



Corporate Plan 2011 – 14

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FOREWORD FROM THE COMMISSIONER

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NICCY) Corporate Plan for the period 2011 – 14 is a framework document which will guide my work for the next three years. It builds on the successes of my previous corporate plan. The corporate objectives within this new plan are designed to achieve real and measurable success in delivering outcomes for our children and young people.

This plan outlines the broad direction my work will take over the next three years, and is written both to provide focus as well as to allow NICCY to be flexible, dynamic and responsive to emerging issues. The plan will also shape the annual business plans throughout the 2011– 14 period, in which I will plan in more detail the actions I will take to deliver on my objectives.

The previous Corporate Plan for 2008 – 11 highlighted 5 key priority areas that I focused upon over this period. This Corporate Plan will link more closely to the legislative remit of my office and specifically, my duties and powers as enshrined within the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

In practice, much of my work requires me to be responsive to the work of the Northern Ireland Executive and Departments. While an aspect of NICCY's work must remain proactive, allowing me to investigate issues as I determine, much of my work involves the scrutiny of how government is delivering for children and, as such, must be reactive to political developments.

Over the next three years, I will focus my powers and duties on improving and making children and young people's lives better with the resources available to me. I will work towards ensuring that the rights children and young people have, as contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), are realised and respected.

It is clear that the context in which NICCY will be working over the next three years will be challenging, not least due to the economic recession. There will be many threats to services, and too often children's services can be the easiest to cut. Now more than ever it is important that there is a strong voice for children, who will hold government to account on how it delivers for children. I am committed to being that strong voice and to using my resources effectively to champion children's rights and best interests with government.

NICCY will strategically focus the work outlined in this plan within the resources with which I have been provided. As I develop my annual business plans, I will identify the areas that I will work on according to the following criteria:



- Where there are significant political developments – new policy proposals and draft legislation that will have a significant impact on the rights and/or best interests of children in Northern Ireland;
- Where I have evidence of significant violations of children's rights, particularly in relation to groups of marginalised and vulnerable children; and
- Where structures and mechanisms are not in place to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard.

In determining these priorities each year for the business plan I will take account of the views of children and young people, as well as other individuals and organisations. I will also consider what other agencies are working on and ensure that we are adding value.

I remain committed to working with those public policy makers and others in the voluntary and community sectors to ensure that children and young people can be happy, valued and respected in society.



Patricia Lewsley
Commissioner for Children and Young People
11 February 2011



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides an overview of the planned work of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).

It explains the background to the establishment of the Commissioner, how her office is structured, and her duties and powers as outlined in the legislation that established her. This legislation, the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, also provided her with a clear aim: 'To safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people'. All the work listed in this Corporate Plan seeks to meet this primary aim, through the delivery against five Corporate Objectives:

Objective 1: Measurably, raise awareness of children's rights and the functions of the Commissioner amongst children, parents and other stakeholders.

Objective 2: Review and advise Government on development of policies, services and legislation relating to children's rights and best interests.

Objective 3: Use the Commissioner's powers to challenge breaches of children and young people's rights.

Objective 4: Ascertain the views of children and young people in relation to issues which affect their lives.

Objective 5: Maximise NICCY's impact and corporate performance

For each objective we have outlined our main delivery mechanisms, as well as listing a number of Key Performance Indicators by which we will monitor our delivery.

NICCY's vision, mission and values underpinning our work for the next three years is presented, along with our assessment of the factors impacting on our work, and the work of Government in delivering for children.

In addition our planning has been informed by a review of our performance over 08-11, which is also outlined, and we also indicate how we plan to monitor and evaluate our work over the period of this 2011-14 Corporate Plan.



WHO WE ARE

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland (NICCY) was established under the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (hereafter 'the 2003 Order').

The Commissioner was established in recognition that, among the new devolved political structures, there needed to be both structures to coordinate delivery for children across government as well as an oversight body, able to hold the devolved government to account in its delivery for children.

