



**Submission on Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services
to the National Economic & Social Forum.**

National Youth Council of Ireland

March 2006

NYCI Submission on Improving the Delivery of Quality Public Services

Introduction

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. The organisation was established in 1967 through the amalgamation of the principal voluntary youth organisations.

NYCI functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act) and as a Social Partner. The NYCI aims through its member organisations and its representative role to empower young people to participate in society as fulfilled confident individuals. The work of the Youth Council is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

NYCI welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the NESF study on improving the delivery of quality public services. Of particular concern to the Youth Council is the issue of urban sprawl and the need to improve the delivery of quality public services to respond adequately to the needs of young people living in these communities.

Background

Over the last decade, there has been a phenomenal increase in housing developments throughout Ireland. In recent years Irish housing output has been well over 70,000 units per annum. Public services have failed to keep pace with the urban sprawl of housing developments during this period leading to a situation where people reside in new housing estates which lack the proper infrastructural development or essential public services necessary to foster the development of community life. In many incidences, where public services do exist, the service delivery is not adequate to respond to the needs of the residents.

Furthermore the emergence of sprawling housing estates around existing mature urban areas has placed severe strain on existing public services in these areas. Existing public services have not been expanded or reformed to take account of the development of new housing estates and the impact of such housing on the locality.

Overpopulated areas tend to suffer the consequences of oversubscribed public services which either deliver poor service provision or in some cases none at all. In light of this, there is need for additional resources to be invested in public services to ensure this situation is redressed.

This Submission

This submission focuses on the following public services and identifies current deficiencies in their service delivery:

- Education
- Recreational Facilities for Youth People
- Health Care
- Transport

- Policing

The submission also highlights the negative consequences of poor public service delivery for young people in relation to quality of life, social and personal development, educational disadvantage, mental health, and associated health problems, and anti-social behaviour. It outlines the key challenges which need to be overcome to reform the current system of public service delivery and recommends a series of policy measures to ensure the delivery of quality public services in the areas outlined above.

Education

School accommodation is a significant problem with many young people being taught in dilapidated schools. The under-resourcing of primary and post-primary schools is particularly acute in rural areas. There needs to be more funding allocated to schools in rural areas to ensure the provision of resource teachers, and greater investment in repairing, upgrading and building rural schools. Such funding should be determined by using agreed measurable targets. Furthermore many schools in urban areas have introduced waiting lists for access and student enrolment figures in classes exceed national standards.

The Education Welfare Service, is critically under resourced¹ and needs to be rolled out fully throughout the country. As a result of inadequate resources, Educational Welfare Officers do not have the capacity to cater for all of the cases referred to them. At the moment the national welfare service is dealing with a caseload which is unsustainable and means that many young people and families are not receiving the service they require and are entitled to.

There is also a gap in service provision whereby young people who have already left school are still not being facilitated in continuing their education. The NEWB has a responsibility to track and assist early school leavers under 18 to access education and training. Employers have a role to play in identifying these young people by only employing a young person who has a certificate to prove that they are registered with the NEWB and by informing the NEWB when they employ a young person. To date Section 29 of the Education (Welfare) Act pertaining to early school leavers taking up employment has not been implemented.

Recommendations:

- Implement the School Building Programme
- Implement the DEIS Report in respect of class sizes and the provision of targeted funding for schools in rapidly expanding urban areas to ensure capacity to provide high-quality school accommodation for all students in the locality and appropriate teacher-pupil ratios in classes.
- Provide adequate resources to ensure the National Education and Welfare Service is fully rolled out in order to meet its statutory obligations.

¹ The National Education Welfare Service established under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and coordinated by the National Education Welfare Board develops co-ordinates and implements school attendance policies to ensure that every child in the State attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate education.

Recreational Facilities for Youth People.

