2002-2003, 88% of children under two years in Northern Ireland had been immunised against measles, mumps and rubella, comparing favourably with 87% in Scotland, 82% in England and 78% in Wales,⁴ the rate of immunisations against measles, mumps and rubella is much lower than the immunisation rates for other infectious diseases.**

See page 89 for references



Underpinning values

The strategy will be underpinned by a number of core values as follows:

All children and young people:

- Have **dignity** as human beings and are **respected**;
- Have **rights as individuals**;
- Need **loving and supportive families or carers**;
- Are **unique** individuals each with a **valuable and diverse contribution to make** to society;
- Are **active participants** in society;
- Are **important in their own right** both now and in the future;
- Are entitled to both adult **protection** and opportunities to exercise their **independence**;
- Are entitled to live in a **peaceful and non-threatening** environment;
- Are entitled to **educational opportunities**;
- Need support to explore and achieve their **individual potential**; and
- Need **support and encouragement through the transition from childhood to adulthood** enabling them to express respect for others and take increasing responsibility for their actions and decisions.

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- The oral health of Northern Ireland's population is the worst in the UK. One in eight adults has no natural teeth and our children have the highest rates of tooth decay in Europe³.
- Dental decay (caries) in children is a significant public health problem in Northern Ireland. Compared to the UK average, our 12 year old children have more than double the level of decay for this age group. In 2003, 8000 Northern Ireland children attended hospital to have dental treatment under general anaesthetic. This is one of the highest per capita rates of general anaesthetic for dental reasons in Europe. Excluding the costs associated with these hospital treatments, fixing the decayed teeth of our children cost over £25 million in 2003.⁷
- Children in the 20% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland are almost twice as likely to have experienced dental decay as children from the 20% most affluent wards.⁷
- In terms of the sexual health of our young people in Northern Ireland, the overall rate of Sexually Transmitted Infections in Northern Ireland is lower than England. However, there has been a recent increase in diagnosis in teenagers and young adults under 25 years of age⁸.

See page 89 for references



Supporting themes

If we are successfully to deliver on improved outcomes for our children and young people, the outcomes framework will need to be underpinned by a number of supporting themes as follows:

- the need to adopt a **'whole-child' approach**, which gives recognition to the complex nature of our children's and young people's lives;
- **working in partnership** with those who provide and commission children's services, taking account of the future arrangements following the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland;
- **securing and harnessing the support of parents, carers and the communities** in which our children and young people live;
- **responding appropriately to the challenges we face as a society emerging from conflict** and recognising that our children and young people are key to securing a more stable and peaceful future for us all;
- making a **gradual shift to preventative and early intervention approaches *without compromising those children and young people who currently need our services most***;
- developing a culture where the views of our children and young people are routinely sought in matters which impact on their lives;
- ensuring the needs of children are fully assessed using agreed frameworks and common language and that the services they receive are based on identified needs and evidence about what works; and
- driving towards a culture which respects and progresses the rights of the child.

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'WHOLE-CHILD' APPROACH

Not all children have an equal start in life. On their journey in life, they will each experience different rates of progress. Some will reach the same place at a different time. Some will only get to the next juncture with assistance and support. Most tragically of all, some children will never reach their 18th birthday. It is for this reason that a 'whole-child' approach is required. A whole-child approach recognises the:

- rounded nature of children's and young people's lives;
- individuality which characterises how children and young people grow, develop and express themselves;
- rich diversity of pathways through childhood and youth;
- capacity of children and young people to shape their own lives as they grow and to learn from the mistakes they may make along the way; and
- way in which children and young people gain from and contribute to complex networks of social support.

Pledge

We will recognise the complexity of children's lives by adopting a 'whole-child' approach in all areas of policy development and service delivery relevant to children and young people.



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

While accepting that we need to do more for our children and young people, government also accepts that it cannot do it alone. As a result, the ten year strategy is not solely about what government in Northern Ireland can do for children and young people. Nor is it about what statutory authorities, voluntary and community sectors, the private sector and groups, which offer universal and targeted services to children and young people, can do. It is about what we can do together, in partnership, to improve the life chances of all our children and young people.

Under the stewardship of the Minister for Children and Young People, we will ensure a coordinated approach across government departments, and the wider public sector, to the development of policies which impact on the lives of children and young people. In planning, delivering, regulating and inspecting services for our children and young people, account will be taken of the new administrative arrangements that are emerging following the Review of Public Administration. We will aim to ensure that the new arrangements can be used to best effect for our children and young people. The focus will be on coherent and integrated service delivery leading to improved outcomes for all our children and young people. We will also bring forward legislation necessary to promote and secure the full cooperation of all agencies delivering for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Pledge

We will work to ensure a coordinated, partnership approach to policy development across government and the coherent delivery of services for all children and young people to produce improved outcomes.

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SECURING AND HARNESSING THE SUPPORT OF PARENTS, CARERS AND COMMUNITIES

Our other key partners are the **parents and carers** of our children and young people and the **communities** in which they live. We all have a much greater chance of success and children and young people will benefit more if they live in safe and stable families and in supportive communities. We must recognise the primary responsibility of parents and carers for promoting children's development and well-being, with the child's best interests as the basic concern. All of us who have had the good fortune to be a parent, or carer, will accept that, rewarding as it may be, parenting is not an easy task. We must endeavour, therefore, to provide assistance and support to parents and carers, particularly those living in difficult situations or in distressed communities. We must build on Northern Ireland's strong sense of community spirit so that communities are further energised to provide supports to parents, carers and children and young people, where these are required. In addition, communities that are supportive and respectful of children and young people, which welcome and value the contributions they make to the local community and society as a whole, are also more likely to receive those contributions and have that respect reciprocated.

Pledge

We will offer support to parents, carers and families to ensure that they are able to take primary responsibility for their children and to assist them with the challenging task of parenting, where this is required. We will also work to energise communities so that they, too, can play a supportive role for the benefit of children and young people.



RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF A SOCIETY EMERGING FROM CONFLICT

Most children and young people in Northern Ireland will not have any direct experience of the major civil unrest and violent conflict, which took place over more than thirty years. However, their families' experience of conflict will have shaped the attitudes and thinking of many children and young people. That conflict impacted to varying degrees on Northern Ireland society; it affected whole communities, and touched many families, turning their world upside down. Today, children and young people in Northern Ireland are living in a society emerging from a long period of conflict, a society which is still in many ways divided and only beginning to take steps towards peace building, reconciliation and inclusion. We should recognise that our children and young people are key to securing a more stable and peaceful future and a society, which is inclusive and respectful of difference.

Pledge

In recognising that Northern Ireland is emerging from a prolonged period of conflict, we will ensure that our children and young people are supported to grow together in a shared, inclusive society where they respect diversity and difference.

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A GRADUAL SHIFT TO PREVENTATIVE AND EARLY INTERVENTION PRACTICE

A parent who recognises a problem and gets help is more likely to secure a better outcome than one who does not. Likewise when professionals intervene in the lives of children in need it is not only the nature of the intervention that is important; the timing and approach is also critical. Help of the right sort, at a moment of maximum effect, can stop a high risk child succumbing to social or psychological problems. Six months later the same intervention may be less effective or even counter productive.

The ten year strategy is also underpinned by a commitment to preventative and early intervention practice. This should not be construed solely as the need for intervention at a point which prevents a problem worsening or a situation deteriorating further. **The aim is to improve the quality of life, life chances and living for all our children and young people and reduce the likelihood of more serious problems developing in the future.**

We will achieve this, in the main, through the provision of quality, universal services at all stages of a child's and young person's life. In effecting a shift to preventative, or early intervention practice, it is important that we do not lose sight of, or take attention away from, those children and young people who are most in need. For example, we must not lose sight of children at risk of abuse or neglect, children who are disabled, those who are 'looked after' or those who have left foster and residential care.



We must ensure that our universal and preventative approaches are supported by targeted and proportionate responses and services for the children and young people who need them most.

Pledge

We will promote a move to preventative and early intervention practice **without taking attention away from our children and young people currently most in need of more targeted services.**

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DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISIONS WHICH AFFECT THEIR LIVES

Our children and young people form over one quarter of our population, but may have only limited opportunity to consider or comment on services designed for them or the policies that impact on them. Many children and young people are not in a position to have influence on matters that greatly affect them. Currently, in the vast majority of cases, adults act effectively in the interests of children and young people. However, it remains the case that children and young people have decisions made about them, for and against their interests, without their views being taken into account, or their needs properly considered. In families in danger of being socially excluded, the scope for the needs of children and young people to be overlooked is even greater. It is vital that we create the opportunity for all children and young people to express their views freely on all matters affecting them and for those views to be given due weight. Children and young people of all ages were fully engaged in the development of this strategy. Their contributions were invaluable and have influenced the shape and content of the final strategy. We will seek, through implementation of the strategy, to be proactive in obtaining the views of children and young people on matters of significance to them. This will be particularly important in relation to service design and policy development. This approach accords with the spirit of Article 12 and is consistent with Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which encourages public institutions to make the best interests of children and young people a primary consideration in all actions affecting them.

