

Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

On 9th December 2015 the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 received Royal Assent and became operative. The Act was introduced to the Assembly as a Private Members Bill by Steven Agnew MLA and was amended through work with OFMDFM and the wider children's sector. It can be accessed at the following link <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2015/10/contents/enacted>

The Act was introduced to improve co-operation amongst Departments and a wide range of bodies including District Councils, HSC Trusts, HCS Board, the Education Authority, NIHE, PSNI and the Probation Board as they deliver services aimed at improving the well-being of children and young people. Within the Act the term 'well-being' is defined using 8 general parameters. The factors identified in the Act which contribute to the well-being of children and young people are:-

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- Physical and mental health;
- Enjoyment of play and leisure;
- Learning and achieving;
- Living in safety and stability;
- Economic and environmental well-being;
- Making a positive contribution to society;
- Respect of rights; and
- Promotion of good relations.

The Act also outlines how the Children and Young Peoples Strategy should be monitored; requires the Programme for Government to take account of reports on the Strategy; and provides powers for statutory bodies to pool budgets to support services for children and young people.

Work is underway on the development of the new Children and Young People Strategy in order to comply with the Act.

Development of the Next Children and Young People Strategy

A substantial amount of work, consultation and engagement has been ongoing since June 2015 to support the development of the new Executive Strategy for Children and Young People. This includes reviewing the previous strategy; analysing and assessing relevant documents; engaging with stakeholders; and considering how the new Strategy may be developed through a process of co-design. From this work a number of key themes and issues have been identified which will be considered as the Strategy develops.

Further engagement will also be required in order to share some of this emerging thinking with stakeholders so it can be tested, discussed and refined. For each

outcome we need to agree what we aim to achieve through the strategy, what data we need to assess progress and what actions are required. We would want to continue to obtain your views on how this analysis should be carried out and your support and experience in considering these issues. Many thanks to the many people who have already made a valuable contribution to date.

It is also vitally important that we now begin a process of engaging with children and young people to hear their views and to ensure they play a central role in the development of the strategy and appreciate the key role children and young people's organisations have agreed play in supporting this.

We welcome your contribution and urge anyone who is interested in this work area to please get in touch with the **Children and Young People's Unit**, OFMDFM at CYPU@ofmdfmi.gov.uk or telephone **Alastair Carroll** on **02890 523423**.