



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR
HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND
PUBLIC SAFETY

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Safeguarding Board Bill:
Evidence Session with the Bradford
Safeguarding Children Board**

30 September 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES
AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

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Evidence Session with the Bradford Safeguarding Children
Board**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Jim Wells (Chairperson)
Mrs Michelle O'Neill (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady
Dr Kieran Deeny
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Tommy Gallagher
Mr Sam Gardiner
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr John McCallister

Witnesses:

Mr Paul Hill) Bradford Safeguarding Children Board
Ms Kath Tunstall)

The Chairperson (Mr Wells):

I welcome Kath Tunstall. Are you anything to KT Tunstall, the famous pop singer?

Ms Kath Tunstall (Bradford Safeguarding Children Board):

No; sadly, I am no relation.

The Chairperson:

That was my immediate response when I saw your name. Kath is the strategic director of services to children and young people in Bradford Metropolitan District Council. I also welcome Paul Hill, who is the manager of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board.

As the witnesses know, the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety was due to visit the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board in February, but, unfortunately, members got caught up in the Icelandic volcanic dust cloud. We were one of its first victims, and we reported for duty at Belfast City Airport at 5.50 am only to be sent home. Members were really looking forward to that visit. However, the mountain has come to Muhammad, as it were, which is good news. The reason why members wanted to visit you in Bradford was because we heard that your board had done some interesting and novel things in this field. Members were keen to meet you and to see your work at first hand.

Perhaps you would give the Committee a flavour of what you do in Bradford in a 10-minute presentation. The Committee has a series of questions that it will put to you after that.

Ms Tunstall:

Thank you, Chairperson. It is a pleasure to be here. It is our first visit to the Assembly, and we have been made very welcome.

Bradford is a large district within West Yorkshire. Like all English authorities, we were obliged to address the issue of local safeguarding children boards in 2005. That was as a result of the Children Act 2004, which required local authorities to establish local safeguarding children boards in each local authority area.

By way of context, members will see from our briefing paper that Bradford is a diverse district with extremes of wealth and poverty. Indeed, I am ashamed to say that one third of our children are classified as living in poverty. I say “ashamed” because, as the director of services to children and young people, I am responsible for the health and well-being of those children, and one of my challenges is to address that.

Bradford has a population of approximately 500,000 people, and children make up

approximately 145,000 of that figure. Of those children, almost 400 are subject to child protection plans, and over 900 are in the care system. To meet those challenges, we set up our safeguarding children board, which was required to be in place by April 2006.

Before I became the director of services to children and young people, I was the director of social services. In England, the director of children's services and the director of education roles amalgamated to form an integrated director role for all children's services, which encompasses child health. As the director of social services, I was the chairperson of the area child protection committee (ACPC). As the director of services to children and young people, I took up the role of the chairperson of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board and oversaw the transition from ACPC to safeguarding board.

The legislation was in place to enable us to do that, and that legislation also placed a statutory duty on all agencies to co-operate. Those agencies included the police, probation services, youth offending teams, strategic health authorities and local primary care trusts. However, interestingly, neither GPs nor teachers were included at the beginning, and although new legislation was passed this year that imposed a duty of co-operation on schools and teachers, GPs are still not covered.

One thing that is strikingly different in the new arrangements is our considerable autonomy as a board. There was a big debate in England about whether there was a conflict in independence and accountability for directors of services to children and young people, such as me, serving as chairpersons of local safeguarding children boards. Earlier this year, we moved to a position of having an independent chairperson, and I no longer chair the board. In the interests of continuity and seeing through the change, our board felt that it was right for me to continue in my role as chairperson, but we are now in a more mature position, and it is the right time to bring in an independent chairperson. He is a local professor of social work from an academic institution in the area, and he brings a refreshing challenge to the board's activities.

The board was fortunate to have Tony Morrison as a consultant. We held some challenging sessions about a safeguarding board's scope compared with that of an ACPC, and it was important that we kept focused and were realistic about what the board could achieve. We knew that our responsibilities were broadening to safeguarding as opposed to child protection, and we had a great deal of professional debate about that.

One of the experiences that we would share with you is that taking on that wider brief was quite overwhelming. We retained our focus on child protection, but did not, for example, take on bullying as an issue until we had been established for a full 12 months. Therefore, we took on issues around child safety and the broader agenda but realised that that had to be done at an incremental pace.

As I state in the briefing paper, we had much consultation with young people and all the stakeholders about how a change to the arrangements could make a difference to protecting children in the district.