Pledge

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we will be proactive in obtaining the views of children on matters of significance to them.



NEEDS-DRIVEN AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Key to the implementation of the strategy will be access to quality information and research which will inform future practice, influence future policy decisions and shape future service delivery. It is essential that the services our children and young people receive are based on evidence about what works and that they produce improved outcomes for them. It is also crucial that the services our children and young people receive are based on assessed need.

To this end, government is currently developing a common assessment model, which will adopt the values and philosophy of the ten year strategy by:

- respecting the rights of children and young people;
- adopting a child-centred approach, which is rooted in child development;
- building on the strengths of the family;
- involving children, young people and carers in the assessment of their needs;
- applying evidenced and knowledge based approaches;
- emphasising that assessment is a continuing process and not an 'event';
- promoting inter-agency involvement; and
- basing it on shared values.

Pledge

To deliver improved outcomes for all children and young people, we will ensure that all future policies developed and services offered to, and accessed by, children and young people, are based on identified need and on evidence about what works.

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A DRIVE TOWARDS A CULTURE WHICH RESPECTS AND PROGRESSES THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

We are committed to driving towards a culture which respects and progresses the rights of children and young people in Northern Ireland. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) sets out internationally agreed standards relating to children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. While the standards are not legally enforceable in our courts, they will be used to inform and guide the implementation of the strategy. The text of the Convention can be accessed at www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm

The standards can be broken down into three main categories:

- **provision:** the rights of a child to minimum standards of health, social security, physical care, family life, play and recreation, culture and leisure, as well as adequate standards of living and a good quality education;
- **protection:** the rights of the child to be safe from discrimination, abuse and neglect, exploitation, substance abuse, injustice and conflict;
- **participation:** the rights of the child to a name and identity, to be consulted and taken account of, to access to information, to freedom of speech and opinion and to challenge decisions on their behalf.

By signing up to the UNCRC in 1991, the UK government committed itself to working towards the realisation of the rights of children set out in it. In pursuance of our commitment to progressing children's rights, government established a **Commissioner for Children and Young**



People for Northern Ireland in October 2003. The Commissioner's role is to protect the rights of all children and young people and to safeguard their best interests. The Commissioner will have a role in overseeing the implementation of this strategy. We are also required to make periodic reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The next report to the Committee is due in July 2007. Future reports to the Committee will be directly linked to progress on actions agreed to deliver on the aims of the strategy.

Pledge

We are committed to respecting and progressing the rights of children and young people in Northern Ireland and will be guided and informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The strategy will be the key mechanism by which we will chart progress on this commitment.

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- **The Young Person’s Behaviour and Attitude Survey (2003) showed that 23% of all young people in the survey (Year 8 to Year 12) had used drugs/solvents and 60% had used alcohol. One third of survey respondents (35%) had been offered drugs or solvents. The mean age that young people first started using drugs (including solvents) was 12.5 years. The mean age when they first started using alcohol was 11.9 years.**
- **Smoking is a serious health problem in terms of the health of Northern Ireland’s children. The Young Person’s Behaviour and Attitude Survey (2003) showed that 33% of those young people surveyed had smoked; 11% of those who smoked had their first cigarette before the age of 9 years; and 54% of those who smoked had their first cigarette before the age of 12.**
- **A particular concern with the health of children in Northern Ireland is the increasing levels of obesity found in our children. Research by the Queen’s University and the University of Ulster, carried out as part of the Young Hearts study, indicates that, among 12 to 15 year olds, the percentage of children that are overweight or obese has increased by more than a quarter in the past decade.³**

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SECTION 2

Charting progress through implementation

In section one, we have described the aims of government for children and young people over the course of the next ten years. The drivers for change outlined in this section, are intended to demonstrate government's ongoing commitment to children and young people. This commitment will be built on during the lifespan of the strategy. It is also essential that we put mechanisms in place to gauge the impacts of the strategy and assess whether our aims and goals are being fulfilled.

Role of the Minister for Children and Young People

The Minister for Children and Young People will have a key role in driving forward the strategy, with the assistance of the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People. At the request of the Secretary of State, both Minister and Committee were established to provide a more coordinated and coherent approach to the development and implementation of government policy, relevant to children and young people and impacting on their lives. The Minister will ensure that the focus is maintained on the child or young person and on how policy can work more effectively for them. The Minister will not detract from, or be a substitute for other Ministers, who will maintain ultimate responsibility for their respective policy areas.

Strategy Planning and Review Group

The Minister will chair a Strategy Planning and Review Group (SPRG). Membership of the SPRG will include senior representatives of statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations. Departments, including the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Court Service, will also be represented on the group.

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Departmental representatives will be at a senior level and drawn from the Children and Young People's Inter-departmental Group (IDG), set up to oversee the development of the strategy. Attendance by departments will be determined by the agenda of SPRG meetings. The chair of IDG will always attend meetings of SPRG and report back to IDG.

The Children & Young People's Action Plan

The role of the SPRG will be to advise on the draft Children and Young People's Action Plan, which will identify the actions which will be taken across government to deliver on our strategic aims. Appendix 1 sets out the structure of departments' contributions to the action plan. Departments will be required to provide timescales for the completion of actions and identify delivery leads and partners. All actions will be linked to the outcomes framework. The action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated as necessary. Account will be taken of the views of SPRG and review reports will be submitted to the Ministerial Sub-Committee for final approval. The original and revised action plan will be published. Progress reports will also be published every two years for the duration of the implementation period.

Other implementation structures

A number of other groups will be established to advise on the impacts of the strategy. The groups are as follows:

- a **Parent's Advisory Group**, consisting of approximately 30 parents, will provide commentary on the implementation of the strategy and the impacts on children and families from a parental perspective;
- a **Practitioner's Group**, consisting of representatives of agencies delivering services for children and young people, will provide



commentary on the implementation of the strategy from the perspective of front-line staff;

- a **Research and Information Group**, consisting of key research and information interests. The group will advise on the development of a research programme and report on the findings of key research, relevant to children and young people, which may have implications for government policy and service delivery in this area.

All groups will be required to meet at least twice a year. The chairs of all groups will be members of the SPRG. The terms of reference and membership of each group will be approved by the SPRG. Terms of reference and membership lists will be published and membership will be refreshed every two years. Chairs will report routinely at meetings of SPRG.

The involvement of children and young people through implementation

Given that it is our aim to **embed a culture** of engaging with children and young people and involving them in decision-making, it is not intended to set up a separate and dedicated forum of children and young people. Instead, it is our intention to develop mechanisms that facilitate engagement in a way that is natural and achieves the cultural change we are seeking to effect. Work on the development of those mechanisms has commenced. For example, it is intended to establish a **Participation Network**, the aim of which will be to:

- offer training and consultancy support to the statutory sector in order to engage directly with children and young people;
- develop and promote standards of good practice in relation to child and youth participation; and

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- develop a bank of resource materials, information and a website in relation to child and youth participation.

The Participation Network will work in tandem with existing or planned participation structures, including a **Participation Hub**, which will be established by the Northern Ireland Youth Forum. The aim of the Participation Hub is to deliver a coherent approach to the participation of children and young people, integrate existing and emerging participation structures and ensure that children and young people have the capacity to engage. Emerging structures will include the **Northern Ireland Network for Youth** which will be established to strengthen the direct voice of young people in all relevant aspects of government provision; and new **District Youth Networks** to strengthen the role of District Councils in youth provision.

For the life of the strategy and beyond we will, therefore, ensure that children and young people are **routinely** involved in the public decision-making process.

Resources

The strategy is being launched in the context of £100m allocated over the next two years through the Children and Young People's Funding Package, recently announced by Secretary of State, Peter Hain. This is in addition to the significant resources already allocated to services for children and young people in Northern Ireland. The package is demonstrable evidence of government's commitment to children and young people. The impact of this investment will be an important consideration in future funding decisions in respect of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review which is currently underway.

Another important consideration in determining future funding in this priority area will be the current review by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, supported by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The review is examining trends in spending on children and



young people in Northern Ireland and drawing comparisons with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Measures of progress

In addition to implementation structures to act as barometers of progress, we have also developed a set of indicators, which will be used to measure the success of the ten year strategy. **The indicator set is again linked to the outcomes framework**, with each indicator corresponding to one or more outcome areas. Baseline data has been provided and the direction (up or down) in which we expect each indicator to travel is also given.

