



northern ireland commissioner
for children and young people

Corporate Plan
2005 to 2008

NICCY Corporate Plan 2005-2008

Foreword

I am pleased to present to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and, to children and young people and the wider general public, our corporate plan for the years from 2005 to 2008.

Organisations need to be clear about what they are doing and why, so they can effectively carry out their work. NICCY is no exception. Our legislation gives us the tools to help achieve our mission and we will creatively use the range of our powers to help bring about the rights and principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for children and young people

In our first year and a half, we have started to build our organisation to take on the challenge of making a real difference to the children and young people of Northern Ireland. The senior staff and most of the wider NICCY team, have now been appointed, we are in our new offices and have started to work for all those under 18¹.

This corporate plan sets out our strategy for the next three years, building on our work in a number of key areas:

- Actively listening to children and young people by being alongside them, hearing their concerns and promoting their rights. To help us we established a panel of young people who have helped us in selecting our staff and provided us with their views on a range of issues.
- Assisting, advising and advocating for and on behalf of children and young people and their parents, on an individual basis, with complaints they have about the services they receive or the unsatisfactory way in which they have been treated.
- Reviewing services and the law relating to children and young people.
- Undertaking research. We commissioned a team from Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) to carry out a major review of how children and young people in Northern Ireland fare against the international standard laid down in the UNCRC. This invaluable work provided the basis for us to decide on our priorities and where we should focus resources to achieve a positive outcome for children and young people. We will continue to use and update this most valuable resource to provide evidence for what we do.

NICCY is a new organisation. Many people are interested in what we do. This was clearly demonstrated in the level of response we got to our SHOUT consultation on our draft priorities for action and corporate plan 2005 to 2008. We

¹ We can act for those aged up to 21 if they are disabled or have previously been 'looked after' by social services.

received the views of nearly 1800 individuals and organisations. Many who responded did not tell us their age but we know that **at least** 392 children and young people of school age and 300 parents responded, along with 96 organisations who work with or on the behalf of children and young people.

We also undertook, in partnership with a range of other organisations, an extensive and active consultation process, directly with children and young people in schools, youth groups and in many other settings through more than 80 events and other related activities. We have learned a great deal by consulting directly with those aged under 18 and their parents and other stakeholders. We thank everyone who responded to SHOUT to help us to understand what was important in their lives and to direct where we should focus our attention. They, quite rightly, have a stake in what we are going to do to improve the everyday lives of all those under 18 in Northern Ireland. Against this background and the high level of expectation there is about what we can do, I believe this strategy to be central to NICCY's future.

NICCY now has a clear list of priorities and a plan for the next three years based on our initial draft plan and priorities amended and supplemented by the range of responses we have received. We have provided an analysis of the responses which we have placed on our website at www.niccy.org. The great majority of responses to SHOUT were constructive and supportive. We outline in our analysis where and how we have changed our priorities and our corporate plan 2005 to 2008 to take account of the range of views expressed to us. One overriding response was clear; that **all** of our priority areas were equally important and we therefore intend to work on all of our priorities over the period covered by this Corporate Plan.

There were two major changes to our original draft. Firstly, was the addition of one further priority area, that of Risk Taking Behaviour. Many responses to the consultation, across the age range of those who responded, underlined the need for our involvement in this area of children and young people's lives.

Secondly we have amended our priorities to take greater account of three of the priorities we had identified in our consultation document, namely:

- Having your say
- Knowing Your Rights
- Implementation of the UNCRC

They come directly from the legislation² that set NICCY up. We have amended our finalised priorities by making sure these three key areas will be more sharply reflected throughout all of our work with children and young people by underpinning everything we do. We have also sharpened the focus of some other priorities recognising that the words we use to describe each area need to more closely reflect what we are going to do.

² The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

I want to change the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland for the better. I recognise that to do so we must concentrate and focus our efforts on the priorities we have set from more than 50 areas identified in the QUB research on the UNCRC in Northern Ireland. To do otherwise would lessen our impact and our ability to deliver real change.

The legislation which set up NICCY gives us a powerful resource to bring about change by:

- Investigating complaints;
- Taking legal action;
- General reviews of advocacy and complaints systems;
- Informal or formal inquiries into issues; and,
- Issuing guidance and advice to those working with children and young people.

