



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Investigation into Consistency in Child
Protection across the CAL Remit: NSPCC
Briefing

7 February 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Investigation into Consistency in Child Protection across the CAL Remit: NSPCC Briefing

7 February 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Ms Irene McCready	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Mr Colin Reid	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Mr Paul Stephenson	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

The Chairperson: I welcome to the Committee Colin Reid and Paul Stephenson, who are no strangers to us, and Irene McCready, who is the senior training and development consultant of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Is this your first visit to the Committee?

Ms Irene McCready (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children): Yes.

The Chairperson: Thank you for coming this morning. I will leave it to Colin to give us an opening statement, and we will follow up with some questions.

Mr Colin Reid (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children): Thank you very much for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee. It is a delight to be here. Go easy on Irene; she is a wee bit nervous because it is her first occasion in front of an Assembly Committee.

I am joined by Paul Stephenson, who has had responsibility for our child protection in sport unit for many years. Irene is a nurse by professional background, but we will not hold that against her. She was a child protection nurse specialist. Interestingly, in her role in the NSPCC, she has worked with a number of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) bodies in providing training. I have responsibility for policy and public affairs. I worked on the NSPCC's national work on disclosure and barring arrangements in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, so you might bear that in mind for questions.

I will make a number of brief opening observations. This is an extremely important and very timely investigation. Operation Yewtree recorded 214 criminal offences against Jimmy Savile that covered a variety of institutions and settings over 54 years. I would not dismiss it or categorise it as something that happened in the past because some of the offences were quite contemporaneous. It has acted as a wake-up call for all of us about the barriers and difficulties in reporting abuse.

DCAL and its family have responsibility for vast numbers of children, probably more than any Department other than the Department of Education. A lot of the DCAL families work with groups that are quite unstructured. There is a range in sport from very structured to unstructured groupings, which is a real challenge. DCAL, as a corporate parent, plays an important role in safeguarding children. I was very glad to hear the activity that has taken place and was reported to you last week by DCAL since you announced your investigation into the issue. That is very helpful.

We have made eight overarching recommendations to the Committee that cover the terms of reference. Paul will say more about the operation of the child protection in sport unit, which was established in 2001. In partnership with Sport NI, it has done much to improve safeguarding arrangements in sport. You would not go too far in sport without coming across the work of the child protection in sport unit.

In our briefing paper, we set out some of the outcomes of the work, all of which are portable to other sectors. They include developing standards, links to funding, reporting structures and processes, networks of designated officers and training. We also address the challenges of new social media. It was interesting to listen to the debate on Tuesday in the Assembly. I think that you, Chair, spoke during that debate. It is very welcome that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) will take a strategic lead on internet safety. There is no doubt that some of your findings will feed into those developments. The internet has huge benefits to children in a range of ways. There are also a lot of challenges, as you know, for children and adults. At one end of the spectrum, it is about naivety and not being aware of some of the risks that new social media pose. At the other end of the spectrum, we have seen the growth of sexting, whereby children send inappropriate pictures through the internet that break the law, and cyberbullying. You will be well aware of some of the significant tragic consequences of that. We make two recommendations on the development of codes of conduct and an acceptable users' policy. We urge you to recommend that DCAL develops an e-strategy for its families around internet safety and new technology.

We refer to other structural and system improvements. A key issue for us is structured support to the leisure and arts sector — something akin to the child protection in sport unit. It is all fine and well to have policies and procedures, but, when you talk to various bodies, they are really struggling with infrastructure and the actual support that is available to deal with groups on the ground. We recommended previously to DCAL, and also in our briefing paper, the development of a strategic group at the Department with links to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. I note in DCAL officials' evidence that they will reinstate that group, into which we had some input a number of years ago. We really stress the importance of that group meeting and regularly developing a dynamic agenda. We have no doubt that it could deal with many issues.

We have also suggested that DCAL collate and keep data on safeguarding issues to facilitate policy development. That is not about reporting every incident to the Minister but about the Department being aware of the types of issues that it is dealing with. To illustrate that, in the annex to our paper, we pull together a few examples that our teams have come across on our helpline and the types of cases that it deals with. That is probably a small, unrepresentative sample of many issues that organisations deal with that relate to safeguarding, but it is important that the Department gather that information for future policy development.

I will move on to the role of local government. That was mentioned to you previously in an evidence session, and we have done some work on that with the Department of the Environment (DOE), which has policy responsibility for local government structure. There is no doubt that many arts, leisure and culture activities take place in local government settings, and there is some work to be done to ensure that local government sees that it also has a responsibility for child protection. I sometimes get very concerned when Departments say that child protection is a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). It is not a matter for that Department. The DHSSPS has lead policy responsibility on a range of child protection issues, but safeguarding is a key responsibility for DCAL, the DOE, OFMDFM and other Departments.

Finally, I will flag up the role of our helpline and ChildLine, which are two UK-wide services that we provide in Northern Ireland. They are different. You will be very familiar with ChildLine, which is a

wonderful source of help for children, and many children contact it. We have two bases in Northern Ireland, and I offer the Committee, if it is interested, an opportunity to see around ChildLine. It is an amazing operation, so please do so. If you want to hold a Committee meeting in ChildLine, we would be very happy to facilitate that. ChildLine is a source of help for children, and a lot of children know about it. You may not know about our adult helpline service. Last year, it received 691 calls from Northern Ireland, which is not an insignificant number. It does not generate into referrals. About 50% are generated into referrals to health and social care agencies, and 50% are about advice and guidance. We think that the helpline service could be promoted within the raft of DCAL non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and next-steps agencies as sources of help and advice for parents who contact them.