The indicator set, categorised by outcome, is set out in the following pages. We have also provided examples of programmes of work across government, which will be drivers for and of change, aimed at delivering improved outcomes.

The examples provided should not be interpreted as the strategy action plan. Detailed action plans, which will be directly linked to the outcomes framework, will be produced and reviewed throughout the implementation period of the strategy. Targets linked to indicators will also be a matter for future action plans. Some of the programme examples cited can clearly be linked to more than one outcome but, for illustration, have been linked to a single outcome area. Working together, all examples contribute to, or facilitate, the move towards a society, which is respectful of the rights of children and young people.

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- In terms of safety of our children, 36% of all those killed in the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland were children and young people, and although the levels of casualties and fatalities have declined since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, sectarianism and division within Northern Ireland is still affecting the well-being of our children and young people. One quarter of respondents surveyed in the Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey (2004) reported that they had felt threatened or intimidated by republican murals, kerb painting or flags in the past 12 months. A higher percentage (35%) had felt intimidated or threatened by similar loyalist displays. Additionally, 28% had been threatened by a paramilitary group; 16% had moved house because of intimidation; 16% had been the victim of a paramilitary beating; 14% had their homes damaged by a bomb; and 30% reported that they had been injured due to a sectarian incident.
- Of significance in Northern Ireland has been the growing awareness of the impact of ‘Troubles Related Trauma’ on young people’s mental health. However, the quality, consistency and accessibility of CAMH (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) services, is inadequate⁹.

See page 89 for references

BRYAN'S STORY

Bryan is 17 and was born in North Africa. He is a practising Muslim and is proud of his cultural and religious background. He left his country of origin secretly, after being interrogated and tortured by the Security Forces in his country. Up until then he had lived on the streets with his older brother. His brother went into hiding and Bryan decided to leave the country because he felt his liberty or even his life would be in danger if he stayed.

After a traumatic journey via Amsterdam, London and Dublin he arrived in Belfast. He was 14, had no money and nowhere to live. He was initially placed in a children's home, then moved to a community placement scheme and then to a leaving care service. Bryan is deemed to be an unaccompanied minor seeking Asylum and has been granted permission to stay in the country up until his 18th birthday. He is currently involved in the Immigration Appeal process and hopes to be granted refugee status and permission to stay indefinitely.

Bryan is prone to panic attacks and is receiving medical help. He has greatly improved his command of English and is studying for his NVQs in catering. He has recently begun to engage in counselling to overcome the emotional scars left by his experience.

We are grateful to Barnardo's (NI) for the case examples used throughout this document. The names of all the children and young people have been changed to protect their identities.

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HEALTHY	Indicator	Data Source
	Infant mortality rate	General Register Office
	Low Birth Weight (proportion of low birth weight live births (<2,500g))	Chief Medical Officer's Report, DHSSPS (Child Health System)
	Immunisation uptake rates for MMR at 24 months	Korner Aggregate Return, Child Health System
	Level of decayed/missing/filled teeth in Primary 7 children	HSS Trusts
	Level of decayed/missing/filled teeth in Primary 1 children	HSS Trusts
	Number of child deaths (U18) due to accidents on farm and in the workplace	General Register Office



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DHSSPS	5.3 deaths per 1,000 live births	2004	↓
DHSSPS	5.9%	2003	↓
DHSSPS	MMR 88.4%	2004/2005	↑
DHSSPS	Decayed 44% Missing 14% Filled 54%	2003/2004	↓
DHSSPS	Decayed 25% Missing 1% Filled 15%	2003/2004	↓
DHSSPS, HSENI, DOE (Road Safety), DE			↓

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Drivers for Change

- As part of the dynamic drive to improve the positive outcomes for children and young people over the next decade, driven by the overarching Strategy for Children and Young People, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is developing a **10-year Strategic Framework for Children, Young People and Families**. The Framework will dovetail and fully augment the aims and objectives of the overarching strategy. It will set outcomes principles, indicators and actions and cover the broad spectrum of health and social services for children and young people. Consistency between the two strategies will be achieved by alignment of the outcomes and progress will be measured using the same set of indicators. A broad range of policy developments and initiatives, including new adoption and fostering strategies; physical and learning disability and mental health policies; and child protection initiatives will act as supporting pillars to the Strategic Framework for Children and Young People and Families;
- the **promoting mental health strategy**, which aims to prevent or reduce the impact of mental and emotional distress, anxiety, mental illness and suicide through a range of preventative measures including raising awareness of mental health issues, promoting coping skills and suicide awareness and outreach work with young people, especially those in areas of need;
- the development of a **suicide prevention strategy** which aims to reduce the suicide rate in Northern Ireland, especially amongst young people and those most at risk;
- the development of a **new policy framework for health-promoting schools** to assist schools to make effective arrangements for supporting the health and well-being of pupils and staff;



- **a universal screening service for children** in line with the recommendations of the Health for All Children Report (2003);
- the development of a **major initiative to improve the quality of food provision in schools;** and
- contribution to the national consultation, led by the Office of Communications (OFCOM), on **restricting the promotion and advertising of food to children on television.**

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HEALTHY	Indicator	Data Source
	% of children with Type 1 diabetes	DHSSPS
	% of children with asthma	DHSSPS
	Number of young people waiting for a first CAHMS outpatient appointment	DHSSPS
	Lengths of time young people are waiting for first CAMHS outpatient appointment	DHSSPS
	Rate per 1,000 births to females aged under 17	General Register Office
	Diagnostic rate of new sexually transmitted infections (under 16 & 16-19 year olds)	DHSSPS, Korner return KC60



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DHSSPS	Information not yet available		
DoE (Education for for sustainable development, reducing pollution); DRD (transport); DHSSPS	Information not yet available		
DHSSPS	1224	31 March 2005	↓
DHSSPS	0-2 months 42% 3-5 months 25% 6-8 months 12% 9-11 months 5% 12 months or more. 14%	31 March 2005	Increase in shorter waiting times/ Reduction in longer waiting times
DHSSPS; DE	3.3 births per 1,000 females	2004	↓
DHSSPS; DE	Under 16 years: 118 per 100,000 persons; 16-19 yr olds: 681 per 100,000 persons	2004/2005	↓

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Drivers for Change

- the development of comprehensive **child and adolescent mental health services** that will focus on preventative measures and help address the suicide rates particularly among young males. This will be informed by the Bamford review on mental health and learning disability, which is due to report on child and adolescent mental health services by summer 2006;
- the **establishment of a number of child and adolescent crisis response teams** to strengthen child and adolescent mental health services and avoid admission to inpatient facilities, by enabling appropriate clinical intervention for young people, prevent problems developing into more serious conditions and, where possible, avoid admissions;
- the extension of and greater access to **schools' counselling programmes**;
- the **teenage pregnancy and parenthood strategy and action plan** which aims to reduce the number of unplanned births to teenage mothers and minimise the adverse consequences of those births to teenage parents and their children through: improving communication, promoting educational opportunity, providing user-friendly services for young people, flexible employment opportunities and improved research;
- the development of a **sexual health strategy**, which aims to promote good sexual health and which takes account of issues affecting young people, in particular those who are looked after or are leaving care; and



- the **establishment of an 18 bed in-patient adolescent mental health facility**, including two intensive nursing beds, on the Foster Green site in Belfast by 2009. This will replace the existing Regional Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient facilities at Knockbracken and College Gardens, Belfast. The facility will include appropriate on-site special education provision.

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	Indicator	Data Source
HEALTHY	% of pupils in Years 8-12 who have ever drunk alcohol (as a proportion of all respondents)	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
	% of pupils in Years 8-12 who have ever been drunk (as a proportion of all respondents/as a proportion of those who have ever drunk alcohol)	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
	% of pupils in Years 8-12 who are current smokers	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
	% of pupils Years 8-12 taking illegal drugs in the past year	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
	% of children consuming 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
	% of children taking part in sports or other physical activities at least 3-5 times a week	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
	% of Primary 1 pupils (approx 5 years of age) who are obese	Child Health System



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DHSSPS; DE	59.5%	2003	↓
DHSSPS; DE	33.0%/56.1%	2003	↓
DHSSPS; DE	11%	2003	↓
DHSSPS; DE	9.6%	2003	↑
DHSSPS; DE	35.5%	2003	↑
DHSSPS; DE; DCAL	36.0%	2003	↑
DOE (Education for Sustainable Development); DHSSPS; DE (school meals, vending machines, education); DETI (FSA food labelling, food promotion)	5.8%	2003	↓

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Drivers for Change

- proposed key priorities for the **new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs**, including developing treatment and support services for young people under the age of 18 in respect of alcohol and drugs; particular focus on the needs of those children and young people deemed vulnerable and/or at risk; addressing underage drinking; and ensuring education and prevention work follows models and principles of good practice;
- the **publication of a cross-departmental response to the recommendations of the Fit Futures Taskforce**, including an implementation plan to deliver the Public Service Agreement target **to halt the rise in obesity in children by 2010**;
- continued promotion of the **travelwise safer routes to school initiative** to achieve the dual aim of improved road traffic conditions and individual levels of health and fitness; and
- the development of a **strategy aimed at improving the health and well-being of those with a physical or sensory disability** through increased service provision and access to services and specialist equipment; improved inter-agency working and workforce planning; replication of models of best practice; more support for parents and siblings; and improvements in the transition from child to adult services.

