

## **NIACRO Response to Sir Roger Singleton's Review on the Children's Provisions in the New Vetting and Barring Scheme**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

NIACRO acknowledges that the protection of children and vulnerable groups should be of paramount importance to society. We welcome the opportunity to contribute our views relating to the children's provision in the new vetting and barring scheme in the context of public protection.

### **2. NIACRO COMMENTS**

#### **2.1 The current definitions of 'frequent' and 'intense'**

NIACRO is concerned the rigid definitions for 'frequent' and 'intense' will lead to the application of legislation that will become about agency protectionism as much as child protection. If it remains in its current prescriptive format, it will negate the purpose of the legislation and fail to protect the vulnerable.

Employers may believe that by simply adhering to the specified and required benchmark, this will prove to be sufficient protection. There must be further guidance offered to ensure employers understand the wider issues surrounding child protection, otherwise there is a danger this new legislation does little else to protect the children for whom it is intended.

Further, these new requirements may in fact reduce services to children. Employers may opt to reduce children's services from one month to 6 weeks to ensure that they remain outside the scope of the scheme's registration requirements. Reducing services to children, particularly those that incorporate safe working practices, will create more harm.

#### **2.2 Recommendations**

There is a lack of uniformity in the definitions of 'frequent' and 'intense' across government guidance. A clear example of this is the difference in language used to outline these definitions in the Home Office "Vetting and Barring Scheme Guide" (October 2009) and that used in Sir Roger Singleton's letter. NIACRO recommends the terms are amended or replaced to prevent the anomalies that will be caused by a number of agencies using their own interpretations.

A positive example of practical wording can be seen in the previous process of the Pre-employment Consultancy Service in Northern Ireland, which was much clearer and straightforward in its wording and implementation. NIACRO recommends the guidance reverts back to incorporating the degree of contact and nature of activity with children. This should include definitions such as substantial, unsupervised access in a setting that incorporates responsibility for teaching, training, instructing, caring, supervising and counselling.

Recent media interest in highlighting confusion amongst the public needs to be taken seriously and addressed. Particular concerns relating to volunteering opportunities must be clarified to ensure that these continue to provide safe mechanisms for integrated child protection.

A clear and easily understood definition of registration requirements of the vetting and barring process should apply to any formal (paid or unpaid) employment relationships which require either a job or role description, or placement or service level agreement to be issued.

Such a process is more likely to ensure that the balance is struck between those carrying out the above duties in a professional capacity and those offering the services of good will.

### **3. Conclusion**

NIACRO acknowledges and supports the spirit of the safeguarding legislation in increasing protection for children and vulnerable adults. However, we remain concerned about the practical outworkings of the legislation, identified in this response.

Further, NIACRO believes that whilst the Singleton review is necessary, it does not go far enough. A complete review of the safeguarding legislation, including the law regarding vulnerable groups, should be undertaken to ensure consistency, proportionality and a balanced approach to public protection.