



# Co-operation in Community Planning: Working with Children and Young People

## Conference Report

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and  
Local Government Policy Division, Department for Communities

1 February 2018

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## Foreword



I am delighted to write this Foreword to the enclosed report and associated recommendations from the **‘Co-operation in Community Planning: Working Together with Children and Young People’** Conference. I am also delighted to acknowledge the partnership that was established with the Department for Communities, specifically the Local Government Policy Division, to deliver the conference. The title of the Conference mentions working together. ‘Together’

is a key word – not just working for, or working on behalf of, but rather ‘working with and alongside children and young people’.

Over five years ago, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People began engaged with the Local Government Policy Division on Community Planning as firstly, the legislation, and subsequently, the Statutory Guidance on Community Planning was delivered. This engagement cumulated with specific reference within the guidance to the obligation to engage with children and young people in the Community Planning process. ‘Process’ is another key word. Participation is not an event, not a one off occurrence, but rather a process that requires nurturing, planning and investment.

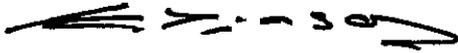
So, along with the Community Planning Guidance, the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (CSCA) legislation, the 2016 UN Committee’s recommendations to the UK government and its devolved administrations, the draft Programme for Government (PfG) and Children and Young People’s Strategy and along with the imminent outworkings of the Community Planning Delivery Plans, we have an energised environment where we have the beginnings of a framework to hear the voice of children and young people.

We also have the beginnings of a framework for key agencies to work together to listen to the voices, the ideas, the thoughts and the opinions of our young people to help them deliver the best possible strategies, policies and services for all our children and young people.

We have a window of opportunity where, by working together, we can fulfil our obligations and deliver the services that support the short-term and long-term needs of our children and young people.

We also have a window of opportunity to give those who work with, and for children and young people, the support and freedom to be creative and dynamic in their engagement with children and young people, and so maximise the impact that they can have on their lives.

Let's do it!



**Koulla Yiasouma**  
**NI Commissioner for Children and Young People**

## 1.0 Introduction

The recent introduction of two key pieces of legislation, i.e., (i) the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014<sup>1</sup> and its associated Statutory Guidance for Community Planning (2015)<sup>2</sup>, and (ii) the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015<sup>3</sup> have provided the opportunity for children and young people to have a real say in the development of services and policies that affect their lives.

The Community Planning Statutory Guidance specifically highlights the requirement for Community Planning partnerships to encourage and promote the role that children and young people can play in Community Planning<sup>4</sup>.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (CSCA) places a statutory obligation on all children's service providers to improve the well-being of children and young people in a manner that realises their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>5</sup> (UNCRC). It places statutory obligations on Government Departments and all statutory agencies to co-operate with each other in order to contribute to the improvement of well-being for children and young people. Eight areas are set out in the legislation that defines the well-being of children and young people. Two of these outcome areas relate to children and young people 'making a positive contribution to society' and 'living in a society which respects their rights'.

It also states that in determining the meaning of well-being for the purposes of this Act, regard is to be had to any relevant provision of the UNCRC.

The UNCRC is a set of legally binding minimum standards and obligations in respect of all aspects of children's lives that the Government has ratified and must comply with in the discharge of its functions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/8/contents>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-lg-2815-%E2%80%93-statutory-guidance-operation-community-planning>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2015/10/contents>

<sup>4</sup> Para 6.8, Pg. 18, Statutory Guidance for Operation of Community Planning: 2015)

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

The UK Government and its devolved administrations have recently been examined by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child with regard to compliance with its obligations under the UNCRC in June 2016. The Committee's Concluding Observations<sup>6</sup> following this examination were published in July 2016 and provide a detailed set of recommendations with which Government must comply across all aspects of children's lives in meeting its obligations under the UNCRC. The following Concluding Observations 2016 have particular reference to participation:

- Establish structures for the active and meaningful participation of children and give due weight to their views in designing laws, policies, programmes and services at the local and national level;
- Fully involve children in planning, designing and monitoring the implementation of play policies and activities relevant to play and leisure, at community, local and national levels; and
- Ensure that children are not only heard, but also listened to and their views given due weight by all professionals working with children.

Following the inclusion of the specific reference to engagement with children and young people within the Community Planning Guidance, NICCY with the support of Department for Communities (DfC) Local Government Policy Division (LGPD) hosted a roundtable discussion and facilitated a conversation bringing together those who can support and influence children's and young people's participation in Community Planning. More recently, NICCY hosted a seminar with Community Planning Managers and representatives to explore developing, within a Community Planning perspective, a framework of engagement with children and young people.

Out of these discussions came the realisation there was a lack of understanding about the CSCA and a certain amount of circumspection about the role and obligations on Community Planning (Statutory) Partners<sup>7</sup> to the delivery of Community Plans on a local level.

There was also an obvious openness and willingness from Community Planning representatives to work with NICCY and LGPD to advance the engagement with children and young people and

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<sup>6</sup> [United Nations Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2016](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/community-planning>

ensure there is an awareness of the obligations of statutory agencies under the CSCA. LGPD and NICCY agreed to working in partnership to organise this conference.

### **1.1 Conference Aims**

In a community planning context, to;

- Raise awareness of statutory obligations under CSCA; and
- Explore roles and responsibilities of Statutory Community Planning Partners in the delivery of Community Plans to children and young people.

