



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs

# Mid-term review of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures

The national policy framework  
for children and young people  
2014-2020

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# Minister's Foreword

Ensuring that Government serves and protects our children and young people is a top priority for me as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

The majority of our children are doing well, but we have some significant challenges to face as a society. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020* is a framework for all of Government and all of society.

In 2014 the framework established a shared set of outcomes for children and young people to which all Government Departments, Agencies, statutory services and the community and voluntary sectors work. These outcomes are helping to transform the effectiveness of existing policies, services and resources and are ensuring a coherent response for children and young people nationally.

The framework sets out the transformational goals and implementation structures through which Government Departments can work together to achieve these outcomes and to be accountable for progress. This 'whole-of-government' working is vital and unifies agendas and actions across all sectors thus ensuring a concerted and coordinated approach. I am glad to say that this approach has been a positive one to date, and has impacted on the way we work across boundaries, how we build relationships and how we maintain viable joined up government structures.

Effective implementation is key to the delivery of policy. The structures that have been established to oversee its delivery have served us well, but we need to consider how they can still be improved. This mid-term review is strategically beneficial. Its approach and recommendations will ensure that progress on implementation continues apace and momentum is maintained.

Crucially, we need to determine the content and course of action for Phase 2 (2018 – 2020) of the framework. It is already underpinned by a number of constituent strategies and I look forward to the publication of the National Early Years Strategy and the National LGBTI+ Strategy currently being prepared by my Department, which are due to be published later in 2018.

One of the main considerations to emerge as a result of this review is that there is a need to focus on certain important priorities such as child homelessness, child poverty, mental health and wellbeing, prevention and early intervention and the progression of the National Early Years Strategy. Work has already commenced on these important priorities through the framework's implementation structures such as the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, the Sponsors Group and the Advisory Council.

I look forward to continued engagement with all sectors and stakeholders involved in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and I am confident that we can in the second phase of implementation continue to improve the lives of children and young people across the country.

**Dr Katherine Zappone, TD**  
*Minister for Children and Youth Affairs*

# Secretary General's Foreword

As we approach the end of the first phase of the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* National Policy Framework and with the publication of the third Annual Report last year, I am pleased to report that progress continues on the commitments in the framework.

The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structure has been key in driving progress across Government. While there was no plan for a mid-term review of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* outlined in the Policy Framework, DCYA took the position at pre-implementation stage that such a review would be strategically beneficial. This approach has ensured that progress on implementation continues and momentum is maintained. Crucially, it also affords the opportunity to pause, reflect on and review the progress and process to date.

This mid-term review is intended to indicate the status of and the advances made on both the deliverables and the process associated with the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Future*, as well as signposting clear direction in the second phase of implementation. However, it is also intended not merely to provide learning on the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, but also to derive such learning for consideration and use in the broader system and sectors working with children and young people, and wider social policy areas.

In summary, this review aims to identify learning that will be accessible, useable and transferable.

This review afforded us the opportunity to establish whether the implementation structures such as the Consortium, Sponsors Group and Advisory Council are fit for purpose, and to decide if change is needed. I am glad to say positive feedback has been received on the effective mechanisms involved for delivering on the commitments and priority actions contained in the framework. I know that this good work will continue.

One key message coming from the review is the need to have a much more targeted focus on some top priorities such as child poverty, child homelessness, mental health and wellbeing, amongst other important issues. This work should not detract, however, from the continued progression of the 163 commitments contained in the framework and this work will be ongoing. Another point is the general consensus that *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* needs to be more visible and that we need to be clearer about its impact.

Overall, the key conclusions and recommendations that are included in the review will give us further momentum. We will look at these key messages carefully and make improvements to the implementation process where necessary. This will help us tailor our approach to Phase 2 of the framework's implementation, and also help further progress the cross-government collaborative approach that is needed to achieve the best outcomes for our children and young people.

**Dr Fergal Lynch**

*Secretary General*

*Department of Children and Youth Affairs*

# Executive Summary

This mid-term review of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* serves as a general progress and process check on the implementation of the first national children and young people's Policy Framework and is directly informed by the views and perspectives of key groupings in this area. The main aim was the delivery of a mid-term review that focuses on the status of the framework and the progress made on its implementation, while offering learning to inform the next phase of the implementation process. This included a focus on the following:

- A review of the process and implementation structure.
- A review of awareness and visibility amongst stakeholders.
- A review of engagement amongst stakeholders.
- A review of outcomes to date.
- An identification of learning and innovative practices.
- The need to determine the content and course of action for Phase 2 of implementation 2018 – 2020.

It also considers progress in terms of the development and implementation of the three constituent strategies of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*:

- National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015 – 2020.
- National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020.
- National Early Years Strategy (forthcoming).

This review is informed by a number of key evidential sources:

- Surveys held with stakeholders involved in the implementation infrastructure to assess engagement and impact, as well as to identify emerging issues.
- Case studies on particular initiatives within *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (e.g. Prevention and Early Intervention, Child Poverty), provided by the Sponsors Group.
- Perspectives from key informants, focus groups and submissions.
- A desk review involving an analysis of other Departments' statements of strategy, policy documents and other relevant material.
- A focus on data outlined in An Indicator Set for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* developed by the Research and Evaluation Unit in DCYA.
- Perspectives from the Implementation Team in the Policy Innovation Unit.

## Key Messages

- The implementation structures have worked well and have provided a solid platform for cross-collaboration and interdepartmental working, with the work on addressing the child poverty issue identified as particularly noteworthy.
- The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework is complicated, with a huge range of commitments contained within it. There is a need to focus on particular priorities such as child poverty and child homelessness.

- Some Government Departments and Agencies need to be held more accountable for their own commitments and their level of engagement.
- There is a need for strengthened Government leadership to act as a key driver in implementation.
- There is a low level of awareness and visibility of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* across some sectors, with children and young people and the general public.
- Engagement via the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structures is positive, although some Departments and Agencies need to improve in this regard.
- There has been some good learning and innovative practices such as addressing child poverty and childhood obesity.
- There is a need for discernible impacts/outcomes to be communicated to a wider audience.
- For the second phase of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* 2018 – 2020 there should be a renewed, succinct approach focusing on important priorities such as Child Poverty, Child Homelessness, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Prevention and Early Intervention and the progression of the Early Years Strategy, amongst other issues. The Annual Reporting process should be revised to take account of this.

## Recommendations

Emerging issues/Recommendations
1. High-level structures should be maintained where senior officials from different Government Departments engage on key issues related to children.
2. Progress should be maintained on achieving commitments; however, owing to the amount, level and quality of some commitments it is critical that further strategising and prioritisation is ensured in the next phase of implementation.
3. There is a need to ensure that cross-sectoral work is child-centred within Departments and bodies working together in a holistic and strategic way. As these cross-cutting structures are nearly unique in Government it would be important that they are recognised, and where appropriate replicated.
4. Wider leadership at the Consortium should be considered.
5. Additional Government Departments should be included in the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> infrastructure.
6. The challenge of the growth of other initiatives that have a child/youth focus but which are not directly linked or fully utilising the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> infrastructure, i.e. Mental Health Taskforce, Early Years' Forum, should be addressed.
7. Greater promotion of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> on social media is warranted in order to increase awareness and engagement among young people.
8. While recognising the complexity of the framework, optimum messaging and communications on <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> across Government is required.
9. Increased awareness of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> amongst children, young people and the general public is needed. A targeted focus in some education outputs, i.e. new Politics Curriculum and CSPE (Civil, Social and Political Education), could be considered.
10. Greater utilisation of the NGO sector to promote awareness of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> is needed.
11. Greater engagement with existing systems to support the communication and advancement of key strategic priorities such as child poverty and child homelessness should be progressed.

12.	The access to and impact of publications such as the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> quarterly ezines and Annual Reports should be maximised.
13.	Better engagement with Comhairle na nÓg and seldom heard children should be considered. Additionally, it was suggested that DCYA could make better use of findings from previous consultations with children and young people.
14.	It is recommended that when consulting with young people it is preferable to consider carrying out such exercises in local, youth-centred settings.
15.	Continuation of the good engagement evident in the development of collaborative approaches to addressing issues is needed. The roundtable on child poverty which emerged from this work brought key influencers and stakeholders together to examine the issue in more detail. This has provided a greater focus on this issue, particularly from a child's rights perspective.
16.	At Consortium level, there is a need for greater accountability and engagement from some Departments, Agencies and other members in relation to their commitments under the framework.
17.	There should be a greater focus on the 'Safe and protected from harm' outcome. Respondents as young as ten years and up to the age of 24 years noted the effects of crime, drugs, violence, harassment and alcohol abuse, which have left children and young people feeling unprotected and unsafe in their community.
18.	A fuller appreciation of the 'Connected, respected and contributing' outcome is emphasised. Respondents recognised this as being important in the context of community development. Specifically, services and supports for children and young people with a disability and young migrants were highlighted.
19.	The development of accessible and useable data and information in informing and supporting best responses for children and young people should be advanced.
20.	Greater progress on the development, implementation and integration of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> and its constituent strategies is needed.
21.	A greater focus on aligning and advancing the transformational goals is required.
22.	There is a need to build upon and transfer the learning derived from the development and implementation of this first national cross-government Policy Framework for children and young people so that other policy implementation initiatives are informed by the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach.
23.	There should be a sustained focus on improving outcomes for children and young people by harmonising policy, enabling better transfer of policy into practice, and ensuring that better practice is informed by evidence.

### Building on Learning and Innovative Practices

#### Improvements made and achievements gained in the implementation process:

- Committing from the outset to a mid-term review in 2017 to ensure front-loading of progress and revisit and reprioritise key actions.
- Establishing one Advisory Council structure, to ensure greater coherence in unifying the policy domains of Early Years, Children and Youth and reflecting a life-cycle approach to addressing issues facing children and young people.



- Establishment of a more dynamic implementation infrastructure than originally envisaged in design phase.
- Leading the Sponsors Group and securing agreement to identify key ‘cross-sectoral priorities’ (intractable issues that require multilateral action across Government).
- Ensuring that the constituent groups in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure have the opportunity to inform the identification of annual priorities and the development of the outcome indicators, and to comment on progress via the Annual Report.
- Development of an Implementation Plan.
- Development and publication of three Annual Reports (2014 – 2017) that seek to account for quantitative and qualitative progress.
- Driving progress on commitments: action on the majority of the 163 commitments is in progress, while a range of commitments have already been realised.
- Situating and strengthening the focus on outcomes and transformational goals.
- Communications via quarterly ezine and the provision of pro-forma briefing material for all stakeholders for dissemination.
- Introducing the concept of annual cross-sectoral priorities such as Child Poverty, Prevention and Early Intervention, etc. to ensure responsiveness to emerging themes.
- Reinvigorating the Children’s Services Committees (CSC) initiative to Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC) via enhanced remit and age range, role and representation; and developing a strong local infrastructure directly connected with central government and the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure, thereby allowing multidirectional information flow and minimising implementation impediments.
- Profiling the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure as the ‘go-to and go-through’ mechanism for children and young people’s issues.

#### **Learning from the implementation process:**

1. Importance of focusing not just on the development of structures, but also on the development of a collaborative culture based on a shared agenda.
2. Importance of ensuring that in pre-development phase all policy actions and commitments be weighted according to importance and impact.
3. Importance of ensuring that the implementation of the policy is not solely focused on commitments fixed at development phase and followed at implementation phase. Rather, the policy and the implementation process needs to remain relevant and responsive to issues which may not have been foregrounded in the original policy, but which have subsequently become critical, e.g. homelessness.
4. Importance of the system and of respective Departments to recognise the need to minimise policy proliferation and ensure policy maintenance, so that specific, strategic and sustainable policy actions are held and advanced, thereby reducing fragmentation and burden for policy makers, providers and practitioners alike.
5. Importance of identifying and differentiating the primary – ultimate – beneficiaries and the secondary beneficiaries of the policy.
6. Importance of recognising that the continuum of policy, provider and practitioner interests are focused on service to the citizen, thereby ensuring the development and delivery of policy that harnesses such inputs and focuses on end-user impact.



7. Importance of recognising the benefits and limitations to the application of whole-of-government approaches to policies and policy implementation.
8. Importance of acknowledging and holding to account the delivery agents of policy commitments, which may be non-statutory agencies. These are key constituents in the broad and diverse system in place in social services provision in Ireland, yet they are not tasked with delivery responsibility within the framework.

### **Determining the Course of Action for Phase 2 of Implementation 2018 – 2020.**

The recommendations and learning referenced will frame and focus the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and the work programmes of the relevant groups in the implementation structure. This will be done in conjunction with stakeholders, with an emphasis on the key themes identified for actions going forward.

The following represent a range of key emerging priorities as requiring action or further advancement in the next phase of implementation. These will be considered and advanced by the respective groups in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure. Having regard to alignment with the existing commitments in the framework, this will ensure that these are prioritised and responsive to emerging issues, and take account of current initiatives being advanced in these respective areas, which may have been developed subsequent to the launch of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in 2014.

1. Child Poverty
2. Child Homelessness
3. Prevention and Early Intervention
4. Mental Health and Wellbeing (personal and communal)
5. Progression of the National Early Years Strategy

DCYA will work with the relevant stakeholders with regard to these recommendations, with a particular focus on the themes of communications, awareness, engagement and impact within *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

# 1. Introduction to the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Mid-Term Review

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs sought to take a strategic and sustainable approach to the implementation of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework. In doing so, it was decided early in the implementation process to carry out a mid-term review to ensure adequate progress and appropriate monitoring be put in place so that the framework is implemented in a real time and responsive manner.

This mid-term review of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* aims to take a take a holistic approach to reviewing the implementation, effectiveness and impact of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

The life-cycle of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* involves a range of phases, as illustrated below.



## 1.1 Context

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs leads significant engagement on cross-government, agency and sectoral working. This engagement and interface is a key part of the Department's remit to which the Department accords significant importance. Since 2014, a more strategic and structured approach to such engagement has been developed through the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020*.

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* represents the first overarching national Policy Framework comprehending an age range that spans children and young people of 0 – 24 years. It adopts a whole-of-government approach and is underpinned by a number of constituent strategies in the areas of early years, youth and participation, and it is envisaged that the framework will encompass other related policies as they develop.

The framework:

- Establishes a **shared set of outcomes** for children and young people to which all Government Departments and Agencies, statutory services and the community and voluntary sectors work to ensure a coherent response for children and young people.
- Identifies the **range of commitments** in place across Government and progresses these based on a structured, systematic and outcomes-focused approach.
- Prioritises the **key cross-cutting transformational goals** under each outcome area that require concerted and coordinated action to ensure the realisation of the respective outcomes.
- Emphasises an **integrated and evidence-informed approach** to working across Government, on horizontal and vertical levels – an approach that is child-centred, benefits from

interagency and multidisciplinary working, and which transfers to all sectors and settings working with children and young people.

