



## **NICVA comments on Children's Services Co-operation Bill**

### **Background to NICVA**

NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) is the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It provides over 1,000 members with information, advice, training and support services on a wide range of issues, together with representation for the sector as a whole.

NICVA works to achieve progressive social change, based on equality and equity, working through a community development approach, to empower local communities to pursue their own needs and agendas.

### **General comments**

NICVA welcomes the opportunity to inform the Committee on our thoughts on the on Children's Services Co-operation Bill.

NICVA are supportive of the Bill and the principles behind it and would like to congratulate Steven Agnew MLA on getting the Bill to this stage.

We believe this statutory duty is a mechanism which will ensure better outcomes for children and young people by focusing attentions on sharing and removing duplication. Currently co-operation on children's issues is mainly carried out through informal networks and entirely dependent on relationships developed between relevant officials, therefore the level of sharing varies across responsibilities. Placing sharing on a statutory footing will ensure that these relationships actually are developed and maintained in the interests of children and young people.

NICVA believes that the sharing of resources and the ability to jointly commission services can only be described as a good thing, and is happening already through the Delivering Social Change signature projects which have a total budget for delivery which has come from relevant departments. This Bill is a natural extension of this practice. Indeed, NICVA would be keen to see the roll out of this approach to other areas, such as job creation, as we believe it ensures the outcome is kept in the forefront of each involved departments mind when making decisions. Therefore one department will not make a decision that would have a detrimental impact on the end goal.

We believe this shift to shared funding will maximise the outcomes from an ever diminishing pool of resources. Currently funding allocated to individual departments is for the delivery of services specific to that department to meet responsibilities rather than being outcomes focused, the method championed by this Bill should tackle this issue. NICVA hopes it will also tackle the silo mentality of departments by placing children and young people's services at the core of decision making, not protection of individual departmental budgets.

A statutory duty makes it easier for departments to come together to share resources and work collectively towards identified shared outcomes. Collaborative approaches will remove duplication and ideally allow of investment in prevention, both ultimately saving budgets in the long term.

NICVA would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on the Bill, should you have any further questions on this response we would be happy to answer them.

For more information contact

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