

Strategy for Looked After Children: Improving Children's Lives

27 June 2018

Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was created in accordance with 'The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order' (2003) to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Under Articles 7(2) and (3) of this legislation, NICCY has a mandate to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services relating to the rights and best interests of children and young people by relevant authorities. Under Article 7(4), NICCY has a statutory duty to advise any relevant authority on matters concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons. The Commissioner's remit includes children and young people from birth up to 18 years, or 21 years, if the young person is disabled or is care experienced. In carrying out her functions, the Commissioner's paramount consideration is the rights of the child or young person, having particular regard to their wishes and feelings. In exercising her functions, the Commissioner has regard to all relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The development of the Strategy for Looked After Children: Improving Children's Lives is an important milestone in working towards better outcomes for children and young people in care, on the edge of care and leaving care and we welcome that the Strategy has been developed jointly between the Departments of Health and Education. We note that a number of areas relevant to the Strategy have been consulted on in the draft Adoption and Children Bill and that the Strategy will need to take account of the outworkings of the Bill.

We welcome the range of documents produced as part of the consultation process, particularly the documents for children, for young people and the Child Rights Impact

Assessment. NICCY acknowledges the range of engagement being undertaken by Departments and others during the consultation process. We note that Departments should, in particular, take account of the views expressed directly by children and young people with experience of being Looked After whose engagement is being facilitated by a number of voluntary sector organisations, particularly VOYPIC. We highlight however that the children and young people's consultation documents do not address all of the outcome areas.

NICCY notes that the Strategy is intended to replace and build upon Care Matters. However we are not aware of any appraisal of the effectiveness of Care Matters or which areas remain outstanding making it difficult to assess whether any action builds upon previous actions.

Please be advised that this is submission draws attention to a range of key themes and reiterates much of NICCY's earlier advice provided in correspondence of 15 December 2016, 15 September 2017 and in meetings on 6 June 2016 and 15 June 2017.

Children's rights

NICCY highlights that there should be a more robust child rights approach to the Strategy. We welcome that the UNCRC is listed in legislative context of strategy alongside other key instruments, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998, but are disappointed that it is not more firmly embedded throughout the commentary document or the Implementation Plans. For example, Our Pledge to Children in section 4 should be explicitly underpinned by the key principles of the UNCRC including rights to non-discrimination, to survival and development to the highest standard, to best interests being a primary consideration and the voice of the child being heard. The UNCRC should be recognised as an 'Enabler' for the Strategy in 5.1 and section 6.5 should better represent the full range of rights afforded to children by the UNCRC, with particular reference to Articles 20 and 21 and others that require particular measures to be

taken by Government to ensure they are fully realised by Looked After Children. Indeed, NICCY advises that Departments consider the Strategy as the delivery plan for the most relevant UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2016 Concluding Observations to the UK and devolved governments.

In relation to the children and young people's Article 12 right to express their views on all matters affecting them and to have these given due weight depending on their age and capacity we would welcome a more robust commitment to this. For instance, in section 6.8 rather than children being involved in planning and review processes "where age appropriate" it should only be when necessary or in exceptional cases that they are not involved and the Strategy should ensure professionals have the expertise and the time to properly support and enable all children to participate fully. We welcome revisions to implementation plan actions and reporting measures where these seek to better capture children's direct experiences, such as children's reporting of feeling safe or protected in Outcome 4.

Outcomes for children and young people

NICCY welcomes the alignment of Strategy outcomes with those set out in the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (CSCA) which provides the foundation for the Children and Young People's Strategy which is, in turn, the policy framework in which Improving Children's Lives sits. In considering the eight outcome areas it would be helpful to identify a small number of key areas that the Strategy will focus on within each, in order to support the overall outcome being delivered and to ensure that appropriate actions are carried through into the implementation plan actions and reporting indicators.

We note that throughout the documents where it is stated that the CSCA means that authorities "may co-operate" this should be amended to reflect the obligation placed on bodies who "must, in so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of its children functions, co-operate with other children's authorities and with other children's service

providers in the exercise of those functions.” This should also be made clear in references to “partnership” throughout the Strategy. As stated in previous advice, the Strategy would also benefit from better reflecting the reporting requirements of the Act which includes: monitoring how children’s authorities have co-operated with each other in the provision of children’s services; how authorities have exercised their powers to share resources and pool funds; and further ways in which the well-being of children could be improved.