JAMIE'S STORY

Jamie felt like he spent the first 13 years of his life in the middle of a big fight. His Dad was violent and hurt both his Mum and the children. Jamie felt like he hated his Dad but also felt guilty about this. As he said, "He is still my Dad". It was a relief to Jamie when his Mum and Dad finally split up but the abuse didn't end there. Jamie still saw his Dad regularly and he made life fairly difficult for him, taunting both him and his Mum verbally. Then Jamie's Dad died and while that would have seemed like the end of his troubles, it wasn't.

His Mum got very depressed and seemed to stop caring. The house got so dirty that he didn't want to be there. At the same time Jamie got more and more confused. He didn't know how to feel about his Dad's death and started to skip school. Jamie was only going to school about two days a week. Jamie eventually got some help to begin to deal with his grief about his Dad and then was put in touch with a service for teenagers who were having problems at school. Eventually his Mum also got help and slowly they are trying to rebuild their lives.

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ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

Indicator	Data Source
% of children living in absolute low income poverty	Family Resources Survey, DSD (Modified OECD, BHC)
% of children living in relative low income poverty (<60% median)	Family Resources Survey, DSD (Modified OECD, BHC)
% of children living in materially deprived and low income households	Family Resources Survey, DSD (Modified OECD, (Will be available for 04/05 survey)
Number of children (under 18 years) living in homes which fail the decent homes standard	Housing Conditions Survey
Number of families presenting as homeless	NIHE
Number of families living in temporary accommodation	NIHE



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DSD (benefits, community capacity, social capital, housing); Inland Revenue (tax credits); General Consumer Council (teaching financial capability); OFMDFM (Anti-poverty strategy); All Departments (access to goods and services, childcare).	14% of children are living in absolute poverty	2002/2003	↓
	23% of children live in relative low income poverty	2002/2003	↓
	Information not currently available		↓
DSD/NIHE	11.7%	2004	↑
DSD/NIHE	5,700	2004/2005	↑
DSD/NIHE	880 families living in temporary accommodation		↓

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Drivers for Change

- the development of a strategy to tackle poverty, including child poverty. Government is committed to delivering on the UK child poverty targets, which aim to **halve child poverty by 2010 and eliminate it by 2020**;
- a commitment to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has **access to good quality affordable housing in the tenure of choice**;
- an **accelerating entrepreneurship strategy**, which recognises the importance of ensuring that young people from different backgrounds and locations are at the forefront of the development of a stronger enterprise culture and through which funding is provided to third party organisations to help young people participate in enterprise by offering them advice and support on all aspects of starting a business;
- a **sustainable development strategy** to improve the quality of life of everyone in Northern Ireland and at the same time minimise negative impacts on the environment through: the more efficient use of available resources; greater innovation; job creation; economic growth; welfare improvements; improved waste management; and a focus on **sustainable communities** as one of six priority areas, the aim of which is to create a physical environment which promotes healthy lifestyles and supports the provision of services to meet the current and future needs of our children and young people;
- a **neighbourhood renewal strategy**, the aim of which is to tackle the complex multi-dimensional nature of deprivation using a long-term, programme-based approach, will consider the needs of approximately 86,877 children and young people living in targeted disadvantaged areas. Working in partnership, government aims to improve sustainable economic activity and



produce better social conditions through the provision of improved public services and both attractive and safe living conditions in these areas;

- the Northern Ireland **concessionary fares scheme** funds the provision of a mixture of free and half fares on public transport services;
- continued implementation of **'The Children Matter Task Force'** regional plan to replace residential accommodation for children and young people which no longer meets standards and expand the overall number of available places. The Task Force is currently developing plans to address the residential needs of children and young people leaving care and the respite care needs of children and young people with disabilities;
- the **rural community transport partnerships**, funded by the Rural Transport Fund to provide services to children and young people in rural areas;
- in 2004/05, £17.32 million of maintenance was secured on behalf of children through the **Child Support Agency**. The target is to increase the number of children receiving child maintenance by 150% by March 2008 against a base at March 2003. The Agency has also developed an **outreach strategy** to enhance its public interface and plans are being developed to improve the delivery of services for children;
- the **Social Security Agency** provides financial support indirectly to children and young people by ensuring that parents and families have maximum entitlement to the full range of benefits available. In the future, the Social Security Agency's benefit uptake programme should help to enhance the well-being of children and young people living in low income households and contribute to their financial inclusion;

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- in addition, the Social Security Agency's work with single parent families through the **new deal for lone parents** and the **welfare reform** programme, with the emphasis on getting people into work, both have potential impacts on the living standards of children and young people;
- the eradication of fuel poverty is one of Government's top priorities. The **fuel poverty strategy** sets challenging targets for the eradication of fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 and in non-vulnerable households by 2016. In addition, by 2010, no household in the social rented sector should suffer from fuel poverty; and
- the **supporting people** initiative provides housing support services for vulnerable persons in supported accommodation, including the provision of community based housing support for people with learning difficulties, moving from institutional care to their own home in the community and helping vulnerable young people cope with new responsibilities.



- In 2000, 40% of Year 6 pupils in primary schools reported that they had recently been bullied; and 25% of Year 6 primary pupils reported that they had recently bullied another pupil. In 2000, 30% of Year 9 pupils reported that they had recently been bullied and 28% of Year 9 post primary pupils reported that they had recently bullied another pupil.¹²
- Research shows that a minimum of 11,000 children in Northern Ireland are presently living with domestic violence. This is likely to be only the tip of the iceberg given the nature of the problem and under-reporting.¹³ Growing up in a household with domestic violence can have a serious negative impact on a child's school attainment and increase the likelihood of school exclusion, youth offending, substance abuse, mental health problems homelessness and suicide.¹⁴
- Additionally, research undertaken in Scotland¹⁵ has shown that one in five young men and one in ten young women believe that violence towards a partner is sometimes acceptable.¹³
- In 2003/2004, 63% of school leavers moved to Further or Higher Education.¹²

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ENJOYING LEARNING AND ACHIEVING

Indicator	Data Source
% of school leavers who move to Further and Higher Education	School Leavers Survey, DE ¹
% of pupils achieving level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 in English	Key Stage 2 Assessments, DE
% of pupils achieving level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 in Maths	Key Stage 2 Assessments, DE
% of year 12 pupils who obtain 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A* to C	Summary of Annual Examination Results, DE
% of year 14 pupils achieving 3+ A levels at grades A to C (or equivalent) [target 60% by 2008]	Summary of Annual Examination Results, DE
% of year 12 pupils who obtain 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to G (or equivalent)	Summary of Annual Examination Results, DE
% of year 12 pupils gaining (any) GCSEs at A* to G (or equivalent)	Summary of Annual Examination Results, DE
<p>1 School Leavers Survey covers all school leavers regardless of year group, whereas DEL Destination Statistics are based on year 12 pupils only.</p>	



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DE/DEL	62.7%	2003/2004	↑
DE	NI Pupils: 75.6% Pupils in most disadvantaged primary schools: 63.4% [target 70% by 2008]	2002/2003	↑
DE	NI Pupils: 78.2% Pupils in most disadvantaged primary schools: 67.1% [target 70% by 2008]	2002/2003	↑
DE	61%	2003/2004	↑
DE	61%	2003/2004	↑
DE	NI Pupils: 85.8% Secondary/ (Non-Grammar) School Pupils: 82% [target 83% by 2008]	2003/2004	↑
DE	NI Pupils: 97% In the most disadvantaged post-primary schools: 92% [target 94% by 2008]	2003/2004	↑

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Drivers for Change

- the introduction of **extended schools**, primarily in areas of disadvantage. Extended schools will provide activities beyond the school day to help meet the needs of pupils, families and the wider community. The focus of extended schools will be on supporting learning, healthy lifestyles and creativity. Each extended school will offer a menu of activities, including: breakfast clubs; after-school study support; after-school youth, sport and leisure activities; programmes for parents; and community use of schools;
- the phased introduction of a **revised school curriculum** that will provide schools with greater flexibility to tailor provision to the needs of young people, with an emphasis on core skills including: communication and numeracy; the use of ICT; and learning for life and work;
- the phased introduction of a new **entitlement framework** for young people in schools from age 15 onwards. The framework will provide young people with access to a wider range of courses, including vocational courses;
- **geographical expansion and enhancement of Sure Start**, including the introduction of a day care element; new projects and satellite services; an expansion of existing projects to incorporate additional wards; and a new programme for 2 year olds, tailored to learning through play and linked to the pre-school year to provide a seamless transition from early years to school. The expansion will primarily target children under the age of 4 and their families, within the 20% most disadvantaged wards and is aimed at giving an additional 12,000 children access to Sure Start services; and



- The Northern Ireland Prison Service and The Probation Board for Northern Ireland, as lead Agencies in the **Resettlement Strategy**, recognise the importance of family in the resettlement of prisoners back into the community. Arrangements are in place to encourage mums and dads in prison to keep in touch with their children through "book and tape" clubs, child centred visits and through the provision of training and advice on parenting skills. The Prison Service also provides financial support to external agencies to operate family centres at each of the three prisons and creche facilities at Hydebank Wood.

