

## Media release

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### **‘White Paper has the potential to improve the child protection system’ – Children’s Commissioner**

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Children’s Commissioner Dr Russell Wills says the White Paper released today should lead to children being better protected under an improved system.

“There is nothing more important than making sure the child protection system works to protect our most vulnerable children. I’m satisfied that the White Paper goes a long way in addressing some significant gaps in the current care and protection model.

“That can only be a good thing for those children across the country suffering from abuse and neglect,” the Commissioner said.

“I’m particularly pleased to see the emphasis on collaboration across the social, health and education sectors. If we want to see things improve for children, these sectors have to work together more effectively than they do now.

“This will involve some seemingly simple measures like ensuring agencies have the ability to share contact details and essential clinical information. That’s important because we know children at risk are often highly transient and can fall through the cracks if agencies lose track of them.

“Changing boundaries so that Education, Child, Youth and Family and DHBs are all aligned to the same area is another deceptively simple, yet vital way to help agencies work together to protect children.

“The introduction of effective Regional Children’s Directors will be critical to achieving the goals of the White Paper. I am pleased to see their accountability for outcomes will be supported by authority over local social services.

“There will be a long road ahead to get collaboration working smoothly. It will rely on outstanding leadership and being adequately resourced at the local level – particularly in DHBs where workloads are high and time and resources are tight. I trust the issue of resourcing will be worked through in the next stage of the process and I will be closely monitoring progress in this area.

“A strong, well-trained work force is also vital to getting things right for children. The White Paper sets out some new initiatives, such as requiring all disciplines to describe the training their members must have in child protection. New vetting procedures, child protection policies, training and supervision will all help improve practice.

“I also support the strategies already underway to improve social work workloads, including increased numbers of social workers in CYF and schools. Strongly encouraging registration for social

workers in all organisations will support improved practice for those new social workers and improve processes for accountability”

“Clearly primary prevention of maltreatment is also vital, because protecting children goes beyond making sure the system and workforce is doing what it should. I am pleased to see the White Paper promoting a public awareness campaign encouraging neighbours and friends to identify and report children at risk. Linking this to the ‘It’s Not Ok’ national and local campaigns is wise.

“I also look forward to the Government’s response to the final report of my Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty in December. In particular, reducing income poverty and improving housing quality and supply have great potential for reducing abuse and neglect.

“Ultimately the success of the proposals in the White Paper will rely on commitment from those that work with children across all sectors to make things happen. There will be significant changes for all of us and we will all need to work hard to ensure they work well.

“If the best interests of children remain at the centre of all our decisions and actions I am sure we will find ways to make this work. I will be watching the progress of the Action Plans closely, and supporting the various Ministries to meet their obligations to children under the White Paper.”

Ends.