



Federation Northern Ireland

**A response to**  
**Consultation on the Education Authority Strategic**  
**Plan 2017-2027**  
**May 2017**

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**From: Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

129 University Street  
BELFAST BT7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041

Fax: 02890 239296

General Email: [info@womensaidni.org](mailto:info@womensaidni.org)

Website: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

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# Section 1

## Introduction and general comments

### 1.1 Introduction

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. Women's Aid exists to challenge attitudes and beliefs which perpetuate domestic violence. We work to promote healthy, non-abusive relationships. Our vision is the elimination of domestic and sexual violence. Women's Aid supports all women and children affected by domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse. We work to help women and children be safe, to break free from the cycle of violence, and to rebuild their lives. Women's Aid has nine local groups and one regional umbrella body (Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland) covering the whole of Northern Ireland, and our wraparound services are available across Northern Ireland. More information about our work is provided as an appendix to this response (see appendix 1).

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland (WAFNI) welcomes the publication of the Education Authority's first Strategic Plan 2017-2027, and the opportunity to respond on behalf of our nine Women's Aid local groups.

### 1.2 General comments

WAFNI welcomes the production of the Education Authority Strategic Plan. We understand the Education Authority is a relatively new organisation, having been established on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 and we are pleased to see the publication of a strategic vision for the next ten years. We agree that the Education Authority is currently working in a challenging context and as such, a clear plan is vital in terms of steering future direction.

Overall, we found the document clear, concise and easy to read. It is well structured and clearly laid out. The plan is set within a Northern Ireland policy context and we welcome the specific reference to, and clear alignment with, the Northern Ireland's Programme for Government, which is referenced several times throughout the document.

However, we are surprised to note the very limited reference (one reference at page 10) to the new Children and Young People's Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017 – 2027, which has recently been released for public consultation (ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017). The production and implementation of this strategy is being led by the Department of Education and given the reference on page 6 of the Education Authority Strategy "*We have a statutory duty to deliver and implement Department of Education (DE) policies and to develop strategies which help to improve the education system*" we would expect to see stronger reference to this and a clearer alignment between both strategies.

WAFNI believes it is important, given the drive towards coordinated approaches, that this document provides a strategic fit and clear alignment with this overarching strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland. There is a risk that Government strategies can be disconnected from each other, with Departments and associated structures working in silos. We have therefore welcomed the introduction of the Children's Services Cooperation Act NI (November 2015) and fully endorse the ethos and drive behind it. We

are optimistic regarding the improvements the CSCA can bring about in relation to more consistent and effective working together in the best interests of children and young people. We would therefore wish to see a closer alignment of this strategic plan with all relevant government strategies, in particular the Northern Ireland Strategy for Children and Young People once finalised. It would be very useful to see reference to the 8 high level outcomes and factors of well being referenced in both the NI Children and Young People's Strategy and the Children's Services Cooperation ACT NI (November 2015) in this strategic plan.

Additionally it is our view that the document could benefit from a more focused "children's rights" perspective. WAFNI is concerned that no clear reference is made to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the draft strategic plan. The UNCRC has four guiding principles (rights to non-discrimination, to life and survival, to best interests being a primary concern and to being heard in all matters). It also has, inherent in the articles, a range of rights, which relate specifically to education:

**Article 28: (Right to education):** All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children's dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence. Any form of school discipline should take into account the child's human dignity. Therefore, governments must ensure that school administrators review their discipline policies and eliminate any discipline practices involving physical or mental violence, abuse or neglect. The Convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.

**Article 29 (Goals of education):** Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people. Children have a particular responsibility to respect the rights their parents, and education should aim to develop respect for the values and culture of their parents. The Convention does not address such issues as school uniforms, dress codes, the singing of the national anthem or prayer in schools. It is up to governments and school officials in each country to determine whether, in the context of their society and existing laws, such matters infringe upon other rights protected by the Convention.<sup>1</sup>

These are very relevant to this strategic plan and fit clearly with the vision, mission, values and strategic priorities presented.