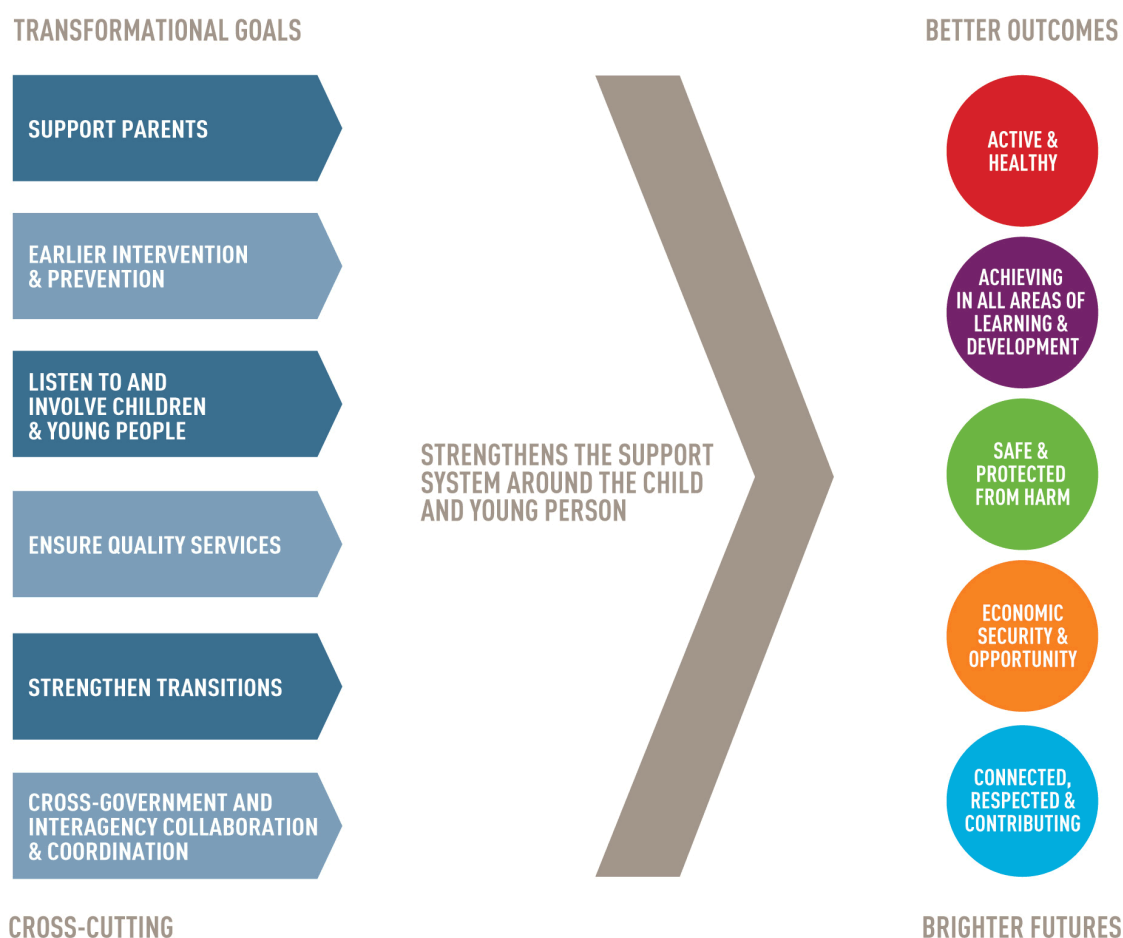


Figure 1: The six transformational goals for achieving the national outcomes

The commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* are drawn from across Government. The framework recognises the need to connect, nationally and locally, if we are to effectively utilise all of the inputs and resources available to support our vision for children and young people.

In light of this, a range of structures were established or aligned (Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium, Sponsors Group, Advisory Council, Children and Young People’s Services Committees National Steering Group, Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and EU Structured Dialogue Working Group (Young Voices)). The aim of this was to ensure that the state and its partners work and plan service provision in a way that is centred on the child or young person, emphasising interagency and outcomes-focused working. These groups, as a whole, bring together representatives from Government Departments, statutory agencies, the community and voluntary sector and independent experts to inform and develop key actions to support these objectives.

More information on the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures can be found at Appendix 1.

To provide a baseline for the commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* an Implementation Plan was developed by the DCYA Implementation Team in 2014. This sought specific annual actions for each of the 163 commitments in the initial implementation phase up to 2017. The

Implementation Plan's focus on actions to 2017 was intended to front-load progress, as well as generating momentum for implementation. The Implementation Plan also committed to a mid-term review.

It was envisaged that that the mid-term review would also consider progress in terms of the development and implementation of the three constituent strategies of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*:

- National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015 – 2020
- National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020
- National Early Years Strategy (forthcoming)

To ensure comprehensiveness, other policy initiatives developed subsequent to, but brought within, the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework also merit reference, with some representing a clear example of actions advancing either the five national outcomes or transformational goals. These include the following:

- Blueprint for the Development of Children and Young People's Services Committees (2015)
- Whole of Government Approach to Tackling Child Poverty (2017)
- Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI) (2017)

## 1.2 Aim of the Mid-Term Review

The main aim is the delivery of a mid-term review that focuses on the status and progress of implementation, while offering learning to inform the next phase of the implementation process. This includes a focus on the following:

- Review the process and implementation structure.
- Review awareness and visibility amongst stakeholders.
- Review engagement amongst stakeholders.
- Review outcomes to date.
- Identify learning and innovative practices.
- Determine content and course of action for Phase 2 of implementation 2018 – 2020.

### Key Considerations in Undertaking this Review

The following considerations have been to the fore in carrying out the review of the first phase of implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*:

- **Utility** – the review needs to have a meaningful purpose and product, beyond that of an inventory of actions achieved.
- **Accessibility and credibility** – the review should be accessible and make the best possible use of the learning and perspectives generated in terms of what has been achieved and what needs to be addressed.

This review is informed by the groups and other key stakeholders involved in the process. This has been and remains key in ensuring ownership, application and achievement of progress.

### 1.3 Methodology

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is a framework for all of Government and all of society. A central enabler for implementation of the framework is greater collaboration and coordination across Government, across sectors and between agencies. This approach runs horizontally (across people, infrastructure, evidence and data analysis, and funding and finance) as well as vertically (from national to local level). A significant challenge in improving outcomes for children and young people is to harmonise policy, enable better transfer of policy into practice, and ensure that better practice is informed by evidence.

Taking such a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach aims to unify agendas and actions in and across Government Departments, Agencies and sectors working with and for children and young people, thereby ensuring a concerted and coordinated approach.

Working in this way supports the Government's overall reform agenda for public services and publicly funded services. The Public Service Reform Plan, 2014 – 2016 and the Civil Service Renewal Initiative are key drivers of the overall Government reform programme and implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* should contribute to and enhance this wider reform programme.

As part of this review process it was felt that it would be essential to seek the opinions and perspectives of the key informants involved in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation process and to get stakeholder experiences in terms of reviewing the implementation, effectiveness and impact of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

Separate to the findings of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* survey (see chapter 3), the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Implementation Team engaged directly with key informants such as the Sponsors Group, Advisory Council and young people.

A thorough facilitated focus group was held with the Advisory Council and a comprehensive paper reviewing implementation was produced.

In addition, a number of the Sponsors Group were asked to provide case studies on their cross-sectoral priorities. These involved the:

- Department of Health – Child Obesity.
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection – Child Poverty.
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs – Prevention and Early Intervention.

In addition, organisational perspectives were offered from the children and young people's sector.

A summary of the key evidential sources informing the mid-term review includes the following:

#### 1. Surveys

Surveys with stakeholders included in the implementation infrastructure to assess engagement and impact, as well as to identify emerging issues.

#### 2. Data

Focus on data outlined in An Indicators Set for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* developed by

Research and Evaluation Unit in DCYA.

**3. Case studies**

Case studies on particular initiatives within *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (e.g. Prevention and Early Intervention, Child Poverty).

**4. Perspectives from key informants**

Information from focus groups and submissions.

**5. Desk review**

Analysis of other Department's statements of strategy, policy documents and other relevant material as well as analysis of State Agencies' and NGO sector references to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

**6. Perspectives from implementation**

Perspectives from the Implementation Team in Policy Innovation Unit with regard to the strengths and areas for development in the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

## 2. Progress to Date on Implementation

### **Overview of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures***

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* contains 163 commitments from across 11 Lead Departments and Agencies. The commitments themselves are diverse and wide-ranging. In 2014 the majority (75%) were current Government policy, while a number (25%) were new policy commitments. Some were very specific and readily actionable, while others were set to evolve over time. Several of the commitments were high-level and required further development through a strategic and concerted focus.

It was not the intention or purpose of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to assign significant streams of new work to Government Departments or Agencies. Rather, it aimed to bring together areas that were already designated as key commitments and identify where Departments and Agencies needed to work together to deliver such commitments comprehensively. As a result, delivery of many of the commitments was capable of being realised by programmes of work which were already underway. However, it was important that these actions and achievements were captured in a coordinated and higher-order framework and capitalised on through an outcomes-focused approach to implementation.

To support coherent progression toward these outcomes, the majority of commitments were each assigned a 'Lead' Department or Agency and several partners. The Lead is the policy-holder. The partners are the other stakeholders who will contribute to/support to varying degrees the achievement of the commitment. Each Lead was responsible for progressing and achieving their assigned commitment. Leads also have responsibility for reporting on their commitment. Each Lead Department was asked to liaise with relevant partners, where necessary, to work toward the achievement of the commitments. This level of interaction depended on the complexity or magnitude of the commitment. The interaction and focus on addressing child poverty is a prime example in this regard.

To minimise the complexity of applying wholesale a range of reporting lines across Government Departments and Agencies to these commitments, many of which could be advanced bilaterally, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs advised that such working could be seen on a range of levels. This may involve strategic and/or operational collaboration, coordination in aligning work plans and reporting structures, or merely exchanging information. Irrespective of the level of interaction, it was emphasised that proportionate input and effort commensurate with the commitment should be made by all in advancing a shared outcomes agenda. This was an important consideration in ensuring that commitments were advanced, while minimising the administrative burden involved.



## 2.1 Key Points

Having delivered the first implementation phase of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, a number of key characteristics offered by the framework can be identified under a range of categories.

### **Policy:**

- Centralises children and young people in and across policy domains.
- Sets out a policy framework for strategic and operational working within which the constituent strategies will be developed and implemented.

### **Process:**

- Establishes and aligns the work of key groupings, both horizontally and vertically, within a robust implementation infrastructure.
- Streamlines and structures the work programmes of the key groupings to ensure that a shared agenda is identified and a common approach adopted.

### **Practice:**

- Endeavours to bring about a change in the way we all work to ensure optimum outcomes for children and young people.
- Moves from sector- and practice-specific responses towards a more comprehensive and coordinated approach.

### **Product:**

- Connects the policy domains of Early Years, and Children and Youth, thereby underpinning a policy continuum along a life-cycle approach.
- Provides a coherent and collaborative approach to the implementation, achievement and ongoing identification of policy objectives and commitments.
- Situates the needs and aspirations of children and young people within a holistic policy context.

## 2.2 Annual Reporting Processes

Following on from the Implementation Plan of 2014, three Annual Reports on the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* have been published to date. These are available on the [DCYA website](#).

In the development of reports, Government Departments and Agencies were asked to account for progress against their commitments and to complete a short form based on a ‘traffic light’ reporting mechanism, which used the following descriptors:

- **Green** = progressing well.
- **Amber** = progressing, with some minor issues.
- **Red** = not progressing, facing serious issues<sup>1</sup>.

Government Departments were also asked to provide a narrative statement on their activities for children and young people in the year covered by each Annual Report. In light of developments since the launch of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in April 2014, Government Departments and Agencies were also encouraged to include additional material relating to contemporaneous actions being advanced that impact on children and young people beyond the commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. This was to ensure that reporting on the framework is kept up to date with emerging developments. These can be read in the full reports.

Overall, strong progress has been made in the implementation of the commitments under the five national outcomes and the transformational goals, as illustrated in Figure 2. These charts show the status of progress on the commitments under each area (as of June 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the two commitments represented by the red portions of the charts in Figure 2, indicating that they are not progressing as envisaged are:

**4.2** Set a national child-specific social target to lift more than 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. This target includes reducing the higher consistent poverty rate for households with children as compared to non-child households (8.8% compared to 4.2%) and for children as compared to adults (9.3% compared to 6%) (DEASP, DCYA, DH, DES, Tusla, HSE).

**5.4** Hold a referendum before the end of 2015 on a proposal to amend the Constitution to reduce the voting age to 16 (DHPLG).

Figure 2: Measuring progress of commitments in 2017



## 2.3 Progressing Cross-Sectoral Priorities: Case Studies

The function of the Sponsors Group is to take a whole-of-government perspective on the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The group monitors progress in terms of implementation within their outcome area at a macro level, while recognising that many other Departments and Agencies contribute to these outcomes and goals.

The Sponsors Group has an integral role in ensuring the realisation and success of the vision underpinning *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* through active collaboration. The success of the framework requires strong links and good working relationships across the Departments represented by the Sponsors Group.

Bringing together key Departments via the Sponsors Group creates a forum for the development of a shared agenda, providing an opportunity to identify synergies and areas for collaboration so that

- Commitments are progressed and priorities identified.
- Communication is facilitated between Departments, allowing for the sharing of best practices and the leveraging of shared solutions.
- Common barriers to successful implementation are identified and addressed.

In order to generate momentum, make progress on intractable issues and model whole-of-government working, the Sponsors Group identified a series of priority commitments to be progressed each year under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation infrastructure.

The Sponsors Group identifies and progresses these key cross-sectoral priorities for children and young people across Government, subject to approval from the Consortium. The cross-sectoral priorities for 2017 were:

Sponsor	Priority
Department of Health	Obesity
Department of Education and Skills	Review of DEIS
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Prevention and Early Intervention
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	Child Poverty
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	Homelessness

### Rationale for Selecting 3 Case Studies

As part of the mid-term review the Implementation Team asked the Sponsors Group to consider three case studies, in line with the overall themes of the review.

These case studies provide an in-depth analysis of three particular areas of focus that were progressed under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework. The three areas of focus are:

- Child Obesity – Department of Health
- Child Poverty – Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Prevention and Early Intervention – Department of Children and Youth Affairs

These three cross-sectoral priorities have an impact on the lives of children and young people and have evolved significantly since the inception of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The case studies illustrate the connections and outputs in these areas.

The case studies broadly cover a number of areas:

- Overview of Cross-Sectoral Priority
- Implementation
- Engagement
- Impact and Outcomes
- Learning and Innovative practices
- Recommendations and Conclusions

The three individual case studies are set out below and serve to illustrate the approaches taken by respective departments in advancing their cross-sectoral priority:

### **Case Study 1: Department of Health – Tackling Child Obesity (including tackling physical inactivity)**

#### **Overview:**

Outcome 1 under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework is ‘Active and Healthy’, in recognition of the importance of achieving optimal physical and mental wellbeing as an outcome for all our children and young people. This outcome is strongly aligned with the goals and outcomes for the overall population as set out in Healthy Ireland (HI), the national framework to improve the health and wellbeing of all people living in Ireland.

In both *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and Healthy Ireland, child obesity was identified as a significant public health challenge and a priority for cross-sectoral action. Prevention and early intervention, and supporting children, young people and families to make healthier choices, are key cross-cutting themes in both Policy Frameworks, which are of particular resonance for this issue.

One in four children in Ireland is overweight or obese. While recent data from the Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) suggests that levels may be stabilising, it is also evident that such stabilisation is not observed in children attending DEIS schools, and that there is also a marked difference between girls and boys, with more young girls tending to be overweight or obese.

