

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SHADOW FAMILY JUSTICE BOARD

Background

The creation of a Family Justice Board is one of the key proposals flowing from the Review of Civil & Family Justice. The Review Group's Report on Family Justice, published on 5th September 2017, recommends:

A Family Justice Board to be set up with an independent chair recruited after a properly advertised recruitment exercise. [FJ168]

Chapter 20 of the report sets out in detail the case for the creation of a Family Justice Board, taking account of the position in other jurisdictions; proposes what the terms of reference for the Board might be [FJ169]; and proposes a core membership of 8 to 10 persons [FJ170]. The report notes the high level of support for the proposal in the responses that were received in respect of the preliminary report on family justice, which was published in August 2016.

In the absence of Ministers, it was agreed with the Permanent Secretaries of the Department of Justice, the Department of Finance and the Department of Health that a shadow Family Justice Board, with a more limited remit, should be established as an interim step, with a senior judge acting as chair. The establishment of the shadow Board was announced by the Lord Chief Justice in his public address at the opening of the new legal year on 5th September 2017.

Remit

The remit of the shadow Family Justice Board is to:

- oversee the co-ordination of a draft plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the Family Justice Report, as accepted by lead organisations;
- make proposals on which of the recommendations within the Report should be prioritised, taking account of available resources;
- engage with incoming Justice, Finance and Health Ministers on matters relating to their responsibilities; and
- identify potential "quick wins" that could be taken forward in the short term.

Membership

The shadow Board will be chaired by the Senior Family Judge and its core membership will include representatives of the following:

- Court of Judicature of Northern Ireland
- County Court of Northern Ireland
- District Judge
- District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)
- The Bar Council of Northern Ireland
- The Law Society of Northern Ireland
- Department of Justice
- Department of Finance
- Department of Health
- Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service
- Legal Services Agency
- HSC Trusts
- HSC Board
- NIGALA
- Office of the Lord Chief Justice

Other nominated individuals may attend meetings of the shadow Board, with the agreement of the Chairman, for particular items of business.

Advisory Group

An Advisory Group will be established to allow stakeholder organisations to provide their input to the work of the shadow Council and to reflect the views of particular interest groups. The Advisory Group will be chaired by a designated member of the shadow Board and will meet at least twice a year.

Sub-committees

A number of sub-committees may, with members' agreement, be established to undertake detailed consideration of specific areas of work and report back to the shadow Board. The membership of the sub-committees may, where appropriate, encompass other organisations or individuals with an interest in the subject matter

under consideration. This may include, but not be confined to, the organisations represented on the Advisory Group.

Frequency of meetings

The shadow Board shall meet at least once a term.

Secretariat

The current COAC arrangements will continue and will be reviewed at an agreed future date with a view to it transferring across to the Office of the Lord Chief Justice.