We have detailed our response by question and have presented some suggestions for the final production and delivery of the strategy across each section. These can be summarised by 8 overarching suggestions as follows:

1. We would like to see a stronger focus upon children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the foundation of this strategic plan.
2. We recommend greater cross-referencing to the draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2017 (consultation document) to promote consistency and strategic relevance.
3. We wish to see a clearer emphasis on mandatory preventative and empowerment education initiatives for children and young people to develop confidence and self

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2015/16 N.P. "Adult" defined as aged 18 and over

esteem, promote positive mental health, increase understanding of keeping safe and promote respect.

4. We wish to see a stronger focus on how participation of children and young people will be promoted and encouraged, especially in relation to the strategic priority Nurturing Leadership.
5. We would like to highlight the importance of mandatory safeguarding training for all education and youth service providers to increase knowledge, skill and confidence in responding to safeguarding issues.
6. We believe there is also a need to raise awareness of children's rights with education and youth service providers.
7. We believe there is a need for stronger partnerships to be established and nurtured between education providers and the voluntary and community sector.
8. We wish to see more counselling services in schools for all children and young people who are affected by poor mental health, including those who may be experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse.



## Section 2

### Specific comments presented by question

**Question 3: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree that: The Vision 'To give our children and young people the best start in life' is appropriate for the Education Authority?**

**Answer: Yes**

WAFNI agrees this is an appropriate vision for the Education Authority. We believe, in order to achieve this vision there must be a clear and consistent focus upon developing the whole child. This will include, developing and nurturing confidence and self-esteem among all children and young people and equipping them with skills to seek support when faced with adversity in life.

WAFNI believes this will involve promoting the mental health and well being of **all our children and young people** from birth. Schools and education/youth settings can play an important role in promoting and developing positive mental health and well-being of children and young people and this is key to giving them the best start in life. This has been reflected in consultations we have recently facilitated with children and young people attached to our services as part of our response to the draft children and young people's strategy for NI. Comments included:

*We've had some talks in school covering mental health awareness and dealing with stress, especially around exam time.*

*Mental health and wellbeing was better addressed in the later years of high school, not so much early on.*

*We've learned about dealing with emotions and feelings.*

*The Schools should educate children about mental health because I have never heard of anything in my school.*

While we understand the importance of educational attainment, we believe there is also a need for a clear focus on the development of emotional intelligence among children and young people, such as their ability to understand and express how they are feeling, demonstrate empathy towards others, understand rights and responsibilities etc. As such, we believe there is a need for a clear focus on the provision of education initiatives which promote respect and equality and which seek to build self esteem and confidence and develop an understanding of keeping safe, at both primary and post primary level. This provides a clear fit with statements presented on page 6:

*We have a key role in working with all Government Departments and other stakeholders to ensure the success of Northern Ireland. We will work towards this by educating and equipping our young people to reach their full potential as the citizens of tomorrow. In all our efforts, we will aim to contribute to the establishment of an equal, flourishing society which contributes to the wider needs of all. We will also endeavour to contribute in a positive way, to the health development and well being of our children, young people and the communities in which they live. Page 6.*

WAFNI believes promoting the safety and stability of children and young people is one of the most important and fundamental outcomes we must focus on, in order to give our children and young people the best chance in life. If children and young people do not have safety and stability in their lives, serious impacts can be experienced across all other outcomes, including education and learning. We firmly believe therefore, that giving children and young people the best start in life involves developing an awareness of keeping safe from the earliest possible stages. By doing this, we are equipping them with knowledge on keeping safe and strategies to access support during times of adversity.



Given the shift towards preventative and early intervention approaches that is inherent in so many government strategies, WAFNI would like to see a clearer emphasis on mandatory preventative and empowerment education initiatives for children and young people that seek to increase their understanding of keeping safe and promote healthy relationships. We believe all children and young people need to receive clear safeguarding messages and awareness of rights within relationships at regular intervals throughout their education. Such

education, while currently inherent in the school curricula, is not consistently available in all schools, especially at post primary level and we would wish to see adequate and sustainable funding streams and resources invested, to build capacity and improve outcomes for children and young people in every school.