In placing the Strategy in the context of the draft Programme for Government, we note that outcome 12 to give our children the best start in life should be more clearly cited.

Corporate Parent and Corporate Family

NICCY welcomes the reference to CSCA in the context of the Corporate Parent and Corporate Family, though we again highlight that this commentary should reflect the duty to co-operate that is brought into effect by the Act. In section 2.5 we welcome that the Corporate Parent should “have the same goals for the child or young person as a parent and to act for the child or young person as a parent would reasonably be expected to act”. This is a central responsibility placed on Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and it is the discharge of this duty which will be critical to how well children and young people are afforded the outcomes set out in the CSCA.

Drawing on our Legal and Investigations work, we highlight the vital role of Corporate Parents and individual social workers in advocating on behalf of Looked After Children and challenging other agencies in the Corporate Family who are not meeting the needs of the child or delivering their statutory functions. This is particularly important for children with complex needs and vulnerabilities, such as those with disabilities or special educational needs, those missing from home or care and those at risk of exploitation and trafficking.

We also welcome recognition of role and responsibilities of the wider Corporate Family in section 5.2 but note the document would benefit from clearer illustration of the commitment

made by others (such as the Departments of Justice, the Economy and for Communities and their respective agencies) to the Strategy and its implementation. NICCY recommends the introduction of mechanisms to hold Corporate Parents and the wider Corporate Family to account, including through children having access to effective complaints and redress processes.

NICCY welcomes reference to the Family and Parenting Support Strategy in 5.12 and acknowledges the important relationship between the two Strategies, particularly in relation to early intervention support for children and young people (at all stages and ages) who are on the edge of care, including when returning to the family home. Indeed, we note that many children in care will previously be known to social care services and that this underlines the crucial work of supporting families and children on the edge of care while also ensuring authoritative early intervention takes place when this is in the child's best interests.

Vulnerable groups

NICCY in section 2.14 welcomes recognition of the need for a targeted approach to supporting (and meeting statutory obligations to) Looked After Children but the Strategy should better reflect that children and young people within its scope are not a homogenous group. The Strategy would benefit from acknowledging the range of adversities many children in care have been subject to, including exposure to domestic abuse, violence and neglect, and should echo the commitment to addressing the impact of multiple adversities on children's lives that is being taken forward across a range of statutory agencies.

Following on from this, the Strategy should more clearly identify groups of children and young people within its scope who require particular support to ensure their needs are met or who are known to be at risk of poorer outcomes. The Strategy should be flexible and responsive so they can be tailored to address the full range of needs, experiences and circumstances of Looked After Children. This should include for example, providing earlier

care planning, extended milestones (including in education) and more graduated transition pathways (including in moving into and leaving residential and supported accommodation).

In considering groups of looked after children who more generally experience poorer outcomes this may include, for example, setting out particular interventions for young people in residential care, who have been subject to multiple placement moves or who have entered care in late adolescence and reporting on progress to improve outcomes.

NICCY has previously expressed concern that the Strategy makes little reference to specialist residential care, secure care or other regional facilities and notes this should be addressed. Indeed, we would welcome greater commitment to developing a broader range of tailored placement options that may include for instance specialist placements for children with disabilities and complex needs, fostering services for Separated Children and those on the edge of care and provision for emergency placements including for children subject to threats to life. In addition to this we note that the Department of Health should review the use of unregulated placements.

Outcome areas

NICCY welcomes the work undertaken to streamline the implementation plans and action descriptors and to seek a better flow from each of the outcomes areas into these. For ease of navigation we suggest each outcome narrative is followed by the relevant action descriptors and reporting data and that sections are reviewed to further develop consistency across the outcome areas.

Outcomes should clearly articulate the positive change in children's lives that the Strategy seeks to attain and implementation plans should set out the concrete and tangible action that will seek to achieve these. Reporting indicators should be directly relevant to the planned actions and intended outcomes and the Strategy should identify any data development agenda needed to ensure outcomes are properly reported against. All

outcome areas should include some data gathered directly from children and young people.

The eight outcome areas

To illustrate the above points in more detail we have noted some examples from across the outcome areas:

Outcome 1 – Living in a society which respects their rights

NICCY highlights that this outcome should be informed by the UNCRC General measures of implementation, in particular Article 4 of the Convention, which commits State parties to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the Convention and the Committee's General Comment No. 5.