No two issues are the same. It remains our intention to carefully choose the tool, or combination of tools, to fix whatever the concern may be in relation to each issue.

The mission, vision and values we have set for NICCY are outlined below. These are not mere window dressing for the sake of a corporate plan. I believe that the way we work is very important. NICCY is determined to be a listening organisation, especially to the often unheard voice of children and young people. I want to promote co-operative working with and among organisations to achieve change. The major trend in children's work elsewhere in the UK is towards considering the child as a whole, and making sure professionals in health, education, law enforcement, social services, youth work, the NGO sector and so on, work together sharing information to improve children's lives. NICCY is determined to ensure children benefit from this approach.

NICCY will also jealously guard our independence to make sure that we can defend and uphold children's rights.

I believe we have taken significant steps already to make sure NICCY is focussed on the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. While we are accountable to the Secretary of State and Parliament, the true test for me will be whether in 3 years time I can look the children and young people of Northern Ireland in the eye and say "We have secured real change on your behalf in the priority areas we set out".

Nigel Williams
Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland

April 2005

Mission

Our mission is to:

Safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people by listening to them and working with them to challenge and change the world in which they live.

Vision

We will:

- Make a real difference in children and young people's lives;
- Promote a much wider understanding and acceptance of children's rights;
- Be a well known and widely respected organisation; and
- Be an example of best practice in implementing children and young people's rights and participation.

Values

We recognise that much of our work is underpinned by a number of values. We will use these in our day to day work and we will seek outcomes based on their fulfilment. They are to:

- Be centred on and respect children and young people and their parents/carers;
- Be independent and trustworthy;
- Be welcoming, friendly, responsive and accessible, open to criticism and ready to change;
- Serve all children and young people whatever their background and needs;
- Be flexible and innovative, always trying to find quick and appropriate solutions;
- Work with others in a collaborative and co-operative manner but, where this proves ineffective, to be prepared to use the full range of our powers to bring about change;
- Be effective, efficient and an organisation that is accountable and based on clear standards;
- Base our work on objective evidence and research;
- Value and care for staff, invest in our people and to be a family friendly organisation.

The context in which NICCY operates

NICCY commissioned a major piece of research from Queen's University, Belfast to compare Northern Ireland against the rights and principles in the UNCRC. The research provides an extensive review of the context in which NICCY works and informed every aspect of this plan. We believe it is a foundation for our work. We are also clear that we will not be able to address all of our priorities alone and we need to work in partnership with a range of stakeholders; children and young people, their parents, statutory service providers, the NGO sector and communities throughout Northern Ireland and these islands.

A. Legislative and policy

We must do what our legislation requires us to do. As a new organisation we are aware that we have not yet used our full powers and functions. We will promote joint and co-operative working. However, we are also prepared to use all our powers if these approaches do not get results. But we will only do this when we try everything else.

The 10 year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 'R Wrlid 2' has been published for consultation by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. This is a landmark strategy which applies to all government departments. It seeks to place children and young people at the centre of the process of government. In responding to the consultation to R Wrlid 2 we have underlined the need for the strategy to be a tool for Government to implement the UNCRC in Northern Ireland. We also wish to see more focussed outcomes, such as those proposed by the Health and Social Services Children's Services Planning groups. We will continue to work closely with Government to review how adequate and effective the strategy is and how it is implemented. A copy of our response is available on www.niccy.org.

Government has also said it will bring together various pieces of equality legislation in a single Equality Bill. We want to see improvements in proposed legislation for the protection of children and young people from abuse and from the difficulties they encounter from sectarianism, racism and discrimination as a result of disability, age and sexual orientation. These are, unfortunately, a growing feature in the lives of many young people in Northern Ireland. We will work with colleagues in the Equality Commission and other statutory and voluntary organisations to help remove these difficulties.

Government has also indicated its commitment to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. We want the rights outlined in the UNCRC included as a key part of a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland. As a signatory to the convention Government has responsibilities to make sure the rights of children are fundamental and are fully implemented across all Northern Ireland legislation. We will work with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the NGO sector to promote the full incorporation of the UNCRC in Northern Ireland legislation through the Bill of Rights.

Whilst we make specific reference to the above three key areas of legislation/policy, which we believe will be a major influence on their lives, we will also continue to seek to influence and improve the law, policy and practice.

