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Date 27/08/2025

Deputy Barry Heneghan
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 41627/25, PQ 41628/25, PQ 41625/25, PQ 41624/25

PQ 41627/25

To ask the Minister for Health the chain of reporting and the lines of accountability for the management of safeguarding services within the HSE, both regionally and nationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 41628/25

To ask the Minister for Health the legal and financial expertise available to support each of the six safeguarding and protection teams; the resources available to the person with overall responsibility for safeguarding within the HSE; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 41625/25

To ask the Minister for Health the additional skills and training that are provided to social workers upon joining safeguarding and protection teams to ensure they can deliver high-quality safeguarding services; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 41624/25

To ask the Minister for Health the number of social workers currently employed in each of the six safeguarding and protection teams within the HSE; the number of vacant posts; and the number of social work posts planned for 2026, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Heneghan,

Thanks for your recent Parliamentary Questions which are detailed above and which the Department of Health have passed to the HSE for direct reply. The matters are inter linked and overlap in detail. Therefore, I have devised a composite reply to all the questions.

Individual Answers:

The current chain of reporting and line of accountability reporting line of accountability for the management of safeguarding services within the HSE.

Regional governance:

Each Principal Social Worker operationally reports to a Head of Service within the HSE regions. This Head of Service is generally a Head of Service for Quality, Safety & Service Improvement (HQSSI) who in turn reports to the Clinical Director for Quality and Patient Safety in each region who in turn reports operationally to the Regional Executive Officer. The Regional Executive Officer reports to the HSE Chief Executive Officer.

National governance:

The Chief Social Worker reports to the HSE Chief Clinical Officer and provides expert advice to the CEO on adult safeguarding and social work matters. The Chief Social Worker role was created to provide leadership and focus on the reform of adult safeguarding in the HSE, and line manages the General Manager of the National Safeguarding Office.

Access to legal and financial expertise available

Safeguarding Teams operate within the Office for Legal Services procedures when seeking to apply for legal advice on specific cases from the list of firms on contract to the HSE. Legal advice can be authorised and then sought on significant and complex cases that require this specialist input and will be sought in advance of any potential applications to the courts. In addition, Safeguarding Teams on a case-by-case basis engage as necessary with both internal colleagues (i.e. NHSS, Patient Accounts etc) and external colleagues (i.e. Department of Social Protection, An Garda Síochána, Banks, Credit Unions etc.) in responses to concerns of financial abuse.

Additional skills and training that are provided to social workers upon joining safeguarding and protection teams to ensure they can deliver high-quality safeguarding services.

Continuous professional development (CPD) is central to social work practice, both to meet CORU regulatory requirements and to ensure best practice.

Individual learning needs:

Individual social workers in supervision with their line manager would identify education needs and any gaps as well as discussing Continuing Professional Development (CPD). CPD is critical to ensuring professional deliver high quality standards. It is part of the supervisor's role to consider the training and education needs of individual social workers and in the initial induction phase of a social who may be new to adult safeguarding specific education needs/ gaps may be identified. Social workers are expected to engage in a range of learning activities and reflect on how these activities impact their practice.



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individual workers maintain portfolios with record of continuous professional development. A social worker's portfolio, as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD), is a record of their professional development activities and how they've improved their knowledge, skills, and competence. CORU, the regulatory body for health and social care professionals, requires social workers to maintain and update their portfolios to ensure they meet the required standards. CORU mandates CPD for social workers to ensure they provide high-quality services and are competent to practice.

Delivery of strategic learning and development

Safeguarding Teams and the National Safeguarding Office also consider learning needs at a team or national level which can result in specific initiatives or events. There are specific learning and development programmes run by the National Safeguarding Office in collaboration with other stakeholders such as the Irish Association of Social Workers, National Dementia Office and Decision Support Service. Each year the National Safeguarding runs a two-day learning and development programme of events targeted at the education needs of safeguarding team members.

Number of social workers currently employed in Safeguarding with current vacancies.

The total number of social workers in position across the safeguarding teams varies over time due to a variety of factors including temporary cover arrangements and varying staff turn over rates. As of August 1st, 2025, across all the Safeguarding Teams nationally it is estimated that there are 96 whole time equivalent social workers currently in post with 21 vacancies with equates to approx. 18% vacancy rate. Future plans for staffing investment are dependent on the upcoming HSE letter of allocation and development details in the 2026 HSE Service Plan developments.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Tim Hanly

General Manager | National Safeguarding Office
Copy to HSE PAD at PQuestions@hse.ie