



**RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENT OF A FUTURE  
COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY PRE-CONSULTATION**

*“you should leave young people alone, you only pick on young  
people”*

**August 2010**



## **RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENT OF A FUTURE COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY PRE-CONSULTATION**

### **Introduction**

Include Youth promotes best practice with young people in need or at risk of social exclusion. We achieve this through the development and promotion of resources, the provision of training, information and support of practitioners and organisations. We also undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness – both locally and nationally.

Amongst the young people at risk with whom, and on whose behalf, Include Youth works are young people from socially disadvantaged areas, those with a learning disability, those with special needs, those who have been truanting, suspended or expelled from school, those from a care background, those who had a negative parenting experience, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

### **General Comments**

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to respond to the pre-consultation on the development of a future community safety strategy. We submitted a detailed response to 'Together, Stronger, Safer' drawing on information from both children and young people, and practitioners (paper attached). As you will be aware we raised a number of major concerns with the overall thrust of the proposed actions in Together, Stronger, Safer, and we heavily criticised what we saw as an anti-youth stance in much of the paper.

### **Devolution**

We support the decision to postpone development of a Community Safety Strategy until after policing and justice powers were devolved. We were pleased to note the Minister's position articulated in his speech on 7 June 2010 that *'with devolution, the time is now right for us to develop a new strategy, and in the months ahead I will lead a debate about what a new Community Safety Strategy should include.'*

We are somewhat concerned that content of this revised Community Safety Strategy appears to demonstrate an intention to retain much of the approach taken to dealing with community safety issues in England. In the context of devolution, we had hoped that development of a future Community Safety Strategy would have gone right back to the drawing board, facilitating the fullest possible engagement with communities, and enabling the framework of the new Community Safety Strategy to emerge from these discussions.

### **Pre-consultation**

We support the move to pre-consult with stakeholders however we are disappointed at the way in which this process has been carried out to date. The pre-consultation appears to have been issued to a selective range of stakeholders, namely NI Policing Board Reference Groups, and while these may include umbrella organisations, we submit that a wide range of community organisations ought to have been directly consulted in their own right, in line with obligations under S75 NI Act 1998. The pre-consultation process on the Community Safety Strategy was an ideal opportunity to draw on a wide range of experience and stakeholders, both within the children and young people's sector and at community level to help inform development of a 'new' strategy envisaged by Minister Ford.

We submit that not enough time has been given to respond to this pre-consultation process. The letter was issued to David Jackson from the NIPB on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, requesting responses from Reference groups by Friday 13<sup>th</sup> August. While we are grateful that the deadline was extended to 27 August 2010, it still has proved to be an unrealistic timeframe for us to consult across our staff team, our practitioners group and most importantly, the children and young people with whom we work directly. This has been made more difficult given the summer holiday period. We are submitting this response but would like to clarify that it does not contain the breadth of representative views which we endeavour to include in all our policy responses.

Include Youth recommends a full pre-consultation be carried out involving a range of independent organisations working with children and young people, together with other stakeholders in a meaningful partnership arrangement.

### **Strategic Framework**

We welcome the Minister's decision to remove Parenting Orders, Support Orders and Dispersal Zones. This is a positive step forward, and we commend the Minister for taking on

board the objections which were raised by a number of children's rights organisations. We note that there is some suggestion that they may be reinstated if 'there are compelling arguments for their inclusion during the consultation'. We believe that the compelling arguments to have them removed have been made and accepted and would welcome the Minister making a commitment to that effect.

We support the statement that *'an effective Community Safety Strategy should identify and address the underlying causes, socio-economic conditions and risk factors that enable and sustain criminal and anti-social behaviour.'* The Strategy must address the structural inequalities which continue to result in multiple deprivation, isolation, marginalisation and exclusion of children and young people, their families and communities within which they live. This will be essential in empowering communities and providing interventions to families and children and young people in an appropriate way, a way which crucially does not label the individual child, family or community.