That is all I want to say. I am sure that you will have some questions, and we will pick up the ones that are relevant to our experience and background.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. You have read last week's evidence from the Department, and it was very positive to hear that, since we decided to undertake this work and since your meeting with the Department, it is now following up on a number of those issues and taking it forward seriously. Our concern is that its focus is very much on the arm's-length bodies that fall directly within DCAL's remit and are receiving funding. As members, we are aware that there are groups that fall outside that and issues for those who are involved in dance, music, and so on. Given Paul's work with the sports unit, my first question is for him. Do you feel that what goes on in the sports unit could be replicated in culture and the arts?

Mr Paul Stephenson (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children): Colin mentioned the child protection in sport unit and a number of successes. I suppose that I would say that because I have been working in the unit, but we believe that those have had a dramatic impact on sporting organisations. Many of those issues could transfer over to other sectors, but it needs co-ordination rather than our reacting to situations. The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure said last week that it has had x amount of child protection enquiries when previously it had not been capturing that information. That is a useful start for the Committee in asking those questions of organisations.

Sport NI, rather than waiting for something to happen or to be forced to do things, has been proactive in rolling out standards, offering training through its coach education programme and raising general awareness and expectation. Linking that to funding has been one core push for organisations. It becomes more acceptable that organisations need to report and record, capture information and be held to account. That has been one of the big drivers over the past few years, and I am sure that Sport NI would acknowledge that the requirement had been simply to implement good practice, and everybody said yes to that. Until we drill down to what that looks like — how you communicate with parents, what you communicate to parents and ask those very specific questions — that is a substantial improvement for organisations.

Bringing organisations on board has also been a challenge. We do not want organisations simply to do things because they are being told to; we want to motivate them to do this for the right reasons. Colin mentioned that organisations quite often do not understand their responsibilities. They want to run coaching clubs or drama clubs, and they do not understand what child protection has got to do with them. It is about driving home the point that, if you have an interface with young people, you have a level of accountability and responsibility for their safety, and safeguarding is everybody's responsibility. The Department of Health takes that line, and we hope that other Departments will also do so.

We are here today because we believe that many other agencies could have a more proactive response, in the same way as Sport NI. They need to implement standards, have a co-ordinated approach to providing advice, motivate people, take every available conference and ask every organisation to consider safeguarding procedures. Now that Sport NI has come forward and is looking at strategic plans, we are asking organisations to consider safeguarding. If organisations want to increase their number of coaches and their participation levels, they need to understand the impact that that will have on safeguarding. It is about making sure that that is on the agenda on an ongoing basis.

The Chairperson: Irene, you are a senior training and development consultant. What is your role? What have your experiences been?

Ms McCready: I deliver safeguarding training to any agencies in Northern Ireland that require it. I also develop child protection policies and procedures for agencies. I was approached by the language body and the museums to look at their training and child protection policies, and I did particular work with the language body. I found it to be very enthusiastic about developing good policies that could be disseminated to its smaller groups and used effectively and simply by them. It provided basic safeguarding training for its senior management, conducted designated officer training and developed its child protection policies. I know that those policies are reviewed regularly because I am contacted and asked whether there is anything new on policy and so on.

It would be good to have an overarching strategy that would allow all the bodies to take that and filter it down to the smaller groups in the DCAL family.

The Chairperson: Have you had any experience with groups outside the arm's-length bodies that deliver on the DCAL remit?

Ms McCready: Yes; I have worked with dance groups. Some of them are confused about who they should go to. They do not know, for example, who their designated officer is, what policies to use and what forms need to be filled in. That needs to be addressed so that smaller group have clarity. They need to know whether they should use DCAL's recommendations or develop their own child protection policies. There needs to be good guidance and structures in the DCAL area for those people. That is particularly so for dance groups because people are putting on children's outfits and helping them to put on shoes and so on. They need guidance on what they can touch so that their area of work, specifically with children, is very clear.

The Chairperson: How have you been able to signpost them in the direction of the correct process?

Ms McCready: If a school comes to me with an issue about a language body, I generally direct it to the language body. I also refer them to our training, the gateway team and our adult helpline.

Policy development is an issue. It is about taking information back to management and making sure that it is aware. I have found that the smaller groups are eager to *[Inaudible.]* management is not aware of the changes that need to be made.

Mr Stephenson: I want to give a personal example. My daughter was involved in gymnastics, Irish dancing and ballet. When I registered her for gymnastics, I was given clear information by the local club in Lisburn about my role and responsibilities, how I was meant to behave and how I was meant to get her to behave. I had to sign a parental consent form, there were posters around the club showing who the designated officer was, and there was an open-vision area where we could watch what was happening. My daughter has been involved in Irish dancing for many years. We gave the dancing teacher our mobile phone numbers on a scrap of paper, and I provided my card. I also offered to provide free training to the organisation, but that offer was never taken up. It was only last year that the dance class introduced a parental consent form. There is no information on safeguarding. It is the same with ballet. There is a need to motivate organisations that want to do things, teach people, give them skills, and so on. They need to up their game.