There have been interesting debates about the board's funding. The costs were touched on earlier. A prescribed budget is not set for the establishment of safeguarding boards in England. Local agencies and partners agreed budgets for their individual boards. We were fortunate in Bradford because the different partners and agencies have good relationships. However, when it comes to budgets, those relationships are really tested. We came up with a formula funding arrangement, which was loosely based on the number of staff who would benefit from the training and services that the board would offer. That is set out in the briefing paper. Our current pooled budget is around £236,000, but that is absolutely based on consensus and a voluntary arrangement and agreement. There is no national guidance and no direct funding to any authority in the district to establish a budget. We have a small grant, which is due to finish at the end of this financial year. It enabled us to set up the child death overview panels. That is a more recent development; they came into being in 2008. I am happy to touch on that matter.

We had to discuss the cost of an independent chairperson at the board because I, as the director of services to children and young people, came free because it was part of my duties. Costs vary around the region. It costs anything between £500 and £800 a day for an independent chairperson. At the moment, the chairperson works about five days a month, and we assess his role. However, that arrangement is fluid; it is still early days in that regard.

We were clear that board membership should reflect appropriate seniority as well as a balance of professional expertise and those who had the ability to take key decisions. When we moved from an area child protection committee to a safeguarding board, it was interesting that it raised the profile of the issue, which was very positive. The level of seniority subsequently rose in the

membership of the board.

The briefing paper contains details of practical issues, such as the frequency of meetings, and so on. I want to emphasise that I hope that the board provides strategic leadership across the district. The real work and activity takes place in the number of subgroups that we established to take that work forward. I have listed some of those subgroups in the paper. The child sexual exploitation subgroup, for example, came about because we recognised the fact that we had an issue in the district that needed to be tackled. The hidden harm subgroup concerns the misuse of alcohol and drugs. We set that subgroup up in response to a serious case review. A very young child died from ingesting methadone, and the subgroup was a direct response to that incident. We also have small task and finish groups. We had one for abuse in faith settings, which has been an issue for us. All the subgroups are accountable to the board. We have been able to exercise that autonomy by setting activities in response to locally identified issues. We undertake a significant needs analysis of the boards so that we understand our child population, look at the trends and see how we need to respond to those strategically.

Another key issue is accountability in governance and the relationship at a local and national level. The arrangements in England are slightly different. There are 150 safeguarding boards, which reflects the local authority structure. We also have Children's Trust arrangements, which are similar to the health and social care arrangements here but are much more embracing in that they bring in education and all the other agencies. Our board is accountable to its local Children's Trust board, but our board is also there to challenge that board. It is quite a complex relationship. Our board is required to bring an annual report to the Children's Trust board, but it is also there to challenge the Children's Trust board to ensure that child protection and safeguarding issues are a priority for that board.

With regard to the local political arrangements within the local authority, there is an overwatching scrutiny committee for children's services. As the director of services to children and young people, I report to that committee on issues such as the number of children who are subject to a child protection plan and whether they have all been allocated social workers. There is detailed accountability in monthly and three-monthly reporting to that committee.

With regard to the individual agency challenge, we have a performance subgroup and a requirement for agencies to self-assess their performance annually. We set up mechanisms such

as challenge panels, audits of case files and much practical work. After the Baby Peter case in Haringey, we immediately undertook two exercises. We brought in an independent firm to scrutinise a number of child protection cases across agencies and almost ran our own inspectorate. We also brought in a professor of social work from the University of Bradford to look at all our procedures to ensure that they were robust. It is important to have a culture that is open to challenge, learning and constantly improving practice. Until his very sad and untimely death, we also continued to involve Tony Morrison every year in a day out to reflect on practice and progress of where we were heading as board, whether we were meeting the needs of our children and young people in the district and what we were doing to improve their lives.

My final point is about the voice of the child. It is difficult to encompass and engage properly and wholly with young people in the process of child protection. We involved young people in consultation about the board and how they could become involved. We also asked them about their priorities. The board had a high-profile launch, and we had a statement of intent that was signed and witnessed by a young person. It was a simple gesture, and the chief executives of all the agencies signed their commitment to the board in a public and formal way. Those young people monitor our activity, because I strongly believe that our ultimate accountability is to the young people of the district.

I have just pulled out some of the key issues from the briefing paper. I am happy to take any questions.

The Chairperson:

As you were arriving at the meeting, you may have overheard our discussion about the fact that an advertisement has been placed for the chairperson of our safeguarding board. Having someone with your experience is too good an opportunity to miss. You now have an independent chairperson of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board. Sparing his blushes, from what kind of background does that person come?

Ms Tunstall:

He is a professor of social work at Leeds Metropolitan University. He was a practising social worker, and I have known him for 30 years. We were social workers together a long time ago. Nick has now gone into the world of academia, which has been very positive as he is absolutely independent from the operational activity and has come from a different city. Leeds and Bradford

are very close — so close that they are competitive — and that is healthy in a positive way. He has an academic social work background with a particular interest in prevention and family support. We feel strongly about prevention and family support in Bradford — it is part of our principles and vision for supporting children — so it was important that the chairperson came with the same values as the board, while also bringing that independent challenge so that we did not become complacent.

