

53rd Meeting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Wednesday 14 September 2022

2.15pm – 4.00pm – Zoom Virtual Platform

Public Minutes

RECORD OF ATTENDANCE

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		✓
D/Superintendent Gary Reid	Public Protection Branch, PSNI (deputising OBO D/Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally)	✓	
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 Colin Reid	Head of Safeguarding, Welfare and Inclusion, 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 Lyn Preece	Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of 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 Michele Janes	Director of Barnardo's NI		✓
Dr Joanne McLean	Director of Public Health, PHA		✓
Ms Kerrylee Weatherall	Interim Director of Children's Community Services, BHSC	✓	
Mr Paddy Mooney	Director, Include Youth		✓
Ms Claire Meenehan	Skills Manager, Include Youth (deputising OBO Mr Paddy Mooney)	✓	
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 Teresa Fallon	Assistant Director, NIGALA (deputising OBO Ms Dawn Shaw)	✓	
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 Teresa McAllister	Professional Officer SBNI		
Ms Joanna Brown	Professional Officer SBNI		
Ms Julie Pollock	Business Support Officer SBNI		
Dr Roisin Devlin	Inspector, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland		
Ms Suzanne Cunningham	Inspector, RQIA		
Ms Muireann Bohill	Inspector, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland		

Summary of Actions

Action No.	Action:	To be completed by:
1	BHSCT will advise how many Asylum-Seeking Children are currently being accommodated in hotels within the BHSCT area.	Ms Kerrylee Weatherall
2	The SBNI Chair, with Ms Helen McKenzie, Ms Kerrylee Weatherall and Ms Emily Roberts will undertake a visit to a Belfast Hotel housing Asylum-Seeker Children and their Families.	SBNI, Ms Kerrylee Weatherall and Ms Emily Roberts.
3	The letter received from the Health Minister in relation to Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency and Dispersal Accommodation will be recirculated to Mr Brendan Whittle, Ms Catherine Cassidy and all Trust Directors.	SBNI Central Support Team
4	Details of each member agency lead person for dealing with Asylum-Seeking Children and their families living in Contingency and Dispersal Accommodation in Northern Ireland to be provided to the SBNI CST for sharing with the TEO.	All Member Agencies
5	Ms Bernie McNally, Ms Helen McKenzie, Mr Simon Rogers and Mr Gerry Guckian will meet with Dr Roisin Devlin and colleagues in relation to the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements.	SBNI Representatives & Lay Members
6	The Role and Function of the SPPG member briefing, will be carried over as an agenda item for the next meeting of the SBNI Board.	SPPG

Summary of Board Approval

The minutes from the Board Meeting on 15 th June 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
The Risk Register was approved.

Preliminaries: Apologies, Quorum, Conflict of Interest, Complaints

The Chair welcomed SBNI members to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Detective Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally, Ms Michele Janes, Ms Bronagh Muldoon, Mr Brendan Whittle, Mr Paddy Mooney, Dr Joanne McClean, Ms Dawn Shaw, Ms Heather Moore and Ms Amanda Stewart. The Chair noted that D/Superintendent Gary Reid is deputising on behalf of D/Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally, Ms Catherine Cassidy is deputising on behalf of Mr Brendan Whittle, Ms Claire Meenehan is deputising on behalf of Mr Paddy Mooney and Ms Teresa Fallon is deputising on behalf of Ms Dawn Shaw.

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 welcomed Ms Lyn Preece, Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work in the SEHSCT and Ms Kerrylee Weatherall, Interim Director of Children's Community Services in the BHSCT to the SBNI Board. The Chair also recorded the Board's appreciation of the work both Ms Carol Diffin – upon her retirement and Ms Barbara Campbell – upon her new post for the work they have undertaken in relation to child safeguarding.

1 53/22P Previous Minutes

1.1 Members agreed the minutes from the last Board meeting on 15th June 2022 as a factual and accurate representation of the meeting.

