



# **NI Commissioner For Children & Young People**

**Children's Rights: From Rhetoric to Reality**

# **Corporate Plan 2023-2027**



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# Foreword

## The Commissioner



Having started my term as Commissioner in September 2023, I am highly motivated and determined to effect change for children and young people. Building on the work of my predecessors, it is my intention to carry the baton forward and raise the bar even higher.

It is imperative that the independence of my office is protected, that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is enshrined in law, and that violations of young people's rights are addressed.

Young people's views are often not heard, and we have work to do in educating children, young people, their parents and carers, duty bearers, and wider society with regard to children's rights if we are to move towards a society that fully understands and respects what it means to put the best interests of children and young people at the centre of everything we do.

I am particularly keen to promote the voices of young people with lived experiences, and to shine the light into areas that are sometimes overlooked.

Each of NICCY's reports, statements and advice to government on Children's Rights over the years, speak to systematic and indeed endemic failures.

Simply put, children and young people deserve better, and it is my intention to fully utilise my duties and powers to make further progress.

We face a plethora of issues while continuing to work within a very unstable political backdrop, and seemingly stuck in a cycle of crisis after crisis. Austerity, Brexit, Covid, child poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, as well as increasing levels of mental ill health - all have a disproportionately negative effect on children and young people.

Children and young people are the main users of public services. We need to move with expedience on issues mentioned as well as others including reforming and resourcing our education and social care systems effectively, homelessness, environmental and economic justice, legacy of the past, the issues that young asylum seekers and refugees face, anti-age discrimination legislation, raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility and more.

I am extremely optimistic that we can bring about significant change over the coming years. It is my intention to use this Corporate Plan as a vehicle for that.

We have a strong and dedicated Staff Team at NICCY and it is my intention we work closely with stakeholders in the community, voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as with elected representatives and other key influencers and decision makers.

We need to not only give our children the best start in life but the contexts in which to live their best lives!

Together we can achieve so much!

*Chris Quinn – Commissioner*

# WHO WE ARE

‘NICCY’ is the Independent Children’s Rights Institution (ICRI) established in 2003 under the ‘Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order’ to ‘safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people’.

To do so, NICCY has a range of statutory duties and powers which are exercised in fulfilment of these.

The work of the Office is fundamentally guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as well as relevant domestic, national and international legislation and conventions.

## **Our Mission**



**'To safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people'**

## **Our Vision**

**'A society where the rights of all children and young people are respected and realised.'**



**The UNCRC General Principles as per Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 underpin that work.**

**These relate to non-discrimination, best interests, survival and development and the voice of the child in the application of all UNCRC Rights.**

# OUR VALUES

01

**Children and Young People's Rights  
are at the centre of all we do**

02

**We value and protect  
our independence**

03

**We respect and value people, promote  
inclusion and diversity, and challenge  
discrimination and inequality**

04

**We are open and honest  
and act with integrity**

05

**We are optimistic, striving to effect  
positive and lasting change.**

# OUR STATUTORY DUTIES



## PROMOTE

Awareness and understanding of the Rights and Best Interests of Children & Young People

Awareness of function / location of the Commissioner and how to contact NICCY

Art 7(1), (5) (a) 2003



## MONITOR & REVIEW

The effectiveness of Law and Practice

The adequacy and effectiveness of services

Art 7(2) &(3) 2003 Order



## ADVISE & COMMUNICATE

Advise Government and Relevant Authorities

Communicate effectively with Children and Young People and their Parents

Seek views of Children & Young People

Art 7(4) &(5) 2003 Order

# OUR STATUTORY POWERS



## UNDERTAKE COMMISSION CHANGE

Research or educational activities concerning the Rights or Best Interests of Children & Young Persons or the exercise of his Functions

Conduct Investigations as he considers necessary or expedient to meet his duties

Compile info, provide advice and publish any matter concerning their rights and best interests

Art 8(1) & (3) & (5)



