



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority

press release

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RQIA Publishes Review of Emergency Social Work Provision in Northern Ireland

Today, RQIA has published the findings of its Review of Emergency Social Work in Northern Ireland, which considered whether the provision of emergency interventions of care is safe, effective and compassionate, and the service is well led. The review team, which included expert representation from Care Inspectorate Scotland, also sought the views of key stakeholders in relation to the provision of this service.

While community social work services operate during office hours - five days a week, access to these services may be required 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These can include: emergency mental health assessments; emergency admissions of children into care; management of imminent risk of harm to a child; and applications for secure accommodation for young people. Previously, such crises were dealt with by an out-of-hours duty social worker, who may not have had knowledge of the individual, or their particular circumstances.

Since 2013, emergency social work interventions have been provided by the Regional Emergency Social Work Service (RESWS), managed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Stakeholders reported significant improvements in accessing these services, since the establishment of RESWS.

Speaking at the launch of the review report, Olive Macleod, RQIA's Chief Executive, said: **“RQIA’s reviewers found that the emergency social work team was delivering a good service; however, we identified a number of significant challenges that must be addressed. These include: access to IT systems to allow social workers to obtain an individual’s information to inform their assessment; a continuation of the programme of training for approved social workers, and vulnerable adults training; and the development of an appropriate protocol for staff safety.”**

Olive Macleod continued: **“We also highlighted a number of areas for improvement, including a review of the call management arrangements to reduce inappropriate referrals.”**

“Our review team also considered that there was a need for strengthened information exchange between the emergency team and daytime social work services; with GP out-of-hours services; the Housing Executive; and the police. We would also encourage further engagement with those who have used the service, to include their voices in the further development of this service.”

RQIA’s Chief Executive concluded: **“RQIA’s report makes seven recommendations to improve the Regional Emergency Social Work Service, which we believe, if implemented, would further improve the delivery of this service for people in crisis.”**

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Editors' Notes

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, established in April 2005 under *The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003*, is the independent health and social care regulatory body for Northern Ireland. In its work RQIA encourages continuous improvement in the quality and availability of health and social care services through a programme of inspections and reviews.

Background to Review of Emergency Social Work Provision in Northern Ireland

A new Regional Emergency Social Work Service (RESWS) was established in May 2013. The service model is based on having staff working at all times that the service is operational. Emergency social work response is provided from a number of offices across Northern Ireland between 5pm and 9am daily and over each weekend and public holiday.

The RESWS has been operational for over three years, and no reviews of this service have been undertaken. As part of its 2015-18 review programme, RQIA has carried out this review to determine whether the interventions of care carried out by the RESWS are safe, effective and compassionate, and that the service is well led.

On Wednesday 25 January 2017, a report of RQIA’s findings will be available at: www.rqia.org.uk.