



Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Strategic Plan

2022 – 2026

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Foreword



As the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) it gives me great pleasure to present to you our Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

This is the SBNI's third Strategic Plan and builds on the achievements of our member agencies in tackling not only the challenges of the recent and on-going COVID-19 pandemic but also builds on the enormous amount of work that has been done during the last four years to tackle the SBNI strategic priorities of; Domestic Violence and Abuse, Child and Parental Mental Health and Neglect.

The SBNI is a partnership organisation consisting of all of the key statutory bodies, the major voluntary agencies and appointed independent persons that manage, operate and resource the safeguarding and child protection system in Northern Ireland. It was set up under the Safeguarding Board Act (NI) 2011 and is the statutory body responsible for coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of its 21 member bodies, for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the 440,500 children and young people in Northern Ireland.

This new strategic plan sets out the direction for the SBNI over the next four years, 2022-2026. I am particularly grateful to the children and young people, their parents and carers, our member bodies and the partner organisations we work with, who took the time to share with us their views on what we should prioritise during this period. Based on what we have heard so far from these key stakeholders, the SBNI has confirmed that our three main strategic priorities over the next four years will be;

- Online Safety

- Domestic Violence and Abuse; and
- Children and Young People’s Mental Health

The primary responsibility of the SBNI membership is to protect children and young people from risk and harm and ensure that effective work to protect children and young people is properly coordinated and conducted.

This new strategic plan sets out a clear path of how we intend to do this, the priorities we will focus on and how we will measure and monitor this work to make sure we are making a difference. Operationally, for each year of this strategic plan, we will develop an annual business plan that will detail how and what we will focus and deliver on derived from our strategic priorities and intentions.

A core facet of the business planning process and production year on year is the facility to add new and emerging safeguarding and child protection concerns as separate priorities and aims that may arise at any time, over the duration of this strategic plan. This agility enables the SBNI to ensure that the key and current safeguarding risks and issues affecting children and young people in Northern Ireland are always at the forefront of our work.

This strategic plan commits me, as the Independent Chair of the SBNI and all our members to work tirelessly to make sure all the priorities and aims set out in it are realised and that we live up to our objective of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland.



Bernie McNally OBE

SBNI Independent Chair

Introduction

Throughout this plan we use the term safeguarding¹ in its widest sense to encompass the full range of both child protection and prevention activities.

Safeguarding children and young people is the process of positively promoting the safety and wellbeing of all children in society. It is about ensuring that children and young people grow up safely and securely and are provided with effective care to enable them to attain greater success in adulthood. It is also about preventing the impairment of children and young people's health and development. Safeguarding also involves a comprehensive response to the needs of children and young people when it is suspected that they have suffered any form of abuse or neglect.

Safeguarding also includes the promotion and protection of children and young people's rights.

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) was established by the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 (the Act). The principal functions stipulated in the Act are:

- To coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
- To develop policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people
- To promote an awareness of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people
- To keep under review the effectiveness of what is done by each person or body represented on the Board to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people
- To undertake case management reviews
- To provide advice in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people

¹ Definition of safeguarding can be found at Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, Version 2 August 2017 p.g.12

- To promote communications between the Board and children and young people
- To make arrangements for consultation and discussion in relation to the safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of children and young people.

Further detail of the membership, functions and procedures are provided in the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (Membership, Procedure, Functions and Committee) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (the SBNI Regulations) [The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland \(Membership, Procedure, Functions and Committee\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2012 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#).

The SBNI is chaired by an independent person appointed by the Minister through the public appointments process, who is independent of the member bodies. The membership of the SBNI is made up of representatives from all the Health and Social Care Trusts, the Strategic Planning and Performance Group, the Public Health Agency, the Probation Board, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Education Authority, District Councils, the Youth Justice Agency; the British Medical Association and the Guardian ad Litem Service. There is also representation from the voluntary sector from Action for Children, Barnardos NI, Children in Northern Ireland, the Children's Law Centre, Include Youth and the NSPCC. There is also representation from the Faith Sector, two lay members and three Panel Chairs on the SBNI Board. Each of the 21 member bodies is represented on the SBNI by a senior member of staff. Their common purpose is to help safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland and help protect them from all forms of risk and harm.

The SBNI Independent Chair and the SBNI members are responsible for providing strategic leadership and direction to the child protection and safeguarding system across Northern Ireland and for ensuring the effective performance and discharge of its statutory objective, duties and functions as set out in the Act. The SBNI Independent Chair and member bodies are supported in their work by a small central support team made up of seven staff.