The Chairperson:

I have to be very subtle about how I phrase this: you pay your chairperson between £500 and £800 a day. Our ad is in the newspapers with a salary of £17,000 a year for a two- to three-day week. A payment of between £500 and £800 a day is an awful lot more than £17,000 a year for a two- to three-day week. We do not want to reduce the issue to being only about remuneration, but you explained that your chairperson is a professor with 30 years' experience in social work. Do you think that you would have attracted the same calibre of candidate with what is on offer in Northern Ireland?

Ms Tunstall:

There are commercial sensitivities involved in having this conversation, because this is a public Committee. Our chairperson is paid at the lower end of the scale that I outlined. It is quite complicated. I am conscious that Jan Horwath is sitting behind me in the Public Gallery, but the university benefits from the fact that Professor Frost is our chairperson. It is not a one-way street. The university is quite pleased that a member of its staff is the chairperson of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board, because we have a very strong reputation. It is positive for the university to be connected to a board that has a reputation for good practice; there are benefits for the university. The university is relaxed about the amount of time that the individual spends with us, and it does not tie us down to the last penny. The rates also change in line with what is happening and how high profile child protection work is. When the pressure is on, the rates go up. Getting the appropriate level of payment for the chairperson of a board is a complex piece of work.

The Chairperson:

From your experience, what type of people are the chairpersons of the safeguarding boards of surrounding local authorities?

Ms Tunstall:

Many of them are retired directors or assistant directors of social care and retired senior health professionals. The vast majority of chairpersons are retired senior officers of health and social care authorities.

The Chairperson:

Is it not a bit unusual that, for the initial period, you were the chairperson of the board even though you were still employed by the local authority in a senior social work position? I have not heard of that happening before. Was that specific to Bradford, or was it more common?

Ms Tunstall:

No; it was very common. The vast majority of the area child protection committees were chaired by directors or assistant directors of social services. When safeguarding boards were introduced, at least half the local authorities in England and Wales continued with the same chairperson. In the past three or four years, there has been a debate in England about whether chairpersons should be independent. There are arguments on both sides. There is an argument that a current director of children's services will have the networks, contacts and infrastructure to shape and influence that power positively. The other side of that argument is that such a chairperson will almost be accountable to himself or herself as a director, and, therefore: where is the accountability?

Following the case of Baby Peter, the previous Government's policy was to say that all boards should move towards having an independent chairperson. A period of two years was given for all boards to move to having an independent chairperson. I think that that two-year period is up this year.

Mr Paul Hill (Bradford Safeguarding Children Board)

It will be up in December.

Ms Tunstall:

The change has been incremental. I was certainly not alone. Directors of children's services came from one of two backgrounds: they were either ex-directors of education or ex-directors of social services. I was an ex-director of social services who happened to have a child protection specialism. Areas in which there were previously directors of education tended to go immediately for having independent chairpersons. It is quite complex. Bradford has not been

alone in my position, but every board in England will, by the end of this year, have an independent chairperson.

The Chairperson:

Two models of choosing a chairperson have been presented to us. In our legislation, the chairperson has a pivotal role. He or she will not simply chair meetings; it goes way beyond that. I am sure that that is also the case in Bradford.

Ms Tunstall:

They have to go beyond simply chairing meetings.

The Chairperson:

One option is that the Minister, after advertising and interviewing, decides that Mrs Smith or Mr Jones is the new chairperson of the board. The other option is that the board does the interviewing and appoints the chairperson. Which model do you use and which is most common in your area?

Ms Tunstall:

The legislation states that the local authority, in consultation with board members, should appoint a chairperson. In Bradford, I, as the outgoing chairperson and the director of services to children and young people, involved the board in the selection process. We have an inclusive approach in that regard, but we did not have to do that. I felt that it was important that the new chairperson was accepted in his role because a number of members of our board did not want an independent chairperson. They were happy with the existing and previous arrangements. I felt that it was really important that the responsibility for the appointment of the chairperson was owned by people on the board, so a cross-section of board members was involved in the selection process. Ultimately, the decision would have rested with the local authority, or, in this case, the equivalent of the Minister, if we translate the national arrangement as being like the local arrangement as a safeguarding board.

The chairperson needs to have a passion for the issue and a commitment to supporting and protecting children and young people. He or she needs to have the confidence to challenge where he or she thinks that the voice of the child needs to be heard; that is probably the most important issue. He or she also needs to have the professional competencies and expertise to discharge the

functions of the role. Who makes the final decision is a difficult question. I would be reluctant to pin my colours completely to the mast in that regard. I can share with the Committee only the experience that we had in Bradford, which seemed to work very well.