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ENJOYING LEARNING AND ACHIEVING

Indicator	Data Source
Number of children participating in Creative Youth Partnerships (Ages 3/4 years -25 years)	DCAL
% of pupils who go to the public library at least monthly	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
% of pupils who take part in sport at least once a week	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
% of pupils who have attended an Arts Arts performance at least once in the last year	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
% of children who say they enjoy taking part in physical activity or sports	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
% of pupils who would feel out of place at an art gallery	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
% of pupils who enjoy seeing exhibitions and displays at museums	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey
% of pupils who agree that public libraries provide an important service to people	Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DCAL, DE	11,311* (Estimate)	2004/2005	↑
DCAL	28.7%	2003	↑
DCAL	88.9%	2003	↑
DCAL	52.6%	2003	↑
DCAL	79.7%	2003	↑
DCAL	51.0%	2003	↓
DCAL	40.5%	2003	↑
DCAL	80.6%	2003	↑

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Drivers for Change

- the **creative youth partnerships** to support learning, personal growth and social development through arts programmes, activities and initiatives; and
- the two-stage development of **play and recreation policies** aimed at improving current play and recreation provision in Northern Ireland. The play policy will be targeted at children aged 11 years and under; the recreation/leisure policy will target children and young people aged 12 to 18 years. The development process will include an initial mapping exercise to establish the current position in relation to designated play areas in Northern Ireland.

MARIAN'S STORY

Marian is aged 17, pregnant and living in temporary accommodation. Estranged from her parents, she contacted the Barnardo's Service for information and advice. The advisor carried out a home visit and accompanied her to the Social Security Agency and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. After a few weeks Marian got financial assistance and was offered accommodation.

The advisor then helped her to claim a Community Care Grant for the essential items needed to move into her house. This application was turned down and the decision was appealed. A review was requested and the advisor accompanied Marian to the Social Security Agency to advocate on her behalf.

The matter was resolved and she was able to move into her new home to prepare for the birth of her child. Hopefully, Marian can now look forward to a better future with ongoing support for herself and her child.

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ENJOYING LEARNING AND ACHIEVING

Indicator	Data Source
% of young people who participate regularly in voluntary and community work (for example, charity fundraising)	Not yet measurable, possible source is Young Person's Behaviour and Attitude Survey.
Success of careers guidance programme to post primary schools	DEL destination statistics ¹
Number of formerly 'disengaged' ² young people who have re-engaged with education, training and employment	DEL Careers Service disengaged statistics
% of 'qualifying' ³ young people in education, training and employment	DHSSPS/HSS Trusts looked after children statistics
% of 'eligible' ⁴ young people in education, training and employment	DHSSPS/HSS Trusts looked after children statistics

- 1 School Leavers Survey covers all school leavers regardless of year group, whereas DEL Destination Statistics are based on year 12 pupils only.
- 2 'Dis-engaged' young people are those who are not in education, training or employment. Their status is assessed on the first Monday of October following their eligible school leaving date - therefore they will be over 16 years old.
- 3 Looked after Children: 'Qualifying' Young People: Young People aged 16-21 years who were discharged from care prior to 1 September 2005, or have re-entered care but have not remained in care for a period of more than 13 weeks.



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
	DE		↑
DEL	Year 12 Pupils: Entering Education: 70% Entering Training: 18% Entering Employment: 5% Classified as 'disengaged': ² 7%		↑ ↑ ↑ ↓
DEL	Information not currently available		↑
DHSSPS/DEL	49%	30.9.2005	↑
DHSSPS/DEL	70%	30.09.2005	↑

⁴ Looked After Children: 'Eligible' Young People: Young People: Young People aged 16 or 17 years, who have been looked after for more than 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are *still looked after*.

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Drivers for Change

- an **education programme** for children and young people and on-line resources to help **improve understanding of the role of the courts and the court process**, and the development of information for children and young people involved in the court process;
- the development of an **education resource**, aimed primarily at key stage four pupils, to encourage young people **to develop a clear understanding of how the criminal justice system works** and the part they can play as good citizens;
- **a range of measures targeted at young people in care** with the aim of improving stability and continuity of care for reducing social exclusion, improving educational outcomes and levels of school attendance and contributing to better long term outcomes in terms of employment, health and wellbeing. The measures will include supports for foster carers to enable them to effectively discharge their role as first educators of the child in their care; supporting staff in residential care settings to promote improved educational outcomes for children in their care; enabling young people who are not yet ready for independence to remain living with former foster carers and to encourage more young people leaving care to continue in education or training up to age 21; and empowering children and young people in care to engage actively in the process of ensuring the system works in their best interests;
- the development of a **policy for children with a learning disability**, which will take account of the recommendations of the review into Learning Disability in Northern Ireland and the Equal Lives report. It is intended that this will be the blue print for the reform and modernisation of services for children with a learning disability;



- the establishment of a **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Inter-Departmental Group** to ensure that children with SEN are provided with appropriate health and education support services such as speech and language therapy and interventions for those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD);
- the establishment of a **regional taskforce** to identify, agree and develop an action plan to improve the provision of speech and language therapy;
- the creation of **multi-disciplinary teams comprising psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and social workers**. With professional input from educationalists, the teams will provide support services to schools and other settings within the extended schools programme;
- the development of a **rural strategy** for Northern Ireland, which takes account of the review of the Rural Development Programme (2000 – 2006) and a major study of Rural Policy in Northern Ireland. The draft Strategy will inform contribution to the UK National Strategic Plan for rural development. Projects addressing the needs of children and young people may benefit from funding arising from the Strategy; and
- the provision of an **education programme for schools and colleges at key stages 1&2 and 3&4 of the school curriculum**, facilitated by forest guides through the Forest Service, to promote the use of forests for public access.

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CONTRIBUTING POSITIVELY TO COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY	Indicator	Data Source
	Attendance rates among post primary pupils	Summary of Annual Examination Results, DE
	% of youth population aged 14-18 years who participate in youth activities	DE
	One Year Reconviction rates for children	Reconviction Bulletin
	Average length of time taken to process a child through the youth justice system from charge to finding	NIO NI Courts Service
	Number of young people sentenced to custody	NIO The NI Prison Population Research and Statistical Bulletin
	Number of young people entering the criminal justice system for the first time	PSNI and Public Prosecution Service



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DE	92%	2003/2004	↑
DE	Outturn = 36%	2005/2006	↑
NIO, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, YJA	After: Custody: 36% Non Custodial Disposals: 22%		↓
NIO, NI Courts Service, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, YJA	Average time in weeks to process a child aged 10-17 from date of summons to date of disposal = 20.7 weeks		↓
NIO, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, YJA	under 17: 57 17-20 year olds: 291	2004	↓
NIO, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, YJA	Information not currently available		

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Drivers for Change

- a **Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy**, which recognises that children and young people have a key role to play in developing and securing a more sustainable society by embedding the concept of sustainable development in the education curriculum at all levels, with an emphasis on demonstrating and achieving positive behavioural change;
- **additional supports for children and young people for whom English is an additional language** through improved access to translated material for schools and interpretation services;
- the **creation of multi disciplinary support teams** to work within schools, extended schools and in early years settings to provide specialist services to children and young people with special or additional needs;
- **additional supports for foster parents** to discharge their role effectively as first educators of the child or young people in their care;
- the development of **peer mentoring and independent advocacy services** to empower children and young people in care and to ensure that they are actively engaged in determining whether the system of care is working effectively and in their best interests;
- the development of **new outreach youth work provision**, focused on marginalised and isolated young people in rural and hard-to-reach communities;
- the development of a new package of **100 additional age-specific day care places for young people leaving special schools** and, where appropriate, mainstream schools as they make the



transition to adulthood; and additional funding to provide social and life skills training for statemented children from age 14 until leaving school;