### **Response to Proposed Themes:**

We note the move to include the four themes as outlined in the proposed new strategy. While we welcome the rewording of aspects of the initial document we are concerned that there remain many aspects of the original draft Strategy which are problematic.

#### **1. Delivering in Partnership**

In the development of a Community Safety Strategy for NI, we recommend that young people are treated as equal partners and significant stakeholders who have a pivotal and positive contribution to make. We are concerned that the tenor of the revised strategy continues to view young people as problematic. We recommend that the importance of the role of children and young people is made explicit within the themes of 'delivering in partnership.' We further recommend that the Community Safety Strategy include a key objective of realising the participation and protection of children and young people.

The Minister in his speech of 7 June 2010 clearly articulated his intention to develop a Community Safety Strategy which would have at its heart a partnership approach, working beyond government Departments to also include partnership working with communities to identify local solutions to local problems:

*"Grassroots leadership will do more for those communities than any amount of top down initiatives, no matter how well meaning."*

Minister Ford continued by stating:

*“I see devolution making a [...] difference: in the opportunity to identify local solutions to local needs. I am determined that we won’t rely on what we have done in the past, nor that we simply adopt what works somewhere else and assume that it will work here. Rather, I want to work with people on the ground to develop and tailor innovative local solutions to fit local needs. It’s an opportunity to look afresh, to do things differently. I am determined that we see what works best for Northern Ireland, and that local accountability drives this department to be bold in its innovation rather than afraid of failure.”*

(Minster Speech 7 June 2010)

We are disappointed that the thinking on partnership working has not been demonstrated in the outworking of the pre-consultation process.

In order for the Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to truly be effective, it needs to be truly representative and have widespread ownership and support, including among children and young people.

There is a danger that children and young people could be overlooked in the process of engagement within communities and unless they are noted as specific partners and proactive steps are taken to involve them, it is unlikely that they will become involved naturally. In particular, specific steps must be taken to engage with the harder to reach groups of children and young people, and those most commonly thought of as engaging in ‘anti-social’ behaviour.

As we have previously said, the practice of consulting with young people can all too often be about engaging with those groups of young people who are already in a position of influence or can already avail of support networks. Where it becomes more of a challenge is to speak to those young people who are more ‘invisible’ and who do not tend to be engaged in mainstream agencies or youth networks. Yet it is precisely these young people who are more marginalised who would benefit from engagement and from being brought in to community networks.

We agree with the need for a multi-agency approach. We welcome the statement within the pre-consultation that “achieving a safer and shared community is the responsibility of many agencies, and a co-ordinated approach will help ensure a more effective strategy.” We also

concur with the aim that any new strategy “should complement and not duplicate other Government strategies and initiatives”. Include Youth have consistently argued for a holistic approach to ensure that the numerous and diverse problems these young people face can be identified and responded to in their best interests.

## **2. Empowering Local Communities**

We strongly agree with the Minister’s statement and with the commitment in the Introduction of the pre-consultation document that community safety should be about *‘local people providing solutions to local problems.’* It is essential that these local communities are adequately resourced and supported in this process.

We welcome the inclusion of young people within the groups listed as those most vulnerable or at risk.

## **3. Early Interventions**

We welcome the commitment to early interventions and to an approach which supports families and communities.

We would stress the need for early intervention to be led not by criminal justice agencies but by wider sector of government agencies (particularly DE and DHSSPS) in partnership with local communities, families, children and young people. International human rights standards emphasize that the well-being of young people from their early childhood should be the focus of any preventive programme. It is essential that early intervention is provided within the appropriate framework, is in the best interests of each child and does not label individual children or families. Therefore, it is vital that the outworking of current early intervention proposals contained within the Department of Justice Discussion Paper, are delivered by appropriate non-criminal justice agencies and groups, recognising the dangers of net-widening and stigmatisation if children are drawn into the formal criminal justice system unnecessarily. (Riyadh Guidelines, 1990).

