

54th Meeting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Wednesday 7 December 2022

3.15pm – 4.30pm – 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	✓	
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 Brendan Whittle	Regional Director of Social Care and Children – SPPG DoH		✓
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 Amber McLoughlin	Nurse Consultant, PHA (deputising OBO Ms Emily Roberts)	✓	
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		✓
Mr Maurice Meehan	Head of Health & Social Wellbeing Improvement, PHA	✓	
Ms Kerrylee Weatherall	Interim Director of Children's Community Services, BHSC		✓
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 Teresa McAllister	Professional Officer SBNI
Ms Joanna Brown	Professional Officer SBNI

Summary of Actions

Action No.	Action:	To be completed by:
1	The SBNI will write to the Mears Group requesting assurances that all Staff working in hotels housing Asylum Seeking Children and Families are subject to an Enhanced Access NI check.	SBNI CST
2	The SBNI will engage with Members regarding their availability to meet with Professor Jones to share their views in relation to the Children's Social Care Services Review.	SBNI CST
3	Ms Roberts will liaise with Ms McKenzie and Ms Brown to consider the risk to the SBNI of the PHA Director of Nursing post vacancy.	Ms Joanna Brown / Ms Emily Roberts
4	Mr Meehan will share information in relation to the PHA dedicated HR support resource with the SBNI CST.	Mr Maurice Meehan
5	Ms Craig will send amendments to the SBNI Annual Report 2021-2022 to the SBNI CST.	Ms Elaine Craig
6	All member agencies will share their responses to consultations as referred to at Agenda Item 8 in the meeting with the SBNI. These should be sent to; Alex.McCoy@hscni.net	All Members
7	Action carried forward from Confidential section of the SBNI Board Meeting –	Chair

	Write to the SPPG requesting attendance at the next SBNI Board Meeting to clarify their role and function.	
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Summary of Board Approval

The minutes from the Board Meeting on 14 th September 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
The Risk Register was approved.
The Annual Report 2021-2022 was approved subject to proposed amendment.
The Appeals Process in relation to a Child Protection Registration was approved.
The Regional Guidance for Northern Ireland on Under-age Sexual Activity was approved.
The Signs of Safety Good Practice Guidance was approved.
The Guidance on the Management of Allegations Against Staff of a Child Protection Nature 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, Dr Joanne McLean, Ms Emily Roberts, Ms Kerrylee Weatherall and Mr Paddy Mooney. The Chair noted that D/Superintendent Gary Reid is deputising on behalf of D/Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally and Ms Amber McLoughlin is deputising on behalf of Ms Emily Roberts.

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 a recruitment process to appoint a Director of Operations within SBNI has recently been completed. Ms Helen McKenzie was successfully appointed to this position.

1 54/22P Previous Minutes

1.1 Members agreed the minutes from the last Board meeting on 14th September 2022 as a factual and accurate representation of the meeting.

2 54/22P Matters Arising

2.1 Complete

2.2 Complete

2.3 Complete

2.4 Ongoing – will be discussed in Agenda Item 3.

2.5 Complete

2.6 Removed

3 54/22P Asylum Seeker Children and Families Living in Contingency Accommodation (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P1)

- 3.1 Ms McKenzie advised that since the last SBNI Board Meeting, she has now attended two meetings of The Executive Office's Strategic Planning Group's Sub Group on Contingency Accommodation which has looked at data requirements – progressed via a bespoke workshop, in order to ensure that the relevant information is passed to member agencies to enable them to fulfil their statutory safeguarding and child protection duties, in terms of receiving timely and relevant information to enable agencies to understand and plan current service provision and plan for services which might be required in the future. This work continues to be progressed and it was highlighted that this must be conducted in line with GDPR and the requirements of legislation in the Children's Order.
- 3.2 Ms McKenzie noted that a formal complaint had previously been made to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) regarding concerns that were initially raised by the BHSCT. These concerns related to conferencing facilities being repurposed into accommodation units in hotels and being used for contingency accommodation. The NIFRS has advised that a fire safety audit has taken place regarding The Park Inn Hotel, Belfast, and also the buildings on either side. The Hotel has passed the audit and assurance was also provided that as part of its Auditing programme other hotels that accommodate Asylum seekers will also be reviewed.
- 3.3 Ms McKenzie reported that on the 2 December, the SBNI attended a meeting with the DoH in relation to concerns raised by SBNI Board Members. The Permanent Secretary of Health and the TEO have now written to the Permanent Secretary for the Home Office and requested that a Safeguarding Review is undertaken in all of the contingency accommodation being used for asylum seeking children and families. The request has indicated that it would be preferable if this Review is undertaken by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration. If the response indicates that this cannot be facilitated, the DoH will work with the TEO to arrange an independent review.

