

**Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister**

**Children's Services Co-operation Bill Response pro forma**

For your convenience the Committee has prepared the attached pro forma to assist in responding to the main clauses of the Bill. The Bill can be found at <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/current-non-executive-bill-proposals/childrens-services-co-operation-bill-as-introduced/>

Please respond by Friday 27 February 2015 to [committee.ofmdfm@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.ofmdfm@niassembly.gov.uk).

<b>Organisation Name</b>	<b>Save the Children</b>
<b>Main contact</b>	<b>Anne Moore</b>
<b>Email address/phone number</b>	<a href="mailto:a.moore@savethechildren.org.uk">a.moore@savethechildren.org.uk</a> 07917232900

**I wish for my organisation to be considered for oral evidence sessions in relation to the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill: Yes**

Clause	Comments (200 words)
<p><b>1. General Duty</b></p> <p><b>Please provide comment on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The six specified outcomes relating to the well-being of children and young people as listed in the 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People 2006 - 2016</b></li> <li>• <b>The duty on Northern Ireland Departments to co-operate with each other in order to further the achievement of these objectives</b></li> <li>• <b>The mechanism in place for amending the specified outcomes</b></li> </ul>	<p>Important timing for this legislation with the Ten Year Children and Young People's Strategy due in 2016, the examination of the UK government by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016, the pending child poverty strategy 2014/15-17 and predicted increase in child poverty by 2020 due to the recession, budget and welfare cuts and increasing in-work poverty. Hence the importance of tackling these challenges with a more coordinated and committed approach from central government. The six high level outcomes were well researched in consultation with the children's sector and inform the children services planning and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership at regional level. They are still supported.</p>

Clause	Comments (200 words)
<p data-bbox="188 244 472 272"><b>2. Co-operation Report</b></p> <p data-bbox="188 316 539 344"><b>Please provide comment on:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="188 387 539 887" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="188 387 539 632">• <b>The requirement for OFMDFM to publish periodically a report on the progress of departments towards achieving the specified outcomes</b></li> <li data-bbox="188 675 539 887">• <b>The requirement for other Northern Ireland Departments to co-operate in the preparation and publication of the report</b></li></ul>	<p data-bbox="577 244 2054 344">The reporting is sensible – it has the potential to improve accountability because it could be aligned with the existing requirement to report annually on the Child Poverty Strategy and could inform reporting on the outcomes in the next Children and Young People’s Strategy.</p>

Clause	Comments (200 words)
<p data-bbox="185 311 557 379"><b>3. Sharing resources and pooling funds</b></p> <p data-bbox="185 416 557 448"><b>Please provide comment on:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="185 491 557 770" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="185 491 557 770">• <b>The enabling power which will permit Northern Ireland departments to establish pooled budgets and shared resources to achieve the six outcomes in clause 1</b></li></ul>	<p data-bbox="575 311 2051 483">In order to achieve the high level outcomes, detailed information on public expenditure must be accessible. The most recent UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations recommended consistent budgetary analysis in order to identify how much spending is allocated to children across the State party and whether it serves to effectively implement policies and legislation affecting them. Therefore it makes sense to have the enabling power to pool budgets in order to enhance transparency and joint service commissioning when appropriate.</p>

Clause	Comments (200 words)
<p data-bbox="185 240 450 308"><b>4. Children’s Services Planning</b></p> <p data-bbox="185 352 539 379"><b>Please provide comment on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="185 424 539 847"> <p data-bbox="185 424 539 635">• <b>The requirement for the Health and Social Care Board to review and publish a children and young people’s plan, including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="286 639 434 667">○ <b>Content</b></li> <li data-bbox="286 676 479 738">○ <b>Review mechanism</b></li> <li data-bbox="286 748 524 847">○ <b>Co-operation between public bodies</b></li> </ul> </li> <li data-bbox="185 895 524 957"> <p data-bbox="185 895 524 957">• <b>The public bodies listed at Clause 4 (7)</b></p> </li> <li data-bbox="185 1005 539 1177"> <p data-bbox="185 1005 539 1177">• <b>The duties placed on the Health and Social Care Board particularly with regard to monitoring and reporting</b></p> </li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="575 240 2042 344">This would seem a sensible development of the precedent set by the HSCB’s Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership. But this existing arrangement would need to be taken into consideration when designing the Stormont House Agreement’s proposed new department for children and young people.</p>

**Do you have any suggested amendments to the Bill? (200 words)**

No

**Do you have any other comments? (200 words)**

Child poverty levels and income inequality are predicted to increase by 2020 due to the adverse impact of welfare and budget cuts, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) research, Child and Working-Age Poverty in Northern Ireland from 2010-2020, commissioned by Ofmdfm. The IFS has predicted that child poverty will increase across the UK, with the sharpest increase in income poverty among children in Northern Ireland. Its latest update states that relative child poverty will increase to 26% (BHC) and absolute child poverty to 29.3% (BHC) by 2020.

However the Executive has committed to ending child poverty by 2020. Each Executive Minister has a statutory obligation to meet the 2010 Child Poverty Act targets, which are reiterated in the 2011-15 Programme for Government. The targets are to reduce relative child poverty to less than 10% by 2020, to reduce absolute and combined child poverty to less than 5%, with a target for persistent low income to be prescribed by regulation before 2015.

The Department for Social Development's (DSD) Households Below Average Income (HBAI) figures for 2012-13 show that 20% of children were living in relative poverty (Before Housing Costs) and 22% (After Housing Costs); 22% were living in absolute poverty (BHC) and 26% (AHC).

Much importance is attached to employment as the chief way to tackle poverty, but more than half of all poor children live in families where an adult is working. Child poverty is becoming a problem of working families, a problem of low wages and insecure work.

According to the latest QUB Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) survey, more than half of children in Northern Ireland (241,000) are growing up in households that could not pay an unexpected expense of £500. One in three adults is unable to make regular savings of at least £20 and 28% cannot make regular payments into a pension because of lack of money; about 75,000 children are living in damp homes; over a third of families cannot afford one or more items central to a child's family life – a week's holiday away from home, a day trip once a month or celebrating special occasions. The number of families unable to afford at least one of four items for a child's educational development has increased and these include children's books, educational games, construction toys and school trips.

In 2008 Save the Children and partners found that 21% of children were living in persistent poverty, attributed largely to the legacy of the conflict. This 21% figure was more than double the GB rate in 2008 and many worry that increasing youth unemployment, welfare reform, budget cuts and in-work poverty will recreate the conditions for social distress and unrest.

The Welfare Reform Bill has reached further consideration stage at Stormont but the Commons Select Work and Pensions Committee has highlighted the severe misery already caused by increasing sanctions and benefit delays in England. The New Statesman has highlighted another worrying development in England – it reported on a pilot for 15,000 low-paid working universal credit claimants who may find that their benefits, including the housing element of universal credit, are reduced if they do not actively seek to work more hours or increase their salary. According to the New Statesman, the change is

important because this policy goes beyond targeting jobseekers, the sick and disabled. It threatens to further penalise those who are working in low-paid jobs.

It is vital that the government response is commensurate with the scale of the challenge. As well as a costed child poverty strategy, we would argue that low income children and their families would benefit from the proposed Children's Services Co-operation Bill to encourage better departmental coordination.