It must also be recognised that there are many issues which impact upon education and can result in children young people struggling to achieve their full potential or disengaging from education completely. We would wish to highlight, as an example of such an issue, the existence of domestic and sexual violence and abuse in the home. This can impact hugely on a child or young people's ability to learn and achieve. As the Department of Education publication (2009), Every School a Good School stated:

*"Sometimes worries about things at home stop boys and girls being able to learn things in school."*

The existence of domestic and sexual violence and abuse in a home creates an environment of tension and terror within the home, such an environment, is far from conducive to promoting learning and achievement. As one child/young person told us recently

*"Children who live with domestic violence sometimes can't concentrate on their work and they don't want to tell the teacher in case the teacher or principal rings home and the child might get in trouble".*

Research has shown that domestic violence impacts upon all areas of children and young peoples lives. CAADA (now Safe Lives) research (In Plain Sight: 2014) drawing upon 877

cases of children exposed to domestic violence revealed that 39% had difficulties in school. The impact on education is different for every child and is wide ranging, with many children and young people finding it difficult to concentrate because of what is going on at home. Recent consultations with Women's Aid Children's Services Staff highlighted several recent examples of children whose school performance had been negatively impacted by the violence they had experienced and the stress of moving to a new area and a new school. These children and young people are at risk of underachieving and at worst, disengaging completely from education. Many children and young people exposed to violence within the home struggle with low self-esteem and confidence and as such, do not reach their full potential within the education system.

#### **Question 4: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree that the Mission 'To provide a high quality education for every child' outlines why the Education Authority exists?**

##### **Answer: Yes**

WAFNI strongly believes that a high quality education should be available for every child. This includes children and young people who may be "harder to reach" or who may experience disadvantage or discrimination e.g. those who may have become disengaged, those who have disabilities and those who are from minority communities. All efforts should be made to ensure education is available and accessible to all. We additionally welcome the reference on page 16 in the medium term corporate objectives "*to develop a regional approach to the delivery of the current Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework*" and "*to work with stakeholders to improve outcomes for children and young people who are at risk of social exclusion*".

We additionally believe that high quality education involves developing the whole child and the points we have made in relation to question 3 are also relevant here. It is also important to note, in relation to this mission statement, all children and young people are individual, with different characteristics, skills, abilities, aspirations and life experiences. In order to provide a high-quality education for every child, this difference must be recognised and celebrated and approaches must be tailored that are appropriate to each and every child to ensure that education opportunities are equitable and accessible.

#### **Question 5: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree that the Values will guide the way the Education Authority should work and develop as an organisation?**

##### **Answer: Yes**

We fully endorse the values presented. We especially agree with the clear focus upon respect and responsibility. We feel however the values could benefit from the inclusion of an additional value, which focuses specifically on children and young people's rights as laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It would be useful to see a clear reference to this treaty, both in this values statement and throughout the whole strategic plan as a strong foundation for development and a key driver for delivery.

## Question 6: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree with the Key Strategic Priority, Meeting the LEARNING needs of our children and young people?

### Answer: Yes

WAFNI welcomes this strategic priority and the associated outcomes presented on page 15. We particularly welcome the reference to the outcome “*A rights based culture for children and young people*” under this strategic priority. However we note this is the only reference to children’s rights we can find in the document. We would have liked to see this focus upon children’s rights expanded upon throughout the whole strategic plan. We additionally welcome the outcome “*A child centred approach to all our activities*”. We believe this to be vital and would welcome additional information relating to how this will be achieved.