The Chairperson: It is about raising awareness and streamlining the process to make it straightforward for such groups to work their way through.

Mr Stephenson: We recognise that the DCAL remit is mostly about volunteers. This is not about creating more bureaucracy for them. It is about professional support mechanisms whereby they can download forms, information and guidance and access training that is specific to their sector. It is about supporting the voluntary sector. It is not about saying, "You have to go and do this, but we do not have any answers for you." That is the difference with Sport NI. It has accessible training and information on its website, and sample pro formas are available.

Ms McCready: Simple things — a community group knowing what form to fill in or who to go to — are very important.

Mr Hilditch: You are very welcome, folks, and thanks for your presentation. We are mostly looking at the DCAL end of things, but your briefing paper touches on local government. It has a part to play because activities are either hosted or sponsored in those areas. Will you give us a wee bit more of your thoughts on that?

Mr Reid: We did a lot of work with local government a few years ago. There have been some excellent working examples of local government embracing the issue of child protection. I worked with Lisburn City Council, which has done a huge amount of work. If you go into any of that council's facilities, you will no doubt see the operation and outworkings that, and we helped it with its policy. We also work with the DOE. Initially, we had some difficulties with the DOE in that while it has a policy responsibility for local government, it did not see that it had any child protection or safeguarding responsibility. We worked with it over a period of time and ran a conference in, I think, 2006.

The challenge is to embed child protection in local government. Local government has to do many things. Although we have done some work, we probably need to revisit the issue. There are challenges for local government in the provision and hiring of facilities, ensuring good practice and so on. I sense that many councils have embraced the issue, but you may want to look at it or make a recommendation in your final report.

Mr Hilditch: Do you have any views on consistency across council areas?

Mr Stephenson: I can simply say: there is no consistency. I deal with a lot of sports development officers in different areas, and councils quite often delegate safeguarding issues to them. That is not the case in Lisburn, but I often get child protection enquiries that are not sports-related but that come through sports development officers because they have met me in the past. When an organisation wants to hire a facility, all councils do not ask the same questions. Who is your umbrella body? Do you have insurance? Are you vetted? Do you have a child protection policy? Who do you report to? Certain councils ask those questions as good practice. They not only do that but say, "If you do not have those things, we will support you in achieving them. We provide that training, and it is co-ordinated in our local area." Some councils do not do that.

Mr McMullan: That is part of the problem. Nobody seems to have any teeth to do anything about child protection. It keeps coming back to individual groups. If a council is not adhering to a policy, somebody should take that council to task for not doing so. If one council is doing it and another is not, it sends out the wrong message to the public. Groups out there are struggling. A lot of them tell me that you can follow a child protection policy in one group and then, when you move to another group, you have to do it all over again. It is all about time. If a person goes through the rigours of passing the policy of one group, surely that should be enough. Bureaucracy is part of the problem.

Mr Reid: Are you talking about vetting checks?

Mr McMullan: Yes; vetting for child protection. In one year, I did two or three child protection courses run by two or three different groups. The groups are probably all bona fide. I did the courses in the council, and the certificates from the different groups are sitting in my house. There does not seem to be one co-ordinated group that undertakes the training. Different groups come to councils to deliver courses. People might say that they had already done a course but are told that this is a different group and they have to do another course. It is the same course. That is not solving the problem. A lot of groups in country areas find it very hard to get volunteers. Such bureaucracy does not help. People can be vetted very closely in one group but then have to go through the same procedure again if they move to another group to help keep it going.

Mr Reid: You will be glad to know that, under the new arrangements that came in under the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, Access Northern Ireland, in conjunction with what is happening in GB, will be developing a more portable system of disclosure. Therefore, you will only ever have one enhanced criminal record certificate check that will enable you to work between various groups. That will eventually take care of the multiple checks, because those are a problem for organisations. If you happen to be a scout leader and also work for the GAA or some other organisation, you have to get a check in each context.

Your point about co-ordination is well made. We think that DCAL could co-ordinate things slightly better through the development of a group, from within DCAL and its agencies, to try to ensure a bit more streamlining and standardisation of child protection training, policies and procedures so that what you talk about stops happening.

Mr McMullan: That should stop with councils. If councils run a child protection course, they should not be bringing people back to do another course. If people have already done a course with one

group, why are councils bringing in another body to do another course? A lot of it boils down to how much these bodies are charging councils for providing the course. For some groups, it is free, as they may have a grant for it. Others charge councils. You will find that a lot of it comes down to cost.

Ms McCready: Part of it is about guidance and the overall strategy. It is about getting answers back from agencies on how often people should get child protection training. There needs to be more guidance on how often training should be done. People would then know that the certificate will last them for three years, two years or whatever. That would be indicated clearly on the cover of the certificate, and that child protection training certificate could be carried over into the next group.

Mr McMullan: That should be done very quickly. Having one check has been talked about for years. The discussion is as old as the hills.

Mr Reid: It is hopefully coming in the not-too-distant future.

Mr McMullan: That will save groups a lot of money.

Mr Stephenson: One cause of the delay was the change of Government. They needed to relook at the structure, and they obviously wanted to change what the previous Government were doing. That was one reason for the delay.