## ISSUE GUIDANCE MAKE REPRESENTATIONS

In relation to any matter concerning the Rights or Best Interests of Children or Young Persons

Make representations or recommendations to any Body or Person relating to the Rights and Best Interests of Children and Young Persons

Art 8 (2) & (6)



## ADDRESS COMPLAINTS/ RIGHTS BREACHES ADVOCACY

Assist with Complaints to / or against Relevant Authorities

Bring, Intervene in, or Assist in, Legal Proceedings

Art 11, 12 & 14



# The New Corporate Strategy



## CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Our 2023-'27 Corporate Plan sets out our high-level objectives based on NICCY's statutory duties, powers and functions. For the first time, this is a 4-year strategy coinciding with the 4 yearly term of office of our 'new' Commissioner Chris Quinn who took up his appointment on 18 September '23.

Undoubtedly, we issue this in a very difficult and challenging context, as Chris states. NI may be tentatively recovering from the grave impacts of the Covid pandemic; however, economically our Society is facing the worst cost-of-living crisis in 45 years, while Northern Ireland has been without an Assembly and Executive since the May '22 elections.

It will be vital that NICCY utilises its remit more effectively than ever in continuing our crucial work safeguarding the rights of our children and young people – particularly those who are most vulnerable.

While we will build on the achievements and progress made to date across key priorities<sup>1</sup>, we recognise that such (as for many) has been further adversely impacted not only by the absence of our Assembly and Executive but by cuts to the NI block grant and departmental budgets.

NICCY is having its 21st anniversary as the independent children's rights institution (ICRI) in 2024 and we look forward to celebrating this with you.

This Corporate Plan – informed by many of you – reflects what we will do to address the more egregious breaches of children's rights. We do this in a context of having due regard to the UNCRC and Concluding Observations issued by the Committee in June 2023, following the periodic examination of the UK State Party.

It is part of NICCY's role to monitor progress made by Government on these and on recommendations issued by NICCY within our Reports and 'Advices' to Government. As such we will during the lifetime of this Plan, issue our 'Monitoring Table' alongside our 4th 'Statement on Children's Rights in NI'.

While we have set out our objectives in the following sections, we are, as always, mindful of the need to retain 'flexibility', to react and respond to new and emerging developments and issues and will continue do so as and where appropriate and possible.

This 4-year Corporate Plan is based on the working assumption that NICCY will receive adequate financial allocations and resources to deliver on the statutory duties, powers and functions of the Office.

We will also continue to monitor our delivery, performance and impact in implementation of the Corporate Plan and subsequent Annual Business Plans in safeguarding the Rights and Best Interests of our Children and Young People.

*Mairéad McCafferty – Chief Executive*

# POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEGAL (PESTEL) CONTEXT

## POLITICAL CONTEXT

The current absence of an NI Assembly and Executive from May 2022 ongoing at time of writing (October 2023) has continued to have wide ranging adverse impacts for NI, not least in relation to decision making, legislation, strategies and decision making which could/can not be taken forward.

In their absence, legislation<sup>2</sup> was passed to enable the Secretary of State to provide continuity and produce guidance for Departmental Permanent Secretaries to progress work and expenditure within certain parameters, as well as to explore options for revenue raising in NI. While the resumption of the Assembly is still awaited, we continue to operate in a 'political vacuum' facing increasing pressures and crises in our public services.

We will also collaborate with our partners in the various human rights and equality bodies and NGOs, in support of the UN Committee's Concluding Observations to promote understanding of how 'rights-based approaches' can better deliver effectively for children and society.

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

Children and young people are the biggest users of public services which are under severe stress given insufficient budgets, workforce depletion and increasing demand for services – including mental health, health treatment and social care, and educational needs – and are giving rise to unacceptable levels of unmet need and growing waiting lists. Transformation of our public services particularly in education and health is long overdue.