We would welcome a clearer focus in this strategic priority, in relation to raising awareness of the UNCRC among children and young people. We believe there remains a lack of awareness among children and young people of their rights. While we acknowledge the efforts implemented by some schools (our consultations with children and young people as part of our response to the draft Children and Young People’s strategy showed a good awareness of rights with many children having knowledge of the UNCRC. Many talked about their schools being rights respecting schools) there is often an evident gap when it comes to children and young people accessing their rights. Many children and young people we talk to, feel teachers and other professionals do not always realise children have rights and have little or no interest in helping children and young people realise these rights.

Children and young people who have engaged in our regional consultation events talked about how they feel they are not being listened to in many areas of their lives. While they may know their rights, this does not make a difference when professionals will not listen to them or pay any heed to their rights. As one child/young person said

*“Sometimes children know about their rights but they aren’t always put into action ...sometimes it feels like it’s all talk and no action about your rights”.*

WAFNI believes that all children and young people should be made aware of their rights, especially those who may find it harder to access their rights. In addition to raising awareness of rights, education programmes should focus upon developing young people’s skill and confidence in identifying and challenging situations where their rights have been infringed. WAFNI additionally believes there is a lack of understanding about rights within relationships among young people and without this crucial education, they will not know about differences between healthy and abusive relationships. Again we would wish to emphasise the importance of preventative education, focusing upon the development of healthy relationships.

While it is important that children are aware of their rights, there is also a need to raise awareness of children’s rights with adults, including educationalists, and all professionals providing services to children and parents. All professionals working with children and young people should also receive training in children’s rights and how to empower children and young people to access these rights. Professionals, through more informed training and practice, should then ensure all decisions are completely based upon the rights and best

interests of children and young people and fully informed by children and young people's voices.

### **Question 7: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree with the Key Strategic Priority, Providing EXCELLENT education support services?**

#### **Answer: Yes**

WAFNI welcomes this strategic priority and the associated outcomes presented at page 15. We particularly welcome the focus upon the development of strong partnerships and the sharing of resources and best practice. WAFNI strongly believes that partnership working is crucial, to ensure all children and young people have the best start in life. Many children and young people are engaged in support services external to the education/youth service environment. These services are crucial in helping children and young people to cope with a wide range of challenging issues that impact upon their lives. Such services can be provided by both the community and voluntary sector e.g. by Women's Aid and the statutory sector e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. It is crucial that education providers have a clear awareness of support services available and that they work in partnership with such services, to ensure effective referral processes and communication where appropriate.

We would wish, at this stage to draw attention to a highly successful partnership that WAFNI has developed with the Department of Education over the last seven years. WAFNI, with the support of the Department of Education, has developed and implemented a strategic way forward, to ensure all children and young people in Northern Ireland will have access to preventative education through our progressive programme, **Helping Hands**. This programme seeks to increase children's understanding of feeling safe and to help them to explore and promote behaviours, which will contribute to a safe environment. The programme seeks to build children's self esteem and confidence and to help them to develop and articulate a vocabulary of feelings. In particular, it explores the right to feel safe and encourages children to seek support when needed by helping them to safety plan and to develop a support network of individuals who can listen and take action to keep them safe (their Helping Hand). This is the essence of prevention and can empower and enable young people to avoid potentially harmful situations or to avail of appropriate support when if and when they find themselves in danger.

Helping Hands emphasises children's rights to live in safety and with stability and to engage in healthy, non abusive relationships and is founded upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 3, Best Interests of the Child and Article 19, Protection from Abuse and Neglect. However, it is also recognised for its wider benefits to all children, such as increasing self-esteem and confidence by recognising and encouraging them to acknowledge their strengths and uniqueness as individuals within their own right.

Over the last seven years, WAFNI has worked with its nine local Women's Aid groups, to build capacity among primary schools across Northern Ireland to deliver this innovative programme. 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). Since 2010, **1,128 teachers** representing **752 primary schools** have been trained. We are seeing fantastic results with this work and feedback from teachers is extremely positive highlighting how useful they find the training in equipping them to deliver their responsibilities of the curriculum in relation to PDMU and promoting key safeguarding messages.