If you move between sports, there is not a requirement to do the course all over again. There is recognition that you have attended a Sport NI workshop, a GAA workshop or whatever. That transfer will be accepted on the training side of things. I spoke to Sport NI's coach education department. The NSPCC does not say that you must retrain every three years. We put the onus on the organisation to make sure that it has a process of ensuring that it gives the right information to its volunteers. If things change, such as codes of conduct or guidance on social media, there should be a process to communicate that. It should not be a case of bringing somebody back in three years' time and making them sit through the same thing.

We are looking at online-learning refresher courses for people as a quicker method of getting information to people. People could do those courses in their own home, as opposed to having to come back for training. A number of sports currently ask for refresher courses to be undertaken, and people will come back and do a few hours. However, that is to do with insurance and the fact that their insurance companies have paid out so much money on child abuse.

Mr McMullan: You said that people can move from sport to sport. That message is not getting out to the public. I know people who went into another sport yet had to do another child protection course.

Mr Stephenson: If those people were to come to me, I would liaise with them and smooth the waves between the two sports. The message coming from the governing bodies is that they will accept previous checks.

Ms McCready: I have recently been working with two local councils to renew their child protection policies. One of the things that they are taking into account is visitors coming to use their premises. That is being built into their child protection policies. They are being very forward-thinking.

Mr Swann: Thanks for your presentation, folks. Paul, your personal experience of gymnastics and ballet is the same as that of a lot of parents and organisations.

Reflecting on your role, Irene, in the development of policy, you mentioned e-learning and all the rest of it, but my concern is that there are a large number of organisations out there that confuse developing policy with downloading policy. They think that if they can simply find a child protection policy on a website somewhere, they can download it, change the header, send a couple of people to the courses that Oliver was talking about, and that is them done and dusted.

On the recommendation about DCAL keeping data and maintaining information of types, how do you see that developing? Is that going to be a separate unit? Is there the expertise and experience in DCAL so that if there were organisations out there at ground level that developed and maintained proper child protection policies and had the training all in place, they could be DCAL-inspected and DCAL-registered, and that should be them done and dusted?

Mr Stephenson: The relationship has to be with the direct arm's-length body, in that same way in which Sport NI has a relationship with DCAL and can report back to it how many safeguarding issues have been dealt with in sport. That report goes to Sport NI every three months and outlines the number of child protection enquiries. It is done between that arm's-length body and DCAL. We are encouraging the sport sector to try to capture not just the reactive issues but the proactive ones — how many people have been through safeguarding courses and how many enquiries it has had from organisations that are planning away trips. You see the message getting out there when people are phoning up for advice rather than waiting until they are away somewhere and find out that one of the coaches has got drunk and is not looking after the young people. People are being proactive with codes of conduct, by phoning us or by going to the government body and getting the information.

Those are the sorts of proactive things that we would like to see people capture as well so that they can judge whether there has been an impact on their communications strategy out to their organisation. If an organisation says that nobody comes to it with any safeguarding issues, it is not getting its message out there to communicate that it should be working more proactively with young people. Organisations should be getting calls from parents and clubs that feel confident enough in your systems to say that they are not happy, for example, about how a person spoke to a young person or about a bullying issue. If an organisation is working with young people and says that it has no safeguarding issues, it is not being proactive in its message. It may not have any direct child protection issues, but it is not being proactive in getting the preventative safeguarding message out there.

I did not have the opportunity to listen to the comments made last week in Committee, but Colin gave me a quick summary, and I was very pleased to see the impact that the inquiry has had, with DCAL saying that it will relaunch its strategic group. A number of years ago we had an opportunity to meet that strategic group. One of the arm's-length bodies at the time came forward to say that it had no child protection issues at all in the organisation. I was very conscious that, the year before, either the CEO or the chief executive had been convicted of grooming a young person through the internet, yet that body came forward and said that it had never had a child protection issue. When asked, the response was that that person was not actually a member of its staff. If you are looking at things from that narrow response, you are not getting the message that we are trying to get across. We want people to be proactive and to say what they are doing actively to engage their audience and their volunteers, and to support those volunteers. It is not just about the Independent Safeguarding Authority or that sort of higher-level stuff.

Mr Swann: Irene, how do you crack the nut of developing policy versus downloading policy?

Ms McCready: One thing is the direct one-to-one contact with agencies and by looking at the policies that someone has downloaded. People have sent me the policies that they are using and asked what I think of them. The policy has to be directly related to, and in the context of, their organisation. We recommend that they look at policy development in a very secure way. Perhaps there is a strategy or an overarching idea of the sort of policy that should be used. Not every agency can use the same policy, but an overarching policy can be developed that can be made to suit every agency. However, it is better if it suits every agency individually.

The Chairperson: In your recommendations, you propose that DCAL establish links with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI). Will you talk to us about the Safeguarding Board, what its role is and how you think DCAL could benefit from having such links with it? Representatives from the board will be at the Committee soon.

Mr Reid: The Safeguarding Board was launched this year and established in legislation enacted in 2011. It creates a structured arrangement for the co-operation and effectiveness of child protection arrangements across a range of member agencies. There are about 22 bodies represented on the SBNI, including local government. It is really an attempt to try to improve the outworkings of our operational child protection arrangements in Northern Ireland. A great challenge for us is to try to look at doing things better. In the development of its strategic plan — you can ask is about this when its representatives come in — I know that the Safeguarding Board is looking at the whole issue of safeguarding within the remit of the Committee's inquiry. That is where we really want to try to protect children and where we can do preventative-type work.

