

Children and Young Person's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP)

Northern Ireland Children and Young People's
Plan 2011 – 2014

A Consultation Response by the NSPCC NI

November 2011

Introduction

The NSPCC is the lead child protection NGO in Northern Ireland providing a range of therapeutic and protection services for children and young people. These include the regional Young Witness Service, ChildLine, a 24 hour Child Protection Helpline, a range of therapeutic and post abuse recovery services and an evolving service base which will see the rollout of 16 new services in the next year.

The NSPCC has statutory child protection powers under the Children (NI) Order 1995, is a member of Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland and is a core member of the forthcoming Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

The NSPCC's key priority is Child Protection but to effect change for vulnerable and young people in Northern Ireland we work across a continuum from a public health and early intervention perspective to direct services at Hardiker levels 2 and 3 and 4.

The NSPCC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the CYPSP's Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Plan 2011 -2014 and we look forward to seeing the more detailed action plans in November. We have based our response on consultation with staff across the organisation at both senior management and operational level. This included Service Centre Managers, Policy and Research staff and staff providing services in NI but which are part of NSPCC's UK wide provision, specifically Childline Schools' Service, Child Protection Consultancy, Child Protection in Sport (CPSU) and Safeguarding in Education Service (SIES). The NSPCC is not currently represented in this process but we recognise the importance of this development in working towards integrated planning for children's services and are interested in becoming involved particularly at Regional and local level.

Membership

We note that the document sets out the shape and content of the first NI Children and Young People's Plan of the of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. The NSPCC supports the aim of the Strategic Partnership to seek to improve the lives of children and young people within a children's rights framework and the focus of this strategy in trying to improve the quality of children and young people's lives through joint planning. However, we would welcome clarification on a number of issues

The NSPCC is a large UK wide NGO with statutory powers under the Children (NI) Order 1995 and we provide a wide range of services to children who have been abused or risk of abuse. While we focus a lot on membership of the Regional Child Protection Committee and Trust Panels, NSPCC also provides preventive services for example, ChildLine, the ChildLine Schools Services, Child Protection in Sport Unit etc which we consider could usefully feature and be accounted for in regional planning of services and the forthcoming Action Plan. The NSPCC is also developing and rolling out a range of new services, some of which are preventative in nature and scope which could usefully be included in integrated planning models.

The structure of the CYPSP as it is currently configured appears complex and there is no member agency which NSPCC would consider to have a mandate to represent our position in relation to commissioning or planning. Given that the Society provides a broad range of services to children and young people and their families we would welcome further clarity on how agencies not currently included in the process can be involved. Provision of information on the criteria for inclusion on different groups and structures would be helpful in ensuring the processes are open and transparent.

The NSPCC in Northern Ireland does not consider there to be any organisation on the Partnership who can act on our behalf or in our interests. We would welcome some further clarity on the nature of the “mandated role” of Partnership Board members and we would be happy to meet to discuss this.

Strategy

The strategy states that the partnership has taken NI wide responsibility for integrated planning of children’s’ services at agency level as opposed to Government level and notes that up until now there has existed a range of partnerships which addressed children’s lives within other contexts such as Health, Community Partnership etc.

We welcome the focused approach on children but given that all the other partnerships referred to currently remain in place, we would welcome some clarification on the links with these other strategy groups and how duplication will be avoided. For example how will the Partnership link with the Regional Hidden Harm Quality Assurance Group or current Regional Child Protection Committee and developments around the Safeguarding Board for NI. Also we are unclear how the Partnership does or will link up with Departmental Groups which impact on children such as the Regional Steering Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence and which have significant detailed action plans which impact on aspects of children’s lives.

The strategy states this is the first time that Chief Executives from statutory agencies with responsibility for support and services for children have come together with a mandate for significant change in the way resources are planned and put in place. We have long advocated the benefits of an inter-agency approach to children’s services but we are unclear how the Partnership will work with agencies who are independent of government and who provide services at

local community level and with organisations such as NSPCC who is not a member. As an independent organisation with Authorised status we are unclear how the CYPSP will seek to “be informed by and inform individual organisational business, corporate and community plans” and we welcome an opportunity to discuss how we might become involved at Chief Executive and regional level.

Also NSPCC has services which contribute at a local level to meeting the high level outcomes indicated in the document including domestic violence services, ChildLine, therapeutic services etc and we are unclear about the mechanism for taking part in these. Our experience to date would indicate that there is criteria for membership of these groups and it would be useful to know what criteria for membership is applied and how decisions are taken in relation to who should attend.

