A Report on the findings of an Open Policy Debate
on the Review of the Child Care Act 1991

on behalf of
The Department of Children and Youth Affairs
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About this report

This report details the findings of an Open Policy Debate on the Review of the Child Care Act 1991 which took place on the 5th of September 2017 in Dublin Castle. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department. Furthermore, it should be noted that the inclusion of data in this report does not imply that a viewpoint necessarily represented a consensus among participants. Also, this report collated all points raised but it was unable to fact check statements made by contributors.

Background

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) was established in June 2011. It has an important mandate in relation to policy and service provision for children and young people. It comprises a number of interrelated strands including the direct provision of universal and targeted services and working to achieve the harmonisation of relevant policy and provision across Government so as to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* (2014)\(^1\) is Ireland’s first overarching national policy which comprehends the age ranges spanning children and young people (0 – 24 years). The National Policy Framework 2014-2020 captures all child and youth policy commitments across government and prioritises six key transformational goals which will be acted upon to achieve specified outcomes.

*Child Care Act, 1991*

The primary legislation regulating child care policy in Ireland is the Child Care Act 1991\(^2\). The Act is the key piece of legislation whereby the State, as a last resort and in the common good, may intervene to take the place of parents as provided for under Article 42A.2.1 of the Constitution, following the thirty-

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first amendment of the Constitution. Although the Act has undergone some amendment (such as to make provision for special care), many of its key provisions have been in force for nearly 25 years.

The 1991 Act covers the following areas:
- Promotion of the welfare of children, including section 3 which governs the relevant functions of the Child and Family Agency
- Protection of children in emergencies, including section 12 which governs the powers of An Garda Síochána to take a child to safety
- Care proceedings, including the different types of care orders which can be made by a court
- Children in need of special care or protection
- Private foster care
- Jurisdiction and procedure, including provisions for the appointment of a Guardian *ad litem* for a child
- Children in the care of the Child and Family Agency
- Supervision of preschool services and
- Children’s residential centres

**Review of the Child Care Act, 1991**

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* contains a specific commitment – under the outcome of children being safe and protected from harm - to ‘review and reform, as necessary, the Child Care Act, 1991’.

The purpose of the review is to:

- Identify what is working well within legislation including its impact on policy and practice
- Address any identified gaps, operational improvements and new areas for new development
- Capture current legislative, policy and practice developments
- Building on those steps, revise the original Act
Open Policy Debate, 5th September 2017

As the first stage of wider consultation with stakeholders, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs organised an Open Policy Debate with a selected group of stakeholders on 5th of September 2017 in Dublin Castle. It is expected that the format and structures of further consultation on more specific issues will be informed by the discussions at, and outcomes from, the event. Invitees included representatives of Tusla, service providers, academics, experts, membership organisations, advocacy groups, legal professionals, officials and inter-agency forums. The Open Policy Debate was chaired by Dr Owen Keenan, Chair of the Advisory Council on Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. The overarching theme for the debate was *What is working well? What needs to be improved or developed within legislation?*

Keynote addresses:

The context was set for the day’s discussions by three keynote addresses that were concerned with the implementation of the 1991 Act in court proceedings, the interaction between law and social work and the importance of a child-centred approach.

**Keynote address 1: Taking a Child-Centred Approach** – (Tanya Ward, Children’s Rights Alliance)

The first keynote address, given by Tanya Ward, Chief Executive of the Children’s Rights Alliance, discussed ‘what are children’s rights?’, and provided an overview of the Child Care Act in the context of applying a rights-based approach. Other areas addressed included the best interests of the child, the voice of the child, non-discrimination, child-friendly social services, child-friendly justice and privatisation of social care.

**Keynote address 2: District Court Child Care Proceedings in Ireland** – (Dr Carol Coulter, Child Care Law Reporting Project)

The second keynote address related to ‘District Court Child Care Proceedings in Ireland’ and was given by Dr Carol Coulter, Director of the Child Care Law Reporting Project. The address provided a background and policy context to the Child Care Law Reporting Project. It also highlighted key issues related to district court child care proceedings in Ireland such as a lack of consistency due to judges
moving around and the high caseloads of judges. It presented the need for a more coherent approach to child care proceedings as well as the development of a specialised family court.

**Keynote address 3: The interaction between law and social work** – (Dr Kenneth Burns, UCC)

The third key note address, delivered by Dr Kenneth Burns from the Department of Applied Social Studies in UCC, was on the subject of ‘the interaction between law and social work’. It identified gaps in knowledge in the area, examined how the process has been reformed in other EU countries, what’s working well in Ireland as well as what is not working well, e.g. the adversarial nature of court proceedings and the passive consent model of voluntary care.

**Thematic workshops**

Three thematic workshop sessions took place at the Open Policy Debate on the topics of:

- ‘Supporting children and families’,
- ‘Listening to and involving children’ and
- ‘Interagency working.’

These topics were chosen with reference to the transformational goal of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. The sessions were introduced by two speakers with different perspectives - each giving their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the current systems and their thoughts on opportunities for further or new developments. These inputs sought to stimulate subsequent discussions in relation the three topics in the context of the review of the Child Care Act 1991.

**Thematic Workshop 1: 'Supporting children and families':**

**Parenting Support in the Irish Context: Opportunities and Challenges**– (Dr Nuala Connolly, Barnardos)

This presentation highlighted the importance of establishing ‘what works’ in parenting support. It outlined the policy context for parenting support and where it fits in the context of family support. It also identified what is working well in parenting support as well as the key challenges including meeting the needs of all parents. Finally, it discussed how to better support parents in different contexts and embed a culture of participatory practice among all parents.

This presentation took the form of a case study of a couple who previously had two children taken into care and were expecting another baby. The presentation provided background information on the personal circumstances of the couple, e.g. housing situation, ethnicity, addiction issues, domestic violence. It outlined options for the unborn baby under the Child Care Act, i.e. a Child Protection Plan, and the crucial elements of this process such as partnership, participation, communication and trust.

**Thematic Workshop 2: ‘Listening to and involving children’:**

**Listening to and Involving Children – Caroline Shore, University College Cork**

This presentation examined the inconsistencies of child participation in court proceedings under the current Child Care Act and what can be learned from The Children and Family Relationships Act, 2015. It discussed the idea of a menu of options for judges in terms of child participation and proposed that children to be allowed to consent to decisions in child care proceedings within new legislation, similar to other jurisdictions.

