



South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust

Stella McArdle
Committee Clerk
Committee for Health, Social Services & Public Safety
Room 416
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

26 February 2010

Dear Ms McArdle

Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

The South Eastern Trust welcomes the opportunity to provide the committee with comments on the proposals for the development of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

We propose to deal with each of the consultation questions set out in your correspondence

1. What are the essential elements that you would like to see to ensure a fully integrated and coordinated response to safeguarding of children?

The Trust would expect to see the work of the Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland (SBNI) build on the existing work of the Regional Child Protection Committee (RCPC), ensuring that both a strategic view is taken of safeguarding/child protection services, but also that operational issues are recognised and responded to.

Within the remit of SBNI it is expected that clear direction and strong leadership will be shown along with providing coordination, consistency and ensuring integration of current and emerging safeguarding and child protection initiatives.

The Trust would hope that the approach adopted by SBNI would be,

- Multi Agency
- Multi Professional
- Deliver clear outcomes for young people

- Mindful of up stream preventative work, such as strengthening family support.

2. Are the functions of the SBNI as outlined at chapter 3 of the policy document adequate?

The functions detailed in Chapter 3 appear to be adequate. It is hoped that these will be reviewed in a systematic way and on a regular basis to ensure that they are still fit for purpose.

3. Given that one of the roles of the SBNI is to secure accountability, how can one panel member hold another to account?

The Trust recognises the difficulty of ensuring accountability when working with a number of different agencies. The ability of SBNI to overcome this issue has been articulated sufficiently to provide assurance. There is a recognition that the Trust will be required to have suitable arrangements in place to interface with SBNI.

The Trust is content that the legislation proposed to require core members to safeguard and promote the welfare of children will provide the opportunity to hold individuals and their organisations to account. It is also welcomed that agency representation will be from senior individuals, who will be in a position to make decisions on behalf of their organisations.

The issue of the current arrangements for the discharge of delegated Statutory Functions and accountability between the Trust and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has been made clear.

4. How representative is the proposed membership; are all aspects of child protection covered i.e. what about courts and judiciary? Does the essential wide representation come at the cost of unwieldiness? What level of seniority should be represented?

The proposed levels of representation would appear to be reasonable, but should not be considered to be a comprehensive or exhaustive list. It is expected that following a period of operation, the membership needs to be reviewed to ensure that the right people are in attendance and that the contribution they make is commensurate with SBNI's aims and strategic focus. The issue of seniority of members has been addressed within the policy document and the Trust agrees with the proposed composition of the SBNI and the Safeguarding panels. The balance however needs to be reviewed to ensure appropriateness.

The Trust is fully supportive of the stance taken with regard to the number of agencies involved, balanced with the number of core members, to try and achieve the optimum, ensuring effective operation of the organisation.

It is suggested that discussions with the Judiciary and court service should take place, to explore the possibility of their participation

5. How should the chairperson of the local safeguarding panels be appointed and should these be paid posts?

It is expected that the chairs of the local safeguarding panels will be selected through the application of the public appointments process and be remunerated accordingly.

6. How clear is the interaction between the DHSSPS, HSCB, the Trust and the SBNI regarding who will have primacy on issues/policy areas and who does what?

The overall distinction between the organisations listed is clear, but there are still some minor areas of clarification required.

The function of SBNI in providing an independent voice on safeguarding arrangements is well defined and understood.

7. Should there be a legal duty on relevant agencies to cooperate as well as safeguard?

The Trust would support this contention, as this would provide a comprehensive and consistent framework in which organisations could operate.

8. Any opinions that your organisation may have on serious case reviews and the single database?

The Trust supports the use of Case Management Reviews, as a means of encouraging critical reflection, alongside other systems and processes that seek to improve professional practice in such cases. It does however acknowledge the imperfect nature of the Case Management Review as a process and will support the work of SBNI in seeking to strengthen current arrangements in line with the work carried out by Queens University Belfast and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

The Trust is supportive of the work to develop the single database, which will allow faster and more reliable access to information regionally.

9. Where should the SBNI be based? Is the Public Health Agency appropriate?

The Trust agrees with the decision that the Public Health Agency should be the host body for the SBNI. The Agency has a remit for child protection in relation to its wider responsibility for prevention.

10. How can potential gaps or slippage between current Regional Area Child Protection Committee and the newly formed SBNI be avoided?

The Trust would suggest a twin track approach with SBNI being formed in "Shadow", to run in tandem with RCPC for a defined period of time. This would allow for the members of SBNI to receive appropriate training and to address a more planned interagency approach to the transition.

11. Is the funding for the SBNI clearly defined? The department have indicated that the £750,000 of funding is supplemented with existing funding? Does this kind of arrangement work?

Whilst the Trust acknowledges the need to have funding to support the work of SBNI, it wishes to register the need for financial support for the Safeguarding Panels as well. To be able to administer and provide professional assistance to the panels a level of funding should be earmarked. This will eliminate the possibility of ad hoc arrangements being put in place and bring consistency across the region.

12. Any other issues you feel may be of interest to the committee?

The Trust would suggest that the Committee try to ensure that both the fledging SBNI and RCPC have good lines of communication and how and what is communicated is reviewed.

Learning from others and sharing best practice is important and the committee should resolve to try and embed this ethos within SBNI.

The development of SBNI has to be set in the context of the increasing levels of activity across both the Trust and the Region. The impact of this increased activity will affect both the priorities and actions of SBNI.

The Trust as stated welcomes and supports the introduction of the proposed arrangements for the SBNI. In general we consider that the proposed functions of the new Board are appropriate. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Yours Sincerely



Kate Thompson
Director of Children's Services &
Executive Director of Social Work