The Chairperson:

You said that your current chairperson is employed for two or three days a month.

Ms Tunstall:

We agreed that it could go up to five days a month because the job is not simply chairing a meeting and leaving; it is about understanding the business and getting to know the different agencies. It also involves attending functions and undergoing training. A chairperson is involved in a range of activities. He or she has to be careful about not going too far in that regard because of being independent. A chairperson cannot become too involved in operational activity because his or her role is to challenge as well as lead the work strategically.

The Chairperson:

Is it actually three or five days a month, or does the chairperson simply do the job but gets paid for only five days? Some chairpersons of our health and social care trusts are employed, technically, for two days a week, but it is almost a full-time job, and they simply accept that. What level of activity is the chairperson involved in?

Ms Tunstall:

It is not a full-time job. Our chairperson's full-time job is professor of social work at Leeds Metropolitan University. However, he does more than he is paid for because of his commitment to the work. Inevitably, that happens with chairpersons' roles in those paid capacities, but it varies. The chairperson reports to me, as the director of services to children and young people, monthly, and I scrutinise his work. At present, it is an average of five days a month, but there are peaks and troughs. The appointee must have the capacity to respond to need. He might work eight days in one month and four days the following month. He probably works at least a couple of days over and above what is stipulated.

The Chairperson:

Several members want to ask questions on that issue, but you have led on neatly to my final question. We are concerned that, as the legislation is framed, it could give the Department

considerable powers to control the work of the chairperson and the board. You said that the chairperson of the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board reports to you. What would happen if that report included a scathing comment about some aspect of the work of your staff with which he was extremely unhappy and in which, he felt, they had failed miserably? How does that work if the chairperson reports to you? Presumably, you authorise whether he continues to pursue that issue?

Ms Tunstall:

If the chairperson brought serious concerns to me, I would have to investigate and deal with it. That would be my responsibility as the director of services to children and young people.

The Chairperson:

What if the chairperson said that he intended to publicise the issue, which would be embarrassing? What if he felt the need to highlight it? You would have the power to say no.

Ms Tunstall:

I would not have that power. However, I would have a conversation with him and ask him whose interest he would serve by highlighting the issue. I would ask him whether it would improve the position of children. As a concerned chairperson, he would want to be satisfied that I was taking actions to address the concerns and to ensure that they would not arise again. To put such concerns in the media and in the public domain would not necessarily assist in the process.

I have had a conversation with the chairperson about such an issue. He said to me that I could not tell him to do something with which he did not agree, that he was independent and was not employed by me. At the end of the day, he would be able to walk away from the issue, as opposed to my staff, whom I employ. He is employed by the safeguarding board, but because of my statutory responsibilities as the director of services to children and young people, I have final responsibility and accountability for the outcomes for all children in the Bradford district. In that sense, the chairperson has to account to me. However, he is not employed by me; he is employed by the board. It is a complex issue and a complex set of relationships. We have to work hard to make them work.

The Chairperson:

The chairperson has to be a critical friend. He or she has to be critical and not too friendly. The

following type of scenario concerns me. The chairperson reports on some aspect of your department's staffing. He wishes to highlight that issue publicly, perhaps in the board's annual report, which you, as the director of services to children and young people, will find embarrassing. Are his options to print and resign, or can he stay if he agrees to do what you tell him? You say that he can walk away. Do you mean that he will have to resign as the chairperson in order to go ahead and highlight the issue?

Ms Tunstall:

If we were in a print-and-resign situation, that would constitute a serious failure and a breakdown in the relationships and the arrangements in Bradford. I would like to believe — I do believe — that if the chairperson had serious concerns on matters that had been brought to his attention, he would bring them to me in the first instance, confident that I would act on those concerns and deal with them. To go to the media would not be a constructive way to deal with those issues. It would be a serious situation if I refused to act on, or follow up, his concerns, and he may then decide to take the matter further by going to the press independently. However, if that ever happened, it would constitute a breakdown in good child protection arrangements in the district.

The Chairperson:

It has been known to happen.

Ms Tunstall:

Yes.

The Chairperson:

From many cases, we have learned that people who stay silent in such situations can often allow abuse to continue. There is a balance. Do not get me wrong: one does not want a chairperson to be a completely loose cannon and criticising everything for the sake of it. Equally, our legislation seems to imply that the Minister can bridle whatever the chairperson does. That worries us, and we are considering the best way to address it. I am, therefore, intrigued by the relationship whereby the chairperson reports to you monthly. That is the crucial issue.