NICCY would highlight our previous correspondence which drew attention to this General Comment on General Measures of Implementation and the recommended elements of an implementation plan which (for this and all outcome areas in the context of the Strategy) should include:

- Specific goals, achievable targets, and allocation of financial and human resources are applied to the actions / priorities;
- Arrangements for monitoring and continuous review, and for regular updating to the Assembly and the public including child friendly versions of reports;
- Evaluation of the impact of implementation (child rights impact assessment);
- Collection of quantitative and qualitative data to track progress made against targets; and
- Making children visible in budgets
- Training and capacity building for those who will be involved in the implementation process.

As noted earlier, it is important to highlight that children within the scope of the Strategy should be afforded the full range of UNCRC rights and protections (including for example detention as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period and the right to a fair trial). We note that reference to Article 6 should include children's right to develop to their maximum potential which is a vital protection for Looked After Children.

In relation to advocacy, we highlight the importance of independent advocacy and also of continuity in relationships with advocates and other trusted adults for children. The implementation of R4 to place advocacy on a statutory footing should consider how continuity in relationships between children and adults they trust can be maintained on an ongoing basis and also into adulthood.

Outcome 2 – Living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted

NICCY notes that there are significant barriers to children and young people within the scope of the Strategy enjoying equality of opportunity. Section 75 requires specific and effective proactive measures to be taken to address the inequality of opportunity suffered by this group (and the groups within it). As we have previously advised, the failure to allocate any actions under this outcome needs to be urgently addressed. The severity of the inequality of opportunity suffered by children in care and the impact on their lives as a result of this impact requires Government to take drastic, effective and urgent measures under this outcome area. While children in care are not protected under section 75, they should become an additional protected characteristic – especially in light of the severity of inequality faced by this group. In the absence of this, Departments should commit to children in care by adding them to their Equality Scheme as a protected group – which they can do if they choose to as a commitment to this group and a measure of best practice. Please see Appendix 1 for the range of issues within this outcome area identified in NICCY's consultation on the Children and Young People's Strategy.

Outcome 3 - Physical and mental health

In relation to mental health, reference is made to the provision of mental health support for Looked After Children that fall across different parts of the system in particular Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), DAMHS, school counselling and so on. It is important to note that there are considerable challenges faced by services in being able to support the needs of young people and it would be important to acknowledge this in the commentary on this section of the report.

This includes gaps in specialist in-patient provision such as alcohol and drugs services; secure CAMHS (where children have been detained or unable to leave a facility); and forensic in-patient facility for those who are involved in the criminal justice system. It also includes the need to recognise and address the wider determinants of children and young people's mental health and this is particularly relevant to young people on the edge of care or living with families that require intensive support.

We refer Departments to NICCY's scoping paper for a fuller overview of the challenges we have found in the system's ability to adequately meet the needs of young people with emotional or mental health problems.¹ Please note we are currently carrying out a review of children and young people's mental health services, although it is not focused on young people in contact with the care system, many of the findings and recommendations are likely to be applicable. This report is due to be published in September 2018.

Again in relation to mental health, in the implementation plan we are pleased with the focus on school regarding early intervention and mental health promotion, however we note that schools also have an important role in identifying poor mental health in children and young people and should having mental health support available with clear referring on processes to specialist CAMH Services. Please also note that statutory counselling

¹ Available at: <https://www.niccy.org/children-and-young-people/issues-that-affect-you/speak-your-mind-mental-health-review>

services are not available in primary schools, therefore the indictor ‘improved wellbeing following engagement with education counselling services’ will not be applicable to primary school children. It would be important to consider indictors which can pick up on the wellbeing of children younger than post primary age, including those not part of the education system, for instance, because they are too young or in Education Otherwise Than At School.

We agree that the development of a specific CAMHS pathway plan for Looked After Children is important, and although the Health and Social Care Board should have a key role, it would be useful to include other agencies as ‘main partners’ such as education, social services and youth justice in recognition of the fact that an integrated approach is essential to the delivery of person centred care.

We welcome that outcome measures are planned which look at psychological disorder as well as broader emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. However, we would draw attention to the fact that the GHQ-12 is not suitable for children. It is vital that measurement tools are checked for their reliability and validity for different age groups and for people with different needs, such as, learning disabilities. We raised similar points during the consultation on the draft Programme for Government.