### **1.2 Delegates**

Delegates at the Conference were representative of a wide spectrum of statutory and community / voluntary organisations. These included representatives from:

- Every local Council;
- Nine out of 12 Statutory Community Planning Partners;
- Five Government Departments;
- Seven Statutory Agencies; and
- Ten NGOs.

(See also Appendix 1)

The attendance of the above were supported by the presence of two of NICCY's Youth Panel members whose contribution was praised throughout. There were 72 delegates in total who attended the conference.

### **1.3 Outline of the Day**

#### **Programme:**

- 9.30am: Registration, Tea / Coffee
- 10.00am: Welcome and Introductions, Mairéad McCafferty, Chief Executive, NICCY
- 10:05am: Opening Address – Koulla Yiasouma, NI Commissioner for Children and Young People
- 10.15am: Presentations:
- Leo O'Reilly, Permanent Secretary, Department for Communities

- Margaret Rose McNaughton, Director of Children and Young People's Services, Department of Education
- Liam Hannaway, Chief Executive, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

11.00am: Tea / Coffee  
11.30am: Roundtable discussion and feedback  
12.40pm: Lunch  
1.40pm: Workshops and feedback  
3.10pm Close

## 2.0 Opening Address and Keynote Presentations

The Conference opened with scene setting through a series of presentations highlighting key issues being addressed during the Conference, i.e., engaging with children and young people, the Children's Services Co-operation Act, Community Planning legislation, its associated statutory guidance and the overall relationship all these have with the (draft) Programme for Government (PfG)<sup>8</sup>.

These presentations provided the basis for the more interactive and participatory elements of the day that followed:

- Roundtable discussions; and
- Workshop sessions.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/consultations/draft-programme-government-framework-2016-21-and-questionnaire>

### 3.0 Interactive Sessions

For both roundtable discussions and workshops, the aim was to provide the opportunity for delegates to learn new ideas and approaches, enabling delegates to mix, strengthen existing relationships and form new ones.

To encourage open and honest discussion, these sessions abided by Chatham House rules<sup>9</sup> and delegates were informed their feedback would contribute to a final post event report which would be disseminated to themselves and further afield.

#### **Aims of Roundtable discussions:**

Following the initial presentations, delegates had the first opportunity to explore with their peers, through facilitated questions, key issues pertaining to CSCA and Community Planning and engaging with children and young people. These issues include:

- The awareness of the CSCA and the obligations associated with it;
- Examples of co-operation between statutory agencies;
- Processes to include children and young people in the outworking of Community Planning delivery plans and any barriers that would hinder ongoing meaningful engagement of children and young people in the Community Planning process; and
- Support required enabling participation to happen.

#### **Aims of workshops:**

The workshops provided the opportunity for delegates to explore in more detail three specific areas pertaining to Community Planning, the CSCA and engaging with children and young people.

- Workshop 1: Steps to engaging Children and Young People in Community Planning in Lisburn and Castlereagh.
- Workshop 2: How can 'Giving our Children and Young People the Best Start in Life' (PfG Outcome 12) be supported through Community Planning?
- Workshop 3: How Community Plans and Planning Partners can support the delivery of the Children's Services Co-operation Act.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule>

The workshop themes reflected the multiple professional working areas and associated knowledge / expertise of the people attending the Conference.

## 4.0 Presentations Overview

Four keynote addresses were made in the morning session.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma spoke about the strategic importance of children and young people's participation; the current obligations about engaging with children and young people and the importance of monitoring and evidencing the impact of children and young people's engagement. The Commissioner also launched NICCY's **'Participation with Children and Young People: Advice to Public Bodies'**<sup>10</sup> publication that contains supporting information on:

- National and international obligations for public bodies about engaging with children and young people;
- Details on writing child friendly documents;
- Lundy's Model of Participation;
- Benefits of participation; and most importantly,
- Direct advice from NICCY's Youth Panel on how to engage directly with children and young people.

Leo O'Reilly, Permanent Secretary, DfC, spoke next about what is required to ensure effective delivery of public services and how children and young people have a role to play within this delivery. Leo talked about how by listening to the voice of our children and young people and considering their needs when developing policies better, modern, child-friendly public services can be designed.

Thirdly, Margaret Rose McNaughton, Director of Children and Young People's Services, DE spoke about the Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015, with a focus on the duty of co-operation; reflecting on collaborative working, pooling of resources and the implications it has for Community Planning Partners. Margaret Rose updated the Conference delegates on the latest draft Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS)<sup>11</sup> and how it will improve and encourage the meaningful participation of children and young people.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.niccy.org/professionals-practitioners-policymakers/participation/participation-with-children-and-young-people-advice-to-public-bodies/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/consultations/children-and-young-peoples-strategy-2017-2027>

Finally, Liam Hannaway, Chief Executive, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the SOLACE<sup>12</sup> (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) lead for the PfG (draft) Outcome 12 spoke about partnership working, pooling of resources and the impact of CSCA on Community Planning. Liam also provided examples of engaging with children and young people in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Area.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.solace.org.uk/branches/branch\\_northern\\_ireland/](http://www.solace.org.uk/branches/branch_northern_ireland/)

## 5.0 Roundtable Feedback - Community Planning

### Do you have a process in place to include children and young people in the outworking of delivery plans?

Many of the delegates stated they have some sort of process in place to include children and young people in outworking plans, although there seems to be a lack of consistency throughout the different agencies present.

