

Mr Seamus Camplisson
Regional Strategy Team
DHSSPS
Room C4.22
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Ref: 102/32/1

Dear Mr Camplisson

'A HEALTHIER FUTURE' A NEW TWENTY YEAR REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

I refer to the above document issued for consultation on 23 December 2004. The Board acknowledges the extensive consultation undertaken with a broad range of stakeholders and is supportive of the consensus which is reflected in the document.

As requested, I have outlined the Board's comments under the particular questions identified in Appendix B:

Question 1

Does the vision adequately describe the health and social services that will meet our future needs and aspirations?

- A strategy which sets out a vision for the next 20 years is welcomed as it encourages innovative thinking and longer term planning.
- The emphasis on promoting health and well being is particularly welcome as is the recognition of the wider determinants of health extending beyond the boundaries of health and social care services. This is an ambitious and challenging vision and there is a need for more detail on how it will be achieved. Comprehensive implementation plans and cross-Departmental budget information will be required to clarify the practical details of how the vision will be realised. There is a danger that, in the context of the current economic climate, it will not be possible to

meet the targets set or improve services, as envisaged.

- It would be helpful to have more emphasis on the HPSS's role in advocating for public health policies, particularly when engaging in partnership working. There is also a need to highlight the rapidly growing, multi-cultural nature of Northern Ireland's society and the implications this will have for the HPSS.
- The vision also should emphasise a sense of future actions being based on strong evidence of what works. In this context, the vision needs to be underpinned by widely shared information, research and evaluation to ensure that HPSS is meeting needs effectively.

Question 2

A Healthier Future focuses on major themes: Investing for Health and Well-being; Involving People; Responsive Integrated Services; Teams which Deliver; Improving Quality; and Making it Happen. Do you agree that it is appropriate to focus on these themes and are there any others that should be addressed by the Regional Strategy?

- These themes would appear to provide a sound basis for achieving the vision. However, as mentioned above, the practical details of how this will happen will only become clear when there are comprehensive implementation plans. There is a need to more adequately represent the cross cutting nature of the themes consistently throughout the document. For example, there could perhaps be more reference made to the Investing for Health theme in the chapters on 'Responsive Integrated Services' and 'Teams which Deliver'.
- The theme "Involving People – building caring communities" is welcome as voluntary and community organisations need to be involved and supported in the prevention of illness and the maintenance of good health.

- The theme “Teams that Deliver” will present major challenges in the future as demographic trends signify a diminishing workforce. Action needs to be taken now and in a sustained manner to address this issue if this theme is to reach its potential. With the increasing emphasis on multi-disciplinary working, there will be a need to reflect this approach in future training across the disciplines.
- The ‘Improving Quality’ theme needs to include a strong focus on evaluation, research and development to improve the evidence base and inform policy development.
- The theme ‘Making it Happen’ needs to include a strong focus on promoting and sustaining leadership at all levels of the HPSS and in the Department. There is also a need for the 20 Year Vision to be shared with and by all HPSS staff and partners across sectors through a major awareness-raising and training programme.
- With regard to the outcome measures identified in this section, it might be helpful to include the work on outcomes for children and young people currently being led by the Children and Young People’s Committees across Northern Ireland.

Question 3

A Healthier Future identifies 16 future Policy Directions. Do you believe these are the right Policy Directions to achieve the vision set out in the document?

- Policy Directions 1 and 2 are particularly welcome. (It would be helpful to make explicit reference to mental health needs in paragraph 1.25) However, it will be important to have clarification on how these Policy Directions will roll out in practice. The 20 Year Vision could provide an opportunity for innovative action, outreach and alternative services in order to be more accessible to deprived communities. There is a need for a Policy Direction related to education and training of HPSS

professionals and others across sectors to facilitate the more integrated, holistic approaches outlined in the Strategy.

- Policy Direction 10 – it would be helpful if the section on carers could include a stronger focus on children who find themselves in a caring role. Caring has a major impact on their health and social and educational wellbeing. In the section on children and young people, we welcome the reference to the approach to improving health and social outcomes by using a joined up approach across Government and at a local level. The interagency Children’s Services Planning Partnerships have proven useful in this regard.

Question 4

A Healthier Future identifies a number of key actions and outcomes. Do you believe that these are the right actions and outcomes to achieve the vision set out in the document?

- There needs to be a stronger commitment to introduce fluoridation.
- It would be helpful if the key actions and outcomes could be grouped together towards the end of the document and, perhaps, included in an expanded Executive Summary.

Question 5

A Healthier Future identifies the need to reduce smoking as a key element in improving the health of the people of Northern Ireland and sets out three main options.

- There is clear evidence that environmental tobacco smoke is directly harmful to health and those in the hospitality industry are at particular risk because of the extent of their exposure. There is no safe level of exposure to the carcinogens contained in cigarette smoke and ventilation does not adequately protect people. Only Option C: **“To make all public places and workplaces smoke-free”** would protect the health of all workers in Northern Ireland.

Question 6

Are the proposals for taking the Strategy forward adequate?

- As mentioned before, there is a need for a comprehensive implementation plan, setting out what needs to be done and by whom. This should include year on year targets and outcomes linked to the 20 year goals. There is also a need for a major communication, training and education programme to inform and engage the whole of the HPSS and those in other sectors. This is needed in order to secure involvement and commitment in implementing the Strategy. It is particularly important to involve other sectors because delivery on many of the targets and outcomes lies outside the scope of the HPSS.
- Given the prominence of the IfH theme, there is a need to clarify how the proposed area plans (page 98) will relate to the local Health Improvement Plans (HIPs) developed and implemented by the Investing for Health Partnerships.

Question 7

Are the equality issues adequately addressed?

As a visionary statement of intent and principle, it will only be by monitoring the outworkings of the Strategy that we will be able to see if equality of opportunity is enhanced. At the level at which the Strategy is pitched, it would be difficult to pinpoint any adverse impacts given that the focus is on making life better for everyone. A commitment to monitoring would be helpful to ensure that the vision in the Strategy becomes a practical reality. For example, monitoring the health and wellbeing indicators of migrant workers, the homeless and the disadvantaged and their ability to access appropriate services will give a clearer picture as to whether equality issues have become embedded in service design and delivery.

An acknowledgement that the fabric of Northern Ireland society has changed in recent years with the advent of a growing number of migrant workers (and is likely to continue to do so) would be a useful

marker. The growing diversity of our community with all the challenges and the benefits it brings will need to be reflected and addressed in order to promote equality of opportunity.

In Conclusion

Overall the Board welcomes the development of this Regional Strategy and looks forward to receiving further information about the related implementation plans which will translate this visionary document into reality.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart MacDonnell', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Stuart MacDonnell
Chief Executive