



80-90 North Street  
Belfast  
BT1 1LD  
T: 028 9026 2400  
F: 028 9026 2450  
E: [info@pbni.org.uk](mailto:info@pbni.org.uk)  
W: [www.pbni.org.uk](http://www.pbni.org.uk)

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Stella McArdle  
Clerk  
Committee for Health, Social Science & Public Safety

Dear Stella

**Proposed Safeguarding Board: Committee for Health, Social Services & Public Safety**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's deliberations on the proposed Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) has a long established interest in child protection and promoting child welfare. In addition to having clear child protection policies and procedures, PBNI are represented on current Trust Child Protection Panels and the Regional Child Protection Committees.

In this context, PBNI welcome the proposed establishment of a Safeguarding Board as a means of enhancing inter-agency co-ordination in the delivery of better outcomes for children in Northern Ireland.

**Potential Key Issues**

By way of fully maximising the potential of the Safeguarding Board, there should be a legislative requirement to co-operate, as suggested in the policy proposal (7.4). A statutory duty to co-operate would also be of benefit in promoting inter-agency accountability. In terms of the practical operation of accountability, the independent Chair(s) of both the Board and Safeguarding Panels should have a role in holding each agency/attendee to account for assigned actions or outcomes.

The functions of the Safeguarding Board, Section 3 of the DHSSPS policy proposal, should include an explicit reference to the Board's function in relation to overseeing the work of the Safeguarding Panels.

PBNI have some concerns about both the scope and outcomes referred to in the policy proposal. These concerns are two-fold: firstly, that the scope and outcomes may be too expansive to deliver on. Secondly, to deliver on the current scope/outcomes, will require a substantial sub-group structure which, in turn, will have an impact on agencies capacities. This will be further exacerbated by the proposal that the Safeguarding Panels will also have a significant number of

sub-groups. The Committee may wish to examine the experience of Safeguarding Boards in England and Wales in this context.

PBNI concur with the proposal that transparency and independence is best served by the Chair(s) being outside appointees. Given the demands of the post, remuneration is necessary to recruit and retain (highly competent) individuals.

The proposed membership needs to be manageable in terms of size. For those agencies not currently proposed as members, perhaps their involvement could be accommodated on an appropriate sub-group – either at Board or Panel level.

Agency representatives should be at senior level, with the agencies holding the discretion on who should act as their representative.

The planning, commissioning and accountability landscape is complex, as these remits can and do apply to the Safeguarding Board, the Department, Trusts, Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency. Interface arrangements need to be clarified. In addition, policy formulation and commissioning needs to be co-ordinated to agree priorities. It could be suggested that all these bodies agree to co-ordinate their business planning processes.

If finances allow, and in the interest of autonomy, the Safeguarding Board should be a separate, fully resourced, stand alone entity. If this is not possible, the Safeguarding Board would appear to best fit with the Health & Social Care Board as opposed to the Public Health Agency. The Health & Social Care Board remit: child protection and welfare; planning and commissioning services for children, combined with its closer relationship with service delivery informs PBNI's view on this matter.

For the purposes of implementation and tracking progress, in respect of serious case reviews, PBNI would welcome the introduction of a single database. A generic or bespoke programme and project management software package would facilitate efficient tracking of progress and enables 'owners' to be assigned to actions agreed from recommendations.

PBNI have also some reservations about the proposed performance management framework. As currently proposed – and this is no doubt associated with the Board's scope and outcomes remit – it will require the collation and interpretation of a huge amount of data. It may be more realistic that performance data is aligned only to the critical business needs of the Safeguarding Board.

Finally, in respect of transition arrangements, the Safeguarding Board could operate in a shadow form, for a defined period, with the existing Regional Child Protection Committee. This would ensure the smooth transfer of responsibilities.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important area of work. If you require any clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Brian McCaughey**  
**Director of Probation**