**Listening to Children- Reidin Dunne, Empowering Young People in Care (EPIC)**

This presentation outlined the importance of listening to children’s voices in the care process. It examined how we engage children in care and the challenges, opportunities and possibilities for empowering children as active citizens in decision-making as opposed to passive recipients of decision-making.
Thematic Workshop 3: ‘Interagency Working’:

Inter-agency Work- Frank Mulville, Young People at Risk (YPAR)

This presentation highlighted the benefits for children, young people and families of YPAR protocols and the Meitheal National Practice Model\(^3\) as well as the importance of interagency relationships, trust and action. The YPAR Hub was also identified as a resource which supports interagency work as well as agencies and their staff in their work with children, young people and their families.

Inter-agency work - Clíodhna Mahony, Dublin City North Children and Young People Services Committee

The final presentation proposed a commitment to interagency partnerships as a way of working; and the need for appropriate levels of buy-in and leadership from top to bottom lines and embedding into practice and leadership. It also discussed inter-agency and intra-agency communication systems and how to view responses in the context of communities.

Methodology

All attendees at the Open Policy Debate were divided into four groups and were split up between four breakout rooms. Attendees then participated in three separate workshops on the three topics. Workshops were facilitated by independent facilitators and assisted by notetakers who recorded the key issues discussed. Within most workshops, participants were divided into smaller groups to discuss topics and at the end of each session each subgroup reported back to the group as a whole with their findings. However, some workshops also had discussions without splitting up. The key areas identified for each theme were:

- What is working well?
- What is not working well?

\(^3\) Meitheal is a National Practice Model to ensure that the needs and strengths of children and their families are effectively identified and understood and responded to in a timely way so that children and families get the help and support needed to improve children’s outcomes and realise their rights. Tusla (2013) Meitheal: A National Practice Model for all Agencies working with Children, Young People and their Families: [http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Meitheal_A_National_Practice_Model.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_Meitheal_A_National_Practice_Model.pdf)
• What are the main gaps?
• What are the key issues/priorities?

Data analysis
Qualitative data from the Open Policy Debate was recorded by notetakers and was then coded, categorised and analysed thematically by the independent Rapporteur. A fair representation of the data collected was assured through strategies such as content analysis to measure the frequency of emerging themes.

About the participants
Over 80 participants took part in the Open Policy Debate. Representatives from a wide range of statutory, non-statutory, academic, legal and professional organisations as well as government departments participated in the event including the following:

• An Garda Síochána;
• Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSCs);
• Children’s Rights Alliance (CRA);
• Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)
• Department of Education;
• Department of Health;
• Department of the Taoiseach;
• Don Bosco Care;
• Early Childhood Ireland;
• EPIC (Empowering People in Care);
• Focus Ireland;
• Fostering First Ireland;
• HIQA;
• Immigrant Council of Ireland;
• Irish Aftercare Network;
• Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW);
• Irish Wheelchair Association;
• Legal Aid Board;
• Mental Health Commission;
• National Family Support Network;
• National Youth Council of Ireland;
• New Communities Partnership Family Support Service;
• NUIG;
• Ombudsman for Children’s Office;
• Public Health Nursing;
• The Courts Service;
• The Law Society;
• Traveller and Roma Centre;
• Tusla, Child and Family Agency;
• UCC;
• UCD;
• Women’s Aid;
• Youth Advocate Programme;
• Young People at Risk (YPAR).
Section 1: Key Issues/Priorities Identified at the Open Policy Debate

Introduction

This section of the report outlines the key issues/priorities identified at the Open Policy Debate in relation to the three topics discussed:

- ‘Supporting children and families’,
- ‘Listening to and involving children’ and
- ‘Interagency working.’

Supporting Children and Families: Key Issues/Priorities

The key issues/priorities identified by participants in relation to ‘Supporting Children and Families’ included the following:

Lack of awareness of best practice standards

A lack of awareness around best practice standards in supporting children and families was the most commonly identified issue by participants. It was felt that best practice standards should be clearly defined and effective practices should be mainstreamed to ensure there are quality practices in all locations, consistent provision of services and equality of access. While participants felt best practice standards should be consistent, it was suggested there must also be room for creativity and flexibility in individual care plans. Creating forums to showcase best practice standards was also mentioned.

Lack of data on children and families

The next most frequently identified issue was the lack of data on children and families and the quality and scope of data which was considered to be problematic. For example, participants suggested there was a lack of demographic information, e.g. on ethnicity, captured in data collection on children and families.
Other issues/priorities

Other issues/priorities identified by participants related to family support practice included:

The voice of the child

• It is important to listen to the voice of the child to effectively support children and families.

Resources

• There is a lack of family support services/resources, e.g. social workers have high caseloads.

Interagency working

• There are challenges related to interagency working within family support.

Mandatory reporting

• The introduction of mandatory reporting and a lack of training in the area for professionals is a concern.

Role of extended family

• The role of extended family in the care process needs to be recognised, e.g. in decision-making in care proceedings, family welfare conferences and as potential carers/guardians.

Role of community

• Other community locations should be examined to highlight/showcase the supports and services available such as in schools and community groups.

Other issues/priorities identified by participants related to family support in legislation included:

• There is a need to reflect changes in society in the area of family support, e.g. prolonged adolescence, immigration including unaccompanied minors and recent changes in legislation, international developments, the children’s referendum.
• There should be a strengthening of family support and related resources within the Act.
• There is a need for stronger obligations on other government departments and agencies (outside of the DCYA and Tusla) in both legislation and practice on family support.
• Thresholds for action on parenting should be clearly defined, e.g. to ensure consistent interpretation of legislation by judges.

**Listening to and Involving Children: Key Issues/Priorities**

The key issues/priorities identified by participants in relation to the topic ‘Listening to and Involving Children’ were:

**Listening to and involving children in the care process**

• Listening to the voice of the child is mandatory and should be put into operation in care processes as well as other processes.
• The voice of children should be listened to at the beginning of any process.
• Children should be protected from negative consequences of giving their views, especially in care proceedings.
• The voice of the child should be central to ‘Child in Care Review’ meetings.
• Children should have more of a voice in their care arrangements and aftercare plans as it is a central principle underpinning the Child Care Act 1991.
• There should be equality in terms of listening to and involving children in the care process, e.g. children in voluntary care do not have the same opportunities to be listened to.

