



Federation Northern Ireland

Consultation Response to

Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People

Consultation document

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

March 2014

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Section 1

Response summary

Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the **Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People** consultation document on behalf of our local groups as part of the public consultation process. Our response has also been informed by participation in a CiNI (Children in Northern Ireland) consultation event on 12 March 2014 in CiNI offices, along with other voluntary sector organisations. Women's Aid are pleased to support CiNI with their consultation response and wish to reiterate and reinforce their key concerns along with our own. Our seven key concerns can be summarised as follows:

1.1 Rationale behind approach

We understand that **Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People** will provide an integrated policy framework encompassing policy on children and young people, including child policy and children's rights. We also understand that it will represent the Executive's **Child Poverty Strategy** as required by the Child Poverty Act 2010, provide an **annual report to the Assembly on child poverty** and **takes forward the work in the Children and Young People's Strategy – Our Children and Young People- our Pledge and deliver on government's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**. Women's Aid strongly queries the rationale behind this approach. We believe it is entirely inappropriate to combine all these important documents in one strategy. These initiatives are core to improving the lives of children and young people in Northern and as such they each require and deserve a separate targeted and comprehensive focus. To combine them in one document presents a serious disservice to children and young people in Northern Ireland.

1.2 Safeguarding children and young people from abuse in the home and in relationships

Women's Aid is seriously concerned to note a complete lack of reference to and focus upon safeguarding children and young people from abuse in the home and in relationships throughout the entire strategy and specifically in the indicators and actions presented. In particular we are appalled at the notable absence of any reference to domestic and sexual violence, as key issues affecting children and young people across Northern Ireland. Domestic and sexual violence impact upon all areas of children's lives and therefore cut across all six outcomes presented in the strategy. This total lack of reference is particularly concerning at outcome 4, *Children and families live in a safe and secure environment* given that domestic violence presents one of the greatest barriers to achieving this outcome for families across Northern Ireland. PSNI statistics for 2012/13 show that 27,190 incidents with a domestic motivation were reported, indicating that PSNI responded to a domestic incident

every 19 minutes of every day of the year. Additionally Women's Aid statistics show that the 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men experiencing domestic and sexual violence managed 47,597 calls in this year. We feel it is totally unacceptable that domestic and sexual violence are not adequately identified or addressed in this strategy. We consider this to be a critical flaw and due to this, and other concerns highlighted in our response, we cannot endorse the strategy in its current format. We present our concerns in relation to this in greater detail later in our response.

1.3 Outcomes Based Accountability

Women's Aid has serious concerns regarding the outcomes framework and scorecards presented, we are concerned the framework presented is not sufficiently comprehensive and is at serious risk of losing important and available information. Overall we found the layout complex and difficult to fully comprehend. While we fully support Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) we consider the framework used here to be weak and disjointed. Indicators are severely limited with four outcomes in total only having one indicator. Additionally indicators do not always "fit" with outcomes and actions and the framework presented in its current format clearly does not measure what matters. We urge OFMDFM to review all scorecards as a priority, taking into consideration all feedback received during the consultation process and to expand upon and incorporate additional indicators as a priority. Robust data collection is crucial if we are to truly understand children and young people's needs, identify concerning trends and highlight gaps in service provision. Our specific concerns in relation to each outcome are detailed later in our response.

1.4 Disconnect with other structures and strategies

Women's Aid is concerned the strategy is disconnected from existing strategies and structures and we would particularly welcome clarification in relation to how the strategy will link with the CYPSP. We strongly believe there is an absence of reference to this body, associated structures and on-going work. We would, therefore welcome clarification of plans or processes, which will ensure proactive partnership working and information sharing. Additionally we believe the document needs to be placed within a clearer strategic context, highlighting how it links in with other key government strategies and policies. We note with concern there is no reference to the combined government strategy to address domestic and sexual violence and abuse which is currently at public consultation stage¹.

¹ Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland 2013 – 2020, Public Consultation Document, December 2013

1.5 Consultation process

Women's Aid is pleased to note the consultation period for responding to the strategy was increased from five to ten weeks. However, we feel this timeframe is still short to allow for a full consultation process. In particular we are concerned about a possible lack of proactive actions and processes in relation to consulting directly with children and young people. Given that fact that this strategy will directly influence the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland (who make up 27% of the population) we believe direct consultation with this group is crucial, to ensure they are consulted with and their views taken on board in a way which is meaningful and not tokenistic. While we welcome and commend the development of the young people's version of the document, we would welcome further clarification as to how children and young people were consulted, what processes were put in place, how was this promoted and who had responsibility for facilitating meaningful consultation.