In 2002 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child had produced a General Comment on the role of Independent Human Rights Institutions for children, noting that it 'considers the establishment of such bodies to fall within the commitment made by States parties upon ratification to ensure the implementation of the Convention and advance the universal realisation of children's rights'.

A number of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) formed an alliance, 'Putting Children First', which lobbied political parties to support the establishment of a Children's Commissioner, and a subsequent private members bill received broad support across the Assembly.

NICCY was established as an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Commissioner's full designated powers took effect from 1 October 2003. Commissioners with similar roles have also been established in England, Scotland and Wales, whilst an Ombudsman for Children exists in the Republic of Ireland.

The Commissioner is Patricia Lewsley, and she is guided in her work by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). She is supported by a Senior Management Team (SMT). This team is comprised of the Commissioner, Chief Executive, Head of Communications and Participation, Head of Legal and Casework and Head of Policy and Research. The Commissioner is also supported by a NICCY Youth Panel (NYP) made up of young people who share and contribute their experiences and thoughts to the organisation in order to help NICCY make decisions about issues that affect children and young people in Northern Ireland.



AIM

Article 6(1) of the 2003 Order established the Commissioner's principal aim as:
"To safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young persons".

STATUTORY DUTIES AND POWERS OF THE COMMISSIONER

Article 7 of the 2003 Order outlines the duties of the Commissioner as:

- To promote an awareness and understanding of the rights and best interests of children and young persons.
- To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the rights and welfare of children and young persons.
- To keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for children and young persons by relevant authorities.
- To advise government and relevant authorities on matters concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons.
- To communicate effectively with children and young persons and their parents and raise awareness of the function and location of the Commissioner and how they can contact her.
- To seek the views of children and young persons in exercising her functions.
- To make the services of the Commissioner available to children and young people in their local area

Articles 8-15 outline the Commissioner's general powers where she can:

- Undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for, research or educational activities concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons or the exercise of her functions.
- Issue guidance in relation to any matter concerning the rights or best interests of children or young persons.
- Conduct investigations as she considers necessary or expedient to meet her duties listed above.
- Compile information, provide advice and publish any matter (including research, educational activities, investigations and advice) concerning the rights and best interests of children and young persons.
- Make representations or recommendations to any body or person relating to the rights and best interests of children and young persons.
- Assist with complaints to relevant authorities.
- Bring, intervene in or assist in legal proceedings.



VISION

Our vision is for a society in Northern Ireland where all children and young people flourish, are valued and their views are respected.

MISSION

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

VALUES

All of our work is underpinned by a number of core values. We use these in our day to day work and we seek outcomes based on the fulfilment of these values.

They are:

Child centred -	Children are at the centre of all we do and we will encourage and value their participation.
Rights focused –	Our work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
Independent -	We will challenge Government and relevant authorities and hold them to account.
Dynamic -	We are a forward thinking organisation, innovative and open to change.
Transparent -	We are open, honest, accountable and responsive in all our work.
Collaborative -	We will work together with others, while maintaining our independence, to deliver more effectively for children.
Enabling -	We will work to build support and capacity to help children, young people, parents and others to act and promote children's rights.



REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

Over the past 3 years, NICCY has focused on delivering the corporate objectives we had set for the period. A full review of our overall performance, as well as our annual accounts, can be found in our successive Annual Reports, which are available on our website www.niccy.org.

The 2008-11 Corporate Plan set out 16 corporate objectives for NICCY. The fulfilment of these objectives guided the work of the Commissioner and helped the organisation achieve our mission and vision.

The corporate objectives were the basis for the work set out in the business plans for the years 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11. These business plans were reviewed, reported, and agreed with our sponsoring department, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The 2008-11 corporate objectives were arrived at using a "Balanced Scorecard" which seeks to ensure that all aspects of the organisation were in balance so that the most effective and efficient use of resources is made to achieve objectives. The objectives were split into four categories:

1. People outside NICCY (Children, Young People, Parents and others)
2. NICCY Staff
3. How we do things
4. Money

Within each category, 4 corporate objectives were set and a review of the actioning of these objectives are set out below.