**Listening to and involving children in the court process**

• Training and guidance for judges on listening to and involving children is required, e.g. a menu of options on how to seek the views of children.
• Direct engagement with children should be utilised, developed and promoted more and the use of Section 25 (making children party to proceedings) extended.
• In court, the voice of the child and their wishes should be balanced with independent assessments on the child’s best interests.
• The question of how the weight attached to the voice of the child is determined, including their social background and what they view as social norms should be considered.

• More resources should be put into enabling listening to and involving children, including the use of technology, e.g. in court proceedings.

Other key issues/priorities:

Other key issues/priorities identified by participants related to listening to and involving children included:

Child-centred approach

• A child centred approach must be taken when listening to and involving children.

Learning from other legislation

• The Child Care Act should take learning from the Children and Family Relationships Act which provides for changes to the laws on adoption, guardianship, assisted human reproduction etc.

Advocacy policies for children

• Policies should be developed around advocacy for children and supporting their access to decision-making.

Constitutional Amendment

• There is a need to build on the positivity surrounding the Constitutional Amendment (Article 42a).

Consultations with children and young people on the review of the Act

• Children and young people should be consulted in relation to the review of the Child Care Act in a meaningful and non-tokenistic way and not at the end of the process.
Interagency Working: Key Issues/Priorities

Participants identified the following key issues/priorities relating to the topic of ‘Interagency Working’:

Community and statutory cooperation

The most frequently identified issue/priority was related to community and statutory cooperation. Some participants felt there was a power imbalance between the community and statutory sectors and government structures which can lead to a lack of understanding. Therefore, capacity building was deemed to be important to enable understanding of expectations and priorities, and promote respect between the sectors. While personal relationships were judged to work well in terms of interagency and inter-departmental cooperation, maintaining interagency working can be problematic when personnel move positions. Consequently, it was felt that relationships should be more organisationally based and more agency or department focused. Some participants felt inter-departmental and inter-agency priorities were not always aligned and can sometimes compete. In addition, the government sector and the community sector do not always speak the same language which can result in a mismatch of expectations and priorities. It was suggested that both sides need to be able to frame material and present information in a useful way to the other and both sectors need to consider what the other needs to understand each other. Finally, it was proposed that a legislative basis should be provided for inter-departmental co-operation and subsequent inter-agency collaboration and the facilitation of effective leadership.

Information sharing and data

The next most commonly discussed issue/priority related to information sharing and data. According to participants, information sharing between agencies should be strengthened both in policy and practice, e.g. between Tusla and the Gardaí, and data protection issues which prevent the sharing of information should be examined and overcome if possible. With regard to mandatory reporting, participants discussed the need for further clarity in relation to information sharing and data protection, e.g. the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and Children First place a double obligation to report child protection concerns to An Garda Síochána and to Tusla. Finally, while participants recognised there is strong national data, it was felt
there is a dearth of data available with a specific local focus and detail which makes it difficult to support local planning.

**Collective responsibility for child welfare**

The next most frequently cited issue/priority related to a collective responsibility for child welfare across all state agencies. Participants argued there should be a change in culture in terms of the responsibility of the state and agencies other than Tusla in the areas of child protection, family support and children in care, e.g. the creation of clear roles. It was suggested that collective responsibility would result in better interagency collaboration. Participants called for collective responsibility to be reflected in legislation and for clarity on the statutory basis of Tusla’s responsibility for family support and other services.

**Other issues/priorities:**

Other issues/priorities related to interagency working identified included:

**Interagency goodwill**

- Participants recognised there was a significant level of goodwill and consistency related to current interagency working and it is important to nurture this.

**PPFS Programme/Meitheal model**

- The new Child Care Act should underpin the current interagency work being conducted as part of the Meitheal National Practice Model.

**Capacity building and resources**

- Tusla should commission services rather than fund service providers, e.g. Tusla should specifically commission services for children in care, rather than providing funds to service providers whose services are then available to children in Tusla’s care on the same basis as any other child, i.e., Tusla funding would see children in care prioritised for the service in question.

**Cooperation in court processes**

- There is a need for cooperation between parties early in the court process, e.g. sharing of documents between Tusla, families and legal representation in a timely manner.
Legislation/protocols

- It is important to consider whether protocols or legislation on interagency working is more appropriate.

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures

- There should be an examination of mechanisms within Better Outcomes Brighter Futures which could be useful regarding interagency working.
Section 2: Key Findings from Workshop 1: ‘Supporting Children and Families’

Introduction

This section of the report details the key findings from Workshop 1 which discussed the topic of ‘Supporting Children and Families.’ This includes general observations, what is working well, what is not working well, key gaps and key recommendations related to ‘Supporting Children and Families.’

Supporting Children and Families: General observations

The following general observations were made by participants with regard to supporting children and families:

Observations on children and family support:

- Children should have the right to remain with their family.
- There should be a balance between the rights of the child versus the right of parents and there should not be an assumption that these rights are in conflict.
- The balancing of the different rights of children should be weighted in particular circumstances.
- It is important to understand the circumstances and characteristics of children who present with welfare issues when responding to their needs, e.g. poverty and mental health issues and the overrepresentation of ethnic minority cohorts.
- There should be a recognition of the importance of “quick wins” within family support.

Observations on supporting parents:

- The trust of parents needs to be gained by social workers.
- There is a need to provide more information to parents on parenting and supports, e.g. in diagrams or other formats that would be easily understood – particularly by those with low levels of literacy/poor English or other difficulties.
• As understandings and expectations of parenting can vary, it would be useful to reflect on these issues and develop common understandings.

Observations on best practice standards in family support:
• Adequate resources need to be put into place to support best practices in family support.
• More guidance is needed on best practice standards in family support.
• Emphasis on offering of family support could be supported by guidance on standards and the planning of what can be provided. This should help to ensure consistent provision nationwide.