In summary and as a result of our internal discussions on this consultative plan, we have a number of questions arising out of the Plan:

- To what extent are all relevant Government Departments engaged in the plan?
- NSPCC is not a member of any of the voluntary sector organisations on the Partnership. We are however a major provider of services with statutory powers. We provide services at both a local and regional level which we believe could be usefully reflected in the forthcoming Action plans. Are the members of the Strategic Partnership there in a representative capacity and if so, who do they represent?
- What are the criteria for membership at all levels and how can the partnership ensure that all agencies providing services are represented at appropriate levels?
- How does the Strategic Partnership intend to ensure two way communication with stakeholders?
- How does this plan connect to other plans relating to integrated services?

- How will the Partnership ensure organisations and agencies not currently included in the membership of the Partnership at various levels are involved in integrated planning and commissioning?

NSPCC Services in Northern Ireland

Given the Compton Review of Health and Social Care and the focus on commissioning of services we welcome the focus on early intervention and NSPCC has been working on developing new services which adopt a public health model (the services are outlined in more detail below). Our services add to the overall profile of children's services in Northern Ireland, spending almost £5 million per year in Northern Ireland.

The NSPCC Corporate Strategy 2009-16 charts a new direction for the Society across the UK. Key to this is the development of high-quality evidenced-based services targeting the most vulnerable children, in particular: babies, Looked After Children, children with disabilities, children experiencing physical abuse in high risk families as well as those experiencing sexual abuse and neglect.

The outworking of the Strategy has also resulted in the development of 3 service centres in Northern Ireland and the centralisation of services in bases in Foyle, Belfast and Craigavon. New service developments in development and for roll out over the next year currently include:

Non- accidental Head Injury (NAHI)

The vulnerability of under 1s to head injury is well documented. Evidence from universal parenting programmes shows they can have a demonstrable reduction in injuries and while numbers of children affected in NI are small the impact on these children, their families and the state is significant. The NAHI programme aims to raise parents' awareness of the vulnerability of babies through the use of

a DVD specially designed for new parents to be viewed in hospital before discharge home. This has additional support materials attached.

“Assessing risk, protecting children” (Craigavon and Belfast)

Research shows poor conviction rates for alleged offenders of sexual offences and high levels of attrition. To address concerns about alleged abusers or offenders, the NSPCC has commissioned the development of a practice manual which provides guidance on the assessment of adults who may have contact with children and who pose a sexual risk. There are currently limited resources/services available for working with this group in Northern Ireland. The service adopts a holistic approach which contributes to decision making within a child protection framework and seeks to work in close partnership with social services.

ChildLine Schools Service (Regional)

Research undertaken by the NSPCC has shown that the majority of children who contact ChildLine for support are over the age of eleven. Yet we know that children under 11 are the largest group of children on the Child Protection Register. The ChildLine Schools Service aims to help every child in the UK understand how to recognise and protect themselves from abuse and where to go for help when they need it. We believe that we can reduce the prevalence of abuse and engage in societal change by reaching more children earlier. The service seeks to operate in all primary schools in NI, running prevention and group work programmes designed to enable children to have the knowledge to keep themselves safe.

“Face to Face” - Connecting with Children in Care (Foyle initially)

The “Face to Face” support service aims to offer short-term, solution-focused, therapeutic interventions to children and young people who are ‘looked after’ and who are seeking support with a specific issue. The support can be accessed via three referral routes, ChildLine, self referral and by other agencies. The aim is to

promote a timely and responsive service that promotes 'looked after' children and young people's access to independent support; potentially preventing difficulties from escalating to a level that may require more intensive, but less readily available, services.

“Letting the Future” (Foyle and Craigavon)

This service offers therapeutic work to children and young people who have disclosed sexual abuse. The model used is based on Bannisters's Recovery and Regeneration Model, 2003. It differs from NSPCC's earlier therapeutic work in that the intervention is time-limited and involves delivery of 5 modules which are holistic in nature and which draws on a range of methods and techniques already used by NSPCC practitioners, including play therapy, sand-tray therapy, CBT etc. The programme is being evaluated to assess improved outcomes for children and young people who have been sexually abused.

“Change for Good” (Southern and Western Trust areas)

“Change for Good” is a structured treatment programme for young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour (HSB). NSPCC research has found that young people are responsible for two thirds of the sexual assaults inflicted on children. Sexual abuse becomes more common during teenage years up to the age of 17 with girls as the main victims. ‘Change for Good’ aims to establish a consistent and rigorous approach to treating children that will allow comparisons with other techniques.

