



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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COMMITTEE FOR  
HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND  
PUBLIC SAFETY

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**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Hansard)

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**Evidence session on the Safeguarding  
Board for Northern Ireland with  
Children in Northern Ireland**

4 March 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES  
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**Evidence Session on the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland  
with Children in Northern Ireland**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Jim Wells (Chairperson)  
Mrs Michelle O'Neill (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sam Gardiner  
Mr Conall McDevitt

**Witnesses:**

Ms Elaine Conway        )  
Ms Pauline Leeson       )       Children in Northern Ireland  
Ms Ethel McNeill        )

**The Chairperson (Mr Wells):**

I welcome the Children in Northern Ireland (CINI) representatives: director, Pauline Leeson; policy officer, Elaine Conway; and children's services trainer, Ethel McNeill. Please give a 10-minute presentation to the Committee, after which members will ask questions.

**Ms Pauline Leeson (Children in Northern Ireland):**

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to give evidence, and I know that members have heard a great deal of evidence on safeguarding. As the Committee has received copies of our

presentation, I will quickly go over some of the key issues that it contains.

First, we welcome the fact that the detailed policy proposal for a safeguarding board highlights the Government's responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). CINI believes that any fully integrated and co-ordinated response to safeguarding children must be grounded in a children's rights framework. We are particularly pleased that the proposal recognises that some groups of children, especially those from a minority ethnic background or those who have a disability, are potentially more vulnerable to harm. Therefore, it is welcome that a proposed function of the safeguarding board is to deliver a regional safeguarding forum. That will provide a platform for a wide group of interested bodies to share their understanding of safeguarding and to influence the safeguarding board about the more marginalised groups of children.

It is essential that there is a statutory duty to co-operate to safeguard children. That crucial ingredient is needed to address previous shortcomings that were identified by Lord Laming, such as poor co-ordination and a failure to share information. A broader understanding and awareness of the concept of safeguarding is also essential. Safeguarding is the responsibility of all public agencies that deliver services to children, young people and their families. It must also include early intervention, prevention and family support to reduce and minimise the need for crisis and statutory child protection interventions.

The proposed functions of the safeguarding board include the delivery of a communication strategy that will inform the general population about the need to safeguard, promote the welfare of children and young people, and encourage participation in safeguarding. Such a strategy is welcome in making safeguarding everybody's responsibility.

CINI agrees with the policy proposal that accountability is an essential component of a successful safeguarding board. Such accountability would be strengthened by a clear understanding of the role and responsibility of board members. Co-operation must be clearly defined and understood by all partners. Our paper recommends that a safeguarding board establish strong links with the judiciary, particularly with the Children Order Advisory Committee (COAC), to co-operate on a variety of court and children's welfare matters.

A subgroup structure will be essential to engaging a wider constituency of relevant expertise

in the board's work, including ad hoc, time-limited bodies to examine specific issues and themes. Members of the safeguarding board should also be senior staff who hold a strategic safeguarding role in their organisations. They must be mandated to commit their organisations to policies and procedures and be able to hold those organisations to account. CINI strongly recommends that the post of chairperson in each local safeguarding panel be held by the corresponding trust's director of children's services, who would have sole statutory responsibility. To provide greater ownership of safeguarding and emphasise a broader remit, we would also like the Committee to consider the appointment of a co-chairperson from the voluntary sector or education.

We welcome the proposal for a part-time paid independent chairperson as a public appointment, but we strongly emphasise that the post of executive officer is probably the most important role in ensuring that the safeguarding board fulfils its functions successfully. It is extremely important that the safeguarding board is an independent body that reports to the Minister. However, there must be clarification of the precise roles and responsibilities with respect to the board's interaction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts.

CINI considers that the legal duty to co-operate and the legal duty to safeguard are one and the same. However, we want to highlight the wider issue of co-operation between the safeguarding board and the children's services planning process, which is responsible for the wider children's plan. To date, a statutory duty has not been placed on all agencies to co-operate in the planning process, and co-operation has relied on the goodwill of partner agencies. That created a weakness in children's services planning with respect to accountability, participation and delivery of the plan. Given the firm connection in the policy proposal between safeguarding and the children's services planning process, CINI asks the Committee to consider scope for a legislative duty to co-operate and commission services for all children and young people, as well as the specific requirement on co-operating to safeguard children. We want that wider duty placed on Departments and agencies.