Ms Tunstall:

The chairperson reports to me, but he is genuinely independent, and I respect that independence. When Nick became chairperson, he had absolute free rein to go into any of the services, have a

look round, talk to front-line staff and do whatever he felt that he needed to do to satisfy himself. I totally respect that. He is accountable to me because I have overall accountability for the children of the district. However, Nick remains independent, which I genuinely respect. If he had any issues or concerns, he would, appropriately, bring those concerns to me. However, if he felt that I had not responded in a way that was right for the children of the district, he could take his concerns to OFSTED, which is the overall inspection agency. In our setting, that would be the next step, and it would then trigger an inspection into children's services in Bradford.

Mr Easton:

Is the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board accountable to the local council?

Ms Tunstall:

Yes, it is. We are accountable to the chief executive of the council.

Mr Easton:

Does the council have the power, as our Minister envisages, to dictate the reports and investigations that the safeguarding board must carry out. Does it have the power to force the board to call in a report before that report is published, or does the board have total independence on what it reports and decides to do in case studies, and so on?

Ms Tunstall:

It is a complex arrangement. I am accountable to the chief executive. However, the Children Act 2004, which established the role of the director of children's services and the Children's Trust, gives me statutory rights that can almost compete with those of my chief executive. Therefore, if I, in my role as director, felt that the council or the chief executive were taking actions, or asking me to take actions, that compromised the health and well-being of children of the district, I could refuse to do that. Therefore, the accountability of the director of children's services, which is a unique post in English law, is in statute.

Mr Easton:

I roughly calculated the remuneration available in England and estimated that it would be around £6,000 a month and £18,000 over three months. Therefore, in three months, chairpersons there are earning more than can be earned in Northern Ireland in a year. If the chairperson post in Bradford is at the lower end of the remuneration scale, I suggest that there is a serious problem.

The Chairperson:

We are not simply demanding more money. We are talking about the status of the position and are trying to reflect that status in the remuneration. It is a pity that it gets down to pounds, shillings and pence.

Ms Tunstall:

That is the reality of what we are dealing with.

The Chairperson:

It indicates the Department's perception about the level at which the chairperson is appointed. Quite clearly, the perception of your chairperson is on a different planet. As a university professor, he is clearly in a very senior position.

Mr Gardiner:

It is lovely to have you in Northern Ireland. Thank you very much for your assistance thus far.

Clause 7 provides for the safeguarding board to establish a case management review panel. It also provides for a child death overview panel. Do you have such a panel in your organisation? If so, how does it handle cases concerning a child's death and how are the parents dealt with?

Ms Tunstall:

We have a serious case review subgroup, which is the equivalent of the case management review panel. If a child dies or is very seriously injured in suspicious circumstances, we initiate a serious case review. A set of regulations ensures that that is done independently. The serious case review subgroup oversees that work and ensures that the recommendations for change and the necessary actions to be taken by agencies have been delivered, and they monitor that delivery. That is for specific cases. In the past few years, Bradford has had, on average, about one extremely serious case a year, such as the case that I mentioned earlier in which a child died from methadone ingestion.

The requirement for a child death overview panel came into force in 2008. Its function is to oversee all child deaths in the district: sudden infant death; road traffic accidents; serious illness, and so forth. Each year, there are about 100 child deaths in the district. The role of that panel,

which is chaired by a paediatrician, is to monitor the causes of death to determine any patterns and, if so, whether those should affect policy. The panel determines whether any trends are emerging. In a sense, that reflects the general duty of safeguarding the health and well-being of children. That duty sits alongside the panel's specific role to investigate individual cases of child abuse and child neglect to determine whether agencies could have prevented the death of each individual child.

As it happens, our serious case review subgroup is also chaired by a consultant paediatrician, because that individual is highly experienced in child protection. She was a member of the ACPC for several years and is now a member of the safeguarding board. Other agencies, such as social care and the police, are involved and sit on that subgroup. The child death overview panel is also multi-agency.

Mr Gardiner:

What support do you give to parents?

Ms Tunstall:

Do you want to answer that, Paul? It will give you a chance to speak. I have been dominating the session.

Mr Hill:

I might be able to be of assistance. One responsibility of the child death overview panel is to ensure that bereavement support arrangements for parents are appropriate. The panel must also ensure that those support arrangements are not delivered in a way that conflicts with the possibility, in some instances, that a criminal investigation might be considered, as it can be some time before the circumstances of some child deaths become clear.

The child death overview panel produces a leaflet, the contents of which are based on advice from organisations that specialise in giving support to those who are grieving. The leaflet also refers to particular legal obligations that apply. That is a general leaflet, which is given to parents only by people who have a relationship with them, because it is a time of great distress. Those leaflets are available from a variety of sources: the chaplain's office at the hospital; midwives; health visitors; and staff who work in palliative care units in which a death may be anticipated.

It is extremely important that skilled practitioners have a relationship with the family and are able to use that to explain to the family, in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and ability to take information on board, the role of the child death overview panel. As Kath said, that panel considers every child death.