The provision of recreational facilities for young people in communities has been acknowledged by Government as an integral part of a young person's social and personal development.² Research conducted on adolescent leisure time reveals that what young people do in the free time is a very important part of growing up and affects their development and future integration into society in their adult life (Verma & Larson (2003)).³

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (1989). The National Children's Strategy specifically refers to the issue of play and recreation. The lack of play and recreation facilities was also identified by the young people themselves in the consultation process that preceded the National Children's Strategy.⁴

At the present time, barriers to structured recreation of young people results from the lack of appropriate public recreational facilities to avail of free of charge, accessibility in relation to the location of the venue and the opening hours of facilities, lack of staff to manage facilities, lack of free time, inappropriate programmes, availability/pressure of drug/alcohol use, and safety issues. The lack of transport for both structured and unstructured recreation is an issue which is particularly acute for young people living in rural areas and for young people with disabilities (Public Consultation on the National Recreation Policy for Teenagers, 2005).

Recommendation:

- The Private/Commercial sector must work with the State to ensure that recreational facilities for young people are incorporated into the planning and development of new housing developments, initiatives and outlets.

Health Care

Health care provision is another public service which is subject to lack of adequate funding. As a result there is no focus on the provision of locally available primary healthcare services leading to over reliance of patients attending A&E for non emergency ailments and adding to the time pressures of staff in A&E.

The prevalence of mental health amongst young people in Ireland is concerning. Ireland has the fifth highest rate of youth suicide in the EU (14 – 24 years olds). Mental health disorders such as depression and substance misuse are also associated with 90% of all

² The National Children's Office is currently developing a recreation policy aimed at young people of secondary school age (12 – 18). The policy is intended to promote positive recreational opportunities for young people and will concentrate on statutory provision to encourage the private/commercial sector to draw on the policy when planning and developing new initiatives and outlets.

³ Verma, S. and Larson, R. (eds.) (2003) "Examining Adolescent Leisure Time Across Cultures: Developmental Opportunities and Risks." *New Directions for Child And Adolescent Development*. No.99.

⁴ "Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood" (National Children's Strategy, 2000).

cases of suicide. Currently there is a vacuum in mental health provision specifically targeted at young people.

The mental health service for 16 – 18 year olds is provided under the Adult Psychiatric Framework. This framework is unsatisfactory to meet the specific needs of young people. There is a real need for the provision of adolescent friendly health services throughout the country to meet the health needs of young people. Such health services would incorporate mental health services and provide comprehensive health care. The services should provide a confidential, informative and flexible service and in order to work effectively need to be well-resourced by professionals.

There is also a lack of focus on preventative health programmes for young people such as education to raise awareness about health living, and the provision of cervical screening.

Recommendations:

- Provide adolescent friendly health services throughout the country to meet the health needs of young people. Such health services would incorporate mental health services and provide comprehensive health care. The services should provide a confidential, informative and flexible service and in order to work effectively need to be well-resourced by professionals.
- Provide preventative health programmes for young people such as education to raise awareness about health living, and the provision of cervical screening.

Transport

The failure of the public transport system to respond to the population growth in new and expanding urban areas and to provide a reliable service in rural areas for young people is a particular concern for NYCI.

The Council acknowledges the recent establishment of the Rural Transport Scheme on a permanent statutory footing but calls for the provision of services for young people to be expanded. To date rural transport has been unreliable and under funded. With backing from the Government, the Rural Transport Scheme has the potential to enhance transport services for young people in rural areas.

While NYCI acknowledges the significance of Transport 21 launched in 2005, we urge the Government to ensure that the other key transport projects contained in the 15 year strategy for transport infrastructure in the Dublin area - 'Platform for Change' strategy launched in 2001 is not forgotten. Platform for change provides a comprehensive master plan for transport infrastructure in Dublin which is still relevant in 2006 and must be implemented in conjunction with the new Transport 21.

Mechanisms to alleviate traffic congestion should be initiated immediately to promote the use of public transport by expanding the number and capacity of park-and-ride sites at key suburban transport nodes and by reducing the costs incurred by commuters using public transport and park and ride facilities.

Recommendations:

- Increase investment in rural school bus services and urban transport services to ensure the provision of a quality public transport system throughout the country.
- Rollout of Transport 21 and other key transport projects contained in the Dublin Transport Officers 2001 'Platform for Change' strategy.
- Expand the number and capacity of park-and-ride sites at key suburban transport nodes.
- Promote the use of public transport and park-and-ride facilities by improving accessibility to tax-relief on commuting costs.

