

## AN BILLE FÁN nGNÍOMHAIREACHT UM LEANAÍ AGUS AN TEAGHLACH, 2013 CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCY BILL 2013

### **EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

Purpose of Bill

The main object of the Bill is to provide for the establishment of the Child and Family Agency. The Agency will, on the establishment day, assume responsibility for functions currently performed by the Health Service Executive relating to child welfare and protection. In addition, the functions transferring to the Agency will include the provision of services relating to the psychological welfare of children and their families.

The Bill also provides for the transfer of the existing responsibilities of the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board to the Agency. This will facilitate the greater integration of services for children and families and also accords with the Public Service Reform Plan and the rationalisation of State agencies.

The Bill also provides for a governance framework in order to ensure that the Agency operates within a strong framework of public accountability. It establishes structures which clarify that the policy objectives for the Agency will be set by the Minister, supported by the Department and that the Agency is responsible to the Minister for its performance. It also seeks to strengthen the governance of services through a greater focus on the management of performance and improved organisational accountability for outcomes and public expenditure.

In addition to provisions providing for the establishment of the Board and the functions of the Chief Executive Officer, the Bill further provides for a number of supplementary matters relating to the commissioning of services by the Agency, staffing, complaints in relation to services and transitional matters relating to the functions transferring to the Agency from the different bodies.

## **Provisions of the Bill**

#### PART 1

#### **Preliminary and General**

Section 1 — Short Title and commencement

This is a standard provision setting out the short title and commencement provisions for the Bill.

*Section 2 — Interpretation* 

This is a standard provision providing definitions for certain words and terms used in the Bill.

Section 3 — Expenses

This is a standard expenses provision.

Section 4 — Regulations

This is a standard regulation making provision allowing the Minister to prescribe such matters as the Act requires to be prescribed. Every regulation under the Act must be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas as soon as may be after it is made.

Section 5 — Repeals

This provision provides for repeals of enactments as specified in Schedule 3.

#### PART 2

#### Child and Family Agency

Section 6 — Establishment day

This provision provides that the Minister shall, by order, appoint a day to be the establishment day of the Agency.

Section 7 — Establishment of Agency

This provision provides for the establishment of the Agency on establishment day.

*Section 8 — Functions of the Agency* 

This provision sets out the functions of the Agency. The functions will include the existing functions of the National Educational Welfare Board and the Family Support Agency. It will also include the functions provided by Child and Family Services of the HSE currently which include supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children. The functions of the Agency will include supporting and encouraging the effective functioning of families which may encompass care and protection for victims of domestic, sexual or gender-based violence whether in the context of the family or otherwise. The functions will also include the provision of services relating to the psychological welfare of children and their families.

Section 9 — Best interests and views of the child

This section provides for the Agency to have regard to the best interests and views of the child when making decisions. When performing its functions under the Adoption Act 2010 or the Child Care Act 1991, the Agency will ensure that the views of the child are ascertained and given due weight.

Section 10 — Agreements between Agency and public bodies concerning the performance of their functions

This provision provides that the functions of the Agency may be performed by a public body by agreement between the public body and Agency. It will also provide for a reciprocal arrangement between a public body and the Agency by agreement.

Section 11 — Informal arrangements between Agency and public bodies concerning performance of functions

This section is to provide for informal agreements between the Agency and public bodies concerning duties relating to their respective functions.

Section 12 — Seal of Agency

This section provides for the seal of the Agency and the manner of its authentication.

## Section 13 — Annual report

This section provides for the preparation of an annual report in relation to the Agency's functions during the previous calendar year. It provides for the specifics of the annual report, its adoption by the Agency, its submission to the Minister, its laying before the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Minister and its publication by the Agency as soon as practicable thereafter.

#### Section 14 — Duty of Agency to furnish information

This section obliges the Agency to furnish information to the Minister which the Minister is likely to consider significant for the performance of his or her functions or information that has been specified by the Minister as falling within a class of developments of public interest or concern. It also provides that the Agency shall, when required by the Minister, submit a report on any matter connected with the functions of the Agency.

