



**NIACRO'S RESPONSE TO - PRE-  
CONSULTATION - FUTURE COMMUNITY  
SAFETY STRATEGY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

NIACRO works to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities and has been operating for almost forty years. Our vision is to be acknowledged as making a unique contribution to the creation of a society in which communities can live without fear of crime and in which the rights and needs of everyone, including offenders, are equally respected.

We provide services for children and young people who offend, people in prison and their families and adult offenders in the community. NIACRO also seeks to influence policy and practices which impact on service users.

NIACRO is grateful for the opportunity to be involved in the pre-consultation on the development of a Future Community Safety Strategy. We were unaware of the pre-consultation until 11th August 2010 and appreciate that the submission deadline has been extended.

In relation to the first Community Safety Strategy NIACRO took the view that linking the theme of reducing crime to reducing the fear of crime was problematic and likely to lead to a paradoxical outcome. We further believed that the measures introduced to tackle anti-social behaviour were in themselves criminalising and likely to give the perception of a rise in crime.

In response to “Together, Stronger, Safer”, NIACRO was particularly concerned that the measures proposed were likely to further increase criminality through the introduction of additional sanctions without offering diversionary or supportive measures.

We therefore welcome the position set out in the new Community Safety Strategy that the Justice Minister does not intend to pursue the punitive measures proposed in “Together, Stronger, Safer”.

NIACRO would caution that any measure instigated and managed by the criminal justice system can have the effect of reducing the sense of responsibility from all other parts of the statutory public service and from the community for community safety. We therefore endorse the key themes proposed of :

- Delivering in Partnership
- Empowering Local Communities
- Creating a safer, shared society.

While supportive of the theme of Early Intervention, we are conscious of the risks, inherent in early intervention being delivered by the criminal justice system, of bringing more and more people within the ambit of the system and again reducing the commitment from others.

With these thoughts in mind we are concerned that the new strategy appears to assume the amalgamation of the functions of the Community Safety Partnerships and the District Policing Partnerships. In our view and as we

stated in the consultation to that proposed merger, this will allow police accountability issues to dominate the agenda at the expense of wider community safety issues. It will further cement community safety into a criminal justice system and reinforce, in the eyes of the community, the view that community safety is a policing issue rather than a community and partnership issue.

The theme of early intervention demonstrates this point. Effective early intervention is best delivered by progressive universal services working in a supportive community environment - a Crime Reduction Partnership with a bias towards ensuring police accountability will militate against this.

Though never a supporter of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, NIACRO believes that the response by many agencies is indicative of the possibilities of partnership and co-operation in addressing and preventing anti-social behaviour and thus avoiding recourse to the "tool of last resort". The problem with ASBOs is that they create the impression in the minds of some members of the public and regrettably in the minds of some MLAs, that anti-social behaviour can be "fixed" by the imposition of a Court Order.

NIACRO argues that the continued emphasis on the "fear of crime" is illogical and unsupported by evidence. This outdated concept has been used to justify measures such as ASBOs by introducing the notion of "perceived anti-social behaviour". This has produced a route to criminalization based on the perception of the "victim" and has had the perverse effect of increasing the fear of crime while at the same time actually increasing criminality.

### **Questions pre-consultation - Response**

1. A successful community safety strategy is one which supports and encourages communities to look out for and support its own vulnerable members, including those who, at times, may appear oppositional. A successful strategy will recognise and understand the developmental and maturational processes of young people and take steps to ensure their continued membership of their community.
2. The priorities for the new strategy should be to ensure that all parts of society understand their role in community safety and do not regard it as a purely criminal justice issue.
3. We refer the reader to Tilley, N.(ed) (2005) *Handbook of Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, Willan which includes a wide range of illuminating perspectives on this issue.
4. The proposed themes are suitable within the context of the caveats expressed above. Consideration might be given to an inter-departmental forum on the issue.
5. Risk issues are best addressed through the provision of progressive universal services (the DHSSPS Early Intervention Strategy for the

prevention of offending by children being one example) which are non-stigmatising and non-criminalising.

- 6/7 The new strategy should take cognisance of the 10 year Children's Strategy, the DOE Early Years Strategy, the NIPS Resettlement Strategy and seek to encourage the inclusion of community safety on the agenda of locality planning.
8. Equality of opportunity and good relations could be effectively promoted by pursuing a co-operative, inclusive strategy which presents community safety as an issue to be collectively managed rather than a problem to be solved by criminal justice.

NIACRO is keen to take up the offer of a meeting with representatives from the Unit to explore these issues further and express thanks for the opportunity to be involved in this pre-consultation.