Policing

The issue of policing and law enforcement is affected greatly by resources and the provision of fully trained Gardaí to patrol ever growing communities. With the onset of much larger tracts of built environment (e.g. new housing estates) additional resources are required to ensure the provision of personnel, vehicles, and specialised juvenile support programmes throughout the country.

More resources are required to recruit and train additional Gardaí to provide adequate and responsive policing which meets the needs of society. Community policing should receive more resources and should be served by Gardaí with specialised training and experience in the area of community policing. Specialised juvenile justice programmes (as provided for by Children's Act 2001 e.g. Garda Diversion programme) should be rolled out in all Garda districts.

Recommendations:

- More resources are required to recruit and train additional Gardaí to provide adequate and responsive policing which meets the needs of society.
- Community policing should receive more resources and should be served by Gardaí with specialised training and experience in the area of community policing.
- Specialised juvenile justice programmes (as provided for by Children's Act 2001 e.g. Garda Diversion programme) should be rolled out in all Garda districts.

Deficiencies in the aforementioned public services, if not adequately addressed, can contribute to a myriad of social problems in Irish society such as a early school leaving and youth unemployment, alcohol and drug misuse, anti-social behaviour and crime, depression and isolation, higher rates of child and adult obesity resulting from poor diet and lack of psychical activity. Other heath problems can result from chronic traffic congestion. The delivery of poor public services can also have negative impact on national economic performances, and a negative impact on family life and community interaction.

Reform of the Irish planning system is extremely important to ensure improved rolling out of key public services and amenities in tandem with residential development. Such

reform could be modelled on the current development of Adamstown Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) in west County Dublin.⁵

Conclusion

Many residential communities are under-serviced and residents do not have adequate access to essential amenities and public services. Thus public service provision in many communities' particularly in expanding suburban areas and rural areas is inadequate and needs to be reformed.

It is imperative that key public services such as education, recreational facilities, primary health care, policing, and public transport are available and accessible in both rural and urban areas. In order to ensure the delivery of quality public services, the current system of service delivery must be reviewed to ensure the provision of cost-effective, equal and accessible key public services which meet the needs of individuals at the local level.

Recommendations

Education

- Implement the School Building Programme
- Implement the DEIS Report in respect of class sizes and the provision of targeted funding for schools in rapidly expanding urban areas to ensure capacity to provide high-quality school accommodation for all students in the locality and appropriate teacher-pupil ratios in classes.
- Provide adequate resources to ensure the National Education and Welfare Service is fully rolled out in order to meet its statutory obligations.

Recreational Facilities for Young People

- The Private/Commercial sector must work with the State to ensure that recreational facilities for young people are incorporated into the planning and development of new housing developments, initiatives and outlets.

Health Care

- Provide adolescent friendly health services throughout the country to meet the health needs of young people. Such health services would incorporate mental health services and provide comprehensive health care. The services should provide a confidential, informative and flexible service and in order to work effectively need to be well-resourced by professionals.
- Provide preventative health programmes for young people such as education to raise awareness about health living, and the provision of cervical screening.

⁵ Strategic Development Zones (SDZ) were introduced through the Planning and Development Act 2000 "to facilitate specified development of economic or social importance to the State." A planning scheme must be prepared for a SDZ which includes information on how the site will be developed including the type of development that will be permitted, transport proposals, and the provision of amenities, facilities and services. Further information on Adamstown as a SDZ please see <http://www.adamstown.ie>

Transport

- Increase investment in rural school bus services and urban transport services to ensure the provision of a quality public transport system throughout the country.
- Rollout of Transport 21 and other key transport projects contained in the Dublin Transport Officers 2001 'Platform for Change' strategy.
- Expand the number and capacity of park-and-ride sites at key suburban transport nodes.
- Promote the use of public transport and park-and-ride facilities by improving accessibility to tax-relief on commuting costs.

Policing

- More resources are required to recruit and train additional Gardaí to provide adequate and responsive policing which meets the needs of society.
- Community policing should receive more resources and should be served by Gardaí with specialised training and experience in the area of community policing.
- Specialised juvenile justice programmes (as provided for by Children's Act 2001 e.g. Garda Diversion programme) should be rolled out in all Garda districts.