Observations on family support in the development of a new Child Care Act:
• The best interests of the child should be the guiding principle of the new Child Care Act
• There should be an emphasis on creative solutions within new legislation, e.g. supported lodgings akin to foster care, finding legal basis for a financial payment/other arrangement and shared care/different forms of respite.
Supporting Children and Families: What is working well

Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme\(^4\)

The most commonly cited aspect of family support which participants judged to be working well was the PPFS Programme. The work being conducted through the five main work streams of the PPFS Programme was considered to be very important, namely the work streams of ‘Parenting’, i.e. supporting parents in developing their parenting skills, and the work stream of an ‘Area Based Approach and Meitheal Model’ i.e. implementing an area-based approach to identifying and addressing needs earlier and in a coordinated manner. Overall, participants felt the PPFS Programme was working well in terms of providing supports to families and keeping children out of care.

Listening to the Voice of the Child

The next most frequently mentioned aspect of supporting children and families which was deemed to be working well was listening to the voice of the child. Participants felt the establishment of Tusla was a positive development with regard to hearing the voice of the child and highlighted the increasing space for the voice of the child in areas of family support such as care reviews.

Garda Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs)\(^5\)

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\(^4\) The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme is a comprehensive programme of early intervention and preventative work which has been undertaken by Tusla, with the support of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. The PPFS Programme will take place over three and a half years (2015 – 2018) and will embed early intervention and prevention within the Agency. The aim of the programme is to prevent risks to children and young people arising or escalating through building sustainable intellectual capacity and manpower within Tusla and partner organisations to perform early intervention work. ([www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/prevention-partnership-and-family-support-programme](http://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/prevention-partnership-and-family-support-programme))

\(^5\) Garda Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) deliver a consistent and professional approach to the investigation of specialised crime types, including sexual crime, human trafficking, child abuse and domestic abuse. DPSUs also focus on the provision of support for vulnerable victims of crime, including enhanced collaboration with the Child and Family Agency to safeguard children ([www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)).
Garda Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) were cited as another example of what is working well in the area of supporting children and families. According to participants, DPSUs promote early interaction with the Gardaí and help to establish relationships between families and the Gardaí and other agencies “before something goes wrong.”

Other aspects of family support which were identified by participants as working well included:

**Information and data sharing**
- Recent more transparent sharing of knowledge, experience and research findings.

**Interagency working**
- Some aspects of multi-agency partnerships, e.g. sharing of risk management and family support between different bodies.

**Service user experience**
- Improved service user experience for families interacting with Tusla.

**Differential Response Model (DRM)**\(^6\)
- Differential Response Model (DRM) planning within the Meitheal Model.

**Signs of Safety**\(^7\)
- Tusla’s ‘Signs of Safety’ national approach to child protection casework should lead to improved relationships within family support.

**Mandatory reporting**
- Mandatory reporting, when introduced, was considered to have the potential to make a positive impact but there were mixed views regarding this.

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Policy frameworks

- The development of policy frameworks in recent years, e.g. Better Outcomes Brighter Futures provides a supportive environment for effective child protection and welfare measures.

Monitoring

- Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) monitoring has a positive effect on Tusla.

Areas related to family support within the Child Care Act 1991 which were judged to be working well included:

- The amendment of aftercare provision was regarded as a positive development as young people leaving care now have a statutory entitlement to an aftercare plan.

- The current Act provides a strong mandate for intervening into family life. In particular, it provides a basis for the work of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency – including immediate intervention when required and a more nuanced approach when not dealing with cases of immediate harm.

- There is a recognition of the role of families within the Act and the need for supports to be provided is an important policy recognition.
Supporting Children and Families: What is not working well in family support practice

Inconsistency in family support services and practice

The most commonly identified issue relating to what is not working well in the area of family support practice was inconsistency in support services and practice. According to participants, there is an inconsistency across the country in terms of the level of available family support services which is leading to inconsistency and differences in practice. As a result, some families have more access to family support services than others, some families are better supported than others and some are less likely to be taken into care than others. Participants called for a more consistent and standardised approach to the provision of family support services to ensure quality practice in family support and to ensure equality of access to services for families. It was suggested that effective local projects and programmes could be mainstreamed. However, the point was also made that family support is a difficult area to showcase good practice due to the high number of individuals and relationships at work.

Court proceedings

The next more frequently discussed aspect of family support which was considered not to be working well was court proceedings. Lack of consistency and training among judges was highlighted as a major issue and the necessity of training and guidance for judges to improve expertise and consistency was emphasised. Inconsistencies between how the courts operate in Dublin and the rest of the country and problems related to the use of travelling judges were also discussed. Other aspects of court proceedings which were deemed not to be working well included the inadmissibility of hearsay evidence, legal arguments in relation to same, which can lead to delays and judicial delays and which may result in seeking care orders based on outdated information. Finally, the expense of court proceedings and how resources could be better used to fund services for families if proceedings were simplified or pre-empted was debated.
Mandatory reporting

The next most commonly raised issue was mandatory reporting\(^8\). Participants felt the area of mandatory reporting was not working well due to a lack of protocol on interagency cooperation and a lack of training available to relevant professionals such as teachers. Some participants called for universal responsibility in the area of child protection and for it not to be Tusla’s responsibility alone.

Other aspects of family support practice which were judged not to be working well included:

- Access to services other than family support, e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), can be of great importance to vulnerable families where the welfare of a child might be at risk but can be difficult for service users to access as they are separate organisations within Tusla/HSE structures and there is a perceived lack of a joint-up approach.
- Lack of clarity on what Tusla services have responsibility in this area, i.e. there are a wide range of supports and services including family support, prevention and early intervention.
- There is a high level of suspicion of family support services among service users which is a major issue to be addressed in the short term.
- The voice of the child is not sufficiently integrated into family support systems.
- High caseloads among social workers.