Additionally, although an annual report is produced, we are clear that written information must not be given to parents by that overview panel. To the best of my knowledge, that is the practice of all child death overview panels. We are clear that the purpose of that panel is to gather information that will assist in providing a general understanding and increased knowledge of the causes of children's deaths in the Bradford district. Such information will assist us in developing policy and providing public health and safety messages. That might include ensuring that information is provided to professionals about issues such as sleeping arrangements for children and the risk of children dying as a result of overlaying. Two cases were reviewed in which that was a concern, and they were addressed by the child death overview panel, even in its early stages. We do not give specific advice to bereaved parents or other family members. That is the role of the professional who knows that family and understands their circumstances.

The Chairperson:

You have created much interest; the questions are piling in.

Mrs O'Neill:

I want to pick up on two issues: subcommittees and the voice of the child. Is there a danger that subcommittees operate in a vacuum and deal with issues that are outside the board's main remit? Could they become sidelined? How do you ensure that that does not happen?

Ms Tunstall:

In Bradford, every subgroup must be chaired by a member of the full safeguarding board. At each safeguarding board meeting, brief minutes and all key actions of the subgroups are reported to the board so that it always has an overview of their activities. Any recommendations that require decisions come to the board; therefore, there is a clear line of accountability from the subgroups back to the safeguarding board through the chairpersons of those subgroups.

Mrs O'Neill:

Has there always been a positive relationship between the subgroups and the board? Has that

always worked out? Has there ever been an instance when it has not?

Ms Tunstall:

We sometimes have quite lively debates, and there are good professional challenges. The relationship is constructively healthy in that professionals and practitioners who sit on those subgroups bring a healthy degree of challenge to a strategic board, which examines policy. Such input will shape and challenge policy.

Mrs O'Neill:

Has a subgroup decision or recommendation ever been completely rejected by the board?

Ms Tunstall:

Paul, can you remember one?

Mr Hill:

The pace of certain developments has been debated, and the board may have to take a view, from its wider perspective, of the range and co-ordination of initiatives being pursued by agencies. At any point, a subgroup may be told that it must approach a matter at a different pace or prioritise matters differently. It may help the Committee if I explain that the board has an annual work plan, as does each subgroup. Although there are opportunities to react to specific developments or, for example, information from a serious case review, there is broad agreement and knowledge across the board about priority areas being addressed by subgroups in the course of the year and how they link into the board's overall work plan.

Mrs O'Neill:

Your briefing paper states that the voice of the child is a challenging area for the board. I read that you have had consultations and participative events. Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) suggested that there should be a shadow board for young people. Have you ever gone down that line? Do you have a group of young people on whom you always call? You talked about the statement of intent to which they all signed up, but the voice of young people must be at the core of safeguarding. It is important to progress from the correct starting point. How do you feel about the suggestion that there should be a shadow board of young people?

Ms Tunstall:

We are always open to suggestions about how to involve young people, because that area is challenging. Young people are full members of the Children's Trust board. Bradford has a young people's parliament — the Bradford and Keighley Youth Parliament (BKYP) — to which there are elections every two years. Members of the parliament meet regularly, and they meet me, as the director of services for children and young people. We discuss issues about the board with the BKYP. We also have a children in care council to which we talk about issues such as Facebook. We have some interesting debates about sharing information on Facebook, which opens up a whole area of work.

We have not thought about having a shadow safeguarding board. We do have a network of participation for young people, whereby the youth parliamentarians are linked into other children and young people's groups through school councils, youth services and the voluntary sector. Bradford is a large, spread-out district. Therefore, we need a complex set of arrangements to ensure an inclusive approach to children's participation. I am completely open to the idea of a shadow safeguarding board. However, we would have to ensure that it did not become isolated from the complex arrangement of networks for the inclusive engagement of children and young people.

Mr Girvan:

The Bradford Safeguarding Children Board was formed in 2006, some four and a half years ago. Did you have difficulty breaking away from a culture in which agencies acted on their own to moving towards working in collaboration with others to effect change? Was it difficult to break that culture? Do organisations still attempt to hang on to their own areas of expertise rather than volunteering to work in collaboration?

Ms Tunstall:

I am worried that I am giving a rosy picture and not addressing the realities. That is not a picture that I recognise. Before the establishment of the safeguarding board as a statutory body, the agencies always worked well together on child protection.

Mr Girvan:

I asked that question because, given that your safeguarding board was formed in 2006, you can now assess whether there has been any material change in delivery? For example, are more

children or fewer children on the at-risk register? Have there been any improvements because of the establishment of the board?

