Introduction
NICCY was established under the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NI) Order 2003. The principal aim of the Commissioner is to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in NI. In exercising these functions, the Commissioner must also have regard to all provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). ‘Still Waiting’ was conducted in accordance with the powers and functions set out in the Order. In particular, duties to ‘keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services provided for children and young people by relevant authorities, to advise Government and relevant authorities, and encourage children and young people and their parents / carers to communicate with the Commissioner and for their views to be sought.

NICCY’s Report
The Review assessed the adequacy and effectiveness of emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people, highlight good practice and identify barriers that prevent them from fully realising their right to the highest attainable standard of mental health (Article 24 of the UNCRC). The Review used a rights based framework to better understand services and support; more specifically this included looking at availability, accessibility, and quality of services and young people’s participation in their own care planning and in the planning and delivery of services.

The report included 3 strands of work – (1) children and young people’s experiences of mental health services and support, (2) a mapping and analysis of service level data and (3) a mapping and analysis of budgeting information.

The report provides a depth and breadth of information on the experiences of children and young people who have accessed or attempted to access mental health services which has not been collected before. As such, it provides a vital insight into the child and adolescent mental health system from the point of view of the service user, the information is of particular relevance and value to those responsible for policy decision making, as well
as those involved in the planning and commissioning of services. The report is based on over 600 children’s and young people’s direct experiences of a range of ‘services or support’ from GPs’ Practices, VCS services to Community CAMHS and In-Patient Care. It identifies significant failings in parts of the system that require urgent attention, including the A&E response to suicidal young people, the access and quality of services for young people with a learning disability and for young people with co-occurring alcohol and/ or drug and mental health problems requiring highly specialist support.

**Key Issues in the Report**

The title of the report is ‘*Still Waiting*’ – this describes one of the key findings from the report that children and young people are (1) waiting too long to ask for help, (2) waiting too long to get the right support when they ask for it and (3) waiting too long for systems / services to change.

An overarching conclusion of the report is that to drive real positive and sustainable change in the availability, accessibility and quality of mental health services and support available to young people, child and adolescent mental health must become a regional priority, with sufficient investment to reflect this.

Child and adolescent mental health is a cross cutting issue that can only be comprehensively addressed if all services, statutory, non-statutory, specialist mental health and services focus on broader mental and emotional well-being, co-operate and collaborate as equal partners. Children’s lives cannot be compartmentalised; to best meet their needs we need a system that takes a holistic approach to these.

**‘Still Waiting’ Recommendations**

In total, the Review contains 50 recommendations that encompass the entirety of a young person’s journey with accessing or attempting to access mental health services and support. The recommendations can be grouped into 8 areas as outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Working Effectively</th>
<th>5. Moving from Child to Adult Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Accessing Help</td>
<td>6. Flexible Treatment Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Support for Adults working with Children and Young People</td>
<td>7. Mental Health Awareness &amp; Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Specialist Support</td>
<td>8. Young People with Additional Needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Working Effectively

- Set up a Project Board
- Invest additional money
- Collect better information more regularly
- Joined up working between services

Accessing Help

- Removing barriers that stop young people accessing services
- Greater flexibility and choice in how young people engage with services
Supporting adults working with children and young people

- **Mandatory** mental health training for **all professionals** who work with young people
- Mental health practitioners attached to **every GP surgery and school**
- Develop **networks** between GPs and the Voluntary and Community Sector

Specialist Support

- **Greater range** of community based mental health support
- **24hr/7 days** a week access to urgent specialist help
- **Needs led** support and treatment in mental health hospitals
- **Implement and monitor** minimum care standards in A&E
- No inpatient treatment on adult wards
- Dedicated **telephone advice line**
Moving from child to adult services

- Make sure all young people are prepared and supported when they move.
- Develop a mental health 'bridging service' for 16-25 yr olds.
- Support the needs of young people who don't meet transition criteria.

