



CONSULTATION ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGY INITIAL 3-YEAR DELIVERY PLAN 2021 – 2024



CONSULTATION QUESTIONS BOOKLET

Introduction

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 requires the Executive to adopt a Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS). The strategy must set out the outcomes the Executive intends to achieve, what actions will be taken by departments (among others) to achieve the outcome and how it will be determined whether, and to what extent, the outcomes have been achieved.

The Executive approved the Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS) on 10 December 2020, and this was published in January 2021. It sets out how the well-being of children and young people would be improved via the following eight outcomes:

- Physical and mental health
- Enjoyment of play and leisure
- Learning and achievement
- Living in safety and with stability
- Economic and environmental well-being
- Making a positive contribution to society
- Living in a society which respects their rights
- Living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted

The Executive also committed that these outcomes would be underpinned by, 'Delivery Plans', containing the actions being taken to deliver the outcomes. The CYPS Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024 (the 'Delivery Plan'), has been created in partnership with all NICS departments to set out the actions being taken to achieve the eight CYPS outcomes to improve children and young people's well-being in Northern Ireland.

The actions outlined in the Delivery Plan may be subject to change depending on new or emerging priorities, the affordability of the actions and depending on the resources which will be available during the 2022 - 2025 budget period. Such decisions will be for respective Ministers and where appropriate the Northern Ireland Executive.

It is advisable to read the accompanying consultation documents prior to completing this question booklet.

Why your views matter

The purpose of this consultation is to gather views and stakeholder feedback on the Delivery Plan. We are inviting you to share your views on its content and format, to ensure we are taking a correct/positive approach towards achieving a better life for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The Department may make responses available on the [website](#) although contact names and addresses would be removed.

Information provided by respondents will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation.

Please note that under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) (Annex A) your responses may be made available, on request, to the public.

Please tick this box if you would prefer your response to remain confidential

Timescales and Submission of Responses

This consultation relates to the Delivery Plan and will close on 9th March 2022. Please note that responses received after this date may not be considered.

We would encourage you to respond to the consultation using the on-line facility on [Citizen Space](#), accessible via NI Direct. If you prefer, you can email or post responses to:

Email - cyops.consultation@education-ni.gov.uk

Or

Write to - **Children and Young People's Strategy Team**
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

Completing this questionnaire

This consultation contains a number of statements and questions. You are asked to indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements. There are also a series of comment boxes available to provide additional information.

We appreciate your time and effort and look forward to receiving your response.

Completing this Questionnaire

The consultation period will run from 13 January 2022 until 9 March 2022. Please note that responses received after the deadline may not be considered.

Please complete this questionnaire in Arial size 12 font or using black ink and block capitals.

Respondent Details

Name:	Catherine Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager Belfast City Council City and Neighbourhood Services Dept. <i>(optional)</i>
Email Address:	TaggartC@BelfastCity.gov.uk <i>(optional)</i>

Who are you answering this consultation on behalf of?

- Yourself
- An Organisation Please specify:
(optional)
- Voluntary and Community Sector Please specify:
(optional)
- Private Company Please specify:
(optional)
- Public Body Please specify:
(optional)
- Other Please specify:
(optional)

Please tick this box if you would like to be alerted when the results of the consultation are published

Consultation Questions

Note; Percentage response indicates views of council officers who responded to each question.

1. The Delivery Plan demonstrates how Government actions will support the achievement of:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
CYPS Outcome A: Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy	20%	60%	20%		
CYPS Outcome B: Children and young people enjoy play and leisure	20%	60%	20%		
CYPS Outcome C: Children and young people learn and achieve	20%	60%	20%		
CYPS Outcome D: Children and young people live in safety and with stability		75%	25%		
CYPS Outcome E: Children and young people experience economic and environmental well-being		66.6%	33.3%		
CYPS Outcome F: Children and young people make a positive contribution to society		66.6%	33.3%		
CYPS Outcome G: Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights		66.6%	33.3%		
CYPS Outcome H: Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted		75%	25%		

2. Are there any Actions missing from the Delivery Plan which would further support children and young people's well-being?