1.6 First key actions

Women's Aid believes the first key actions presented throughout the document are extremely limited and do not effectively deliver across all outcomes. Many of the actions are short term in nature and go little way to addressing the underlying social problems impacting upon all children and young people. There is a need for a clearer and more definite focus on early intervention and prevention that is not evident in the current actions that are listed. There is often a disconnect between the outcome and actions and as such the score cards and actions do, in our belief, need a thorough review. Once again there needs to be direct links to other government strategies and the action plans that are attached to promote cross departmental working and avoid duplication. Our specific concerns in relation to each outcome are detailed later in our response.

1.7 Child rights perspective

Women's Aid is disappointed to note there is not a clear and sufficiently strong focus on children's rights in the document. Given that the document seeks to deliver on governments commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC), this is both shocking and disappointing. We believe there is a clear need for a much stronger focus on children's rights throughout the whole strategy and across all outcomes. The strategy needs to be strongly based upon the articles presented under the UNCRC and must clearly demonstrate how Government, through this strategy is fulfilling its obligations under the Convention.

Section 2

Introduction to Women's Aid

2.1 Introduction to Women's Aid

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic violence as one form of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic and sexual violence and, through our work, promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

2.2 Core work of Women's Aid

The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and local Women's Aid groups is to:

- Provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- Manage the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline.
- Provide a range of support services to enable women who are affected by domestic and/or sexual to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- Provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- Equip teachers to deliver preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- Educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic and sexual violence.
- Advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery.
- Work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up response to domestic and sexual violence.

Throughout this consultation response, the term "Women's Aid" is used to reflect the overall Women's Aid movement in Northern Ireland, which is made up of our local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation. All local Women's Aid groups are members of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Each Women's Aid group offers a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

2.3 Women's Aid statistics (2012-2013)

- The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed 47,597 calls.
- 880 women and 546 children sought refuge.
- 53 women in refuge were supported during their pregnancies and 14 babies were born to women in refuge.
- 1,517 one to one support sessions were held with children and young people in refuge.
- 3,659 women with 4,469 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 811 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- 1,591 women participated in a range of group work and personal development programmes including *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum*.
- 375 women with 519 children accessed support from a Women's Aid Women's Safety Worker while their partners or ex partners were undertaking the IDAP perpetrators programme provided by Probation Board Northern Ireland.
- 168 teachers were trained to deliver the Helping Hands programme in primary schools.

N.B. Additional Women's Aid statistical data and statistics regarding domestic violence and violence against women including crime statistics is provided as an appendix.

Section 3

Consultation response – overview

- 3.1 Women’s Aid welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the **Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People** consultation document on behalf of our local groups as part of the public consultation process. Our response has also been informed by participation in a CiNI consultation event on 12 March 2014. Women’s Aid are pleased to support CiNI with their consultation response and wish to reiterate and reinforce their key concerns along with our own.
- 3.2 Women’s Aid welcomes the **Delivering Social Change** initiative, driven by the Executive as an overarching framework to coordinate the efforts across departments to take forward work on priority social policy areas. Women’s Aid believes wholeheartedly in the need for a joined up approach to improving outcomes for all members of society and we welcome any initiatives which support a more coordinated approach to addressing social need and priority areas. We welcome the statement provide on page 8 that *the long term objective of Delivering Social Change is to create a solid foundation for continued social improvement for children and young people along with a sustained reduction in poverty across all age groups*. On page it states: *Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People represents the **Executive’s Child Poverty Strategy** as required by the Child Poverty Act 2010, provides an **annual report to the Assembly on child poverty**, takes forward the work in our **Children and Young People – Our Pledge** and delivers on our commitments under the **United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.*
- 3.3 Women’s Aid believes it is entirely inappropriate to combine all these important documents in one strategy. These initiatives are core to improving the lives of children and young people in Northern and as such they each require and deserve a separate targeted and comprehensive focus. To combine them in one document presents a serious disservice to children and young people in Northern Ireland. We are concerned that core detail and valuable investment in the ten year children and young people’s strategy has been lost or diluted. In particular, we are concerned the needs and rights of **all children and young people** may be overlooked by focusing specifically on children and young people in poverty. We question what added value this new approach will bring and we question the rationale for moving away from a well-researched and robust framework which is already delivering change for children and young people as presented in the ten year strategy, **Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge**.
- 3.4 We strongly believe the ten year children and young people’s strategy should be retained and a separate robust **Child Poverty Strategy** be developed in consultation with key stakeholders. Our concerns regarding this are highlighted in more detail later in our response.

Section 4

Consultation response by question

Questions 8 and 9

The proposed **Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People Strategy** encompasses policy on child poverty, policy on children and young people and children's rights (through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with this approach.

