

Under-6 Provision in Northern Ireland (“Squirrels”)

This paper brings to the Board's attention developments in Northern Ireland regarding provision of pre-Beaver activities, and actions being taken to regularise governance, risk-management and appropriate operations. The Board is invited to note the background and present progress, ahead of an anticipated formal proposal in March 2011.

Background

1. Over a number of years, an increasing number of Scout Groups in Northern Ireland have been supporting the offer of activities for young people aged four and five, now under the nomenclature of “Squirrels”.
2. The co-ordination of this provision was itself originally informal, but then collectively became established as the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland (SANI)..
3. Whilst having no formal status within the framework of Scouting, local perceptions are that “Squirrel Dreys” are operating under the aegis of The Scout Association, with all the subsequent perceived assurances that that might then follow. In local communities, Squirrels are seen to be a part of local Groups, and to act as part of “the Scout family”
4. The Northern Ireland Scout Council (NISC) entered into direct discussions with SANI, and between them arranged that from early 2009 there would be an arrangement of affiliation between SANI and NISC; discussions about such an arrangement did not involve The Scout Association (TSA), of which NISC is a constituent body.
5. In June 2009, to research and review the situation (including background, provision, governance and any issues arising) prior to formal consideration of the issues by TSA, a Working Group was established, with the UK Chief Commissioner inviting this to be led by Graham Haddock (Scottish Depute Chief Commissioner for Programme, and Trustee of TSA).
6. The membership and remit for the Working Group is provided below, being an extract from their main report. **[A copy of the Working Group's report (less Appendices) is provided to Board Members with this paper.]**

Introduction and background

- 1.1 *At the request of the UK Chief Commissioner, a small working group was established in June 2009 to investigate the provision in uniformed Youth Organisations for children in the under 6 years age group.*
- 1.2 *The membership of the working group was:*

Graham Haddock (Chair) Depute Chief Commissioner (Scotland) & UK Trustee
Helen Woolsey, Regional Training Advisor, Jersey
Alison Chapman, AAC (Beavers), Wales
David Poppleton, (Staff support) Head of Regional Development Service

1.3 *The remit of the group was agreed with the UKCC*

To explore the issues surrounding the current informal provision of Scouting for 4 and 5 year olds currently existing only in Northern Ireland, but more specifically:

- *To research the current provision in Northern Ireland*
- *To explore the legal implications in all parts of the UK of such a provision*
- *To seek parallels with the introduction of Beaver Scout Section in the past and learn lessons where possible*
- *To investigate the provision for this age group in:*
 - *Girlguiding UK*
 - *Boys Brigade*
 - *Girls Brigade*
 - *Other uniformed and non-uniformed youth organisations in the UK and in other countries*
- *To explore the implications of such a development on resources within TSA in terms of:*
 - *Adult leadership*
 - *Meeting venues and related safety and other issues*
- *To consider what a suitable programme for this age group might look like and how such a programme would be developed*
- *To determine the skills needed for adult leaders to work with this age range*
- *To determine whether WOSM has any policy, standards or guidelines for such a new provision*

To determine whether TSA should formalise provision for 4 and 5 year olds.

1.4 *The final report was to be completed and presented to the UKCC by May 2010.*

Working Group Report and Recommendations

7. The Working Group concluded their research and report in February 2010.
8. Of particular interest for Trustees will be the following sections of the Report:
 - 4.1 Background
 - 4.5 Process leading to affiliation with NISC
 - 4.6 Current "Rules and Guidance"
 - 7.0 WOSM perspective
 - 8.0 Implications
9. The Working Group's Recommendations are as follows:

10.0 Recommendations

10.1 *The Squirrel Section in Northern Ireland has developed to address a significant local need in that part of the UK as a consequence of the strength of the Boys Brigade and the close relationship that exists between Scouts and churches in the Province. The Section works well and has much to commend it. Nevertheless, the Working Group feels that such a provision is not necessary in any other part of the UK and does not recommend that a provision for under 6's should be established outside of Northern Ireland.*

10.2 *The Scout Association should require the Northern Ireland Scout Council to address areas of concern noted in this report in relation to the lack of clarity surrounding the process of affiliation of the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland. Issues relating to insurance, risk assessment, leader training, membership subscription and membership benefits need to be clearly defined.*

10.3 *The Scout Association should require that the Northern Ireland Scout Council not provide support to any under 6's provision outside of Northern Ireland. Failure to do so constitutes significant reputational risk, both internal and external, to TSA.*

10.4 *The Scout Association should make its position on provision for under 6's clear to line managers across other parts of the UK – namely that such provision is not condoned or supported and that, where it exists, such provision should cease.*

Progress on a response to Working Group Recommendations

10. In March 2010, the Working Group's Report was provided to the NISC for consideration ahead of a meeting set up to be between TSA Chairman, UK Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive, together with Chairman NISC, Chief Commissioner for Northern Ireland and Executive Commissioner NISC.
11. That meeting took place in June 2010, albeit with Chris Thompson representing the NISC instead of the Chairman NISC, and apology for absence being received from the Executive Commissioner NISC. The key paragraphs from the notes of that meeting are as follows.