The consequences of overweight and obesity in children are significant, including an increased risk of several chronic diseases, including heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. In addition, and in particular for children, being overweight carries a stigma, which may contribute to bullying and mental health issues. Overall, such children may experience reduced quality of life and reduced opportunity to reach their full potential.

Furthermore, levels of physical inactivity in children and young people in Ireland are a cause of concern. As well as contributing to a healthy weight, being physically active is vital for healthy growth and development, and is associated with emotional, social and cognitive benefits.

#### **Approach to progressing this cross-sectoral priority:**

In 2015 the development of a first National Physical Activity Plan and a new Obesity Policy were in development under the Healthy Ireland agenda. The policy development processes for these had at early stages recognised the strong policy alignment with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and the

need for a cross-sectoral approach, recognising the significant overlap in stakeholders and objectives. DCYA and many of these common stakeholders were involved in the groups established to oversee the development work, as well as through the various associated consultative processes.

A key input to the development of the Obesity Policy, which arose out of the relevant commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, was a consultation conducted with children and young people, which was facilitated by DCYA. The report of those consultations, *Healthy Lifestyles – Have Your Say*, was launched by the Ministers of both Departments at the launch of the Obesity Policy and Action Plan in September 2016. The National Physical Activity Plan was approved by Government and launched in January 2016.

The approach within both of these national plans was strongly cross-sectoral and aligned with the two overarching Policy Frameworks (HI and *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*). Progress on implementation of both Policy Frameworks is overseen by the same Cabinet Committee and there were existing working relationships in place.

However, the new and evolving infrastructure around *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* provided additional opportunities and structured avenues for strengthening cross-sectoral engagement and buy-in, and progressing work of mutual benefit. This included cooperation to support the role of the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) in addressing these policy priorities, including the innovative approach taken to collaborate with the Department of Health and co-fund a strand of the new Healthy Ireland Fund in 2017 to support CYPSC in that regard, and drive greater collaboration at a local level, including between CYPSC and Local Community Development Committees.

The structured engagement facilitated through both the Consortium and the Sponsors Group offered a valuable means for networking and communication, and for both refreshing existing cross-departmental and cross-sectoral relationships and synergies, as well as pursuing new ones.

The *Healthy Lifestyles – Have Your Say* report outlines the views of children and young people on factors that help and hinder them in having a healthy lifestyle and reflects the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* commitment to include the voices of children and young people in decisions and policies that affect them.

### **Progress on implementation:**

A significant amount of progress has been made on this priority throughout 2016 and 2017. The engagement and relationships built during policy development gave a good basis for a collaborative approach to implementation. The implementation oversight groups established for both Obesity and Physical Activity include DCYA and other key mutual stakeholders, and a focus on children and young people is agreed as a priority under both work programmes.

Among key deliverables so far:

- START: 'Healthy Weight for Children', a new five-year strategic communication and engagement campaign to support parents in making healthier choices, was launched in November 2017.
- New Healthy Eating Guidelines and Food Pyramid, *Healthy Food for Life*, published in December 2016. This is a toolkit which includes a Food Pyramid guide to everyday food choices for adults, teenagers and children aged five and over. Packs were disseminated to all primary and post-

primary schools in 2017. Work has also begun on healthy eating guidelines for one- to five-year-olds.

- Circulars from DES to primary and post-primary schools on 'Healthy Lifestyles' (healthy eating and physical activity).
- Expansion of the Active School Flag.
- New Nutrition Standards for the School Meals Scheme.
- A voluntary Code of Practice agreed with industry on the marketing and promotion (particularly to children) of food and non-alcoholic beverages.
- Health assessments (including weight checks) in the GP under-six contract.
- A range of initiatives funded through the Healthy Ireland Fund 2017 at both local and national level (in addition to DTTAS and Dormant Account funding for a wide range of physical activity and sport initiatives).
- Commissioning of a second Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) research project on participation in physical activity, physical education, extra-curricular and extra-school sport among 10- to 18-year-olds. (The last study was carried out in 2009/2010.)

### **Outcomes for children and young people:**

Both the Obesity Policy and the Physical Activity Plan set specific targets around their respective outcomes – reductions in levels of excess weight; increase in number of children meeting activity guidelines and decrease in numbers of inactive children. However, these trends will only be properly seen over time. The development of these policies and plans, along with the opportunity for children and young people to have their voices heard, has given a renewed emphasis and understanding of the issues and a renewed cross-sectoral commitment to tackle them.

### **Learning from this work:**

The collaborative approach taken in pursuing these priorities has provided new and tangible ways for DH and DCYA, in conjunction with other Departments and stakeholders, to progress a range of strategic priorities and enablers for the respective Policy Frameworks, including a focus on prevention and early intervention, supporting and empowering parents and families, and taking a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to these important societal issues. It has also been a valuable interdepartmental learning experience as we have seen how *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* has been progressed and how to incorporate some of that approach into our thinking on implementation of HI. There has also been feedback from stakeholders about the positive impact they see from the more visible and obvious close working relationships between Departments.

From the DH perspective, involvement in the Consortium and engaging with the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Advisory Council has offered opportunities to develop new relationships with some key sectors, in particular the youth sector.

More engagement with young people in policy development is certainly recommended based on the experience with the Obesity Policy. The challenge into the future is how best to facilitate and incorporate the voices and views of young people into implementation in a meaningful way. Continuing this approach through implementation will be a positive challenge as we continue to implement these policies, which will remain priorities under the Healthy Ireland agenda, into the coming years.



## Case Study 2: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection – Child Poverty

### Background

In 2014, as part of the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (*Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*), the Government set an ambitious and challenging child poverty target. The target is expressed in the form of a Government commitment:

‘To adopt a multi-faceted approach to tackling child poverty through seeking to reduce rates of consistent poverty for children, improving rates of parental employment and reducing the number of jobless households; and increasing investment in services that can improve child poverty outcomes. This will be achieved through commitments made to lift 70,000 children out of poverty by 2020 and increase opportunities for parents to access employment.’

The Irish Government defines poverty and social exclusion as follows:

‘People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.’

However, poverty, particularly child poverty, is also about not having access to the supports and services which allow us all the opportunity to fulfil our potential.

One of the main reasons why this cross-sectoral priority was chosen was the large increase in the rate of child poverty during the recessionary period between 2008 and 2014. According to the Survey on Income and Living Conditions figures, the rate of child poverty in Ireland more than doubled between 2008 and 2014 from 6.2% to 12.7%. At the time the priority was identified, national plans to tackle child poverty were already outlined in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016*. The 2014 publication of *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures* provided a new impetus for these plans and offered a unique opportunity to address the issue of child poverty, which requires a strategic and multilateral approach in order to ensure the best outcomes for our children.

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020* seeks to improve the lives and life chances of children and young people under the age of 25, addressing child poverty, social exclusion and wellbeing. The five national outcomes identified aim to ensure that children are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing, can achieve their full potential in all areas of learning and development, are safe and protected from harm, have economic security and opportunity, and are connected, respected and contributing to their world. It is in the context of this framework that this cross-sectoral priority was chosen.

In order to progress this cross-sectoral priority, many stakeholders were included in the process under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structure. The process of developing a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty involved active engagement from a variety of agencies across the statutory and voluntary sectors. These included the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, Education and Skills, Health, Housing, Planning and Local Government, and

engagement from the NGO sector, the Children’s Rights Alliance, Barnardos, One Family, the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the National Youth Council of Ireland.

An ad-hoc group on child poverty was formed in late 2015 and was crucially important to the process. Solutions to the problem of child poverty do not lie with any one Government Department or Agency. Nor can effective and sustainable solutions be arrived at in one simple step. In the first instance there was a need to identify the problem in a way that every stakeholder can understand and receive. Only then could progress begin to be made toward developing and implementing solutions.

### Challenges

The process was not without difficulties. Where other departments are facing their own intractable issues, it can be difficult for them to engage fully with a process like this. While this is understandable, it can serve to undermine to some extent the idea of a whole-of-government approach.

Perhaps the most important barrier was the absence of a high-level driver which could encourage and facilitate Departments to engage fully and push the child poverty agenda forward at the highest levels of government and civil society. In terms of dealing with the first obstacle above the only means at our disposal was to offer as many opportunities as possible to engage. In terms of the second barrier, efforts are ongoing in addressing this issue.

### Engagement

On the positive side, the active cooperation of our partner Departments was hugely important. The willingness of the NGOs to engage in frank and open discussion was particularly useful in terms of helping the various parties to gain new perspectives on the issues under discussion and assisted them in the identification of priority actions. The establishment of the ad-hoc group was crucial. The co-chairing arrangement seemed to give the group a shared sense of ownership of the process and appeared to encourage the openness and willingness to engage which characterised the work of the group.

Clearly the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures played an important role in creating a space within which the priority could be identified and discussed in the first place. After that, and in the very early stages of discussion between the various stakeholders, there was something of an impasse in relation to how the priority should be progressed. The establishment of the ad-hoc group was a response to this impasse. While such a group was not specifically mandated by the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures, our success in developing the approach could not have been achieved without it.

In terms of engagement, the priority required a whole-of-government response; therefore such an approach is absolutely essential. For the most part, our engagement with the relevant Government Departments was beneficial and very effective. Engagement with and by the relevant NGOs was excellent. Part of the success of our engagement with other departments and with NGOs can be measured by the extent to which a common understanding of the nature, scope and extent of the problem of child poverty has begun to develop within and between these agencies. Implementation is referred to in one of the earlier questions here but at this early stage we can only talk about implementation in terms of putting into place a more reasoned and coherent sense of the shared

responsibility, across all Departments and the various sectors, to assist in the development of effective and sustainable responses to child poverty. The ad-hoc group on child poverty provided the mechanism through which this common understanding and shared sense of responsibility were developed.

There was an open, active and mutually beneficial engagement between the statutory and voluntary agencies which has led to a shared understanding of the nature, scope and extent of the problem of child poverty and of the possible solutions to that problem.

### **Progress made**

Progress, in terms of the process which developed through the ad-hoc group, has been significant and as a result of this engagement two papers have been produced. The first paper is the Advisory Council's policy paper on child poverty. This paper is intended to act as the Council's policy advice on the approaches which should be taken in relation to tackling child poverty.

The second paper, *A Whole of Government Approach to Tackling Child Poverty*, published in late 2017, was drafted by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), in conjunction with partner Departments. It details the whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty and emphasises the need for a combined approach to tackling child poverty in Ireland, involving both income supports and services.

In terms of developing a shared understanding of the issue, there was some very valuable work done. In regard to the ultimate goal of identifying and operationalising an effective whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty, there is some way to go. Nevertheless, the progress made on the first goal should, so long as the impetus gained is not lost and the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures can continue to be effectively utilised, allow for substantive progress to be achieved in relation to the second and ultimate goal.

In relation to key deliverables, the key output of developing a whole-of-government approach was successful. In relation to progressing the approach, many of the key deliverables are set out in the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People as government commitments and reported on using the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework. The range of commitments necessary to achieve an effective whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty covers all five *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* outcome areas. The work must now begin with a reacceptance across Government and the NGO sector that only by adopting a whole-of-government approach can we be ultimately successful. Monitoring improvements in relation to the five national outcomes should also help us to measure levels of progress and the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structure provides an ideal mechanism for this.

A focus on child poverty across Government should result in a greater understanding of the causes, effects and possible solutions to the problem of child poverty. This, in turn, can lead Government Departments to view their plans through a child poverty lens and encourage them to take into account the effect their plans and policies may ultimately have on levels of child poverty in Ireland.

### **Learning and innovative practices**

This process has been beneficial in terms of learning and innovative practices. Setting up the ad-hoc group; having a co-chairing arrangement; entering into the process with open minds, a willingness to

listen to each other and realistic expectations; allowing adequate but not open-ended time for discussion; agreeing to produce two separate and distinct papers which, along with their own specific points of view, would also reflect the value of the process. The work of the ad-hoc group was a first for some of the people involved. The downside to that was that some expectations may not have been fulfilled.

While the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has a long track record of engagement with external stakeholders, this is not the case with all Departments. For those who engaged in this process their experience may encourage them to adopt similar approaches in the future.

### **Key messages, conclusions and recommendations**

There was some very valuable work done as a result of the process. So, perhaps with a slightly clearer focus at the outset, but retaining the core principle of active and open engagement from all participants, replicating the approach might prove valuable in relation to work on some other intractable issues.

The priority will continue to be progressed through the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework. Indeed the framework provides the ideal opportunity, through the Sponsors Group and overseen by the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Consortium, to construct a solid platform to progress and build on the whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty.

There is a danger that, with the publication of the two documents, the process may now be seen as complete. However, the document produced by the Government Departments is, for the most part, an illustration of an approach. There is a clear need to do more and to drive action in the key areas that will make a real and sustainable difference in the lives of children.

Departments need to begin to see the work they are doing through a child poverty lens. In order to effectively address child poverty over the long term they need to acknowledge the important role they all have to play in ensuring that a multi-dimensional, integrated approach is adopted; one where access to adequate resources is underpinned by a clear focus on access to quality, affordable services.

Consideration should be given to creating mechanisms within the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structure which have the power to resolve or overcome problems as they arise. Where problems are identified, in relation to a lack of engagement for example, there needs to be a direct and open channel to the Consortium so that it can intervene to move the process on.

### **Case Study 3: Department of Children and Youth Affairs – Prevention and Early Intervention**

#### **Introduction**

Prevention involves developing strengths, supports and strategies to prevent a problem from arising. Early Intervention involves anticipating and addressing problems as they arise or escalate. Evidence shows that disadvantage suffered at an early stage tends to multiply as children become older, and that effective prevention and early intervention can halt and reverse poor outcomes amongst children. If prevention and early intervention is based on best available evidence, using the best approaches and delivered by the best-placed people, this has significant benefits for children, young people and their families, and is also an effective and efficient use of resources.

In the past ten years there have been considerable policy, practice and organisational developments in the range of sectors and settings working with and for children and young people. A common theme in these developments is an increasing focus on early intervention and prevention approaches informed by best available evidence to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* identifies prevention and early intervention as a key transformational goal for children's services. The specific emphasis on this theme builds on the considerable research evidence, expertise and experience in a range of areas working with children and young people such as Parenting, Child Development and Learning and Youth Development. Investment in an effective prevention and early intervention approach is critical to achieve this transformational goal in the area of prevention and early intervention. Harnessing the significant learning in this area and adopting a more strategic approach has the best potential to support a trajectory to more positive outcomes for children.

Informed by this commitment, the Policy Innovation Unit within the Department of Children has developed the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI), which aims to ensure that what works effectively in prevention and early intervention to support the wellbeing of children, young people and their families is harnessed and applied across the relevant services and supports. The QCBI will play a critical role in progressing prevention and early intervention as a transformational goal and cross-sectoral priority under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

### **Progressing the cross-sectoral priority – Developing the QCBI**

The Quality and Capacity Building Initiative aims to take a coordinated approach to enhance capacity, knowledge and quality in prevention and early intervention policy, service and practice. Four key components have been identified to embed and enhance prevention and early intervention. These key components, which make up the four work streams under the initiative, aim to:

- align data;
- harness evidence;
- enhance implementation through coaching and development;
- and embed prevention and early intervention approaches through a quality framework.