Please provide any detail to further explain your response to the above question.

- We understand that **Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People** will provide an integrated policy framework encompassing policy on children and young people, including child policy and children's rights. We also understand that it will represent the Executive's Child Poverty Strategy as required by the Child Poverty Act 2010, provide an annual report to the Assembly on child poverty and takes forward the work in the Children and Young People's Strategy – Our Children and Young People- Our Pledge.
- As we have already stated, Women's Aid believes it is entirely inappropriate to combine all these important documents in one strategy. These initiatives are core to improving the lives of children and young people in Northern and as such they each require and deserve a separate targeted and comprehensive focus. To combine them in one document presents a serious disservice to children and young people in Northern Ireland.
- We strongly query the need to replace the ten year overarching children's strategy, Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge. We have serious concerns that by replacing the children's strategy with this new approach, there is a risk that quality work and resource investment will be lost. The introduction of the ten year strategy marked a momentous development for children and young people in Northern Ireland and there was a huge investment in time and resources across all sectors, including the voluntary and community sector to ensuring this document was well researched, comprehensive and robust.
- Since its introduction much proactive, highly successful work has been initiated and sustained under the framework of the high level outcomes presented and much of this work is still on-going. There has been a wide range of successes, which have been delivered under this framework, perhaps the most notable one being the establishment of the CYPSP and the excellent interdepartmental working that has developed as result. Women's Aid believes that Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge presents a robust and solid framework for the delivery of children and young people's services and a vehicle to uphold their rights. We strongly question why this is being replaced.

- Many organisations have developed vital services under the framework of the ten year strategy and there is still much to be achieved under these high level outcomes. Women’s Aid for example developed a proactive five year children’s strategy **Our Place – Safe Space**, detailing a vision and strategic areas to meet the needs of all children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence and this strategy was benchmarked against these high level outcomes. Additionally we have developed a comprehensive outcomes framework to measure progress against these high level outcomes. We are seriously concerned that **Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People** is replacing a solid framework that is already working and which still has much potential to deliver. We also seriously question the impact such change would have on organisations who have invested significant time and resources in developing and delivering services under the framework of the ten year children and young people’s strategy.
- Additionally the ten year children and young people’s strategy is wholly based upon improving the lives of **all children and young people**, whereas Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People has a much narrower focus on children and young people living in poverty. Women’s Aid strongly recommends retaining the ten year strategy and further developing this framework to ensure that key successes (current and planned) are not lost and to demonstrate a clear commitment to improving the lives of all children and young people in Northern Ireland. A separate comprehensive Child Poverty strategy can be developed in consultation with all stakeholders to fulfil the Executives obligations under the Child Poverty Act 2010.
- Finally we wish to express our opinion that there is a serious lack of a clear children’s rights focus in the document. The document is not children’s rights focused and in our opinion does not serve in any way as a response to honour and deliver the Government responsibilities under the UNCRC.

Questions 10, 11 and 12

The vision, included on page 10 of the consultation document states:

That all children have the right to support and nurturing required to allow them to have a healthy, safe and active childhood, have access to good quality education, which will provide them with the skills to gain employment and fulfil their potential as active, engaged citizens.

10. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the vision as stated above.

11. Is there anything not included in the vision that you think should be included for a Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People Strategy?

12. Is there anything included in the vision that you think should not be included in a Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People Strategy?

- Women's Aid welcomes the emphasis in the vision that children should have support and nurturing to allow them to have a safe and active childhood and have access to good quality education. We also welcome the reference to safety. Women's Aid believes that all children and young people have a right to be safe in the home and in relationships and should be protected from all forms of domestic and sexual violence.
- Given this reference to safety in the vision, we are absolutely appalled to note a total lack of reference to domestic and sexual violence and abuse throughout the document and in particular at outcome 4, *children and families live in a safe and secure environment*. Research and statistics show that the biggest threat to children's safety is in the home. Research² estimates that approximately 32,000 children and young people are victims of domestic violence. Further statistics relating to this are provided on page 17 of our response. **Violence in the home is impacting on the lives of children and young people across Northern Ireland on a daily basis and it is vital that this is fully acknowledged and addressed in any strategy aimed at improving the lives of children and young people. We wish this serious omission to be rectified as an urgent priority.**
- Additionally, we have some concerns regarding the latter part of the vision. The wording presented here presents a strong association of work with contributing positively to society. Children and young people can grow up to contribute to society in many other ways such as volunteering and/or taking on caring roles and responsibilities that would not necessarily fall within the traditional context of paid employment. Additionally many children and young people with severe disabilities and/or complex needs may not survive into adulthood or may never be in a position to enter employment and therefore we find this reference to employment restrictive and as such would welcome a much more holistic vision that is inclusive of all children and young people.