\(^8\) Participants referred to mandatory reporting, however, the Children First Act will only commence mandatory reporting on 11 December 2017. It is presumed that participants may have been referring to the reporting of child protection concerns as relevant at the time, but may also have been commenting on the future introduction of the mandatory reporting system.
Supporting Children and Families: Key gaps in family support practice

Lack of research and data

The main gap identified by participants in relation to supporting children and families was a lack of research and data in the area. In the opinion of participants, in the absence of adequate research and data on best practice on family support, it is difficult to make evidence-based decisions on children and families and their future needs. The reason for a lack of research and data in the area was thought to be linked with data collection which often focuses on deficits rather than best practice and some aspects of family support such as individual work and relationships-based practice not being captured. Therefore, the need for further research on best practice within family support was proposed. Some participants also discussed the need for "disaggregated data collected within a human rights framework", which was previously raised by Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, i.e. the need to collect data on Traveller and Roma families to allow for equality monitoring on ethnic grounds.

Lack of access to mental health services

A lack of access to mental health services was the next most frequently identified gap with regard to supporting children and families. Some participants felt children with complex needs were being “let down” by Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) due to not meeting eligibility criteria to access these services. Participants called for more community based mental health supports for children and families and for these supports to be individualised. The need for better access to mental health services for children in care and to support families to enable children to remain with their family was also highlighted.

Gaps in care arrangements

The next most commonly mentioned gap was related to care arrangements. This included a lack of provision for shared care arrangements between families and foster carers, a gap in appropriate placements for young people aged 14-18 years, responsibility for same, and a lack of financial supports to facilitate private foster care arrangements.
Other gaps highlighted related to supporting children and families included:

- There are challenges facing certain services, for example in the area of domestic violence.
- The rights of children in care are not prioritised.
- Family support sometimes does not work in practice, i.e. there can be a power imbalance between relationships and working in partnership.

**Supporting Children and Families: What is not working well in the Child Care Act 1991**

**Provision on family support in the Act**

- Some participants felt there was currently very little legislative provision on family support in the Act which does not reflect the balance of work of Tusla.
- Other participants felt the Act does provide for family support but stated that services were lost as a result of the Child and Family Agency Act, e.g. separation of Tusla from the HSE caused problems related to access to HSE services.
- Participants perceived the current legislation to be risk-focused and sets out procedures to take children into care, while it is largely silent on preventative support and how it might be provided.

**Lack of definitions in the Act**

- The definition of ‘best interest’ of the child is not included in the Child Care Act 1991, whereas it is in other legislation such as the Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

**Implementation of the Act**

- There are areas where the implementation of the Act is not fully understood.

**Adversarial nature of the Act**

- Participants judged the legislation to be “fundamentally adversarial.”

**Gaps in rights of children**

- Participants highlighted the gaps between the different rights afforded to different children based on how they came into care, e.g. Guardians *ad litem* cannot be appointed for children in voluntary care.
Parental rights

- Participants highlighted a gap in the legalisation in terms of parental rights. For example, in the case of unaccompanied minors there can be difficulties in applying for care orders or providing for voluntary care as there is no provision for application for ex-parte orders in care proceedings. There are also difficulties, once those children are in care, in applying for passports or consenting to medical treatments. This can be resolved by both adding required provision in the Act but also ensuring that immigration legislation and administrative policies are updated.

Secure/special care for vulnerable young people

- The area of secure/special care for vulnerable young people was considered to be weak in the Act.

Aftercare

- Participants identified a gap in the Act in relation to aftercare services for children. Aftercare services need to acknowledge that children in care are often developmentally delayed or experience regression due to trauma.
Supporting Children and Families: Key Recommendations

Recommendations on family support practice:

Recommendations made by participants on family support practice included:

Holistic working

- Family support should work with children and families in a holistic way, e.g. working with children’s schools, community and environment, and recognising the specialised roles in services that allow for the family to be supported holistically.

Child protection guidance

- Clearer guidance or a checklist for the evidence/threshold required for child protection proceedings should be developed.

Interagency care provision models

- Some participants called for a stronger inter-agency model of care provision.

Access to disability services

- There should be better access to services for children with disabilities in care and to support children staying in their family, e.g. Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy.

Information for families

- Clearer information should be available on the range of supports available to families.

Parenting education in schools

- There should be better education in schools on parenting to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Links between child protection, health and education services

- Better links should be created between child protection and health and education services.
Mandatory reporting training

- There should be better training on upcoming mandatory reporting requirements and procedures.

A national advocacy service for parents

- A national advocacy service for parents should be developed.

Resources

- There should be a focus on resources and contexts that help keep children out of care, e.g. housing, poverty and the input of other state agencies.

Aftercare services

- Aftercare services need to recognise that children in care are often developmentally delayed or experience regression due to trauma.
- There is a need to set expectations as to these children’s futures and to follow up on this.
- Young people in aftercare services should have the right to follow up treatment such as mental health services as opposed to going on an adult waiting list.
Recommendations on family support relating to reviewing the Child Care Act 1991

The following recommendations were made by participants with reference to supporting children and families when reviewing the Child Care Act 1991:

Family support in the Act

- There is a need to shift the balance in relation to family support in the Act, i.e. reframe the legislative provisions, without being overly prescriptive.

Align with societal/legislative changes

- The new Act should be aligned with current changes in society and legislation.

DCYA Policy statement on family support

- There is a need to reflect the principles of the ‘DCYA High Level Policy Statement on Family Support’ in legislation as it is important not to lose these principles.

Impact of new legislation

- The impact of other new legislation from different departments on child care legislation and practice should be taken into account.

Quality practice

- To ensure quality practice in family support, the revised Act should anchor and clearly profile parenting and family supports while avoiding being too prescriptive.

Focus on prevention

- There should be a focus on welfare issues in terms of prevention and how family support, social work and other measures may tackle those problems.

Advances in child protection and welfare

- The new Act should reflect advances in service infrastructure in child protection and welfare as well as family support.

Definition of family

- The new Act should adopt a wider definition of family. There should be a more explicit recognition of the role of relatives in preventative family support, in pre-court mechanism such
as wider use of family welfare conferences and their preferred consideration as carers or guardians for the children. For example, in other jurisdictions there are specific orders that allow for relatives taking guardianship of related children, e.g. residence or guardianship orders.

**Reunification**

- The Act should include a focus on reunification or permanency planning for children in care.

**Access to other services**

- The Act should consider how it might facilitate access to other services, e.g. disability, mental health and addiction services which are important to vulnerable families since lack of access can have serious consequences of the welfare of the child.

**Obligations of other services**

- The Act should place obligations on other services, e.g. the HSE, education, housing.