Hopefully, the SBNI will start to make a big impact on the structural arrangements and driving forward the agenda. We encourage DCAL to have a relationship with the SBNI in developing the strategy for

the SBNI's policy. It is not the case that no one except the SBNI does anything, but the SBNI will have a co-ordinating role in some of that.

Ms McCready: I sit on the education and training subgroup of the SBNI, and one of the things that it is looking at is the possible development of a training strategy. That would be developed and enhanced throughout Northern Ireland, but it cannot do that alone. It has to do that in conjunction with all other bodies.

The Chairperson: Is there a timescale for that?

Ms McCready: No. It had only its second meeting the day before yesterday. It is about taking that forward in a way that meets everybody's needs while ensuring that everybody can feed into it.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you. That is useful.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thanks, folks. First and foremost, what I am increasingly hearing from people is that there are delays in the vetting process, particularly through Access NI, and that has caused a lot of frustration for those who put themselves forward for vetting. I remember that that period was actually quite short some years ago, when you would have been looking at a maximum of six weeks. Others are now saying that, in their experience, that is much extended. I do not know whether that is happening across the board, but it is a concern.

You rightly talked about the effect that Sport NI's policies and practices have had right across the board and said that those have been very successful at quite a number of levels. There are, of course, organisations, clubs, dance schools and all the rest that fall between two stools. Irene, you said that you try to engage with as many of them as possible, but a lot of people are obviously very difficult to reach. I am thinking of people who are unaffiliated to their governing bodies and, indeed, those involved in sports that are not currently a Sport NI-recognised sport, of which there are quite a number. I know that a number of contact sports, such as kick-boxing, are in the process of being recognised. What is the extent of that? What has been the uptake in getting advice from the likes of you, Irene? What is the estimate of the work in hand to be done?

Ms McCready: Most of the sporting groups go through Paul, because it is recognised that Paul's name is well known in the sporting arena. The groups that come through my side of things for training and consultancy are smaller. They really are confused about what to do in the safeguarding arena and need guidance. Have they got policies and procedures? Do they have the right documentation to make a referral if they are concerned about a child? I think that those smaller groups can be — the only word I can think of is this — confused about what to do, and they need more guidance.

Mr Ó hOisín: Paul, you said that your kids attend Irish dancing but that you have only recently swapped numbers with the teacher. We have found that Irish dancing in particular — I am sure that this is true right across the board — is taken by an individual or perhaps a group, and dancers obviously take part in competitions organised by the likes of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Is there some remit within that to have a more formal setting to encourage uptake and to see what is good practice?

Mr Stephenson: I can speak only as a parent and as someone who volunteered his knowledge and service to the chairperson of one of those dancing organisations but got no reply. I am not sure whether they go elsewhere, but that certainly has not been cascaded to me as a parent. That is one of the worries that I would have about the other organisations in the DCAL family. There is a co-ordinated approach for sport. It might take a while for people to get to us, but when they do and issues need to be dealt with, there are procedures in most sporting organisations to deal with complaints. I am certainly conscious of someone in Irish dancing who was in the press a while ago. When I raised that — this was on my daughter's side of Irish dancing — with the dancing school, its response was, "Innocent until proven guilty." He was consequently convicted of sexual offences, but he had been allowed to continue as a dance instructor. There are issues in organisations that do not have robust procedures. Driving that forward may mean providing organisations with consistent advice.

I am not aware of a constant delay at Access NI. There are issues in the process, and it is often when they leave the organisation as opposed to Access NI's delay. It is normally a voluntary organisation that may get an individual's application and not send it out for a week or so. That can cause delay, or

if people have a number of addresses, they all need to be contacted. However, the turnaround time is still two to three weeks.

Mr Ó hOisín: I am not sure how widespread it is, but I did have a couple of cases where people were bidding, and in once case it took nearly three months.

Mr Reid: In our view, Access NI runs a pretty effective ship; we have a lot of contact with it. One reason why there may be a delay is that if someone has local police force information against them, Access NI has to write to the PSNI. Therefore it sometimes takes some time, and if there are multiple addresses and somebody has lived in multiple parts of jurisdictions, that can add time to the process.

A challenge for small, voluntary organisations are the disclosure and barring arrangements. At present, they have a statutory duty to refer to the Independent Safeguarding Authority — or the Disclosure and Barring Service, as it is now called — anyone whom they have moved for harming children. All those organisations have a statutory duty.

Government also places a statutory duty on them to carry out a check, so some infrastructure work needs to be done, with even very small organisations. Just as they have health and safety requirements, they have vetting requirements. Part of Paul's work with sports organisations will be to steer them through the complicated and convoluted process that are the disclosure and barring arrangements. That is a challenge for small clubs in the arts and culture and leisure sector.

Mr Ó hOisín: What about non-recognised sports?

Mr Reid: It does not matter; it applies to them, too.

Ms McCready: One thing that I am also finding with the smaller groups is that many of them have never seen or heard of the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) regional child protection policies and procedures, nor, it seems, their own child protection policies and procedures from their governing body. It helps groups if they know what to do if they have a child who is causing concern.

Mr Stephenson: Going back to non-regulated groups, Sport NI is working with unfunded but recognised organisations to put in place requirements for them to step up to a proportionate level of accountability, different from the funded organisations but with some of the key points.