## Section 15 — Requirement to furnish information and documents

This section provides that the Minister may require the Agency to furnish certain information or documents to him/her where he or she considers it necessary in the public interest to do so for the performance of his or her functions. The Agency is required to provide the information in any period specified by the Minister and in any event without delay.

Section 16 — Minister may share information and documents in certain circumstances

This section enables the Minister to share certain information or documents received pursuant to sections 14 or 15 in the context of an examination or inquiry.

## Section 17 — Use of information and documents

This section enables the Minister to use information and documents obtained under sections 14 or 15 for the performance of his or her functions. This power is qualified in relation to the publication of such information or documents.

#### Section 18 — Saver

This section provides clarity that nothing in sections 14-17 limits the power of the Minister contained elsewhere in the Act or otherwise to require information from or issue directions to the Agency.

#### PART 3

## **Board of Agency**

## Section 19 — Membership of Board of Agency

This section provides for the composition of the Board of the Agency. In addition to the standard provisions relating to the composition of the Board, this section provides for the method of appointment, term of office, credentials of members, gender balance and resignation.

## Section 20 — Filling of casual vacancies

This section provides for the filling of casual vacancies in specified circumstances. The person appointed to fill a casual vacancy will hold office for the unexpired period of his or her predecessor's term of office or a period determined by the Minister. A person appointed to a casual vacancy may serve two further terms subject to maximum of 10 years.

#### Section 21 — Role of Board

This section sets out the role of the Board of the Agency as the governing body of the Agency. It also specifies various functions of the Board that may not be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer. It also provides that the Minister may issue directions to the Board in relation to the delegation of functions to the Chief Executive Officer.

#### Section 22 — Meetings of the Board

This section provides for the holding of meetings by the Board. It provides for a minimum number of meetings per year, the number of members required to be present to have a quorum, how matters are to be determined at meetings and that the Board may regulate the procedures and business of the Board.

## Section 23 — Conditions of office

This section sets out the conditions of office and the circumstances in which the Minister may remove a member of the Board from office. It also enumerates those eventualities which will result in immediate cessation of membership of the Board.

#### Section 24 — Removal of all members of the Board from office

This section enumerates the circumstances in which the Minister may remove the entire Board of the Agency from office. It contains standard savers in regard to the delegation of the Agency's function to the Chief Executive Officer in such a situation.

#### Section 25 — Committees of Board

This section is a standard provision enabling the Board to set up committees to assist and advise it on matters relating to its functions. Persons who have special knowledge and experience related to the purposes of the committee but who are not members of the Board may be appointed to such committees.

## Section 26 — Membership of either House of Oireachtas, European Parliament or local authority

This section sets out the circumstances in which a person is ineligible to be a member of the Board or of a committee of the Board and the circumstances in which a member of the board or of a committee ceases to hold office.

## Section 27 — Remuneration and expenses of the members of the Board and committees

This section provides for the remuneration and expenses of members of the Board and of committees of the Board to be paid by the Agency at such rates as the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform may determine.

#### PART 4

## **Chief Executive Officer**

#### Section 28 — Appointment of chief executive officer

This section provides for the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer of the Agency. The remuneration and allowance of the Chief Executive Officer are payable by the Agency. S/he may attend meetings of the Board and make submissions and advise the Board in accordance with the procedures of the Board.

# Section 29 — Functions of chief executive officer and their performance by deputy

This section provides that the Chief Executive Officer is responsible to the Board for the performance of his or her functions and the implementation of the Agency's corporate plan and business

plan. It sets out the functions of the Chief Executive Officer and provides for their delegation to an acting Chief Executive Officer if the Chief Executive Officer is absent or the position is vacant.

Section 30 — Delegation of functions by chief executive officer

This section provides for the delegation of the functions of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Agency to employees and for their subdelegation to or by other employees.

Section 31 — Effect of delegation and subdelegation of functions

This section provides for the effect of a delegation and subdelegation of functions by the Agency to the Chief Executive Officer and by him or her to an employee of the Agency. It provides that the delegation or subdelegation is to be taken to include the delegation or subdelegation of any power or duty incidental to or connected with that function.

