



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Department of Health Consultation – Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services in Northern Ireland</b>
<b>Date:</b>	15th December, 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-poverty Karen Anderson-Gillespie, Strategic Performance Manager

**Restricted Reports**

**Is this report restricted?** Yes  No

**Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.**

**Insert number**

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

**If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?**

<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Call-in**

**Is the decision eligible for Call-in?** Yes  No

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to ask the Committee to approve the draft response to the consultation of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services in NI.

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) consider the draft consultation response which has been submitted as a draft response in-line with the closing date for consultation;</li> <li>(ii) note that the response has been submitted on the basis that it would be subject to Committee and Council approval, with any additional comments submitted; and</li> <li>(iii) approve its formal submission, subject to any comments or amendments provided at Committee.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>Members may be aware that, in October 2021, the Minister for Health agreed to commission an independent review of children’s social care in Northern Ireland. The review was announced in February 2022 and took 16 months to complete, publishing in June 2023. The review set out to understand and evaluate issues within the NI children’s social care services, and the experiences of service users and providers. Information was gathered from a wide range of sources including children and young people, parents and carers and service providers.</p> <p>3.2 Led by Professor Ray Jones, the review engaged with parents, children and young people and those working within and alongside children’s social care services, including foster and kinship foster carers. A copy of the published review report and a summary easy read is available via the following link: <a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultation-on-recommendations-of-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-services-in-northern-ireland">Consultation on Recommendations of Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services in Northern Ireland   Department of Health (health-ni.gov.uk)</a>.</p> <p><b><u>Consultation on Emerging Recommendations</u></b></p> <p>3.3 The Review Report sets out 53 recommendations for action, primarily focusing on the role of the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector, although some are relevant to the policy responsibilities of other government departments. In the main, the recommendations relate to service provision, both existing and new services, while others focus on structural change at regional and local levels. A number of the recommendations seek to address current workforce pressures. Others relate to how progress is monitored and tracked.</p> <p>3.4 On 8th September 2023, the Department for Health launched a consultation on the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services in NI with a specific focus on the emerging recommendations as set out in the review. The closing date for feedback on the consultation was 1st December, 2023.</p> <p><b><u>Belfast City Council Draft Response</u></b></p> <p>3.5 Accordingly, a draft officer response was submitted in line with this date, however, stating that the submission was subject to consideration and approval of the SP and R Committee on 15th December and ratified by the Council on 8th January, 2024. The DoH was informed that, should any changes be made at Committee or Council, an updated response would be submitted.</p>

3.6	<p>The draft response <a href="#">here</a> welcomes the Independent Review undertaken of the Children’s Social Care Services in Northern Ireland and endorses the recommendations emerging from the review. The draft response welcomes the strategic and cross-cutting focus of the proposals to ensure our most vulnerable children and families are offered consistent and practical help and support including, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families need more help to care well for their children. (R4)</li> <li>• Action should be taken to tackle, through welfare benefits changes, the increasing prevalence and intensity of child poverty. (R2)</li> <li>• The success and contribution of Sure Start should be recognised and with it, along with other family support services: expanded, including for children aged 4-10 years. (R23)</li> <li>• Foster carers do a very important job and that should be recognised and supported. (R26)</li> <li>• Respite care for children with a disability should be expanded and with children receiving respite care not seen as looked after children. (R30)</li> <li>• Young people should be given a longer time, if they need it, to prepare for the transition to adult services. (R31)</li> <li>• Children and young people in care, and leaving care, should have a person they trust to stand beside them and support them throughout their journey. (R37)</li> <li>• There should be the development of emotional health and well-being services separate from clinical CAMHS services. (R42).</li> <li>• We need to think about some young people with Learning Disabilities being cared for in a hospital in-patient setting (R44)</li> <li>• Need for longer-term and increased funding commitment for key services rather than the insecurity of annual budgets. (R48 and R49).</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>The consultation document also sets out a recommendation to introduce a region-wide single focused children’s and families Arms-Length Body (ALB+) which it states will provide the required leadership and delivery focus for children and young people. Whilst the draft council response supports this recommendation in principle, it highlights the need to ensure local connection and ability to deliver responsive local support services. We have requested that in considering the potential feasibility and design of a new ALB+, there is a need to recognise and seek to build upon already established local services and structures including, for example, community planning. It is important that we seek to enhance and connect services as may be appropriate, avoid potential duplication and maximise the potential contribution and commitment of cross-sectoral/ inter-agency partners.</p>
3.8	<p>Members should note that as part of the Belfast Agenda refresh, we are actively exploring opportunities to take a lead role in bringing forward with partners initiatives to test and explore new approaches and concepts to social challenges. We would wish to explore with the DoH and other partners what opportunities may exist and what recommendations emerging from the Review could be accelerated within Belfast to help address the long-standing systemic and endemic difficulties for children’s social care services which impact on children and families across the City.</p>

3.9	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>There are no direct implications associated with this report.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p>
3.10	<p>There are no direct implications associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Draft BCC cover letter and consultation response – <b>see link in Paragraph 3.6</b></p>