It is important that it does not happen just in sport and that someone offers all those smaller organisations support, direction or asks them questions. That is why it is important if you are hiring a facility that there is consistency across local government. I am also conscious that if you are hiring halls from faith-based organisations, some of those are starting to ask organisations about their child protection policies and procedures. That can be the prompt for some of them to seek help. The question is where they get that help.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for your presentation. I declare an interest as a member of the Scout Association because I want to draw on my experience from my time there. The protection of children is paramount in everything that you do and all the things that we discussed this morning. I have a slightly different way of coming at this. I see this not as a child protection policy but as a child protection and adult protection policy.

The focus here is on protecting the child, but surely the policy is also about protecting those who work with children. Can that not be brought into consideration in the title deed of the document? Often, the practitioners and volunteers who give of their time and talents freely in society feel that every one of them is under some suspicion because of the naming of those policies. What is your view on that?

Mr Reid: You raise a very important point. Children benefit greatly from volunteers and people who work with them. My child is an Ulster and Irish swimmer, and she benefited greatly from the dedicated coaching and volunteering from a whole raft of people. We do not want to discourage people from participating in sport, which is so important to children.

However, your point is well made. Sometimes, we have to provide policies and guidance to staff working with children that encourage good practice and sensible work with them. An example is Facebook. New social media can prove an absolute nightmare for people who, through naïve practices or unfamiliarity with what they are doing, end up, for example, befriending children and all

sorts of things happen. Any guidance on child protection needs to include good practice guidance for adults who work with children in the context of helping them to adopt best practice. I agree totally with you.

Mr Humphrey: I was a district commissioner and was responsible for the training of all the scout leaders in my district. You try telling that to a new leader who is handed a 10-point code of conduct by the Scout Association. Frankly, when he or she reads it, they will have second thoughts about getting involved because the whole thing is "don't, don't, don't, don't, don't". I am making a point about the titles of documents, and we need to get the message across to people that it is about protecting them as well as the children and that they are not perceived as a potential criminal.

David made a point earlier about consistency. I am alarmed to hear from Paul that there is no consistency across local government. Therefore, it seems to me that responsibility should reside with regional government and the police. There is inconsistency in other areas of local government, because some councils have greater resource than others. For example, the very small councils will not have the resource of Belfast City Council. If resource is a problem in the delivery of this, regulation to ensure consistency and protection should reside with the regional government and the police. What is your view on that?

Mr Stephenson: Can I respond to your first point first? Sport NI's course is wholly reliant on volunteers, so part of it emphasises that this is about keeping yourself safe as well. The tutors say that to all the attendees. The difference between what the scouts get and our sample policies is that ours are written in a more proactive and positive way. They are about the ethos of the organisation, the dos and the values that you should have when working with young people. There are some don'ts as well, but they start off with a more proactive approach, and our advice to organisations is to induct volunteers appropriately. We need volunteers, but we need the right volunteers with the right attitude.

Mr Humphrey: You used the word "attendees". You should make it more attractive for people to attend the courses and not a deterrent. People have said to me, "I did not realise what I was getting involved in", and people who I worked with in my previous job used to say to me, "Why do you bother doing that? Look what you are exposing yourself to". There is complete inconsistency. I take your point. I am member of the congregational committee of the Presbyterian Church, which has its own regulations on this. We have the Girls' Brigade, the Boys' Brigade and the Scouts, and some people are leaders in two organisations and have to go for three sets of training. It is crazy. People do not have that time.

Mr Stephenson: I am a trainer for the Presbyterian Church. They should not have to do that.

Mr Humphrey: I can assure you that, in my experience, the Scout Association will tell them that they have to go for training, and so will the Presbyterian Church.

Mr Stephenson: That should not be the case because there is a memorandum of understanding on vetting and training that is recognised in the faith-based organisations. That was drawn up between the uniformed organisations and the Presbyterian Church. There are issues with communicating with people.

In sport, we are working to make sure that volunteers feel supported, do not feel that they are being accused, and do not feel guilty about volunteering to work with young people. We are a child protection agency; we are about protecting children and preventing abuse but also about transforming people's attitudes. We talk about a safeguarding course in sport, and we try to use that term as opposed to "child protection". We are looking at preventative methods for people who come forward.

Mr Humphrey: The Prime Minister talks about the big society. The truth of the matter is that people who are involved in the Guides, the Scouts, GB, BB, Sunday schools, sports clubs and dance schools on a voluntary basis could not be paid by government for their contribution, and there is a tremendously rich culture of people wanting to join organisations to put something back into the community or the organisation that they benefited from when they were younger. Although we must absolutely protect the young people, we need to remember to protect volunteers as well and not discourage them.

Mr Reid: We have agreed wholeheartedly with you.

Mr Stephenson: That is a part of our ethos, that the young people who have a positive experience now will be junior leaders or volunteers because they have had a good experience with coaches, and will stay in that sports club, dance club or organisation.

Mr D Bradley: Good morning. Thank you for your presentation. I was somewhat disturbed by what Paul said about the Irish dancing class that his daughter was attending. There are two parent bodies, as I understand it, for Irish dancing; one is worldwide, the other island-wide. I would be very surprised if they did not have safeguarding policies for their organisations. Having said that, I suppose that there is nothing to stop individuals starting lessons in Irish dancing or in any form of the arts or sports. I wonder whether there is anything that we can do to protect children from unregulated activities, where an individual starts up a class in arts, dance, sport or whatever. The individual is not associated with any parent body and, therefore, the parents and children do not have the reassurance of the overarching policy that a parent body would provide.

