

52nd Meeting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Wednesday 15 June 2022

3.45pm – 5.00pm – Zoom Virtual Platform

P u b l i c M i n u t e s

R E C O R D O F A T T E N D A N C E

Name	Title & Organisation	Present	Apology
Ms Bernie McNally	Independent Chair Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland	✓	
Mr Tom Cassidy	Director of Women & Children's Services, WHSCT	✓	
Dr Naoimh Whyte	GP representative of N.I. General Practice Committee	✓	
Mr Rodney Morton	Director of Nursing and Allied Health Professionals, PHA		✓
Ms Bronagh Muldoon	NSPCC Head of Services NI	✓	
Mr Paul McStravick	Director YJA	✓	
D/Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally	Head of Public Protection Branch, PSNI	✓	
Ms Paddy Kelly	Director, Children's Law Centre	✓	
Ms Amanda Stewart	CEO, Probation Board NI	✓	
Ms Pauline Leeson	Chief Executive Children in N. Ireland		✓
Ms Una Turbitt	Director (Interim) Children and Young Peoples Services, EANI		✓
Ms Elaine Craig	Interim Assistant Director for Pupil Wellbeing and Protection, EANI,	✓	
Mr Brendan Whittle	Regional Director of Social Care and Children – SPPG DoH		✓
Ms Catherine Cassidy	Deputy Director of Social Care, SPPG DoH (deputising OBO Brendan Whittle)	✓	
Ms Barbara Campbell	Director of Children Services & Social Work SEHSCT	✓	

Mr Colm McCafferty	Director of Children & Young People's Services SHSCT	✓	
Ms Emily Roberts	Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and Young People, PHA	✓	
Ms Lorna Ballard	Director NI, Action for Children		✓
Ms Maura Dargan	Director of Women, Children & Families Division/Executive Director of Social Work, NHSCT		✓
Ms Tracy Magill	Assistant Director of Safeguarding, NHSCT (deputising OBO Maura Dargan)	✓	
Ms Michele Janes	Director of Barnardo's NI	✓	
Dr Stephen Bergin	Director of Public Health and Medical Director, PHA		✓
Ms Carol Diffin	Executive Director of Social Work/Children Community Services, BHSCT	✓	
Mr Paddy Mooney	Director, Include Youth	✓	
Dr Jacqui Montgomery- Devlin	Head of Safeguarding, Council for Social Witness, Presbyterian Church in Ireland representing the SBNI Interfaith Committee		✓
Ms Dawn Shaw	Chief Executive Officer – NIGALA	✓	
Ms Heather Moore	Chief Executive Officer, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	✓	
Mr Andrew Thomson	Independent Chair of the CMR Panel	✓	
Ms Yvonne Adair	Independent Safeguarding Panel Chair, Southern, South Eastern and Belfast Areas	✓	
Ms Mary Rafferty	Independent Safeguarding Panel Chair, Western and Northern areas	✓	
Mr Simon Rogers	Non-Executive (Lay) Member	✓	
Mr Gerard Guckian	Non-Executive (Lay) Member	✓	
In Attendance			
Ms Alex McCoy	Board Secretary SBNI		
Ms Helen McKenzie	Director of Operations SBNI		

Ms Joanna Brown	Professional Officer SBNI
Professor Ray Jones	Professor of Social Work at Kingston University and St. George's, University of London

Summary of Actions

Action No.	Action:	To be completed by:
1	Business Plan financial year dates to be amended.	Ms Helen McKenzie
2	SBNI will write to the Home Office, The Executive Office and relevant government departments to seek assurance that for all Asylum Seeker Children and their families living in Contingency Accommodation that there are measures in place to ensure children and their families are able to access services and support required to for child safeguarding and protection.	Ms Helen McKenzie

Summary of Board Approval

The minutes from the Board Meeting on 13th April 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

The SBNI Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026 was approved

The SBNI Business Plan 2022 – 2023 was approved, with amendments to be made to the financial year dates as per the actions.

