Response to Consultation 'safe and Effective Staffing Legislation in Northern Ireland'

October 2024

Background

Association for Real Change supports 56 provider organisations in Northern Ireland. Of these 67% are charitable; 24% are private and 9% are statutory. They cover all service types – living options (care home; home care and Supported Living); day activities (day centres; day opportunities; supported employment); advocacy; respite/short breaks; and family support.

As ARC NI is not a direct provider, this response is based on a principle common to individual providers that offer different types of services to people with a learning disability and employ staff carrying out a variety of roles within such.

Guiding Principles on Safe and Effective Staffing

Providers already operate within the framework of care and support being safe, effective and compassionate. And as a heavily regulated sector, providers demonstrate governance measures, accounting for a well led service.

The guiding principles proposed to be introduced in legislation do not contradict the framework providers are already used to operating within.

Workforce Planning

The social care workforce crisis has been well documented and the reasons for this are also known. Opportunities to improve the data/evidence of the social care workforce, but we would advocate the need to find mechanisms to account for those that are not required to be registered with the Socia Care Council. Furthermore, nuances within Programmes of Care and Service Types would need to be considered. This we believe would assist the collective sector to strategically plan for changes required to strengthen the workforce.

Common Staffing Method

We accept that for some services it may be easier to formulate a calculation to identify appropriate staffing complement to deliver an effective service. Staffing levels in learning disability services tend to be determined by the needs of each individual supported.

We accept that the proposal placed on the Department of Health is to '**consider**' the use of a common staffing method and staffing calculation tool but would advocate strongly in the need for significant and detailed collaborative working to take this forward.

We hold reservations as to the achievability of the proposed timescale, of within 1 year of the legislation's introduction.

Reporting and Monitoring Arrangements

Whilst some providers may have tools/software in place for real-time staffing intelligence others may not. In our experience, social care providers experience significant increased business running costs year on year. Sometimes there are because of an external environmental/marketplace issues e.g. energy / insurance costs. However on many occasions these costs are as a result of increased demands from commissioners and regulators within existing contracts. Hence any annual uplifts received do not take account of the increased expense to a provider. Previous examples of non-funded requirements include the introduction of auto-enrolment, changing training requirements/additional demands and more recently cyber essentials plus certification within tender requirements which can cost a provider approximately £10,000 per annum.

We would advocate that this proposal should be costed in advance of moving to placing a statutory duty on non-statutory providers.

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