1. People Outside NICCY

(a) Listen to and encourage the active involvement and engagement of children and young people and their parents and promote our work

To ensure children's participation was at the heart of Government, NICCY engaged with all Government departments over the period of the corporate plan. NICCY devised a "Participation Policy Statement of Intent" which was an aspirational document asking each department to sign up to working towards full and genuine participation for children and young people within the departments. Over the course of this corporate plan 11 out of the 12 departments signed up to this.



In order to ensure that children and young people's views could be garnered, NICCY developed an Outreach model where the Legal and Casework and Communications and Participation staff would go to where the children and young people lived and sought their views on matters affecting them and also offered advice through the casework service. Since being piloted in 2008/09, this outreach model was rolled out during the "Make it Right" (see below) campaign when one outreach clinic was carried out in each month of the campaign which linked to the topic of that month's campaign.

NICCY ran a number of campaigns during this corporate plan, which encouraged the active involvement of children and young people and their parents. These included "Make it Right" and the "Democra School", "We want the Airwaves" and Disable the Label" initiatives.

NICCY has developed a unique Train the Trainers model for student and full time teachers using the concept of cascading education where investing training in a person with teaching responsibility can have an exponential benefit to a wider number of children and young people than would otherwise be possible. To date almost 1000 people have been trained to deliver UNCRC workshops that have direct relationship to the curriculum.

NICCY undertook various major pieces of research during this period, which involved active engagement with children, and young people and their parents/carers and others involved in their lives. Two examples of this are "Children's Rights Review: Rhetoric or Reality" published by NICCY in February 2009 and "Talking Transfer" published in September 2010.

NICCY also worked with and advised statutory bodies to encourage the inclusion of young people into development and decision making processes. The PSNI Youth Independent Advisory Groups, DARD's young people's action plan and the NI Policing Board's Youth Advisory Panel are examples of this.

(b) Provide a responsive, accessible and targeted legal assistance, complaints and advice service to children and young people and parents.

The Legal and Casework team provides a number of avenues for children and young people to contact NICCY including by telephone, by email and by engaging with outreach as set out above. The team provides advice and assistance to children and young people who have complaints about their rights in relation to their interactions with public authorities. Over the three years of the corporate plan NICCY has handled a large number of individual complaints namely 575 in 2008/9, 676 in 2009/10 and 434 in 2010/11. NICCY has also engaged in litigation in the Courts.



Over the period of the corporate plan, NICCY has intervened in 5 cases in the High Court in Northern Ireland, The Supreme Court and also the European Court of Human Rights.

The Legal and Casework team has increased the awareness of NICCY's powers amongst the legal profession and have organised two lectures for the profession in the business years 2009/10 and 2010/11.

(c) Influence and improve the law, policy and practice relating to children and young people.

The Legal and Casework team has challenged, where appropriate, the law, policy and practice of the Government through its various legal cases and interventions and also through its casework function. It has also initiated the outreach model of complaints clinics (see above).

The Commissioner has made public statements and has attempted to highlight the issues as they present themselves.

The Policy and Research team has worked towards influencing law, policy and practice by responding to consultations released by the various government Departments. Over the period of this corporate plan, NICCY has responded to 82 consultations.

NICCY uses its statutory role in order to influence government in relation to law, policy and practice. NICCY has given evidence to 16 committees over the period of this corporate plan.

Where gaps have been identified in relation to law, policy and practice NICCY has conducted research and made recommendations on how these can be addressed. One such example is the "Talking Transfer" research which was carried out with 964 children and young people, 23 parents and 42 teachers/educationalists. The research allowed, for the first time, pupils to have their say on the transfer process

NICCY has worked with other members of the children's sector in order to influence and improve the situation for children and young people in Northern Ireland. NICCY set up the Participation Forum of NGO's and statutory bodies in 2008/9. The forum's primary role is to offer support and information to the Commissioner on matters affecting the participation of children and young people in Northern Ireland. It also provides a forum where information and experiences can be exchanged and collaborative working opportunities can be explored.