- the establishment of a new **state-of-the-art juvenile justice centre**, planned for 2007, to facilitate a more effective response to those young people who need to be detained;
- courts have been provided with a wider range of **community measures for dealing proportionately with young people who offend**. This is supported by a continuous effort among a broad partnership of agencies to **reduce the likelihood of offending or re-offending** and to ensure that linkages to key services in the community are strengthened rather than dislocated;
- the **development and increased use of youth conferencing arrangements**, based on the principles of restorative justice, in a way which offers the prospect of making lasting repair to the harm caused by crime. The arrangements provide the young person with the opportunity to take responsibility for their behaviour, to understand the effect of their actions on the victim and to make amends;
- the PSNI **youth diversion scheme** provides the framework within which the police respond to children and young people who come into contact with police for non-offence behaviour, who have offended or are potentially at risk of offending or becoming involved in anti-social behaviour. The scheme draws on the philosophy and principles of restorative justice and in partnership with other agencies, aims to divert those children and young people who have offended away from becoming further involved in the criminal justice system; and

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- the establishment of a normal, civic society where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of an interdependence is the overarching objective of **A Shared Future** – Government’s policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland. By producing positive impacts for all parts of society, the strategy will have particular importance for children and young people through the creation of sustainable relationships, built on trust between individuals and communities, to ensure a peaceful and prosperous future.

ROBERT'S STORY

Robert is the oldest boy of a family of four. This time last year Robert would have described his life as brilliant. He had just passed his 11+ and was in his first year of grammar school. The family had a great holiday in the summer camping in France and in school he was picked for the school football team. At Christmas that year everything changed for Robert.

Robert came home from school early one afternoon and found his Dad hanging from the landing. Robert's Dad was a teacher and there were no indications that Robert's father was depressed or suicidal.

Robert is finding it difficult to sleep. He is in a state of constant anxiety and cannot sit still or focus for any length of time. He is very confused about his father's death. He has had to help his mother out in caring for the younger children and does a lot of the parenting tasks. He feels he cannot talk to his mother because she is struggling with her grief and his friends can't understand why he has changed so much.

His grades have dropped in school and he has received detention for not having his homework in on time. Last week, he missed training again as he didn't want to leave his Mum alone. As a result, he has been dropped from the football team.

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LIVING IN SAFETY AND WITH STABILITY

Indicator	Data Source
Number of children (under 16 years) killed or seriously injured on our roads	PSNI
Number of re-registrations on the child protection register during the year	Children Order returns – CPR9, DHSSPS
% of children under 16 years (looked after for more than 2 1/2 years) in the same placement for the last 12 months or placed for adoption	DHSSPS OC2 2002/2003
% of formerly looked after children at their 19th birthday who are in training, education or employment	OC3, Community Information Branch, DHSSPS
% of primary pupils who had recently been bullied (Year 6)	DE Research (Bullying in Schools)
% of primary pupils who had recently bullied another pupil (Year 6)	DE Research (Bullying in Schools)
<p>5 Economic activity of 39% of formerly looked after children at their 19th birthday was unknown/not reported.</p>	



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DOE (Road Safety), DRD, PSNI	11 killed 140 injured	2004	↓
DHSSPS	162 (12.6% change of all registrations in the year)	2004/2005	↓
DHSSPS	88% (provisional figures)	2002/2003	↑
DHSSPS, DEL	55% ⁵	2003/2004	↑
DE	40%	2000	↓
DE	25%	2000	↓

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Drivers for Change

- the development of an **adoption strategy** which will seek to provide a stronger focus on ensuring permanency of care for looked after children and address the long term implications of adoption for the children and families involved. This will include a proposal to introduce a new legal option for the care of children who cannot remain with their parents, but for whom adoption is unsuitable. The aim of the strategy will be to deliver a truly modern adoption service, underpinned by new primary legislation;
- the development of a **fostering strategy** with the four Health and Social Services Boards for the delivery of services to support the statutory requirements in respect of foster care with the aim of increasing the number of foster carers by 300 to 1500 by 2008. Consideration will be given to the inclusion of a **payment for skills** model, similar to that in place in England;
- in partnership with the anti-bullying forum, the creation of a system to provide **information and identify best practice around tackling bullying**, which is accessible to all schools;
- the proposed introduction of legislation to improve current structural arrangements for the protection of children, including: the creation of a single **regional safeguarding board** to replace the four existing area child protection committees; a new legislative duty to co-operate to improve well-being; and a new legislative duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
- improved access to **telephone helpline support targeted at children experiencing abuse**;
- the establishment of a **dedicated, full-time child protection support service for schools** to promote and develop best practice in schools around safeguarding pupils;



- the provision of the **young witness service and special measures**, which aim to help reduce the stress and trauma experienced by children and young people who may give evidence as a witness in court;
- the inclusion of a specific target in the criminal justice strategy and delivery group's plan to **reduce delay and give youth cases greater priority in the criminal justice system** in Northern Ireland; and
- a **review of current liquor licensing law** in Northern Ireland. The review has specifically examined licensing laws as they affect children and young people and has put forward a number of proposals to address the protection of children. Work is ongoing to bring forward legislation on test purchasing to tackle the sale of alcohol to minors.

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LIVING IN SAFETY AND WITH STABILITY

Indicator	Data Source
% of post-primary pupils who had recently been bullied (Year 9)	DE Research (Bullying in schools)
% of post-primary pupils who had recently bullied another pupil	DE Research (Bullying in schools)
Proportion of young people who feel safe in the area they live	Young People's Behaviour and Attitude Survey



Lead Department(s)	Baseline Data	Date of Baseline Data	Expected Direction of Change
DE	30%	2000	↓
DE	28%	2000	↓
DSD, NIO, PSNI, DOE (Road Safety), DRD	91.3%	2003	↑

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Drivers for Change

- the establishment of **local community safety partnerships**, which are working to make the streets safer for everyone and particularly for children. For example, through projects such as the **bee safe** scheme, which aims to prepare Primary 7 pupils for the transition to post-primary school by promoting safety and developing community awareness;
- a **review of sexual offences legislation** with the aim of strengthening and modernising the framework of sex offence law, particularly with regard to offences against children;
- **strengthening of current sex offender assessment and risk management arrangements** and the **extension of arrangements to include violent offenders**;
- the introduction of a **system of accreditation**, under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 targeted at providers of children's services in the voluntary and community sectors, with the aim of promoting improved child protection practice;
- legislative change to **strengthen the protections available for all victims of domestic violence and abuse**;
- the **introduction of the equivalent of Section 58 of the Children Act 2004 in Northern Ireland**, which will restrict the defence of reasonable chastisement to the charge of common assault. Legislative change will be supported by the development of mechanisms to promote the use of alternative positive forms of discipline in the context of a **family and parenting strategy**;
- review of the current arrangements for **contact** between children and parents who have separated with the aim of encouraging constructive and positive family relationships post-separation;



- the **establishment of new disclosure arrangements for Northern Ireland, under Part V of the Police Act 1997**. This will deliver wider and more comprehensive criminal and police record checks for those working with the vulnerable;
- **enhancement and reorganisation of front line child protection services** to ensure a more expert, more consistent and faster response when assessing children in need and responding to child protection concerns;
- the extension to Northern Ireland of legislation flowing from the Bichard programme, creating a **new system for vetting and barring those who seek to work with children and vulnerable adults**;
- the implementation of a **new regional child death review protocol** that sets out the responsibilities of statutory agencies and professional staff when dealing with the sudden or unexpected death of any child from birth up to the age of 18 years, whether that death occurs at home, in a community setting (including any educational, care, secure care or custodial setting), or in hospital. The protocol takes account of best practice and recommended procedures arising from the most recent policy and research developments within this area of expertise;
- the development of a **range of initiatives to tackle violence in the home**, led by the regional steering group for domestic violence; and
- the development of **child protection policies across all departments of government**; the nomination of senior government officials with responsibility for child protection; and the introduction of assurance mechanisms to determine if policies are being appropriately applied.

