

These notes refer to the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (c.10) which received Royal Assent on 09 December 2015

Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

EXPLANATORY NOTES

OVERVIEW

12. The Act requires departments and statutory bodies to co-operate with one another and with other children's services providers to improve the well-being of children and young persons. 'Well-being' is defined drawing on language used in the Children's Strategy (A ten-year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016). The strategy is put on a statutory footing with a requirement that it contain outcomes, actions, measure and timelines as well as a requirement that children and young persons, parents and guardians and children's representatives, be consulted.
13. The Act also contains an enabling power which will permit departments and statutory bodies to pool their budgets and share resources for the purposes of fulfilling their duties. This can improve co-operation, as it will facilitate the provision of joint services, helping to avoid duplication and to improve co-ordination. It will also facilitate the provision of services which would otherwise not be provided by any department or body acting alone. Pooled budgets will also create opportunities for early intervention and preventative spending as it will enable departments to fund services outside of their statutory remit, which may be a more effective means of meeting their own statutory responsibilities.
14. The Act consists of eleven sections. It was substantially amended at Consideration Stage, during which the Member in charge of the Bill opposed all but one of the original sections and proposed amendments replacing and adding to the opposed provisions. Section 4 of the Bill as introduced, dealing with children's and young people's services plans, was removed and the amendment to replace that clause was not moved.
15. Five amendments were made at Further Consideration Stage, refining definitions; adding regulation-making powers related to the pooling of budgets and sharing of resources; bringing forward the first reporting date; and requiring the Executive to take account of that report in preparing a Programme for Government.