The programme is based at the Craigavon Service Centre. The service is for boys aged between 12 and 18, within the normal ability range who have been assessed as medium to high concern assessed using the Aim 2 assessment model. Changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviour will be measured using standardised scores.

“FEDUP” (Family Environment: Drug Using Parents) based in Foyle

The Fed-up programme will offer a service for children affected by parental substance misuse alongside a programme of work with parents who may or may not be involved in a substance withdrawal treatment programme. The aim is to give children a safe environment to talk about their experiences, wishes and feelings, and to help them process and make sense of their world living with a substance using parent. Work with parents is aimed at raising awareness and understanding of the impact of their substance misuse on their children and to reduce risks so parent will be better able to meet their child’s needs.

Family SMILES (Belfast)

Family SMILES is based on a group-work programme (SMILES) developed in Australia for children of parents with a mental illness. Family SMILES targets families where there is experience of parental mental illness and where this has been a significant contributory factor to concerns about the child’s emotional health, wellbeing or safety.

There are three components to the Family SMILES programme – individual work for the parent with the mental illness, group-work for the child, and a family safety planning session for the family unit. The aim of the work is to increase the parent’s ability to empathise with their child, to increase the child’s knowledge about mental illness, to improve their coping ability and resilience, and to improve the family’s ability to attend to the needs of their child in a time of crisis.

Improving Parenting, Improving Practice (IPIP) (Belfast)

This service will target families where there are concerns of actual or potential neglect. The service will provide two separate programmes – Promoting Positive Parenting (Triple P) and Video Interaction Guidance (VIG). Triple P is a supportive / educative parenting programme that aims to prevent severe emotional and behavioural problems in children by enhancing the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents. VIG involves recording interactions between

parents and children. These video recordings are then reviewed with the parents with an emphasis on positive interaction and promotion of healthy attachments. Referred families referred will access one or other of these programmes

Existing services and projects

NSPCC continues to provide a number of regional and national services in Northern Ireland in tandem with new service development. These include:

“Caring Dads - Safer children” (Belfast)

The NSPCC’s Belfast Domestic Abuse Recovery and Support Services (DARSS) offers an innovative intervention programme (Caring Dads, Safer Children) designed specifically for men who have abused their children and/or who have exposed their children to abuse of their mother. The programme seeks to work with fathers who want to improve their fathering role and address their abusive behaviour towards their partners and children. The aim is to help fathers gain an understanding of their child’s needs and thus improve and strengthen their relationship with each other. Each group runs for 17 sessions. This service is funded by NSPCC N.I. and is available to men residing in Belfast Trust; South Eastern Trust and Southern Trust.

ChildLine 24 hours children’s counselling helpline with bases in Belfast and Foyle – 0800 1111

The NSPCC Helpline 24 Child protection helpline across the UK and CTAIL, the **Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line** which provides a service for professionals seeking advice on children who may have been trafficked and who have First Responder status to the National Referral Mechanism.

The **Child Protection in Sport Unit** provides safeguarding advice, information and training to sports governing bodies in Northern Ireland.

Independent visiting services to Looked after children in two trust areas in Northern Ireland

Young Witness Service aims to make the process of giving evidence in court more understandable and less traumatic for witnesses under the age of 18 years. NSPCC staff and volunteers provide support and information, before, during and after the trial, including a pre-trial visit to court. Volunteers and workers accompany the young witness when using the TV link to give evidence and when they give evidence in open court. Young Witness Service is currently available in all courts. The service is also piloting the use of remote TV link to Londonderry Crown Court from our Bishop Street offices. 350 children and their parents/carers were helped by the project in 09/10.

Domestic abuse services: Domestic Abuse Recovery and Support Services continues to support parent and child victims of Domestic Abuse and is working on the development, publication and roll out of the DARSS toolkit to other partner agencies as part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy. On completion of the roll out, it is anticipated that partner agencies trained in the delivery of the DARSS toolkit will develop the capacity to take over the direct work currently done by NSPCC.

Training and Consultancy providing advice and training programmes
Safeguarding in Education Service (SIES) which currently is focusing on the development of preventative education approaches in primary schools and the promotion of emotional, health and wellbeing in post primary schools.

Community development service based in Foyle designed to promote best practice around safeguarding within NSPCC's Adult Advice and Information Services.

Policy and Research team producing a range of briefing papers and research outputs.

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