

30th March 2005

Regional Strategy Team
C.4
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Dear Sir/Madam

A Healthier Future – A Twenty Year Vision for Health and Wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2005 – 2025

1. Investing for Health and Wellbeing

The Council supports the overall aim of improving the physical and mental health and social wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland.

A lot of this chapter focuses on the health facts and outcomes and less on the causes and attitudes associated with social wellbeing.

Key Actions such as revising the addition of fluoride to water supplies will need public consultation and support.

Partnerships across Government as outlined are crucial to success. The Department of Education has a particularly important role in instilling good practice at an early age. It is interesting to note that the document mentions nutritional standards for school meals and the recent media coverage on the content of school meals by Jamie Oliver.

In referring to whether our Health and Social Services can cope, it is evident that the services have not adapted to meet changing needs and shifts in where demands on the services will arise. With a population growing older and the need for increasing community support a greater shift in resources is required.

2. Looking Ahead: A Changing World

This chapter sets out a good vision of both the future population and the anticipated advances in diagnostics and treatment. A key statement on Page 31 is that people will

have greater expectations of the type of services they wish to receive. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the increasing use of the internet will mean people are better informed about their conditions and the possible options for treatment.

The section on the workforce, demonstrates the 'fit' required between training recruitment and retention to have appropriately skilled staff available to meet the demands upon the service. The lessons of the present need to be taken on board for the future.

3. Our Vision for the Future

In the first chapter, frequent reference is made to the present poor health and wellbeing among those less well off. In chapter 2.3 it refers to a greater gap between the rich and the poor in the future.

How then does this chapter then reconcile that in 20 years time, 'the health gap between the rich and the poor will have been substantially reduced'?

The target access times would be a common vision shared by all.

4. Involving People – Caring Communities

While the relationship has changed somewhat between those who use and those who deliver services, it still has a long way to go. Not all policy makers and those delivering services realise or are committed to the benefits of entering into partnerships with users and communities. However, the vision of greater community involvement is shared by the NHSSC.

5. Responsive Integrated Services

The integration of staff to provide seamless services as outlined is strongly supported and needs to move steadily and speedily in this direction. Adequate funding and resources needs to be provided to enable this to happen.

The role and recognition of the role, of carers is welcomed. The average age of carers increases as the population lives longer. The report also recognises the implications demographic trends will have on the demand and availability of carers. The development of a Carers Strategy is acknowledged and needed.

6. Teams Which Deliver

The Council supports ways of looking at changing roles and developing new roles. The report refers to tasks carried out by doctors which could be undertaken by nurses or other healthcare professionals and similarly there are tasks carried out by professionals which could be done by admin support staff.

Within Northern Ireland, there is a greater need for sharing of scarce skills. At present there is too much 'poaching' of staff between Trusts.

Overseas recruitment as a source of skilled staff is widespread but may not remain so in the future as less developed countries will be forced to take steps to protect against a drain on their own manpower levels and skills base.

7. Improving Quality

The vision of confidence comes about partly through openness and the activity of the media and the service reaction to it. People have much greater access to news and media interest and the service has not always delivered responses or reacted in ways which have inspired confidence.

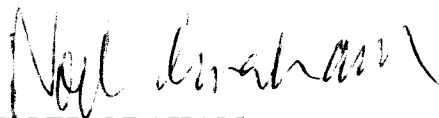
Similarly Councils have encountered failings in the way the service has handled or responded to complaints in the past.

8. Making it Happen

Crucial to the success of this vision is Government commitment to the proposals and means to make it happen and the drive to take it forward within the time frame. The regular reviews should outline achievement towards the vision against those expected and be published. Departmental partnerships are essential to the success and should be given high priority.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Northern Health and Social Services Council.

Yours faithfully



NOEL GRAHAM
CHIEF OFFICER