Section 32 — Certificate evidence concerning delegation of functions This section provides for certificate evidence signed by the Chairperson, Chief Executive Officer or employee concerned concerning the delegation of functions to be proof of matters stated in the certificate in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

Section 33 — Accountability of chief executive officer to Committee of Public Accounts

This section obliges the Chief Executive Officer to attend before the Public Accounts Committee whenever required in writing to do so. In such circumstances, the Chief Executive Officer will appear as an accountable person and not an accounting officer.

Section 34 — Accountability of Chief Executive Officer to other Oireachtas Committees

This section obliges the Chief Executive Officer to attend other Oireachtas Committees as and when requested in writing to do so. He or she is not required to give an account of any matter relating to the general administration of the Agency that is or is likely to be the subject of proceedings.

Section 35 — Disqualification resulting from membership of either House of the Oireachtas, European Parliament or local authority

This section provides that a Chief Executive Officer immediately ceases to hold office in particular circumstances.

#### PART 5

#### **Standards and Disqualifications**

Section 36 — Standards of integrity.

This section provides for the maintenance of proper standards of integrity, conduct and concern for the public interest by specified persons performing functions under this Act or any other enactment.

*Section 37 — Codes of conduct.* 

This section provides that the Agency will issue codes of conduct to provide guidance on standards of integrity and conduct to be maintained by persons in the performance of their functions.

Section 38 — Availability of codes of conduct.

This section obliges the Agency to make its code of conduct available to the persons to whom it is intended to be directed as soon as practicable after issuing the code.

Section 39 — Gifts.

This section precludes the Agency from accepting gifts if the conditions attaching are inconsistent with the functions or obligations of the Agency.

Section 40 — Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

This section is a usual feature of legislation setting up a public body and provides that certain defined confidential information may not be disclosed except in certain circumstances.

#### PART 6

#### Accountability and Funding of Agency

Section 41 — Performance framework

This section provides for the development of a Performance Framework by the Minister at specific times to inform the Agency's corporate planning processes. It will provide the Agency with policy guidance, direction and prioritisation parameters. The Minister may consult with the Minister for Health or the Minister for Education before developing a Performance Framework which includes matters relating to their functions.

#### Section 42 — Corporate plan of Agency

This section obliges the Agency at 3 year intervals to prepare and submit to the Minister for approval a corporate plan which has regard to the Performance Framework provided by the Minister. The corporate plan will include the Agency's key objectives, outputs and related strategies, a review of the Agency's statutory functions in the previous three years and accord with any directions issued from time to time by the Minister and the policies and objectives of the Minister and the Government.

#### Section 43 — Publication of approved corporate plan

This section provides for the laying of the corporate plan before the Houses of the Oireachtas as soon as practicable after its approval by the Minister and for its publication subsequently.

#### Section 44 — Annual performance statement

This section provides for the development of an annual Performance Statement by the Minister to provide the Agency at specific times each year with specific policy guidance, direction, prioritisation and resource parameters for the preparation of the annual business plan.

Section 45 — Determination by Minister of net expenditure limits for Agency

This section obliges the Minister to issue a determination of net expenditure to the Agency for a financial year. The Minister may amend a determination and notify the Agency in writing of the varied amount.

#### Section 46 — Business plan

This section provides for the submission of a business plan to the Minister within 30 days of the provision of the Performance Statement to the Agency. The section provides for the contents of the business plan and for the implementation of the business plan by the Agency unless the Minister directs the Agency to amend the plan within 30 days of the submission of the plan to him or her.

#### Section 47 — Power of Minister to give direction to Agency

This section provides for the Minister to give an additional written direction to the Agency for the purposes of this Act concerning any

matter or thing and the implementation of any policy or objective of the Minister or the Government and notwithstanding that directions have been issued under sections 41 and 44. A direction given shall not interfere with the exercise of professional judgment in a particular case. A direction given under the section shall be published in Iris Oifigiuil and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas as soon as practicable after it is given.