DCYA consulted with key informants and experts in the design and planned delivery of the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative, reaching over 80 stakeholders. DCYA also held an EU Peer Review and an Open Policy Debate. In addition, a targeted landscape analysis was commissioned to identify relevant initiatives that QCBI should consider when developing its outputs.

As part of the consultation, QCBI engaged with relevant national programmes with strong prevention and early intervention elements, such as the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme by Tusla, the Nurture programme by HSE and the DEIS initiative by the Department of Education and Skills to identify synergies and opportunities for collaborations. Leading experts in the fields of prevention and early intervention have also provided advice and further input into the development of deliverables under QCBI.

The governance structures of QCBI ensure connectivity with related key initiatives in place across Government and have direct linkages to the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structure such as the Consortium and the Advisory Council. The QCBI Implementation Group has been established to

guide and support the development of QCBI. This governance structure includes departmental and sectoral representatives, practitioners, academics, researchers and the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Advisory Council. Work is also progressing to secure the services of a managing agent with significant reach into the children and young people services sectors to support the Department in the coordination and delivery of the initiative.

In Q1 2018, it is expected that the QCBI website will be operational and will function as a knowledge exchange platform supporting improved access to data and information relating to children, young people and their families. It will harness the learning from prevention and early intervention initiatives, and research and actively support the use of this learning as a source and resource to planning, delivery and evaluation. Policy makers, practitioners, commissioners and service providers will be able to access information regarding prevention and early intervention approaches and the use of data and evidence to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families in Ireland. It will also support capacity development in the appraisal and application of data- and evidence-informed approaches to prevention and early intervention by raising awareness of collaborative programmes of coaching, training and development opportunities that connect practitioners. The QCBI will further enhance capacity development by directly working with partners to develop targeted and universal professional learning opportunities to meet this aim.

Significant progress has been made in the Outcomes for Children Project, in partnership with Tusla, under the QCBI. The Outcomes for Children National Data and Information Hub project aims to incrementally build a centralised data hub that will host a wide range of published data from various agencies and provide information for policy makers, service providers, Tusla management and local communities in the planning and delivery of services to support prevention and early intervention. This project involves the building of an open access, interactive area-based geo-mapping system to provide information so that planning and delivery of services are informed by the best available data.

The project involves training and support for Tusla and relevant CYPSC personnel during all phases of the project including the operation of a geo-mapping system, data interpretation, trend analysis and specific training in Results Based Accountability (RBA). This project therefore offers a sustainable opportunity to provide a national standardised technical solution for mapping outcomes, indicators and services for children and young people. The launch of the platform will take place in mid-2018.

Developments also include support for innovation through a targeted funding measure currently in design which will support local interventions that have a strong prevention and early intervention focus in respect of children, young people and their families, and will also promote partnership among statutory and non-statutory organisations that utilise and produce data and evidence with promising results and assist them in improving their processes.

### **Outcomes and impact for children and young people**

As the QCBI is in its initial stages, it is too early to determine its impact on children and young people's outcomes. The QCBI has begun to embed prevention and early intervention as a key concept and approach in our responses. It will for the first time bring together the key learning in prevention and early intervention from different initiatives, practice fields and organisations which support the needs of children, young people and their families and translate it into a strategic and practical approach. It will improve access, understanding, quality and use of data and evidence in



service design and provision for children, young people and their families. With its clear links to the five national outcomes in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, this initiative will strengthen connections across systems engaging with children, young people and their families, supporting outcomes.

### Learning from the QCBI

The cross-sectoral approach being taken by the QCBI supports the implementation of a range of commitments relating to data development, evidence-informed approaches, standards and workforce development as detailed in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. Given the potential scale of the initiative, the incremental approach to its implementation recognises the complexity of systems change while cultivating innovation. Throughout the development process there has been recognition by the Department that effective change management requires extensive involvement and ownership by the primary stakeholders and DCYA is committed to achieving in this.

## 2.4 Implementing Constituent Strategies

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* comprises three constituent strategies in the areas of participation, youth and early years. The National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020 was published in 2015. The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015 – 2020 was also published in 2015 and the National Early Years Strategy is due to be published in 2018. Outlined below is a summary of progress made to date on the three Strategies. It is envisaged that the forthcoming LGBTI+ Strategy will also come under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structure.

### National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020

The second progress report of the Strategy was published in November 2017. The progress of commitments in the Second Annual Report shows a positive picture of how the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020 continues to be implemented. All Government Departments and Agencies are actively progressing 77 of the 94 agreed actions for 2017. Government Departments and Agencies have made a strong start with 82% of the agreed actions reaching completion or in progress. The actions not yet commenced will be included in the 2018 Action Plan to be circulated in Q2 of 2018. The 2018 Action Plan will contain both the actions not yet commenced for 2017, as well as a series of new actions to be reported on in 2018.

The priority action in the Strategy for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs was the establishment of a Children and Young People's Participation Hub, as a national centre for excellence. The Hub will support Government Departments and other organisations in implementing the Strategy through training, documenting best practice and developing education on children's rights for professionals. The Hub was established in 2017, and after consultation with young people it was named 'Hub na nÓg: Young Voices in Decision-Making'. This resource is now available to support all Government Departments, State Agencies and other relevant bodies in implementing the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020.

This is building on the positive work which was reflected in the first year of the National Strategy, with the DCYA consulting with children and young people, in partnership with Government Departments and Agencies, on various topics including:



- Human Rights in Ireland (DJE)
- After School Care (DCYA)
- The National Obesity Strategy (DH)
- The Direct Provision system (DJE)
- Cybercrime (Law Reform Commission)
- Ireland 2016 State Commemorative Programme (DCHG)

### National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020

#### Implementation of the NYS: establishment of the National Youth Strategy Lead Team

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs provides leadership at national level in implementing the National Youth Strategy and in ensuring that national policy is connected to local implementation. The implementation structures established by DCYA for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* are being used to assist and support the implementation of the National Youth Strategy.

A National Youth Strategy Lead Team has been established in the Department to coordinate, progress and monitor implementation of the Strategy. Two sub-groups of the National Youth Strategy Lead Team were also established: one to engage with the Advisory Council and another to oversee the implementation of the Value for Money Policy Review of Youth Programmes.

#### Ensuring that national policy is connected to local implementation.

All youth services funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs employ the National Youth Strategy Outcomes and Actions to plan and structure their Strategy for delivering youth programmes. All youth services and national youth organisations funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, when applying for funding, must present their core outcomes to be achieved with reference to the five outcomes of the National Youth Strategy. This approach is also reflected in the Annual Progress Reports and the National Quality Standards Framework Annual Progress Reports for the youth services and the national youth organisations. The Department is confident that the National Youth Strategy is now embedded in the way youth services and national youth organisations operate.

#### Cross-departmental engagement

Cross-departmental engagement is ongoing. Departments with responsibilities under the National Youth Strategy report the status of actions via the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* reporting structures. The National Youth Strategy Lead Team monitors this information and is satisfied with the progress being made.

### National Early Years Strategy

The National Early Years Strategy is currently being progressed by the Early Years Policy Unit in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The Strategy will focus on the period of early childhood, from the antenatal phase to age five, and will cover all aspects of children's lives, with particular focus on child health and wellbeing, early learning and development and supports to parents and families.

A draft of the Strategy was developed in the first half of 2017. Efforts to progress the remaining work have intensified recently and a process of redrafting is now underway alongside further engagement with key stakeholders. While the Strategy has been delayed due to staff changes and resource constraints, there have been other significant developments for young children, including a number

recommended by the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, which have been progressed in recent years<sup>2</sup>.

Drafting of the Strategy is being directly informed by expert advice and consultation inputs. Bilateral discussions with interdepartmental colleagues and review of current data and policy developments will continue with a revised full draft anticipated in Q2 2018. This draft will be consulted upon with partners across Government and more widely through an Open Policy Debate in June. It is hoped to finalise the Strategy for publication later in 2018, subject to negotiation and agreement across Government on commitments, actions and timeframes. DCYA will outline a plan for implementation which will involve close monitoring of progress on all actions within agreed timeframes.

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<sup>2</sup> Including an 87% increase in investment in funding for childcare over three budgets, the establishment of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, the extension of the universal free pre-school year, the introduction of the Access and Inclusion Model, publication of Early Years regulations and inspections, early years education-focused inspections and the introduction of paid paternity leave for fathers.

## 3. Findings from Survey & Focus Groups

### 3.1 Review of Stakeholders' Experiences Survey

The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Mid-Term Review Survey provided the Implementation Team in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) with a better understanding of how the Policy Framework is perceived within the implementation infrastructure, in the Department and in the wider domain. The survey was developed by the Implementation Team in DCYA following consultations with the Research and Evaluation Unit in the Department. It was available online via a link emailed to members of the implementation infrastructure. It was also available on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' website for completion by members of the public. The survey was forwarded for completion to members of the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, Sponsors Group, Advisory Council, Children and Young People's Services Committees National Steering Group, Children and Young People's Services Committees Local Coordinators, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, statutory sector, community and voluntary sector and the public. The survey was open for completion for a period of six weeks from mid-October 2017 until end November 2017.

It was important for the Implementation Team to gather perspectives from members who are involved in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework and those who are not so involved. The survey yielded 167 responses. Feedback was far-reaching, with many respondents seemingly very engaged with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and other respondents seemingly unaware or only vaguely aware of the policy until receiving the survey. This was not unexpected as some of those that responded to the survey would only have minor or no involvement at all with the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

Based on the experiences of those involved in the Policy Framework and others, the survey was seeking views on the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* – what's working and what's not working so well – in the following areas:

1. The visibility and awareness of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* amongst for example, Government officials, stakeholder groups, the community and voluntary sector, children and young people and the public.
2. The strengths and weaknesses of the overall implementation structures.
3. The strengths and weaknesses of implementation processes, including delivery and achievement of actions and impacts to date.
4. The quality, frequency and effectiveness of engagement between Government Departments, Agencies, and other stakeholders.
5. The identification of changes and learning on foot of the implementation of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework.
6. The identification of priorities, learning and improvements that can inform the course of action for Phase 2 of the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* from 2018 – 2020.

The survey's aim was to capture the reflections of respondents on the process and progress of implementation: relating to particular implementation processes or structures, and in terms of

actions achieved or not achieved. In addition, the survey aimed to capture learning and possible improvements for the next phase of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation.

The responses were confidential. Survey results were aggregated and presented as part of this review.

### Summary of responses

There were a range of options that respondents could choose from when selecting the sector that they were responding from. There would have been some overlap as members of the Sponsors Group are also members of the Consortium while some members of the Consortium responded as members of the statutory sector. As the responses were anonymised this made it difficult to disaggregate the data.

Q.2.	From your experience, how would you rate the visibility and awareness of the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> Policy Framework and its implementation process?	
a.	Very high	5%
b.	High	29%
c.	Neither high nor low	39%
d.	Low	17%
e.	Very low	10%

Q.3.	I have an understanding of my organisation's role in the implementation of the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> Policy Framework	
a.	Strongly agree	26%
b.	Agree	44%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	20%
d.	Disagree	5%
e.	Strongly disagree	6%

Q.4.	In general, what is your level of interaction with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and its wider structures in relation to the implementation of the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> Policy Framework?	
a.	I interact with the Department and its wider structures weekly	28%
b.	I interact with the Department and its wider structures monthly	23%
c.	I interact with the Department and its wider structures yearly	10%
d.	I interact with the Department and its wider structures only when I receive communications from them	26%
e.	I never interact with the Department and its wider structures	13%

Q.5.	Reflecting on your overall experiences of, or involvement in, the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> framework, how has it contributed to changes in the way you work?	
a.	My work has changed a lot, for the better	19%
b.	My work has changed a little, for the better	35%
c.	My work has not changed at all	45%

d.	My work has changed a little, for the worse	1%
e.	My work has changed a lot, for the worse	1%

<b>Q.6.</b>	<b>Please indicate your level of agreement with each one of the following statements in respect of the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> framework:</b>	
<b>i.</b>	<b>The implementation structures are working well</b>	
a.	Strongly agree	3%
b.	Agree	31%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	56%
d.	Disagree	8%
e.	Strongly disagree	2%
<b>ii.</b>	<b>The implementation processes are working well</b>	
a.	Strongly agree	2%
b.	Agree	32%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	55%
d.	Disagree	8%
e.	Strongly disagree	2%
<b>iii.</b>	<b>The right people have responsibility for implementation</b>	
a.	Strongly agree	3%
b.	Agree	31%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	55%
d.	Disagree	8%
e.	Strongly disagree	2%
<b>iv.</b>	<b>There is public support for implementation</b>	
a.	Strongly agree	6%
b.	Agree	23%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	51%
d.	Disagree	18%
e.	Strongly disagree	2%
<b>v.</b>	<b>There is high-level leadership for implementation</b>	
a.	Strongly agree	4%
b.	Agree	34%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	44%
d.	Disagree	13%
e.	Strongly disagree	5%
<b>vi.</b>	<b>Interagency service delivery/practices for children and young people are working better as a result of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i></b>	
a.	Strongly agree	5%
b.	Agree	38%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	41%
d.	Disagree	11%
e.	Strongly disagree	5%
<b>vii.</b>	<b>There has been strong progress in addressing issues especially facing children and young people</b>	
a.	Strongly agree	8%
b.	Agree	29%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	41%
d.	Disagree	17%
e.	Strongly disagree	5%

viii.	It has helped to progress or meet international/European commitments	
a.	Strongly agree	4%
b.	Agree	28%
c.	Neither agree nor disagree	53%
d.	Disagree	12%
e.	Strongly disagree	4%

Q.7.	What has <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> achieved for children and young people? [Please tick all that apply]	
a.	It has driven implementation of actions for the delivery of key policy priorities	34%
b.	It has created a change in thinking in terms of service delivery	36%
c.	It has contributed to a public recognition of the need to holistically address issues facing children and young people	32%
d.	It has encouraged a Whole of Government approach in tackling issues facing children and young people	44%
e.	I am not sure what <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> has achieved	34%
f.	<i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> has not achieved anything	3%
g.	Other	8%

Q.8.	In your opinion, what impact has the implementation of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> framework had on each of the following areas?	
i.	Establishing a whole-of-government approach to issues facing children and young people	
a.	Significant impact	13%
b.	Some impact	60%
c.	No impact	13%
d.	Negative impact	1%
e.	Don't know	14%
ii.	Getting buy-in and recognition from the public of the importance of a child-/young people-centred focus	
a.	Significant impact	7%
b.	Some impact	41%
c.	No impact	31%
d.	Negative impact	0%
e.	Don't know	22%
iii.	Securing Government commitment to addressing key policy priorities	
a.	Significant impact	13%
b.	Some impact	52%
c.	No impact	20%
d.	Negative impact	1%
e.	Don't know	17%
iv.	Engaging Stakeholders to support the delivery of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> transformational goals	
a.	Significant impact	15%
b.	Some impact	50%
c.	No impact	17%
d.	Negative impact	1%
e.	Don't know	17%