A number of steps must be taken in connection with the serious case reviews. There must be wider representation from public health and education on the panels, appropriate training of chairpersons and members, and the reports must be more focused and contain fewer recommendations. With respect to case management reviews, CINI strongly advocates that the safeguarding board have an oversight role and identify key trends and themes that require

attention. We strongly recommend that the single database include all children who are subject to serious case reviews, as some of them do not appear on the child protection register.

The only other outstanding issue that we want to highlight is the proposed young persons safeguarding forum, which we warmly welcome. We have proposed amended wording to include younger children as well as young people in the proposal, and CINI is keen to support the development of the forum and the active inclusion of children and young people through the work of the Participation Network, which is funded by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), to help public authorities to engage effectively with children and young people.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you. Do any of the other members of the delegation wish to say anything?

**Ms Leeson:**

No, but my colleagues will take questions.

**The Chairperson:**

You highlighted the serious case reviews. In England, under the Children Act 2004, a general summary of what is happening is published and made available to the public and the media. It does not refer to or name the social workers or individuals concerned. You indicated that you are not in favour of that happening here. Will you expand on your reasons for that?

**Ms Leeson:**

No. I said that several steps must be taken to improve serious case reviews and the reporting mechanism. We are in favour of the summary report, as long as it keeps professionals and families anonymous and focuses on learning.

**The Chairperson:**

There is pressure in GB to preserve the anonymity of the individuals concerned, but to name the social workers. What is your view on that?

**Ms Leeson:**

Anyone who comes forward and contributes to such a learning exercise must be protected,

because participation by professionals as well as families needs to be encouraged. It is appropriate that a summary be made available, as much can be learned from serious case reviews. However, the naming of health and social work professionals would inhibit their participation and, therefore, restrict what could be learned from the reviews.

**The Chairperson:**

Others have answered that question similarly, and there is much logic in what you say. The job is difficult enough without the danger of being named and shamed on the Internet, and the media subsequently reporting it. It is an interesting point that we will have to consider when the Bill comes through to Committee.

The word “co-operation” came up several times in your contribution, and it comes up time and again in serious case reviews. It seems good in theory. However, given that each agency has its own delegated powers and responsibilities and is accountable to the various strands of government and the judiciary, is it practical to enforce mandatory co-operation?

**Ms Leeson:**

Without a duty to co-operate, the functions of the safeguarding board would be weakened. There is no reason why agencies should not have a statutory duty to co-operate. It would strengthen the work of the board and encourage people to work together. After all, safeguarding is a joint exercise.

We welcomed the broader remit of the safeguarding board here. I sit on the Regional Child Protection Committee, which has widened its membership to include prisons, the voluntary sector, including CINI and youth justice. If one is serious about protecting children, there must be a strong duty to co-operate so that organisations can work together in that spirit.

**The Chairperson:**

One issue that I have come across in my constituency is the duty of care for the protection of children from ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. The culture of some ethnic minorities is different with respect to children than it is for people from Northern Ireland, in the sense that what we perceive to be underage or arranged marriages are perfectly acceptable in some cultures. I have found that some people have a different view on what is morally acceptable. How will the safeguarding board deal with that particular difficulty?

**Ms Leeson:**

There is a role for the safeguarding board in raising awareness, particularly with respect to minority ethnic communities. We read the research on safeguarding minority ethnic communities, but there is not much available. The safeguarding board should be asked to consider its relationship with minority ethnic communities and how it can reach out to those communities.

There is a role in the board's communication strategy to make connections with minority ethnic communities, and it is clear from our submission that we want that connection to be based on the children's rights framework. That means that the rights of children — their welfare and needs— are paramount, so that any work with any community, including minority ethnic communities, is based on that premise.

**The Chairperson:**

We have much to learn from the experiences of the Children Act 2004 in GB, but what makes Northern Ireland different is its land border with the Irish Republic. We tried to tease out from previous witnesses whether protection would be improved by setting up a safeguarding board in Northern Ireland that stops at the border. A child in Strabane who is clearly at risk could be walked 500 yards across the bridge into Lifford. Under the proposed legislation, the child would be protected by safeguarding panel overseen by the board. Under the proposed legislation, what protection, if any, would that child have as he or she crossed the border?