2 53/22P Matters Arising

2.1 Completed

2.2 Completed

3 53/22P Asylum Seeker Children and Families Living in Contingency Accommodation

- 3.1 The Chair commented that a very useful and fruitful conversation had occurred at the last SBNI Public Board Meeting in relation to Asylum Seeker Children and Families Living in Contingency Accommodation. The accommodation is being managed by the 'Mears' Group and it was noted that Members had expressed concern in relation to a number of issues surrounding the safeguarding of asylum-seeking children and families. The Chair and Ms McKenzie met with the Permanent Secretary of The Executive Office, representatives of the Home Office and representatives of the Mears Group on 05 August 2022. The concerns of Members of the SBNI were outlined at this meeting. It was accepted at this meeting that the strategic direction in terms of sharing data, preparing Member Agencies and preparation work in relation to the placement of these children and families was not undertaken and this was a gap which has led to significant difficulties to member agency staff on the ground who are trying to provide services. An outcome of this meeting was that it was agreed that Ms McKenzie would attend the Executive's Strategic Planning Group Meeting on the 22 September 2022. This will be a follow up meeting in relation to taking forward some of the issues and concerns that have been raised.
- 3.2 The Chair highlighted that the SBNI have shared all responses received from Government Departments in respect of this issue with Board Members. The Chair noted that the DoH has indicated in their response that the SBNI has a statutory duty to protect all children and this will override any considerations that the Mears Group and others may have in terms of the SBNI's role and ability to access asylum-seeking children and families.
- 3.3 Ms Kelly thanked the Chair and Ms McKenzie for significant and impactful engagement with the relevant bodies in relation to this issue. The Children's Law Centre (CLC), in partnership with the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) have been continuing to work on this issue and whilst assurances have been received, there are concerns that there has not been the progress that would have been hoped for. Ms Kelly noted that both STEP and the CLC are not confident that the road map in terms of referrals is in place, or that Asylum-Seeking Families living in Contingency Accommodation are

aware of how they can make referrals. Concerns were also raised that there is nobody undertaking independent inspections in the hotels. Extensive concerns had been raised previously by the BHSCT in relation to hygiene around communal areas and nutrition for specific groups of adults and children.

- 3.4 As of September 2022, Ms Kelly noted that there have been reports received by the Children's Law Centre that there are 48 children of school age who have no school placements. It was further reported that there is uncertainty as to whether fire inspections have been carried out on some of the hotels. Furthermore, clarity has also not been received in relation to the level of safeguarding clearance and training that hotel staff have received. Ms Kelly reported that another emerging issue is in relation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. She has spoken with SPPG and it was noted that the Mears Group are not regularly sharing information in relation to the age assessment undertaken by the Home Office of these children. Linked to this, it was noted that reunification is another emerging issue whereby unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive separately from family members are placed in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation whilst parents/family are living in Mears Accommodation.
- 3.5 As an overarching concern, Ms Kelly noted that it is important to consider whether multi-occupancy accommodation in itself presents a safeguarding risk.
- 3.6 In terms of education and the 48 children of school age who have not received placements, Ms Craig noted that the Intercultural Education Service have not received any funding for the Ukrainian Advice Centres or for Asylum Seeking Children and Families in Hotel Accommodation. The EA, along with the BHSCT are trying to ensure that they have staff going into hotels with a view to setting up a "one stop shop" where families are given information. However, it was noted that school places, particularly in the Belfast area are at a premium and the situation is very difficult to manage. Schools can apply for a temporary variation of their numbers, but it is up to the school as to whether they want to apply for this variation and this will then impact upon children who are on the current waiting list for school placement. The EA have engaged with colleagues

in the Education Directorate around area planning as it is expected that this problem will only grow.

- 3.7 Ms Weatherall highlighted that there are 13 hotels in the Belfast Trust area housing asylum seekers, 5 of which are housing children at this present time. Health Visitors had visited hotels in the Belfast area and had raised concerns in relation to hygiene etc. Family Support Hubs have been signposting the asylum seekers to services, but Ms Weatherall stated she needs to gather more information in relation to the different types of referrals. The Chair noted that each of the Trusts should develop a Safeguarding Strategy in relation to this emerging issue and if this requires additional funding, representations should be made to SPPG and the DoH to highlight this need and request necessary funding.

Action – BHSCT will advise how many Asylum-Seeking Children are currently being accommodated in hotels within the BHSCT area.