The Review of Children's Social Care in NI led by Professor Ray Jones and launched in June '23 has set out a range of options to address current systemic failings and pressures. Our formal investigation report contains recommendations we anticipate will 'dovetail' with this review. The marginalisation of children and young people e.g. facing poverty, economic disadvantage, sectarianism, racism, heterosexism, and/or discrimination against those living with a disability or who are asylum seekers or refugees are all issues which NICCY will address.

## ECONOMIC CONTEXT

NI is facing the worst cost-of-living crisis in 45 years and a challenging economic climate – the broader context of which has been referred to as 'a punitive NI budget' from Westminster.

Over the short, medium and longer terms, the effects of budgetary deficits will continue to be felt across sectors of our economy. Necessary investment to effectively meet the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people in Northern Ireland is crucial to meet current need but also to resource transformation if NI is to move away from crises such as we have recently seen.

For NICCY we will continue to liaise closely with our sponsor department DfC, to ensure the level of resource required is such that NICCY is 'fit for purpose' and enabled to deliver on our statutory duties. We are always open to identifying efficiencies and cost savings through closer collaboration and partnership working with others, as well as keeping under review the potential to share services. NICCY is also aware of a pending premises move as we move to more 'agile' working.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Given the fast changing developments and innovation in technology, there is a need for effective and appropriate regulation and oversight to protect children and young people. Children and Young People spend increasing time in the online world. While digital technological advances are welcome where they are of benefit, we must remain vigilant of the potential dangers particularly of artificial intelligence (AI).

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

We are aware that climate change and environmental degradation are the 'biggest existential threat' to our children and young people globally today. Young People have been 'leading the charge' for climate justice and environmental protections. We will continue to support them through NICCY's policy and legal work in this area.

## LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT – REVIEW OF NICCY'S LEGISLATION THE 2003 ORDER

NICCY's Article 24 Report based on 2 Reviews (2007 & 2012) set out the necessary changes to the foundational 2003 Order establishing the Office. The Commissioner's statutory duties and powers continue to be as set out in the 2003 Order including the requirement to be 'Paris Principles compliant' and have 'due regard' to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Committee's Concluding Observations and General Comments and those relating to independent human rights institutions for children.

On coming into post, the Commissioner Chris Quinn has submitted his endorsement of the recommendations within the 'Article 24 Report'.

### Report to Department for Communities under Article 24 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NI) Order (2003)

It is anticipated that when the NI Assembly and Executive are restored, the recommendations from the Reviews can now be progressed and implemented.

## OUR SPONSOR DEPARTMENT – DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES (DFC)

Sponsorship of NICCY rests with the Department for Communities; our relationship with DfC is set out in the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) while we await a new ALB Partnership Agreement. Periodic meetings are held between NICCY and DfC as an accountability mechanism and include oversight of governance arrangements.

NICCY's remit also includes monitoring the Department's work – in line with our legislative remit and functions – given the range of areas under the Department's remit which impact upon children's and young people's lives and outcomes.

## REVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF THE NI COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Review of ALBs as envisaged under the then NI Executive's 'New Decade, New Approach' has been carried out in respect of NICCY by DfC. We will be engaging with the Department and relevant stakeholders on this going forward.

# REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

A full review of our overall performance during each of the years of our previous Corporate Plan 2020-2023, as well as our annual accounts, can be found in successive Annual Reports.

[Annual Report  
2020/2021](#)

[Annual Report  
2021/2022](#)

The range of legal work including our formal investigation report ‘Looked After?’, court case interventions, complaints and casework successfully addressed, can be found in our ‘Annual Complaints & Legal Report’ also available on our website.

Our Policy & research including our monitoring reports and advice papers (informed by our commitment to participation) are set out in our Annual Reports and available on our website.

These as well as necessary governance reporting, provided to Government Departments and Agencies, are also available.

NICCY's strategic objectives relate directly to the duties, powers and functions of the Office.