**Ms Ethel McNeill (Children in Northern Ireland):**

Much work is being done in Northern Ireland on cross-border working before the safeguarding board is established. There is a strong relationship between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána in trying to share information. However, there are obstacles involved, such as how the human rights agenda is interpreted in law. We have much stronger connections with Wales, Scotland and England through the Criminal Records Bureau, etc, and a great deal of work is being carried out on information sharing. The safeguarding board will highlight child protection on the right agenda. It will also demonstrate that the issue is being taken seriously in Northern Ireland, and our neighbours will want to contact us for information about it.

**The Chairperson:**

If a child is moved from Northern Ireland to Wales, a much stronger trail of information follows that child than if he or she moves a few hundred yards across into Cavan or Donegal.

**Ms McNeill:**

Yes, that is right, because the systems for child protection in Northern Ireland and Wales are similar. The systems based on our legislation came from the Children Act 2004 in England. Our legislation, the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 was based on that Act. The systems have similar policies and procedures, which makes the flow of information easier. However, it does not make it impossible for us to share information with our neighbours in the South. An onus must be placed on the safeguarding board to strengthen that relationship.

**The Chairperson:**

Should specific reference be made in the proposed Bill to encourage greater cross-border co-operation?

**Ms McNeill:**

Yes.

**The Chairperson:**

At present, does the information travel with the abused child or the abuser?

**Ms McNeill:**

I am sorry; I do not know the answer to that question. Information is shared, but I am unsure of the system used. That is the responsibility of the PSNI, and my background is in social services child protection work.

**The Chairperson:**

My limited knowledge is that, if a person is an abuser, information travels across the border, but if a child is moved from one abusive family to another, no information travels with that child. It is a common problem. In a recent tragic case, one of the offenders was living in the Irish Republic. It is a major issue that we must address and it is one that makes Northern Ireland different from England or Wales.

Abusers can be highly manipulative. If they know that they can drive half an hour down the road and continue to abuse, they will do so. We must make it as difficult as possible for them.

**Ms Leeson:**

The Department is working on protocols for information sharing.

**Mrs O'Neill:**

I thank the witnesses for their presentation. During last week's Committee meeting, it was suggested that membership of the safeguarding board should be reviewed annually. Currently, it is a guessing game, with the Department saying that it will appoint people but that that may not work out, and others may need to be included. Do you agree that membership of the board should be reviewed annually?

**Ms Leeson:**

That is a very sensible proposal. Tony Rodgers, the chairperson of the Regional Child Protection Committee, made that commitment last week.

**Mrs O'Neill:**

Research in England suggested that smaller safeguarding boards have been more successful. I am aware that the feeling here is that the board should be larger and include all the relevant agencies.

**Ms Leeson:**

There are a number of factors to consider. Jan Horwath from Sheffield University will speak to the Committee after us, and she has a great deal more experience in working with the safeguarding boards in England. Boards must be of a reasonable size, and they must have a very good executive officer who is able to fulfil the functions of the board by processing information and providing guidance. The roles and responsibilities of board members need to be crystal clear, and training and capacity building programmes must put in place before board members meet, so that they understand why they are there and what they propose to do.

The independent chairperson of the board is another important factor. The successful appointee must have a background in safeguarding so that he or she understands the issues. That background will also help the chairperson to have integrity and be respected by the other board members. It is also important that the chairperson is a good facilitator and enabler and can take

on board the dual role of co-operation and challenge. There will be a challenging role for each member of the safeguarding board and the chairperson.

**Mrs O’Neill:**

I agree with what you said about having a legislative duty to co-operate. There have been some high-profile cases in which, although individual organisations played their role, the failure to co-operate with other bodies meant that the work fell down.

**Mr McDevitt:**

I thank the witnesses for coming to see the Committee this morning.

During the Committee meeting last week, there was some conversation among the witnesses about the barriers that might affect the successful outworkings of the safeguarding board. One of the issues raised was the need for a significant cultural shift in the North. It was said, that, to some extent, the creation of the board will remove some of the structural barriers but that cultural barriers will remain. What major cultural barriers are still in place in the statutory and non-statutory sectors? Do you feel that the role of chairperson will be critical? Can the successful appointee come from Northern Ireland yet be sufficiently independent to carry out the challenge function?