NICCY holds Government to account when law, policy and practice is not meeting the needs of children and young people. NICCY further has highlighted where the Government has not met its obligations under the UNCRC and has specifically highlighted the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. NICCY, in conjunction with the Commissioners in the 3 other jurisdictions of the United Kingdom produced a Shadow Report to the UN Committee identifying where law, policy and practice needed to come into line with the obligations under the Convention.

NICCY has worked on specific issues which relate to children and young people including reviewing the Case Management Review of children who die in certain circumstances, producing research papers, providing briefings to Assembly Committees, attending various forums and engaging with key political representatives.

The most visible piece of work that NICCY carried out within this corporate plan period was the award-winning "Make It Right" Campaign. This campaign was conducted to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the UNCRC and ran from November 2009-December 2010. The campaign drew on the conclusions of NICCY's 2009 research "Children's Rights: Rhetoric and Reality", the UN committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations and the evidence gathered in talking to over 1500 children and young people as part of our Corporate Plan consultation. This information was distilled into 12 topics; 28 workshops were carried out with 2000 children over this campaign. NICCY intends, over the course of the next corporate plan, to monitor the actions of Government in relation to the calls to action which NICCY made.

(d) Utilise the powers and functions of the NICCY Order to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people.

As set out above NICCY has over the course of the corporate plan used its powers in the 2003 Order to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

NICCY has used its statutory platform to access Government and to provide evidence to them and to advocate for the true participation of children and young people.

Through NICCY's legal powers and functions the Commissioner has provided advice to over 1500 children and their families over the 3 years and has further used her legal powers in order to intervene in cases with the purpose of highlighting issues and arguments in respect of children in general and further ensure that the arguments that



arise from the UNCRC are put to the Courts.

NICCY has used its powers to call government to action and to hold them to account. For example, NICCY intervened on the matter of precautionary suspensions in the Supreme Court in London in 2010, which ruled these to be illegal. Therefore, NICCY met with the Department of Education to ascertain how it would amend its guidelines. NICCY continues to monitor the situation and liaise with the Department of Education.

2. NICCY staff

(a) To have staff numbers and skill levels required to effectively deliver our services

NICCY has reduced its headcount from 28 to 26 full time equivalent staff.

In 2008/9 NICCY recruited its Participation Officers as full time NICCY employees which ended the practice of having them seconded.

NICCY has ensured all staff are competent in their roles and have been provided with training where appropriate. NICCY has ensured that training needs are assessed during staff 1-2-1's with management and also during the annual appraisal process.

NICCY has ensured that the professional members of staff are able to meet Continuing Professional Development obligations of their professional bodies.

NICCY has provided training to all staff in respect of child protection.

(b) Develop our staff and leadership in line with best practice (identify; plan; take action; evaluate)

As above NICCY has been open to staff development either by way of training or allowing staff to undertake personal development by allowing flexible working and/or study leave.

The NICCY appraisal system is applied to ensure that staff are meeting their objectives and if corrective action is required that this is identified and measures put in place.

(c) Value staff and support them to achieve an appropriate work/life balance

NICCY operates a flexible working policy. NICCY has been understanding of staff who require alternative working hours because of caring commitments.



NICCY has subscribed to the Carecall system which provides a confidential counselling service for all staff when required.

In order to streamline processes and to ensure that the most up to date information is available to staff NICCY introduced an electronic staff handbook in the year 2008/9. This allows staff to consult it at any time.

NICCY is working towards Investors in People accreditation and it is hoped that this will be awarded in the early part of the new corporate plan.

(d) Develop a child friendly and child centred culture

NICCY has sought to ensure that their premises are child and young person friendly.