This strategic plan covers the period April 2022 to March 2026. It sets out the strategic direction of the SBNI and provides a guide for the work it will do for the next

four years.

The SBNI continues to:

- Work in partnership with other agencies, service users and communities to ensure children and young people have the best start in life and are part of a caring society that supports people throughout their lives
- Provide leadership and set direction for the safeguarding system across Northern Ireland
- Respond in a timely manner to new and emerging concerns
- Drive improvements in the current child protection system
- Continue to build the capacity of the SBNI to enhance the knowledge and skills of the entire membership to ensure it is providing effective, evidence-based responses to the safeguarding challenges now and in the years ahead.

In addition, the SBNI continues to build on the achievements of the last four years to drive forward and embed a trauma informed approach to underpin all of its work to safeguard children and young people. This strengths-based approach to practice, policy, procedure and strategy has shown how, when professionals better understand what has happened to the children and young people in their care and the adversity they have experienced, they respond more compassionately and more appropriately which ultimately leads to better outcomes over the long-term.

The relationship between poverty and safeguarding and child protection has long been recognised. In some cases where families are unable to meet the basic needs of children and young people this can lead to an increased likelihood of abuse, harm and neglect as a result of the additional strains poverty places on family life. This strong association between family poverty and the potential risks for children and young people is also clearly reflected in the theory and outworkings underpinning the concept of adverse childhood experiences. Additionally, during the COVID-19 outbreak where paid work is threatened or has been lost or where families have been forced to isolate, the risk of poverty increases thereby adding a further burden on already pressurised families.

The SBNI continues to be cognisant of this and ensures that the issue of poverty in

its many forms that can impact on a child's life informs and influences the Board as it continues to provide leadership and set direction in the safeguarding, protection and welfare of children and young people.

The SBNI also acknowledges and recognises the current and long-term impact of COVID-19 on safeguarding in general and particularly on child protection and the child protection system. During the series of lockdowns, we have seen the under reporting of concerns that would normally have been raised and investigated along with the projected increased incidences of risk and harm resulting from this. We continue to work through our member and partner agencies to ensure the safeguarding and child protection system in Northern Ireland remains agile, focussed and responsive to the challenges both present and anticipated as a result of the pandemic.

The SBNI also recognises the occurrence and impact of paramilitary violence and organised criminal activity in relation to child protection and safeguarding. It continues to support the involvement and outputs of its member bodies as part of the ongoing work currently being undertaken by the cross-departmental 'Tackling Paramilitarism' Programme (TPP). The SBNI is committed to working with the TPP to support a multiagency trauma informed response to prevent risk and harm for the children and young people affected by paramilitary activity. The SBNI continues to participate in the strategic and operational forums designed to address this very important child protection issue.

Objectives

The SBNI Strategic Plan 2022-2026 aims to:

- Contribute to delivering the following Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework 2021
- Fulfil our Personal and Public Involvement duties and satisfy the SBNI's statutory function to promote communication between the SBNI Board and children and young people
- Be informed by the views of children and young people in Northern Ireland in

its delivery

- Acknowledge the important role played by parents/carers in safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare by involving them in its implementation.

Implementation

The SBNI Strategic Plan 2022-2026 is kept under review to ensure it takes into account changes in the external environment, best practice, new and emerging concerns, research developments and the needs of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Any changes to this strategic plan resulting from these will be carefully analysed, assessed and agreed with the SBNI member bodies. We will also consult with the Department of Health prior to implementation, as the legislation requires us to do so.

In developing the plan we reviewed the previous SBNI Strategic Plan 2018-2022, considered progress to date and identified the continuing challenges in child protection and safeguarding.

We will fulfil any outstanding commitments from our previous four years work, in addition to our three strategic priorities and will specifically;

- Ensure that the learning from case management reviews is embedded in child protection practice
- Continue to uphold the principles of the UNCRC
- Continue to provide training and general awareness opportunities across all areas of our work
- Commission professional training and awareness in relation to our Strategic Priorities as is appropriate
- Continue to support and provide assistance to faith-based communities to assist in the sharing of best safeguarding practice
- Continue to embed safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures to ensure standardisation of practice
- Support parents in positive parenting and member agencies who help them to

do this;

- Work to conclude the delivery of the recommendations associated with the 2020 Child Sexual Exploitation Evaluation Report and the Criminal Justice Inspection NI, 30 June 2020.