Preliminaries: Apologies, Quorum, Conflict of Interest, Complaints

The Chair welcomed SBNI members to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Ms Maura Dargan, Ms Pauline Leeson, Dr Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin, Ms Lorna Ballard, Mr Brendan Whittle, Mr Maurice Meehan, and Mr Rodney Morton. The Chair noted that Ms Tracy Magill is deputising on behalf of Ms Maura Dargan and Ms Catherine Cassidy is deputising on behalf of Mr Brendan Whittle.

Conflict of Interest

The Chair requested that members declare any Conflicts of Interest as and when they arise throughout the meeting.

Chairs Business

The Chair advised that the SBNI have now recruited the Business Support position and staff will be in post within the next few months. Ms Orla O'Hagan has now taken up post as Online Safety Coordinator. To assist with the Governance of the Executive's Strategy a steering group will be established to oversee implementation.

1 52/22P Previous Minutes

1.1 Members agreed the minutes from the last Board meeting on 13th April 2022 were a factual and accurate representation of the meeting.

2 52/22P Matters Arising

2.1 Completed

2.2 Completed

2.3 Completed

2.4 Ongoing – Ms McKenzie has corresponded with Mr Whittle and is currently awaiting response. The SBNI have asked that this matter is resolved to conclusion and Ms McKenzie hopes to have further information from Mr Whittle in the coming weeks as to how this can be progressed.

2.5 Agenda Item 3

3 52/22P SBNI Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026 (Please refer to Paper BM52-06.22P1A and BM52-06.22P1B)

- 3.1 Ms McKenzie reflected on an extensive process regarding the development of the SBNI Strategic Plan including two Board Development Days and a public consultation. It was noted that all comments received in the public consultation have been responded to and there is agility in the main body of the Strategic Plan which will allow the SBNI to respond to new and emerging priorities. There have been three strategic priorities highlighted for the period of 2022 – 2026. These include Online Safety, Mental Health and Domestic Violence and Abuse.
- 3.2 The Chair added that this is now the end of the process and a copy of the Strategic Plan has now been sent to the DoH.
- 3.3 Mr Rogers commented on the thorough and efficient process in the development of the Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026 and indicated that he is particularly pleased with the engagement of children and young people.
- 3.4 The SBNI Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026 was approved by the Board.

4 52/22P SBNI Business Plan 2022 – 2023 (Please refer to Paper BM52-06.22P2A and BM52-06.22P2B)

- 4.1 Ms McKenzie advised that the Business Plan examines how the SBNI will implement the Strategic Priorities, explains the process and incorporates ongoing conversation with Committees regarding the actions of the Business Plan which will also be reflected in the Committee work plans. There is also an element of manoeuvrability reflected in the Business Plan in order that the SBNI is able to take on additional areas as they come to light if this is deemed necessary by the Board. There will be additional costings associated and these will be provided to the Board when the business case for Online Safety has been completed.

- 4.2 The Chair thanked members for their contribution in the development of the Business Plan.
- 4.3 There were no additional comments raised in relation to the SBNI Business Plan 2022 – 2023.
- 4.4 The SBNI Business Plan 2022 – 2023 was approved by the Board.

Action 1 – Business Plan financial year dates to be amended.

5 52/22P Review of Children’s Social Care Services Discussion

- 5.1 The Chair welcomed Professor Jones to the meeting and thanked him for presenting on the review that he is undertaking on Children’s Social Care Services in Northern Ireland.
- 5.2 The Chair highlighted that this is an opportunity for Members to share their thoughts on the review of Social Care with Professor Jones and noted that there have been previous discussions at Board around this, particularly concerning workforce issues. It was acknowledged that workforce issues tend to become exacerbated when dealing with professions that are particularly vulnerable when child protection matters are required e.g. Social Work, Health Visiting and Nursing etc. This review is timely as we try to reboot following Covid and is extremely welcomed by Members.
- 5.3 Ms Roberts sought clarity and reassurance that the review would consider a multiagency perspective and would not just focus on Social Services. Professor Jones reported that although he is undertaking a review of Social Care, he is very keen to examine what is happening for children and families as a whole in Northern Ireland and this will encompass all areas of the system and associated adult support services. In addition, Professor Jones advised that he is interested in what is happening in schools and the YJA and to date has met with over 450 Social Workers. He has also met with key people in the National Infrastructure Organisations and is now beginning to get out to services on the