## Section 48 — Power of Minister to issue guidelines to Agency

This section provides that the Minister may issue additional written guidelines to the Agency notwithstanding guidance provided in accordance with sections 41 and 44. The guidelines may relate to additional policy guidance or changes in policy and changes in prioritisation of business plan commitments.

## Section 49 — Permission of the Minister needed for major capital spending

This section provides that the Agency must obtain the Minister's prior permission in writing before it may commit to major capital spending.

## Section 50 — Code of governance

This section obliges the Agency to prepare a code of governance to be submitted to the Minister for approval. It provides for the specific matters to be included in a code of governance and for its publication by the Agency following approval by the Minister.

## Section 51 — Accounts of Agency

This section is a standard provision providing that the Chief Executive Officer will keep accounts including such special accounts as may be directed by the Minister. It provides for the submission of accounts of the Agency prepared by the Chief Executive Officer to the Comptroller and Auditor General within 3 months of the end of the financial year to which they relate. A copy of the accounts and the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Minister within 2 months of their receipt by the Minister.

#### Section 52 — Advances by Minister to Agency

This section allows the Minister, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, to make, out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas, advances to the Agency with a view to enabling the Agency to perform its functions.

## **PART 7**

#### **Employees and Advisers**

## Section 53 — Employees of Agency

This section provides that new staff may be appointed to the Agency. The Agency may determine terms and conditions, grades and numbers in each grade, with the approval of the Minister given with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

## Section 54 — Superannuation

This section provides for the preparation and submission of a scheme to the Minister for the granting of superannuation to employees, other members of staff as may be appropriate and former members of staff of the dissolved bodies. Save in accordance with a collective agreement, such a scheme shall not be less favourable than that which applied to employees and former members of staff of the dissolved bodies immediately before establishment day.

This section enables the Agency, with the agreement of the Minister, to engage consultants or advisers and provides that the fees due in respect of such services will be paid by the Agency.

#### PART 8

#### **Provision of services**

Section 56 — Arrangements with service providers

This section enables the Agency, subject to certain matters including the resources available to the Agency, to enter into arrangements with not for profit service providers for the provision of services similar to activities carried out by the Agency and consistent with its functions. It also sets out certain processes to be adhered to in the interests of effectiveness and transparency.

Section 57 — Provision of services by statutory body

This section provides that a statutory body may by agreement provide services to the Agency with a view to the performance of its statutory functions and for the appointment of authorised officers for the purposes of the contract.

Section 58 — Particular arrangements — special care and residential places

This section enables the Agency to make arrangements with any suitable person to discharge its obligations in relation to special care and residential places for children in the care of the Agency. It also sets out certain processes to be adhered to in the interests of effectiveness and transparency.

Section 59 — Assistance for voluntary bodies

This section allows the Agency, subject to any direction of the Minister, to provide financial or other assistance to a voluntary body to provide services to children and families supplemental to services provided by the Agency.

#### PART 9

## **Complaints**

Section 60 — Definitions

This section provides for the definition of terms used in this Part of the Bill relating to complaints.

Section 61 — Persons who may make complaints

This section identifies the persons who may make complaints under this Part of the Bill and the basis on which such complaints may be made. A person may bring a complaint in respect of a service by the Agency or a service provider as defined on the basis that the action does not accord with fair and sound administrative practice and adversely affects or affected a person. It also provides for the types of actions that do not accord with fair and sound administrative practice.

Section 62 — Time limit for making complaints

This section sets out the time limit for the making of complaints so that they can be dealt with by way of the complaints mechanism and are not ruled out as being impossible to investigate by virtue of the passage of time. A complaint must be made within 12 months of the date of the action giving rise to the complaint or within 12 months of the date the person who is to refer the complaint or on whose behalf the complaint is to be referred became aware of the

action giving rise to the complaint. The time limit may be extended by the complaints officer in special circumstances.

Section 63 — Matters excluded from right to complain

This section provides for the matters that are to be excluded from the complaints mechanism. It also provides that a matter may be dealt with by a complaints officer notwithstanding that a complaint was referred to the Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children

Section 64 — Complaint and review procedures to be established

This section provides that the Agency will establish complaint procedures and procedures for reviewing recommendations made by complaints officers. A service provider may with the agreement of the Agency establish its own complaint procedures. The Agency may assign to another person the Agency's functions in relation to dealing with complaints and reviewing any recommendation made by a complaints officer.