We believe there are also other initiatives, which could be promoted, and utilised to ensure pupils who may be experiencing violence in the home, are getting the support they need from education providers. WAFNI endorses the introduction of the Operation Encompass Initiative and calls for the roll out of this initiative into schools across NI (Operation Encompass is the reporting to schools before 9am on a school day when a child or young person has been involved or exposed to a domestic abuse incident the previous evening. The information is given to a school’s Key Adult to enable support to be given dependent on the needs and wishes of the child.) This initiative has been rolled out across areas of England with great success. More information is available at [www.operationencompass.org](http://www.operationencompass.org)

Additionally we believe, not only is there an need to work in partnership with support services external to the school but additionally, support services need to be strengthened within educational settings. We would wish to see more counselling services in schools for all children and young people who are affected by poor mental health, including those who may be experiencing domestic violence in the home. Children and young people regularly highlight this to us, as a need, during consultation events. Comments have included:

*There should be relationship education in schools.*

*There should be more help in schools for people who are struggling to cope.*

*More school counsellors.*

*Teachers need to learn more about what goes on at home and why children behave badly.*



## Question 8: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree with the Key Strategic Priority, Developing ALL OUR PEOPLE to carry out their jobs?

### Answer: Yes

WAFNI welcomes this strategic priority and the associated outcomes presented at page 15. WAFNI strongly believes in the importance of developing and supporting staff, to enable them to reach their full potential and to carry out their duties to the best of their ability. This is essential in any organisation and is particularly relevant to the education sector at present, given the challenges outlined in the strategic plan relating to expectations and needs of young people, their families and the communities in which they operate and the financial and resource challenges which are also evident.

The key success to delivering this plan is to build and sustain a well trained, informed and supported workforce who are confident in carrying out their duties and responding to the specific needs and challenges articulated by children and young people. Ongoing personal and professional development is crucial and it is important that time and resources are invested in this for all staff, to ensure training and learning needs are identified and met on an ongoing basis. This will give all staff the confidence, skills and professional knowledge to deliver the best for all pupils and members of the school community.

WAFNI believes there is a need for quality mandatory domestic and sexual violence training for all professionals working with families on a regular basis and this includes teaching and youth services staff. Teachers need to be trained in relation to the impact of domestic violence on children and young people and how they, in their role as a social guardian, can provide effective support and intervention. As one child/young person told us during our consultation events *"I think the kids who have problems at home sometimes behave badly at school and the teacher judges and punishes them more.... teachers need to learn more about what goes on at home and why children behave badly"*.

Additionally, there is a need for more understanding among education providers of the complexity of domestic and sexual violence and abuse and the difficulties families experience when transitioning from a violent situation. For example, there are currently access issues when children and young people have to travel from refuge to schools, which are a distance away. Refuge isn't a permanent address so mothers cannot get a bus pass for their children. This can impact further on a family's economic well-being, when mothers, who are struggling to make ends meet and to adjust to a new financial situation, struggle to meet the costs of this themselves. There is a need for both flexibility and financial assistance to make this transition smooth for all concerned.

WAFNI wishes to highlight, once again, the success of its teacher-training programme. This two-day 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). Since 2010, **1,128 teachers** representing **752 primary schools** have been trained.

A recent pre-training survey with teachers participating in our Social Guardian Training showed:

Only 58% teachers felt comfortable discussing safe and unsafe feelings with children.

28% of teachers did not feel they had sufficient resources to deliver the PDMU elements of the curriculum in safeguarding children.

I hope to gain more information and resources about how to support children who are in need of "in school" support.

35% of teachers did not feel they understood the impact domestic violence could have on children in their class.

Teachers' response after training...

100% teachers agreed the training had increased understanding of strategies to safeguard children (56% strongly agreed).

100% teachers agreed the training had increased their knowledge of concept of social guardians (31% strongly agreed).

