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**Feedback for Corporate Plan**

1.What is your name?

Roberta Marshall

2.Are you responding as: (please highlight)

* A child/young person
* A parent/carer
* Someone who works with children/young people
* Someone who works for government or a public body
* Other: As Chairperson for The Stronger from the Start Infant Mental Health Alliance for Northern Ireland (SFTS)

3.If you are responding as an organisation can you tell us who?

The [Stronger from the Start](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/northern-ireland/influencing/stronger-from-the-start) Infant Mental Health Alliance for Northern Ireland (SFTS) represents over 50 organisations across the Voluntary and Community Sector working together to promote and improve infant mental health, including supporting good parent-infant relationships and strong attachments. Our member agencies are committed to collaborating in the best interests of babies and their families. We are working together to amplify key messages about infant mental health in Northern Ireland and to campaign for meaningful change in policy, practice and life experiences. As an Alliance we recognise the specific importance of the First 1001 Days in laying the foundations for mental health and wellbeing throughout the lifespan.

4.Do you think the priority themes and objectives represent the most important issues for Children and Young People?

Mostly.

Within their individual responses to this consultation, some of our member organisations have put forward recommendations that NICCY’s Corporate Plan must also explicitly and meaningfully consider the needs and right of babies -including within the commitments to tackling child poverty and improving health and wellbeing. SFTS supports this recommendation.

5.Do you think there's something important that we haven't included in our Corporate Plan? If yes, can you tell us what it is and explain why it's important?

Yes.

Throughout the 4 nations much work has been done on addressing the ‘baby blind spot’ by giving specific mention and consideration to the rights and needs of babies. This is something important which SFTS strongly believes should be included in the Corporate Plan.

As one example, when we consider + 4,200 households (including babies and children) are living in temporary accommodation, it would be useful for the Commissioner to also include thinking/focus around the IMH impact on babies in these circumstances and within his focus on housing and homelessness. Infant Mental Health is not an issue only confined to Health, Social Care and Education Departments.

We believe that the needs of babies should be specifically recognised and considered in Strategy, Policy and Service Design/Delivery. Without the inclusion of babies in policy documents and strategies they and their specific needs risk being overlooked in implementation and service delivery. SFTS would like to see the inclusion of the term ‘babies’ as part of NICCY’s language.

We believe there are 4 key areas of focus for the promotion and improvement of infant mental health in Northern Ireland. Three of these are already established within the Public Health Agency’s [Infant Mental Health Framework for Northern Ireland](https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/infant-mental-health-framework-northern-ireland) and we echo their importance: Improving Evidence & Policy; Workforce Development; and Service Development. We've added Leadership & Collaboration as an underpinning principle and an area in which we need to see urgent and demonstrable progress. You can read our full manifesto and learn more about our key asks in the [Stronger from the Start manifesto](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/northern-ireland/influencing/stronger-from-the-start).

COVID-19 and its impact on babies and their families has strengthened the case for urgent action, as has the ongoing Cost of Living Crisis.

Investment in the earliest years of life is supported by a wealth of research and evidence and is a cost-effective way of transforming child and family outcomes. We would urge the Northern Ireland Children’s Commissioner to use his influence to secure long term investment for services for babies and very young children locally. We would also ask if Northern Ireland Children’s Commissioner plans to coordinate with the other Commissioners across each nation of the UK to ensure the needs of babies, children and young people are a political and investment priority. Some of our SFTS members are part of a wider-UK campaign (Children at the Table) that includes an ask for coordinated leadership towards ensuring more of our national wealth is used in improving the lives of babies, children and young people and spending strategically on early intervention and prevention in each nation, including Northern Ireland. We would warmly welcome the NI Commissioner joining with the wider UK Commissioners to influence in this area and ensure that adequate and equitable resources are available in each nation according to levels of need.

By working to #IncludeInfants in policy, strategy and service delivery SFTS believe we can deliver change to the life chances of our children, and to generations to come.

6.Have you any further comments?

SFTS appreciates this opportunity to provide comment on NICCY’s draft Corporate Plan, and appreciates the support extended to us from previous Commissioner, Koulla Yiasouma. We would be keen to meet with the current Commissioner Chris Quinn to continue this relationship and discuss any of the issues raised in this response.