



# Northern Ireland Local Council Elections 2023





Barnardo's has been supporting children and young people in Northern Ireland for over 100 years.

However, the challenges that children, young people and families have faced overcoming the pandemic and which are now enduring through the cost-of-living crisis are some of the most difficult in our history.

At Barnardo's NI, we believe the system around children and young people is going to be more critical than ever if we are to help the next generation not just adapt to a new reality, but to thrive, and local councils have a role to play in ensuring their success.

The current budgetary pressures facing Northern Ireland are daunting, and support for children and families is often the first to be cut. Decisions are being taken by civil servants, rather than politicians and vital services are at risk of being eliminated, eroding the safety net

for the children. With political instability continuing, and the cost-of-living crisis spiralling, families are now looking to their local councillors for leadership and direction to ensure children in their local communities get the best start in life.

Together we need to address the persistent issues and new challenges facing our children and young people as they grow up today. We need to work across public, private, and community and voluntary sectors to improve the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Barnardo's NI's goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children; to do this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods, and positive futures and local councils are instrumental in delivering those outcomes. The calls we have for councillors get to the heart of these issues, and we hope that we can count on your support.

**Michele Janes,**  
**Director, Barnardo's Northern Ireland**

## About Barnardo's NI

Barnardo's is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland, with more than 45 services delivering support to around 18,000 children, young people and families over the last year. We are also a leading provider of schools-based support, reaching more than 32,000 children in schools across the UK and Ireland through our NI-managed social and emotional literacy programmes.



We have developed our manifesto calls based on our experience in delivering services in Northern Ireland, the expertise from our frontline colleagues, and the voices of the children and young people we work with. We work towards positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities based on our four strategic priorities: **Stronger Families**, **Safer Childhoods**, **Positive Future** and **Working Together**

# Barnardo's NI in numbers...

We work with  
over  
**18,000**  
children,  
young people  
and families



**400+**  
volunteers



**20+**  
retail shops



## Barnardo's Northern Ireland our calls...



### Positive futures

- Ensure a trauma-informed approach for all systems, services and policies that impact children and young people is adopted within your council.
- Highlight key areas of work within the council area that will compliment any future Anti-Poverty Strategy, including actions the council will take to protect and support children and families.



### Stronger families

- Prioritise children's mental health and wellbeing so our children receive the right support at the right time.
- Strengthen role of local councils as advocates and strategic partners to build upon good practice examples.



### Safer childhoods

- Support the development of strategic partnerships, working with schools to ensure children and young people learn about healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries.



### Working together

- Commitment to working in partnership with the community and voluntary sector as valued and equal partners in the development and delivery of services.
- Development of co-production and co-design principles to ensure the voices of children, young people and families are heard and reflected in policy making and service delivery.
- Full cost recovery commissioning model as standard, in conjunction with longer commissioning cycles of at least 3-5 years.

# Stronger Families



*We believe children should thrive with the love and support of their families. But sometimes they come up against challenges that prevent this. We support them and work with them to overcome these challenges.*

Building resilience in children starts on day one, which is why we need good mental health support for children from day one. We can support children to develop resilience and good mental health through universal early intervention, mental health support in education, communities and specialist support through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

To make this a reality for every child, there is a need for better connectivity in mental health services at a local level. Children referred to CAMHS face long waiting lists, often 'ageing out' before they even receive their first appointment. Councils have a key role to play in ensuring individuals are connected and can access the right services locally when they need them. In the next council mandate, we encourage councillors to strengthen the role of local councils as advocates and strategic partners where examples of good practice are developed locally.



## Our calls:

- Prioritise children's mental health and wellbeing so our children receive the right support at the right time.
- Strengthen role of local councils as advocates and strategic partners to build upon good practice examples.

## Service spotlight:

In the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area children and young people, who have been supported by Multi-Disciplinary Teams in GP surgeries, receive therapeutic support from NOVA Trauma Service to improve their emotional health and wellbeing and their caregivers are helped to understand how they can further support their children. NOVA provides, individual therapeutic trauma support for children and young people who live in a post-conflict society and have experienced adverse childhood events which have impacted on their emotional health and well-being.