100% teachers agreed they now felt confident to deliver the Helping Hands programme to their class. (69% strongly agreed).

Comments from teachers have included:

Great resource filled with lots of fun activities, which are suitable and useful for all children.

It was very helpful in supporting the PDMU curriculum and for greater knowledge of domestic violence and the feelings children may have when witnessing or being a part of it.

Teachers are social guardians. Abuse crosses all classes, we can help children to express their emotions. Early intervention is crucial.

It would be beneficial for all teachers to know about Helping Hands and how to deliver the programme as it provides a child friendly and structured way to address issues of safety.

It makes it much easier to have resources and lessons at the ready.

The Helping Hands Pack is an excellent tool for delivering elements of the curriculum – great activity ideas that will help children in later life.

I think the Helping Hands programme will help teachers to feel more confident when dealing with sensitive issues. I think this is a course that should be available to all children in Schools across

I now have ideas on how to give children the language they might need to describe their feelings. I also have a clear understanding of how to seek support should a disclosure occur.

A very worthwhile course, particularly working in a special needs school with vulnerable children.

These comments evidence the fantastic results we are consistently seeing with this work, feedback from teachers is always extremely positive highlighting how useful they find the training in equipping them to deliver their responsibilities of the curriculum in relation to PDMU and promoting key safeguarding messages.

**Question 9: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree with the Key Strategic Priority, Managing our RESOURCES effectively and efficiently?**

**Answer: Yes**

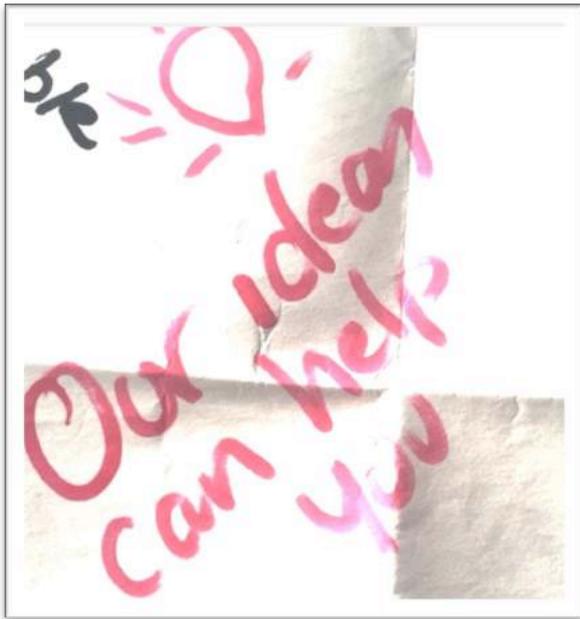
Given the financial challenges currently present and referred to in the strategic plan, this strategic priority will be of the utmost importance over the next decade.

We particularly welcome reference to the use of estate to promote community access. This is also emphasized under strategic priority one, where there is reference to *increased community use of schools* as an outcome. Schools are an integral part of the local community and there is huge potential to build upon this. WAFNI believes all schools can build upon their community spirit and can demonstrate a full and strong commitment to being an integral part of the local community. Schools have excellent facilities and while these are primarily resourced for school children, where practical, appropriate and reasonable to do so, these facilities may be made available for use by the local community or by organisations that support and contribute to the ethos of the school. Schools have a significant part to play in the local community and there are many potential educational, economic and broader community benefits that may result from partnerships based upon sharing of facilities. This is also consistent with other government initiatives and policies such as community planning, which is currently being progressed. Community planning is one of the new responsibilities of local government which provides an over-arching framework for partnerships and initiatives in Council areas and at local and neighbourhood levels, to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of the area, improving the quality of life for citizens and ultimately developing strong, vibrant and resilient communities.

