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supervision and this unsupervised freedom to develop independence, ere can be real challenges in

moved on. This can be dangerous at night, if they move to areas which are not well lit and where few adults choose to go.[7] These are often the most unsafe areas in a community, places where young people can be vulnerable to violence or other forms of harm.[8]

The 2007 YPBAS found that more than half of the young people surveyed had come into contact with the police over the previous year,[9] and of these, 30% said that this was because they were moved on. Almost a quarter (23%) believed that they were treated unfairly by the police. Young people also reported being threatened and moved on by other groups within their community – in some cases by groups with paramilitary associations.

Personal Freedom and Community Spaces

It is important to recognise that, at times, young people's behaviour in the community can be problematic - due to noise, intimidation, damage to property or harm inflicted on individuals. However it is also important to note that this occurs only in a minority of cases. Government responses have become increasingly punitive with the 2004 introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and more recent proposals for a range of measures including Dispersal Zones and Parental Compensation Orders - cited in the *Together. Stronger. Safer* consultation document. In this climate, NICCY is calling on Government to focus on making communities places of safety for children, where their rights and freedoms are protected.

1. As policing and justice are devolved, a more positive focus on children and young people is required.

NICCY's 2008 review of children's rights demonstrates the importance of community safety to children, with participants highlighting many concerns ranging from drug and alcohol use, car crime and paramilitary activity.[10] The planned devolution of policing and justice in Northern Ireland provides an important opportunity to move away from a punitive to a protective approach towards children and to ensure the Government's forthcoming Community Safety Action Plan reflects both the spirit and entitlements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Aspects of the 2008 NIO consultation document *Together. Safer. Stronger*, such as the commitment to work with families not simply individuals, are to be welcomed.[11] However it is of concern that the document fails to fully embed the principle that children are integral members of our communities and that their protection should be central to community safety policy. Indeed, because they require special protection and are at risk of experiencing anti-social behaviour and crime, children should be designated as a vulnerable group within the Community Safety Action Plan.

Focusing on the protection of children in community spaces is not intended to dismiss the fears or minimise the impact of anti-social behaviour. However it does require a revision of current approaches and their possible consequences. For example, a failure to accommodate children in public space results in them being moved to more dangerous areas. This often has a negative impact on relations between young people and the police and fails to address the underlying causes of community tensions.[12]

Duty bearers: NI Executive, NIO/new NI Department of Policing and Justice, PSNI.