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commissioner

25th July 2012

Dear Anna

Consultation re: Legislative proposal to introduce 20mph speed limits in designated restricted streets

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by Mr McDevitt. Given the remit of the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), our response focuses on the potential impact of the proposals for children and young people in Northern Ireland. Where our response corresponds to a specific consultation question, this is indicated.

Road safety is an important issue for NICCY. In 2006, we commissioned research along with the Department of Regional Development and the General Consumer Council on 'Safer Routes to School'¹. This research highlighted the problems caused by traffic around school gates and its impact on road safety. In 2007/08 NICCY conducted a major review of the current state of children's rights in Northern Ireland: '*Children's Rights: Rhetoric or Reality, A review of Children's Rights in Northern Ireland*'². Children and young people participating in this review expressed a wish for road safety to be improved so they could access play and leisure facilities and travel to school in safety. Those living in residential areas outlined concerns regarding specific areas of communities and villages where roads were unsafe and improvements were needed, including traffic calming measures and speed limits.

¹http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/School%20Transport%20Report/saferJourneysReport.pdf

²http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/1_71784_NIC71784%20Childrens%20Rights%20Text%20203.pdf



In addition to this research, NICCY has responded to a range of consultations issued by various government departments, relating to road safety, safer school journeys, and speed limits³.

Children's Rights

NICCY appreciates that there are often complexities when reconciling the rights of children and young people with their welfare and best interests. In relation to *Question 10*, NICCY would recommend the proposals are reviewed against relevant Articles within the UNCRC to ensure that the rights and best interests of children and young people are upheld and protected. These articles should be used as the minimum standards, which the proposal should meet in order to fulfill children's rights. The following articles are particularly relevant to this proposal;

- Article 3: All decisions taken which affect children's lives should be taken in the child's best interests.
- Article 6: All children have the right to life and to the fullest level of development.
- Article 12: Children have the right to have their voices heard in all matters concerning them.
- Article 31: Right to play and leisure.

In relation to Article 12, NICCY would strongly suggest that since the proposed legislation is likely to have a significant impact on children and young people's health and safety, they should have the opportunity to contribute their views during the consultation process.

Response to Consultation Proposals

Research indicates that traffic is the biggest cause of non-medical death of children in the UK.⁴ While the number of children and young people killed or fatally injured on roads in Northern Ireland declined between 1996 and 2008, the statistics for 2010/11 indicate that almost 900 under 16 year olds were recorded as casualties in road traffic collisions.^{5, 6}

³http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/Consultation%20Responses/Consultation%20Response%20DOE%203%20for%202%20transport%20April%2007.pdf

http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/Consultation%20Responses/2007/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20use%20of%20seat%20belts%20and%20child%20restraints%20 2 .pdf

http://www.niccy.org/uploaded_docs/2010/Consultations/Response%20to%20Consultation%20on%20a%20Road%20Safety%20Strategy%20for%20NI%20%20June%202010%20FINAL.pdf

⁴ <http://www.brake.org.uk/kids-schools/wb12scot.htm>

⁵ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/roadsafety/northern_ireland_s_road_safety_strategy_to_2020_final_version.pdf

⁶ http://www.psni.police.uk/10_11_recorded_injury_rtcs-2.pdf

Indeed, the Department of the Environment 'Road Safety Strategy to 2020' indicates that two of its targets are to reduce the number of children (aged 0-15) and young people (16-24) killed or seriously injured in road collisions by at least 55% by 2020. Given these figures and the fact that that the 'single biggest cause of death and serious injury on Northern Ireland roads is excessive and inappropriate speed'⁷, there is clearly a need to increase the level of protection that can be provided to children and young people and to tackle speeding more effectively, on our streets and roads.

NICCY agrees that lower speed limits in designated restricted streets will benefit all urban road users and in particular more vulnerable road users, such as children and young people. NICCY therefore welcomes this proposal to introduce 20mph speed limits, particularly in residential areas, as residential street collisions often involve a higher proportion of children than on other roads. Children and young people constitute some of the most frequent users of residential roads, as they regularly meet or play in areas adjacent to their homes. They may also walk or cycle to and from schools, local shops, and homes of friends or family. Therefore, they are especially at risk on residential and unclassified roads (*Question 1*).

Both NICCY's 2006 research and the Children's Rights Review (2007/8) highlighted the concerns of pupils, parents and professionals in relation to school transport and road safety. The issue of traffic congestion outside school gates was highlighted and NICCY would support an extension of the proposals to apply lower speed limits outside schools and near play parks or designated play areas (*Question 5*).

NICCY would suggest that 20mph zones will not necessarily be self enforcing; displaying a 20mph speed limit will not immediately ensure that drivers reduce their speed. Signage may need to be accompanied by additional traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, ramps or speed cameras to ensure that all drivers abide by the speed limits (*Question 6*).

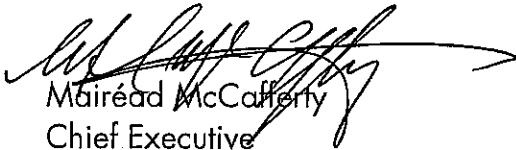
Furthermore, in order for the 20mph speed limit to be enforced and for drivers exceeding this limit to be identified and prosecuted, it will be important that residential and unclassified roads are effectively patrolled by police or alternatively, that fixed speed cameras are installed. Clearly, the effectiveness of applying 20mph speed limits will be greatly enhanced if drivers exceeding the limit are aware that it is highly probable they will be identified and prosecuted (*Question 6*).

⁷ Op.cit, doeni.gov.uk, p29

In conclusion, NICCY welcomes the key proposal to introduce 20mph speed limits in designated restricted streets and particularly in respect of its potential to improve children and young people's safety and to reduce the number of casualties amongst this age group.

If you require further information regarding this response, please contact Dr. Alison Montgomery via email, Alison@niccy.org or telephone 02890 316385.

Yours sincerely



Mairéad McCafferty
Chief Executive