



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children &amp; Vulnerable Adults</b>
<b>Date:</b>	20 November 2009
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### **Purpose of the Report**

To provide further information to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in relation to certain matters affecting Members pursuant to the Council Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults.

### **Relevant Background Information**

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee, at its meeting of 18 September 2009, considered a report concerning the provision of training for Elected Members on the Council's revised Policy & Procedures for the Protection of Child and Vulnerable Adults. The Committee adopted the recommendation to include in the Members' Training Plan the provision of awareness sessions on the protection of children and vulnerable adults, and also agreed that a further report on whether Elected Members were required to be screened under the Council's Child Protection Policy be submitted to a future meeting.

### **Current Position**

The policy and procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults were adopted by the Council on 3 June 2002. The policy was subsequently reviewed and the revised version was agreed by Council on 1 September 2009.

The policy and procedures provide information and guidelines on:

1. what is abuse
2. recognising signs and symptoms
3. recording and reporting procedures
4. training for staff.

### **Leisurewatch**

The Council agreed at its meeting on 1 September 2009 to become a member of the Leisurewatch scheme. This will involve awareness training for staff regarding adults who may

potentially use public facilities such as leisure centres to gain access to children and young people. A site audit is undertaken, which examines physical, design and security issues and ensures that materials (including signage) are provided in order to confirm that the premises comply with Leisurewatch criteria.

The main difference between Leisurewatch and Child Protection is that the former is about perpetrator awareness. Under this initiative, staff are trained to be aware of potential sex offenders who may come onto the premises to gain access to children. This may include a person hanging around a centre or park specifically at times when children are about. Concerns are fed to the police at an early stage as a precautionary measure. Child Protection deals specifically with the situation where a child or young person may have been harmed or exposed to harm.

### **Vetting**

Following the recommendations of the Bichard Inquiry which reviewed vetting procedures in the United Kingdom, two new systems were introduced replacing the former criminal convictions checks scheme and DHSS checks scheme regarding the Disqualification Lists. A copy of a presentation providing more detailed information on the two new systems is included at Appendix 1.

#### **A. AccessNI**

Became operational from 1 April 2008. It provides a more comprehensive system for carrying out checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work directly with children and young people.

#### **B. Vetting and Barring Scheme**

Launched in October 2009 and to be rolled out from July 2010. This scheme involves the establishment of a register under the Independent Safeguarding Authority – (ISA). The ISA register will provide a minimum standard and will exclude anyone who has a violent or sexual conviction against a child or vulnerable adult. It will apply to those who have contact with children and vulnerable adults.

### **Key Issues**

#### **Current Procedures**

Belfast City Council currently carries out checks on staff and volunteers that directly work with children or vulnerable adults through AccessNI. Belfast City Council will also be required to have the staff and volunteers registered with ISA. AccessNI checks will continue to be carried out on staff and volunteers following the introduction of the ISA register to enable more comprehensive information to be ascertained.

#### **Elected Members**

In England and Wales, Elected Members will be required to be ISA registered as Social Services falls within their remit. This currently does not apply to Northern Ireland.

The relevant legislation states that the following will need to be ISA registered:

1. Those individuals who work or manage staff that are considered to be in a regulated position are required to be checked. A number of posts within Belfast City Council would come under the definition of “regulated position”, as they work directly with children and young people.
2. Individuals that may regularly come within a facility defined as a specified place. This includes education facilities and some community services provision where there is a service registered with Social Services (for example pre-school playgroups, after school clubs, SureStart).

The issue of vetting of Elected Members is being considered by other district councils. Both Craigavon Borough Council and Lisburn City Council are currently discussing the possibility of introducing the requirement for Elected Members to be ISA registered. The AccessNI checks would only be applicable if they Members were to work directly with children or vulnerable adults.

The recommendation is to defer a decision until the ISA register is operational as the implementation of the scheme is still in progress. This will enable additional information to be obtained and to ascertain the range and responsibilities of individuals being vetted.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

To take place within existing resources.

#### Human Resources

No implication on the current allocation

#### Asset and Other Implications

There is no impact on any physical BCC asset.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members:

- a) note the contents of the report, and
- b) approve the recommendation to defer a decision regarding the vetting of Elected Members until the ISA register is operational.

### **Decision Tracking**

### **Key to Abbreviations**

ISA – Independent Safeguarding Authority

### **Documents Attached**

Copy of a Presentation on AccessNI and ISA

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