You also talked about someone from inside the system chairing the local boards, which I found interesting. Potentially, that is contradictory with the concept of an independent central chairperson. Will you explore those three areas for me?

**Ms Leeson:**

As regards culture, there is a willingness among statutory authorities to look at a much broader understanding of safeguarding. Our organisation wants a preventative and proactive board as well as one that is more reactive. That has to be qualified by a clear understanding that it is “protection first” for children. That is why we are so clear about the children’s rights framework. There is now a good opportunity to move into something that is much more embracing and that will create greater inter-agency collaboration and work. However, there is a challenge with respect to co-operation and the role of challenge in the statutory services.

Given our background, we are used to challenge. However, one must understand that anyone

who works with children is an advocate for them, whether they work in the statutory or voluntary sectors. There is a greater willingness to embrace that. The Regional Child Protection Committee, on which we have just started to sit, reflects all views and is chaired well. There should be a smooth transition from the old area child protection committees (ACPCs) to the new safeguarding board, which will have a wider membership and a deeper understanding of the broader remit.

The key to success is that board members must be clear about their roles and responsibilities. They must have authority, mandate and commitment from their respective agencies. They must be senior people who have a strategic role, and they need some training to introduce them to partnership working. The right people have to be at the table; that is crystal clear from the research that has been carried out in England.

It is essential that the chairperson of the new safeguarding board is independent and has a good background in safeguarding. The chairperson must also have the skills to facilitate discussion and challenge. The challenge role should not be left solely to the chairperson.

**Mr McDevitt:**

You advocate a strong regional chairperson and a large degree of independence for the board. However, with respect to the local boards, you want the chairpersons to be people from within the system. How will that benefit the challenge function or make the perceived and actual independence of the boards stronger?

**Ms Leeson:**

As I said before, the challenge role will apply to all members. Everyone on the board will have that included in the description of their role.

**Mr McDevitt:**

As you know, someone will have to take the decision.

**Ms Leeson:**

Also, one has to be absolutely clear about who is responsible for safeguarding. The directors of children's trusts also have a responsibility for that. The appointment of a co-chairperson who is from the voluntary or education sector will assist independence and objectivity. It will also help

with the challenge function. However, one must be clear about who has responsibility for protecting children in Northern Ireland.

**Mr McDevitt:**

I will pick up on cross-border issues quickly. That is an area that we should take time to explore. As you rightly point out, the systems in the Republic and the North are very different. The North/South Ministerial Council's working group is making significant but slow progress because of the huge gap between the systems. Should an extra step be taken to try to knit together a framework which, as the Chairperson points out, guarantees that information will definitely flow, not only about the perpetrator, but the child? What specific steps should be taken in the North to flag that up and determine at what levels the commonalities exist, so that we can make statutory provision for those in the legislation?

**Ms McNeill:**

There is no doubt that one of the key roles of the safeguarding board will be to determine how we can work in conjunction with our neighbours. There are issues concerning the information that is shared between us and the Republic of Ireland. In short, it is timely for the Committee to start to consider that important safeguarding issue. It may help the Committee to ask someone who has a solid background in the field to give evidence. One must also consider the PSNI and the relationships that it has already built.

The ongoing risk-assessment model that we use in the North of Ireland tries to bring together the key professionals who work with high-risk offenders, both violent offenders and sexual offenders, to try to address some of the issues. It is worth looking at what is in place now and deciding how we want to ensure that the legislation places the right emphasis on the safeguarding board to take the issues forward.

**Mr McDevitt:**

The systems are so different that it is often difficult to see where they interconnect, except at operational level. What is the highest level at which there is parity between the two systems? What technical measures are the most practical, looking beyond the police, to make between practitioners and social services North and South? If there is to be a statutory provision, will that be to provide for one person to have a statutory duty to liaise with another, and, if so, at what level in the system will that interconnection apply?

**Ms McNeill:**

There is communication from the ministerial groups down, so connections already exist. There are cross-border connections, and people meet to exchange information. I represent CINI on the group that examines communication. The group that directly follows ours is the one that meets to discuss information sharing. An expert witness from that group could give evidence to the Committee and provide a better testimony on what it does.