It was commonly felt that in many cases there were already good practices to build upon and there is not necessarily any need to reinvent the wheel. It was also recognised that 'one size does not fit all' and that the idea of following a framework of participation such as Lundy's Model of Participation<sup>13</sup> would be a positive step forward. These experiences were also reflected in the workshop on the experience of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) and the partnership model they developed in setting up their Youth Council.

It was suggested, just as organisations can achieve awards for investing in their staff, there should be a similar award of engaging with children and young people:

*“Organisations have a duty to involve young people. Many organisations got IIP awards. Can there not be a participation youth equivalent?”*

It was felt there was a need to engage with children and young people and to ensure their voices are heard. It was agreed there was great potential for partnerships between statutory and voluntary sectors to make an impact, however people need to “buy in” and be willing to work together.

*“It does not make sense not to have children and young people involved. If you give them a platform they will take it and will speak out when they realise they can.”*

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Lundy (2007) 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33:6, 927 — 942, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>

## **How would that work in practice between Community Planning Partners?**

It was felt the ability and willingness to pool resources and budgets would be a key enabler to ensure that engagement processes are developed within a community planning context.

It was also recognised the willingness of the community and voluntary sector to support community planning was vital. Existing (local) community partnerships are very strong and are in a good position to share experience and knowledge within and across council areas.

Although there are many different approaches to engagement, it was felt there is a need to have some form of engagement framework to provide consistency and quality of participation and to maximise the benefit of that engagement. It was recognised there was the need to have a specific participation budget for any engagement with children and young people.

Reference, as examples of good practice, were made to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership's<sup>14</sup> (CYPSP) Outcome and Locality Planning Groups and their existing working relationships between statutory, voluntary and community organisations.

## **Are there any barriers to hindering the ongoing meaningful engagement of children and young people through the Community Planning process?**

The key issues facing the meaningful engagement of children and young people were varied, but included the restrictive culture of 'short-termism' against the need to put in place long-term funding and procedures and associated aims, objectives and outcomes.

It was stressed there was a constant and ongoing need to present children's issues to Government. It was felt, at times, Government spends money without taking time to engage directly with children to identify their real need as opposed to perceived needs.

Again, the inconsistency of engagement methods was highlighted and the need for partnership and agreement between councils, with all working to the same guidelines and standards.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.cypsp.org](http://www.cypsp.org)

*“Different areas do it in different ways some are not involved from the beginning. There should be uniform Community Planning processes throughout NI.”*

The need to invest in improving communications at a community planning partnership level was also recognised – both amongst partners and even within individual partner organisations. There was an opinion however, that despite lots of local strategies currently in place, not all are being fully implemented.

### **What support is needed to enable this to happen?**

Delegates identified many different forms of support that they thought would be required to enable this to happen.

Delegates agreed that the provision of guidance along with case studies and examples of good practice would be beneficial in assisting agencies to move forward.

*“Guidance needed to explain what we need to do, how we will do it, and how do we get it right”*

It was felt that organisations put up barriers by thinking they need specific tailored programmes to work with children and young people. It was recognised that specific skill sets may not necessarily be in place within particular agencies. Youth workers have their ear to the ground and know the issues affecting children and young people so making it easier to engage.

*“A lot of people find it harder to work with children – it is a special skill and some organisations do not have these skills. We need to use our partners who do.”*

How engagement with children and young people occurs is important. Delegates advocated for an open process and not just an opportunity afforded to children and young people by adults. It was noted that Community Planning does not have a budget – every statutory body has its own budget, but none dedicated to community planning. Participation costs money in order to do it right.

## **Examples of good practice and practical steps taken to enable this to happen, i.e. pooling / collaboration of resources (human/ financial)**

It was recognised that support is needed in terms of capacity building for those who wish to engage so that it can be meaningful. This includes providing access to learning and resources and joining up with those who have the skills to do this well.

It was acknowledged that good work is taking place, but then not necessarily rolled out or does not receive adequate resourcing. Innovative ideas might not fall within traditional funding. Long term funding is needed as a creative enabler but most initiatives are still tied to year on year funding.

Good examples of good practices were shared by NI Fire and Rescue Service; Libraries NI; Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the CYPSP amongst others.

### **General Comments:**

General comments focused around the practical steps required to support engagement with children and young people within the Community Planning process and what drives those involved to work together.

Feedback expressed that using Outcome Based Accountability is a step forward to ensure delivery plans are meaningful and realistic.

There was a common thought that through CSCA, the potential to pool budgets and resources, including human, would make things work better.

*“What gets measured is done – need to push organisational drive through shared targets and pooled budgets”*

There was also a feeling that there should be more training and awareness raising of the Community Planning processes and explanation of the statutory guidance. There was a call to embed policy into practical working.

*“This is an opportunity to reboot, do it a different way, a better way, build consultation in...”*

## 6.0 Roundtable Feedback – Children’s Services Co-operation Act

### Were you aware of the CSCA?

Most at the table had an awareness of the existence of the CSCA but knowledge as to the detail and its obligations was limited. There was an awareness of the Act through the private members bill but there were queries about what it means practically. Those delegates who were involved in Community Planning tended to be more aware of the CSCA.