<b>v.</b>	<b>Engaging Stakeholders to support the delivery of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> outcomes</b>	
a.	Significant impact	13%
b.	Some impact	46%
c.	No impact	22%
d.	Negative impact	0%
e.	Don't know	19%
<b>vi.</b>	<b>Driving an evidence-informed approach to the delivery of interventions for children and young people</b>	
a.	Significant impact	13%
b.	Some impact	49%
c.	No impact	23%
d.	Negative impact	1%
e.	Don't know	14%
<b>vii.</b>	<b>Driving changes in service delivery for children and young people</b>	
a.	Significant impact	7%
b.	Some impact	54%
c.	No impact	20%
d.	Negative impact	21%
e.	Don't know	17%
<b>vii.</b>	<b>Driving changes in practices in the sector in which I work</b>	
a.	Significant impact	13%
b.	Some impact	45%
c.	No impact	22%
d.	Negative impact	5%
e.	Don't know	15%
<b>vii.</b>	<b>Providing clarity for what I need to do in my own work in respect of issues facing children and young people</b>	
a.	Significant impact	16%
b.	Some impact	41%
c.	No impact	28%
d.	Negative impact	2%
e.	Don't know	13%

<b>Q.9.</b>	<b>Overall, how have the lessons learned from supporting the implementation of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> informed your work?</b>	
a.	It has provided significant learning to inform my work	17%
b.	It has provided some learning to inform my work	47%
c.	It has provided no learning to inform my work	30%
d.	It has provided learning of what not to do	1%
e.	Other (please specify)	5%

<b>Q.10.</b>	<b>Please describe examples of where lessons learned from implementing the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> framework have led to new ways of working, new approaches or actions which improve outcomes for children and young people if any (if none, please write 'no changes')</b>	
1.	Interagency working has improved significantly and there is a greater focus on evidence-based programmes	
2.	Increased cross-government working	
3.	Consultation with young people in decision-making process	



<b>Q.11.</b>	<b>In your opinion, what are the top three priorities within <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> that should be progressed between now and 2020, in the next phase of the implementation of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i>?</b>
1.	Child poverty/homelessness
2.	Youth mental health
3.	Early years sector/prevention and early intervention

<b>Q.12.</b>	<b>Reflecting on your experiences to date, what is the single most successful aspect of the implementation of the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> framework?</b>
1.	Whole-of-government approach on issues facing children and young people
2.	Interagency working and service delivery
3.	Providing a platform for prevention and early intervention

<b>Q.13.</b>	<b>Reflecting on your experiences to date, what is the single least successful aspect of the implementation of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> Policy Framework?</b>
1.	Difficulty in engaging with some Departments
2.	Delay in the National Early Years Strategy
3.	Better awareness and visibility of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> within Government Departments and Agencies

### 3.2 Advisory Council Focus Group

The Advisory Council provides a forum for the community and voluntary sector and independent experts to engage with the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and its constituent elements to actively inform and support the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. Members of the Advisory Council have met to reflect on and consider the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to date, as a contribution to the current mid-term review. The Advisory Council members welcomed the Review and engaged with it effectively, both individually and collectively. This is a summary of the Advisory Council's paper and the summary is covered under specific headings. The full paper can be found on the [Department of Children and Youth Affairs' website](#).

#### Awareness and visibility

At its outset, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was lauded as seminal and ground-breaking but – despite the high-level launch by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, and Minister for Children and Youth Affairs – it is not seen as important, as evidenced by the fact that it is not generally well enough known and there has been a lack of commitment in its implementation. It does not seem to feature as a priority within the overall government system. By contrast, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is perceived as important by the non-statutory sector.

The Council noted that the Departments of the Taoiseach and Tánaiste are not represented in the Sponsors Group and that it is left to the smallest Department to coordinate the whole government system. It was considered that there is a need to get the attention of the Taoiseach to breathe new life into the framework.

There are problems with the name '*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*', since it is difficult to communicate, and these are exacerbated by the almost universal (within the sector) use of the BOBF

acronym – which is meaningless to other audiences. In contrast, strategies such as ‘Vision for Change’ and ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ are better known and comprehended.

There is scope to reconsider and strengthen the role of the Consortium and of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. There is still a need to be more strategic and specific, for example, to identify five things that will produce 80% of what will improve children’s lives. It would be helpful to get communications advice; while it may be too late to rebrand *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, this should be considered in the context of the next strategy for children and young people. It would be better if it were titled e.g. ‘The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People’ or ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures for Children and Young People’.

The diagrams in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* are very static; for example, there is no connection depicted between the outcomes.

### **Successes in implementation**

The Consortium is very valuable and important but there is a need for more consistent membership and attendance for it to be more effective. The Sponsors Group meets and has robust discussions; for example, it was the first time various Government Departments have come together on child poverty. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* provided a mechanism for the community and voluntary sector to engage with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and there is a developing engagement with the Department of Education and Skills.

### **Weaknesses in implementation**

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was intended as a high-level, strategic policy framework. Instead it contains too many commitments, not all of which carry the same weight in terms of their impact on children and young people’s lives, and there is a need for sharper focus and prioritisation.

### **Implementation structures**

As arts and culture are not represented at the Consortium, there should be representation from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaelteacht. The Department of Justice and Equality should be a member of the Sponsors Group. There is good ongoing communication between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Advisory Council; the Department is always communicating with the other elements of the structures.

### **Engagement**

There was extensive engagement on the child poverty issue. This suggests that it is easier to get this engagement when there is a specific issue in focus, together with a reciprocal interest in collaborating.

### **Outcomes to date**

The specific focus on child poverty has produced several beneficial outcomes. Improvements in the Direct Provision child payment were also consistent with the Council’s recommendation in this regard. The Council was also influential in including a focus on the impact of Brexit on children and young people in the Government’s agenda and in shaping the national debate.

While the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* process has delivered to a degree, it has not delivered so much in terms of specific commitments and their direct impact on the lives of children and young people.

## Future Priorities and Phase 2

The Council agreed to continue to progress the issues of Learning and Development, Child Poverty, Child Homelessness and Rights and Equality. Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Prevention and Early Intervention are issues that are cross-cutting and feed into the Council's priorities for 2018.

There should be a renewed action plan which focuses on top priorities going forward while continuing to hold Government Departments and statutory agencies accountable for their commitments. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* has raised the visibility of issues facing children and young people such as mental health, child poverty and rights and equality. There needs to be a renewed focus by Government in 2018 on the lives of children and young people. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was established to have a lasting impact on the lives of children and the focus needs to turn to long term policies and strategies that will have a lasting impact.

The implementation infrastructure – Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, Sponsors, the Advisory Council, the Implementation Team in Department of Children and Youth Affairs, EU Structured Dialogue and Comhairle na nÓg – has helped to bring about a change of working for Government Departments, statutory agencies and the non-statutory sector.

The Advisory Council is committed to progressing actions in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and to improving the lives of children and young people in Ireland. The Council will continue to promote *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and to build on relationships with a mutual goal established between Government Departments and stakeholders. A new Chair will be in place by early 2018 appointed by the Minister, which will help to re-focus the Council.

The Advisory Council will advise the Minister on matters such as Brexit and be available to other Government Departments to advise and provide information on matters that affect children and young people. The Council will establish themselves in the public on matters such as child homelessness and child poverty.

## Conclusions

The Advisory Council remains supportive of both the intent, and content, of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and identifies significant positives both in its implementation to date and in the role that the Council has played. Where the Council is critical of the implementation it is where it has fallen short of targets and expectations, and/or where it is perceived that the necessary commitment has been lacking. There are key messages emanating from the Council's focus on the mid-term review. These are:

- There is a need to communicate *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* more effectively and encourage and promote its implementation and also a need for better awareness of the framework and its impact.
- There has been positive collaboration, but shortcomings remain. There is a need to address barriers to implementation such as lack of engagement from some Government Departments. There is scope to reconsider and strengthen the role of the Consortium and of DCYA. Government leadership is important.
- While the implementation structures are useful and beneficial, attendance from some stakeholders at Consortium meeting has been weak and this needs to be addressed. There is a need to hold stakeholders to account on their commitments.

- There have been improvements in specific policy areas such as child poverty for instance, but the Council have concluded that the promise that attended the launch of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* has not been realised despite some successes.
- There is a need to be more strategic and specific, for example, to identify the five things that will produce 80% of what will improve children's lives. For most children and young people there is some evidence of things getting better but there is a need to guard against complacency. Going forward there is a need to focus on child homelessness, education and systemic inequalities, challenges that parents face in getting necessary support for their children, and a need to deal with the effects of the financial crisis and reverse the damaging cuts.
- Phase 2 of implementation should focus on prioritising some actions such as child poverty and homelessness and establishing better engagement from Government Departments to advance these.

### 3.3 Young Voices Focus Group

#### Awareness and visibility

The Implementation Team in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs held a focus group with young people from the EU Structured Dialogue (Young Voices). The young people had all been previously aware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* through Comhairle na nÓg, Young Voices or through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' consultations with children and young people.

Those involved in the Youth Check project (Government Policy assessment tool for young people) in Young Voices are more aware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* than others. When initially developing their ideas for Youth Check, the young people looked at the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation which was established under the structures of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

The young people on the focus group had some awareness of other strategies, such as Healthy Ireland, the National Youth Strategy and the forthcoming LGBTI+ Strategy.

The young people discussed how *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* could be made more visible across social media and media outlets to ensure that young people are made aware of the Policy Framework.

#### The voice of the child

While there are opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard, particularly through DCYA, it is not always evident if/how this is used by Departments in informing policy or legislation.

It was noted that some children and young people may be discouraged from participating, as it can often be difficult to see where their voice fits into the end result. It was noted that it is difficult to communicate the value of participation.

#### Engagement

It was stated that most engagement with children and young people is carried out by DCYA. Engagement with children and young people does not appear to be a concern for many of the other

Departments. However, the Department of Health engaged with young people during the consultation phase of Healthy Ireland.

Of this engagement, most appears to be with a specific cohort, such as Comhairle na nÓg or Young Voices. As for vulnerable groups of seldom heard children and young people, it was viewed that many of these children and young people would be unlikely to engage with traditional participation structures.

It was highlighted that engagement with a wider range of children and young people, including many groups of seldom heard children and young people has been carried out by NGOs, especially harder to reach groups. It was suggested that DCYA could make better use of the findings from these than holding new consultations.

Generally, there is not a wide recognition of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. It is also difficult to explain *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to people who are not already aware of it.

Should there be any attempts at promoting *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, a focus on outcomes/aims would be useful. Highlighting the voice of children and young people within the framework would also be important. Discussion of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in schools, during Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) for example, would help engage young people.

### **Determine content and course of action for Phase 2 of implementation 2018 – 2020**

The young people discussed issues that they believe should be a priority going forward. The housing crisis and homelessness were noted as critical issues that need to be progressed in 2018. The young people noted the cost and availability of student accommodation as an emerging issue due to the housing crisis, particularly in Dublin. City/town planning and infrastructure was discussed in relation to developing sustainable goals and thinking towards the future. The promotion of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* on social media to bring about more awareness and visibility with the younger generation was discussed by the young people. Mental health was noted as an issue facing many children and young people in Ireland.

## **3.4 Swan Youth Service – Survey Response**

### **Awareness and visibility**

The Implementation Team circulated the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* mid-term review survey to a Youth Organisation in the North East Inner City. In total there were 47 responses from children and young people from the ages of 10 – 24 years and the children and young people were asked six key questions. Members of the Youth Organisation completed the surveys individually or in groups and some young people in the community completed the survey. Respondents were given a brief overview of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework and the five national outcomes prior to completing the survey. Having analysed and disaggregated the data, there are some overarching comments that span the age range. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 3.

In addition to the survey, the young people in Swan Youth Service produced a video relating to the questions posed in the survey under the five national outcomes in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. These young people were invited to the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Consortium meeting on 15 February 2018 where they presented their video and also informed the Consortium of their views and opinions on issues relating to the voice of the child in Government

and policies relating to children and young people. They also informed the Consortium about the issues they are facing in the North East Inner City, and the North East Inner City Task Force on the Mulvey Report was also discussed. The video and follow-up discussions were well received by members of the Consortium. Discussions that followed included the following topics: safe and protected from harm, education, homelessness, child poverty and mental health. Members of the Consortium commended the young people from Swan for engaging in the discussion and for their honesty and openness in issues that are facing them as young people growing up in the North East Inner City. This process was very beneficial and informative for the mid-term review process in terms of engaging with children and young people and listening to the challenges and opportunities they are dealing with in their local areas.

### **The voice of the child**

The majority of children and young people were unaware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and most felt that they did not have a voice on issues that directly affect them. However, many observed that they had a voice within youth organisations that may feed into Government Departments' policies and frameworks for children and young people. Some young people noted that they do not have a voice because they are unable to vote on issues that directly affect them. This concern was also raised by the Young Voices group who strongly advocated for the voting age to be reduced to 16 years.

### **Engagement**

When the children and young people partaking in the survey were asked how the structure of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* could engage more with them, many respondents recommended face-to-face interactions with children and young people. Respondents discussed the need for Government Departments and policies relating to children and young people to be more youth friendly. The use of social media and videos with children and young people discussing the topic would be a useful way of promoting new reports, policies or frameworks. Promoting *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in schools and youth clubs would promote the awareness and visibility of the Policy Framework with children and young people, the community and voluntary sector and the education sector. It seemed that the majority of respondents would like Ministers and representatives from Government Departments to meet with children and young people in their natural and informal setting, such as in youth centres or schools, rather than in Government Departments.

### **Phase 2 implementation and future priorities**

The final question referred to the top priorities until 2020. While many participants of the survey had been previously unaware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, they were specific in their response to this question. 'Outcome 3: Safe and Protected from Harm' was the overarching priority that children and young people referenced. When analysing this data, many factors need to be taken into account such as age range, whether they completed the survey in a group setting or individually and the area in which the survey was undertaken. It was overwhelmingly clear that children and young people living in the North East Inner City do not feel safe in their community. Respondents as young as ten years and up to the age of 24 years noted that crime, drugs, violence, harassment and alcohol abuse have left children and young people feeling unprotected and unsafe in their community. This is an issue that is receiving dedicated attention from the North East Inner City Task Force on the Mulvey Report



‘Outcome 2: Achieving in all areas of learning and development’ was noted as the second priority that needs to be addressed between now and 2020. Education was selected as a top priority for Government by the children and young people. A lack of supports in schools, a lack of promotion of opportunities post-school and overall ‘bad experiences of education’ were noted. Similarly, ‘Outcome 4: Economic Security and Opportunity’ came up frequently. Respondents feel that there are a lack of opportunities and support upon finishing in the education system and they do not feel economically secure. The children and young people explained that they are not made sufficiently aware of training courses and opportunities to go to college through the education system.

‘Outcome 1: Active and healthy’ and ‘Outcome 5: Connected, respected and contributing’ were listed by some respondents. Mental health came up several times in the context of support for children and young people and young migrants suffering with mental health issues. Some respondents noted body image and body confidence should be a priority, perhaps to be rolled out in schools or youth organisations. ‘Connected, respected and contributing’ was acknowledged as being present in the context of community development. Other issues identified were the voice of children and young people, the need for services and supports for children and young people with a disability and to emphasise the need for services for those from a migrant background.

It is clear from this exercise that *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* needs to be more visible and accessible to children and young people. This could be done by promoting the framework online or on social media or videos relating to the five national outcomes and the key priorities. The majority of respondents noted that they did not have a voice which is heard by Government Departments, but they felt satisfied that they have a voice in their youth organisation which the children and young people hope can be conveyed back to Government Departments. The final question asking respondents to comment on the top three priorities to be focused on until 2020 proved to be the most interesting when analysing the data and feedback. ‘Safe and protected from harm’ was the overarching priority that was noted by children and young people. Feeling safe and protected in their community, schools, home environment and youth organisation was the respondents’ top priority. Education and economic security were also viewed as needing a clearer focus through *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation infrastructure.