Flexible treatment options

- Greater choice of Psychological Therapies.
- Medication only after all other non-drug treatments considered.
- Provide clear information on service standards and how to make a complaint and feedback.
- Strengthen involvement of young people in decisions about their care and how services are delivered.
Mental health awareness and understanding

- Educate children and young people about their emotional wellbeing as part of the curriculum
- Education providers should work more closely with mental health services
- Provide information at key stages and transition points
- Strengthen public awareness and community capacity building

Young People with additional needs

- Equal access for young people with a learning disability to services and support
- Access to services to address mental health and substance use problems at the same time
To address the fundamental issue of a need for greater collaboration and interagency working, including statutory duties to co-operate as set out under ‘The Children’s Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015’, and to drive adequate and proportionate investment on children and young people’s mental health, the following overarching recommendations were made:

- The establishment of a high level multi-agency, cross-sectoral project board (for coordinating the implementation of the recommendations from NICCY’s Review);

- Development of an adequately resourced action plan for taking recommendations forward. (This recommendation reflects the fact that a source of the failure of many implementation plans has been the lack of resource to follow through with the necessary actions); and

- Embed actions into the existing transformation programmes happening across Health and Education; this should include the development of a ‘Children and Young People Mental Health Transformation Fund’ and the establishment of a long term and sustainable ‘funding and practice partnership’ model.

**Investment**

The budgeting section of the report provides the most comprehensive picture to date of how government funds emotional and mental health services for children and young people in Northern Ireland. The most recent budgeting information available from the Review was for 2015/16, and it found that less than 1p in every pound of the overall NI health budget is spent on emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people. It also found that a disproportionately small percentage of the overall budget was spent on prevention and early intervention services (34%).

**Dissemination of Report**

Since ‘Still Waiting’ was launched in September 2018, NICCY has been sharing the report and ensuring that the evidence gathered informs the work of other stakeholders. This has included engaging with Government Departments, Agencies, Professional Bodies and regulatory bodies and inspectorates to discuss progressing implementation of the recommendations. Dissemination is a vital step for building a constituency of support around the actions that need to be taken to address weakness and failings in the realisation of children’s mental health rights.
NICCY will be working in partnership with its youth panel and the wider youth sector on the development and dissemination of a Young Person’s Mental Health Campaign Toolkit / Resource Pack.

**Informing NI Political Parties:**
NICCY has met with representatives from across the political parties in NI to share the findings and recommendations from the report and to inform the work they carry out through Northern Ireland Assembly structures i.e. committee hearings and All Party Group sessions, and the development of party policy and position papers. Each of the political parties listed below have welcomed the report and have agreed that focusing on improving services and outcomes for children and young people’s emotional wellbeing and mental health is vitally important. i.e. Alliance, DUP, Green Party, People Before Profit, UUP, SDLP and Sinn Fein.

**Implementation of Recommendations – Progress to Date**
An Inter-Departmental Project Board (IDG) has been established, Chaired by the Department of Health (DoH) and consisting of representatives from the Department of Education (DE), Department of Justice (DoJ) and Department for Communities (DfC). We have advised the IDG that the action plan must have funding allocated to those recommendations that require it and that the action plan and implementation of it involves cross-sectoral and multi-agency engagement. The IDG is currently drafting an action plan for taking the recommendations forward.

**NICCY Monitoring Process**
NICCY will publish monitoring information on an annual basis; this will be used to report on progress made against the recommendations set out in the report. The first monitoring report will be published in early October 2019 and will outline NICCY’s assessment of the IDG’s response to the ‘Still Waiting’ recommendations i.e. recommendations accepted and not accepted and quality of action plan. This will be followed by a full monitoring report of progress against actions in January 2020. We will engage with the widest range of stakeholders to inform this monitoring process.

For further information and follow-up contact Christine Irvine, Policy and Research Officer, E: christine@niccy.org or T: 02890 316384. Background information about the Review and copies of the main reports are available from NICCY’s website- https://www.niccy.org/stillwaiting
Please contact the communications team at NICCY if you require an alternative format of this material.