	Yes	No
CYPS Outcome A: Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy	20%	80%
CYPS Outcome B: Children and young people enjoy play and leisure	25%	75%
CYPS Outcome C: Children and young people learn and achieve	25%	75%
CYPS Outcome D: Children and young people live in safety and with stability	50%	50%
CYPS Outcome E: Children and young people experience economic and environmental well-being	50%	50%
CYPS Outcome F: Children and young people make a positive contribution to society	25%	75%
CYPS Outcome G: Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights	50%	50%
CYPS Outcome H: Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted		100%

If Yes, please provide additional comments:

The majority of council respondents felt there were no missing actions in the action plan, we would note a particular omission in relation to play service. Officers feel that the plan does not demonstrate how the noted actions will support the achievement of the proposed outcomes in this area. While there is an obvious relationship between the actions and the outcomes, the effectiveness of the proposals is not demonstrated. Furthermore, the document could be read as a list of current actions that might have an impact on children and young people and not a specific proposal to tackle the areas of priority and /or the proposed outcomes.

In term of actions missing. The strategy and attached action plan are relatively complicated documents to read. As professionals working in the sector, we have found this time consuming and challenging. It is the nature of the complex document produced, that at times losses the focus in particular areas of intervention. To provide an example, throughout the document there is an argument that Play has a key role in brain development, social interactions, education and so forth. This value is recognised in the action plan specifically in the areas of greater focus numbers 1,2,4,5,6,7,16. In addition, Outcome 2 specifically relates to Play.

When looking at the detail of the action plan, apart from the continuation of the Play Matters project, there is no other action that promotes play in any form (physical, free, child lead, as educational tool, as mental health regulator etc...). To be more specific:

Area of greater focus 2 highlights ***the importance of Play for infants and young people***. In addition, Outcome B states that **Children and young people enjoy play and leisure**. The actions "related" to this AOF of outcome B should reflect the relevance of Play in the action plan however all the actions proposed are:

- The Department for Communities is developing a new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland to cover the next ten years and beyond.
- 39 projects delivered as part of People and Place – A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal to promote physical renewal to help create attractive, safe, sustainable environments.
- Department of Education will take forward the Expert Panel on educational underachievement.
- Department of Education will continue to progress interventions to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the learning of children and young people who attend special schools.
- Publication of a refreshed early years policy framework by March 2023 to ensure the delivery of quality early years education and learning services.
- Publication of the proposed framework of future provision for children in the early years with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to improve the well-being of children with SEN in Northern Ireland.
- Develop and publish the Executive Ten-Year Childcare Strategy and related Implementation Plan which will be baselined, and performance managed to monitor achievement.
- To improve the well-being of looked after and care-experienced children and young people and to give them the best chance of the life they deserve.
- Deliver programmes and services to support the Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework (final version), which seeks to support educational settings to promote emotional health and wellbeing at a universal level, through a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach, and providing early and enhanced support for those children and young people who may be at risk or showing signs of needing further help.

- Deliver the Independent Review of Education, as prescribed by New Decade, New Approach, and to agree delivery of the Review's recommendations.
- To improve children and young people's physical and mental well-being. To do this we will implement the current obesity prevention strategy.
- To establish infant and early years health and well-being from the outset.
- To ensure children and young people live in safety and stability.
- Deliver Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training.
- Deliver initiatives to promote awareness and encourage a greater understanding of our natural environment amongst school children and young people.
- As proposed in the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework¹ we 'seek to build healthy lives through School Food Education to create the foundation for a healthy lifelong relationship with food'.

While these actions are welcome, the reflection of Play in the actions proposed is totally absent probably lost in the complexity of the action plan. The lack of coherence between the Outcomes proposed in the Areas of Greater Focus and the actions must be reviewed.

Council considers that it would be beneficial if the Children & Young Peoples Strategy Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024 highlighted the key areas of work to be taken forward by Community planning partners. Community planning partnerships are listed as one of the main partners to achieve the outcomes within the strategy document, but they aren't referenced as a partner within the delivery plan. Therefore, there is an action missing across all the outcomes to ensure that the regional Children & Young People Strategy and Delivery Plan priorities are delivered, where possible at a local level through existing and well-established multi-agency partnerships such as community planning partnerships and their support deliver groups.

We welcome the opportunity to adopt a collaborative approach as part of community planning to address the eight outcomes of children and young people wellbeing and delivery of key actions, as set out in the Delivery Plan. The Delivery Plan reflects key synergies with the community planning process, as required by Part 10 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (e.g., multiagency planning process, improving wellbeing outcomes etc.), which in turn highlights the need to ensure alignment and complementarity of actions, to avoid duplication of effort.