In our submission of 15 September 2017 we raised serious concerns about the protection and safeguards that will be afforded to children under 16 years and children age 16 and 17 years by the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. We have been given assurances that these concerns are being addressed by the Department of Health and request a further update on this.

Outcome 4: Living in safety and with stability

As highlighted in previous advice, the outcomes commentary, implementation plan and reporting measures should all have a greater focus on child protection and safety and on

continuity and permanence, including placement stability. As also previously noted, children in contact with the criminal justice system should be included within this outcome (as set out in the Children and Young People's Strategy) rather than in Making a Positive Contribution to Society. In reflecting the responsibilities of the full Corporate Family and the obligations of the Children's Services Co-operation Act, greater emphasis should be given to multi-agency working (including the role of the police and others to protect and support young people).

We note that 6.27 should include meeting as well as assessing the needs of the child. We highlight that the scope and remit of Regulations across different forms of care should be acknowledged, for instance the use of physical punishment is not permitted where a HSCT holds parental authority but this is not the case in all care placements.

NICCY welcomes the reference made to ensuring effective responses to known risk factors, such as children going missing, and to further developing the regional service for Separated Children. In regard to contact arrangements, consideration should be given to ensuring that (where contact is in the child's best interests) that this can be better facilitated for parents who have No Recourse to Public Funds, including those subject to immigration control.

We note with concern that the previous thirteen actions under this outcome have been reduced to three. While we welcome these, particularly the targeted nature of actions to address CSE and support Separated Children we reflect that these represent areas of ongoing work and again highlight that actions should address both the safety and stability aspects of the outcome. This could include actions such as extending the GEM Scheme to residential care and improving continuity of placement and key staff relationships, including in the critical period when a child becomes 18 years old and beyond. As referenced earlier, we welcome the report card focus on the reported views of children but would highlight that this should be accompanied by quantitative data sources which

identify progress in key areas in child protection (such as trends in missing from care episodes and re-entry into care) and stability (such as numbers of placement moves and numbers of young people accommodated in the juvenile justice as a place of safety).

We note that children and young people's consultation documents should address all of the outcome areas, including outcome 4.

Outcome 5 - Learning and achieving

NICCY notes that this outcome focuses on schools themselves and not on the children in the schools and also that the repeated emphasis on 'school staff' should be amended to reflect that not all areas are the responsibility of individual teachers. The outcome would be strengthened by including clear actions in relation to early years intervention and home / study facilities particularly in residential care settings. We note with concern that little reference is made to nurture units. In relation to PEP's, NICCY is concerned that these have not been systematically implemented and recommend a thorough programme of training and awareness raising should be implemented to support placing them on statutory footing.

In relation to resources and reference made to the Common Funding Formula in section 6.33, NICCY highlights the clear recommendation in our Cost of Education report on the need to introduce statutory measures for accountability as in England and Wales to ensure money is being spent on the groups for whom it is intended.

We note that the statistics used are from 2015 / 2016 and are not reflective of the usual trends in educational attainment, but rather reflect a change in how the statistics are collated that particular year. Data from the previous or following year should be used to illustrate the more accurate situation.

In considering section 6.36 on issues outside of school NICCY notes that there should be a greater emphasis on Article 29(1) of the UNCRC which highlights the role and obligations of education in the development of children's skills, talents and abilities. Careful consideration should be given to how learning support will enable a wide range of staff in different settings to support children fully enjoying their right to education and the Strategy should consider how staff will be supported, remunerated and relationships with children will be fostered.

Outcome 6 – Play and leisure

NICCY notes that the commentary section does not appear to include detail on whether care experienced children are less likely to be able to access play and leisure opportunities. We know that parents and wider family groups usually play a key role in ensuring children access play opportunities, for example, dance, music, sports – particularly when children are young. It would be helpful for the document to better consider how children in care are accessing these opportunities.

We also highlight that ensuring children and young people in care, including those in residential care have Wi-Fi and internet access is a key issue in this area of their lives as well as education and note that it should only be in exceptional circumstances that this should not be possible.

The indicators and actions are seriously limited with one main action which is vague and non-specific in nature and one additional for DEARA in relation to outside spaces. In order to build confidence that children within the scope of the Strategy will have equal access to play and leisure opportunities the Implementation Plan should be reviewed.