### 3.5 Submissions from the C&V sector

**The visibility and awareness of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* amongst for example, Government officials, stakeholder groups, the community and voluntary sector, children and young people and the public.**

It is clear that *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* has had a positive influence in several Government Departments and many officials are familiar with the goals and outcomes. In some bilateral meetings as part of the Community and Voluntary Pillar, officials regularly reference *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. However, not all Government Departments engage with the framework in the same way and are not aware of their commitments under it.

Overall, people are aware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* but often in their own work area. Many members operating outside normal public affairs work are not familiar with the content, application or different implementation structures or how it applies to their everyday work on the ground. The document is not as accessible as it could be.



Children and young people and the general public appear to be less aware of the framework. It might be worth considering a targeted focus in some education outputs i.e. new Politics Curriculum and CSPE.

A problem in communicating *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is the long title and name. It's easier for people to understand a strategy rather than a policy framework. A communications consultant could help resolve the difficulties in communicating it to key audiences.

### **The strengths and weaknesses of the overall implementation structures**

It is really positive that there is such a high-level structure in place where senior officials from different Government Departments engage on key issues related to children. The cross-sectoral work is essential as it ensures that Departments and bodies are working together in a holistic way rather than at cross-purposes or duplicating work. It also ensures a child-centred focus. The cross-cutting structures are almost unique in Government.

The Advisory Council has been an important vehicle to ensure that the Government, in particular the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, is updated with ongoing developments from leaders in civil society with expertise in children's rights. Particular areas of output and influence include: child poverty, Brexit, the voice of the child, National Early Years Strategy, youth policy, education, right to vote for young people and homelessness.

The implementation structures are complex and there are different layers to them. It might be worth considering ways to use these structures in a more dynamic way. The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium for example could be a power vehicle for change, particularly in its second period of existence. The Sponsors Group has delivered well.

The Council has engaged with the EU Structured Dialogue (Young Voices) well. It was the first time that the EU Structured Dialogue engaged formally with the Council.

### **The strengths and weaknesses of implementation processes, including delivery and achievement of actions and impacts to date**

The implementation processes have worked well in certain areas. For example, the establishment of the sub-group on child poverty co-convened by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Children's Rights Alliance was an extremely productive activity. The production of the whole-of-government paper on how to achieve the child poverty target, alongside the solutions paper provided by the NGOs and adopted by the Advisory Council, demonstrated the existing synergies and alignments in achieving a common goal. The roundtable on child poverty which emerged from this work brought key influencers and stakeholders together to examine the issue in more detail. This has brought a greater focus to this issue particularly from a child's rights perspective.

A key challenge emerging is the establishment of other initiatives that have a child/youth focus but are not directly linked to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* i.e. Mental Health Taskforce, Early Years Forum. To some degree these initiatives emerge when there is a changing of the guard. Going forward it might be useful to identify ways to ensure that initiatives like this are tied to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

### **The frequency, quality and effectiveness of engagement between Government Departments, Agencies, and other stakeholders**

The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* ezines and Annual Reports are useful but could be more informative on how the activities relate directly to the commitments outlined in the National Policy Framework.

### **The identification of changes and learning on foot of the implementation of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework**

Planning, strategising and focusing are the key to implementation. The document has too many commitments as it stands. Maintaining a key focus on specific targets has helped with implementation, i.e. child poverty, etc.

Learning from the current structures and the mid-term review should inform other upcoming strategies including the LGBTI+ Strategy and the Early Years Strategy.

### **The identification of priorities, learning and improvements that can inform the course of action for Phase 2 of the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* from 2018-2020**

In terms of priorities, the work on achieving the child poverty target has been productive but is ongoing. The work on this should continue in order to reduce the level of child poverty in Ireland in line with the target set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

The Early Years Strategy is another priority and it is essential to ensure that a tailored strategy, underpinned by children's rights, is developed for children in early childhood. The development of a strategy will support key policy developments in relation to young children while at the same time ensuring that developments are strategic and that outcomes are mapped and outlined with clear timeframes and activities on how to achieve the key aims.

The framework should be capable of adapting to issues arising that were not considered when *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was originally drafted. These could include developments in relation to children's rights online, particularly in light of the upcoming General Data Protection Regulation, which will come into force next year and Ireland's position to set the age of digital consent at 13. Further education is needed for children, young people, their parents and teachers in relation to children's digital rights. Also, Brexit has arisen as an unforeseen issue and the Minister and the Council has had to respond to this given the importance and scale of the potential impact on children and young people. While the Minister has been able to use the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures to do so, it is important that the mid-term review takes account of the need to be able to respond in these types of circumstances.

In order to identify future priorities, meaningful consultation should take place with stakeholders including children and young people to hear their views at this juncture on how *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is working.

A new/revised commitment around housing and commitments in the field of education and child protection need to be reconsidered in light of the huge level of change that has happened over the same period.

### 3.6 Desk Review of BOBF Profile

The Implementation Team in DCYA undertook a desk review on a random sample of Government Departments, State Bodies and NGO key documents. The findings from this are below:

#### Departmental Strategies: References to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

- Overall there seems to be a low level of coverage of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in Government strategies. Some documents refer to issues that are covered by *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* without referencing *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. In Departments whose work significantly overlaps with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* there is a low level of coverage.
- Some of the references to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* seem to be largely passing comments. There is little detailed discussion of the implications of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* for the work of these Departments.
- The absence of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* references in these documents might be explained by the fact that they were mostly published in 2015 and 2016 when awareness and understanding of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was still growing.

#### State Organisations' References to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

- It would appear that references to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in state organisations' documentation is largely confined to those organisations linked to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health.
- The lack of reference to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* by oversight and regulatory agencies may indicate a need for enhanced targeted engagement with such agencies.

#### *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Advisory Council Membership Organisations' and other Non-Governmental Organisations' References to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

- The nature of the references to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* among non-governmental organisations' documentation appears strong. However, this may be explained by many of these organisations being directly involved in the Advisory Council. Notwithstanding this, it appeared during this review that there is more awareness needed on *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* amongst direct front-line delivery staff and with community and voluntary organisations that are not connected in with the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures or the representative groupings therein.

## 4. The Use of Data to Inform Progress

### Overview

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* emphasises the need for an integrated and evidence-informed approach in order to provide the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

From the outset, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* has been committed to developing a comprehensive set of indicators to support the framework and to track progress across the aims of each of the five national outcome areas. The framework also committed to disaggregating data and indicators by important demographic characteristics to allow for improved evidence-based policy-making, implementation and monitoring, and in the delivery of services. It also committed to delivering a county-level data analysis initiative to support the Children and Young People's Services Committees.

The mid-term review seeks to take stock of progress on the delivery of these commitments and to see if any additional priorities in terms of data and research are warranted during the second phase of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation process (2018 – 2020).

### Indicator Set for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020*

The Report on the Indicator Set for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020* presents the set of indicators for children and young people developed for and aligned with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The aim of this indicator set is to track progress for children and young people aged 0 – 24 years across the five national outcomes outlined in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The set includes over 100 indicators spanning the outcomes and aims of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. In addition, the report includes summary level data on each indicator and detailed information on data sources.

While *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* indicators will not explain how or whether a particular action or commitment in the Policy Framework has caused or given rise to a particular outcome, they are important because they will:

- Help to track progress towards outcomes.
- Assist in identifying trends.
- Contribute to priority setting or resetting.
- Inform policy formulation and service provision.
- Provide for international comparisons, where possible.

The development process has involved a number of phases including bilateral consultations with experts and policy makers in Government Departments and Agencies. An indicator set for *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* is the first of a number of planned outputs by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Indicator Set. Further detailed reporting of the data on each indicator, by different subgroups in the population (where possible), will be undertaken and published in electronic format.

## Outcomes for Children Project

As part of the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI), the Department has co-invested with Tusla in the Outcomes for Children Project. The project offers a sustainable opportunity to provide a national standardised framework for mapping outcomes, indicators and services for children and young people based on the CYPSC geographical areas to underpin all multi-agency children's services planning.

The aims of the Outcomes for Children Project are to:

- Develop one nationally centralised open platform data hub which will hold and analyse data for all CYPSC areas, regionally and nationally, to ensure effective, accessible, integrated, multi-agency outcomes-based children's services planning. The data hub will utilise all relevant published and other data including:
  - Central Statistics Office (CSO)
  - Small Area Health Research Unit (SAHRU)
  - Pobal
  - Health Services Executive
  - Tusla, the Child and Family Agency
  - Department of Education and Science
  - An Garda Síochána
  - Others

This will ensure system users have access to quality information that will inform children's services planning.

- Develop effective data trend analysis and dissemination capacity at CYSPC and regional and national levels to effectively underpin integrated multi-agency children's services planning.
- Train and support both Tusla personnel and relevant CYSPC partners at national and local level in the use and application of the system to underpin and optimise local and national children's services planning.
- Using the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework, establish a set of agreed National Indicators within the system such that progress can be measured over time.
- Enhance both quantitative and qualitative data collection to support Tusla and DCYA research agendas and meet corporate objectives regarding capacity as a learning organisation.

It is envisaged that through the development of the open platform and the related extensive training and capacity building provided by Tusla that the CYPSC across the country will utilise the data gathered, including census data, to plan children's services. CYPSC, as part of their three-year planning cycle, also use socio and demographic data and census data to plan for delivery of services in their local area.

The project will involve the building of an interactive area-based geo-mapping system to provide information for policy makers, service providers, Tusla management, practitioners, information managers and local communities so that planning and delivery of services are informed by the best available data.

## Progress and plans

Good progress has been made in the delivery of these commitments with the publication of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Indicator Set in October 2017 and the trialling of the CYPSC Data Outcome for Children Project, which is expected to be rolled out nationally in 2018.

The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Indicator Set aligns the five national outcomes of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and has been developed specifically as a resource to support the ongoing implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and its constituent strategies.

During Phase 2 of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation process, the indicators will help the identification of key issues and questions for further exploration and explanation. This set can be used as a resource for all those with policy agendas relating to the lives of children and young people. Indicators can be aligned with or help inform existing strategies or strategies in development. Certain indicators can also be aligned with other indicator sets with a particular focus on particular policy areas, age groups or subgroups of the population. In addition, the indicator data can be used as a population benchmark against the same measure where it is used in targeted surveys aimed at minority or disadvantaged subgroups.

DCYA plans to undertake further detailed reporting of data on each indicator by different subgroups in the population (where possible) for publication in electronic format. This includes, for example, indicator data reported by age, gender, social class or membership of the Traveller community. This disaggregation of the data will provide more information about variations in outcomes for different groups of children and young people.

The development and dissemination of data that is accessible and has utility for structures, sectors and organisations working with and for children and young people is a key concern for the DCYA.

## 5. Emerging Issues/Recommendations and Actions

Below is a summary of the key messages received from the participants during the mid-term review journey. The messages are not exhaustive but give a flavour of the perspectives of the various stakeholders across all the sectors that have contributed. The recommendations underneath each key message will be considered by the Consortium for consideration and approval with follow-up action to be monitored via the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation infrastructure.

### 5.1 Building on Learning and Innovative Practices

#### Improvements made and achievements gained in the implementation process:

- Committing from the outset to a mid-term review in 2017 to ensure front-loading of progress and revisit and reprioritise key actions.
- Establishing one Advisory Council structure, to ensure greater coherence in unifying the policy domains of Early Years, Children and Youth and reflecting a life-cycle approach to addressing issues facing children and young people.
- Establishment of a more dynamic implementation infrastructure than originally envisaged in design phase.
- Leading the Sponsors Group and securing agreement to identify key ‘cross-sectoral priorities’ (intractable issues that require multilateral action across Government).
- Ensuring that the constituent groups in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure have the opportunity to inform the identification of annual priorities and the development of the outcome indicators, and to comment on progress via the Annual Report.
- Development of an Implementation Plan.
- Development and publication of three Annual Reports (2014 – 2017) that seek to account for quantitative and qualitative progress.
- Driving progress on commitments: action on the majority of the 163 commitments is in progress, while a range of commitments have already been realised.
- Situating and strengthening the focus on outcomes and transformational goals.
- Communications via quarterly ezine and the provision of pro-forma briefing material for all stakeholders for dissemination.
- Introducing the concept of annual cross-sectoral priorities such as Child Poverty, Prevention and Early Intervention, etc. to ensure responsiveness to emerging themes.
- Reinvigorating the Children’s Services Committees (CSC) initiative to Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC) via enhanced remit and age range, role and representation; and developing a strong local infrastructure directly connected with central government and the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure, thereby allowing multidirectional information flow and minimising implementation impediments.
- Profiling the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure as the ‘go-to and go-through’ mechanism for children and young people’s issues.



### Learning from the implementation process:

1. Importance of focusing not just on the development of structures, but also on the development of a collaborative culture based on a shared agenda.
2. Importance of ensuring that in pre-development phase all policy actions and commitments be weighted according to importance and impact.
3. Importance of ensuring that the implementation of the policy is not solely focused on commitments fixed at development phase and followed at implementation phase. Rather, the policy and the implementation process need to remain relevant and responsive to issues which may not have been foregrounded in the original policy, but which have subsequently become critical e.g. homelessness.
4. Importance of the system and of respective Departments to recognise the need to minimise policy proliferation and ensure policy maintenance, so that specific, strategic and sustainable policy actions are held and advanced, thereby reducing fragmentation and burden for policy makers, providers and practitioners alike.
5. Importance of identifying and differentiating the primary – ultimate – beneficiaries and the secondary beneficiaries of the policy.
6. Importance of recognising that the continuum of policy, provider and practitioner interests are focused on service to the citizen; thereby ensuring the development and delivery of policy which harnesses such inputs and focuses on end-user impact.
7. Importance of recognising the benefits and limitations to the application of whole-of-government approaches to policies and policy implementation.
8. Importance of acknowledging and holding to account the delivery agents of policy commitments who may be non-statutory agencies. These are key constituents in the broad and diverse system in place in social services provision in Ireland, yet they are not tasked with delivery responsibility within the framework.

## 5.2 Improving the Process and Implementation Structure

It is clear from the mid-term review process that the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation process has had a positive influence in several Government Departments and many officials are familiar with goals and outcomes. Across most of the stakeholders who engaged in the review process, there seems to be a positive reaction to the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structures. The structures have accommodated cross-collaboration and fostered and provided a platform for good interdepartmental working. The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures are seen by some as unique and they think that the implementation of other government strategies could learn from this process. Particular mention is given to the work completed to date on child poverty and the way in which the structures accommodated this work and collaboration.

The implementation structure is seen as useful and there is coherence in its design with clear linkages between the Implementation Team, Advisory Council, Sponsors Group, CYPSC National Steering Group, Consortium, Senior Officials Group and Cabinet sub-committee.

The Consortium is seen as a valuable forum, but there is a need for a more consistent membership and for attendance to be more effective. Moreover, some stakeholders are of the view that Government Departments and State Agencies must have more accountability and be responsible for the commitments assigned to them. Also, some respondents pointed out that there is a need for

Government leadership and a high-level driver, with input from the Taoiseach at Consortium level suggested.

