

Barnardo's NI Response to the

Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21

Introduction

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. We work with almost 11,000 children, young people and families across more than 40 different services and programmes and in over 200 schools. We provide a wide range of services, from working with disabled children, minority ethnic families, looked after children and care leavers, to offering family support and early intervention. We believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, and our service provision reflects that philosophy.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21. As well as overarching general comments on the approach of the Framework, we have provided specific recommendations in relation to the proposed outcomes, indicators and measures, with an emphasis on those related to children and young people. Our comments are informed by our extensive experience of working with children and families in Northern Ireland, particularly those who are marginalised.

1. General Comments

Barnardo's NI welcomes the Northern Ireland Executive's move towards an outcomes based approach in the next Programme for Government. However, for this approach to be effective, it is important that cross-departmental working is truly implemented.

We recommend that more information is provided on the intended structure and processes to be put in place to enable genuine cross-departmental working. Elements requiring more information include:

- clarity on overall responsibility and accountability for each outcome and action plan;
- time bound and specific plans for integrated working; and
- an outline of a proposed plan for a whole system approach.

In addition, we recommend a standardised measurement tool and data collection mechanism is established to ensure progress is tracked robustly. We also recommend that a regular review mechanism is

implemented to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement in action plans, indicators and measurement tools.

We are disappointed to note the lack of explicit focus on prevention and early intervention throughout the Draft Framework. Specific examples and opportunities are provided below, but in general terms we recommend that recognition of the role of early intervention should be woven throughout the Programme for Government, given that a reported key element of this approach is that the outcomes “are designed to stay in place for a generation” (page 7, Draft Programme for Government Framework).

Our final general point on the approach of the Draft Framework relates to the complexity of the issues. By placing just one lead measure against each indicator, the Framework misses the nuances of each identified area and arguably undermines the need for cross-departmental working across a range of measures to achieve objectives. Specific examples in relation to children and young people are given below, but we recommend this one indicator = one measure approach is reconsidered to ensure progress against outcomes: our recommendation is that each indicator has at least three meaningful and relevant measures attached to it, with the potential for some measures to be used against more than one indicator. Given the long-term aims captured in the outcomes, it is important that the indicators and measures are appropriately sophisticated now to avoid problems with measurement in the coming years.

2. Outcomes

2.1 Children and Young People

We welcome that Outcome 14 explicitly references the need to give our children and young people the best start in life. To strengthen this outcome, we recommend the following changes are made:

- We welcome that the Executive recognises its role in “providing services that protect children from harm” (page 44). We recommend that the definition of “harm” in this instance is defined to recognise the wide range of types of harm that can affect a child, including mental, emotional and developmental harm as well as physical and sexual.
- We welcome that the Executive notes a commitment to working with a range of stakeholders including “providers of services to children and young people” (page 44). We recommend explicit

reference is given to working with the voluntary and community sector at this point, given the sector's unique positioning in working with children and young people, particularly those from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds.

- We recommend that Outcome 14 specifically acknowledges the barriers to the best start in life for children and young people. In particular, this Outcome should commit to giving **all** children and young people the best start in life, including marginalised groups such as children of people in prison, looked after children, disabled children and newcomer children.

2.2 Housing

We recommend another outcome is added to the current Framework to reflect the importance of safe and sustainable housing in improving wellbeing, tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth. An outcome such as '**We have safe and affordable housing for everyone**' would contribute to the Framework's holistic approach to improving lives; we believe neglecting to reference housing in the Outcomes weakens the Framework as it currently does not acknowledge the role of housing (social or otherwise) in improving educational achievement, employment, health and mental health, diversity, offending rates, and equality, as well as the importance of housing as an element of providing meaningful support for young people leaving care and for newcomer families and children.

3. Indicators and Measures

3.1 Children experiencing neglect or abuse

We recommend that an additional indicator is introduced to **reduce the number of children and young people experiencing neglect or abuse**. One of the measurements which could be used for this indicator is a percentage reduction in the incidences of neglect on the Child Protection Register. As our Children's Charter outlines, "neglect is one of the most prevalent forms of harm recorded on the Child Protection Register in Northern Ireland. Frequently leading to long-term physical, psychological, behavioural and societal consequences, neglect often occurs alongside other forms of abuse and is a predominant feature in families experiencing multiple adversities" (Barnardo's NI and NSPCC NI Children's Charter, May 2016, page 7). We believe this is an important indicator against 'Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life', amongst other outcomes, and also complements but does not duplicate other indicators: we therefore recommend it is added to the list of indicators.

3.2 Indicator 10: Improve support for looked after children

We welcome that this group of children is explicitly referenced in the Draft Framework. We recommend that the indicator is broadened to include young people leaving care and children on the edge of care, as both would also benefit from similarly improved support.