# Safer Childhoods



*We believe every child should be safe from harm. But for many this isn't the case. We support children and young people who have been abused and help them feel safe again.*

In order to support our children to grow up to become resilient adults, we need to equip them with the skills and knowledge to understand consent and healthy relationships, as well as challenging myths and stereotypes.

Providing standardised, well-informed Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in all schools and supported by your local council and community would play a key role in educating young people about healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries.

Local councils are well placed to build strong partnerships in order to ensure children in their local area are receiving the knowledge they need in school to become healthy, resilient adults. The education sector in Northern Ireland is facing major cuts to their budgets, and as a result, many important programmes in schools are being lost. Councils can step in to provide support to schools to fill those gaps and ensure children and young people get the best opportunities in education.



## Our calls:

- Support the development of strategic partnerships, working with schools to ensure children and young people learn about healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries.

## Service spotlight:

The PATHS® Programme for Schools is a universal, social emotional learning (SEL) school programme for 4-11 year olds which empowers all children to develop the fundamental SEL skills which will enable them to make positive choices throughout life. The PATHS® Programme promotes positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in primary schools and is delivered through resources, training and coaching support from Barnardo's. The PATHS® Programme team deliver support across all council areas in Northern Ireland.





# Positive Futures



*We want children to have the best chances in life so that they can achieve their full potential. It can be hard for some children to access the right support to get them started. We help them deal with what can be a challenging transition to adulthood.*

Many children growing up in Northern Ireland today will have experienced some form of trauma, whether that is growing up in poverty, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, or intergenerational trauma from the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland.

All council strategies, policies and services delivered to children and young people must be trauma-informed; for example the Anti-Poverty Strategy.<sup>1</sup> This means that they take into account the impact of trauma and consider that each child may have particular needs that must be addressed alongside the support they are receiving.

With over 100,000 children living in poverty in Northern Ireland, children are more likely to be in poverty than any other age group in Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

Poverty can impact children in many different ways, from disrupting their development to putting young people leaving care at a higher risk of homelessness.

Every council must understand its important role to work strategically with public bodies and the community and voluntary sector to protect and support children and families at risk of, or living in, poverty.



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- Highlight key areas of work within the council area that will compliment any future Anti-Poverty Strategy, including actions the council will take to protect and support children and families.

## Service spotlight:

At Barnardo's we know that the cost-of-living crisis is making life harder and harder for families that is why our frontline staff are providing essential support for young people and families who are using our services and are struggling. That is why we have developed a Children's Emergency Support Fund that helps people by delivering clothes, appliances and vouchers to help with everyday essentials like food and energy across Northern Ireland.



# Working together



*Barnardo's has strong relationships with partners across the public, community and voluntary, and private sectors. It is the strength of those partnerships that allows us to address challenges as they arise.*

Every council aims to create positive, long-term outcomes for all residents. Establishing strong partnerships where partners collaborate to improve local services to meet the needs of local people will help councils to achieve their aims.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have highlighted the vulnerabilities that exist within our communities, and it is more important than ever that help is provided to children and families when they need it, where they need it.

As well as working with local communities and community and voluntary sector partners, we encourage councils to engage directly with children, young people and families to ensure that their voice is heard and central to decision making about the issues that impact them.



## Our calls:

- Commitment to working in partnership with the community and voluntary sector as valued and equal partners in the development and delivery of services.
- Development of co-production and co-design principles to ensure the voices of children, young people and families are heard and reflected in policy making and service delivery.

## Service spotlight:

THRiVE is a collaborative project between local parents, schools, community and voluntary organisations and statutory partners who are all working together to improve outcomes for children and young people in Newtownabbey, Rathcoole and Monkstown. THRiVE's WE CAN campaign promotes positive messages across the community on key areas such as Aspiration, Attainment, Well-being and Collaboration.







# Barnardo's Northern Ireland our calls...

## ✓ Our calls

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Believe in  
children



Barnardo's  
Northern Ireland



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Images posed by models.

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children**



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