Section 65 — Refusal to investigate or further investigate complaints

This section provides for the situations in which a complaint will
not be investigated at all or processed by further investigation
following preliminary investigation. The complaints officer will
inform the complainant in writing as soon as practicable after making

his or her determination or decision.

Section 66 — Restriction on type of recommendations complaints officers may make and power to suspend implementation of recommendations

This section places a restriction on the type of recommendations that complaints officers may make. A complaints officer shall not make a recommendation which would require or cause an amendment to the Agency's business plan, corporate plan or an arrangement with a service provider. If such a recommendation is made, the recommendation may be amended so that no amendment is necessary to the business plan, corporate plan or arrangement or rejected and such other measures taken to remedy, mitigate or alter the adverse effect of the matter to which the complaint relates.

Section 67 — Adherence to complaint and review procedures to be condition of arrangements with service providers

This section provides that it will be a condition of any arrangement with a service provider that it will adhere to the complaints procedures established by the Agency or establish its own procedures as agreed with the Agency and adhere to those procedures.

Section 68 — Regulations for the purposes of this Part

This section empowers the Minister to prescribe matters by regulations for the purposes of dealing with complaints.

Section 69 — Referral of complaints to Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children

This section provides that a person, who is dissatisfied with a recommendation or step taken in response to a complaint or review of a recommendation of a complaints officer under this Part, is not prohibited or prevented from referring the complaint to the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children. For the purposes of those Acts, any action taken by a service provider shall be deemed to have been taken by the Agency.

Section 70 — Annual report to include report on complaints and reviews

This section requires the Agency to include a report on the performance of its functions relating to complaints as part of the Agency's annual report. A service provider who has established a complaints procedure by agreement with the Agency will each year provide the Agency with a general report on the complaints received by the service provider during the previous year. If the Agency assigns its functions in relation to complaints or reviewing and establishing procedures for reviewing any recommendation made by a complaints officer to another person, that person will each year provide a general report on the complaints dealt with and reviews conducted by it during the previous year.

#### **PART 10**

## Dissolution of Family Support Agency and National Educational Welfare Board.

Section 71 — Dissolution of Family Support Agency and National Educational Welfare Board

This section is to provide for the dissolution of the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board on establishment day.

Section 72 — Transfer of functions to Agency

This section is to provide for the transfer of specified functions of the Family Support Agency and the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board on establishment day to the Child and Family Agency.

Section 73 — Transfer of members of staff of dissolved bodies

This section provides for the transfer of staff from the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board to the Agency on establishment day and it preserves, on that day, the terms and conditions of staff transferring and provides for the reckoning of previous service as service for the purpose of certain specified enactments.

Section 74 — Property and rights and liabilities of dissolved bodies

This section is a standard provision enabling the transfer of property of the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board to the Agency on establishment day without any conveyance or assignment. It also seeks to preserve the rights and liabilities of both of the dissolved bodies entered into before establishment day pursuant to a contract, agreement or arrangement.

Section 75 — Preservation of contracts made by dissolved bodies

This section is a standard provision providing for the continuation in force of contracts, agreements or arrangements entered into by the Family Support Agency or the National Educational Welfare Board which are in force immediately before the establishment day.

Section 76 — Records of dissolved bodies

This section is to provide for the records of the Family Support Agency or the National Educational Welfare Board to be transferred to the Agency on establishment day and for the records to become the property of the Agency.

Section 77 — Liability for loss occurring before establishment day

This section is a standard section to provide for the substitution of
the Agency for the Family Support Agency or the National

Educational Welfare Board in any legal proceedings pending immediately before establishment day. It also provides that any claim in respect of any loss or injury alleged to have been suffered by a person before establishment day arising out of the performance of functions by a dissolved body will after establishment day lie against the Agency.