We recognise there are a wide range of issues adversely impacting children's and young people's rights in Northern Ireland and have therefore identified key priority areas of work informed by listening to our stakeholders, the complaints raised with the Office each year, and reviewing the relevant evidence alongside the UNCRC Committee's Concluding Observations 2023.

## We will build on our work to date on:

### Objective 1 – Incorporation

To bring the UNCRC 'home' to better protect children.

Ensure Children's and Young People's rights are incorporated in the work of all Duty Bearers.

### Objective 2 – Rights

Monitor the systematic barriers and advise Government.

Highlight and address critical issues which adversely affect Children and Young People.

### Objective 3 – Advocate

Use our 'tools' and powers to challenge child rights violations.

Address breaches of Children's and Young People's rights.

### Objective 4 – Knowledge

Ensure our 'stakeholders' or 'audiences' understand what we do!

Raise awareness of Children's & Young People's Rights, the UNCRC and the functions of the Commissioner.

### Objective 5 – Participation

Promote CYP's Voice so services can better meet their needs!

Promote the participation of Children and Young People.

### Objective 6 – Effectiveness

Delivery as the Independent Children's Rights Institution in NI.

Ensure NICCY is an effective and efficient organisation.

# 1 – INCORPORATION

To bring the UNCRC 'home' ! [for /or /and better protect / children]

Ensure Children's and Young People's rights are incorporated in the work of all Duty Bearers

NICCY's role is to promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people. In doing so, we have identified a number of high-level objectives influenced by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Measures of Implementation, recommendations by the UN Committee, their General Comments, and the Paris Principles which set out the minimum standards that International Human Rights Institutions must meet:

## INCORPORATION OF THE UNCRC INTO LAW

In order to fully promote and protect Children's and Young People's Rights, the UNCRC should be incorporated into NI law. This would enable and promote a proactive culture where if rights are breached, children and young people are provided with redress.

## HOLDING GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT

It is essential that government puts children's and young people's needs at the centre of their work. Children and young people are the biggest users of public services and are those most adversely affected in times of crisis. The Commissioner will publish the 4th Statement on Children's Rights 2025 alongside our Monitoring Table to analyse progress made against UNCRC Committee's Concluding Observations 2023.

## PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

NICCY will promote Government integration of Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) into their work, as per Article 4 of the UNCRC, to inform, assess and determine their impact on the realisation of children's rights.

## PROTECTING OUR INDEPENDENCE

Protecting and enhancing the Independence of NICCY is of paramount importance in terms of the Office of the Commissioner fulfilling its duties and powers. NICCY as set up under the 2003 Order has a duty to review this legislation on a periodic basis. We will continue to seek the implementation of NICCY's Article 24 Report recommendations.

## MONITORING THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC BODIES

The Commissioner monitors the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services delivered by government for children and young people, and challenges it if/when necessary. Real and meaningful change needs to happen to address ongoing systematic failures. We will do so, making recommendations to protect children's and young people's rights. This will include monitoring the effectiveness and implementation of the Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015; as well as the effectiveness and implementation of the Children and Young People Strategy 2020-2030. We will also continue to monitor the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU ('Brexit') for Children's Rights to protect children from any 'diminution of rights'.

# 2 – RIGHTS

Monitor the systematic barriers and advise Government

Highlight and address critical issues which adversely affect Children and Young People.

NICCY has a strong track record of providing advice to, and challenging government departments. Given the protracted nature of these issues, we are committed to continuing to address them to ensure changes occur that are in the best interests of children and young people.

This Corporate Plan will act as a vehicle for us to build on and develop our work by following up on the advice already provided, and drawing on our statutory powers to maximise the impact of our work. In doing, so the Commissioner shall follow up on all existing recommendations and monitoring reports.