- i. *The meeting had been convened to consider the "Report of the Under 6's" Working Group".*
- ii. *The Report had been provided on 21st March 2010, together with notice for this meeting.*
- iii. *The Report had been researched and prepared by a Working Group chaired by Graham Haddock, Trustee of The Scout Association, member of The Scout Association's Operations sub-Committee, and Depute Chief Commissioner (Scotland). There had been three other members of the Working party, which had been established in June 2009 at the request of the UK Chief Commissioner.*
- iv. *It was AGREED that provision for Under 6's in Northern Ireland was a de facto situation, and that the desired outcomes should be to regularise the governance arrangements and to assure the quality and safety of experience for the young people meeting as Squirrels and the adults who volunteer as Squirrel Leaders in Northern Ireland.*
- v. *It was ACKNOWLEDGED that there appear to be two distinct models, both in principle and in perception:*
 - a. *Model of Affiliation, whereby the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland is a legitimate and separate charitable and legal body, enjoying a formal and recognised affiliation with The Scout Association through the Northern Ireland Scout Council with a formal and documented Service Level Agreement between the two entities, whilst retaining its own legal accountability.*
 - b. *Model of Incorporation, whereby The Scout Association brings into its own charitable and legal accountability all aspects of provision for the Under 6 age-range, even if only applicable in Northern Ireland and if managed by and through delegation to The Scout Association's Northern Ireland Scout Council.*

- vi. *Most discussion of the meeting focused on issues regarding these two models, particularly:*
- a. *That the Board of Trustees of The Scout Association have not received any proposal to accept incorporation of Under 6 activity into provisions made by The Scout Association*
 - b. *That within Northern Ireland the common perception is that Squirrels form an integral part of The Scout Association's provision, and that this perception is maintained in publications and marketing material of Groups, Districts, Counties and the Northern Ireland Scout Council*
 - c. *That there continues to be no clarity (as was identified by the research of the Working Group) on "who" or "what" constitutes the formal charitable and legal entity of the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland, nor whether it is actually registered as a charity having a Board of Trustees.*
- vii. *It was AGREED that a sharp test of distinction between the Model of Affiliation and the Model of Incorporation would be "who ultimately would be held responsible in a Coroner's Court if there was to be youth-member fatality" (ie either the Trustees and Chair of the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland or, ultimately, the Trustees and Chair of The Scout Association).*
- viii. *It was NOTED that, in the meeting, it was not possible to clarify the exact nature of any undertaking or representation that the Northern Ireland Scout Council had formally given to the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland, regardless of whether intentionally or inadvertently.*
- ix. *It was ACKNOWLEDGED that the present situation needs to be reported to the Board of Trustees of The Scout Association.*
- x. *It was AGREED that Messrs Mulryne and Thompson would seek clarification with regard to the issues raised above, and to provide a first response from the Northern Ireland Scout Council on the recommendations of the substantive Report as specified in its paragraph 10.2, namely **"to address areas of concern in relation to the process of affiliation of the Squirrel Association of Northern Ireland. Issues relating to insurance, risk assessment, leader training, membership subscription and membership benefits need to be clearly defined."***
- xi. *It was AGREED that the meeting would reconvene in September, on a date to be confirmed.*

/ends.

12. In September 2010, there was further discussion between TSA Chairman, UK Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive, with Chris Thompson representing the NISC, and the Chief Commissioner NISC having sent his apologies. The NISC had reflected on the Working Group's Report and on the June discussion; they had also obtained legal advice. On the basis of their consideration of the issues, the NISC proposed that their relationship with SANI should be on the basis of affiliation rather than incorporation. It was agreed at that meeting that NISC would prepare a draft for a proposal of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between NISC and SANI, which would address the issues raised and which would require the formal agreement of TSA Trustees.
13. As at November 2010, good progress has been made in drafting a synopsis for the content of a formal MoU. The Director of Corporate Services has offered assistance with the drafting process, which is currently in hand.
14. The current timeline (as at November 2010) is that:
- Drafting continues over the coming weeks
 - A position-review will take place in early December, with a meeting planned between Chairman TSA, UK Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive, together with Chief Commissioner for Northern Ireland, Chris Thompson and Executive Commissioner NISC
 - Comments on drafting will be obtained from NISC and SANI
 - A formal proposal will be provided for the Trustee Board to consider, in March 2011, a recommended MoU between NISC and SANI.
- 15. The Board is invited to note and comment on this paper, and to support the timeline being suggested.**

Derek Twine
November 2010