**Aftercare services**

- 25 years should be the upper age for aftercare services as opposed to 23 in order to reflect changes in society and other legislation.

**Non-legislative changes:**

There was recognition among participants that, although the area of family support needs to become more effective, this might not necessarily be achieved through a change in legislation. Some non-legislative suggestions made by participants in relation to supporting children and families included creating a mandate for interdepartmental working to allow for consent and leadership.
Section 3: Key Findings from Workshop 2: ‘Listening to and Involving Children’

Introduction

This section of the report documents the key findings from Workshop 2 which was on the topic of ‘Listening to and Involving Children’ and includes general observations, what is working well, what is not working well and key recommendations in the area.

Listening to and involving Children: General observations

Listening to and involving children in all stages of child care proceedings

Participants felt it was important that children should be given the opportunity to have a say at all stages of their child care proceedings, not just in court proceedings. This was considered to be important in terms of resulting in positive outcomes for children in care, e.g. participants stated that outcomes for children who have chosen residential care tend to be better than those who had it chosen for them. It was suggested that the principles of listening to and involving children in all stages of child care proceedings should be clearly set out in the Child Care Act 1991.

Training on listening to the voice of the child

Training is required to ensure the voice of children is listened to and heard as listening effectively to children is a skill. Training would also help create a common language around listening to and involving children.

Child friendly court system

Consideration should be given to creating a child-friendly court system. Legal precedence on ascertaining the voice of the child in court proceedings included guidance and protocols, e.g. child psychologists to be used to elicit the views of the child and to report these back to the court. However, introducing such procedures would raise the question of who would be responsible for funding this.
Right for children’s voices not to be heard
According to participants, children should also have the right for their voice not to be heard. For example, in instances where a parent may be violent and to give their views may put a child at risk.

Listening and involving younger children
While current practice in care proceedings often provides for older children to give their views, the views of young children are not always considered. In addition, adults can sometimes act as gatekeepers for younger children in the current child protection and welfare system, therefore, the system should be reviewed with that focus in mind.

Advocates
Participants discussed the need for children to have a choice in relation to who they want to advocate for them. The need to encourage the role of a significant adult other than a social worker in the lives of children was also mentioned.

Resourcing
Resourcing child care proceedings to ensure children are listened to and involved is important as the key issues related to this area are largely operational/cultural rather than legislative.

Family unification
The possibility of reuniting children with their families should be examined and children should be listened to in addition to assessing the family environment and whether parents are able now to provide adequate care.
Listening to and involving Children: What is working well

Guardian *ad Litem*\(^9\)

The provision of a Guardian *ad litem* under the Child Care Act 1991 was identified as what is working best in terms of listening to and involving children. Guardians *ad litem* were considered to be very important advocates for children. However, participants stated the dual role of the Guardian *ad litem* of obtaining the views of the child and giving testimony on the best interests of the child can sometimes be in conflict and needs to be managed in a transparent manner.

National children and young people’s participation strategies

The development of national participation strategies such as the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (DCYA, 2015)\(^10\), the pending Child and Family Agency Strategy for the Participation of Children and Young People and Tusla’s Child and Youth Participation Toolkit (Tusla, 2016)\(^11\) were also considered to be very positive advances in the area of listening to and involving children. However, participants highlighted the need for meaningful and non-tokenistic consultations with children and the importance of explaining the reasoning behind consultations and the potential use, influence and outcomes of seeking their views, e.g. in relation to decision-making.

Specialist interviewing and Section 25

The next most commonly mentioned area which was judged to be working well was some aspects of listening to and involving children in court processes, namely specialist interviewing and Section 25. Participants felt specialist interviewing of children for court proceedings was working well but called for

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\(^9\) Section 26 of the 1991 Child Care Act provides for the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* in respect of care proceedings where a child is not a party to those proceedings and where the court is satisfied that it is necessary in the best interests of the child and in the interests of justice to have a Guardian *ad litem* (www.dcyia.ie).


more social workers to be trained in this area. Section 25 of the Child Care Act 1991 (making children party to proceedings) was also deemed to be working well as it provides a useful facility to solicit children’s views directly by making them party to proceedings.

Other areas working well in listening to and involving children highlighted by participants included:

- Child in Care Reviews
- Long-term relationships between children and social workers ensure care planning and reviews reflect the voice of the child
- Where sufficient resources are in place the voice of the child can be heard more
- Advocacy services for children, e.g. Empowering People in Care (EPIC) advocacy services for children in care
- Tusla work including the PPFS programme is a positive practice model
Listening to and involving Children: What is not working well

Aspects of the care system

Certain aspects of the care system were most frequently identified as what is not working well with regard to the topic of listening to and involving children. Many participants felt the care system was not working well as it was not child friendly or child centred which makes it difficult for children’s voices to be heard. For example, children often have to interact with numerous agencies and tell their story and/or raise complaints repeatedly with little visible effect which can be frustrating and disillusioning for children. Children also often might not understand the care process and the purpose of consultations/meetings. In addition, participants felt children are not adequately involved in their own care plans, care arrangements and aftercare plans and stated that very few children attend child protection conferences and parents often leave before they are over. Finally, a lack of social workers, high caseloads and high turnover among social workers were highlighted as not working well as these issues make it difficult for children to develop a good relationship with their social worker which is necessary for them to feel comfortable sharing their opinions and for their voice to be heard.

The courts system

The courts system was the next most commonly identified area which is not working well in terms of listening to and involving children. One of the key issues highlighted was a lack of adequate training among judges on listening to and involving children in court proceedings and having no explicit direction in terms of how to seek children’s views. Participants also considered the adversarial nature of court proceedings to be “inherently hostile to the voice of the child.” Current court arrangements are often not conducive to hearing the views of children, e.g. sharing facilities with other court proceedings means children’s privacy is not protected. Finally, participants felt children are not adequately prepared for participation in the court system, the volume of cases in court makes it difficult to listen to and involve children in proceedings and the current Section 25 (making children party to proceedings) is under-utilised.
**Guardian ad litem services**

The next most commonly mentioned area considered not to be working well was some aspects of Guardian *ad litem* services. While positive views of the Guardian *ad litem* services were highlighted previously in relation to what is working well in listening to and involving children, participants felt there is a lack of consistent provision of Guardian ad Litem services including inconsistencies in relation to the skill and qualification base of Guardians *ad litem*. Another key issue highlighted was the fact that a Guardian *ad litem* cannot be appointed for children in voluntary care which participants felt unfairly affords different rights to different children based on how they came into care. It was proposed that advocacy services, separate to Guardian *ad litem* services, should be better advertised and more widely available to children, particularly outside of Dublin were access was perceived to be “patchier.”