B. Political and administrative

We have started our work at a time when devolved powers have been suspended. This has had a significant impact on the agendas of many organisations, including our own. The current Review of Public Administration is an important and potentially far-reaching process which will have an impact on those organisations who deliver services to children and young people, especially in health and social care and education. We will use the opportunities this major review brings to promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in the services they need and seek to make sure any changes do not make things worse.

A Commissioner for Children and Young People in England has just been appointed. The legislation setting up his office will affect how we work, especially on matters which are not devolved from Westminster. There is potential confusion as a result of the scope and remit of the English Commissioner's Office and we will work with him and our fellow Commissioners in Scotland and Wales to develop a clear agreement and working relationships between our offices, on our relevant responsibilities.

We also look forward to building on our excellent relationship with our colleague, the Children's Ombudsman in Ireland and our partners across Europe in the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC) to make sure we, where possible, work in a co-ordinated manner. We will also provide an independent voice for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and will work, where possible with our UK Commissioner colleagues, to achieve any country specific recommendations coming from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

NICCY is also very aware of the need to establish formal relationships with a number of key bodies here in Northern Ireland. We will establish Memoranda of Understanding (that is written agreements on how we will work together) with:

- NI Police Ombudsman
- NI Commissioner for Complaints
- NI Human Rights Commission
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Criminal Justice Inspectorate
- SSI & Education Inspection bodies

C. *Economic and social*

NICCY is aware of the significant impact poverty has on the rights and best interests of many children in Northern Ireland. The fact that poverty remains one of the main reasons for the failure of many children and young people to achieve many of their rights under the UNCRC is starker at a time of relative growth in our economy. We want our work to highlight and challenge the effects of poverty on our children and young people and we will continue to seek improvements.

Children and young people in Northern Ireland live in a post conflict society. Sectarianism continues to blight the lives of many of Northern Ireland's children and young people. There is also growing evidence of the impact of racism, homophobia and discrimination against those who have a disability. We are aware that these forms of social exclusion will continue to be a significant factor in children and young people's lives unless a consistent and co-ordinated effort is made across the public, voluntary and private sectors.

NICCY also has a clear role within our legislation to provide advice to Government and other statutory providers, as to whether services for children and young people are adequate and effective. In this context we have made strong representations to Government on the Budget and Priorities 2005 to 2008. We will continue to actively monitor, review and advise Government about the need for adequate and fair resources for children and young people's services.

D. *Value for money*

We welcome the important developments in public sector governance arrangements which guide our management activities. These changes develop audit and control arrangements to cover all our organisational activities, not just how we spend and manage our money but it also covers many of the ways we work.

The developments are designed to minimise risk and ensure effective controls throughout the organisation and will make further positive changes to the way in which we provide services, organise ourselves and are accountable for what we do.

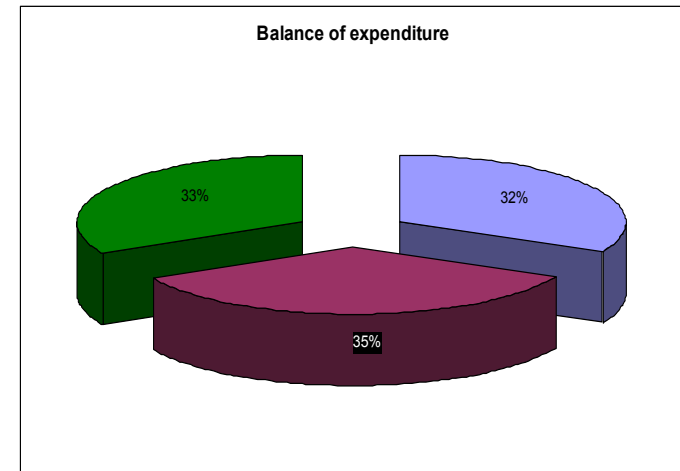
We recognise that we also have an opportunity to learn from other Government initiatives, such as Best Value and Modernising Government, through the adoption of "best practice".

E. Finance

We receive £1.9M a year as grant-in-aid from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. Over the lifetime of this plan, 2005 to 2008, we anticipate that what we need each year to do our work will be at least £1.9M³.