The lead measure attached to this indicator ('the % of care leavers who, aged 19, were in education, training or employment') does not capture the complexity of support required by care experienced young people. Rather, an improved measure of achievement (for example, GCSE attainment) would better reflect improved support for looked after children. As well as this, there are other barriers disproportionately affecting children who are looked after which should be monitored to track improved support for this group. For example, the 2011 Youth Justice Review noted an over-representation of looked after children in the Youth Justice System, with 37% of admissions to the Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) being children in care. The review also noted the unusually high use of remand in the JJC for looked after children.

We therefore recommend that the additional measures used against this indicator include:

1. the number of looked after children affected by the Youth Justice System;
2. the percentage of looked after children achieving 5 A*-C grade GCSEs; and
3. emotional health and wellbeing support provided to looked after children, preferably through an integrated mental health and education model. This would need supported by the collection of comprehensive and disaggregated data on child mental health.

3.3 Indicator 11: Improve educational outcomes

We recommend that as well as qualifications at school leaving age, this indicator also uses measures that capture and monitor progress at earlier stages too. Our Children's Charter (Barnardo's NI and NSPCC NI, May 2016, page 18) highlights the need for "a consistent framework of standardised assessment, recording and reporting for literacy and numeracy progression across all primary schools".

In addition, we recommend this indicator is broadened to capture more holistic, social education to ensure an educational outcome is that young people are prepared for life and employment. For this measurement, better data is required than is currently available: a data collection model similar to that used in the [Renfrewshire Health](#)

[and Wellbeing Survey](#) of secondary school age young people to provide a baseline of their health and wellbeing could be used effectively here.

3.4 Indicators 16, 17 and 18: Young People who are 'NEET'

Barnardo's NI believes there should be greater reference to the specific needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) throughout the framework document, and particularly under Outcome 14: We give our children and young people. For example, this group should be referenced within the following three indicators, which could be applied to Outcome 14:

- Indicator 16: Increase the proportion of people in work
 - The measures should also specifically include an improvement in the rates of young people who are not in education, employment and training (NEET).
- Indicator 17: Reduce economic inactivity
 - A measurement relating to a specific reduction in economic inactivity for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) should be included. In January - March 2016, there were 24,000 young people (aged 16 to 24) in Northern Ireland who were 'NEET', of which 10,000 were economically inactive. It is also notable that the youth unemployment rate (percentage of economically active 18-24 year olds who are unemployed) at 13.3% is higher than the UK average rate (10.7%) and more than twice the overall rate of unemployment in Northern Ireland.
- Indicator 18: Increase the proportion of people working in good jobs
 - Achieving this outcome would significantly depend on how a 'good' job is measured. Barnardo's NI supports the recommendation from the NEET Youth Forum that consideration is given to measuring job satisfaction and the quality of the jobs, i.e. in terms of growth, pay, training, and promotion opportunities.

3.5 Indicator 31: Increase shared space

Whilst Barnardo's NI welcomes the inclusion in the Outcomes Framework of positive outcomes such as 'we are a shared society that respects diversity' and 'we have a more equal society', we are disappointed that this indicator does not reflect that commitment to diversity. By focusing on shared space between Protestants and Catholics, we are concerned that the diversity in our society is not

considered. We therefore recommend that the lead measure is amended to monitor the percentage of people who think facilities are 'shared and open' across all religious, ethnic and other groups, in recognition of the need to support integration for newcomer families and reduce discrimination and segregation.

3.6 Indicator 38: Increase the effectiveness of the Justice System

This indicator is not currently listed against 'Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life'. However, whilst we recognise this indicator is currently framed in relation to the speed of the Justice System, we believe there is scope to broaden the interpretation of this indicator and the measures against it. A more effective Justice System would reduce offending and improve outcomes for people affected by the system, including victims and those who have offended. By including measures which seek to increase the use of alternatives to prosecution and divert young people away from both offending and from the Youth or Criminal Justice System, this indicator would support the aims of increasing the effectiveness of the justice system and of giving **all** our children and young people the best start in life, whilst also complementing the indicators of reducing crime (1) and reducing reoffending (39), the latter of which is listed against Outcome 14. To achieve the outcome of giving our children and young people the best start in life, it is critical that the Executive recognises and addresses the lasting impacts of childhood offending and conviction on a young person's life chances.

3.7 Indicator 42: Increase quality of life for people with disabilities

The lead measure for this indicator is the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities. We recommend that this is widened, at the very least to explicitly include children and young people with disabilities. We are disappointed that this indicator is vague and arguably unambitious: it fails to grasp the scale of the barriers facing children and young people with disabilities and the link to other indicators, such as educational attainment and cultural participation, whilst measures such as the provision of appropriate accommodation and emotional support are notably absent from the Framework. We therefore recommend that this indicator and its associated measures are widened to reflect the complexity of this issue.

Conclusion

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021. We have commented on the areas most relevant to the children, young people

and families we work with, and we would be happy to further engage with the Executive on these points.

We look forward to reading the Draft Programme for Government and action plans when published for consultation later this year. In the meantime, please contact Julia Kenny if you have any questions or require any further information on the issues raised in this response:

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