

Ms. Frances Fitzgerald,
Minister for Children,
Head Office, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 43-49 Mespil Road Dublin 4
December 22nd 2011

RE: HSE decision to remove the Social Work Department (Child Protection Services) out of Ballymun.

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you regarding information that has been brought to our attention by the members of the Association, and I enclose some of the relevant documentation/letters. The members of the Association have expressed serious concerns in relation to current plans by the HSE to remove Social Workers from the existing community based settings and purpose-built facilities. The reason given for this move was the transition of responsibility from the HSE to the new Child & Family Support Agency. The HSE's intention is to relocate their own clerical and administrative grades into these front-line social work offices. This is presently occurring HSE Dublin North City (Ballymun), and is potentially a nationwide issue.

The proposed moves will have a detrimental impact on Social Workers' capacity to respond to children who are not receiving adequate care and protection in their community, as in some instances the new social work offices are located several kilometers outside of the communities they serve. Notably, social workers have not been consulted about the moves, nor about the impact the moves will have on the children and families they work with.

The social work members in their letter to their acting head of operations in the HSE, Mr Pat Dunne have outlined their concerns for the service as follows;

(1) Manageable Caseloads:

The additional commute time for Social Workers from Park House to Ballymun, for home visits, meetings, access etc., will subtract a *minimum* of half-a-day per week from current casework hours. Social Workers will have a reduced capacity to meet their current caseload requirements, necessitating a return of cases to the waiting list. This will be even greater for those who presently rely on public transport, or who may be forced to use public transport as a result of the proposed move.

(2) Interagency relationships:

The Civic Centre was purpose built as part of the regeneration plans for Ballymun, to redress the high levels of social exclusion and deprivation in the area. The Centre brings key services together, as a one-stop-shop for clients. It is a model of best practice for effective interagency working and joined-up practice. The present location has facilitated a partnership approach with key protective and preventative services in the Centre and in the locale. These relationships are central to effective Social Work practice, as evidenced in reports such as the Victoria Climbié enquiry in the UK. Relocating the Social Work Department to a remote location outside of the community will be to the detriment of these interagency relationships.

(3) Service accessibility for clients:

Park House is not open to the public, and retaining offices in the Civic Centre is not a workable solution given the chaotic lifestyle of many clients. Office meetings and drop-in support with allocated Social Workers is frequently unpredictable. Teenage clients seeking support will face similar difficulties, and may become further isolated as a result. The proposed move will also make it increasingly difficult for Social Workers to carry out home visits, which are essential to risk assessment, support and monitoring. Multiple home visits are frequently required before contact is established, and proximity is a key component in facilitating and maintaining such contact.

(4) Loss of facilities:

The Social Work Department was involved at the design stages of the Civic Centre, and the social work offices are purpose built. Current facilities include a reception, a waiting area, duty rooms, team leader rooms, a childcare room, conference and meeting rooms. *Park House* is not designed or located in a way that can facilitate the service provided to clients.

The relocations constitute a move away from the principles of *Children First*, the *National Children's Strategy*, and indeed the very essence of the new *Child and Family Support Agency*, putting the State at risk of failing in its legal obligations.

We would welcome your input under Section 69 of the Child Care Act, 1991, to ensure that the HSE retain Child and Family Social Work Services in their present locations within the communities they serve. It is imperative that Child and Family Social Work Services do not suffer in the present transition.

Yours sincerely,

Ineke Durville
President