Outcome 7 - Economic and environmental well-being

We note that this outcome largely focusses on educational attainment and access to employment, which are indeed important. However, one reporting indicator should be

included on income levels for young people leaving care. The actions within the Implementation Plan are limited and again unspecific, for instance, looking at what is provided in relation to ‘advice, guidance and representation’ and ‘support’ and should be revisited. While housing is referenced in the document, it is disappointing that there are no associated actions / indicators on this outcome.

Outcome 8 – Contributing positively to community and society

As noted, youth justice should be placed in outcome 4 to ensure the focus is on children and young people’s vulnerabilities and possible Government actions to protect vulnerable children and ensure the realisation of their rights. The profile of young people in care who come into conflict with the law needs to have a much greater consideration in the provision of an appropriate societal response to offending behaviour. The move to ‘Living in safety and with stability’ is necessary to re-imagine Government’s response to very vulnerable children and young people in care who come into contact with the youth justice system. With regard to youth justice, the main action in the document relates to A5 In partnership with the Department of Justice implement the findings of the Review of Specialist Children’s Services and NICCY notes concern that this will not address the issues that are currently faced with regard to the interface between care and justice.

On a broader issue, the implementation plans rely on the implementation of reviews which, in the case of the above named Review, has yet to be published making it impossible for respondents to this consultation to make comment on whether the implementation of such a review will make the proposed improvements in children’s lives.

Implementation and monitoring

We note that the documents do not set timelines or identify allocated resources to ensure that the Strategy can be taken forward. It is essential that there is proper investment in the Strategy to ensure that it is ambitious and that children and young people within its scope have their rights realised. In committing to a co-design process the Strategy refers to

ongoing engagement of children and young people in the review and development process and we welcome this.

However, NICCY is concerned that many of the Action Descriptors discuss further initial development or review work to be undertaken rather than committing to clear actions based on existing research, knowledge and practice. For example:

- A2 Develop and introduce a definition for ‘edge of care’ – it would have been preferable to have had such a definition as part of this consultation.
- R1 Review the Looked After Children Review process – it would have been preferable for improvements to this process to have been identified.
- H2 – Explore options for early intervention – these options should have been consulted on within this draft Strategy.
- S1 – Implement outstanding recommendations of the Marshall Inquiry and SBNI thematic Review – in view of the lack of timely Progress Reports it is impossible to comment on the outstanding recommendations and the requirements of implementation.
- L2 – Develop a quality framework of provision - this action is dependent on the outcome of all other actions in this section particularly L4. However it is deeply frustrating that there is no acknowledgment of the outcome and learning of work undertaken with regards to the education of looked after children. Again key actions should have been proposed.
- EE1 – Work with young people to review current arrangements for advice and guidance – it is disappointing that such reviews are not on-going in order for specific recommendations to have been made within this consultation.
- EE3 – promote the use of social clauses – NICCY understands that some HSCTs have undertaken extensive work in this area and would suggest that clear guidance should be issued to all Corporate Parents.
- CS2 – promote the participation of Looked After Children – there should be clear measures to ensure effective participation of children and young people. NICCY

would draw the Departments attention to guidance the Commissioner issued regarding this.²

Incorporating key and specific milestones and points for review will also provide opportunities to assess whether interventions within the Strategy are effective or whether barriers to poorer outcomes remain persistent and require further targeted action and resource. We note that the implementation framework should consider how inspection and regulation activity can be drawn upon to inform monitoring and reporting. We also note that Departments should commit to publishing on reported progress and identifying challenges and barriers on a regular basis.

Impact assessments

We applaud Departments for using the development of the Strategy as an opportunity to introduce a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) tool into the policy-making process and look forward to Health and Education, as well as other Departments, using this important tool for policy formulation on a regular basis. NICCY would however highlight that the CRIA should include a fuller presentation of evidence and more robust assessment of the measures necessary to ensure that, through the Strategy, children within its scope will be better afforded the full range of UNCRC rights. We have attached the CRIA published by the Welsh Government in relation to proposed reform regarding physical punishment as an illustration of this (albeit in relation to a different subject) and hope this is helpful.