It was recognised that some organisations are not on board although there is a need for “*everyone to become involved*”. There was a view that the CSCA is very positive, that Community Planning was already doing it and the CSCA strengthens this.

There was a query about how CSCA was being marketed as there is a need for all those concerned with the outworking to collaborate and deliver services. It was commented that at times wording of any statutory compliance can be vague, therefore clear guidance is required.

One delegate stated “*if we need legislation to co-operate, it says a lot*”, highlighting that previous failure to co-operate drove this legislation. However, CSCA now opens a door for collaboration that does not exist in other arenas.

*“We need to break through the way things have gone before. We need to make this more important and meet the challenges”*

### Were you aware of the obligations of CSCA for Government Departments and Statutory Agencies?

There was an awareness of the enabling power of pooling budgets and sharing resources but limited awareness of practical details beyond this.

In terms of the obligations around the legislative framework, there was a view that local government, at least at a neighbourhood delivery level, was already administering a strong local engagement approach with children and young people. It was also felt that this may not be reflected at a strategic level.

The planned guidance was welcomed and it was felt that a legislative and policy framework would help to drive improvement. Others thought that there should be further support and direction:

*“Every (sic) organisation has obligations to children and young people and should write its own Children’s Strategy, everyone must understand their roles and responsibilities, but guidance and clarification is needed. There needs to be a single point for children and young people within Organisations and across different strategies.”*

The practicalities of co-production were discussed with regard to shared targets and shared outcomes. It was thought that encouragement should come from the strategic decision makers and support given to middle managers to ensure co-delivery on the ground.

There was a desire for case studies and good practice examples of working together along with a mapping exercise both within Northern Ireland and in comparison with other areas in UK and Ireland.

### **Have you any examples of co-operation between Statutory Agencies?**

Delegates were able to provide examples of co-operation including within Derry City and Strabane District Council; Sure Start; Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Libraries NI.

It was noted that the CYPSP Outcome Groups are already bringing relevant agencies together highlighting the importance of (i) good practice and (ii) *“not reinventing the wheel”*.

Discussion highlighted that there was no lack of desire to improve the outcomes for children and young people but there was a dearth of resources required to do the job.

*“It is not a lack of commitment or passion but often a lack of resources”.*

### **General Comments:**

The challenge of implementing the CSCA was recognised. Delegates expressed a need for *“creativity, political maturity, bravery and courage and a risk attitude”*.

There was also a query about what happens if organisations do not co-operate – are there any consequences? Co-operation was put in the context of austerity and the ability to delivery of services on reduced budgets. Also, co-operation is dependent on the will of partners in terms of resources.

*“Government needs to provide money and resources to enable organisations to facilitate the CSCA strategy.”*

## 7.0 Workshop reviews

### **Workshop 1: ‘Steps to engaging Children and Young People in Community Planning in Lisburn and Castlereagh’**

Facilitators: Catharine McWhirter (Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council), Mary McGrath and Stephen Dallas (Education Authority)

Using the experience of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC), the aim of this workshop was to explore key issues when developing a Community Planning engagement programme with children and young people, looking at why you should include children and young people in the Community Planning process; to explore what evidence supports involving children and young people; to look at potential blockages and how to overcome them; to discuss children and young people’s roles in the Community Planning delivery plans and how to evidence the impact of children and young people’s engagement - finding an agreed framework.

#### **Summary of discussion:**

Initially, the participants outlined their experiences of engaging with children and young people and how the various forums and panels added positively to each of the respective organisations delivery plans.

The workshop went on to explore the developing relationships between various statutory agencies within the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area and how this developed to enable the establishment of the Lisburn Castlereagh Youth Council.

The Youth Council is managed through a partnership involving the Education Authority Youth Service, Police Service Northern Ireland, Lisburn and Castlereagh Community Planning Partnership and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (Community Development, Policing and Community Safety Partnership, PEACE IV and Good Relations). The 24 members of the Youth Council will be provided with the opportunity to become involved and engaged in local areas of interest.

In a positive example of collaboration and co-operation, each of the partners contribute equally to cover costs and employs a senior youth worker. It was noted that the development of the Youth

Council within the partnership arrangement took two years to develop. However, having been established, the process could be described as a pilot with a potential of replication in other council areas.

It was also noted, that contrary to the 2016 UN Concluding Observations, Northern Ireland does not yet have a nationwide participatory body for children and young people – more structure is required.

### **Considerations:**

The facilitators shared, in developing the LCCC Youth Council, that various issues were raised and worked through by lead partners:

- All partners recognised the benefits of participation with children and young people and agreed that they needed to give young people a voice to influence service delivery;
- There was a fear of what the young people could say. How would they manage it? This was resolved through an agreed terms of reference with the Youth Council;
- Decision makers are traditionally risk averse but there was a realisation that there was a need to break down that fear. Adults need to know how to hear what the young people are saying;
- School's councils, both in primary and post primary have a role to play - pupil councils or pupil forums are making a real difference to issues such as bullying, road safety and littering.

