

**Learning from experience to inform the future -**

**Findings emerging from the initial phase of the  
Children's Services Committees**

# Introduction - Setting the scene

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- Centre for Effective Services was asked by OMCYA:  
**To distil learning from the initial implementation stage of the Children's Services Committees, with a view to informing the future development of CSCs, both existing and new**
- **Many emphasised the timeliness of this exercise**
  - Existing CSCs in operation for 3 years
  - 6 new CSCs being established in 2010
- We were urged to **“tell it as it is”**

# Methodology

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- Rapid distillation of key learning from CSCs needed
  - Drew on methods of qualitative research
  - Report represents hybrid between research and consultation
- 20 meetings over a five month period between November 2009 and March 2010 with major stakeholders in CSC initiative:
  - Policy makers and senior officials in government departments and agencies
  - Chairs, local authority representatives and CSC co-ordinators
  - Members of CSCs
  - Advisors and consultants
- Discussion guide based on ‘CSC Toolkit’
- Review of reports, briefs and policy
- Data input into analytical matrix, organised thematically around headings

## CSCs – Origins and background

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- CSCs established in 2007, as a **structure for bringing together a diverse group of agencies** in local county areas to **engage in joint planning and interagency collaboration in delivery of services for children**, centred around the 7 national outcomes for children
- OMYCA intended that **CSCs would meet the “implementation” gap** which existed in relation to a range of government policies and, in particular, those actions requiring **cross-agency planning and delivery**
  - Model to be **informed and designed from the ground up**
- **Similar initiatives exist in many other countries**, including New Zealand, USA, Israel, UK, Northern Ireland
- **“Draft Strategic Plan for the Development and Implementation of the CSC initiative”**, developed end 2009
  - Defines the overall purpose of the CSCs as *“securing better developmental outcomes (meaning the 7 National Outcomes) for children through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level”*

# The CSCs today

- **4 CSCs established initially** – Donegal, Dublin City, Limerick City, South Dublin
  - Each with a Chair (HSE), a Co-ordinator , and a number of subgroups
- **Demographic population and geographic area covered by each CSC varies significantly**

CSC	Total Population	Child Population (0-18 yrs)
Limerick City <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total area</li> <li>• Regeneration area</li> </ul>	59,790 9,161	12,351 (21% of total pop) 2,987 (33% of Regen. area pop)
Dublin City <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total area</li> <li>• Model area</li> </ul>	505,211 23,556 (5% of total population)	97,769 (19% of total pop) 3,961 (16.8% of Model area population)
South Dublin	246,935	71,736 (29% of pop)
Donegal	149,215	40,288 (27% of pop)

# CSC activity

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- In the absence of a clear framework at the outset to guide CSC development, **substantial diversity has emerged between the 4 CSCs in their approaches to:**
  - **Outcomes** – 3 of the 4 CSCs have identified outcomes which are reflected in their work plans and sub groups, and are based on the 7 national outcomes for children
  - **Indicators and needs analysis** – significant effort being devoted by CSCs to data gathering and needs analysis
  - **Evidence based practice** – Each of the CSCs has sourced evidence-based or certainly evidence informed initiatives from other jurisdictions, mainly the UK

# General observations

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- **CSCs are at an early stage in their development, and much of the early work has centred around developing structures and processes.** This is consistent with:
  - Similar large scale initiatives being developed internationally, where the indications are that measurable impact at the level of specific outcomes for children and young people takes time to emerge
  - Large scale change management initiatives, where time and effort are required at the early stages both to develop ‘fit for purpose’ processes and structures and to build relationships
- **Widespread acceptance, among those we consulted, that the CSCs are a long term initiative**
  - 10 years for full impact to become evident
  - “A long hard road” ....