ground. He is due to spend time with Barnardo's and EA in the coming weeks and will also meet with school nurses, AHPs, Judiciary and the PSNI. His intention is that, by autumn, he will have identified key themes and will then bring together multi-professional groups with parents and young people to discuss these themes and what can be done to improve Social Care in Northern Ireland.

- 5.4 Professor Jones acknowledged that there have been a vast amount of reviews carried out in Northern Ireland. The Terms of Reference for his Review indicate that he will be in Northern Ireland from February 2022 – June 2023 and it is his aim to make a difference whilst he is here. The Report is to be written by June 2023.
- 5.5 Professor Jones acknowledged that workforce issues are paramount and the priority is to ensure that a stable, confident and experienced workforce with adequate capacity can be provided. Professor Jones is meeting with Children's Services again in September to begin to look at early actions to tackle workforce issues. It was reported that the Workforce Strategy is being developed at the moment, although it was also recognised that some of these actions are medium term and won't make an impact for the next 2-3 years. Professor Jones indicated that he hopes that in his work he can begin to make some difference to workforce pressures over the coming months.
- 5.6 Ms Muldoon commented on the issue around deprivation and poverty in Northern Ireland, particularly in light of the cost of living crisis as it is accepted that this will exacerbate the problem. Ms Muldoon drew on the impact of poverty and the link between this and child abuse. NSPCC are concerned with how they and other agencies can support families when they do not have increasing budgets.
- 5.7 On discussion, Professor Jones advised that he would be interested to have a discussion with NSPCC and other voluntary organisations in relation to how we can work alongside families within communities when they begin to struggle, rather than when they reach crisis points. Professor Jones reported that he is

keen to reflect with colleagues across the region as to how family support can be provided. One issue that he will look to comment on and push on critically is context for children and families which will take into consideration issues of deprivation, particularly with regards to housing etc. He is eager to ensure that he gets a view of what is happening across the province in terms of work within communities, schools, Sure Start Centres etc. Professor Jones acknowledged that there is a need for universal provision.

5.8 The Chair agreed that it is important to reflect on the infrastructure that we have in Northern Ireland and the work we do within communities when considering deprivation and poverty. She agreed that it is important to liaise with DfC alongside DoH with supporting families as it is evident that what goes on in communities is vital in providing support for families.

5.9 Ms Janes commented on unaccompanied children and refugees living in Northern Ireland and enquired as to whether this will be taken into account within the review, particularly with regards to the safeguarding needs of these children. Ms Janes noted that systems in Northern Ireland are still in their infancy in terms of developing responses to manage unaccompanied children in Northern Ireland. On discussion, Professor Jones recognised that it may not be possible to focus on every issue due to capacity. However, he advised that he will offer advice and share his own experiences where he can. As part of his review, he will be looking at the overall situation and structures but he will give attention to other issues where possible.

6 52/22P SBNI Response to Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency Accommodation (Please refer to paper BM52-06.22P3A, BM52-06.22P3B and BM52-06.22P3C)

6.1 Ms Kelly discussed paper BM52-06.22P3C in relation to the Rights of Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency Accommodation (Hotels) in NI. In particular, Ms Kelly paid tribute to Barnardo's and the work that they are doing to support children and their families living in contingency accommodation. Ms Kelly advised that the Children's Law Centre and STEP have met with the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of

National Minorities and have raised their concerns. A Paper (referenced BM52-06.22P3C) was then developed and submitted to the Advisory Committee to inform the Council of Europe's Report to the UK government. In order to inform this paper, Ms Kelly noted that the Children's Law Centre have met with Barnardo's and other agencies on the ground; as well as with the children and their families. With their consent, this paper has been submitted to a range of agencies including the Home Office, DoH, DfE and DoJ. The Children's Law Centre is also meeting with the Commissioner for the Human Rights Council of Europe on the 27th June.