### **Workshop 2: How can 'Giving our Children and Young People the Best Start in Life' (PfG Outcome 12) be supported through Community Planning?**

Facilitators: Johnny McBride (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) & Kim McLaughlin (Fermanagh and Omagh District Council)

This workshop looked at how Community Planning can contribute towards the achievement of the NI Executive's Programme for Government Outcome in respect of children and young people. It aimed to identify and consider the opportunities and challenges presented, both now and in the future, alongside the reflections of participants on the must do's. The workshop explored the importance of Outcome 12 in PfG; the key issues emerging from the identified indicators; the relationship and alignment with Community Planning; what are the responsibilities of Community

Planning Partnerships and individual partners; how we balance regional and local priorities and the identification of opportunities, challenges/barriers and important next steps.

### **Summary of discussion:**

The workshop highlighted a number of opportunities of how we can support our children and young people to have the best start in life be supported through community planning. This can be summarised as:

- Using the Community Planning Partnerships to enable children and young people to gain experience of employment for example through mentoring, work experience schemes or apprenticeships;
- Targeting resources more effectively – e.g. health services can reach young mothers early teens through school engagement. There are opportunities to access hard to reach groups via other partners groups and networks;
- The involvement of Further Education Colleges to target continuing / further education for young parents;
- Using community planning to shape services and direct resources, identifying gaps and duplication;
- Community Planning Partnerships provide a broad range of data resources to enable decisions around targeting services; and
- There is scope to use community planning opportunities to target resources at early intervention activity to mitigate negative outcomes.

Conversely, discussion amongst the participants highlighted a number of barriers to supporting Programme for Government Outcome 12, summarised as:

- Divisions in NI society are harming the development of children and young people. There needs to be properly integrated education in Northern Ireland for everyone. The teaching of divided sports perpetuates this;
- There are different corporate cultural identities and differing understandings and expectations of what community planning means and can deliver;
- Understanding of the pace of change which can be achieved in community planning;

- There is a lack of knowledge of the many relevant activities already underway and of diverse range of potential partners out there, which can contribute. More scoping and mapping is required;
- The enormity of the task can lead to too much planning and strategising rather than leading to actions;
- On a number of occasions the lack of a working Executive was noted:

“Probably the biggest setback and problem lies with the absence  
of NI Executive / Assembly”

### **Considerations:**

The discussions raised the following points as matters to consider moving forward:

- The importance of identifying the correct indicators for moving forward the work relating to children and young people. With regard to an outcomes based approach, the indicators will dictate the direction of travel therefore it is vital that these are relevant and realistic;
- Differences in the way data is gathered and classified by community planning partner organisations can present barriers to progress – e.g. it was reported that the description of children with disabilities differs between DE and DoH;
- Is the CYP Strategy reflected in Community Planning delivery plans?
- Community Planning should make use of existing structures and acknowledge the existence of these - such as the CYPSPs and make use of best practice and initiatives already in place;
- For successful community planning there needs to be a loosening or removal of barriers to ownership and accountability;
- Is there a lack of consistency across Community Planning Partnerships – there are naturally tensions between local ownership and identity and regional approaches of Government Departments. A common approach by Community Planning Partnerships would better support Outcome 12 and Programme for Government in general.

### **Workshop 3: ‘How Community Plans and Planning Partners can support the delivery of the Children’s Services Co-operation Act’**

Facilitators: Dreena Evans & Pamela Baxter, Children & Young People’s Strategy Team, DE

DE is currently developing the Children and Young People’s Strategy and guidance for the Children’s Services Co-operation Act. There are clear synergies between the statutory duty of community planning and the statutory duty of co-operation to improve the well-being of children and young people. This workshop looked at how community planning can underpin and complement the aims and requirements of the Act and the Strategy so that statutory, community and voluntary organisations work in partnership to deliver positive, long lasting outcomes for children and young people. The workshop explored the level of awareness of the Children’s Services Co-operation Act; the importance and implications of the Act; the links between the Act and Community Planning; lessons from the Community Planning experience and how Community Planning and Community Planning Partners can help implement the CSCA.

#### **Summary of discussion:**

Various experiences were shared by the participants on how they viewed the CSCA, its potential to support community planning and issues that need to be addressed in moving forward. The discussion can be summarised as:

- Those at a senior level with the Departments and Councils seems to know about CSCA but middle management don’t;
- There is a need to align the PfG outcomes within the various strategies, policies, etc.;
- There is a need to co-operate, to pool budgets, resources etc. Complement each other, streamline and share resources;
- People need to be allowed the freedom or ‘licence to co-operate’. Synergies are there but need to be better aligned;
- Existing structures such as the CYPSP outcomes groups may be best placed to use money to get best outcome;
- More children’s champions (like Departments have) throughout those agencies whose work directly impacts on children and young people;
- Although one method will not fit all, there needs to be more consistency in the models of engagement. School councils can play a central role;

- There needs to be an awareness raising initiative by DE – use case studies highlighting difficulties / successes;
- Children and young people need to take ownership or it will never work;
- Need to know how each organisation / agencies can fit into the wider picture, e.g., what do NI Libraries do? How can they support health or education in achieving appropriate outcomes?

## 8.0 Evaluation Feedback (see Appendix 2)

At the end of conference, participants were asked a series of questions, both quantitative and qualitative about their thoughts and experiences throughout the day<sup>15</sup>.