**Best practice in listening to and involving children**

The next most frequently cited area which is not working well was best practice in listening to and involving children. It was felt that the quality of practice regarding listening to and involving children was very mixed and listening to and involving children appears to be largely discretionary. A lack of training for professional working with children in care, e.g. social workers and judges, was highlighted and more training on best practices was proposed, e.g. training on active listening skills, the purpose of listening to children.

**Gap in primary legislation on participation**

While the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making (DCYA, 2015) is a strong commitment to listening to the voice of the child, a deficit in primary legislation in the area of participation was identified by participants.
Listening to and involving children: Key Recommendations

The care process:

- Children’s voices should be listened to and heard from the beginning of the care process and at different stages of the decision-making process.
- Children’s participation in their care arrangements should be more explicit and a central principle underpinning the Act.
- Children should be involved in the development of their Meitheal plans and care plans, e.g. in Sweden children from the age of 15 can object to care arrangements.
- Children and young people should be actively involved in the development of their aftercare plans and receive life skills education to enable a successful transition to independent living.
- There should be more longitudinal research on children in care in order to capture their voice and experiences of the care system and learn what is working well and what areas need improvement.
- Trusted adults such as foster carers could have a more significant role in communicating the voice of the child in the care process.
- There should be cultural sensitivity and diversity in the care process that allows for consistent practice but does not insist on uniformity.
- Children should not be in a position of carrying the burden of being the sole decision maker in the care process.

Courts system:

- A specialised family court with appropriate facilities should be introduced to decrease the volume of cases and make it easier to listen to and involve children.
- Consider the option of developing regional family courts as there may not be adequate numbers of cases in rural areas.
- The revised Child Care Act should be explicit in terms of the obligations of seeking children’s views in court and provide guidance on how their views could be heard directly or indirectly, e.g.
a menu of options to hear children’s views including non-verbal communication such as expressive drawings.

- Judges should be adequately trained in seeking the views of children in court.
- Children should have the power to consent to care orders depending on their age.
- There is a need to consider whether children would be happy with the types of care orders available and are they sufficient for all situations.
- The role of social workers in courts should be reconsidered, e.g. a trusted adult such as a foster carer could communicate the voice of the child in court proceedings.
- There should be greater focus on the best interest of the child in court proceedings rather than parental transgressions.
- It is important that children would be able to give their views in a protective and safe manner, particularly where violence may be involved.
- There is a need to consider to what extent there should be child participation in court, e.g. should a 15-year-old child be able to go to court themselves and make an application.

**Child friendly care system:**

- There should be a more child centred approach rather than a ‘systems orientated approach’ within the care system.
- Ensure children understand the care system and the purpose of consultations/meetings.
- Make sure children are informed that their voice will be listened to and heard in the care system.
- Appropriate supports, resources and capacity building should be put in place to help children give their views, have their voice heard and ensure their rights are upheld.

**Weight of the voice of children**

- The child’s capacity to give their views must be assessed (participants referred to the three steps process under the Constitution outlined in Caroline Shore’s presentation).
- When apportioning weight to the view of the child, consideration should be given to their social/cultural etc. background and their perceptions of social norms.
• In relation to children’s capacity, it was also argued that the “Mc Gillick principle” could be applied, a principle developed by the UK jurisdiction that sets out that a child under 16 can consent to a treatment if s/he achieves sufficient understanding about what is proposed in relation to him/her.

**Guardians ad Litem**

• There should be more consistency in Guardian ad litem services.
• Guidelines should be developed related to Guardians ad litem best practice, e.g. the type of relationship between Guardians ad litem and children and amount of time spent etc.

**Legislative content**

• It was put forward that the new legislation could incorporate relevant human rights instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into law with a view to strengthening children rights through direct reference to the international standards.
• There is a need to consider what should go into a practice framework and what should go into legislation with regard to listening to and involving children. Whatever is in legislation needs to be enabling and supportive of what is in the practice framework.

**Create a culture of listening to and involving children**

• There should be more education on children’s rights in schools to raise awareness and to encourage the capacity in children to voice their views in different contexts.
• A culture where children’s voices are heard needs to be created in society as it is rare that children’s voices are heard and there is still a paternalistic view that “adults know better.”

**Younger children**

• There is a need to employ different age-appropriate methodologies when listening to and involving children of different age groups.

**Advocacy for parents**

• There should be advocacy supports for parents as well as children.
Section 4: Key Findings from Workshop 3: ‘Interagency Working’

Introduction

This section of the report details the key findings from Workshop 3 which was on the topic of ‘Interagency Working.’ The section outlines general observations, what is working well, what is not working well and key recommendations on interagency working.

Interagency Working: General observations

The following general observations were made regarding the theme of interagency working:

Benefits of interagency working

The main thrust of general observations on interagency working related to its benefits. For example, participants stated that building interagency relationships can in effect multiply the resources which are available to a child or young person and interagency working can promote a culture where children and young people can access the right services at the right time. It was also suggested that government departments need to realise the “downstream benefits” of interagency working for them by averting future potential problems.

Legalisation on obligations of other agencies

Participants asked whether legislation should be used to force Local Authorities and other agencies to consider their obligations and to make provision for these. The example of UK Corporate Parenting which places statutory duties regarding children in state care on all Government Departments, not just social services was discussed. However, the difference in the management of budgets between the UK and Ireland in this sector was pointed out.
Other general observations on interagency working included:

**Interactions**
- There is a need for both top-down and bottom-up interactions in interagency working, e.g. policy-level co-ordination to impact on local planning and provision, and effective local co-ordinated responses to be mainstreamed and informing national policies.

**Interdepartmental collaboration**
- Effective inter-agency working needs to be supported by effective inter-departmental collaboration.