- 6.2 Ms Kelly highlighted that there has been a significant increase in the number of Asylum Seekers residing in contingency accommodation in Northern Ireland. The most up-to-date figures indicate that in June 2021 there were 14 asylum seeking individuals living in hotel accommodation; in contrast, as of April 2022 there are 1067 asylum seeking individuals living in this contingency accommodation. These individuals are only meant to be in this accommodation for a period of 6 weeks, but the Children's Law Centre are aware of some who have resided here for 7 months and more. In addition, they are also aware that there are a number of single asylum seeking men in these hotels with children and families.
- 6.3 Ms Kelly reported that there is a major concern around access to culturally appropriate food and there are occasions when children are only receiving access to one piece of food per day and not enough milk. In addition, there are instances where, due to the times of meals, some children are not getting access to breakfast before going to school. There is some evidence to suggest that children are not thriving and are actually losing weight and becoming anaemic as a result. In addition, there is very little access to play facilities and in relation to accommodation, some families are being housed on different floors of hotels. In instances where the children are remaining together, some are being forced to sleep on the floor. Furthermore, children are not being registered with GPs and there are concerns that pregnant women are not getting access to clothing and appropriate post-partum care. Ms Kelly further reported that there is limited access to nappies and other

support for new born babies and families are not getting access to financial support. Approximately 50% of these children within asylum seeking families are not in education. There are reports that families are very scared to voice their concerns about these issues due to their very vulnerable position.

6.4 Ms Kelly asked for clarity as to whether asylum seeking children living in this contingency accommodation are receiving access to social services in the same way as indigenous children and have statutory services spoken directly to children and families in this accommodation to make them aware of their rights and how to raise complaints and concerns in an accessible way, with provisions made for this to be available in the individual's own native language. There is also clarity required as to how these children are monitored and the safeguarding measures that have been put in place. Ms Kelly highlighted that the Children's Law Centre are hopeful that the SBNI will write to the Home Office and relevant government departments requesting clarity on the issues raised. As part of this, it is important to seek assurances that staff members working in this accommodation are suitably trained and Access NI checked and that children are given appropriate access to education. The Children's Law Centre are keen that DoH, DoJ, DfE and The Executive Office are also given sight of this letter of concern.

6.5 Ms Diffin pointed out that this is a relatively new emerging issue and noted that there are 12 hotels in Belfast which are housing asylum seeking children and their families and as this makes up the lions share, it is extremely concerning that there have not been discussions with BHSCT in relation to the impact of this. There is no automatic information that is relayed from the Home Office to BHSCT and this is alarming. Ms Diffin reported that it was the Northern Ireland New Entrant Service (NINES) that raised this concern with her and she has since asked for more detail. It is accepted that there is a need for a multiagency coordinated approach.

6.6 Ms Craig reported that the EA have also had an issue of no communication and information sharing from the Home Office for a period of over a year. Although this has now been resolved, this has left a large backlog with a very

small team and no additional resources to support this work. Ms Craig highlighted that there is a great will across agencies to offer support, but additional funding is required.

- 6.7 Ms Roberts noted that within the PHA, she and others have been supporting a response with the Chief Executive to the letter received from the Children's Law Centre. There have been similar concerns raised by Public Health Nursing and Midwifery services attending these hotels and it was noted that issues that were being identified at that time were being picked up and responded to. However, there are major concerns with the volume of issues and it was emphasised that this contingency accommodation is just not suitable. Ms Roberts reported that the PHA is working hard with Trusts, particularly BHSCT to pick up on these issues. It is noted that the NINES service are hugely overwhelmed and there has been a paper presented to the PHA Board in terms of trying to develop an increased capacity in resources. In the interim period, it was highlighted that other Public Health Nursing services are picking up some of the initial assessments to try and help and support.
- 6.8 Mr Guckian expressed shock and great concern with the issues raised. He noted that it is an opportune time for these issues to be expressed, particularly in light of the Strategic Plan and the conversations around what safeguarding means and the extension of the definition to include the welfare and the rights of children. He is very keen that the SBNI are supportive of voicing these concerns with the relevant parties.
- 6.9 Ms Magill noted that the NHSCT have been having similar issues and have recently discovered that there are two hotels in the NHSCT area that are housing asylum seeking children and their families. This was discovered by pure chance and there was no formal notification from the Home Office. She reiterated that there has been a lack of communication and interaction. In addition, Ms Magill pointed out that the Home Office has now filled these two hotels in the NHSCT area with single asylum-seeking men and moved families on to the Belfast area as it was felt that there were more schools

