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Boomer, Linda

From: Joy Poots [joypoots@utvinternet.com]
Sent: 08 February 2007 18:07
To: Boomer, Linda
Attachments: Safegaurding.doc

Dear Linda
Please find attached a consultation response to Safeguarding Board.
Many thanks
Joy Poots
PS Do not request confidentiality

CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO SAFEGUARDING BOARD PROPOSALS

FROM INNER CITY SOUTH BELFAST SURE START

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Introduction

Inner City South Belfast Sure Start (ICSBSS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. However, because of time constraints we are only able to make some general comments as opposed to completing the pro-forma.

Proposed Structures

ICSBSS generally welcomes the proposed structures i.e. a regional Safeguarding Board and 5 Safeguarding Panels (all to be independently Chaired) and in particular that the Safeguarding Board will have statutory obligations. We also welcome the proposal to establish a youth reference group with direct links to the Chair of the Safeguarding Board.

Membership

Again we would generally concur with the proposed membership of the Board and Panels and the level of seniority suggested for the agencies represented. We are concerned that while there is reference to voluntary and community sector participation the involvement of the community sector is not reflected in the list of member organisations. While seniority is essential in regards to organisations with specific responsibilities in regards to safeguarding children we feel it is important that this is balanced with members who have knowledge or personal experience of the impact of child abuse and/or the systems that operate at 'ground level' in order to safeguard children. This could be achieved through the lay and patient/client representatives and should be a key feature of the youth reference group. Agencies such as VOYPIC, Rape and Child Sexual Abuse Centre, NEXUS and Contact Youth would be key to assisting in this regard. While we understand that the Board needs to be of a workable size the 5 Panels that feed into the Board could be used to further diversify the input of local communities and communities of interest such as children with disabilities, children from black and minority ethnic communities etc.

Resourcing

There is little reference in the proposals as to how the work of the Safeguarding Board will be resourced apart from the HSSA having responsibility for the funding of the independent posts and the secretariat. There is also a suggestion that participating agencies could 'pool' their resources to undertake activities such as interagency training and awareness raising initiatives. We would be extremely concerned that the latter could actually reduce resources for frontline services that are currently under immense strain as is clearly demonstrated in the recent inspection report (Our Children and Young People – Our Shared Responsibility). If the Safeguarding Board is to effectively respond to the serious gaps and deficiencies in regards to safeguarding children outlined in the inspection report then additional resources are required to take forward the improvements needed.

Objectives and Remit

While the 4 objectives are broad enough to include all aspects of safeguarding some of the other text in the proposal are concerning in terms of the potential effectiveness of meeting these objectives. In particular point 16, which lists results and outcomes such as a decline in referrals to Social Services, involvement of children with Social Services and children on the Child Protection Register over 5 years is not acceptable in terms of the levels of childhood abuse that is currently not being prevented or ended or even known to the authorities. The functions of raising community awareness, better training and interagency working should actually increase in the medium term the numbers of children where intervention takes place. To aid in improving safeguarding the Board should be able to commission research and innovative pilots and activities to order to better understand how child abuse can be prevented or identified and reach out to those children who are vulnerable. The inspection report also identified gaps in services for victims or survivors of child abuse and it is essential that the Safeguarding Board plays a major role in improving post-intervention and therapeutic services if the outcomes for these children are to be genuinely enhanced.