**Question 10: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree with the Key Strategic Priority, NURTURING LEADERSHIP across the EA to give clear direction in a dynamic and complex environment?**

**Answer: Yes**

WAFNI welcomes this strategic priority and the associated outcomes presented at page 15. The delivery of this strategic plan will be dependent upon the existence of strong leaders and champions who will inspire and support staff in education and youth service settings, to deliver the strategic outcomes and embed the values contained in the plan to all aspects of work.



While we welcome the outcomes presented at page 15, we would welcome reference to developing and nurturing leadership roles for children and young people. We believe there is huge potential to develop children and young people as effective leaders within education and youth service settings and we believe they provide a wealth of untapped potential in relation to influencing, informing and helping to deliver upon this strategic plan. Given this potential, WAFNI is surprised to note the complete lack of focus under this strategic priority and across the whole strategic plan in relation to the participation of children and young people and the potential for them to make a positive contribution to leadership within education settings.

It must be acknowledged that children and young people can and do make a positive contribution at many levels. They are resourceful citizens who, with support and encouragement can bring about positive change to our society. This is acknowledged and emphasised in the draft Children and Young People's Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-2027 where it is captured under the following high level outcomes:

**Outcome 6:** Children and young people make a positive contribution to society

**Outcome 7:** Children and young people live in society, which respects their rights

**Outcome 8:** Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted

While we can see that participation has become more commonplace in our schools through the establishment of youth councils, our consultations with children and young people, as part of our response to the draft Children and Young People's Strategy, shows that this is not always truly representative of all children and young people. As one child/young person stated during our consultation events, *"Some people are in the school council and they have a say but I didn't try out because I thought I wouldn't get picked"*.

WAFNI believes that encouraging children and young people to make a positive contribution requires a strong support framework that builds confidence, skills and self-esteem. For contribution to be meaningful and to deliver benefits for children and young people (as well as for the education provider) they need to be fully informed, equipped with knowledge and skills and supported throughout. Also approaches need to be tailored for children and young people and will be dependent upon factors such as their age, abilities and levels of confidence. We believe that many children and young people are the "seldom-heard voices" and efforts should be invested in encouraging their participation to ensure their voices are heard.

Additionally, we believe there is a need for attitudinal change in relation to listening to children and young people. There is a need for professionals working with children and young people to have a greater understanding of participation and to fully appreciate the

importance of developing effective child centred services that focus upon giving children and young people a voice. Listening to children and young people requires great amounts of skill and confidence and for effective communication with children to happen, we believe robust, quality assured training and development opportunities are crucial to support and empower all professionals working directly with children and young people to really listen to children and young people and harness their contributions in safe and supportive ways. Only then will we see the delivery of services that are truly child centred and based upon the best interests and voices of children and young people.

Finally, we believe children and young people can be excellent advocates for other young people but they need to be supported and empowered to take on these influential roles.

### **Question 11: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027 do you agree with the outcomes as listed at page 15?**

#### **Answer: Yes**

While we agree with the strategic priorities and outcomes listed at page 15, the points we have made in relation to the strategic priorities above are relevant here.

### **Question 12: Having read the Education Authority Strategic Plan 2017- 2027, do you agree that The Strategic Plan provides a framework for the work of the EA as it seeks to improve outcomes for Children and Young People?**

#### **Answer: Yes**

As we have stated at the start of our response, we welcome the production of this strategy and we feel it will be a very useful framework for steering the work of the EA as it seeks to improve outcomes for children and young people. However, we do have some concerns and we also have some suggestions for consideration in both the final drafting of the strategy and in its delivery. We hope these comments are useful and constructive. In conclusion we wish to highlight these 8 overarching points once again, as follows:

1. We would like to see a stronger focus upon children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the foundation of this strategic plan.
2. We recommend greater cross-referencing to the draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2017 (consultation document) to promote consistency and strategic relevance.
3. We wish to see a clearer emphasis on mandatory preventative and empowerment education initiatives for children and young people to develop confidence and self esteem, promote positive mental health, increase understanding of keeping safe and promote respect.
4. We wish to see a stronger focus on how participation of children and young people will be promoted and encouraged, especially in relation to the strategic priority Nurturing Leadership.