available. This has been carried out without any communication with the Trust.

- 6.10 The Chair requested clarity as to where the NI Executive Office are in relation to all of the concerns raised. Ms Janes emphasised the view that the SBNI need to go back to the Home Office with regards to safeguarding as action needs to be taken to support these children and their families. It was noted that there is a tiered system with refugees across the UK and these families have experienced trauma which makes them even more vulnerable.
- 6.11 Ms Kelly emphasised that there is an urgency in this as has been reflected by all discussions today. The Children's Law Centre has written to the Home Office but it was reported that the response was less than satisfactory.

Action 2 – SBNI will write to the Home Office, The Executive Office and relevant government departments to seek assurance that for all Asylum Seeker Children and their families living in Contingency Accommodation that there are measures in place to ensure children and their families are able to access services and support required to for child safeguarding and protection.

- 6.12 The Chair acknowledged that this is a very shocking situation and thanked Members for bringing this to the attention of the Board.

7 52/22P Social Work Workforce Implementation Board 2022 to 2025 (Please refer to Paper BM52-06.22P4A, BM52-06.22P4B and BM52-06.22P4C)

- 7.1 The Chair noted that this agenda item was for information purposes only. The DoH has set up a Social Work Workforce Implementation Board and this is chaired by Mr Sean Holland.

8 51/22P Update on the Closure of HSCB (BF April 2022) (Please refer to Paper BM51-04.22P10A, BM51-04.22P10B and BM51-04.22P10C)

- 8.1 Ms Cassidy advised that the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) has been set up to replace the HSCB. This was a seamless transition and it is only now that issues are emerging as HSCB had previously been the

go-between between DoH and Trusts. As the SPPG is now part of the DoH, they are currently determining how they will work with Trusts, with a particular focus on the areas of Commissioning, Performance Management and Strategic Direction.

- 8.2 Ms Cassidy reported that the SPPG would like to have regular Strategic Planning Meeting with Trusts to focus on what areas are working well, where the deficits are and what can be done to improve the service for users. It was stated that Children's Services and Mental Health Services are currently in transition, but Members were reassured that the legislation has not changed as it is a directed delegated statutory function. It is the responsibility of the CEO of the Trusts to ensure that the statutory function is exercised and it is the responsibility of the SPPG to manage the performance of the Trusts.

9 51/22P Regional Facilities for Children and Young People (BF April 2022)
(Please refer to Paper BM51-04.22P9A and BM51-04.22P9B)

- 9.1 Mr McStravick noted the paper which was circulated in advance of the meeting in relation to Regional Facilities for Children and Young People. He advised that the Regional Facilities Programme Team has developed a plan to develop a multidisciplinary hub across both the Lakelands and Woodlands sites. These sites will share resources including CAMHS and there will be a shared model of therapeutic care as well as joint staff training. It was acknowledged that this will take a while to implement.
- 9.2 Ms Campbell commented that she welcomes the opportunity to work together across both sites.

10 52/22 AOB

- 13.1 There was no other business discussed.
- 13.2 The next SBNI Board meeting is on Wednesday 14 September 2022.

BM52-06.22PM

13.3 The Chair closed the Public section of the meeting at 5.00pm and thanked Members for their attendance.

Bernie McNally

Independent Chair SBNI