NICCY has a wide range of duties to fulfil. We have set out our priorities in the context of the resources available to us - both financial and human. We are conscious of the legitimate desire of many consultees to expand our role beyond our priorities or our legislative remit. We will continue to work closely with OFMDFM to make sure the level of resources meets what is required to deliver our priorities. Here, in the accompanying chart, we set out the balance of how we spend our money⁴ on our three key functions:

- **Actively listening to children & young people by being alongside them, hearing their concerns and promoting their rights;**
- **Assisting, advising and advocating for and on behalf of children and young people and their parents;**
- **Reviewing services and the law relating to children and young people through both formal and informal processes and undertaking research.**



³ Subject to financial efficiency targets set by government.

⁴ Each function is colour coded; Legal & Complaints (green); Communications & Participation (blue) and Service Review and research inc. Formal Investigations (red).

F. Review of the Office of the Commissioner

NICCY will publish annual Business Plans on its website setting out impact statements, actions and measures to translate its higher level strategic objectives, included in this Corporate Plan, into a clear statement of purpose for each operational year 2005 to 2008. Following agreement with our sponsoring department, OFMDFM, on the detail of each annual business plan, we will publish it on our website at www.niccy.org.

We anticipate that in the period covered by this Plan, we will be subject to a review by Government. This review will critically examine the justification for the Commissioner on policy grounds and make certain we have the right people, doing the right things, at the right time. We will pay careful attention to preparing ourselves for this review.

Our Priorities

The results of the large scale research project, comparing Northern Ireland against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), undertaken by Queen's University, give us a rich and wide-ranging source of information on many aspects of children and young people's lives. Publication of the full report will mean other organisations and our partners in this research can also benefit. We also intend to refresh this research every three years to provide up to date evidence for our work.

In using the research to help us decide our draft priorities for action we considered the findings against a number of criteria, set out below. We also considered our experience of complaints we received over the course of our first months, the feedback from children and young people on our Young People's panel and elsewhere and our collective experience of issues faced by children and young people in Northern Ireland. We also considered issues the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child identify as "outstanding business" for the UK and Northern Ireland.

In agreeing our priorities for action we used the following criteria:

- Issues that impact on most children or which are very serious breaches of rights (which may affect only a few children in terms of risk to their life or serious harm);
- Issues identified by children and young people as very important;
- Issues NICCY has received a lot of complaints about;
- Issues that fall within the remit of our statutory duties.

During the SHOUT consultation on the priorities and corporate plan we asked consultees to rank the priorities and tell us if we had missed out any important areas of concern. We received many responses covering the use of drugs and alcohol by children and young people and issues about the pressures on children and young people to become involved in sexual behaviour. We have responded to these views, many from children and young people themselves, as well as parents and a range of others, and we have now included one further priority area; children and young people and risk-taking behaviour.

Our priority areas for action are set out below and are grouped following the major headings of our research, for ease of cross referencing:

Priority Areas for Action				
Implementation and Civil Liberties⁵				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having your say <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing Your Rights • Implementation of the UNCRC 				
Education	Play and leisure	Health, material well-being and environment	Family life and alternative care	Youth Justice
Special educational needs	Facilities for leisure for all children and young people and the development of a Play strategy	Children and Young People with mental health issues and suicidal tendencies	Safeguarding children and young people ⁶	Children, Young People and Crime
Bullying		Poverty	Physical Punishment	Children, Young People and the troubles
Road safety & School transport		Children and Young People with disabilities		
		Children and young people and Risk-taking behaviour		

⁵ These are underpinning priorities derived from the duties in our legislation which are central to everything we do.

⁶ Including Children and Young People who are in contact with Social Services

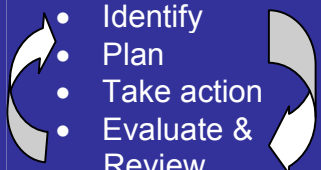
Corporate Objectives

Set out below are 23 corporate objectives for our organisation from 2005 to 2008. These objectives will guide our work and, together with the Priorities for Action, will focus the work we will do to achieve our mission and vision. They will form the basis of individual Business Plans in 2005 to 2006, 2006 to 2007 and 2007 to 2008. We will be reviewing these objectives annually with the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, to make sure we continue to be flexible and innovative while also making sure we have an agreed and widely accepted set of corporate objectives.

