Joint Committee on the Eight Amendment of the Constitution
29th November 2017.

Opening Statement by Ms. Olive McGovern, Principal Officer,
Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Thank you, Chair, for inviting me to attend this session of the Joint Committee on the Eight Amendment of the Constitution

You will have already received my submission which follows on from a letter of response from the Secretary General to you in which the ancillary recommendation of the Citizens Assembly that falls within the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs was addressed.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities.

There are approximately 1,600 youth groups and clubs across the country in receipt of funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme with an estimated membership of 89,000 young people. The majority of these young people are in clubs affiliated to national youth organisations. Local youth clubs, along with each national youth organisation in receipt of funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs are expected to operate in accordance with the National Youth Strategy which a constituent strategy of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020) (BOBF).

The implementation of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020) (BOBF) has been ongoing across Government since its launch in April 2014.

The National Youth Strategy includes commitments identified by young people themselves. It builds on the youth-specific policy commitments outlined in BOBF. In line with current and emerging policy, the National Youth Strategy addresses the current socio-economic needs and aspirations of young people aged between 10 and 24 years.

The implementation structures established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under BOBF are overseeing the roll out of the National Youth Strategy. Youth clubs and services have a significant contribution to make to realise the goals of the National Youth Strategy as part of a cross-sectoral, whole of society approach to supporting young people in their everyday lives.

One of the main objectives of the National Youth Strategy is that young people enjoy a healthy lifestyle, in particular with regard to their physical, mental and sexual health and well-being.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs also provides funding to the National Youth Health Programme. This programme is a partnership operating by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) in conjunction with the Youth Affairs Unit of the Department of
Children and Youth Affairs and the Health Promotion Unit of the Health Service Executive. In 2017 the Department of Children and Youth Affairs allocated €86,952 to the NYCI to support the implementation of the National Youth Health Programme.

The National Youth Health Programme provides a broad based flexible health promotion education support and training service to youth organisations and to all those working with young people in out-of-school settings.

Through the National Youth Health Programme the NYCI has sought to develop the capacity of the youth sector and youth organisations to advocate on issues that affect young people and develop evidence based resources to support that work. The National Youth Health Programme works with practitioners across the youth sector to build knowledge, skills and expertise on a range of health areas including health promotion, mental health and sexual health. This work is achieved through the development of a range of training and policy programmes.

Specifically with regard to sexual health and relationships, the National Youth Health Programme provides training to youth workers within organisations and aims to strengthen the organisational environment for the delivery of sexual health programmes.

The Delay/b4udecide training course is offered in conjunction with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and training and accompanying resource explores the concept of delaying early sexual activity among young people. The Developing a Sexual Health Policy – Good Practice in Sexual Health Promotion is a follow on course for youth workers to the Delay/b4udecide training and aims to strengthen the organisational environment for the delivery of sexual health programmes.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is committed to delivering on both the commitments of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Policy Framework and those of the National Youth Strategy as they relate to prioritising the sexual health and wellbeing of children and young people. The funding provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in conjunction with that provided by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health, supports young people in relation to relationships and sexuality and provides access to timely and appropriate information.

Ends.