In particular, the SBNI Safeguarding Panels at local levels will:

- Coordinate the implementation of the SBNI Strategic Plan to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their areas
- Promote an awareness of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people
- Where relevant, ensure that the findings of case management reviews are disseminated widely and implemented in full
- Promote and facilitate communication and engagement with children and young people in the exercising of their statutory duties.

Strategic Context

Since the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) became operational in 2012, it has worked to improve the safeguarding and protection arrangements for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

This work has been informed, influenced and shaped by international treaties. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is of particular relevance. In accordance with the UNCRC the SBNI must at all times act in the best interest of the child (Article 3), in a manner which is non-discriminatory (Article 2) and in a way which respects the views of the child (Article 12).

The SBNI Strategic Plan 2022-2026 takes account domestic legislation such as the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 as well as a number of departmental strategies, policies and priorities, such as the 'Keeping children and young people safe: an Online Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2020-2025', the 'Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031', the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, the SBNI's Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy 2018-2022, the cross-departmental policy 'Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People (Version 2 August 2017)' the Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland - A Seven Year Strategy, March 2016' and the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 which is due to be operationalised in February 2022².

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) draft Outcomes Framework 2021 sets out the major societal outcomes that the Executive wants to achieve. We have carefully considered this PfG framework and the 'Building Forward: Consolidated COVID-19 Recovery Plan'³ and have identified three outcomes that especially apply to our work. These are:

- Our children and young people have the best start in life
- We have a caring society that supports people throughout their life

² Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (legislation.gov.uk)

³ [Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan](#)

- Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other.

The SBNI is committed through this strategic plan to help ensure that these outcomes are realised. The strategic priorities for the next four years therefore reflect, support and complement the PfG. They also look to the immediate need to support children and young people and their parents and carers, through the delivery of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan. By understanding the importance of tackling inequalities, the impact of COVID -19 on mental health and associated vulnerability the SBNI will work within the context of the ‘health of the population as a recovery accelerator’ to prioritise work within and across our Partnership, to help keep the most vulnerable in our society safe and free from harm and abuse.

The Department of Health (DoH) is the sponsor department for the SBNI. In accordance with guidance issued by the DoH, the SBNI is required to report on progress against its strategic plan and annual business plans which flow from it. We are also required to provide assurance as to the ongoing effectiveness of our systems on internal control.

The SBNI remains committed to aligning our work with current and emerging departmental strategies, policies and priorities. In particular, the key policy document ‘Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (Version 2 August 2017)’. This provides the overarching, cross departmental policy for safeguarding children and young people in Northern Ireland and will direct all safeguarding policy and practice.

In addition to the Safeguarding Board Act (2011) which places a requirement on all member bodies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 strengthens this by providing a statutory duty for public authorities to co-operate in order to contribute to the well-being of children and young people. The addition of this legislation to the safeguarding arena strengthens the commitment to partnership working demonstrated within this strategic plan.

All public sector organisations, including all SBNI member bodies and our central support team, are facing substantial budgetary constraints. It is likely that these

constraints will continue to be a theme throughout the duration of this strategic plan. It is imperative that the SBNI keeps the impact of any financial constraints under review and makes the best use of available resources to achieve the maximum outcomes. In particular, the SBNI will carefully consider the implications of any effects, as a result of these constraints and pressures, on its strategic and operational intentions, priorities and workplans and be mindful to respond accordingly.

The SBNI continues to develop its Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) framework to help define the outcomes we want to achieve as a result of our work and how this can be measured. The use of OBA is helping improve safeguarding and welfare outcomes for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Mission, Vision and Values

SBNI Mission Statement

Our mission is to safeguard and promote the welfare and rights of children and young people by working together in partnership to prevent and protect them from risk and harm.

SBNI Vision Statement

Our vision is that all children and young people are seen, their voices are heard and that they are protected, respected, supported and have appropriate opportunities to grow up in safety, thrive and fulfil their potential'.

SBNI Values

We listen to children and young people and respond to them about their wishes, feelings and experiences and place them at the heart of what we do.

We work in partnership to safeguard and promote the welfare and rights of children and young people.

We develop, respect and value those who work with us as we strive for excellence in what we do.

We are open, honest and transparent in our work with children and young people our members, partners and staff.

We respect diversity and promote equality and inclusion in all that we do.