Question 13

Outcome 1 states "Families have adequate income and work that pays" Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the inclusion of this outcome.

- While we welcome this outcome, we find it somewhat restrictive. We believe the numerous barriers which impact upon income and employment are not fully acknowledged or outlined in the strategy. The document fails to

² UNICEF (2006) Behind Closed Doors, the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children. Body Shop International plc. West Sussex

acknowledge the potentially devastating consequences the proposed Welfare Reform Bill will have on families. We would like to draw attention to a published report by the Women's Resource and Development Agency entitled "The Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge"³ This report effectively examines women's current economic position, economic participation and the impact of the current economic crisis upon their lives. It provides a robust evidence base on women's position in terms of economy, employment, childcare, pensions, welfare, debt and credit, housing, fuel and fuel debt. The report includes a comprehensive chapter on Welfare and Welfare Reform. Overall the report paints a bleak picture for the position of families in the current economic climate and in particular, highlights the potential damage of proposed changes to welfare reform.

- Save the children research⁴ highlights that there are an estimated 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK and this figure is expected to soar by 400,000 in the coming years. A lack of jobs, stagnating wages, increased living costs and spending cuts are placing enormous pressure on families up and down the UK. Statistics highlight 61% of low income families cutting back on food, 26% skipping meals, and 31% saying that they 'have nothing left to cut back on'. The impact of welfare reform is not reflected in the story behind the baseline or in the key actions presented under this outcome.
- The indicator presented under this outcome is extremely narrow and we believe this score card could certainly benefit from additional indicators which could include families on income support, families with no recourse to public funds, families in receipt of disability living allowance etc. Additionally, as it stands the document does not take into account the high rates of economic inactivity due to caring responsibilities and complex medical problems.
- We welcome the actions presented on page 27 of the document and we particularly welcome the initiatives targeted at improving childcare provision, particularly in rural areas. However, it must be stressed that we would wish to see childcare provision for all children, not just those who are of school age. Childcare presents a huge barrier for parents (particularly mothers) entering employment. Unfortunately in Northern Ireland there is a serious absence of a quality childcare infrastructure to support parents into employment. The need for such an infrastructure will be further reinforced by the introduction of welfare reform and in particular universal credit which will depend upon the existence of quality affordable childcare.
- While the key actions are to be commended we believe they need to be much stronger and more robust. Many of the key actions are short term in nature and largely reactive to the current poverty levels. We believe there

³ Hinds, B (July 2011) The Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge? WRDA: Belfast

⁴ Child Poverty in 2012, it shouldn't happen here (2012) Save the Children: London

needs to be a more targeted approach at preventing poverty rather than reacting to its impact. There are many underlying issues for poverty which need to be addressed at the earliest possible stage. We would welcome sustained long term initiatives that will not only respond to the impact of poverty but that will also work to address the key underlying issues.

- We would also wish to emphasise the need to provide practical support to mothers who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence, to improve their economic and environmental well-being. This may include, housing support, emotional support, training and development opportunities, improved access to benefits etc.

Question 14

Outcome 2 states “Children in poverty achieve good educational outcomes” Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the inclusion of this outcome.

- Women’s Aid has serious concerns, once again, that this outcome is very narrow and focuses only upon children in poverty. Women’s Aid strongly believes that **all children and young people should have the opportunities to achieve their full potential through education and to achieve good educational outcomes.** This is emphasised in the UNCRC articles 28 and 29 which clearly document children and young people’s right to education and specifically outline the goals of education focusing on the need to develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full, to encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.
- This reinforces our concerns in relation to replacing the ten year strategy with this document. This document tends to focus on children and young people in poverty **and does not represent a holistic approach to all children and young people as was reflected in the ten year strategy.**
- Additionally we consider this section to be very weak. Education is crucial to delivering improved outcomes for all children and young people. There are many gaps and inequalities in our current education system and addressing these needs to be seen as a key priority. Education is key to addressing poverty but is also key to ensuring all children and young people get the best possible start in life and have opportunities to fulfil their potential. While we welcome the actions presented, we are seriously concerned that many of these are, once again, short-term in nature and do little to address the long term goals of ensuring quality education is accessible to all.
- We have concerns that the indicator presented is, once again, too narrowly focused and we would welcome a wider range of indicators which take into consideration different levels of ability, different vocational paths and also

the diversity of backgrounds that children and young people come from e.g. those who are from BME and traveller communities.