**Clarity on roles and responsibilities**
- There is a need for clarity on the roles and responsibilities of various agencies.

**Additional supports**
- Families may need more than just family support, e.g. disability, addiction or mental health services can be of great importance in respect of families where welfare issues may have arisen.

**Interagency resources**
- Resources are not just a financial issue for agencies, e.g. recruitment/retaining social workers.
Interagency Working: What is working well

National interagency structures

The establishment of national interagency structures such as the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme, the Meitheal National Practice Model and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)\textsuperscript{12} were the most cited examples of good interagency working. CYPSCs were considered to be working well as they bring together a range of organisations and members make a personal commitment and have a mandate to participate. The evaluation of national interagency structures has also contributed to learning in the area of interagency working, e.g. the PPFS Programme Evaluation.

Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children\textsuperscript{13}

Children First was the next most commonly identified feature of successful interdepartmental co-operation. Child protection conferences which, according to Children First, are central to identifying children at risk of harm and promote a multi-disciplinary and interagency approach which is essential to reducing the risk and safeguarding the child, were highlighted as working well. Sharing of information based on Children First was also deemed to be successful.

Interdepartmental policies and structures

\textsuperscript{12} Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working (www.cypsc.ie).

\textsuperscript{13} Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA: 2017) provides the national guidance for the protection and welfare of children in Ireland. The guidance is a roadmap to help parents, professionals, organisations and the general public to identify and report child abuse and welfare concerns (www.tusla.ie). It should be noted that Children First has just been revised but at the time of the discussions the 2011 version was still in use.
The development of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020*, a national policy framework which represents a whole of government approach, and The Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium, which is part of the implementation infrastructure of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and drives cross-Government implementation of National Policy Framework for Children and Young People and supporting strategies, were the next aspect of interagency working which was judged to be successful.

Other aspects of interagency working which are working well included:

**Efficiency and impacts**

- Interagency working can be more efficient because organisations are not doubling up on work and there is a pooling of resources, e.g. human resources.
- Interagency work can have “a multiplier effect” and a “domino effect” in terms of impact.

**Interagency working between Tusla and the Gardaí**

- Joint interviewing by Gardaí and social workers was judged to be working well in locations where it is in place.

**Goodwill**

- Participants felt the level of goodwill and consistency in interagency working is an example of what is working well in the area.
Interagency working: What is not working well


Issues related to Children First were the most frequently identified feature of interagency working which participants felt was not working well. According to respondents, Children First has created an “information overload” for Tusla, with the vast majority of referrals not meeting the threshold for intervention. Another key area discussed was legacy issues related to the establishment of the Child and Family Agency in 2014, which resulted in the division of child protection services from Tusla, e.g. CAMHS, disability services and public health nurse services are now separate to Tusla, which in turn has caused problems in relation to data sharing, supports etc. Some participants stated that child protection concerns can cause non-specialised services e.g. disability services, to disengage from the child in need, ceding all responsibility for support to Tusla. Finally, the need for more clarity for schools and Boards of Managements in schools on their duties under Children First was discussed.

Data and information issues

The next most commonly cited area of interagency working deemed not to be working well related to data and information issues. Some participants considered information sharing between agencies not to be working well and highlighted issues related to data protection and privacy as being problematic. Overall, participants felt there was a lack of data, particularly at a local level, which makes it difficult for agencies to work together and to inform service planning. It was felt there was also a lack of qualitative data on children in care.

Lack of interagency systems/best practice

A lack of interagency systems or best practice for interagency working was the next most commonly cited issue. There is currently no system for “easy interagency working”, there are different priorities among agencies which need to be balanced across different systems and there is not adequate collaboration to support more effective multi-agency responses with sufficient accountability.
Section 3 of the Child Care Act

Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991, which relates to the function of the Tusla (formerly the HSE) and the performance of this function, was the next area deemed not working well. Participants felt Section 3 was too vague on the legal responsibilities of Tusla and other statutory bodies and could be open to interpretation, leading to inconsistency in practice in different areas.

Other aspects of interagency working judged not to be working well included:

Interdepartmental communication

- Some participants felt there were problems in terms of interdepartmental communication that have not been solved through Better Outcomes Brighter Futures.

Dual diagnosis

- “Dual diagnosis” still occurs where different services assess and treat families/children separately, e.g. mental health/alcohol problems are treated individually, not in a joint manner.

Boundary issues

- There are sometimes difficulties associated with agency boundaries for services.

Litigation

- Not gaining access to services, typically for children in care, may be subject to litigation that costs more than providing the services in the first place.

Resources/funding

- It is hard for organisations to transfer resources across areas while delivering on their own work plans.

Issues related to unions

- There are issues around public health nurses being under union instruction not to partake in interagency work.

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14 Section 3 of the Child Care Act states “it shall be a function of every health board to promote the welfare of children in its area who are not receiving adequate care and protection.”
Interagency working: Key Recommendations

Interdepartmental working

- There is a need for better interdepartmental communication on national issues.
- Many aspects of interagency work need to be legislated for by other departments, e.g. issues related to unaccompanied minors – immigration applications and citizenship applications should not be a social worker’s responsibility and the Department of Justice needs to recognise this.
- Interdepartmental work is required in order for a mandate for interagency work to be clearly defined.

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures

- Structures and interdepartmental collaboration related to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures should be placed on a statutory footing, with clear accountability and reporting requirements.
- The age group that the Child Care Act is concerned with should be broadened to 0-24 to align it with Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures.

Best practice

- A best practice system for interagency working should be developed, e.g. protocols and frameworks.
- Ensure that effective local multi-agency pilot committee/projects/programmes are up-scaled and mainstreamed.

Legislation on interagency working

- There is a need for legislation on interagency working as it largely depends on interpersonal relationships.

Interagency priorities

- Interagency priorities need to be integrated into work plans so that interagency work can operate on the ground between services.

Resources and capacity building

- Resources and funding are needed so that people have the space and time to coordinate interagency work and to build capacity to carry out this work.
Child centred approach

- Inter-agency platforms need to create a child-centred space as opposed to a professional centred one.

Information and data issues

- A framework should be developed in information sharing, data and privacy issues.

Training

- Interagency training is important to build capacity and has a knock-on effect of creating increased understanding between organisations.