# Achievements to date

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- **Widespread support for the CSC initiative - overwhelming commitment to, and engagement with, the CSC initiative, at local CSC and national level**
  - Many CSC members differentiated the CSCs from other multi-agency groups or committees with which they are involved
    - For CSC members, the experience of interagency working in one CSC provided for them a real example of why “working in silos should be a thing of the past”.
    - The philosophy underpinning interagency working as they see it is “that one family gets touched by the CSC, rather than by 8 or 9 different agencies operating individually”
    - CSCs seen as “the only way forward to structurally address complex needs across all sectors, in an integrated way.”
  - ‘Parent’ government departments
    - Expressed their interest in the OMCYA’s effort to develop a coherent framework for the delivery of services to children, in the context of very significant financial investment by the state in services to children and families.
    - Recognised CSCs as being “really significant” and “the only option”

# Achievements to date

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- **Building relationships and understanding of the role of different agencies, at CSC, CSC subgroup and NCSIG level** - the major area where the CSC initiative is seen to have had an early impact
  - CSC members point to specific examples of interagency projects and issues relating to individual cases and families which have been progressed or resolved effectively, because of the relationships built among CSC and CSC subgroup members
  - Many individuals remarked that relationships between the HSE and local authorities at CSC level are working well
  - Some CSC members noted that interagency working within the education sector at CSC level has been very powerful
  - Many NCSIG members emphasised the value of relationships built between senior people through the NCSIG
  - A number of the organisations consulted emphasised the need for interagency work to become embedded in the system, rather than dependent on individuals.

# Achievements to date

- **Successfully establishing local champions and local ownership of the initiative**
  - At local level, each CSC is chaired by a HSE Local Health Manager. In many cases, leadership at CSC level appears to be provided jointly by the HSE and the local authority
  - Most CSCs emphasised the value of having a senior local champion who stays with the initiative
  - A strong sense of local ownership has developed among CSC and subgroup members, in relation to the work being conducted by each CSC
- **Developing structures are in place, with the aim of enabling the CSCs to operate, including particularly:**
  - The CSCs themselves and CSC subgroups
  - CSC co-ordinator – viewed as essential by all CSCs
- **Emerging CSC activities, around:**
  - Local needs analysis
  - Identifying outcomes and prioritising actions (through work plans and action plans)
  - Implementing initiatives to meet the needs of the local area

# Challenges and obstacles

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- Acknowledgement of strategic importance but disappointment at absence of **'measurable impact'**. Four areas:
  - Governance
  - Sustainability
  - Developing a national framework
  - Communication and support to CSCs
- **Governance**
  - **Leadership** – HSE have provided leadership and driven initiative forward but for many HSE 'buy in' to CSCs is poor overall
  - **Mandate and remit** – Lack of clarity has created ambiguity as to where the authority to implement CSCs originates and to whom the CSC is answerable
  - **Universal v targeted remit** – CSCs to benefit all children or focus primarily on disadvantaged children
    - Progressive universalism
    - Implementation of policy
  - **Funding** – opposing views and current dilemmas presented by CSCs
    - Funding to come through CSC itself *versus* 'keep money off the table'

# Challenges and obstacles

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## ● Governance (cont'd)

- **Accountability** – different responses to question posed, ‘who CSCs are accountable to’
- **Membership** – two quarters the subject of debate
  - Department of Education & Skills
  - Department of Social Protection
- **Effectiveness of NCSIG** – largely seen by members as a communication and information sharing forum rather than a decision making body with a strategic focus
  - Role and functions of NCSIG need to be clarified
  - ‘Big and unwieldy’ group
  - ‘Too slow and not action oriented’
  - More junior in representation
  - Lack of analysis and discussion on technical issues e.g. assessment frameworks

## ● Sustainability

- **‘Buy in’ and taking ownership** of CSC initiative – level of support and participation varies greatly
- **Embedding CSCs** into the system
- **Scale** of CSCs
- **Evaluation** of CSC initiative

# Challenges and obstacles

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## ● Developing a national framework