**The Commissioner has highlighted a series of Key Priority issues; however, we will adopt a flexible, pragmatic approach that will enable us to respond to and act upon contemporary and emerging issues for children and young people.**

**We will focus our proactive work and advice to government on the following key areas:**

## TACKLING CHILD POVERTY

We will continue to work with others to raise awareness of, and act upon, economic and social justice. We will focus on advising government on actions to lift families on low income out of poverty including through the delivery of an Anti-Poverty Strategy; working with the local administration on Welfare and Fiscal issues.

## IMPROVING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We will work with statutory, voluntary and other agencies to ensure the lived experiences of children and young people drive a wellbeing agenda that achieves improvements in mental health outcomes for children. We will continue to monitor progress against our 'Still Waiting' report, monitor and advise in relation to the Mental Health Strategy and its Funding Plan.

We will work to provide recommendations to government with regards to children's health services and waiting lists. We will monitor and advise relevant bodies on how data is captured and shared putting the needs of the child to the forefront.



# 2 – RIGHTS

## ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

We shall take action aimed at tackling inequality and inspiring transformational reform of the education system, based on the best interests of children and young people, supporting them to reach their full potential.

The Commissioner will work to ensure that the right to an effective education, as laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is realised for all children and young people including those who are disadvantaged. We shall oversee the monitoring and implementation of our Review of SEN provision (2020), to ensure that children's needs are met.

We will support progress on a Childcare strategy as well as monitor the impact of the Play and Leisure Policy recognising the importance of play, need for age-appropriate space seek to address the negative stereotyping of children and young people.

## ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF THE CONFLICT

Children and young people continue to be affected by the transgenerational legacy of the past.

They have spoken about issues affecting them and their families directly as well as issues of sectarianism and division, likewise the need to address criminal coercion and exploitation, or abuse of children and young people by criminal gangs.

We will monitor and advise government and relevant authorities on the issues to be addressed.

## STRENGTHENING SAFEGUARDING PROVISIONS

We will monitor the statutory mechanisms in place to safeguard children and young people e.g. in relation to a Barnahus model for NI, child sexual exploitation, child death overview panels, domestic and sexual violence, human trafficking, safeguarding online and unaccompanied and separated young people within the refugee and asylum-seeking system.

## ADDRESSING ISSUES IN YOUTH JUSTICE

We will monitor, advise and challenge government on the application of the 'Best Interests' principles across the youth justice system.

This will include taking action to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in accordance with acceptable international standards; seek accurate and current information on using Children as CHIS (covert human intelligence sources), advise on stopping use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, the use of Stop and Search and harmful devices such as spit & bite guards.

## CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION

We will continue to use our powers to provide robust challenge to ensure children and young people do not experience discrimination in relation to the provision of goods, facilities or services and to ensure that equal protection against assault applies to them as it does to adults.

# 2 – RIGHTS

## ASYLUM SEEKING & REFUGEE CHILDREN / NEWCOMER CHILDREN

NICCY recognises the lack of rights that asylum seeking, refugee and newcomer children and their families often experience. Promoting their voices and issues facing them will be a priority for the Commissioner over the next three years.

NICCY will monitor and provide advice to government with regard to rights breaches. We shall work with Commissioners in other jurisdictions to address issues of common concern. We shall monitor and advise our NI Executive on the roll out of the Illegal Migration Act and work with public bodies to review and strengthen the supports and services asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children receive when they arrive in NI.

## CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT:

Environmental degradation, climate change, resource depletion, pollution, protecting natural spaces and wildlife have many implications for children's rights. NICCY will continue to work with government and other agencies to emphasise the urgent need to address the adverse effects of environmental degradation.

We shall advise government on meeting the legal targets as set out in the NI Climate Change Act and follow up on environmental litigation to promote children's rights at the forefront of judicial decision making.

## HOMELESSNESS

Youth Homelessness is on the rise, and this has been exacerbated since COVID-19. Rising numbers of people are vulnerably housed with rising poverty, cost of living pressures and record levels of people on housing waiting lists. NICCY will work closely with DfC, the NIHE and others to address these issues including providing advice on Homelessness Prevention, ensuring the Children's Services Co-operation Act is utilised in relation addressing housing-related issues.