We note the inclusion of the paragraph on drugs and alcohol. While we fully support the need to address underage drinking, we are yet again concerned that making specific reference to children in this section has an implicitly negative impact on children and young people. While

we are fully aware that children engage in underage drinking we believe that the current wording suggests that children and young people are the main perpetrators of alcohol abuse. This is clearly not the case and such a statement within the document points again to the presumption that children and young people are the problem. For example, we would draw to your attention the recent ChildLine/NSPCC report which highlighted the number of children in Northern Ireland who were seeking help due their parents' alcohol or drugs problem. (NSPCC, August 2010)

#### **4. Creating a safer, shared community**

We note with disappointment the missed opportunity to remove ASBOs from the statute book. In light of the recent comments made by UK Home Secretary Theresa May, that ASBOS have resulted in an increase in the numbers of children being imprisoned and that she intends to cease their use in England in Wales, we would urge the Minister to make a similar statement about removing ASBOs from legislation in NI.

We note the intention to 'design out' crime by 'tackling environmental disorder'. While we are fully supportive of the need to have community spaces and environments which are pleasant, clean and 'feel' safe to be in, we are concerned that many of the popular means purported to achieve this are actually about 'designing out' children and young people from their communities. Certainly, the debate around the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, would suggest that children and young people will be the number one targets when it comes to cleaning up our streets. We know from our direct work with young people that they too value and desire a neighbourhood which is safe and pleasant to be in. Young people have much to contribute to the thinking on how their neighbourhoods can be improved and made safer. It is also well known that children are not always safe within their own homes. It is essential that the Community Safety Strategy address these issues, and an important aspect in this regard is to ensure that the focus is not about keeping young people off the streets.

We are concerned to note that children and young people are not included among those groups defined as 'most vulnerable' and we recommend that they be added to this list.

We welcome the commitment to address wider issues and to focussing on the 'fear' of crime. The Community Safety Strategy must tackle what it acknowledges as a 'disproportionate fear of crime'. This will involve playing a key role in supporting education within communities and across statutory agencies about the realities of the lives of young people – the role of the

independent voluntary sector in this regard will be important. In addition, it is important that the Community Safety Strategy sets out clear objectives around challenging negative perceptions of young people and the role of the media in stoking tensions in this regard.

The document makes no reference to the fear of crime that young people feel. Feeling unsafe is a daily occurrence for many of our young people. It is well known that young males are the group most likely to be the victim of crime and violent crime within this jurisdiction. We recommend that explicit reference is included to tackle this issue.

We would question why, under the section on Shared Communities and Spaces, no reference is made to racially motivated and homophobic crimes.

### **Annex C**

We note the reference in Annex C to related Government strategies and while we accept that the list is not intended to be exhaustive, we are somewhat disappointed that some key initiatives are missing from the list.

- The NI Strategy for Play which is currently being finalised and of which Include Youth are a member of the Implementation Plan Group is not mentioned. Provision of safe leisure and play facilities are integral to the effective outworking of a Community Safety Strategy and it is worrying that this has been overlooked in the pre-consultation.
- There is no reference to international and domestic human rights instruments in the consultation paper, in particular the Human Rights Act 1998 which incorporates the ECHR, the UNCRC, Beijing Rules, Riyadh Guidelines, Tokyo Rules and the UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.
- There is no reference to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- There is no mention made of NIPS Policy Directive on Children and Young People.
- There is no reference to Section 75 of the NI Act and the wider equality implications of the community safety strategy.

The pre-consultation paper does make reference to the Clean Neighbourhoods agenda but does not note the wide body of criticism to aspects of the proposed legislation made by various children's organisations. The proposals contained within the Bill do not convey a message of shared and partnership working with children and young people but rather is going down a path of more punitive sanctions directed at children. This approach is in contradiction to a Community Safety Strategy which aims to achieve an inclusive and preventative community approach.

### **Concluding Comments**

We are pleased to have an opportunity to respond to the Department of Justice's pre-consultation and intend our comments to be a helpful contribution in our on-going work with the Department and the Community Safety Unit in particular on this issue. We would welcome a meeting with Department officials to discuss matters raised in our response further.