- There is a clear need to provide positive interventions to enable all children and young people to participate fully in education and we would wish to see this reflected in the actions presented. We would also like to see more sustainable actions targeted at specific vulnerable groups of children and young people to support them in education and encourage them to achieve their full potential. Such groups may include, once again children from BME and traveller communities, school age parents, children and young people who have been affected by domestic and/or sexual violence, LGBT young people, children in the youth justice system etc. We also wish to highlight our belief in the importance of early years support for families and the need for further actions surrounding early intervention to ensure all families are supported to give their children the best possible start in life.
- We wish to emphasise the importance of preventative education to address and prevent experiences of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland, over the last 5 years, has been instrumental in the development and delivery of effective preventative education focused upon developing schools capacity to promote and safeguard the welfare of all children and young people. Women’s Aid believes that preventative education work with all children and young people in schools and community settings is essential to ensure that attitudes within society are changed to the point where domestic violence is unacceptable and no child or young person is left without information or support.
- Through working in partnership with the Domestic and Sexual Violence Unit, DHSS&PS and the Department of Education, Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland has developed and implemented a strategic way forward, to ensure all children and young people in Northern Ireland will have access to preventative education programmes such as Helping Hands and Heading for Healthy Relationship (H4HR).
- To date this has been achieved through the development and roll out of an accredited training programme, in partnership with the Department of Education, which builds capacity for primary school teachers to deliver Helping Hands. This programme “Effective Communication Skills for Social Guardians Delivering Helping Hands” has been delivered to primary school teachers across the five Education and Library Board Areas since 2010 and is accredited through the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM). The programme has the following Social Guardian outcomes:
 - Assist teachers to understand the context and impact of domestic violence in the lives of children and their families.

- Assist teachers to develop preventative and early intervention strategies in relation to children who do not feel safe, specifically children affected by domestic violence.
- Enable teachers to deliver the Helping Hands programme linked to the curriculum.
- Feedback from schools highlights the importance of the programme and the need for continued delivery. An independent external evaluation was also commissioned and evidenced extremely positive outcomes for teaching staff and children. Plans are also in place for the roll out of a parallel capacity building model for teachers in post primary schools to develop their capacity to deliver the post primary education package “Heading for Healthy Relationships” (H4HR).

Question 15

Outcome 3 states “Children and families thrive and have a healthy future”. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with the inclusion of this outcome.

- Women’s Aid completely endorses the CiNI view that this outcome places too great an emphasis on a medical model approach rather than a holistic, integrated early intervention, emotional well-being whole child model. When we consider what needs to be in place for children to thrive and have a healthy future there is a whole spectrum of needs including, family support, play and leisure, education, access to a full range of quality health services promoting physical and emotional well-being, information etc. This document certainly does not sufficiently address all the factors that are key to improving the health and well-being of all children and young people.
- The “Whole Child” model⁵ is accepted and endorsed by Women’s Aid as a process for understanding how society can impact upon children and how children can impact upon society. This model sees the child as an active participant in their world and demonstrates the inter-relationships between the child and the systems and structures surrounding them in both the immediate and wider environment.
- There is a wide variety of factors which impact upon health and well-being such as emotional wellbeing, safety and support, disadvantage, experiences of domestic and sexual violence etc. and as such we find the indicators presented here far too restrictive and do not fit with the actions provided on page 32 which are more holistic. We would like to see this set of indicators broadened significantly as a priority, to include other factors such as those presented in the 10 year children’s strategy and those outlined on the CYPSP website. While dental health is important, it is one factor within a complex

⁵ Kopp, C, Krakow (1982) Child Development in the Social Context, Addison- Wesley Publishing.

spectrum of factors which need to be in place if children are to thrive and be healthy. We would like to see specific reference to domestic and sexual violence and abuse in both indicators and actions. Domestic violence has adverse effects on children and young people and can be traumatic. It can impact upon all areas of life, including, health, education, the development of relationships, recreation and social activities. The effects of domestic violence on children and young people are wide ranging and long-term. The effects will also differ for each child.