### Quantitative Feedback:

- **80%** (40) either agreed or strongly agreed that the knowledge gained throughout the day would help them with their job.
- **66%** (33) either agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned new ideas/skills throughout the day:
- At the end of the conference, **48%** (24) had a raised awareness of the obligations to engage with children and young people within Community Planning (Nb. **36%** (18) had the same, generally high awareness level before and after the event);
- At the end of the conference, **54%** (27) had a raised awareness of the obligations, through the Children's Services Co-operation Act, for statutory agencies and other children's services in order to contribute to the improvement and well-being of children and young people (Nb. **30%** (15) had the same, generally high awareness level before and after the event);
- **86%** (43) attended the conference to improve their knowledge about CSCA (this confirmed the anecdotal feedback NICCY has been receiving that there is a lack of understanding about the obligations under CSCA).

### Qualitative Feedback:

#### • What did you like about the conference?

Delegates thought the conference was well structured with varied and engaging speakers. There were clear outcomes and specified goals. Most delegates thought there was a good combination of presentations, group work and interactive activities delivered in an easy style and atmosphere, well paced and well organised.

*“Clear positive and consistent messages which were motivating”*

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<sup>15</sup> 50 returns from 72 attendees (70%)

Feedback highlighted the learning opportunities provided by attending the Conference including honest and open discussion and sharing of experiences and ideas.

The ability to learn about policies and strategies and the opportunity to hear from others / individual about engaging with children and young people was welcomed.

*“Events like this really help those within organisations to understand how Community Planning is drawing together all of the services being provided to help improve lives.”*

The diverse mix of statutory partners, agencies and stakeholders and the opportunity for networking was also mentioned by many delegates.

*“I welcomed the opportunity to begin dialogue and to meet partners and get the ball rolling”*

And finally, the icebreaker of making the St. Bridget’s Crosses was mentioned by many as being different, fun and interactive.

- **What could be improved?**

As always, positive criticism was welcomed and comments were received about the about to time set aside for the presentations and more time should have been set aside for the workshops and roundtable discussions.

More young people attending<sup>16</sup> would also have been welcomed as would more involvement from schools and education bodies.

- **Do you have any specific comments on the workshop you attended?**

The workshops were well received and were commonly described as very informative, relevant and providing great discussion.

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<sup>16</sup> Although two members of the NICCY Youth Panel did attend the event, the targeted audience was adults working with c&yp. Potential future activities will aim to have a greater c&yp involvement.

The sharing of good practice was welcomed especially with regard to engaging with children and young people. Delegates felt the presence of young people in one of the workshops was extremely beneficial.

*“I was unaware of the Youth Council activity. The young representatives were so open and really stating the obvious.”*

*“Would love to see more elements that were young person led.”*

Some delegates felt the workshops should have been longer, enabling further discussion and sharing of experiences and networking.

As noted previously, the mixture of bodies and organisations present provided lively and interesting debate.

- **What will you do differently as a result of attending the seminar?**

There were many positive commitments by delegates with regard to Community Planning; the CSCA; participation with children and young people and co-working and how the knowledge gained impacts on individual roles and responsibilities.

**Community Planning:**

*“Linking in with Community Planning to promote experiences for children and young people within current services.”*

*“Check in with community plans and teams when we are delivering to see how we can work together better via the Act.”*

*“Actively engage with other organisations and seek to set up partnerships.”*

*“Clearer appreciation of the issues related to developing community*

*planning - impact of different corporate identities to the process.”*

*“Contact all Community Planning leads.”*

**CSCA:**

*“Going to pilot CSCA in action to see how much buy-in / leverage it really has.”*

*“Read the CSCA”*

*“Now I have greater awareness of obligations, I will liaise with relevant staff elsewhere in organisation to ensure this is factored into upcoming policy work.”*

*“Try and raise awareness of the CSCA within the Council.”*

*“Frame all of our work on the CSCA.”*

*“Think outside the box and look at new ways to co-operate.”*

**Participation with children and young people:**

*“Engagement with children and young people needs to be measured, monitored and evaluated.”*

*“Incorporate the participation guidance into our officer toolkit for Consultation and Engagement.”*

*“Actively seek children and young people to engage with”*

*“More aware of need to challenge the absence of voice of young people.”*

*“Look to the services provided by other organisations to support young people.”*

*“Review a wider range of engagement models.”*

*“Take more cognisance of young people.”*

*“Take service user involvement more seriously and get on with it!”*

**Co-working:**

*“Keep promoting communication and links across agencies.”*

*“Look for additional opportunities for co-working.”*

*“Good to have each organisation showcase what they do / what current projects they have.”*

*“Rely on others that are experts in the field / ask for guidance.”*

- **In relation to Community Planning, do you have any suggestions for future seminars / workshops?**

With regard to engaging with children and young people comments included:

*“...bring children and young people in to tell us what to do”*

*“...more practical examples of how we can actually do the engagement”*

*“Frontline work – reality of engaging young people on a sustained basis”*

*“Focus on specific needs and / or inters groups, e.g. Children in care, children with disabilities.”*

There was also comments on the structures required to enable further co-operation:

*“Opportunity for statutory bodies to comes together at senior management levels and agree sharing resources and making it happen”*

*“Sub-groups of areas that need stronger links, i.e. child health and education”*

*“Communicating the existing links that have been already been established and are in place in relation to co-operation and participation”*

The idea that there are existing pockets of good practice and how these can be used to support further and more widespread good practice was raised frequently.