Ms Tunstall:

There has been improvement. Putting the board on a statutory footing has raised its profile among senior people in agencies and organisations. Before the establishment of the safeguarding board, for example, a senior nurse might have represented a primary care trust. After the formation of the board, its profile was raised, and I found myself having conversations with the chief executives of trusts. The board was taken much more seriously, which was a positive and helpful step that could be built on. We have been able to take on more responsibility through broadening our remit. Therefore, we consider child safety, anti-bullying and other issues that we did not previously consider. That has resulted in a better service for young people that is better able to address their issues. For example, the issue of domestic violence receives more attention than it did previously.

Mr Girvan:

Is that because of the make-up of the board, in that senior officials are now members as opposed to, historically, clinicians?

Ms Tunstall:

That is a factor. Previously, it was very much about practitioners — experts — and clinicians. However, the board now has wider management accountability and responsibilities, and that has helped. There is a greater awareness. In my experience, it often comes down to individual personalities who have a commitment and a passion for this area of work and who make things happen in their organisations.

Mr Hill:

The fact that we have a pooled budget is another aspect of the board's arrangements that has contributed to a more effective, collaborative approach. If an agency is committing a substantial amount of money to the operation of the board, that agency has an additional interest in the effectiveness of the board. There are examples of greater transparency of arrangements in individual agencies about how they address issues of child protection and wider safeguarding arrangements.

Certainly, the type of information on which I can call on behalf of the board now compared with what I could call on four years ago has improved greatly. For example, I can seek the number of police investigations into crimes in which children were victims or witnesses, or the number of children who are hospitalised as a result of an accidental injury and break down that information to try to understand it better. However, it is a constant journey. When we receive further information, we recognise the fact that there are other areas in which our joint working could become more effective.

In addition, a benefit of the board, given the wider remit of safeguarding rather than narrow child protection, is that it raised the profile of agencies that previously received little recognition or appreciation of their work. For example, people who work in road safety units to try to reduce the number of child casualties on our roads have particularly welcomed the developments of the safeguarding board because it raised the profile of their work. They are able to frame it as a way to improve the well-being and safety of children in the district, alongside other, perhaps more commonly perceived, aspects of road safety. It has improved their capacity to reach into schools and other areas in which people work directly with children and also raise the profile of road safety. I could talk about other aspects of safeguarding, but that is one example in which that has been noticeable.

Ms Tunstall:

Performance frameworks in host agencies sharpened people's commitment. A primary care trust is judged on its commitment, engagement, arrangements and procedures for child protection in a way that it previously was not judged. That is always a helpful driver.

Dr Deeny:

You are welcome, and thank you for allowing me to have a lovely lunch today. I am sorry that I missed the start of your presentation.

The answer to Paul Girvan's question answered one of my questions. Almost two years ago, there was a terrible tragedy in Omagh, in which a family of seven burned to death in a house fire. You may have seen it on the national news. All sorts of fingers of blame were pointed at social workers and policemen, and it was said that they should have done this, that or the other. For most of those who have considered the case since, there was a lack of working together. People did their own thing. For example, the man who started the fire had two previous convictions and

had served a custodial sentence. Everybody wondered how in God's name that man was allowed to live in the same house as young children. Somebody, whether in the legal system or whatever, felt that that was acceptable. On looking back, it certainly was not.

That tragedy occurred in my area. It was in my nearest big town, and I attended the funeral. I will never forget the sight of those coffins. Nobody wants to blame any individual. I know the police officers and the social workers who were involved, and they were asking themselves how that man had been allowed to live in that house.

How do you ensure that there is good teamwork on the board? Paul Hill talked about councils, road safety and schools. Does the board have relationships with, or include representatives of, the local police or the judiciary? All those agencies have a part to play so that we can safeguard our children to the best of our ability. None of us ever wants to see what happened in our area happen again elsewhere. There was a complete breakdown in communication among the different agencies. They were all trying to safeguard children in their own way but, unfortunately, in isolation.

Ms Tunstall:

The membership of the safeguarding board is prescribed in legislation and includes the police, both community police and specialist child protection units. It also includes the local probation board. However, it does not include the local fire service, but we still engage with it. There have been a couple of fire tragedies in Bradford.

It is difficult. In every serious case review, the key issues are communication, exchange of information and awareness. With child protection work, we can never be complacent and must strive for the most robust set of arrangements and procedures. That requires people to exchange information and work together at an operational as well as a strategic level. When tragedies happen, we must ensure that lessons are learned, procedures are changed and arrangements are constantly improved.

A serious case review that is due to be published shortly involves the death of a child in a house fire. We are examining how information about the adults in that household was shared among different agencies. In such cases, collective risk assessments are undertaken to weigh up the risks posed by the adults living in the household. It is important that child protection

procedures work alongside adult risk assessment procedures and that multi-agency risk assessments are carried out.