5. We would like to highlight the importance of mandatory safeguarding training for all education and youth service providers to increase knowledge, skill and confidence in responding to safeguarding issues.
6. We believe there is also a need to raise awareness of children's rights with education and youth service providers.
7. We believe there is a need for stronger partnerships to be established and nurtured between education providers and the voluntary and community sector.
8. We wish to see more counselling services in schools for all children and young people who are affected by poor mental health, including those who may be experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse.

## Section 3

### Contact Details

For further information about this response please contact:

**Sandra McNamee**  
**Consultancy Support – Children and Young People’s Strategy**

Or

**Sarah Mason**  
**Regional Finance and Training Coordinator**

At

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland  
129 University Street  
BELFAST  
BT7 1HP  
Tel: 028 9024 9041

Email: [Sandra.mcnamee@womensaidni.org](mailto:Sandra.mcnamee@womensaidni.org) or [sarah.mason@womensaidni.org](mailto:sarah.mason@womensaidni.org)  
Website: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

**24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline – 0808 802 1414**  
**Email Support: [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)**  
Text support to 07797805839

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



## Appendix 1 – Women’s Aid information and statistics

### 1. Women’s Aid Information & statistics

#### Who We Are

Women’s Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. Women’s Aid exists to challenge attitudes and beliefs which perpetuate domestic violence. We work to promote healthy, non-abusive relationships.

**Our vision is the elimination of domestic and sexual violence**

#### What We Do

Women’s Aid supports all women and children affected by domestic violence. We work to help women and children be safe, to break free from the cycle of violence, and to rebuild their lives. Women’s Aid has 9 local groups and one regional umbrella body covering the whole of Northern Ireland, and our wraparound services are available across Northern Ireland. Our core work includes:

- Refuge accommodation for women and their children suffering domestic violence.
- Running the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline.
- Support services to enable women affected by domestic and/or sexual violence to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- Support services for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- Preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- Educating and raising awareness among the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact of domestic and sexual violence.
- Advising and supporting other agencies in responding to domestic & sexual violence.
- Working in partnership with other agencies to ensure a joined-up response to domestic and sexual violence.

#### Domestic & Sexual Violence in 2015-16: a year in numbers

- **738** women and **520** children stayed in a Women’s Aid refuge.
- **51** pregnant women were supported in refuge and **167** pregnant women accessed outreach services.
- **15** babies were born to women in refuge.
- **6,212** women and **7,296** children accessed Women’s Aid outreach services, enabling them to get support while staying in their own homes.
- The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed **25,935** calls.
- **1,968** women took part in programmes run by Women’s Aid, including our *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum* programmes.
- We trained **150** teachers across **97** primary schools to deliver the *Helping Hands* preventative education programme.

## Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland: Trends

- 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 *Stopping Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy* estimates the cost of domestic and sexual violence in Northern Ireland to be **£931 million**.
- 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, **69%** of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2015/16 were female.<sup>2</sup>
- Over **30%** of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.

## Crime Statistics 2015-16

- Domestic Violence is a crime. Domestic abuse crimes (**14,073**) accounted for **13.4% of all crime** reported to the PSNI.
- There were two and a half times as many domestic abuse crimes as drug offences (**14,073** as opposed to **5,577**), and twice as many domestic abuse crimes as shoplifting offences (**6,773**).
- Police responded to **28,392** incidents with a domestic motivation – that’s one domestic incident **every 18.5 minutes** of every day of the year.
- Between 2010 – 2015, there were **31 homicides** with a domestic motivation in Northern Ireland. Of the **21 women** killed, **17** were killed by a partner or ex-partner and **4** were killed by a family member. Of the **10 men** killed, **1** was killed by a partner or ex-partner and **9** by a family member.
- **780** rapes (including attempted Rapes) were reported to police in Northern Ireland. Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that **up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported**.

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<sup>2</sup>Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2015/16 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over