Mr Stephenson: We need to transform people's attitudes on what they are willing to ask of organisations and what to expect of organisations that they let their children attend. I have no concerns about my daughter's club and where it goes; I am talking about the umbrella body. Do not ask me which organisation is involved. The umbrella body did not have guidance for this volunteer teacher, and that was my issue. There was no structure in place for that volunteer, who was doing the right thing, putting in the hours with the young people, and was a fantastic teacher. However, if there were concerns, or if a young person was to come to her with a concern about something that was happening elsewhere, she may not have the confidence or the structure to go elsewhere with it.

Just as we encourage local councils to have procedures in place, people who have facilities will need to have them in place. As church-based organisations tighten their guidance, people will voluntarily be motivated to be directed somewhere. It is a cultural change, and we have seen that motivation in sport. Last time I was here, I said that I felt like a double-glazing salesman when I first started the job because no one wanted to listen to me, whereas now I long for the days when the phone does not ring as much and I get a chance to do things. That is a huge cultural change. It is not that there are more child abuse or child protection issues in sport; it is just that people feel that they can come forward with their issues and they have a direction in which they can go. That is what we are looking for with other arm's-length bodies, that there is a co-ordination in their response.

Ms McCreedy: It is about communication strategy, of making sure that the word about safeguarding gets out there and that people are aware that parents should be asking for a copy of the child-protection policies. They should be aware of that; and people should be going through the vetting and barring process, etc, even volunteers who set up a small Irish dancing class on their own.

Mr D Bradley: Many people run lessons in their own homes — for music, singing, learning instruments and so on. What is your advice in that situation?

Mr Reid: That is an interesting one because it falls outside the disclosure and barring arrangements. Those are what is classed as private, voluntary arrangements that you, as a parent, make and contract with someone else. We always say to parents that they should put into practice sensible safeguards and procedures to ensure that your child is safe. You would take up references, seek other people's advice about the practice and, if anything comes from your child that causes you alarm, you deal with it. Those are sensible arrangements that you can put in place that are proportionate and realistic for that activity.

Mr Stephenson: Some years ago, we worked with the Department of Education to produce guidance for individual home tuition. That was given to the Department, although I am not sure what was done with it.

Mr D Bradley: That was with the Department of Education? Thank you.

Mr McGimpsey: I am sorry that I missed your presentation, as it is a subject that interests me. We have seen a great deal of change in the last number of years, particularly since Soham, albeit some it has been stop-start, such as the Safeguarding Board, Access NI and so on. Yet, we have now the latest revelation about Savile, and the background of the church and so on. It appears to me that we take very sensible measures, but abusers always find their ways through. What are the weaknesses in the system and how do we address them? Nothing is perfect. A great deal of effort has gone into

child protection, through the setting up of the board, Access NI and so on, but there are bound to be gaps. Where are the gaps and how do we remedy them?

Mr Reid: You are right, and we can never be complacent. You will probably know better than anyone here some of the systems and process changes that the Department of Health has put in place. We are in a very different place from where we were 20 or 30 years ago. We see a proliferation of people coming forward, not necessarily because there is more abuse but because people have been enabled to come forward and talk about abuse. One of the interesting things about Savile was the number of people who came forward and reported contemporaneous abuse because of what they heard in the media and they felt that they would be listened to.

We can never be complacent about this inquiry. Huge strides forward have been taken, particularly around the support structure in Sport NI. That is why I come back to my opening remarks, in which I said that this inquiry is timely. We are dealing with quite an unstructured and vast array of different groups and organisations. If we can do anything, let us invest in infrastructure development for those groups that will help them to work through this complicated area and build up their capacity. We also need to invest in systems that encourage children to speak out, develop a rights approach for children and provide them with access to independent others from whom to seek advice. We also need to provide advice on best practice and how to protect children for parents and for those in positions of governance. If we do that as a result of this inquiry, we will have helped huge numbers of children and played a significant role in improving our arrangements.

Ms McCready: One of the things that I found out from working with smaller groups is that where people have a good child protection or safeguarding policy, all the staff or volunteers are fully aware of it and that gives them much more confidence in being able to support someone who comes to them in their organisation to stop abuse or to prevent it from happening.

Mr McGimpsey: Yes; as far as we can see, the weakness for the church abuse was that individuals did not come forward because they did not think that they would be believed or be seen as credible. It was similar with Savile. However, once one or two came forward, an avalanche of complaints came forward. Is that where you are talking about going? Is it about making it easier to complain and making complaining more accessible to individuals, very often minors, who are often dismissed? In the case of Savile, they were dismissed by police and senior authority figures.

Mr Reid: Yes. The police have an important role to play in all those systems and they have invested hugely in structural changes here in how these things are reported.

Ms McCready: In training, we always talk about children being believed. That is a very important part of having an informed status.