The agencies on the board have close working relationships. The Probation Board's role on the board is crucial, because it is the interface between adult and child risk assessment. Members involved in adult social care also sit on our board. That plays a key role in ensuring that we think about "family" as opposed to silos of "children" and "adults". It is, therefore, about lining up systems with procedures. However, we are constantly striving to improve those systems and procedures and to learn from those terrible tragedies.

Dr Deeny:

Will you provide us with details of the make-up of your board — not the names but the individual posts? As we look forward to the establishment of the safeguarding board for Northern Ireland, do you have any suggestions as to how we ensure communication? I presume that there should be regular communication to avoid a breakdown when things go wrong.

Ms Tunstall:

We include details about the safeguarding board website at the end of our briefing paper. There is a great deal of information about our procedures on the website. We brought some documentation with us for the Assembly Library. However, we are aware that you must be inundated with papers.

I wish to commend a couple of features on the website. First, there is our training strategy, which concerns multidisciplinary training for all agencies with different levels of sophistication around child protection. The training is for the police, the fire service, health visitors, doctors, social workers and teachers. A delivery plan flows from that strategy. We have training for thousands of childcare staff. I am using the word "childcare" in its broadest sense to mean paediatricians and others across the board. Secondly, there is e-learning, which is used to reach people who cannot attend courses. E-learning covers a comprehensive set of arrangements from raising awareness and dealing with concerns to training people to a sophisticated level, depending on the role of the professional involved. Those are just a couple of examples. Publications on the website include 'Anti-bullying Strategy 2008-11' and 'Getting Serious about Safety'.

Mr Hill:

Subgroups are extremely important in that respect, because they provide an opportunity for people, be they managers or practitioners from agencies, to work together with people from other disciplines. Although they work on the subgroup's programme of work, the experience improves their understanding of agencies' different roles and powers. Therefore, although our local fire service, for example, is not represented on the board, its staff are involved in our subgroups. They give advice, help to draft policies and procedures, and they ensure that other agencies have up-to-date information about the way in which the fire service operates. In doing so, they ensure that people understand, for example, how to invite the fire service to a school to give information to children and young people.

People who sit on the main board meet at a strategic level every two months, which is extremely important. However, you should also consider the breadth of the subgroups, each of which is made up not only of managers but practitioners from health settings, the fire service, the police and local authority services. From that, you get a sense that the number of people who are directly involved in delivering the board's agenda is wider than the membership of the headline board suggests.

Mr Brady:

My question is on inter-agency relationships. You mentioned challenge panels, which, presumably, facilitate front-line staff through holding meetings to discuss particular cases. Is that regarded as merely a cosmetic exercise, or do you consider that it could be an evolutionary process whereby improvements could be made about how things are done? In your experience, do staff find that to be a useful exercise?

Ms Tunstall:

Yes, they do. It is important to hold such events when not reacting to a tragedy or doing so as part of an inspection process. In other words, such meetings should happen when the pressure is not necessarily on. That frees people to be more open to learning, engaging and being honest about various cases. That is one plank in the overall management performance arrangement, but it is a valuable one, and front-line practitioners love it.

Mr Brady:

In a sense, you have answered the next part of my question. I was going to ask you whether such

meetings were proactive or reactive.

Ms Tunstall:

They must be proactive.

Mr Hill:

They are scheduled for the next 12 months. Only yesterday, I signed off the latest version of the action plan. One extremely important aspect has, perhaps, not yet come through. In all safeguarding activity, it is vital to have information when something has gone wrong. However, we also like to celebrate good practice, by which I mean that we draw attention to it and people learn from it. Of course, we learn from our mistakes, but there is also extremely good practice. It is important that bodies such as local safeguarding children boards showcase good practice, commend people on it and encourage others to follow their example.

The Chairperson:

On a practical note, when the annual report or any document that has been produced by the board is ready for publication, must it be brought to you, Kath, for approval?

Ms Tunstall:

The board approves the annual report, after which it goes to the Children's Trust board. I will open up a can of worms now, but that body is chaired by a politician from the district who is the lead member for children's services.

The Chairperson:

Could that lead member say that a document was not suitable for publication?

Ms Tunstall:

In theory, probably yes. I spoke earlier about my being accountable to the chief executive, yet I have the statutory power to challenge. I am not politically naive. I operate in a highly political world in which there are powerful influences that must be managed. The lead member, as chairperson of the Children's Trust board, could say that he would not accept an annual report. However, powerful representatives of agencies sit around that table, and I am sure that he would think carefully before taking that course of action, because it would have consequences. Therefore, he would not take that course of action lightly. As the chairperson of the Children's

Trust board, however, he could say that he did not think that a certain document should be published, but that would give rise to a lively debate.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for your evidence, which was very helpful. Feel free to stay for the next session, or there is no problem if you wish to retire. Needless to say, as we plough through legislation for our own safeguarding board, the input from those who have been there for four years already will prove to be very useful.