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In addition, Government is also taking forward a number of **strategies in relation to equality, including the introduction of new age discrimination legislation**, all of which are intended to contribute to the ten year strategy for children and young people by primarily tackling the inequalities experienced by them on a range of grounds. These include:

- a **racial equality strategy** for Northern Ireland, the aim of which is to provide a framework to tackle racial inequalities in Northern Ireland and open up opportunity for all; to eradicate racism and hate crime; and (in conjunction with A Shared Future, Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland) initiate actions to promote good relations. The racial equality action implementation plan will include specific actions aimed at minority ethnic children and young people;
- a **gender equality strategy**, which will focus on identifying and directing action to tackle gender inequalities and to promote gender equality for men and women in Northern Ireland. It will be supported by two action plans (targeted separately at women/girls and men/boys) and high-level gender equality indicators;
- a **sexual orientation strategy** and action plan to tackle inequalities linked to sexual orientation; and
- new **age discrimination legislation**, which will prohibit unjustified age discrimination in employment and vocational training. The legislation will give individuals important new rights not to be discriminated because of their age and will place new responsibilities on all employers and providers of vocational training. The age regulations will establish basic requirements to prevent people being denied jobs because of prejudice about their age and enable harassment and victimisation on the grounds of age to be tackled promptly and effectively.



- The introduction of seat belt legislation, alcohol limits and introduction of child restraints has halved the level of fatalities on Northern Ireland roads since the mid seventies. However, 11 children were killed on Northern Ireland roads in 2004, 140 were seriously injured and 951 were slightly injured. Of all child casualties under 16 years of age, just over half (51%) were pedestrians, 36% were passengers in motor vehicles and 6% were pedal cyclists.¹⁰
- At 31 March 2005, there were 1,593 children on the child protection register in Northern Ireland. This is a rate of 31 per 10,000 children aged under 18, compared with 24 in England, 33 in Wales and 20 in Scotland. Between 1999/00 and 2004/05, the number of child protection registrations increased by 5.8%. At 31 March 2005, 34.8% of children on the child protection register were assessed to be at risk of neglect (only); 19.8% to be at risk of Physical Abuse (only); 15.2% at risk of emotional abuse (only); 14.7% at risk of sexual abuse (only) and 15.5% at risk of more than one type of abuse.¹¹

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- **At 31 March 2005, there were 2,531 looked after children in Northern Ireland, a rate of 56 per 10,000 children aged under 18. Comparative figures in the UK are 55 in England, 106 children in Scotland and 65 children in Wales. The numbers of children placed in residential care in Northern Ireland has increased by 11.2% from 285 in 2000 to 317 in 2005.¹¹**
- **Across the UK regions the majority of children in care are placed in foster care. The Northern Ireland proportion of 57% is lower than equivalent figures of 68% in England and 71% in Wales.¹¹**
- **The numbers of looked after children per 10,000 in Northern Ireland has increased from 50.5 in 1999 to 54.3 in 2002 in Northern Ireland. 5% of looked after children in Northern Ireland had three or more separate placements during 2001/2002 compared to 8% in Wales and 15% in England.⁴**

See page 89 for references



SECTION THREE

Equality, Good Relations and New TSN considerations

Defining the aims of the policy

Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge, a ten year strategy for children and young people will set out what will be done by the Northern Ireland administration, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Court Service over the course of the next ten years to bring about improvements in the lives of Northern Ireland’s children and young people. It is intended to be a high level framework, expressed in terms of a common vision, underlying principles, with a focus on high level outcomes for children and young people and effective measures and indicators of progress. The aim of the strategy is to create a better world for **all** of our children and young people. Change in many cases will not always be immediately realisable and will take time to effect. It is for this reason that the lifespan of the strategy is set at ten years.

Consideration of available data and research

Throughout the development of the strategy, considerable effort has been put into compiling data and researching available sources of information about the lives of children and young people living in Northern Ireland. A *Research and Information Panel* was set up, which comprised leading academics and independent researchers to consider the research and information infrastructure and to ensure that the strategy was based on a sound information base. Research and data sources are referenced on page 89 of this document. International academics were also approached to ensure that the strategy was critiqued against international best practice. The final shape of the strategy has also been influenced by recent strategic developments in

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other parts of the United Kingdom, where the emphasis is placed on delivering on improved outcomes for children and young people in key areas of their lives. In summary, the final strategy is the product of several years' work, during which government has consulted widely and engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including children and young people. The equality and other impacts of the strategy have been considered throughout and are set out in *Making it R Wrld 2*, which issued for public consultation between November 2004 and March 2005. Responses to consultation, including consideration of equality issues, were recorded, analysed and can be accessed on the Children and Young People's Unit website at www.allchildrenni.gov.uk.

Examples of the data used to inform the development of the strategy appear throughout this document. It is evident from the data presented, and this is acknowledged in section 1, that not all children have equal experiences in life. The inequality of experience is also echoed in the small number of case examples, which again appear throughout this document. Our key challenge will be to ensure that the particular problems (or negative impacts) experienced by specific groups of children are mitigated by targeted responses and at the same time strive to ensure the provision of quality universal services for all children and young people.

The extensive work done to date also highlighted issues relevant to good relations and New TSN agendas. For example, child poverty and the impact of the conflict were consistently identified as key themes in the lives of children and young people throughout the development phase of the strategy. Both are acknowledged in this document; we have included an outcome linked to improving the economic wellbeing of children; restated the commitment to delivering on the UK poverty targets and have pledged to ensure that our children and young people are supported to grow together in a shared inclusive society where they respect diversity and difference.



We are committed to ensuring that future delivery for children and young people is on the basis of sound information and evidence about what works. The pledge on page 21 reflects this commitment. Informed by consultation, engagement with stakeholders and available data and research, we have developed and set the strategic framework. This, of course, is only the start of the process. Using a limestone analogy (based on the theory put forward by Professor Eithne McLaughlin (2004) as part of her report on the Independent Review of the Operation of Section 75), we must ensure that equality data is filtered through every level of the outworking of the strategy over the next ten years. We will strive to build on the data and research available and to ensure that is used in the screening and, where appropriate, equality impact assessments of all policies emanating from the strategy. We will also ensure that data, information and research available, or developed throughout implementation, are used to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the strategy.

Assessment of impacts and consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impact and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity

The strategy is the product of a number of years' work, involving a wide range of organisations across sectors and disciplines. Most importantly the strategy was developed with direct inputs from children and young people. As stated above, we have taken into account the adverse impacts experienced by many children and young people living in Northern Ireland. The key challenge we face is to put in place or develop mitigating measures to alleviate these adverse impacts and deliver positive impacts for those experiencing disadvantage. The document as published establishes the strategic framework and expresses our strategic aim to deliver for **all** children and young people, which will require the mitigation of disadvantages experienced by individuals or groups of children and young people. Until we have identified future action to deliver on our strategic aims,

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in the form of a Children and Young People's Action Plan, it will not be possible to carry out full screening or Equality Impact Assessment. However, an integrated and incremental approach to equality issues is being taken in this strategy, in line with existing good practice. Data, research, and consideration of impacts have been taken into account at each stage and we will build a detailed picture of the equality impacts as we move from the development/formulation phase and into the delivery phase.

Good Relations assessment

The good relations assessment in the draft strategy stated that the strategy had the potential to promote good relations in Northern Ireland and to help heal community divisions. We recognise that children and young people are key to securing a better future for Northern Ireland as we emerge from a prolonged period of conflict. We remain committed to ensuring that our children and young people are supported to grow together in a shared inclusive society, where they respect diversity and difference. This is particularly important given the increasing intercultural make-up of Northern Ireland. This commitment is articulated on page 17. Action to deliver on the commitment, is set out in the **Shared Future Action Plan**, published in April 2006 and will be complemented in future Children and Young People action plans.

New Targeting Social Need assessment

As stated above, the aim of the strategy is to deliver improved outcomes for all children and young people. This includes children and young people and families, experiencing social exclusion and multi-faceted need. Our commitment to tackling social exclusion and social need is reflected in the 'economic and environmental well-being' outcome. It is also reflected in a number of the supporting themes identified on pages 13 to 23, including the need to secure and harness the support of parents, carers and communities in which children and young people live. We will also ensure, through



implementation of the strategy, that services offered to children and young people are based on assessed need and evidence about what works. The commitment is further evidenced by the drivers for change outlined in section 2.

Consultation

The strategy has been developed using an open and inclusive process, which involved all eleven Northern Ireland departments, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Court Service, statutory agencies and bodies, the Equality Commission, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, voluntary and community organisations, parents and children and young people. The development process spanned four years and has been widely acknowledged as innovative.

All Section 75 categories have been involved in the development of the strategic framework, principally through focus group events with: children and young people with multiple identities; with a disability; children and young people from minority ethnic communities; young offenders; children of Irish travellers; care leavers and younger children.

In addition, a number of groups were established to inform the development process. These included an Inter-Departmental Group on which all Northern Ireland departments, the Northern Ireland Court Service and the Northern Ireland Office were represented; a Non-Governmental Organisation's Forum, made up of leading children's organisations and smaller groups; a Research and Information Panel comprising leading academics and independent researchers; and a Young People's Advisory Forum, consisting of 48 young people aged between 12 and 18. The Forum was a representative grouping of all categories of children and young people.