Community planning partners and stakeholders are currently working together to co-design a new Community Plan for Belfast. Partners and stakeholders have identified eight strategic priorities to focus on to improve the wellbeing for everyone in Belfast. To help ensure that the different needs of all our citizens and communities are considered, four cross-cutting themes have also been identified, of which children and young people is one. These themes "cut across" all the priorities, which means they influence or are impacted by them and are interconnected. Collaborative actions relating to the cross-cutting themes will appear under each priority, and where appropriate specific ambitions and actions have also been identified. We welcome the cross-cutting nature and importance of Children & Young People across the eight outcomes, adopted within the Children & Young People Strategy and Delivery plan. As part of the community planning refresh process, community planning partners are currently working with the Belfast Area Outcomes Group (BAOG) to maximise opportunities for further collaboration and co-designing a delivery action plan. It is important that the new Community Plan interfaces with the work of the Children & Young People Strategy and Delivery Plan to improve outcomes for Children & Young People.

Council would also suggest encouraging and enabling partners to come together to align plans, activities, and resources where appropriate. We would ask that this is given accelerated consideration for Belfast and would suggest that the Community Planning Partnership can support this and consider the potential to take forward demonstrator projects to help.

Outcome D&H – Area of focus 19 ‘Formation and implementation of an inclusive participation network to empower and support C&YP to participate in decision making which impacts their lives’ generates two questions as follows –

Our assumption is this relates to the ambition for EA Youth Service to work with local authorities specifically to develop what will be known as ‘Youth Voice’

BCC already has a highly respected and proactive Youth Council with formal links to our committee process to ensure a strong and representative voice for CYP in the city. Council is keen to work with EA to support the Youth Voice participation programme while retaining the autonomy of our established Belfast City Youth Council.

Outcome D&G- Area of focus 11&14 Deliver the recommendations relating to C&YP in the ‘Gillen Report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences’

It remains unclear to what extent the delivery of the Gillen Review recommendations will be implemented. There are a number of specific recommendations which are not mentioned which directly relate to C&YP including education and awareness around the topic of RSE which our Youth Council has undertaken research on in conjunction with Queen’s Centre for Children’s Rights and Common Youth. This piece of research, titled ‘Any Use?’ makes a number of recommendations in relation to the provision of RSE to C&YP and can be viewed on the Council website at <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/Documents/youth-forum/Any-use-report>

With regards to access to play, recreational and other activities for children from families living in poverty we thought that the inclusion of the provision of ‘free to access’ local equipped play areas, MUGAs and informal play opportunities (amenity open space) has been missed in the strategy (this could be added after paragraph 6.34 (P47) along with sports clubs, youth organisations, after-school clubs or local libraries) and was therefore also missing in the delivery plan.

We fully support the outcome to promote awareness of the needs of children and young people with a disability so that these are considered by those designing play or leisure facilities. It may be useful to highlight the council’s annual Playground Improvement Programme that helps deliver more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive play facilities across the city. Over £6 million has been invested since 2011 in poor quality playgrounds that now provide a much better play experience for children and parents. As council officers this is something we strive for when designing council play and recreational facilities. The programme has been supported financially by DfC in recent years, this may be worth including in the action plan.

Regarding the actions around ‘environmental well-being’ it may be useful to highlight some of the key strategic principles set out in council’s Belfast Open Space Strategy [https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/things-to-do/parks-and-open-spaces/belfast-open-spaces-strategy-\(boss\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/things-to-do/parks-and-open-spaces/belfast-open-spaces-strategy-(boss)) and the Green & Blue Infrastructure Plan [Green and blue infrastructure plan \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/things-to-do/parks-and-open-spaces/green-and-blue-infrastructure-plan). Both strategies aim to make open spaces across the city safer, more sustainable, and accessible to local communities, especially beneficial to those in areas of deprivation. Support for both strategic documents may be worth including in their action plan.

3. The Delivery Plan adequately addresses all the Areas of Greatest Focus identified in the Executive Children and Young People's Strategy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	80%		20%	

If you Disagree or Strongly Disagree, which Area(s) of Greatest Focus does it not address and why?

While Council believes that the Delivery Plan adequately addresses the Areas of interest Identified, there are some areas where you can find confusion between the Outcomes, areas of greatest focus and actions. To provide another example, AGF 1, relates to the impact of COVID in children and young people. It is proven that the impact relates to several issues such as child protection, socialization, play time, physical activity, etc...However, the actions in the plan focus in very prescriptive areas that relate to government departments and not the whole reality of children needs. The key areas addressed by the proposed actions are:

- Department of Education will continue to progress interventions to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on children's learning.
- Implement & monitor the Vulnerable Children and Young People – Contingency Planning Framework.
- Provide Free School Meals suitable as the main meal of the day to pupils of "non-working" and low-income families.
- Department of Education Restart to ensure that schools remain fully open and continue to be a safe environment.
- Deliver the Independent Review of Education, as prescribed by New Decade, New Approach, and to agree delivery of the Review's recommendations.
- To improve children and young people's physical and mental well-being. To do this we will implement the current obesity prevention strategy.
- We will establish a Children's Oral Health Options Group which will develop recommendations to improve the oral health of children.
- Deliver rural focussed initiatives to promote the social inclusion, health, and wellbeing of people (including children and young people).
- As proposed in the Northern Ireland Food Strategy.

