

W E S T E R N

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD



8 April 2005

Regional Strategy Team
Room C.4.
Castle Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3 SQ

Dear Sir

Re: The Response of the Western Health and Social Services Board to 'A Healthier Future'

Thank you for giving the Western Health and Social Services Board the opportunity to comment on the new Regional Strategy, 'A Healthier Future'.

Our Response was discussed and agreed at the meeting of the Board which was held on 07 April 2005.

On behalf of all my Board colleagues I would wish to record our appreciation for the very inclusive approach which has been adopted in the development of the Strategy. The team of people who led the work made significant and in our view very successful efforts to engage the widest possible range of stakeholders. This has resulted in the production of a document which is both comprehensive and highly relevant and which provides a very effective framework for the development of health and social services in Northern Ireland over the next twenty years.

Within the Western area we have also tried to engage with key stakeholders and to develop a shared understanding of the kind of issues which we would wish to see addressed within the Strategy. As you may be aware this approach enabled us to work closely with the local Trusts, the Western Health and Social Services Council and the main Community Networks in the Western area in the development of a shared Response to the initial consultation on the Strategy.

Our shared analysis was then submitted to the review team in May 2003.

While we feel that the Strategy does reflect many of the themes contained in our original submission we would like to take this opportunity to highlight a number of issues which we believe will be particularly important in securing the effective implementation of the Strategy.

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It is our view that the key to successful implementation will be the extent to which the Strategy informs and is reflected in the work of a wide range of Government Departments and more specifically in the extent to which it underpins the work of these Departments and of local government at the sub-regional and local level. This will require both ownership and a clear commitment to joint working in pursuit of a shared objective, namely the development of a healthier community.

It must also be recognised that the successful implementation of a twenty year Strategy requires very significant resources, particularly during the first ten years if there is to be a return in terms of improved health and wellbeing later in the twenty year cycle. The Strategy must therefore be much more than aspirational. It must be resourced and the need for additional resources must be recognised and accepted across Government Departments. It must also be supported by detailed implementation plans which are widely shared with the public and which clearly indicate the inputs required from all relevant sectors and agencies.

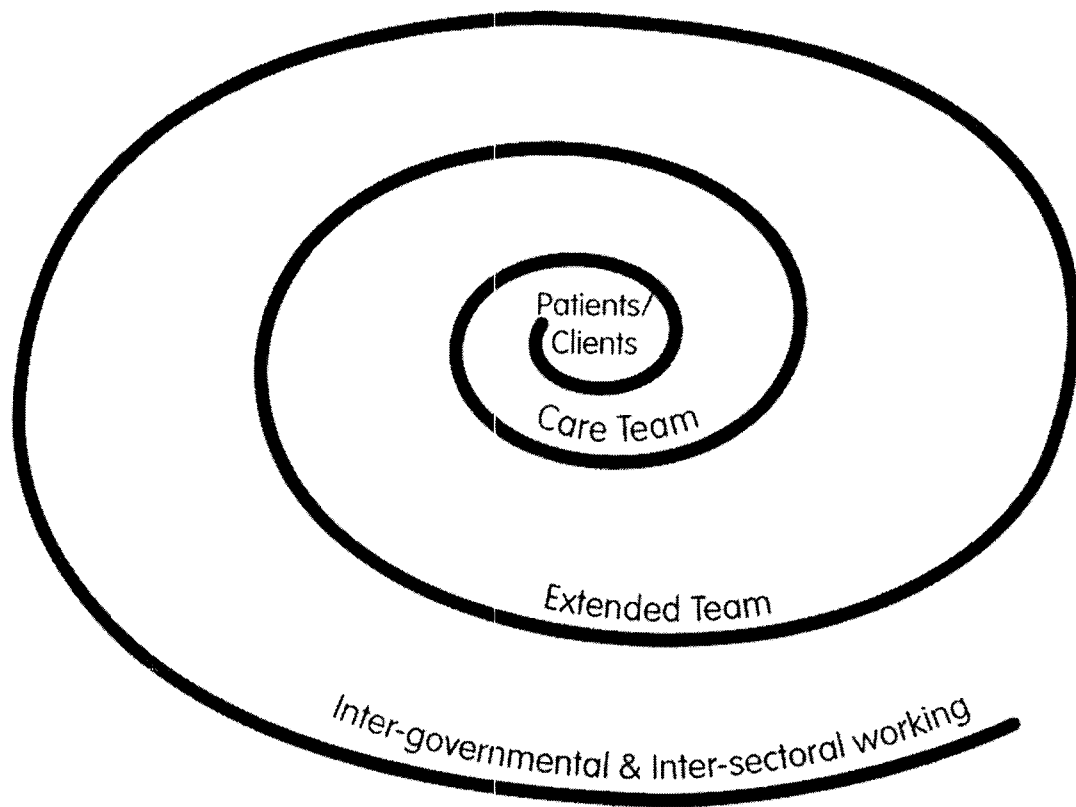
One clear way in which commitment can be shown to the realisation of the Strategy is through 'Priorities for Action' and people will rightly expect to see the Strategy and its objectives reflected in 'Priorities for Action' into the future. This provides a clear demonstration that commitment is being translated into action.

The Strategy recognises the vibrant culture of community development in Northern Ireland. We are pleased to see the contribution made by the community and voluntary sector recognised in the Strategy but this must be backed by a commitment across Government to supporting, resourcing and empowering those who are involved in community development. This is particularly important within health and social care and we look forward to working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in ensuring that community development approaches are used effectively in the planning and provision of services within the framework set by the Regional Strategy.

There are many other elements of the Strategy which we could highlight in this Response. For example, we completely support the key themes of involving people, the development of the workforce and the overarching objective of improving quality. We also look forward to playing our part in taking the Strategy forward in the Western area and to working closely with other stakeholders in its implementation through mechanisms such as the Investing for Health Partnership.

In developing this Response we have tried to give Board members and our staff the opportunity to put forward their views and I have reflected these in this letter. One aspect of the Strategy which attracted particular interest at a recent Board Workshop for members and staff was the emphasis on the importance of effective team working and in particular Figure 5.1 which is shown at paragraph 5.19 of the Strategy. We very much support the placement of the patient / client at the centre of the team process but would suggest that the diagram used at Figure 5.1 needs to be re-drawn to fully capture the nature of the inter-relationships which are so important in the caring process.

The existing diagram suggests a number of layers with 'barriers' between them. This doesn't really do justice to the central theme of the Strategy which is the need for a much more integrated and inclusive approach to improving health and wellbeing. The diagram which follows may therefore provide a more appropriate representation of these inter-relationships and we would of course be more than happy to further explore our thinking with the review team if this was felt to be helpful.



Finally, could I ask you to convey our thanks to all of those who were involved in the development of the Strategy. It has succeeded in its aim of providing a vision for health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland over the next twenty years and as I indicated earlier we very much look forward to playing our part in translating this vision into actions designed to improve the health and wellbeing of our population.

Yours sincerely

Karen Meehan
Chairwoman