NICCY has ensured that their major publications are accessible to children and young people and have striven to prepare child friendly versions where possible.

NICCY has ensured that all its work is permeated by the ethos of inclusion of children and young people and has striven to ensure that the NICCY Youth Panel are involved in all aspects of the organisation. In 2010/11 NICCY undertook to ensure that a Senior Manager attended each meeting of the NICCY Youth Panel in order to discuss corporate matters and also a SMT/NYP liaison meeting was established.

NICCY has ensured that the Youth Panel has been involved in all recruitment that has taken place during this corporate plan period.

3. How we do things

(a) Develop, implement and evaluate strategies for research, service reviews and investigations

NICCY conducted an internal review of its Participation service in 2008/9.

NICCY drew up a framework for terms of reference for investigations.

(b) Maintain and evaluate criteria for review, investigations and legal assistance.

NICCY has put in place policies and procedures for all aspects of the work of the Legal and Casework team. These policies are reviewed annually or more frequently if appropriate.



NICCY has developed procedures regarding the Commissioner's legal funding capabilities. A Legal Funding Criteria document has been settled to include a step by step process against which the Legal Funding Committee must assess any applications for assistance and also a flow chart.

NICCY has ensured that through these policies and the review of casework that all matters which are being worked by the Legal and Casework team are compliant with the aim, mission and values of the organisation and are fulfilling our statutory function.

(c) Develop, implement and evaluate internal policies and procedures and governance arrangements

During this period NICCY embedded key policies and practices covering all areas of governance. Participation emphasis was evident in the operations of ie the Audit and Risk Committee, Ethics Committee, financial and management processes. A Staff Handbook and training guidance were also developed in this period.



CORPORATE OBJECTIVES 2011-2014

These objectives have been developed from our statutory duties as contained within the legislation that established the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland.

Objective 1: Measurably raise awareness of children's rights and the functions of the Commissioner amongst children, parents and other stakeholders.

Informing others about the work of NICCY and influencing change is at the heart of all NICCY's work. This meets our statutory requirements, but also means we can explain in clear terms the issues that affect children and young people in Northern Ireland and how NICCY can help.

We engage both formally and informally with a vast range of stakeholders from children and young people themselves to Government, the media and many individuals and groups all with the same aim in mind – to help protect and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people.

We will do this through:

- Promoting an understanding of children's rights and the functions of the Commissioner to children and young people, parents, carers and our stakeholders
- Raising awareness of the UNCRC through education, facilitation and training
- Developing resources to enable a better understanding of children's rights
- Developing effective and innovative ways to communicate with children, their parents or carers and our stakeholders
- Providing advice and information

Key Performance targets:

- Awareness of UNCRC among priority stakeholder groups increased 5% where baseline is established in year 1
- Capacity building programme delivered to 5 stakeholder groups (Children and young people, Parents, Politicians, Media, NGOs and other groups) on Children's Rights and the functions of the Commissioner
- 5% increase in downloads of online resources
- Traffic to website increased by 5% annually
- NICCY key messages carried in 25% of media coverage



Objective 2: Review and advise Government on the development of policies, services and legislation relating to children's rights and best interests.

A number of NICCY's duties relate to monitoring Government delivery for children and providing advice on policies, services and legislation relating to children's rights and best interests. NICCY has reviewed how we most effectively provide advice to Government, and we have subsequently changed our way of working in this respect. We are seeking to engage with key departments more proactively on significant issues affecting children earlier on in the policy development process. The four Departments we are focussing on are Health, Education, OFMDFM and Justice.

We will do this through:

- Scrutinising Government delivery for children through monitoring outcomes for children
- Producing reports to Government, including research reports, on critical matters affecting children and young people
- Providing advice to Government in relation to issues that impact upon children and young people
- Providing advice to Government in relation to mechanisms for delivering more effectively for children and young people
- Reviewing, and providing advice in relation to, spending on children
- Working with other organisations, including the British and Irish Network of Ombudsman and Commissioners for Children to report on progress against international human rights standards, in particular the UNCRC.