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All these groups were involved in the formulation of the policy and had a further opportunity to comment through the public consultation process.

The results of the consultation exercise were fully taken into account and used to finalise this strategy. A summary analysis of responses is available on the Children and Young People's Unit's website at www.allchildrenni.gov.uk.

Decision by Public Authority

Following extensive consultation, both formal and informal, over a period of four years and with the close involvement of major stakeholders in its formulation, this publication sets out our decision on the way forward.

Monitoring for adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring

As detailed in Section 2 of the document, the effectiveness of the strategy will be closely monitored by a range of mechanisms including:

- The Minister for Children and Young People and Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People;
- A Strategy Planning and Review Group;
- The Children & Young People's Action Plan;
- A Parent's Advisory Group;
- A Practitioner's Group; and
- A Research and Information Group.



Additional measures of progress

- A comprehensive set of indicators linked to the outcomes which the strategy will seek to deliver;
- Report to United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on how we have fulfilled our commitment to respect and progress the rights of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

We are confident that the monitoring mechanisms put in place throughout implementation, will ensure that the strategy will be continuously assessed for adverse impacts and, should any arise, that they will be quickly and effectively mitigated.

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- In 2001/2002 the proportion of looked after children and young people missing 25 or more days schooling was higher in Northern Ireland (14%) than in England (12%).⁴
- In 2001/2002 the proportion of young people aged 16 or over leaving care with at least one GCSE or a GNVQ was higher in Northern Ireland (44%) than in England (41%). However, young people leaving care are poorly qualified and are more likely to be unemployed than all school leavers. For example, 2% of young people who left care had three or more A levels compared to 29% of all school leavers in Northern Ireland; 14% had at least five GCSEs at Grades A*-C compared to 58% of all school leavers; 53% of care leavers had no formal qualifications compared with 5% of all school leavers.²¹

See page 89 for references



APPENDIX 1

Future children & young people's action plans

Departmental contributions to future children and young people action plans will, in relation to each strategic outcome, provide relevant input on:

- **Information/Indicators** to be used in the measurement of outcomes and how these are reflected in public service agreement targets;
- **Research** planned or underway to inform future policy making;
- **Activity/Actions, the aims of which are to:**
 - promote improved outcomes;
 - prevent poor outcomes;
 - reduce differentials or address inequalities;
 - offer support to parents, carers, and communities;
 - respond to the needs of specific target groups; and
 - address the comments/observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (where relevant).
- **Identify:**
 - delivery partners;
 - delivery mechanisms/vehicles; and
 - levels of expenditure.

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- **Half of Northern Ireland children are poor on the basis of at least one poverty measure, compared to 45% in GB¹⁷.**

- **In 2004, there was a 20% increase in youth defendants entering Youth Courts (from 1,554 entered in 2003 to 1,862 entered in 2004) . The PSNI referred a total of 8,424 children and young people below the age of 17 to a Youth Diversion Scheme because of offending or anti-social behaviour or at risk of doing so.²⁰**

See page 89 for references



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PLEDGE

'Whole-Child' approach

We will seek to recognise the complexity of children's lives by adopting a 'whole-child' approach in all areas of policy development and service delivery relevant to children and young people.

PLEDGE

Working in partnership

We will work to ensure a coordinated, partnership approach to policy development across government and the coherent delivery of services for all children and young people to produce improved outcomes.

PLEDGE

Securing and harnessing the support of parents, carers and communities

We will offer support to parents, carers and families to ensure that they are able to take primary responsibility for their children and to assist them with the challenging task of parenting, where this is required. We will also work to energise communities so that they, too, can play a supportive role for the benefit of children and young people.

PLEDGE

Responding to the challenges of a society emerging from conflict

In recognising that Northern Ireland is emerging from a prolonged period of conflict, we will ensure that our children and young people are supported to grow together in a shared, inclusive society where they respect diversity and difference.

PLEDGE

A gradual shift to preventative and early intervention practice

We will promote a move to preventative and early intervention practice without taking attention away from our children and young people currently most in need of more targeted services.

PLEDGE

Developing a culture of involving children and young people in decisions which affect their lives

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we will be proactive in obtaining the views of children on matters of significance to them.

PLEDGE

Needs-driven and evidence-based practice

To deliver improved outcomes for all children and young people, we will ensure that all future policies developed and services offered to, and accessed by children and young people, are based on identified need and on evidence about what works.

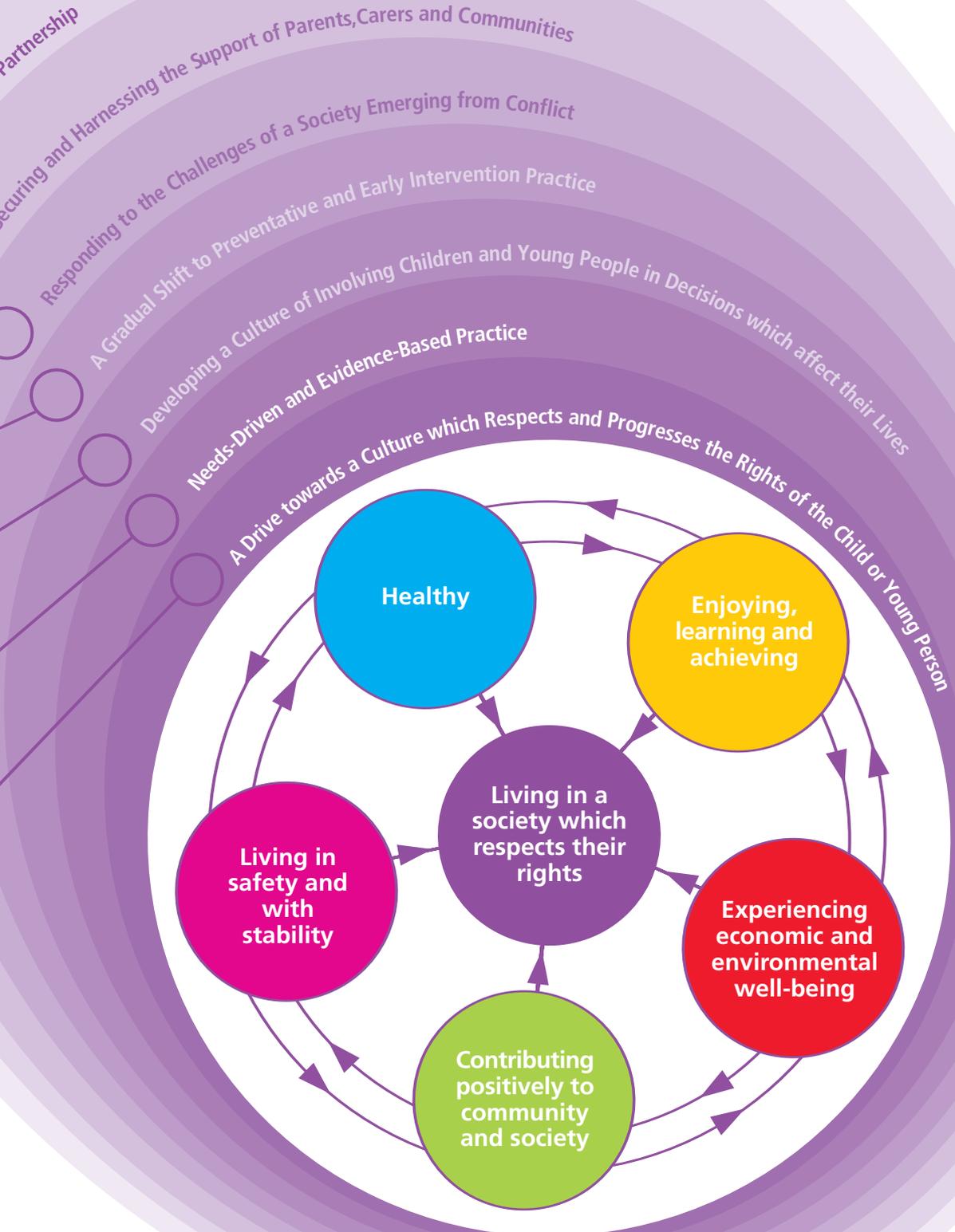
PLEDGE

A drive towards a culture which respects and progresses the rights of the child or young person

We are committed to respecting and progressing the rights of children and young people in Northern Ireland and will be guided and informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The strategy will be the key mechanism by which we will chart progress on this commitment.



**A Northern Ireland in
which children and
young people thrive
and look forward
with confidence to
the future**



Published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister with the full endorsement of all Northern Ireland government departments including the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Court Service.

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Children & Young People's Unit
Block B.3,
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SR

Tel: 028 9052 0745
Email: cypu@ofmdfmni.gov.uk
www.allchildrenni.gov.uk