- **Outcomes** – consensus that outcomes and outcomes focussed practice not well understood and lack of clarity about origins
- **Indicators and needs analysis** – difficulties with needs analysis and associated data collection methods
  - 7 national outcomes do not easily map onto national child well being indicators
  - Data required to populate data set not easily accessible
  - Lack of coherence of data systems across sectors
- **Evidence-based practice**
  - Models approaches and interventions – not being replicated as designed by developers but ‘best bits’ taken from a number of programmes. Creates difficulties in terms of diluting ‘active ingredients’ and ‘tweaking’ to create programme whose effectiveness is unknown
  - Terminology/language/constructs/concepts/definitions\*??!\*!
  - Participation of children and families – identified as ‘point of weakness’
- **National framework with local autonomy** – need for overarching framework with flexibility to allow CSC to identify their own needs within this and to decide their own priorities for action

# Challenges and obstacles

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- **Communication and support to CSCs**
  - **Communication, information sharing and networking**
    - Largely operating independently
    - No formal communication between CSCs
    - Level of awareness amongst professionals, services and public
    - Support from parent department to individual agencies sitting on CSC and information sharing amongst this group
  - **Reporting and resolution of issues** – reporting from CSC to NCSIG described as a one way process and response to issues and initiatives being developed is slow
  - **Technical assistance and support** – assistance accessed by individual CSCs around specific projects or pieces of work e.g. Needs analysis, data collection and evaluation, but no comprehensive effort to identify technical needs of each CSC and determine how these could be addressed

# Conclusions

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- **CSCs are at an early stage in their development, and much of the early work has centred on developing structures and processes**
  - This is consistent with similar large scale initiatives being developed internationally, where the indications are that measureable impact in terms of outcomes for children and young people takes time to emerge
- **We have developed a number of recommendations which have the potential to support the successful development of the CSC initiative**
  - Many of the recommendations resonate with the outcomes and activities identified in the “Draft Strategic Plan for the Development and Implementation of the CSC Initiative”
  - Suggest that the OMCYA and NCSIG should reflect on how the recommendations could inform the Draft Strategic Plan, as well identifying any gaps or outstanding issues which are not currently addressed in the plan

# Recommendations

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## Developing a national framework

To **increase the credibility and accountability** of the initiative at government level, a national framework for the CSC initiative should be developed. The framework could:

- Guide the successful development of CSCs and **facilitate a more coherent approach to the seven national outcomes for children**, and associated indicators, across the CSCs.
- It should allow **for interpretation of policy at local level** to meet local needs, and **facilitate evaluation** of the CSC initiative at a national level.
- The framework should **provide a platform upon which local creativity and innovation could flourish** and should not preclude or prevent CSCs from **developing their own evidence informed initiatives** for use in this cultural context.

# Recommendations

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## Developing a national framework (cont'd)

- **Rec. 1** The framework could outline for example:
  - The **mandate, remit and functions** of CSCs
  - **Outcomes** to be achieved - the 7 national outcomes
  - The **inputs and actions** needed to achieve these outcomes should be decided at local level, based on a local needs analysis
  - A **'core' set of indicators**, which can be used to measure outcomes by each CSC.
  - A clear **definition of terms, concepts and constructs**, so that the terms are consistently used and easily understood by everyone
  - The importance and benefits of **applying evidenced-informed approaches**, models and interventions
  - Whether different initiatives should ideally be **replicated in CSCs as designed by developers**, to preserve the effectiveness and facilitate evaluation
  - **Standards and criteria** for use of these approaches, models and interventions

# Recommendations

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## Developing a national framework

- **Rec. 2 Matching of the 7 national outcomes to the national well being indicators** needs to be re-visited. This requires a rapid development of a **co-ordinated and coherent national data strategy**, to identify how and where data can be sourced nationally *and* at local county level. This will allow **measurement of child well being at county level, and facilitate cross county comparison**
- **Rec. 3 A repository of approaches, models and interventions** in use by CSCs should be developed and made available - to cover specific areas of interest e.g. needs assessment, information sharing, participation and intervention tools

# Recommendations

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## Governance - *CSC mandate, remit and functions*

