

Family and Children's Policy  
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To whom it may concern

As Commissioner for Children and Young People it is my principal aim, as set out in legislation, to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. As the Department will be aware, NICCY actively engaged in all stages of the development of primary and secondary legislation as well as statutory guidance for the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI). Due to the short consultation period for the proposed changes to schedule 1, 3 and 5 of SBNI's regulations, I have not been able to consider the amendments as fully as I would have liked, however, I have a number of concerns regarding the proposed changes to the quora for meetings and proceedings of the safeguarding board, safeguarding panels and case management review panels.

The primary principle for determining quoracy should be that there are sufficient agencies present to enable decisions to be made that reflect the knowledge, skills and priorities of every agency represented on the Board or Panels. Regulations have been set which outline key professional, department and agency membership which are required to support the Board to deliver on these core functions (Regulation 3, 23, 35). Furthermore, as set out in the Department's own guidance it states that "representatives from the bodies listed in section 1(3) of the Act have been selected because of their capacity to each safeguard and promote children's welfare in the context of services which they currently provide to them" (DHSSPS, 2014, Guidance to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland).

I am concerned that the impetus for this change to the quora for meetings has come about because of the thematic review which is a short term piece of work which is unlike most other pieces of work SBNI will be doing. I believe that 'at least two thirds' of membership should still be the marker which SBNI sets for meetings. A reduction to 'at least one third' of membership for meetings, as proposed, should only happen under very specific circumstances and should include additional measures to ensure that the integrated, holistic aspect of the work and therefore the quality of the decision making is not affected.

In conclusion, due to my concerns that reducing the quora for meetings could weaken the multi-agency aspect of SBNI's work, I seek clear and robust details of how these proposed changes would be managed to prevent any weakening of the critical inter-agency activity which comes from SBNI's defined membership.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Lewsley-Mooney". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney  
Commissioner