*“Useful to map out services already provided – explore current good practice / areas where co-operation could work and support more effective delivery”*

*“Good practice models that show how Community Planning has embraced existing structures”*

*“An approach that highlights areas of potential overlap or friction and That uses knowledge of attendees so that solutions and opportunities can be identified and explored”*

*“Short, specific an focussed sessions on, e.g., examples for good practice, engaging with communities (children and young people) what has worked in other countries / areas, characteristics of good partnership working, e.g. CYPSP and EITP (Early Intervention Transformation Programme)”*

- **Final Comments:**

There was a feeling that the conference was a positive start to other conversations, events and opportunities to learn. The presence of the young people was deemed very positive and future events should develop this engagement further.

*“A good move forward”*

*“Found the young people who attended a good asset to learning.”*

*“Was a learning curve, now I need to know more”*

## 9.0 Conclusion

Ongoing engagement between Community Planning Officers, NICCY and DfC's Local Government Policy Division recognised the need for an occasion for decision makers and practitioners to explore issues and opportunities pertaining to Community Planning.

The 'Co-operation in Community Planning: Working with Children and Young People' Conference was developed with the aim – in a community planning context - to both raise awareness of statutory obligations under CSCA and to explore roles and responsibilities of Statutory Community Planning Partners in the delivery of Community Plans to children and young people. A successful conference was based on the premise that the event would be addressed by some of the most senior officials from the Department for Communities, Department of Education and the local Councils.

Interest in the subject area was evidenced by the numbers attending the Conference and the existence of a waiting list. Positively, every Council area was represented, along with nine out of 12 Statutory Community Planning Partners. Along with DfC and DE, three other Government Departments attended together with seven other statutory agencies and 10 NGOs.

With two key sessions of the day being discussion based, delegates had plenty of opportunity to share their hopes, aspirations and concerns in moving forward both children and young people's engagement within Community Planning and the concept of partnership working through the CSCA. It was always envisaged that the Conference would provide a source of evidence to assist in prioritising the direction of travel required to support both the strategic and practical delivery of Community planning and CSCA especially with respect to collaborative working and pooling of resources.

One of the most common elements of feedback was focussed on what does it all mean in real terms? How do we engage meaningfully with children and young people? How do we work in partnership? How do we actually share resources? How do we put legislation and guidance into action?

It would be fair to say that many of the delegates did not have detailed knowledge of their obligations and responsibilities under both CSCA and Community planning as combined pieces of legislation - awareness levels require improving.

The absence of an Executive is also stalling the journey from 'draft' documents (Programme for Government, Children's Services Co-operation Act Statutory Guidance and the Children and Young People's Strategy, etc.) to 'signed-off' pieces of legislation and guidance.

The good practice examples that were discussed throughout the day highlighted positive co-operation and collaboration from a wide variety of sectors but they tended to be isolated local examples without consistent regional replication.

The call for a mapping exercise to review the partnership landscape, comparing it with other areas within the UK and Ireland and identify examples of good practice was a common comment.

And finally, the desire to engage in a meaningful way with children and young people was evident. However, giving children and young people a voice in decision-making requires a cross-government response involving initiatives and actions from all key departments and agencies. The Children and Young People's Strategy should assist in this area but it was suggested that specific participation measurements are required.

## 10.0 Recommendations

To move forward from the shared experiences highlighted at the Conference and in context of the Community Planning legislation and guidance, the CSCA and its associated obligations, along with the forthcoming Children and Young People's Strategy, four recommendations are listed below. In the spirit of co-operation and collaboration, each government department and many associated public agencies will have key roles in delivering the recommendations.

### 1. Hearts and Minds - From Rhetoric to Reality:

Information is key. Informing those who develop policies and strategies as well as those that deliver services is the fundamental building block to the normalisation of engaging with children and young people as well as working in partnerships.

The draft Children and Young People's Strategy recognises the CSCA has implications for the review and development of policy and the way services that aim to improve the well-being of children and young people should be delivered. It states that there is a need for mechanisms to be in place to "...publicise the requirements of the CSCA, and those with a leadership role will work within their organisations to create a culture where the implementation of co-operative activities is proactive and timely. The need for any shared training or formal awareness sessions will also be considered"<sup>17</sup>

#### **Recommendation:**

**Establish a programme of awareness raising - aligned with appropriate training and support – primarily, but not exclusively within the public sector - to normalise both working in partnerships and working with children and young people.**

### 2. Policy into Practice:

Feedback from the delegates indicated there was great aspiration for further knowledge about how working in partnership works in reality. What does it look like on a day-to-day basis; how do you go about sharing resources (human and financial); how do you determine roles and responsibilities, etc. With ever increasing desire towards co-working and co-operation under CSCA, Community Planning, the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE Strategy and the CYPSPs, comes the need for a

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<sup>17</sup> Para 5.10, Pg.31, (Draft) Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027

greater understanding of the practicalities of working in collaboration. To fundamentally underpin this work as it moves forward, professional practitioners need to be empowered to have the ‘freedom to co-operate’.