Section 78 — References to dissolved bodies in enactments made before establishment day

This section contains a standard provision providing that references to the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board, in any enactment, will after establishment day, be read as references to the Agency.

Section 79 — Final accounts of dissolved bodies

This section provides for the preparation of final accounts of the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board by the Agency within 3 months of establishment day and for their submission to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Section 80 — Final annual report of dissolved bodies

This section provides for the preparation of final annual reports by the Agency in respect of the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board and for their submission to the Minister within 6 months of the establishment of the Agency. The reports will then be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and published.

Section 81 — Transitional provisions consequent upon transfer of functions of dissolved bodies

This section provides that anything commenced by or under the authority of the Family Support Agency or the National Educational Welfare Board and not completed before establishment day may be carried on and completed by the Agency after establishment day.

#### **PART 11**

## Transfer of certain staff, functions, etc. of Health Service Executive to Agency

Section 82 — Transfer of certain functions of Health Service Executive
This section provides for the transfer of specified functions from
the Health Service Executive to the Agency on establishment day.
The functions vested in the HSE by or under the enactments
specified in Schedule 1 are transferred to the Agency on the
establishment day.

Section 83 — Transfer of certain employees of Health Service Executive

This section provides for the designation by the Minister for Health following consultation with the Minister, of staff to transfer to the Agency on a day as may be specified by the Minister. It preserves, on that day, the terms and conditions of staff transferring including remuneration and tenure and provides for the reckoning of previous service as service for the purpose of certain specified enactments.

Section 84 — Land and other property of Health Service Executive

This section is a standard provision enabling the transfer to the Agency on establishment day of such land and property of the Health Service Executive as is agreed between the Minister and the Minister for Health without any conveyance or assignment.

Section 85 — Transfer of rights and liabilities of Health Service Executive

This section provides that rights and liabilities of the Health Service Executive entered into before establishment day pursuant to a contract, agreement, arrangement or commitment and all obligations imposed on the Health Service Executive by virtue of an order of a court or tribunal insofar as they relate to functions transferred to the Agency shall stand transferred to the Agency on the establishment day.

Section 86 — Preservation of contracts of Health Service Executive

This section provides for the continuance in force by or against the Agency after establishment day of contracts, agreements or arrangements entered into by the Health Service Executive in force immediately before the establishment day insofar as they relate to functions transferred to the Agency.

Section 87 — Records of Health Service Executive

This section is to provide for the transfer of records of the Health Service Executive to the Agency insofar as they relate to functions transferred to the Agency on establishment day and for the records to become the property of the Agency.

Section 88 — Pending legal proceedings — Health Service Executive This section provides for the substitution of the Agency for the Health Service Executive in any legal proceedings pending immediately before establishment day insofar as they relate to functions transferred to the Agency.

Section 89 — References to Health Service Executive in enactments made before establishment day

This section contains a standard provision providing that references to the Health Service Executive in any enactment insofar as they relate to functions transferred to the Agency, will after establishment day, be read as references to the Agency.

Section 90 — Transitional provisions consequent upon transfer of certain functions of Health Service Executive

This section provides that anything commenced by or under the authority of the Health Service Executive and not completed before establishment day insofar as it relates to functions transferred to the Agency may be carried on and completed by the Agency after establishment day.

#### **PART 12**

## Miscellaneous

Section 91 — Consequential amendments of other Acts

This section provides for the consequential amendment of other Acts as set out in Schedule 2.

Section 92 — Agency's discretion to publish other reports

This section provides that the Agency may prepare and adopt reports in relation to its activities and functions in addition to the annual report. It also provides for the submission of such reports to the Minister and their subsequent publication by the Agency.

Section 93 — Charges in relation to functions

This section provides that the Agency may, with the consent of the Minister, make regulations specifying such charges as it considers necessary and appropriate in consideration of the exercise of specified functions and the provision of specified services. A charge may not be made by the Agency when the charge relates to services provided to a person under 18 years.

Schedule 1 sets out the enactments under which functions are to transfer to the Agency.

 $Schedule\ 2$  provides for matters related to consequential amendments.

Schedule 3 provides for matters related to enactments being repealed.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, July, 2013.