- 3.8 In terms of the pathway for referral, the Chair noted that a proactive approach is required as asylum-seeking families may feel anxious about self-referrals to Gateway Services. Ms Weatherall commented that she has spoken to the BHSCT Coordinator of Family Support Hubs and it has been reported that there has been a significant increase in asylum-seeking families living in hotel accommodation approaching Family Support Hubs for support, particularly in relation to food vouchers. In terms of a proactive approach, Ms Weatherall advised that she is meeting with the Executive Directors of Social Work on 16 September 2022 and can table this issue for further discussion at this meeting.
- 3.9 Ms Dargan advised that the NHSCT area did in the past have two hotels which were housing asylum seeking children and families. However, these families have since been moved out and it is now single males who are occupying these hotels.

- 3.10 Ms Preece reported that she is aware of 1 hotel in the Bangor area of the SEHSCT where families have been placed by Mears. There have been two specific referrals into the SEHSCT Gateway Team and there are child protection processes underway in relation to these families in particular.
- 3.11 Mr McCafferty advised that he is not aware of any hotels housing asylum seeking families in the SHSCT area. Anecdotally however, he has heard that Mears are exploring potential accommodation sites. He has shared his concerns regarding this potential expansion with SPPG and the ability of the Trust to meet this emerging need within the current resources. As a Board and as a safeguarding system in the broadest sense, Mr McCafferty highlighted that multioccupancy accommodation is not a model that can be endorsed. He feels that a proactive interdepartmental approach is required. The Chair commented The Executive Office are accepting that a strategic approach is required, but this needs to be a two-way approach where Trusts and all other agencies have a proactive response on the ground. Trusts have statutory powers to visit these hotels and the conditions that are being reported can be taken as referrals.
- 3.12 Mr Cassidy highlighted that all agencies have a role to play in relation to a joined-up approach to safeguarding. The Chair accepted this and advised that all agencies will be approached in relation to playing their part in response to this emerging issue. Mr Cassidy further noted that it is important that the voice of children and young people in these hotels is considered. He suggested that legal advice would be beneficial in this instance, particularly in terms of how Trusts can be proactive. Mr Guckian agreed that it would be an advantage to have one legal advisor in terms of Health and Social Care. He does not anticipate any problems with any department in HSC asking DLS for an opinion on this. However, Mr Guckian further noted that if the significant concerns raised by Ms Kelly are identified as a generality it is important for Trusts to act as children may be at risk.
- 3.13 Ms Roberts advised that the Northern Ireland New Entrant Service (NINES) is often where health provision concerns are triggered. NINES is currently inundated as a result of the increasing numbers and demand. By way of

background to this, Public Health Nursing including Health Visitors, School Nurses and LAC Nurses have intervened in order to support initial first assessments. Ms Roberts has been assured by Trusts that when Health Visitors or any nurses are entering hotels and raising concerns from a child protection perspective that these children are being referred through the normal child protection procedures. The bigger issue from a health perspective is getting families into the other services which can support them in respect of their ongoing health needs. Ms Roberts reported that Public Health Nursing are currently working with the SPPG in terms of developing a paper to expand the NINES service in the first instance to try to meet the demand, as well as considering what other universal support that Public Health Nursing can offer. There are also other regional groups who are looking specifically at pathways for health for all asylum seekers, in order to standardise and expediate these pathways.

- 3.14 Mr Rogers noted that there is an Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration who inspects these premises and a report was completed in May 2022. As part of this, they visit the accommodation and evaluate whether it is fit for purpose. Mr Rogers suggested that we should be asking through the meeting with the Executive Office on 22 September that these concerns are raised with the body that exists in statute to look at the standard of accommodation that is provided. Ms Kelly acknowledged that this is a very useful suggestion, but noted that they do not examine through the eyes of the child and emphasised that although this inspectorate definitely have their place in the solution, the onus is on all Member Agencies to consider the safeguarding of these children.
- 3.15 The Chair noted that she and Ms McKenzie would be happy to visit hotels. In the first instance, the Chair highlighted that she would like to attend hotels in the BHSCT area and requested that Ms Weatherall also attend this visit, alongside Ms Roberts from a Public Health Nursing perspective.

Action – The SBNI Chair, with Ms Helen McKenzie, Ms Kerrylee Weatherall and Ms Emily Roberts will undertake a visit to a Belfast Hotel housing Asylum-Seeker Children and their Families.

