For attention of
The Convener and Members of the Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament

Children and Young People (Information Sharing) (Scotland) Bill

Unite the Union and in particular the members that we represent within our Community Practitioner and Health Visitors Association, (CPHVA) have been supportive of the intention and direction that recent legislation has followed in relation to the Named Person and a child’s wellbeing.

We have at times been regarded as critical partners during this process and have raised our concern’s privately and when required publicly regarding the plans and their impact upon practitioners and in particular our Health Visitor members, the majority of these practitioners in Scotland sit within our membership.

We are now at a point where our members experience of the Named Person as proposed by the legislation and accompanying debate has been compromised. This has come about as a result of local interpretation/misinterpretation, the assumptions made by other professions, the hostility and suspicion from certain elements of society. Our members experience is varied and is dictated largely by the postcode in which they practice. The best, singular description of the practitioners experience is confusion. This feeling abounds throughout Scotland.

The lack of clarity, guidance and the process has dragged on for too long and whilst we appreciate that the delays have been as a result of proper judicial scrutiny, this is of little consolation to the Health Visitors facing the reality of an increasing workload. With the promised appropriate Health Visiting resource not becoming the reality that it was intended to be.

Unite the Union remain supportive of the Named Person and of GIRFEC generally but we believe that they have been adversely affected by the prolonged timescale relating to the legislative process. This we believe can only hamper the effectiveness of the Health Visitor identified as the Named Person for the pre-school child in the longer term.

The confusion over the Named Person role and the understanding of not just the Health Visiting workforce but also others that they engage with, will we feel increase the risk to the Health Visitor and their ability to practice safely and effectively.

Unite the Union are dismayed by the approach that many in public life have taken during this debate with the Named Person becoming the rope in a political tug of war. The well-being of the child and the professionals identified as the Named Person being the potential casualties in a battle of political dogma. Ultimately it will not be a politician who has to argue the merits of the Named Person but a clinician establishing a relationship with a child and their family.

There needs to be clarity over the “duty to consider” and the “Named Person” with strong assurances that the organisation employing the Named Person take the responsibility for any institutional deficits that result from a lack of human and other relevant resources. Reassurances need to be in place that the individual practitioner does not become the focus of blame when they are under resourced for the enhanced role and it’s expectations.

Unite the Union from the early stages of discussion, (that ultimately resulted in the Scottish Governments Health Visiting implementation plan), have advocated for more than the promised 500 additional Health Visitors. Our suggestion of 800 being a more
realistic human resource to tackle the enhanced Health Visiting pathway and the expected demands of the Named Person. We believe that this number is indeed more accurate, the nearer we are to the end of the implementation plan. Simply health boards are under resourced regarding Health Visitors and the increasing demand moving forward will only drive these practitioners to a more defensive, safeguarding focused mode of working rather than being the agents of public health and well being that was the intended vision. If it adds to the deliberations of the committee I am happy to contribute oral evidence on behalf of Unite the Union and it’s membership at the appropriate time. In the meantime if there is any additional information that I can supply please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely
Gavin Fergie
Lead Professional Officer
(CPHVA, Scotland)
Health Sector
Unite the Union
25th August 2017