Mr Stephenson: That is why we are here today. We recognise that there has been a huge transformation in attitudes among the vast majority of people in the sports sector. We are just asking for that reach to be extended, because so many people volunteer in the CAL community. It is not just about their volunteering role; they are also parents, neighbours, churchgoers and other citizens. Once confidence and understanding have raised in one area, it will translate into wider society. It is about a societal confidence to come forward and deal with these issues. I think that it is a time to be proud. In delivering church training in the past, I have heard people ask what sort of a state we live in, where people are so anxious about child protection. However, I think that we live in a good time, because we are saying that the societal standards that we have in place are that we will not accept the abuse of children now. It is a proud time in which we are now doing the right thing as a society.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. The strategies and guidelines for organisation are important, but the biggest area is teaching children and encouraging them to come forward. As a teenager, I was involved in two different groups, both of which had an abuser in them. Everybody knew about it, but nobody said anything. I cannot even think why we did not tell anyone, but that was the norm. One of those abusers was prosecuted 25 years later, so somebody spoke up at some point. There may still be that reluctance among children to say something. That is where the effort needs to be.

Mr Reid: You are right. The issue is empowering children to seek help. The relationship that you have with them will help them greatly to navigate the challenges they may face from people who might pose a risk to them. You are absolutely right.

Mr Stephenson: A child is more likely to come forward about personal and serious issues, such as potential child abuse, if they have confidence in their leader on other issues and they are listened to about other things. That is why we are encouraging organisations to consult with young people, communicate with them and be a listening ear on gentler and softer issues, because that will build up confidence so that, if there are serious concerns, they will have someone they can turn to.

We are making quite a push with Childline. Hopefully, we will use sports organisations. I made some reference in the paper to what some sports are doing to promote ChildLine's number and the NSPCC's number. Therefore there is that reach. DCAL has a huge reach to young people — the largest in the voluntary sector.

Ms McCready: Many staff and volunteers are worried about how they will deal with it and their personal impact. We encourage organisations to make sure that they have support for staff or volunteers who are listening to children, because children will tell you quite graphic things sometimes.

Mr McMullan: There is no mention of disability or special needs. That is a different, and nearly more complex, field, and it is one that is shied away from by some local authorities because of its complexity. You say that you want young people to come forward to report, and that is quite correct. However, with children with disabilities or special needs, you do not get that. I want to see more disability campaigns dedicated to that; you have them in local authorities, but you really only have them there in name. For example, many people do not know how to deal with some of the complex issues that affect children who have autism. That is a very hard situation, and I do not see it changing.

I am bit disappointed that addressing that problem does not jump out of the report, because it should. It should be a stand-alone in child protection, because it is complex. Anybody working in the area should at least be trained. I go back to what I said earlier: some groups, organisations and even local authorities shy away from that because the cost of training is too much.

Mr Reid: You raise a very interesting point. I am glad that you have, because I feel as if our report has been marked now. You were not a teacher in a former life, were you?

Mr McMullan: I have been a whole lot of things, but not a teacher.

Mr Reid: Children who are disabled are more likely to be abused. The research shows that clearly; yet they are under-represented in the statistics. Therefore your point is well made. Perhaps if DCAL established a group to look at child protection, it may want to look particularly at protecting disabled children who participate in sport, arts and culture. That is a very laudable aim. As you said, it is a specialist area, but you are absolutely right to raise it.

Mr McMullan: It is not anywhere in the report.

Mr Reid: You are quite right.

Mr Stephenson: The last time we were here in November, we had eight points from the sport sector, and one of the areas that we addressed was the particular vulnerability of young people with a disability or a hearing or visual impairment in sport.

In the sport sector there is a training resource that Sport NI has sponsored that is free to governing bodies and which has a number of elements; it contains guidance on how to deal with behavioural problems. That has been given to the governing bodies of sports: the next challenge is for them to use that tool and cascade it down to their organisations. Sport NI has already started to look at that as issue and at raising the profile of the particular vulnerability of young people with disabilities as an issue that must be addressed. That is a relatively new area for sport. I go back to the issue of emphasising the work of volunteers. We need to bring in volunteers who can implement this and who have an interest in working in that area. We work very closely with the Special Olympics on behalf of our youth athletes. Training resources have been developed, and the challenge now is to communicate them and use them to get people to take an interest in those areas and to raise awareness about that vulnerability.

Mr McMullan: The only people doing that are the likes of Mencap, whose volunteers come in on their own time to advise you. You have talked about strategies and so forth, but you should look at developing a strategy on that very quickly. It is clear that we do not have one.

It is something to which, for want of a better word, we pay lip-service in the hope of winging it. It should be in there, jumping out at you. Your report is very good, but the disability and special needs category should be jumping out of every page and it is not there at all.

The Chairperson: That point is well made.

Ms McCready: Disability awareness flows through all National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children training advice when we work with groups. It is brought out in lots of scenario work and group work that we do. We include it and we try very hard to make sure that groups are aware of what to do if they have a disabled young person and how they can help them disclose if necessary.

Mr McMullan: You are not following up on that. You are sending that advice out and hoping that groups take it up, but no one is following it up to see whether they are doing it. That is where it is falling down.

The Chairperson: You talked about the internet safety strategy and mentioned the debate on that subject that took place in the Assembly on Tuesday. How do you see DCAL contributing to that?

Mr Reid: As I said earlier, I hope that DCAL sees that it has a part to play and that it can develop an e-strategy for the DCAL family. We have made a recommendation that this specialist issue should be dealt with as part of DCAL's overarching areas of responsibility.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much for attending this morning. The session has been very useful.