3.16 Ms Cassidy advised that the Social Care Department of SPPG are very much involved with Homes for Ukraine but not as heavily involved with Asylum Seekers. Ms Louise McMahon in Integrated Care takes the lead for SPPG in relation to Asylum Seekers in Contingency Accommodation. A meeting has been planned for Ms McMahon, Mr Whittle and Ms Cassidy to examine these issues in further detail. Funding for Ukrainians is very clear, but it was noted that this is not the case for the wider asylum seekers and this is a concern. Ms Cassidy indicated that she had not received the correspondence that had been sent from the Health Minister in relation to Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency and Dispersal Accommodation.

Action – The letter received from the Health Minister in relation to Asylum Seeker Children Living in Contingency and Dispersal Accommodation will be recirculated to Mr Brendan Whittle, Ms Catherine Cassidy and all Trust Directors.

3.17 Ms Kelly commented on the issues with data flow from the Home Office in relation to asylum seeking children and families living in contingency accommodation, as is evidenced by the variation in knowledge of numbers across all agencies. It was noted that there may be approximately 200 asylum seekers coming to Northern Ireland every month, of which approximately 65% are children. As a result of this significant influx, more hotels will be required to accommodate, and if these issues are not resolved now the concerns will only increase. Ms Kelly suggested that a lead person for dealing with Asylum-Seeking Children and their families living in Contingency Accommodation is nominated by each agency. On discussion, this was agreed by all Members.

Action – Details of each member agency lead person for dealing with Asylum-Seeking Children and their families living in Contingency and Dispersal Accommodation in Northern Ireland to be provided to the SBNI CST for sharing with the TEO.

4 53/22P Annual Report 2021-2022 (Draft) (Please refer to Paper BM53-09.22P1A and BM53-09.22P1B)

4.1 Ms McKenzie advised that the SBNI Central Support Team has sent a draft copy of the Annual Report to Members for their review and comment. These comments have been requested by 23 September 2022 in order for the Annual Report to be presented to the SBNI Board for approval before it is sent to the DoH to be laid before the Assembly.

5 52/22P Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements (Please refer to Paper BM53-09.22P2A, BM53-09.22P2B and BM53-09.22P2C)

5.1 The Chair welcomed Dr Roisin Devlin and colleagues to the SBNI Board meeting and thanked them for their presentation. It was noted that this is a unique Joint Inspection pilot of child protection arrangements which is being carried out on an interagency basis in the SHSCT area.

5.2 Dr Devlin noted that this type of inspection happens more routinely in England and has been piloted in Wales also. The primary focus of the inspection is to look at the child's journey through the different systems, rather than focusing on one particular agency. The Joint Inspection is being carried out by the Criminal Justice Inspection alongside RQIA and the Education and Training Inspectorate and looks to understand how children are helped when they come to the "front door" of child protection services. This is a pilot and it is the aim to keep it small in order that learning can be gleaned in relation to how well the process itself works and how agencies are able to engage in this type of inspection. Terms of Reference and a Framework have been created and it is accepted that this is very much a working document that will need to be tweaked to make it workable as the journey progresses. The inspection is being piloted

is in the SHSCT area in order to make it a manageable inspection in the first instance.

5.3 Mr McCafferty advised that they are trying to work through the planning process in advance of the inspection at the moment and will continue to do so in order to make the pilot as informative as possible. The Chair commented that it will be helpful from an SBNI perspective to get some feedback in terms of how agencies work together in relation to this matter.

5.4 Mr Guckian enquired as to the role of SBNI in relation to the Inspection and whether it would just receive the results which would then be used to inform its business. Dr Devlin advised that some of the information requested and lines of enquiry round the inspection will be about governance and oversight and as the inspection progresses, it may be useful to have a conversation with the SBNI in relation to this and to how it fits in with our work. When the report is available, it is anticipated that areas for improvement within this will be centred around joint working and potentially also oversight of this joint working. In addition, strengths of the child protection system will also be a focus as well as benefits for children and young people. It may be beneficial for the SBNI to gather learning from this. Ms Cunningham further commented that from a Health and Social Care perspective, the Inspection will be examined from the “front-door.” This is not just the Gateway Team, but will also look at who refers the child and this could be GPs, Emergency Services, Health Visitors, School Nursing etc. The Inspection is about focusing on each part of this front door system to show how agencies work together to ensure that the child remains at the centre of this process.