Many respondents took the view that the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures were too complicated and there were too many commitments, and there is a need to use the structures in a more dynamic way. There is also a need to maintain a focus on specific targets. The framework should also be capable of adapting to issues arising which were not previously considered when *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was published in 2014. Also, it was felt that certain barriers to effective whole-of-government implementation have not been adequately recognised or addressed.

Feedback was received on the membership of the Sponsors Group and the Consortium. It was suggested that the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht should be asked to sit on the Consortium and that the Department of Justice and Equality should be represented on the Sponsors Group with an assigned cross-sectoral priority. It was also noted by some that children and young people can now access the Consortium to air their own issues, which is very positive, particularly in light of the development of participation structures in organisations and those led by the Participation Unit within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Respondents also commented that interagency delivery and practice for children and young people are working better as a result of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and this is most welcome, but work on this needs to be sustained if we are to complete outstanding commitments.

Emerging issues/Recommendations	Actions	Timeline
1. High-level structures should be maintained where senior officials from different Government Departments engage on key issues related to children.	DCYA will maintain and further develop the operational efficiency of the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and Sponsors Group.	Ongoing
2. Progress should be maintained on achieving commitments; however, owing to the amount, level and quality of some commitments it is critical that further strategising and prioritisation is ensured in the next phase of implementation.	DCYA will carry out a deeper review of the status and progress of all commitments and actions in the 2018 Annual Report. DCYA will maintain a key focus on specific targets and prioritise issues such as cross-sectoral priorities and the priorities in the work plans of different groups. Key issues from these will be considered by the Consortium. This will need to align with the work programme of the Senior Officials Group on Social Policy to minimise duplication and offer additional value.	Q4 2018

3. There is a need to ensure that cross-sectoral work is child-centred within Departments and bodies working together in a holistic and strategic way. As these cross-cutting structures are nearly unique in Government it would be important that they are recognised, and where appropriate replicated.	DCYA and Sponsors will ensure the identification and progression of key cross-sectoral priorities through the Sponsors Group. DCYA will share the learning from the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> process within the wider system, thereby increasing awareness and knowledge exchange.	Annually
4. Wider leadership at the Consortium should be considered.	DCYA will explore this further having regard to the work of the Consortium and related structures.	Q2 2018
5. Additional Government Departments should be included in the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> infrastructure.	DCYA will invite the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to sit on the Consortium. The Department of Justice and Equality will be invited to participate in the Sponsors Group.	Q 2 2018
6. The challenge of the growth of other initiatives that have a child/youth focus but which are not directly linked or fully utilising the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> infrastructure, i.e. Mental Health Taskforce, Early Years' Forum, should be addressed.	DCYA will further encourage the utilisation of existing <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> structures in related policy development and implementation. DCYA will review internal department-wide processes and will liaise with the Sponsors and Senior Officials Group on Social Policy regarding more efficient cross-government operations.	Q 2/3 2018

### 5.3 Improving Awareness and Visibility

The feedback received on the awareness and feedback in relation to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was mixed. The responses were varied amongst stakeholders. For example, there was lower awareness among children and young people and the general public, whilst there was a higher awareness in the community and voluntary sector, DCYA staff and also the key stakeholders involved in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structure, including CYPSCs.

At its outset, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was seen as potentially ground-breaking, but despite the high-level launch in 2014, and much good work carried out under the auspices of the framework's implementation structures, it is clear that more effort is needed in enhancing its profile and visibility.

One of the main issues to come out of the surveys and focus groups was that the name '*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*' did not resonate with people and the use of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (BOBF) acronym was vague to some audiences. This has resulted in a problem in communicating *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. As we are over halfway through the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* process, it may be too late to rebrand the framework but consideration should be given to taking a fresh approach in communicating its message and increasing awareness.

There is a need to reinvigorate *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and to embed the framework more in the operations of Government Departments and State Agencies.

The main conclusion here is that people outside of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structure and DCYA are generally not very aware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. There is a need to engage more with children and young people and the public and to increase awareness of the outcomes that have been achieved and the progress made towards those outcomes.

There is also a need to consider enhanced public awareness for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and this should be addressed. There are differing levels of engagement from some Government Departments which may be due to a lack of awareness and visibility also. Visibility of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* within the media is very low; this is in spite of continual efforts on the part of the DCYA in referencing the Policy Framework as the context for our work in press and media briefings.

DCYA will continue to build strategic relationships and to advocate for continuing awareness development amongst stakeholders, encouraging them to play their part in the awareness raising and information dissemination.

The Implementation Team carried out a desk review to look at references to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* amongst other Government Departments, Agencies and the community and voluntary sector. This indicated that while there are references to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, most are merely passing references and do not situate relevant aspects of work relating to children and young people in the context of the Policy Framework.

Emerging issues/Recommendations	Actions	Timeline
7. Greater promotion of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> on social media is warranted in order to increase awareness and engagement among young people.	DCYA will engage with children and young people to find ways of improving the visibility and engagement of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> on online fora.	Q 2/3 2018
8. While recognising the complexity of the framework, optimum messaging and communications on <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> across Government is required.	DCYA will continue to build on its communications strategy and request Government Departments and Agencies to reference <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> where it concerns policies relating to children and young people, particularly in their Statements of Strategies and high-level policies.	Ongoing
9. Increased awareness of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> amongst children, young people and the general public is needed. A targeted focus in some education outputs, i.e. new Politics Curriculum and CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education), could be considered.	DCYA will explore further with the Sponsors, Advisory Council and CYPSC NSG.	Q 3 2018

10. Greater utilisation of the NGO sector to promote awareness of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> is needed.	DCYA will encourage awareness with full input from across the Advisory Council members and constituents.	Q 2/3 2018
11. Greater engagement with existing systems to support the communication and advancement of key strategic priorities such as child poverty and child homelessness should be progressed.	DCYA and Sponsors will consider further.	Q 2 2018
12. The access to and impact of publications such as the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> quarterly ezines and Annual Reports should be maximised.	DCYA will further develop these with specific reference to activities that directly relate to the commitments, progress and emerging learning under <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> . A wider circulation base will also be developed.	Q 2/3/4 2018

## 5.4 Improving Engagement

There was a very positive response from nearly all stakeholders in relation to the engagement piece. People felt the whole-of-government approach worked very well and this resulted in solid interdepartmental working, although some Departments were more responsive than others. Some people cited the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structure, which created the space for engagement with others and the progression of issues and improvements in service delivery for children and young people. People also felt there was openness in engagement from DCYA. There were some strong views around accountability and some respondents were of the opinion that, although they found the Consortium to be very valuable, there is a need for more consistent membership and accountability. This, it was felt, can only occur through strong leadership at a senior level.

Generally, people found that this cross-sectoral work is essential as it ensures that Departments and other bodies are working together in a collaborative fashion rather than at cross-purposes or duplicating work. The structure was seen by some as almost unique in Government in its collaborative approach and in ensuring a child-centred focus. The Advisory Council's experience to date is that engagement of many statutory agencies and Government Departments is respectful but some have not yet subscribed to the approach of identifying and addressing issues or challenges which the structures could assist in resolving. The leadership shown by the DEASP, DH and DCYA was viewed as enabling the surfacing of challenges and identifying solutions. This was seen as learning that could be adopted by other Departments and Agencies.

It was felt that it was essential to identify what the 'wins' are for stakeholders, so that ideally they would choose to engage because of the benefits, rather than as a result of direction.

During the review, the Implementation Team engaged with children and young people. There is some awareness of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* but this seems to be dictated by the involvement of children and young people under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures only, such as the 'Young Voices' Group. While more connections need to be made with the

Comhairle na nÓg structures, some children and young people have awareness of other government strategies such as Healthy Ireland, the National Youth Strategy and LGBTI+.

The Advisory Council formally engaged with the Young Voices Group, which is a positive in terms of participation of children and young people in the process and involvement in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structure. The Implementation Team also engages with Young Voices who have twice presented to the Consortium, which was also noted as positive. It is essential that this participatory work continues. Some noted that there needs to be additional and direct engagement with vulnerable groups of seldom heard children and young people, as most of these young people would be unlikely to engage with traditional participation structures and this should be addressed. The direct engagement with children and young people through the North East Inner City Mulvey initiative was viewed as a positive and less mediated approach in hearing the youth voice.

A significant positive has been the role of the Advisory Council in relation to child poverty together with the engagement of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection on this issue. This process, which is still ongoing, can be seen as a benchmark project which can influence the advancement of the pressing issues such as child homelessness in 2018.

Emerging issues/Recommendations	Actions	Timeline
<b>13.</b> Better engagement with Comhairle na nÓg and seldom heard children should be considered. Additionally, it was suggested that DCYA could make better use of findings from previous consultations with children and young people.	DCYA Implementation Team will cultivate direct connections with relevant services and will also improve engagement with the DCYA Participation Unit and Comhairle na nÓg structure.	Q 2/3/4 2018
<b>14.</b> It is recommended that when consulting with young people it is preferable to consider carrying out such exercises in local, youth-centred settings.	DCYA will consider further having regard to expert input from the DCYA Participation Unit.	
<b>15.</b> Continuation of the good engagement evident in the development of collaborative approaches to addressing issues is needed. The roundtable on child poverty which emerged from this work brought key influencers and stakeholders together to examine the issue in more detail. This has provided a greater focus on this issue, particularly from a child's rights perspective.	DCYA and <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> groups will consider such approaches as a useful and meaningful way to advance action on existing and emerging issues.	Ongoing
<b>16.</b> At Consortium level, there is a need for greater accountability and engagement from some Departments, Agencies and other members in relation to their commitments under the framework.	DCYA will increase efforts and set aside specific space at Consortium meetings regarding monitoring and assessment of actions beyond those of the Sponsors. DCYA will also address instances of low engagement bilaterally with relevant Departments.	Q 3/4 2018



## 5.5 Improving Outcomes

Through the last Annual Reporting process in 2017, the majority of commitments were listed as ongoing, so it is difficult to see the final outcomes until *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* nears completion in 2020.

Feedback from participants in the review seems to point to a lack of understanding in terms of actual outcomes for children and young people and what the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation process has delivered. Again, the child poverty work has produced several beneficial outcomes but this seems to be only one of the few cases where tangible outcomes have been seen.

Some members of the Advisory Council considered that *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was perhaps too ambitious, with insufficient focus on key targets, and while there have been improvements in specific policy areas, so far the envisaged outcomes have not been realised. While there is, through the cross-sectoral priorities, an increased focus on systemic issues, these need to be maintained and connected. It was noted that the visibility of children and young people's issues in central Government has increased but some members consider that for children on the margins, little has changed. Newer and pressing issues have emerged since the launch of the Policy Framework, such as child homelessness, while others such as child poverty remain. Therefore, it is crucial that the framework keeps pace with such issues and associated responses, and captures the same in the context of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

The three case studies in the review point to good progress and potential positive outcomes for children and this work is ongoing. It will be interesting to keep a focus on these with a view to measuring the impact of this work in the future.

One of the more positive outcomes over the last couple of years has been the whole-of-government approach and the opportunities for interdepartmental working. This is quite evident throughout the review document itself.

It is also important to make use of evidence and data when making policy decisions and to keep the focus on tangible outcomes for children. Very good work to date has been completed on this on foot of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Indicator Set and through the progress made to date on the Outcomes for Children Project. This will enable us to track progress over the next three years across each of the five national outcome areas and to report fully on outcomes achieved.

Emerging issues/Recommendations	Actions	Timeline
17. There should be a greater focus on the 'Safe and protected from harm' outcome. Respondents as young as ten and up to the age of 24 years noted the effects of crime, drugs, violence, harassment and alcohol abuse, which have left children and young people feeling unprotected and unsafe in their community.	DCYA will, through its leadership of Children and Young People's Services Committees and through its pilot work in specific sites, consider effective community-wide approaches to addressing such issues.	Q 2/3/4 2018



18. A fuller appreciation of the 'Connected, respected and contributing' outcome is emphasised. Respondents recognised this as being important in the context of community development. Specifically, services and supports for children and young people with a disability and young migrants were highlighted.	DCYA will ensure that this issue and the relevant target groups are considered in the development of policy and funding scheme provision.	Ongoing
19. The development of accessible and useable data and information in informing and supporting best responses for children and young people should be advanced.	DCYA will continue to develop accessible and useable data via the <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> Indicator Set and the Outcomes for Children Project co-funded under the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative.	Ongoing
20. Greater progress on the development, implementation and integration of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> and its constituent strategies is needed.	DCYA will ensure that a more integrated approach is taken to this, to ensure greater standardisation and coordination in the delivery of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> , its constituent strategies under the five national outcomes and transformational goals.	Q 2/3/4 2018
21. A greater focus on aligning and advancing the transformational goals is required.	DCYA and Sponsors will focus on the transformational goals during the second phase of implementation; this will include a focus on Parenting and Quality Services, as well as a continued focus on Prevention and Early Intervention and interagency working amongst other items.	Q 2/3/4 2018 & ongoing
22. There is a need to build upon and transfer the learning derived from the development and implementation of this first national cross-government Policy Framework for children and young people so that other policy implementation initiatives are informed by the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach.	DCYA will utilise case studies and identify lessons learned from the implementation of <i>Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</i> to inform related policy initiatives in the human and social services domain. This will be particularly important to inform the policy pre-development and implementation cycle.	Q 3/4 2018
23. There should be a sustained focus on improving outcomes for children and young people by harmonising policy, enabling better transfer of policy into practice, and ensuring that better practice is informed by evidence.	This can be progressed through the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI).	Ongoing

## 5.6 Determining the Course of Action for Phase 2 of Implementation 2018 – 2020.

The recommendations and learning referenced will frame and focus the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and the work programmes of the relevant groups in the implementation structure. This will be done in conjunction with stakeholders with an emphasis on the key themes identified for actions going forward.

The following represent a range of key emerging themes identified as requiring action or further advancement in the next phase of implementation. These will be considered and advanced by the respective groupings in the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure. Having regard to alignment with the existing commitments in the framework, this will ensure that these are prioritised and responsive to emerging issues, and taking account of current initiatives being advanced in these respective areas which have been developed subsequent to the development of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in 2014.