In arriving at these objectives we have used a tool known as the “Balanced Scorecard”. This helps us make sure everything in our organisation is in balance so that we use our resources well to achieve objectives. The scorecard traditionally involves four key elements: Financial results, Customers, Processes and Learning & Growth. We consider the key elements for NICCY are best reflected through the following:



NICCY Corporate Plan 2005 to 2008

Our Stakeholders Children, Young People, Parents Others	Listen to and encourage the active involvement and engagement of C&YP and their parents	Influence and improve the law relating to C&YPs	Influence and improve policy relating to C&YPs	Influence and improve practice relating to C&YPs	NICCY Staff	To have staff numbers and skill levels required to effectively deliver our services	Develop our staff in line with best practice  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Plan Take action Evaluate & Review 	
	Provide a responsive, accessible and targeted complaints and advice service	Provide targeted assistance to Children and Young People in legal proceedings	Conduct formal investigations under articles 9, 10 and 12 of the NICCY Order	Promote awareness of our work and develop and maintain effective relationships with key organisations		Value staff and support them to achieve an appropriate work life balance	Ensure effective and accountable leadership at all levels in the organisation	Develop a child friendly and child centred culture
How we do things	Develop, implement and evaluate a research strategy to inform the work of NICCY		Develop and evaluate a programme of service reviews & investigations using agreed criteria	Develop, consult on and implement criteria and processes for assisting complainants	Develop, implement and evaluate a communications strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal External Influencing 		Control costs, make effective and efficient use of our resources within budget	
	Develop, implement and evaluate effective internal policies and procedures			Develop, implement and evaluate a participation strategy with children and young people		Secure funding to maintain & develop our services	Develop and maintain effective governance arrangements in line with best practice	

Criteria for Legal Assistance

The legislation which set up our office gives us the power to initiate, intervene or assist in legal proceedings⁷ in order to safeguard and protect the rights and best interests of Children and Young People.

We believe we must focus our resources, both human and financial, to ensure the best outcomes for those under 18. In doing so we must be mindful of our values, our priority areas for action, and the objectives in this corporate plan.

To help us we have agreed a number of criteria that we will use when deciding on which cases will be provided with assistance. A number of the criteria are taken directly from the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. It is a legal requirement that these criteria, highlighted below in red, are met before NICCY can assist a case.

In addition NICCY has set out a number of further criteria. The first of these, highlighted below in blue, must also be satisfied before NICCY can assist a case. NICCY operates within a finite budget and there must therefore be resources available to assist a case, even in the circumstances where all other criteria may be met. In addition NICCY has decided, as part of its duty to ensure value for money, to apply a test of weighing the likely cost of a case against the likely benefit to be gained from supporting it. Where the cost is not commensurate with the benefit to be gained, NICCY will not support the case.

A number of further criteria will be applied which set out NICCY's desire to ensure that its support for cases is closely aligned to its strategic objectives. For a case to be supported by NICCY it must satisfy at least two of these further criteria, highlighted below in green.

⁷ The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 Sections 14 & 15

The criteria are set out below:

<p>Legislative (Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003) criteria~ ALL must be satisfied</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises an issue of legal principle or uncertainty; • It would be unreasonable to expect the child or young person to deal with the case without assistance because of its complexity, or because of his position in relation to another person involved, or some other reason; <p style="text-align: center;">Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are other special circumstances which make it appropriate for NICCY to provide assistance • There is no other person or body likely to provide such assistance;
<p>Financial and success criteria~ BOTH MUST be satisfied</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The availability of resources and whether the cost is commensurate with the benefit to be gained. • There is a reasonable chance of success
<p>Additional Criteria ~ ANY TWO must be satisfied</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comes within our agreed priorities as set out in our Corporate Plan; • The outcome will affect a number of children or is a very serious breach of a child or young person's rights • Has the potential to promote awareness of children's rights and/or bring about change in practice

In line with its corporate objectives NICCY will also continue to develop its day to day practice in providing support to complainants including how children and young people and their parents and/or representatives can access this support. We will also develop a protocol for referral from other agencies and legal professionals.

We will also continue to operate an open door policy and will encourage young people, children and their parents to make us aware of their problems and concerns and we will continue to offer them help by directing them to seek advice and assistance from the most appropriate organisation. Where this is not possible we will offer our help to mediate and advocate on their behalf and, where appropriate, offer legal assistance.