Key Performance Targets

- Quality, timely advice provided proactively to four key departments (Education, Health, Justice and OFMDFM) on critical children's rights issues.
- Annual reports to Ministers of four key Departments and respective Committees in relation to progress on critical children's rights issues
- Two reports produced on specific, important children's rights issues each year
- Advice provided on measures for implementation of children's rights
- Report produced on UK Government progress against 2008 Concluding Observations to be submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as part of the 2014/15 UK reporting process.

Objective 3: Use the Commissioner's powers to challenge breaches of children and young people's rights.

The Commissioner has been vested with powers to ensure that the rights of children can be protected through legal challenge if necessary. The Commissioner has the power to bring, intervene in or provide assistance with legal proceedings. In addition



our legislation gives us powers of investigation to be used in circumstances where no other statutory body can perform such a role.

We will do this through:

- Identifying gaps in service provision or legal loopholes through casework.
- Scoping child rights abuses to inform SMT decision making on areas for potential investigation if appropriate
- Intervening in legal cases which concern children's rights where we can add value
- Taking strategic legal cases, as appropriate to highlight and invoke challenge
- Conducting or commissioning research, consultations and/or investigations
- Taking or funding legal proceedings as appropriate

Key Performance Targets

- Issues identified within our legislation fed into the review of same by OFMDFM
- Cases taken to court only when an appropriate use of our resources and powers, as considered and decided upon by our legal funding committee
- Achieve a 90% client satisfaction rate on legal and casework services offered.

Objective 4: Ascertain the views of children and young people in relation to issues which affect their lives.

One of the key things for NICCY is to make sure children and young people are not only at the heart of what we do as an organisation, but that their views and voices are heard.

The importance of engaging and communicating is recognised together with the understanding that children should not just be passive recipients but should be encouraged to take action.

NICCY's legislation requires that we engage and work with Government to ensure structures are in place to enable children and young people to participate and have a say in decisions that affect their lives. This means helping them to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, not only in day-to-day activities such as school but also in society in general.

We will do this through:

- Seeking the views of children in gathering information on issues affecting them and in formulating advice to government
- Developing creative and accessible mechanisms to ensure children and young people can contact the Commissioner



- Targeted legal workshops with marginalised children to ascertain where they feel their rights are not being met and how they feel they should be addressed.

Key Performance Targets:

- Internal participation strategy implemented
- Issues raised by children and young people tracked and reports produced through the NICCY information management system
- Deliver a participatory project to ascertain children's views on a key issue
- Evaluation of 3 years evidence of children and young people's concerns informs 2011-2014 corporate plan
- Carry out an evaluation of the workshop model from the previous corporate plan.
- Use recommendations from that evaluation to develop the current workshop model
- Conduct at least 2 workshops in each year of the corporate plan

Objective 5: Maximise NICCY's impact and corporate performance

In fulfilling this objective NICCY will continue to ensure the effective management of staff and resources to achieve the Commissioner's preceding objectives, in line with the best corporate governance practice. NICCY will also focus on ensuring all activities are properly tracked to make sure that work planning is effectively reported upon and manages to meet all targets as established in yearly business planning.

We will do this through

- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of our work
- Reviewing and revising key organisational strategies (Human Resources, Financial, and Accommodation).
- Producing annual business plans throughout the 2011 -14 period
- Maintaining and further developing other organisational strategies and policies that support the achievement of our corporate objectives

Key Performance Targets

- Impact and effectiveness of our work evaluated
- Annual Business Plan produced



FACTORS AFFECTING THE EXECUTION OF THE PLAN

A. Legislative and policy context

NICCY was established on 1 October 2003 under the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. NICCY's detailed powers and duties are set out in this legislation. The Commissioner is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), an international agreement setting out how children should be treated and the rights that they have. The Commissioner's duties and powers may be grouped under 3 main areas as follows:

- Promoting children's rights – In promoting children's rights the Commissioner must communicate effectively with children and young people, and their parents, and must raise awareness of her function, location of her office and how she can be contacted. She is also required to seek the views of children and young people in her work.
- Advising Government on children's rights and best interests - both in response to requests from Government and proactively as the Commissioner determines. The Commissioner will base all her work on thorough research and evidence. The Commissioner has the power to undertake general inquiries, research or investigations into issues where she believes children and young people are being adversely affected.
- Supporting children's complaints and legal action – the Commissioner can deal with individual complaints from children and young people, or their parents/guardians about any services from relevant authorities¹ that impact on those under 18 years of age (or under the age of 21 for those with a disability or leaving care).

B. Political and Administrative

We anticipate that this Corporate Plan will be delivered in a period of considerable political and administrative change.

The forthcoming elections to the NI Assembly in May 2011 will result in a new Northern Ireland Executive. Any new directions established by Ministers, following the 2011 elections will be incorporated into NICCY's business planning processes to ensure that NICCY maintains its role of monitoring Government's actions and

¹ As defined in Schedule 1 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NI) Order 2003.



commitments to children and young people. In addition, NICCY will take cognisance of the 2011 local government elections.

The outcomes of the review of administrative arrangements for Northern Ireland including education and local councils, which have faced delays, will also have a bearing on our work.

NICCY continues to advise the Northern Ireland Executive and NI Assembly to promote the rights and best interests of children and young people and to ensure that any legislative and/or policy changes do not lead to children and young people being disadvantaged. In relation to the Executive's Programme for Government (PfG), NICCY will monitor its implementation over the period and challenge Government when policy, legislation and services are ineffective or inadequate.

NICCY's relationship with individual Committees of the NI Assembly is ongoing and positive. We aim to maintain a high level of mutual understanding in relation to the key issues that affect children and young people.

We will continue to build on the excellent working relationships that we have with our fellow Commissioners and Ombudsman in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, including monitoring developments against the United Nations Concluding Observations. Together, we constitute the British and Irish Network of Ombudsman and Children's Commissioners (BINOCC). In addition, we will continue to play a leading role as a member of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

In seeking to ensure maximum impact, value for money and avoid duplication, NICCY will build on the positive working relationship with the children's organisations within the NGO sector and will work closely with other statutory organisations in the public sector, particularly the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI). We will also continue to seek opportunities with other organisations to share services in order to reduce cost and maximise service resilience.

The recent review of NICCY confirmed that the interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland continue to be best served with an Independent Commissioner. Therefore, NICCY will continue to protect this independent role and hope this recommendation will help inform the work of the Northern Ireland Executive's Review of Arms Length Bodies.

NICCY continues to develop and review Memoranda of Understanding with statutory, inspectorial and monitoring bodies. We will continue to undertake shared work on



matters of mutual interest with a range of statutory, community and voluntary organisations.

C. Economic, Social and Technological Context

Social exclusion arising from sectarianism, racism, homophobia, and discrimination against those with a disability, remain significant factors in children's and young people's lives in Northern Ireland. Our 2009 Children's Rights Review outlined that, while many children in Northern Ireland have a positive experience of growing up, for too many the experience is considerably different. We want to ensure that a consistent and co-ordinated effort is made across the statutory, public, voluntary and private sectors to improve the lives and well-being of children and young people.

We are concerned at the demonising and negative stereotyping of children and young people in Northern Ireland, and at the way too often children's views are not sought, or not considered. We are also aware of the limited support for children's rights within society and are committed to working to explain their importance and how a rights based approach can deliver effectively for children and society.

Plans to reduce public sector expenditure will undoubtedly have an effect on frontline children's services, and may lead to more children experiencing poverty. NICCY will monitor very closely how the potential impact of these cuts affect individual children, groups of children and their families. We will particularly seek to ensure that provision to the most vulnerable groups of children in Northern Ireland are protected.