NICCY highlights concerns that the Equality Screening, Disability Duties and Human Rights Assessment Template do not provide a full analysis of available data regarding the equality implications of the Strategy or make full use of opportunities to consider how to better promote equality of opportunity in relation to the protected characteristics and

² <https://www.niccy.org/professionals-practitioners-policymakers/participation/participation-with-children-and-young-people-advice-to-public-bodies>

multiple identities of children and young people within the scope of the Strategy. As noted earlier, NICCY would welcome Departments establishing a best practice standard by including Looked After and Care Experienced Children as a protected group within Departmental Equality Schemes.

Conclusion

NICCY welcomes this draft Strategy and the work that has been undertaken by Departments to date. The Commissioner looks forward to working with the Departments of Health and Education in the next stages of the Strategy as it is further reviewed following this consultation. NICCY plans to continue to engage with and advice Departments on relevant aspects of the Strategy as it is being revised and developed, particularly in relation to the rights and equality impact assessment processes.

Appendix 1 Equality of opportunity and good relations: range of issues identified in NICCY's consultation on the Children's Strategy

Consultation

- Importance of hearing children's voices, concern this not achieved through Section 75.
- Poor consultation practice discussed, including children's versions being issued post consultation and poor pre-consultation engagement.
- Lack of structured mechanism to enable children and young people to engage.

Education

- Potential of this outcome under the Children and young person's strategy, including in relation to schools.
- Importance of educating children and young people together.
- Education and concern about arbitrary nature of enrolment numbers e.g. 105 pupils in primary school not appropriate in rural areas.
- Needing to think creatively about addressing issues e.g. role of schools and earliest stage interventions can be put in place to support children and young people.

Legacy of the Conflict

- Paramilitarism and the conflict: how to ensure young people can access 'fact based' information.
- Supporting parents and whole school approaches that address identity, heritage and history.
- Good practice of community relations in schools, working with nursery children noted; sensitivity and skills required for this acknowledged. Needing to identify the transgenerational impact and Fresh Start obligation re the legacy of the conflict on children raised.
- Need to recognise that children have different experiences, live in different

communities, different actions needed for different young people depending on their needs.

- Where the conflict sits – affects everything, across all outcomes, speaks to broader dynamics in society of power, vested interests.
- Question of how to depoliticise key issues such as education, health and housing, these is a sense that NI has focused only on depoliticising policing and justice but not other key areas such as health.

Equality

- Potential of focus on equality to highlight needs of children with disabilities and carers.
- Opportunity to ensure discrimination against children is addressed.
- Need to think about equality and diversity very seriously in the context of this obligation.
- Information and evidence gathering and lack of good data following /in spite of Section 75 obligations.
- Absence of poverty and care as a recognised characteristic and limitations of this.
- Transgender children and young people.
- Traveller and Roma children.
- Multiple identities that children have - not single issue e.g. disability and sexual orientation.
- Concern about discrimination from the point of birth and cultural aspect to this e.g. gender, disability. People with disabilities are still less likely to be in public life, appointed to boards, public appointments despite legislation to address this.
- Disconnect between age, ability and education.
- Young carers.
- Young people in need of employment, education or training.
- Children with mental health needs.
- Poverty – also connection with welfare reform and housing.

- Children who have health needs.
- The media do not highlight good news stories e.g. YLT 51% young people feel they make a positive contribution to bringing their community together. Query if BBC could be a 'children's service provider'; obligation in relation to negative stereotyping; noted some research correlates negative reporting on people with disabilities as 'scroungers' and increases in hate crime. Also, disabled people can be portrayed as heroes, both are extremes and unrepresentative.
- Newcomer and BME children and families, time needed to build relationships and give basis for engagement raised.

Good Relations

- Good relations and possibilities of broadening this out to include other fora.
- Concerns about impact of austerity raised including loss of smaller grassroots groups (often those with access to 'hard to reach' groups); impact of reduced capacity for advocacy (e.g. not able to support individuals/groups accessing help from charities or others); groups seeking funding from other pots (e.g. council for CRED support); at same time as increased demand on organisations due to welfare changes (e.g. PIPS and disability groups). This will have a significant impact on good relations work at a community level.
- Concern about lack of joined up working and collaboration; community and voluntary sector spending more time seeking and then reporting on funding and this detracting from service provision; lack of continuity, longevity and sustainability. Example given of proactively planning how to use opportunities like yearly slippage monies to meet identified needs of the organisation / group.