We will work with relevant organisations to support and ensure that they seek and act upon the views of children and young people who are vulnerably housed or who have experienced homeless. We will monitor progress against NICCY's 'A Place Called Home' report into youth homelessness as well as take cognisance of and acting upon research reports conducted by others on this issue.

## COVID-19 IMPACT LEGACY

The long term effects of COVID-19 continue to unfold. While we are aware it has exacerbated inherent inequalities, we must also learn more about the long-lasting impact on children's and young people's mental health and education.

NICCY will therefore seek and collate further information on how lockdowns have affected children's early years development taking cognisance of the impact on key milestones, social and emotional intelligence and mental health. NICCY will also continue to respond to the UK Covid Inquiry.

# 3 – ADVOCATE

Use our 'tools' and powers to challenge child rights violations

Address breaches of Children's and Young People's rights.

**The 2003 Order confers a range of powers upon the Commissioner.**

These powers are the 'tools' which enable the Commissioner to advocate and fulfil his duties and ensure children and young people are treated fairly.

We will continue to 'raise the bar' through the Commissioner's power to bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings.

**We will use these powers to challenge breaches of Children's and Young People's rights through:**

- **Complaints Handling (casework) to, or against, relevant authorities, when the matter has yet to be resolved – in line with the requirements of our legislation – ..;**
- **Conducting Independent Investigations where breaches of the rights of children and young people are alleged;**
- **Formal Investigations into cases / complaints which require formal use of NICCY's powers including cases which expose systemic failings adversely impacting on Children's Rights;**
- **Strategic legal challenge to breaches of children's and young person's rights through bringing, intervening in, or assisting with, legal proceedings;**
- **Processing Protected Disclosures in line with the 'Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014. (Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 as subsequently amended).**

# 4 – KNOWLEDGE

Ensure our 'stakeholders' or 'audiences' understand what we do!

Raise awareness of Children's & Young People's Rights, the UNCRC and the functions of the Commissioner.

**NICCY has a duty to promote awareness of children's and young people's rights, the UNCRC and to create an understanding of the role and functions of the Commissioner and the Office.**

**Communicating our work, what we do – and listening to what others tell us in the process – is a key priority for the Office.**

**Our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy supports the implementation of our Corporate Plan 2020-'23. Our strategic approach to this work over the next four years will focus on:**

## ENHANCING VISIBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

**Ensuring Children, Young People, their parents, carers and those who work with them know about their rights, about NICCY and our work is an important part of our job. It is essential that we are visible and accessible – particularly to those most in need. We seek to engage using a variety of materials and mechanisms as a means of fulfilling our statutory duties.**

**Direct and ongoing Engagement;**

**The Commissioner shall, in the discharge of his duties, engage directly with a range of stakeholders, in a meaningful way. This will include direct engagement with:**

- **Children and Young People, meeting and speaking directly with them, to understand, and act upon their lived experiences; raising their awareness of their rights and of NICCY.**
- **Parents, Guardians and Carers, meeting directly with them to hear about the issues affecting them and their children; and to raise their awareness of children's rights and NICCY.**
- **Professionals, Practitioners and 'trusted adults', including meetings, attending and speaking at events, providing training, publishing reports on specific child's rights issues, and issuing guidance for statutory departments and agencies on implementing children's rights. This work will include raising awareness of children's rights issues and the actions required to realise these.**
- **Political Representatives and policy makers, meeting directly and working at all levels to raise awareness and to garner support for implementation of children's rights.**
- **General Public, raising awareness, media engagement, the use of social media and attending public events across Northern Ireland.**

# 5 – PARTICIPATION

Promote CYP's Voice so services can better meet their needs!

Promote the participation of Children and Young People

The Voices of Children and Young People will continue to be a fundamental part of the work of the Commissioner, and of our organisation. We will embed young people's voices in the culture and fabric of NICCY and we will be proactive in seeking out and supporting the voices of those most vulnerable.