- **Rec. 4** The mandate, remit and functions of the CSCs should be agreed, documented and communicated to all those involved in CSCs
  - a. The mandate should define what the CSCs are authorised to do and from where that authority comes
  - b. The remit of CSCs should be captured in a ‘terms of reference’ for the CSCs
  - c. The functions should identify proposed activity areas for CSCs.
- **Rec. 5** The NCSIG and relevant government departments should **consider the benefits and disadvantages of putting CSCs on a statutory basis**, and enshrining in legislation the need to establish Children’s Services Committees
- **Rec. 7** The role of CSCs in terms of influencing funding decisions about (new and existing) services in their area should be clarified by the OMCYA and relevant government departments / agencies.

# Recommendations

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## ***Governance - Mandate from 'parent' government departments***

- **Rec. 9** There should be a clear mandate from the very top (ideally at Cabinet / Secretary General level) which requires senior management in the relevant government departments and agencies to participate actively in the CSCs and the NCSIG. Senior management in the relevant government departments and agencies should communicate that participation in CSCs is a priority for their staff.

# Recommendations

## Governance - *NCSIG*

- **Rec. 11 The role and functions of the NCSIG should be clarified and communicated.** NCSIG should be **split into two discrete but closely linked steering groups at national level:**
  - **A National Children's Strategy Steering Group**
    - **Mandate:** to oversee the development and implementation of the National Children's Strategy
    - **Members** could include senior management from the government departments and state agencies that develop policies or deliver services that affect children and young people. The Group could be chaired by the OMCYA.
  - **A Children's Services Committee Steering Group**
    - **Mandate:** to oversee the implementation of CSCs throughout Ireland, including discussing and agreeing technical issues requiring direction from national level to local CSCs
    - **Members** would include the Chair of each CSC, 3-4 members from the National Children's Strategy Steering Group (to ensure coherence between the two groups) and potentially 2-4 County/ City Managers / Local Authority representatives. This Group could also be chaired by the OMCYA.

# Recommendations

## Governance – *NCSIG (continued)*

- **Rec. 13** The Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (**SOGSI**), chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, **could be used as a route for addressing major policy or political issues**, identified by the National Steering Group / NCSIG and emerging from the CSCs

## Governance – *CSC accountability*

- **Rec. 14** **Greater clarity should be provided around to whom CSCs are accountable, in terms of improving outcomes for children.** Given that CSCs are a national initiative, but with a local focus, consideration should be given to the CSCs **having accountability at two levels:**
  - **At *national* level – to a National Steering Group** – to oversee the roll out of the CSC initiative and to resolve common policy or service issues arising across a number of CSCs
  - **At *local* level – to a County Development Board** or some similar structure – to oversee, co-ordinate and resolve local issues.

# Recommendations

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## Sustainability

- **Rec. 20 Each CSC should develop a strategy or plan** aimed at securing better developmental outcomes for children in the CSC's area, through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level
- **Rec. 22 Consideration should be given to defining the appropriate structures and organisation of CSCs in larger urban areas**
  - As new CSCs come on board, it will be important that consideration be given to dividing the larger, mostly urban areas, into smaller groupings with local implementation groups attached to each of these (reporting to the CSC). This currently happens with similar initiatives in other jurisdictions
- **Rec. 23 Each new CSC should appoint a co-ordinator, at the outset**
- **Rec. 24 A plan to evaluate the effectiveness of CSCs**, as an interagency initiative designed to improve outcomes for children and families, **should be developed and implemented**

# Recommendations

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## Communication and support to CSCs

- **Rec. 25** CSC initiative should now be **publicised** on a national and local level
- **Rec. 26** **Opportunities** should be provided **for CSCs to meet together**, through networking and learning seminars and events to discuss CSC development
- **Rec. 27** Individual agencies and departments with representatives sitting on CSCs should organise **meetings of their staff involved in CSCs**
- **Rec. 28** Appropriate **technical support should be provided to CSCs**
- **Rec. 29** The **support** which could be provided **to CSCs from a “central” function**, led by the OMCYA in collaboration with relevant agencies, **should be defined**