

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Government response to the consultation on safeguarding adults – the review of the no secrets guidance.

Tuesday 19 January 2009

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Phil Hope): Safeguarding vulnerable adults who are at risk of harm sits at the heart of government. Those who need safeguarding help are often elderly and frail, living on their own in the community, or without much family support in care homes; they are often people with physical or learning disabilities, and people with mental health needs at risk of suffering harm both in institutions and in the community. It is to these and to many others that government has a duty of safeguarding.

Safeguarding encompasses three key concepts: protection, justice and empowerment. Government has an important role in the protection of members of the public from harm – before harm has happened and after it has happened. This includes ensuring that services and support are delivered in ways that are high quality and safe. Government has an important role in facilitating justice where vulnerable adults become the victims of crime; and finally, Government has a role in the empowerment of people at risk. To empower them to recognise, avoid and stop harm; to empower them to make decisions based on informed choices, to balance taking risks with quality of life decisions; and to empower people if they have been harmed, to heal and to live with self-confidence and self determination.

“No Secrets: Guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse” was government guidance on safeguarding, issued in 2000. In 2008-09 a national consultation exercise was held, in which some twelve thousand people took part. Many sent us detailed responses; others wrote us very personal letters about their own experiences. Safeguarding partnerships met and discussed many of the 100 questions we posed; they debated and analysed and explored the issues with commitment, with passion and with dedication. Rarely have so many different professionals – social workers, police officers, nurses, housing officers, lawyers and voluntary sector workers – all responded to the same consultation. We are grateful to all who responded and we have listened carefully to the views expressed. A summary of responses was published on 17 July 2009. This Written Ministerial Statement sets out the Government’s programme of actions in response to the consultation.

There were a number of key messages from the consultation. These included that stronger national leadership was needed, that local arrangements should be placed on a statutory basis; and that revision and updating is needed to the *“No Secrets”* guidance. Our plans respond to all these points.

Around 3000 people participated in the consultation as members of the public, as users of social care, health care, including some who had suffered abuse in some form. Of the wide-ranging views expressed, first and foremost was that the voice of vulnerable people needed to be heard much more than it currently is. Vulnerable people wanted to be heard in

safeguarding policy and practice and in situations where they were victims of harm. We will reflect these views very carefully in developing our response.

First, the Government will establish an Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group (IDMG) on Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults. This Group will include Ministers from the Department of Health, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Inter-Departmental Ministerial group will demonstrate government commitment to the issue of safeguarding vulnerable adults; provide national leadership; co-ordinate Government policy and set the framework for effective local arrangements. We plan to have the first meeting in March. The IDMG will have three roles. It will:

- i) determine policy and work priorities for the forthcoming year;
- ii) provide a strategic and co-ordination role; and
- iii) provide public and parliamentary advocacy for this policy area.

Second, the Government will introduce new legislation to strengthen the local governance of safeguarding by putting Safeguarding Adults Boards on a statutory footing.

Local Safeguarding Adults Boards bring together the key agencies that have a part to play in safeguarding – particularly social services, the National Health Service and the police, but also other organisations. They are one of the main drivers in effective safeguarding arrangements founded on effective partnership and joint working. An effective board provides clear leadership and helps individual organisations develop complementary safeguarding and empowerment strategies.

Safeguarding Adults Boards exist in many parts of the country, but they are not mandatory and their effectiveness is variable. A key message from the consultation was that local leadership and scrutiny of safeguarding needs to be improved and strengthened. The Government will therefore introduce legislation to put Safeguarding Adults Boards on a statutory footing, to ensure that effective leadership and coordination in this important area is assured for all vulnerable people wherever they live.

Third, the Government is launching a programme of work with representative agencies and stakeholders to support effective policy and practice in safeguarding vulnerable adults.

We will produce in the autumn, new, comprehensive, multi-agency guidance to set out clearly the roles and responsibilities for all those involved in safeguarding vulnerable adults. This will be built on and bring together targeted guidance and support materials, which will be developed in the coming months, including:

- a guide to the law on safeguarding, to help professionals understand and effectively use the range of legal powers that can prevent and deal with harm – including the Criminal Justice Act 1988, the Fraud Act, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, and the Mental Capacity Act 2005;
- targeted guidance and toolkits for specific professionals, including general practitioners, nurses, housing staff and police officers; and

- the Association of Chief Police Officers has set up a working group under the umbrella of the economic crime portfolio to lead a programme of work to improve our response to financial crime against vulnerable adults. Work is currently underway to complete an intelligence assessment with additional work to follow to further aid those involved at the frontline.

Finally, I wish to thank those on the Advisory Group and those in the local Safeguarding Partnerships who have helped us in this review of safeguarding. We will continue to draw on the expertise and views of relevant organisations and stakeholders, through a newly-convened Advisory Board, as we develop the full programme of work to see through the plan of action announced today.