We ensure that all of our work and relationships are undertaken from an awareness of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and a trauma informed perspective

Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priority 1: To provide leadership and set direction in the safeguarding, protection and welfare of children and young people.

SP1.1 To ensure that the Case Management Review, Safeguarding and Child Death Overview Panels meet their statutory functions.

SP1.2 To ensure that the non-statutory committees fulfil their delivery obligations within their terms of reference

SP1.3 To participate in relevant child safeguarding and child protection fora

Strategic Priority 2: To hear and respond to the voices of children and young people affected by domestic violence⁴ and abuse.

SP2.1 To work with government departments and their agencies to prevent domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from occurring.

SP2.2 To work with member and partner agencies engaged in the DVA arena to raise awareness among parents/carers and professionals of the impact of DVA on children and young people.

SP2.3 To work with member and partner agencies to provide training resources and expertise in how to improve the recognition, assessment, and responses to children, young people and families experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

Strategic Priority 3: To support children and young people in exercising their rights to enjoy the benefits of the online world free from harm, fear and abuse.

⁴ Definition of DVA as per the Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland - A Seven Year Strategy, March 2017'.

SP3.1 To work with government departments and their agencies to develop an online infrastructure and associated standards to prevent children and young people from experiencing harm and abuse online.

SP3.2 To work with member and partner agencies to educate children and young people, their parents and carers and those who work with them to navigate the online world safely and confidently and support them to stay safe and well online.

SP3.3 To ensure the views of children and young people inform and influence online policy and practice development

Strategic Priority 4: To hear and respond to the voices of children and young people affected by mental health issues.

SP4.1 To work with government departments and agencies to help reduce the incidence of children and young people affected by mental health issues

SP4.2 To work with member and partner agencies to raise awareness among parents, carers and professionals of the impact of poor mental health and any associated stigma, on children and young people.

SP4.3 To work with member and partner agencies to promote awareness for children and young people, their parents and carers in how to recognise, respond and seek help in relation to mental health.

SP4.4 To work with partners to promote training in how to improve the recognition, assessment, and responses to children, young people and families experiencing the impact of mental health issues.

Monitoring and Review

The SBNI believes that its plans and priorities for the next four years are ambitious and challenging and will require everyone to work together to make them happen.

The SBNI believes that the realisation of these plans will positively impact on its objective of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The SBNI is committed to continually reviewing the plan to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose and is able to respond to new and emerging concerns.

The SBNI will continually monitor its performance against each of the strategic objectives and priorities and aims outlined in the plan. This will be done through monitoring and reporting mechanisms and the identification of outcome measures and indicators. The SBNI will receive regular reports throughout each year on progress against its strategic plan from the SBNI Committees, Sub-Groups and Safeguarding Panels. These will reference and comment upon the annual business plan/s to make sure the SBNI is achieving its strategic objectives priorities. The SBNI will provide to the Department of Health (DoH) an annual assurance statement relating to performance against the strategic plan's priorities and aims underpinned by supporting evidence.

Each year the SBNI will provide an annual report to the DoH to be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly. This will include reports from all SBNI Committees, Sub-Groups and Safeguarding Panels.

The SBNI commits to making sure that children and young people, their parents and carers are involved in the outworkings of the strategic plan and are able to comment and influence this.

This will essentially be done through our Safeguarding Panels and the engagement exercises they undertake at their local levels.

The SBNI will also provide assurance that each member body is adhering to the SBNI requirements as set out in the legislation.

All member bodies must have in place arrangements and be able to demonstrate that:

- Senior management is committed to safeguarding
- Training and learning opportunities are in place for staff specific to safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare
- They have robust selection and recruitment processes in place for staff seeking work with children and young people and that they are fully compliant with the requirements of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007
- They undertake reviews of how staff work with children and young people, with an emphasis on safeguarding practice.

The SBNI is committed to monitoring and reviewing its work to help ensure that it is on target to achieve its priorities and aims and that our member bodies are really listening and acting upon what they hear from children and young people and their parents and carers.

The SBNI continues to work together in partnership to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and prevent and protect them from risk and harm and to achieve the vision that all children and young people are seen, heard and protected in order that they thrive, grow up in safety, and fulfil their potential.

Glossary

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
DoH	Department of Health
DVA	Domestic Violence and Abuse
EITP	Early Intervention Transformation Programme
OBA	Outcomes Based Accountability
PfG	Programme for Government
SBNI	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
TPP	Tackling Paramilitarism Programme
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child