NICCY will continue to advise and where appropriate, challenge government and other statutory organisations when policy, legislation and services are ineffective or inadequate.

The role and growing importance of technology in society is another area that may impact our work in the coming corporate plan period. This is seen particularly in the online and social media environments which are leading the way and setting the pace in terms of change. Young people are typically early adopters of these technologies which often become integral to their lives, shaping how they engage and interact with each other and wider society. NICCY will need to consider how it will keep pace with these technologies, looking for new opportunities to engage with children and young people and other stakeholders, adapting existing ways of working and adopting new strategies.



D. Finance

There are a number of financial considerations to be taken into account which will impact upon how much progress we will be able to make in taking forward the corporate objectives as set out in this corporate plan 2011-14. The United Kingdom economy has faced severe economic pressures which have, in turn, had an impact upon public expenditure in Northern Ireland.

This has had consequent implications for the resources that we receive from Government. NICCY's provisional budget for the next four years is being reduced by 3% each year (administration element). The annual budget for 2011- 12 is £1,719,000. More financial information will be available in the Annual Report and Accounts which will be published on www.niccy.org on an annual basis.

The current staffing structure comprises 28 full time staff including the Commissioner. We will continue to work closely with OFMDFM to ensure that the level of resources is fit for purpose and enables us to deliver on our objectives as outlined in this Corporate Plan and related annual Business Plans. We will also continue to work with other OFMDFM sponsored Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) to identify and implement efficiencies and savings through potential co-location, sharing of back office functions and through closer collaboration. We will also contribute to the NI Executive's review of ALBs.

NICCY remains committed to being accountable for, and demonstrating value for money, in our work on behalf of all children and young people in Northern Ireland. We will coordinate our activities with other agencies to prevent duplication.

We have consolidated and strengthened our governance processes and structures in line with best practice and will ensure that we maximise our resources over the period of this plan in pursuit of our corporate and business objectives.

E. Review of the Commissioner

OFMDFM is required, as detailed within NICCY's management statement and financial memorandum, to commission a comprehensive review of the Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland every three years. The most recent review commenced in 2010 and its main purpose was to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of NICCY's operations and to examine the delivery and validity of its functions in relation to Government policy objectives.



The Review confirmed that the role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People is best achieved through a separate, independent arms length body, which provides both advice and challenge on children's rights issues.

The Review also recommended that the Commissioner increases her influencing and facilitative role with regards to coordinating intervention around major issues affecting children and young people.

The Review endorsed a collaborative approach to sharing back office functions throughout the statutory rights sector. In addition, the Commissioner will further strengthen NICCY's performance management and financial management processes to demonstrate the impact of its work in the sector and to underpin the positive impact that NICCY has upon children and young people.



OUR KEY ASSUMPTIONS

NICCY has developed this plan in line with its statutory duties and powers. The corporate objectives based on the following key assumptions:

1. We will continue to receive the political commitment to carry out the functions of the Commissioner for Children and Young People from the Northern Ireland Assembly.
2. Recognising the difficult economic situation in the UK at present, we will receive adequate financial support through the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to effectively deliver on this Corporate Plan and acknowledge that we will be required to deliver greater efficiencies over the period of this plan.
3. We recognise that over the period of this plan, without the full implementation of the UNCRC into domestic legislation, there will be a continued need to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

NICCY will develop an evaluation framework for each year of the corporate plan outlining how work carried out will lead to the aims and objectives of the organisation being met and the impact made. NICCY's information management system will be used to track activity and associated resource implications against each objective. This information will be used with internal evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness and value for money. This system will be reviewed annually to ensure success.

We will do this through

- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of our work
- Reviewing and revising key organisational strategies (Human Resources, Financial, and Accommodation).
- Producing annual business plans throughout the 2011 -14 period
- Maintaining and further developing other organisational strategies and policies that support the achievement of our corporate objectives

On completion of the Corporate plan, NICCY will evaluate and report on its impact. This may include commissioning evaluation of critical areas of the Corporate Plan.

