



Adult Safeguarding: Government Response to Consultation

In 2008/9 the government undertook a national consultation on adult safeguarding and in particular the "No Secrets" guidance previously issued.

The government response to that consultation has now been published. Legislation is promised to reinforce and clarify the adult safeguarding regime.

Key Points:

- Safeguarding Adult Boards to be put on a statutory footing
- Legislation to ensure effective procedures
- Ministerial safeguarding vulnerable adults group to be established

In 2000, the Government published guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse, entitled "No Secrets". The guidance was aimed at all commissioners and providers of health and social care services including primary care groups, regulators of such care services and appropriate criminal justice agencies.

The aim of "No Secrets" was to create a framework for action within which all responsible agencies could work together to ensure a coherent policy for the protection of vulnerable adults at risk of abuse and a consistent and effective response to any circumstances giving grounds for concern or formal complaints or expressions of anxiety.

The guidance stated that the agencies' primary aim should be to prevent abuse where possible but, if the preventative strategy failed, agencies should ensure that robust procedures were in place for dealing with incidents of abuse.

Local authority social services departments were told to play a co-ordinating role in developing the local policies and procedures for the protection of vulnerable adults.

"No Secrets" gave guidance to local agencies that have a responsibility to investigate and take action when a vulnerable adult is believed to be suffering abuse and also offered a structure and content for the development of local inter-agency policies, procedures and joint protocols.

The government ran a consultation on the "No Secrets" guidance from 16th October 2008 until 31st January 2009. Consultation events were run across the country and 12,000 people took part, including 3,000 members of the public, many of whom were adults to whom the guidance applies (or their carers), and 9,000 professionals. Over 500 written responses were also received.

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The aim of the consultation was for the government **“to listen to what was going well and was not going well...to find out what was needed to prevent, to respond to, and to stop harm – to report, to question and to challenge abuse, and to work within the criminal justice system to bring to justice those who commit criminal offences against those in situations that make them vulnerable.”** The government wanted to identify what was needed for better safeguarding.

One of the key messages derived from the responses was that the guidance should be updated and that legislation should be introduced to place adult protection on a statutory basis. At present, there is no legal requirement for partners to engage with safeguarding processes and no duty to share information or report abuse.

In particular, it was argued that the Safeguarding Adult Boards needed to be placed on a statutory footing. This was because the structure and role of boards were different across the country. Legislation that defined clear roles and responsibilities would remove this inconsistency. A statutory framework was also deemed essential to enable boards to be effective, and to encourage effective strategic buy-in and co-operation from all agencies.

On 19th January 2010, the government announced its plan to enshrine Safeguarding Adult Boards in legislation.

The legislation will enforce the need for every area to have in place such a board, made up of the social services authority, the police, the NHS and all other groups involved in protecting vulnerable adults. The board will ensure that vulnerable adults who suffer abuse will have quick and easy access to the people who can help them best.

The government, working with stakeholders, will also set in train a programme of work to lead and support all agencies involved in safeguarding adults. A new cross Government Ministerial group will be set up, to oversee the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, set priorities, work up new policy and provide national leadership. New and improved guidance will also be issued.

This announcement builds on previous measures designed to improve adult safeguarding, including making every independent care home subject to the Human Rights Act and giving the Care Quality Commission tough powers to penalise or close down care providers who offer substandard care. The government is also working with the General Social Care Council on a system of registration for care workers, to strengthen the protection of vulnerable people, raise the quality of care provided and help prevent abuse.

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