- We welcome the list of actions presented on page 32 relating to outcome 3. However, once again, we would wish to see such actions extended to all children and young people and not just those who are living in poverty or disadvantage. While we welcome the creation of additional family support hubs we also wish to emphasise the need to support those organisations who are inputting into the hubs and accepting referrals. While we completely endorse the need to work in partnership, we have serious concerns in relation to funding reductions, heavy waiting lists and capacity to sustain vital support services among many voluntary organisations, including Women's Aid. Such issues present huge barriers to effective partnership working. Difficulties are currently experienced across the sector in relation to sustainability of core services. Across Women's Aid, sustaining the vital services delivered to children and young people in particular, in both refuge and community settings has become increasingly difficult. It is important to note that this work has been developed and delivered over the years in the absence of core funding. Women's Aid across Northern Ireland has sustained and developed service delivery, within a myriad of funding arrangements, the majority of which have been short term. Sustainability for services has increasingly become a major priority for all Women's Aid groups. This has been particularly evident with the withdrawal of the Children's Fund two years ago.
- We welcome the action relating to the investment of £1.6 million in play and leisure over the next three years to support initiatives in championing play. We additionally welcome the focus on preventative approaches in the actions listed including the preventative support for first time young parents. While we welcome the action 3.9, to provide support to parents of children 0-4 years old in the 20% most disadvantaged ward areas, once again we strongly believe this needs to be extended to provide support for **all parents**.
- Finally while we welcome the action 3.10 presented on page 32, we wish to highlight our strong belief that, while there is a need for counselling, there is also a need for preventative education programmes which provide a vehicle for early intervention and for raising awareness among children and young people of key issues which may impact upon their health and well-being. It is our strong belief that the only way to improve health is to raise awareness of all factors which may impact upon health and well-being with children and

young people from a very young age. We believe such education needs to focus on a range of issues including, healthy eating, exercise, emotional well-being and promotion of healthy relationships. Women's Aid has a successful record of delivering prevention work in schools, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and has been at the forefront of raising awareness of issues of safety, healthy relationships and rights within relationships, at both primary and post primary level, through Women's Aid education resources such as "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships" programmes. An independent evaluation has highlighted the successful outcomes for children and young people and the impact on health and well-being.

Question 16

Outcome 4 states "Children and families live in a safe and secure environment"

- Women's Aid is totally shocked to note the extremely limited reference within this outcome to safeguarding children and young people, particularly children and young people who are victims of domestic and or sexual violence. **Research and statistics show that the biggest threat to children's safety is abuse in the home.** Domestic and sexual violence and abuse are major contributory factors to children living in safety and security and we strongly recommend the inclusion of separate indicators relating to children and young people who are victims of domestic and/or sexual violence. Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's business and we are seriously concerned that there is a clear omission of these vulnerable children and young people in this document.
- UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland. MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) statistics show that between January 2010 and November 2013 a total of 6049 high risk cases of domestic violence involving 8162 children were discussed. Additionally Women's Aid statistics for 2012 – 2013 show that 880 women and 546 children sought refuge, 1,517 one to one support sessions were held with children and young people in refuge, 3,659 women with 4,469 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 811 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities. PSNI statistics for 2012/13 show that 27,190 incidents with a domestic motivation were reported indicating that PSNI responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year. Additionally the total of 11,160 crimes with a domestic motivation recorded in that year represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 47 minutes in Northern Ireland.

- Such statistics go some way to highlighting the extent and context of domestic violence in Northern Ireland and begin to form a picture of how many children and young people are exposed to violence in the home on a daily basis. Children and young people will experience domestic violence in many ways and every experience will be different. The Hidden Victims Study⁶ showed that 90% of children were aware of the violence, 75% had witnessed violence, 10% had witnessed sexual violence, 99% of children had seen their mothers crying or upset as a result of the violence and more than half of the women (52%) said their children had seen the resulting injuries. The Hidden Victims Study also showed that more than a quarter (27%) of the children involved had been hit or physically abused by the violent partner.
- The indicators presented on pages 33 and 34 are far too narrow. While we agree that a focus upon homelessness, accidental injuries and crime is important, there are so many other factors that impact upon children’s safety and security. We also seriously question how knowing these figures will improve outcomes for children and young people in relation to safety and security.
- Additional information which is readily available and which could be used to highlight children and young people’s experiences of domestic and sexual violence include:
 - Numbers of children and young people on the child protection register
 - MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) statistics
 - PSNI statistics
 - Women’s Aid statistics including Helpline statistics
- The only reference to domestic violence throughout the whole document is presented on page 33. This reference is not only completely and utterly inadequate, it is also inaccurate and inappropriate, placing the issue in the entirely wrong context. The diagram on page 33 states as a contributory factor, **relationship breakdown (including domestic violence)**. We consider this to be inappropriate as they are separate issues. We wish to see a clear differentiation between **relationship breakdown** and **domestic and sexual violence and abuse** to ensure clarity. The draft combined strategy for addressing domestic and sexual violence and abuse, produced by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Justice⁷, which is currently at public consultation stage defines domestic violence as:

⁶National Children’s Homes, Action for Children (1994), *The Hidden Victims, Children and Domestic Violence*, NHC: London.