**The Chairperson:**

We heard evidence from Professor France last week. I cannot remember whether he said that there were 146 or 166 boards/panels in GB. He said that, even at that level and with identical legislation, there was a problem with the flow of information. Therefore, if someone moves from Lincolnshire to Staffordshire, the authorities are not necessarily directly alerted.

**Ms McNeill:**

The information that came through about Ian Huntley was a classic example.

We can place an emphasis on what we want people here to do, but we are unable to dictate what people in the Republic of Ireland do. However, we can negotiate with them and ask them to do the same.

**The Chairperson:**

Cross-border co-operation can sometimes be controversial, but in this instance it is a no-brainer. If cross-border co-operation cannot crack this problem, it is a meaningless concept, because the entire community wants it to be sorted out. We know that children who were abused in the North were taken into the South and disappeared from the system, and vice versa. The safeguarding board will have to devise the best possible method of stopping that. Otherwise, the abuser has a one-way ticket.

**Mr Gardiner:**

I was impressed with your presentation and the professional manner in which you delivered it. However, you are hitting a stone wall somewhere along the line, because someone is blocking some of the measures that you want to be passed. Is the Department, or someone within the Department, causing the problem?

**Ms Leeson:**

I would not characterise the situation as “hitting a stone wall”. We want to maximise opportunities for the safeguarding board to work and maximise opportunities for outcomes generally for children to be improved. The one issue that we have picked up on in our paper is the lack of a general statutory duty to co-operate among Departments and agencies. That duty is present in England, Wales and Scotland.

**Mr Gardiner:**

I am trying to get to the point at which the Committee can help to progress the issue and support you, because it is a worthy cause. I am sure that I reflect the thoughts of all Committee members when I say that we want to encourage and support you and, if there are obstacles, we want to break those down.

**Ms Elaine Conway (Children in Northern Ireland):**

The Committee may be able to help with that issue. As Pauline mentioned in her presentation, we looked closely at the statutory duty to co-operate and, although we are absolutely clear that that duty must be about safeguarding, we want it to have a wider remit, which should be applied across the planning and commission of all services for children and young people. Although the broadening out of the safeguarding duty is to be welcomed, it will have implications across the planning and commission of all services for children and young people. Pauline mentioned the Children Act 2004, which applies in England, and the duties to co-operate and promote welfare are included in section 10 and section 11 of that Act.

We understand that the ministerial subgroup on children and young people considered the issue. The Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister carried out an inquiry into child poverty in Northern Ireland, which involved the commissioning of research on a statutory duty. In its final report, the Committee stated that it would consider strengthening legislation to include a statutory duty on agencies to co-operate on issues related to children’s services planning, which includes services for all children and young people and safeguarding.

That ministerial subgroup recently considered the issue, and we welcome the fact that it has now decided to consider placing children’s services planning on a regional basis. However, we note that, at this point in time, it will be done in the absence of a statutory duty to co-operate. If

that duty exists in England and Wales, where children, young people and families will benefit from a statutory duty on agencies to co-operate and to plan and commission services for them, why should children in Northern Ireland not benefit from such a duty at this time? As Pauline said in her presentation, we want the Committee to consider that further. Perhaps that could be done through liaison with some of the other Committees.

**The Chairperson:**

It is clear that the level of co-operation, and who co-operates with whom, will be a crucial issue when the legislation is going through. I suspect that there will be some resistance to an all-encompassing rule that every authority must co-operate. Our role is to see how far we can push that along.

During your discussions with the Department about the legislation, were you given any indication of a timescale for when it will materialise? Although we are talking about it now, we have not had any clear indication of exactly when we can expect the draft legislation to come before us.

**Ms Leeson:**

We have heard several timelines. We were hoping that the Committee may be able to pursue that issue.

**Mr Gardiner:**

That is why I asked the question, but, to be quite honest, I have not yet got an answer from you. Although you spoke, you have not given us a directive about who we should go to or what we can do to push the issue for you.

**The Chairperson:**

The Committee wrote to the Department to ask for clarity on that issue. We are simply asking each set of witnesses whether they have received any information of which we may not be aware.

**Ms Leeson:**

The latest that we heard is that there should be legislation around April.

**The Chairperson:**

Is that April 2010?