NICCY's statutory duties outline our role in communicating with children and young people, their parents and carers; as well as seeking the views of children and young people. Participation crosses over all other aspects of this Corporate Plan and over the next three years we will strengthen young people's participation within NICCY and promote a culture of meaningful participation within and across public bodies, recognising the role of the voluntary sector in this.

Recognising that the participation of children and young people is key to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child we will further develop the NICCY Participation Forum, and NICCY Youth Panel. These vehicles will guide us in our work and help strengthen our recommendations to Government in light of the UNCRC Concluding Observations.

The best interests of children and young people should be considered when designing new laws and policies, as well as when decisions are taken about them. The UN have reinforced the fact that children and young people should be able to express their views and to have their views taken into account in all decisions affecting them. NICCY will support this through advising the NI Assembly, NI Executive, Departments and their agencies in the development of meaningful participation with children and young people specifically but not limited to the development of:

- A regional youth participation mapping exercise.
- A regional Participation policy which will consider key principles, the roles and responsibilities on departments and other children's authorities, including resource implications to ensure the process is meaningful and not tokenistic.
- Participation mechanisms that embed the views of a wide range of children and young people and provide opportunities for them to engage, participate and contribute to the development and implementation of policies, programmes and services that impact them.
- A pupil participation policy for education settings and associated quality assurance processes

We are committed to supporting and creating opportunities for children and young people to have a direct say in decisions affecting them, including supporting them to campaign on issues affecting children in Northern Ireland.

We will prioritise progress in respect of lowering the voting age to 16, aligning with political education programmes.

# 6 – EFFECTIVENESS

Delivery as the Independent Children’s Rights Institution in NI.

Ensure NICCY is an effective and efficient organisation

**We will ensure effectiveness and efficiency in maximising our organisational performance by delivering on our strategic objectives as detailed in our annual Business Plans; through robust systems of corporate governance, internal controls and accountability mechanisms; sound financial management, appropriate staffing levels, professional performance and reporting to achieve greatest impact within organisational resources.**

**We will do this through:**

- **Delivery on our Annual Business Plan objectives and targets based on this 4-year Corporate Plan utilising organisational resources – Human, Financial and Physical – to best effect, including liaison with Sponsor Department on resourcing;**
- **Efficient Corporate Governance Systems across financial management and systems of internal controls, ARAC, NDNA Review, robust risk management, internal and external audits and relevant reviews;**
- **Accurate Monitoring and Reporting on NICCY’s Outcomes – performance and impact through laying of the Annual Report and Accounts before NI Assembly, Quarterly Reports to our Sponsor Department, internal reporting and periodic reports / updates to stakeholders;**
- **Prompt implementation and/or updating of relevant guidance, recommendations and legislative changes to policies, procedures and practice as directed and necessary;**
- **Staff Wellbeing through activities, approach and adherence to our values & behaviours and Staff Charter monitored;**
- **Accreditation with Investors in People and building on accreditation achieved as we progress through the IIP ‘journey’ including learning and development opportunities for our Staff;**
- **Corporate Social Responsibility activities e.g. shared services ensuring appropriate ‘value for (public) money’, sharing of expertise as well as environmentally friendly policies and practices; and**
- **Work with other Organisations with similar remits e.g. ENOC, Rights Institutions, our Advisory Forum and others to enhance the work of NICCY by Identifying emerging issues and use of duties and powers to challenge and effect change.**

# NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)

Equality House

7-9 Shaftesbury Square

Belfast

BT2 7DP

**CONTACT**



**028 9031 1616**



***info@niccy.org***



***www.niccy.org***



***@nichildcom***



***niccy\_yp***

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this Corporate Plan, please contact our Chief Executive Mairéad McCafferty via 028 9031 1616 or [Mairead@niccy.org](mailto:Mairead@niccy.org)