The focus seems to be around educational achievement, leaving important challenges such as socialization, emotional resilience, Play, family life and other aspect of CYP outside the educational settings un-addressed.

A particular emphasis has also been placed in rural areas. Arguably, the impact of COVID has been equally bad for CYP in urban settings, where access to outdoor spaces, and lack of socialization has been equally challenging for CYP.

As part of the "continuing" Belfast conversation, the engagement process to develop the new Community Plan for Belfast, a series of workshops and online engagement was carried out between June and September 2021. The engagement feedback and evidence received from stakeholders, confirms the outcomes and areas of greatest focus identified within the Children & Young Peoples Strategy and Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024, and highlighted some additional key areas of concern/ issues for consideration i.e., Digital inequality – increased concerns about young learners experiencing digital exclusion and isolation and the desire for greater inclusion, diversity, and a shared future.

4. The Delivery Plan documents are easy to read and understand.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
'Children & Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024' (Microsoft Word)		80%			20%
'Children & Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan – Excel Solution' (Microsoft Excel)	25%	50%			25%
Children & Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024 – Additional Easy Read Guidance (Microsoft Word)	25%	50%			25%

If you Disagree or Strongly Disagree please provide additional comments:

It is very difficult to keep track of how elements relate within the document. While the complexity of the issue might be a challenge, efforts should be made to make the content more accessible. If participation, especially that of children and young people, is one of the guiding principles, the document (including the easy read version) will prove to be to be complicated.

The 'Children & Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024' is very long with a lot of actions outlined. It would benefit from including a reference number for each action. Some of the wording used within the actions refer to dates that have already passed, for example 'A Fair Start' final report and action plan due in May 2020: the wording may therefore need to be future proofed. The Children & Young People Strategy refers to various other strategies and programmes, i.e. People & Place Strategy, A Fair Start, Labour Market Partnership etc. It would be beneficial if the delivery plan focused on new and specific actions that will be taken forward and that these were separated from actions already included and taken forward within established strategies and programmes.

We look forward to seeing the publication outlining what population indicators will be used/ developed to show whether the outcomes for Children & Young People are being achieved. It is difficult to comment on the suitability of actions without understanding how success will be measured.

We found Excel Solution easy to read and provides a good summary, briefly, of the relationship between desired outcomes, actions, priorities, whether it is an enabling activity or measurable outcome, main partners, and lead department.

We consider the uncluttered page layout, simple language and use of supporting images in the Easy Read Option Document very useful.

If you wish to share any additional comments please do so below:

Council welcomes the commitments and actions outlined in sections G and H of the action plan. We welcome the interdepartmental commitments to empower, as well as directly deliver action on the ground. However, as a general observation, more emphasis could have been put on concrete examples of what the action plan will deliver, rather than promising to deliver or develop another strategy. While we understand and appreciate the need for the strategy to be as all-encompassing as possible, the action plan needs to be focused and directed at what will be delivered on the ground. More detail would be required on the following two issues to allow us to make a meaningful evaluation of the likelihood of success for the strategy.

Respecting Children's Rights: Outcome G

Council believes that there should be a focus in the strategy on Article 31 – The Child's Right To Play.

Article 31 of the UNCRC formally enshrines the child's right to play and the right to engage in other recreational activities, including participation in cultural activities and the arts. Article 31 states:

States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 31 imposes three obligations on state parties to guarantee that the rights it covers are realised by every child without discrimination:

- The obligation to respect which requires government to refrain from interfering directly or indirectly in the enjoyment of the rights contained within Article 31.
- The obligation to protect which requires government to take steps to prevent third parties from interfering in the rights contained within Article 31.
- The obligation to fulfil which requires governments to introduce the necessary legislative, administrative, budgetary and other measures aimed at delivering full enjoyment of Article 31 rights by all children and young people.

BCC currently facilitates these rights through

- Delivery of Play Summer Schemes
- Access to potential Play Grants for clubs
- Access to more Play venues / facilities provided by Council in conjunction with Government Departments

We would welcome opportunities to cooperate with Government Departments to enhance children's right to play, sharing our expertise and venues.

Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted: Outcome H

In 1999 Dr Paul Connolly produced a book on Sectarianism, Racism, and Community relations, [Sectarianism, Children and Community Relations in Northern Ireland by Paul Connolly \(1999\)](#) which stressed 'contact theory' as one of the key elements in breaking down sectarian attitudes that had become 'imprinted' at an early age. This imprinting appeared to be initially located in the family, peer group thence school friends and so on into early adulthood. The school environment can and does act as a counter to these early experiences and attitudes.

While reference is made to 'Shared Education' earlier in the document, there is no reference to the impact of shared education on the promotion of Good Relations (as per the CRED strategy), or significantly, Integrated schooling. The Department of Education has a legal duty to "encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education". This is underlined in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the current TBUC strategy recognises the difficulties for a society transitioning from conflict that segregated education and housing can create. Bearing in mind that there is currently a Bill before the Assembly on Integrated Education, there is a risk that the action plan will not adequately reflect the legislative context.

In 2010, the Good Relations Forum produced an on line document, [Ensuring the Good Relations Work in our Schools Counts](#). This resource was developed by the Community Relations Council, Equality Commission, ICTU, Queens University School of Education and representatives from the voluntary and Community Sector. Under 11 headings, it sets out concrete proposals for measures to promote Good Relations in Schools. We feel that this may be an opportunity missed if these actions were not incorporated into the current action plan. The document is naturally dated, however most of the issues addressed in it remain current and urgent.

The [British Educational Research Association](#) have found that Educational disadvantage and underachievement in Northern Ireland is still strongly correlated with socioeconomic status. While there are statistics indicating that children and young people from disadvantaged PUL communities fare less well in the education system compared to the CRN comparators, Poverty and deprivation remain as the key determinants of educational opportunity, or the ability to avail of the opportunities that exist. BCC would expect a greater emphasis to be placed on raising educational achievement and expectation in areas of high social and economic deprivation.

Climate, Energy and Green Growth

We feel the delivery plan is light in terms of action in relation to climate, energy and green growth which are all strategic areas of focus across government, with the Energy Strategy having been launched in December, Green Growth Strategy being a cross cutting strategy which contains elements relating to young people, and 2 potential Climate Bills making their way through the Assembly. Under Actions within Outcome E: Children and young people experience (a) economic and (b) environmental well-being the only reference we see is "2.5.16 Deliver initiatives to promote awareness and encourage a greater understanding of our natural environment amongst school children and young people. To do this we will:

- Work with members of the Education for Sustainable Development Forum and other partners

- Provision of the CAFRE Schools Nature Trails at Greenmount and Enniskillen Campuses to allow primary school children the opportunity to investigate farming, farmland habitats, wildlife, and environmental issues.
- Provision of grant aid including through the Environment Fund. This includes provision of financial support to the international 'Eco-Schools' programme, which focuses on improving the environment through education, behavioural change and action in our schools."

There are several workstreams looking at skills and education in relation to the green economy, retrofit programmes and green energy, coming from Belfast City Council, Belfast Metropolitan College, QUB, UU and others. The Reset for Growth report addresses the need for greater investment in this area. It would be helpful for the plan to address this.

There has also been research with young people through the Belfast Climate Commission Youth Working Group which engaged with 1200 young people in September 2021 through BCC Your say Platform. The results included recommendations that there needed to be more skills and learning in the school setting for young people, and that educators require support and resources in this area of work.

In relation to access to the natural environment we would support that. Council leads on a number of initiatives such as Belfast One Million Trees Programme, the Bolder Vision (with DFI and DFC), Greenways Programme and others which promote the protection of and expansion of green space and woodland which confer a range of benefits for young people and all citizens including health and wellbeing, improved air quality, biodiversity, flood alleviation and carbon sequestration. Research conducted through Belfast One Million Trees Programme – the Belfast I-Tree ECO report is due to launch soon which will elaborate on the benefit of the trees of Belfast for example.

It should also be noted that the Belfast Resilience Strategy prioritises children and young people as central to improving the resilience of the city, through urban design, placemaking and in being engaged with as we address climate change among other issues. Belfast (through Belfast City Council) is a member of the Real Play Coalition, acting as an ambassador city advocating that play should be integrated and prioritised in the city.

In conclusion, we include weblinks to all three documents listed above for consideration by the department.

https://www.belfastclimate.org.uk/sites/default/files/Climate%20Crisis%20Youth%20Survey%20Report_0.pdf

<https://minutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/s93255/Reset%20for%20Growth%20Report.pdf>

https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/downloadable_resources/Network/Belfast-A-Climate-Plan-for-Belfast.pdf

ANNEX A – FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – CONFIDENTIALITY OF CONSULTATIONS

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#)