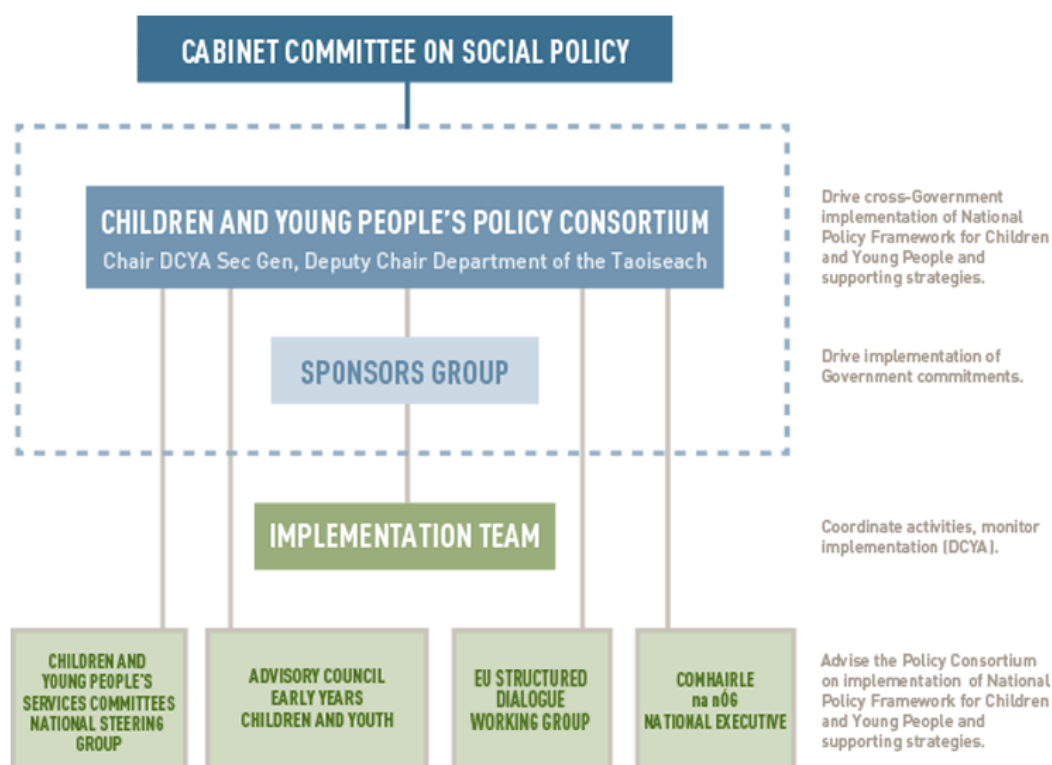
1. Child Poverty
2. Child Homelessness
3. Prevention and Early Intervention
4. Mental Health and Wellbeing (personal and communal)
5. Progression of the National Early Years Strategy

DCYA will work with the relevant stakeholders with regard to these recommendations, with a particular focus on communications, awareness and better engagement within the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation structures.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Implementation Structure

A key focus of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is on effective implementation to ensure accountability, drive implementation and provide a forum for stakeholder engagement. This is addressed through the establishment of an efficient and effective infrastructure that is outcomes-focused, while having appropriate regard for establishing enabling processes for engagement. These structures consolidate many of the existing consultative bodies and interdepartmental processes within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) into the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, the Sponsors mechanisms and the Advisory Council. Allied to this is a greater alignment and redevelopment of the existing groupings: the Children and Young People's Services Committees National Steering Group, the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and the EU Structured Dialogue Working Group.



### The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium

The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium represents the keystone in the implementation infrastructure for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. It comprises high-level representation from Government Departments and Agencies, and key experts and representatives from a range of sectors and settings working with children and young people.

The Consortium is tasked with overseeing and driving the effective implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* within their respective spheres of responsibility, across Departments,

Agencies and sectors. The Consortium is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, with a deputy chair from the Department of the Taoiseach.

The Consortium was established and held its first meeting in April 2014.

### Sponsors Group

The Sponsors Group is a sub-group of the Consortium. It comprises six sponsors – one sponsor for each of the five key Departments that are the primary Lead Departments in relation to the five national outcomes of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, plus one sponsor for the transformational goals. Each Sponsor has been assigned an ‘outcome’ area, as presented below:

Area of responsibility	Sponsor
<b>Outcome 1</b> Active and healthy, physical and mental wellbeing	Department of Health
<b>Outcome 2</b> Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development	Department of Education and Skills
<b>Outcome 3</b> Safe and protected from harm	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
<b>Outcome 4</b> Economic security and opportunity	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
<b>Outcome 5</b> Connected, respected and contributing to their world	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
<b>Transformational goals</b> and Chair of the Sponsors Group	Department of Children and Youth Affairs

The Sponsors Group has an integral role in ensuring the realisation and success of the vision underpinning *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* through active collaboration to drive and enhance cross-departmental and cross-sectoral engagement to realise the five national outcomes for children and young people.

### Advisory Council

The Advisory Council provides a forum for the community and voluntary sector and independent experts to engage with the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium and its constituent elements to actively inform and support the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The Council consists of four constituent groupings:

- The first three groups have representation drawn from the Early Years, Children and Youth voluntary sectoral pillars. Nominations are drawn from umbrella organisations representing each of these constituencies. In addition, the first three groups are supplemented by the appointment of a Ministerial nominee to each, bringing the total to four nominees per constituent grouping.
- The fourth group comprises Ministerial nominees involving key individuals with experience and expertise in themes and trends impacting on the lives of children and young people.

The Advisory Council, Chaired by Dr Owen Keenan, was established and held its inaugural meeting in November 2014.

### **Children and Young People's Services Committees National Steering Group**

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) bring together a diverse group of agencies in local county areas to engage in joint planning of services for children and are firmly embedded in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* as an important vehicle for implementing the framework at local level and driving local interagency work.

The CYPSC National Steering Group represents the CYPSC at national level. It acts as a vehicle to link implementation at local level with oversight by the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, with which it has a formal link. The National Steering Group oversees the work of Children and Young People's Services Committees and ensures that clear and effective connections are in place between the national and local implementation infrastructures to ensure effective interagency working.

### **Better Outcome, Brighter Futures Implementation Team**

An Implementation Team has been established as part of the Policy Innovation Unit within DCYA to lead the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. The Implementation Team project-manages reporting on implementation and coordinates the work in and across the implementation structures for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. It also assists in identifying emerging themes and trends relating to implementation and ensuring knowledge transfer across the implementation infrastructure.

The focus of the Implementation Team in the initial year of implementation has been to establish and ensure the effective operation of all elements of implementation structures. A particular focus of the Implementation Team has been on promoting the identification of cross-sectoral priorities among the Sponsors Group, to ensure that key issues are identified and addressed in a strategic and sustainable manner. The Implementation Team has actively worked with the constituent groupings in the development of work programmes for their respective remit.

### **Children and Young People's Participation Structures**

Consultation with children and young people informed the development of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, and will inform its ongoing implementation. Children and young people will be able to engage with the implementation through the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and through the EU Structured Dialogue Working Group. Both of these groups will have a formal link with the Consortium.

A main priority is to embed the participative process in the implementation structures. DCYA will examine the optimum approach for this, having regard to the DCYA Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making.

Moreover, representatives on the Advisory Council are tasked with ensuring the voice of children and young people informs the work of the Council. In addition, the Children and Young People's Services Committees National Steering Group has a position for a young person on the group to ensure the voice of young people informs proceedings.

## Appendix 2: *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*: Stakeholders' Experiences Survey

### Background

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020* was approved by Government and launched by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Ms Frances Fitzgerald, on 16 April 2014 and runs from 2014 to 2020. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* represents the first overarching national children's Policy Framework comprehending the age ranges spanning children and young people (0 – 24 years). It adopts a whole-of-government approach and is underpinned by a number of constituent strategies in the areas of Early Years, and Youth and Participation. A copy of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* can be accessed [here](#).

Now that we have reached the mid-point of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* we have decided to review progress to date. We would like to hear about your experiences of the implementation of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Policy Framework, on activities to date as well as your views on improvements for the future. This survey and its results will form part of the mid-point review. This review aims to take a holistic approach to examining the implementation, effectiveness and achievements of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to date. It seeks the perspectives of key informants in the implementation process and the general public and will focus on the status, progress and learning from the implementation process and key activities since the launch of the framework in 2014.

### Aims of the survey

Based on your experiences this survey is seeking your views on the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* – what's working and what's not working so well – in the following areas:

1. The visibility and awareness of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* amongst for example, Government officials, stakeholder groups, the community and voluntary sector, children and young people and the public.
2. The strengths and weaknesses of the overall implementation structures.
3. The strengths and weaknesses of implementation processes, including delivery and achievement of actions and impacts to date.
4. The frequency, quality and effectiveness of engagement between Government Departments, Agencies, and other stakeholders.
5. The identification of changes and learning on foot of the implementation of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework.
6. The identification of priorities, learning and improvements that can inform the course of action for Phase 2 of the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* from 2018 – 2020.

This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. It aims to capture your reflections on the process and progress of implementation: relating to particular implementation processes or structures and in terms of actions achieved (or not achieved). In addition, the survey aims to capture learning and possible improvements for the next phase of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation.



Your responses are confidential. Survey results will be aggregated and presented as part of a Review Report.

If you have any questions about this survey or have any difficulty in completing it, please contact Leah\_Steadman@dcya.gov.ie.

Please complete the survey by **Friday 3 November 2017** and many thanks for your time and assistance.



\* 1. Are you responding as a member of the:

- |                                                                                                  |                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Children and Young People's Policy Consortium                              | <input type="radio"/> Statutory Sector                         |
| <input type="radio"/> Sponsors Group                                                             | <input type="radio"/> Community and Voluntary Sector           |
| <input type="radio"/> Advisory Council                                                           | <input type="radio"/> Department of Children and Youth Affairs |
| <input type="radio"/> Children and Young People's Services Committees<br>National Steering Group | <input type="radio"/> Public                                   |
| <input type="radio"/> Children and Young People's Committees Local<br>Coordinators               |                                                                |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)                                                     |                                                                |

\* 2. From your experience, how would you rate the visibility and awareness of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Policy Framework and its implementation process?

- |                                            |                                |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Very high            | <input type="radio"/> Low      |
| <input type="radio"/> High                 | <input type="radio"/> Very Low |
| <input type="radio"/> Neither high nor low |                                |

\* 3. I have an understanding of my organisation's role in the implementation of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Policy Framework

- |                                                  |                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree             | <input type="radio"/> Disagree          |
| <input type="radio"/> Agree                      | <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree |
| <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree |                                         |

\* 4. In general, what is your level of interaction with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and its wider structures in relation to the implementation of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework?

- |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> I interact with the Department and its wider structures weekly  | <input type="radio"/> I interact with the Department and its wider structures only when I receive communications from them |
| <input type="radio"/> I interact with the Department and its wider structures monthly | <input type="radio"/> I never interact with the Department and its wider structures                                        |
| <input type="radio"/> I interact with the Department and its wider structures yearly  |                                                                                                                            |

\* 5. Reflecting on your overall experiences of, or involvement in, the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework, how has it contributed to changes in the way you work?

- |                                                                    |                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> My work has changed a lot, for the better    | <input type="radio"/> My work has changed a little, for the worse |
| <input type="radio"/> My work has changed a little, for the better | <input type="radio"/> My work has changed a lot, for the worse    |
| <input type="radio"/> My work has not changed at all               |                                                                   |

\* 6. Please indicate your level of agreement with each one of the following statements in respect of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The implementation structures are working well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The implementation processes are working well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The right people have responsibility for implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is public support for implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is high level leadership for implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interagency service delivery/practices for children and young people are working better as a result of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There has been strong progress in addressing issues especially facing children and young people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It has helped to progress or meet international/European commitments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 7. What has Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures achieved for children and young people? [Please tick all that apply]

<input type="checkbox"/> It has driven implementation of actions for the delivery of key policy priorities.	<input type="checkbox"/> It has encouraged a Whole of Government approach in tackling issues facing children and young people
<input type="checkbox"/> It has created a change in thinking in terms of service delivery	<input type="checkbox"/> I am not sure what Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures has achieved
<input type="checkbox"/> It has contributed to a public recognition of the need to holistically address issues facing children and young people	<input type="checkbox"/> Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures has not achieved anything
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	
<input type="text"/>	

\* 8. In your opinion, what impact has the implementation of Brighter Outcomes, Better Futures framework had on each of the following areas?

	Significant impact	Some impact	No impact	Negative impact	Don't know
Establishing a whole-of-Government approach to issues facing children and young people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting buy-in and recognition from the public of the importance of a child/young people-centred focus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Securing Government commitment to addressing key policy priorities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging Stakeholders to support the delivery of BOBF transformational goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
eEngaging Stakeholders to support the delivery of BOBF outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Driving an evidence-informed approach to the delivery of interventions for children and young people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Driving changes in service delivery for children and young people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Driving changes in practices in the sector in which I work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing clarity for what I need to do in my own work in respect of issues facing children and young people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 9. Overall, how have the lessons learned from supporting the implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter informed your work?

- ☐ It has provided significant learning to inform my work
- ☐ It has provided some learning to inform my work
- ☐ It has provided no learning to inform my work
- ☐ It has provided learning of what not to do
- ☐ Other (please specify)

\* 10. Please describe examples of where lessons learned from implementing the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework have led to new ways of working, new approaches or actions which improve outcomes for children and young people if any (if none, please write 'no changes')

\* 11. In your opinion, what are the top three priorities within Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures that should be progressed between now and 2020, in the next phase of the implementation o Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures?

1

2

3

12. Reflecting on your experiences to date, what is the single most successful aspect of the implementation of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures framework?

13. Reflecting on your experiences to date, what is the single least successful aspect of the implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Policy Framework?

### Appendix 3: Children and Young People's Experiences Survey

Do you want to make Ireland the best country for children and young people to grow up in? Within your organisation, do you discuss issues that have an impact on children and young people in Ireland? Is it important for you to be involved in decisions that are made that will affect the lives of children and young people?

We recognise that **your voice** is important in the delivery of policy and ensuring that **Government Departments and the broader children and youth sectors are listening to you and your opinion**. This survey will be used so that we can find out what children and young people think of Ireland as a place to live and give them a voice to discuss issues that need to be addressed by Government Departments.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is currently reviewing the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework for children and young people 2014 – 2020*. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is a policy that was launched in 2014 and will continue until 2020. This policy addresses issues that affect the lives of children and young people in Ireland such as education, equality, isolation of minority groups, mental health, homelessness, child poverty, homelessness and many more important issues.

We are asking you to consider this survey so that we can get your views on the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. Your feedback will directly inform the improvement of the implementation process.

We would greatly appreciate your time and participation in completing this survey.

## Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Outcomes

### Active & Healthy

The aims are that all children and young people are physically healthy and able to make positive health choices, have good mental health, have a positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health, and that their lives are enriched through the enjoyment of play, recreation, sports, arts, culture and nature.

Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development.

The aims are to ensure that all children get the best foundation in learning and development, have social and emotional wellbeing, and are engaged in and achieving in education.

### Achieving

### Safe

Safe and protected from harm.

The aims are that all children and young people have a secure, stable and caring home environment; that they are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation; that they are protected from bullying and discrimination; and that they are safe from crime and antisocial behaviour.

The aims are that all children and young people are protected from poverty and social exclusion; that they are living in child/youth-friendly sustainable communities; that they have opportunities for ongoing education and training; and that they have pathways to economic participation, entrepreneurship, fulfilling employment and independent living.

### Economic Security

### Connected & Respected

The aims are that all children and young people have a sense of their own identity, are free from discrimination and are part of positive networks of friends, family and community; furthermore, that they are civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious, and are aware of their rights as well as being responsible and respectful of the law.

**1. Are you responding as a member of ...**

- a. A children's or youth organisation
- b. A structure representing children and young people
- c. Other

**2. Are you aware of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the national policy framework 2014 – 2020*?**

**3. Do you think that children and young people have a voice on issues that directly affect them?**

**4. Do you think your voice is heard within Government Departments and other organisations/services/structures which engage with children and young people?**

**5. How could the structure for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* engage more with children and young people?**

**6. In your opinion, what are the top three priorities that should be focused on between now and 2020, in the next phase of implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*?**