⁷ Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland 2013 – 2020, Public Consultation Document, December 2013

- *Threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) by a current or former intimate partner or family member.*
- It is inappropriate to combine domestic violence with relationship breakdown. Many relationships break down and there can be a whole spectrum of reasons for this. Often a relationship breakdown happens within a process of mutual understanding and agreement. Domestic violence is not merely about relationship breakdown; it is persistent, intentional and deliberate abuse of a person, often resulting in serious injury or death. Labelling domestic violence as relationship breakdown downplays its seriousness. This is in stark contrast to the fact that nearly one third of the murders in Northern Ireland last year were domestically motivated.
- We also believe that domestic and sexual violence and abuse should be included in the diagram relating to contributory factors presented under Indicator 3 for this outcome. Domestic and sexual violence are often contributory factors behind families presenting as homeless to NIHE and to overlook this is, in our opinion, a serious omission. Given Women's Aid remit and expertise within this area as the lead agency addressing domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland, we wish to see inclusion of our organisation in the Partners section of this outcome.
- We welcome the actions presented under this outcome on page 35. However we do find these actions narrow and disproportionately focused on issues such as prevention of crime, promotion of road safety and environment improvement. We are extremely disappointed to note that there are no specific actions which relate to safeguarding children and young people from abuse in the home and in relationships, in particular there are no actions relating to supporting children and young people who are affected by domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
- While we welcome action 4.5 *Work with the Safeguarding Board NI to develop an executive wide approach to protect children and young people on line*, we strongly believe that safeguarding children and young people extends far beyond internet safety and again we are gravely concerned that children who are affected by abuse in the home are completely excluded from this strategy. Actions for safeguarding children need to be clearly focused upon all areas of prevention, provision and protection and it is our belief that this key strategy should provide a robust focus upon all three. Women's Aid in Northern Ireland has a long and successful history of meeting the needs of children and young people who experience domestic violence. Over the years, service provision for children and young people has developed and expanded. Women's Aid provides age appropriate, specialised services and support for children and young people who

experience (or are at risk of experiencing) domestic violence. Needs are responded to at all points of service delivery, including refuge and in the community. Group work with children and young people is a valuable element of support and a range of programmes has been developed to meet the needs of children and young people. A full overview of service provision is reflected in the Women's Aid children's strategy Our Place – Safe Space and the accompanying Directory of Services for Children and Young People. It is important to note these services are delivered for children and young people in the absence of core funding. Women's Aid across Northern Ireland has sustained and developed service delivery, within a myriad of funding arrangements, the majority of which have been short term. Sustainability for services has increasingly become a major priority for all Women's Aid groups. This has been particularly evident with the withdrawal of the Children's Fund two years ago.

- Once again we would wish to highlight the importance of prevention work in schools to increase children and young people's awareness of safety and security. Women's Aid believes that all children and young people have a right to participate in education programmes that increase awareness of safety and support, including differences between healthy and abusive relationships. As previously mentioned, Women's Aid has a successful record of delivering prevention work in schools, in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and has been at the forefront of raising awareness of issues of safety, healthy relationships and rights within relationships, at both primary and post primary level, through Women's Aid education resources such as "Helping Hands" and "Heading for Healthy Relationships" programmes. An independent evaluation has highlighted the successful outcomes for children and young people and the impact on health and well-being. We consider this work to be essential for preventing abuse and for ensuring children and young people who may be affected by domestic and sexual violence have the opportunity to access support.
- **We urge you to completely review this outcome**, particularly the key actions, to ensure services are in place at all levels, to safeguard and protect children and young children and young people from abuse in the home and in relationships and to ensure the necessary supports are in place for those who have been affected. We strongly believe that adequate long term funding streams need to be put in place to ensure the delivery of this outcome.

Question 17

Outcome 5 states "Children contribute positively to community and society".

- Women's Aid is disappointed to note how short this section is and the very limited indicator which is presented. Children and young people can

contribute positively to community and society in so many ways. Children and young people have unique experiences, perspectives and expertise that they can contribute to bring about positive social change and impact. To enable them to do this, Women's Aid strongly believes that safe spaces must be created to enable children and young people to make a contribution, voice their views and have these views taken on board. It is Women's Aid's belief that we must invest in children and young people at all levels to ensure they are fully supported and equipped to make a positive contribution, create social change and make a difference. To ensure they are fully supported and equipped, appropriate services, supports and resources need to be in place and we would wish to see this highlighted and taken forward in the indicators and actions.

- The indicator presented here **proportion of 16-24 year olds not in education, employment or training** is extremely restrictive as it is narrowly focused upon education and employment and does not consider the wealth of other ways children and young people can contribute, e.g. through volunteering, through youth participation models and processes, through caring roles etc.
- While we welcome the actions presented on page 37, once again we are concerned that many of these are short term in nature e.g. action 5.2 states *create 10,000 one year placements in our new "United Youth Programme" offering young people in the NEETS category structured employment, work experience, volunteer and leisure opportunities along with a dedicated programme designed to foster good relationships and a shared future.*
- We welcome the action 5.3 presented to develop a programme designed to challenge the negative perceptions of children and young people and to enable young people to play a full and active role in decision making in their communities. We would welcome further clarification as to what the programme will look like and how it will be delivered.