5.5 The Chair commented that from a SBNI perspective, she along with Ms McKenzie and the Non-Executive Lay Members would be very happy to meet with the Inspectorate to assist with developing an understanding of the role and statutory functions of the SBNI.

Action – Ms Bernie McNally, Ms Helen McKenzie, Mr Simon Rogers and Mr Gerry Guckian will meet with Dr Roisin Devlin and colleagues in relation to the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements.

5.6 Mr Cassidy noted that Inspectorate colleagues had previously presented to the Child Protection Committee. This was a very useful discussion and the Committee had asked for them to reattend when the report was completed in order to present on what they learned from the Inspection process. Dr Devlin noted that one of the points raised in the Child Protection Committee was in relation to engaging with children and young people and handling this process carefully. Dr Devlin and colleagues have been in contact with Ofsted and as they are looking at pure “front-door” it may not be appropriate to approach children and young people given that they are likely to be in crisis point and perhaps do not have support systems around them.

6 53/22P Role and Function of SPPG

6.1 As Ms Cassidy had to leave the meeting early, it was agreed that the Role and Function of the SPPG agenda item will be deferred to the next meeting of the SBNI Board.

Action – The Role and Function of the SPPG member briefing, will be carried over as an agenda item for the next meeting of the SBNI Board.

7 53/22P Equality and Disability Action Plan Progress Report 2021 – 2022 (Please refer to Paper BM53-09.22P3A, BM53-09.22P3B, BM53-09.22P3C, BM53-09.22P3D, BM53-09.22P3E and BM53-09.22P3F)

7.1 The Chair noted that the Equality and Disability Action Plan Progress Report has been submitted to the Equality Commission. Ms McKenzie added that the SBNI will begin to work with the BSO Equality Unit to develop a new Action Plan for the next 5 years and this work will be commenced in the next 12-month period. In addition, it is important to consider how the Equality and Disability Action Plan fits within the Committee and Panel structures in terms of standing agenda items and how we see this manifesting itself through continuous improvement. Ms McKenzie assured members that this work is being undertaken and due cognisance is being taken of it.

8 53/22P Risk Register (Please refer to Paper BM53-09.22P4A, BM53-09.22P4B and BM53-09.22P4C)

- 8.1 Mr Guckian advised that there are currently 2 high risks within the Risk Register. Risk **0819** in relation to Information Management remains high risk as it would have major impact if breached. For this reason, this will always remain as a high risk. In terms of mitigation to this risk, the Information Governance Training within the SBNI is continuing and this will continue to be monitored to ensure that everyone is undertaking the training that is required. In addition, the provision of a designated doctor (**1119**) remains high risk. It was noted that every effort is being made to make representations and try to have a paediatrician appointed and this process is ongoing.
- 8.2 In relation to the closure points, it was suggested that risk **0719** should be closed as such good progress has been made with regards to the partnership aspect of the Board that it should not be included on an organisational Risk Register. Similarly, risk **1320** in relation to the impacts of the COVID pandemic has been recommended to close as the impact has been reduced to low level.
- 8.3 Mr Guckian commented that Chairs of Committees have been reporting assurances to the Governance Committee. The Chair agreed that this is very important.
- 8.4 The Risk Register was approved by Board Members.

9 53/22P Finance Update Report (Please refer to Paper BM53-09.22P5A and BM53-09.22P5B)

- 9.1 The Chair noted that while the SBNI recurrent funding is £735,000 per year, there has been additionality received for the Online Safety Strategy and TIP. It was highlighted that while this has increased SBNI capacity, it has also increased SBNI workload.

10 53/22 Declaration of Assurance Mid-Year September 2022 (Please refer to Paper BM53-09.22P6)

10.1 The Chair advised that this is for noting and requested any comments from Members. No further comments were made.

11 53/22 AOB

11.1 The Chair noted that the SBNI are currently working with HR to get the Director of Operations post advertised. This has been a slow process but it is hoped that we are nearing the end of this now. Ms McAllister added that she would anticipate that the Director of Operations post will be advertised on HSC Recruit in the coming days and it is hoped that interviews will be conducted in October.

11.2 The next SBNI Board meeting is on Wednesday 7 December 2022.

11.3 The Chair closed the Public section of the meeting at 4.00pm and thanked Members for their attendance.

Bernie McNally

Independent Chair SBNI