**Recommendation:**

**Develop a series of events for practitioners to share knowledge and real examples of working across departments, across agencies and across sectors. These would enable wider peer learning including opportunities to engage with community planning approaches in other jurisdictions. This would include events developed with, and by children and young people.**

**3. Partnership Landscaping:**

It is unclear how prevalent co-working is in Northern Ireland and where the gaps are, especially when the responsibilities for dealing with children and young people issues overlap between, and amongst, public agencies and government departments.

To provide strong case studies and examples of good practice, greater exploration and consideration of existing partnerships and the beneficial impact that co-working has in delivering children and young people’s services is required. This will only be possible with a contemporary, robust mapping of what partnerships are in existence; which agencies are driving these partnerships and what motivations enable these partnerships. Mapping existing services, structures and partnerships will identify service duplication and gaps. This reflects one of the suggested next steps identified by recent research<sup>18</sup> on Community Plans and aligning central and local priorities carried out by the University of Ulster.

**Recommendation:**

**Carry out a landscape review of partnership working within and between government departments and their associated public agencies.**

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<sup>18</sup> Pg.23, [‘Aligning central and local priorities in Northern Ireland: Overview of Community plans and links to the draft Programme for Government’, Dr Johann Gallagher, Nov 2017.](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/259796/UUEPC-Overview-of-Local-Government-Community-Plans-and-links-to-the-PfG.pdf)  
([https://www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/259796/UUEPC-Overview-of-Local-Government-Community-Plans-and-links-to-the-PfG.pdf](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/259796/UUEPC-Overview-of-Local-Government-Community-Plans-and-links-to-the-PfG.pdf))

#### **4. Tangible Participation:**

Feedback from delegates expressed recognition of the need to, and benefits of, engaging with children and young people. However, unless a national structured framework of participation is established, the key barriers to engagement will continue, i.e., a continued focus on one-off consultations; the absence of consistency in approach; lack of joined up structures and no evidencing of the impact and benefits of children and young peoples' participation.

Existing guidance relating to Community Planning and the CSCA (draft), and the (draft) Children and Young People's Strategy all highlight the need to engage with children and young people along with the obligations upon Departments / statutory agencies to engage and involve Children and young people. The (draft) CYPS specifically states the need for young people "to participate in decision making on important matters which affect them and be confident in expressing their opinions - with the knowledge that their voice will be heard and responded to."<sup>19</sup>

#### **Recommendation:**

**To develop a Northern Ireland Participation Framework with measurable outcomes for the participation of children and young people. The Framework would provide appropriate linkages from local District Councils' level to NI Government Departments' level, providing relevant models of engagement and examples of good practice.**

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<sup>19</sup> Para 6.9.13, Pg. 79, (Draft) Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027

## Appendix 1: Delegate breakdown

### Councils:

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Belfast City Council
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

### Community Planning Statutory Partners

- EA (The Education and Library Boards)
- The Health and Social Care Trusts
- North
- Western
- Southern
- Belfast
- Public Health Agency
- Health and Social Care Board
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
- Sports Council for Northern Ireland, (SportNI)
- Libraries NI

### Others

- DfI
- DE
- DfC (other than yourselves)
- NI Water
- Sure Starts
- Regional Colleges
  - SRC
  - SERC
- Consumer Council
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Patient Client Council
- NGO's

- VOYPIC
- Parenting NI
- Autism NI
- Start 360
- Barnardos
- Bryson Care
- Playboard NI
- Children's Law Centre
- NIACRO
- CiNI / CYPSP
- NICCY Youth Panel

## Appendix 2: Evaluation Form

### Co-operation in Community Planning: Working together with Children and Young People

#### Pre-Event Awareness

**On a scale of 1-5 please score the following:**

1. Before today, through existing legislation, strategies and policies, I was aware of the obligations to engage with children and young people including within Community Planning processes:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

**Not aware**

**Highly Aware**

2. Before today, I was aware of the obligations through the Children's Services Co-operation Act, for statutory agencies and other children's services in order to contribute to the improvement and well-being of children and young people.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

**Not aware**

**Highly Aware**

#### Overall Evaluation

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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*Please tick relevant box for each question below:*

I attended the conference to improve my knowledge about community planning					
I attended the conference to improve my knowledge about the Children's Services Cooperation Act (NI) 2015					
Objectives for the conference were clearly explained					
I have learned new ideas/skills					
The knowledge I gained will help me with my job					

#### General Comments

What did you like about the conference?

What could be improved?

Do you have any specific comments on the workshop you attended?
What will you do differently as a result of attending the seminar?
In relation to Community Planning, do you have any suggestions for future seminars / workshops?

**Post-Event Awareness**

<p><b>On a scale of 1-5 please score the following:</b></p>
<p>1. After today, I am more aware of the obligations to engage with children and young people including within Community Planning processes:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">             1-----2-----3-----4-----5  <b>Not aware</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Highly Aware</b></span> </p>
<p>2. After today, I am more aware of the obligations through the Children's Services Co-operation Act, for statutory agencies and other children's services in order to contribute to the improvement and well-being of children and young people.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">             1-----2-----3-----4-----5  <b>Not aware</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Highly Aware</b></span> </p>

**Any Final Comments**

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Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Email address (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_