**Ms Leeson:**

Yes, although there may have been some delay. We want the legislation to be introduced as soon as possible. The transitional arrangements are adequate, and we are happy enough with them. However, in the long term, there is a need for the legislation to be introduced and the boards to be established so that we can start to embark on a much broader agenda for safeguarding children and young people. The delays are unhelpful.

**The Chairperson:**

The word “co-operation” keeps being mentioned. You said in your submission that there should be a statutory requirement to co-operate on children’s services planning. What exactly do you mean by that?

**Ms Leeson:**

As Elaine said, the legislation will include a duty to co-operate on safeguarding. In England and Wales, there is a much wider statutory duty to co-operate in many other areas. Examples of that include the joint commissioning and planning of children’s services, which involves a number of Departments or agencies coming together to consider children’s plans. We do not yet have that system in place.

There is a regional children’s services plan, but it is more about planning for children’s services than commissioning them. CINI wants a similar system to be put in place here, and that would require legislation similar to the Children Act 2004. CINI does not want to hold up the proposed legislation, but it wants the Committee to examine, and take more evidence on, that wider duty later.

**The Chairperson:**

Why would that system require separate legislation? The obvious place to incorporate it would be in the proposed legislation that we will have in April. Would it not be better to amend that legislation?

**Ms Leeson:**

It would, but we have waited long enough for the legislation. We must have it now.

**Mr McDevitt:**

If there was a strong enough feeling, those issues could be dealt with through amendments during the legislative process. The process would not be delayed hugely as a result of the legislation being amended, but it is a question of whether there is a will and a need to amend what is in the Bill.

I am struggling to understand how the independence of the safeguarding board can be copper-fastened without losing the essential expertise. Is it feasible for the chairperson of a safeguarding board to come from this region?

**Ms Leeson:**

It is a tall order for anyone to chair a safeguarding board. If someone can be found who has the necessary knowledge, experience and competencies to facilitate and enable discussion and challenge, and to co-operate and collaborate, there is no reason that the chairperson could not be from Northern Ireland. If the position is to be filled by public appointment, all those competencies will be sought.

**Mr McDevitt:**

Another issue that arose during last week's Committee meeting was the potential role that the judiciary will play in the board. What is your opinion on its involvement?

**Ms Leeson:**

There should be strong links between the judiciary and the safeguarding board. The judiciary is an independent institution, and that independence must be maintained to protect the welfare of children.

CINI has a representative on the Children Order Advisory Committee. It is through that forum that we should communicate with the judiciary. There will be many opportunities for the judiciary to liaise and influence the safeguarding board and give it expert advice. However, it must retain its independence.

**Mr McDevitt:**

Therefore, is it correct to say that you do not think that representatives of judiciary should be members of the safeguarding board?

**Ms Leeson:**

They should not be members at this time. The safeguarding board must first be established and, as the Deputy Chairperson said, its membership could perhaps be reviewed during the next year.

The independence of the safeguarding board and the judiciary must be protected. It should be sufficient to have strong links with the judiciary through the Children Order Advisory Committee.

**The Chairperson:**

The independent chairperson of the safeguarding board will have to be quite a person. He will have to have the wisdom of Solomon, the brains of Einstein and vast levels of experience. I am trying to think whether I know anyone who could take on that role.

**Mr Gardiner:**

You are elected. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:**

It certainly should not be a politician.

**Ms Leeson:**

The relationships that are established between all the players will be important. There must be a good relationship between the chairperson and the members of the board, and between the board, the panels and the other authorities with statutory responsibility. I am not sure that all that has been worked out in England, and we should pay close attention to how that works in Northern Ireland. A balance must be struck between collaboration, co-operation and challenge.

**The Chairperson:**

Should the board have a doctor, GP or medical expert among its members?

**Ms Leeson:**

The Regional Child Protection Committee has a member who is a doctor and it also has a GP. It

is essential for the safeguarding board to have representation from the medical profession.

**The Chairperson:**

I thank the witnesses for their contribution today. It has been very useful.

The Assembly will be proceeding with the legislation, and the Committee will be in regular contact with CINI as that legislation winds its way through the system. Interesting times lie ahead. I hope that the legislation materialises in April, but I will not be surprised if it is not. An election could also be called, which could delay the process for at least six weeks.