Outcome 6 states "Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights" Please indicate how strongly you agree with the inclusion of this outcome

- Women's Aid believes this outcome is central to the whole strategy and should provide the foundation for moving forward in terms of delivery. Given this belief we are disappointed to note the relatively short and weak nature of this section.
- We would welcome a much stronger focus on children's rights throughout the whole strategy and across all outcomes. The strategy needs to be strongly based upon the articles presented under the UNCRC and must clearly demonstrate how Government, through this strategy is fulfilling its obligations under the Convention.

- We seriously question the relevance of the single indicator presented under this outcome. We are confused as to how the use of the Youth Life and Times Survey demonstrates how the Executive has fulfilled its obligations under the UNCRC. There is a wealth of positive work that has been developed and delivered under the umbrella of the ten year children and young people's strategy such as the participation network and we are concerned that such positive developments may be lost or diluted in this strategy.
- Participation of children and young people in decisions which affect their lives is crucial and there is a need for a clearer focus in the strategy as to how this will be promoted. UNCRC obligations associated with article 12 places an onus on the Executive to promote the voice of the child as well as making the voice of the child integral to service design, planning, delivery and evaluation. We would like to see a much greater emphasis on participation and the Government's obligations under the UNCRC in this outcome in all areas, including indicators and actions.
- Additionally we are concerned to note the very limited proposed actions under this outcome. We are seriously concerned to note the lack of specific, focused actions which would promote the development of a society and culture which respects children's rights. We agree there is a clear need to raise awareness of the UNCRC with children and young people, all those who work with or on behalf of them and the general public. However we feel the use of e-learning resources is too restrictive and there needs to be a much greater and more accessible programme of training and awareness raising in place for all those working for and on behalf of children and young people along with effective public awareness raising campaigns.

Section 5

Concluding comments

- 5.1. Women's Aid appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People strategy.
- 5.2. Women's Aid strongly believes there is a need for an integrated approach to meeting the needs of **all children and young people** in Northern Ireland through clear actions which deliver outcomes and promote real social change. We have concerns that this strategy does not present the right approach for this and we have serious concerns in its ability to deliver positive change for children and young people in Northern Ireland.
- 5.3. We remain concerned that much of the progressive developments that have been taken forward under the umbrella of the ten year children's strategy will be lost or diluted and we seriously question the benefits of introducing this new strategy. We support CiNI in their request to retain the Ten Year Strategy for children and young people and to implement a proper allocation of accountability in partnership with the CYPSP and develop a Child Poverty Strategy that is fit for purpose.
- 5.4. We draw your attention, once again, to the seven key issues we identified on our summary response on page 3 relating to:
- Rationale behind approach
 - Safeguarding children and young people from abuse in the home and in relationships
 - Outcomes Based Accountability
 - Disconnect with other structures and strategies
 - Consultation process
 - First key actions
 - Children's rights perspective
- 5.5. **Women's Aid would like to reiterate our serious concern regarding the total lack of reference to safeguarding children and young people from all forms of abuse in the home and in relationships.**
- 5.6. **We are totally shocked that there is relatively no reference in the strategy to children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence and abuse. We consider this to be a serious omission and we cannot, as such, endorse the plan in its current format.**
- 5.7. **We seek immediate consideration of the points we have made.**

Section 6

Contact details

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24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline

Call: 0808 802 1414

Email Support: 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

Text **support** to 07797 805 839

Freephone from all landlines and mobiles. Translation service available.

Open to *all women and men* affected by domestic & sexual violence.

Appendix 1

Additional information on domestic and sexual violence including crime statistics

Additional Women's Aid statistical data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 16,425 women and 15,488 children and young people.
- During the last 17 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 374,406 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline.

Statistics: Domestic violence & violence against women

- Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.
- The joint DOJ, DHSSPS Strategy “Tackling Violence at Home” estimates that the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.
- UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- Where the gender of the victim was known, 72% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2012/13 were female.⁸
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.⁹

Domestic violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2012/13)

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2012/13 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (11,160) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,976) – all recorded sexual offences (1,948), shoplifting (5,890) and theft of a motor vehicle (2,138).
- PSNI Statistics for 12/13 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.

⁸Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2012/13 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

⁹Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

- The total of 11,160 crimes with a domestic motivation in 12/13 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 47 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 12/13 total 17. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 5. Therefore, 29% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 12/13 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 533 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2012/13.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2012/13)

Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.