- 3.4 Ms McKenzie advised that all member agencies have now nominated a lead person for dealing with Asylum-Seeking Children and their Families living in Contingency and Dispersal Accommodation. Ms McKenzie has written to these leads and requested that they confirm the staffing and support which is being provided and in which areas. This information will be provided to the DoH and collated to understand where there are gaps, where there is good practice and how this can be scaled, embedded and implemented as part of a statutory provision to support the concerns which have been raised by the SBNI, CLC, STEP and all other agencies.
- 3.5 Ms Janes thanked Ms McKenzie and the SBNI Members for their work in this issue. However, Ms Janes is still concerned as data has not been made available to agencies. This is essential to assist agencies with planning and delivering services. In relation to asking the Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to carry out a Safeguarding Review, Ms Janes expressed apprehension that different mechanisms are used for hotels housing asylum seeking children and families than those used for families who are homeless for example. This could create a two-tiered system as families from different circumstances are not afforded the same safeguarding measures. Ms Janes also highlighted that agencies are still unaware as to whether those people working in hotels, in particular security staff are appropriately checked through Access NI. In addition, reports are still being received about women who are being discharged from hospital without the appropriate support.
- 3.6 Ms Kelly extended her thanks to Ms McKenzie and staff at the SBNI for their hard work in relation to this issue. It is now getting more focus and it was noted that this is largely as a result of the work that has been undertaken by the SBNI. However, Ms Kelly echoed the concerns expressed by Ms Janes. She noted that some children have been living in contingency hotels for 20 months and she is concerned about the delay in frameworks for data collection. In addition, Ms Kelly expressed concern with 'referral by consent' for access to service and is unsure as to how this consent is being sought. She is also unsure about the referral procedures which are in place. The Children's Law Centre is not aware if staff working in these hotels have had an Enhanced Access NI check carried

out, and the level of safeguarding training they receive is also unclear, particularly with regards to whether the standards of this training comply with the level required in this jurisdiction. It is unclear if residents' details are being recorded, or how many safeguarding issues there have been since April 2021. Ms Kelly noted that although the NIFRS have now carried out a fire safety audit of the Park Inn Hotel, she feels that it is paramount that a timetable is received as to when the other hotels housing asylum seeking children and families will be audited and this needs to be conducted with a sense of urgency. Access to services is an issue and the CLC has just become aware that the Family Help Service is only available to children aged 0-4 or to families where there is a pregnant female. This leaves a significant gap in support for children of school age. The issue of access to food, medication and an inability for families to wash clothes remains. In addition, Ms Kelly noted that there is an Interjurisdictional issue whereby records are not shared. The CLC is hearing accounts of families with serious medical conditions where records are in a different country and there is an inability to retrieve these. Furthermore, the CLC has been unable to receive any assurances that post-partum mothers will not be returned to the hotels following the birth of their child. Ms Kelly stressed that a timeframe is required in relation to the safeguarding exercises that are being undertaken, and this is required as a matter of urgency.

- 3.7 Ms Craig advised that there are now 4 EA workers who are undertaking visits to hotels. However, she highlighted that these workers are acting beyond their remit of education specific work with regards to finding children school placements. They have been accessing wheelchairs for disabled children as well as transport. When the EA is aware that there are school age children, they are doing their very best to access school placements. Funding is still critical and although this has been agreed, it has not yet been allocated. It was further noted that when this funding is allocated, it will have to be spent by the end of the financial year. Despite the issue in respect of the allocation of funding, the EA is progressing with recruitment of staff to undertake the work with asylum seeking children. Currently, the work is being carried out by EA staff who are funded to carry out case work with Roma and Traveller children. These staff are still undertaking the work that they are funded to do, but are going over and

above. These issues have been raised at the EA Child Protection and Safeguarding Sub-Committee and Ms Craig noted that it has been an emotive topic for those involved.

- 3.8 Dr Montgomery Devlin advised that Welcome Churches are carrying out work with refugees and asylum seekers. Mears Group has indicated to them that any volunteers who are entering hotels from the Welcome Churches must be Access NI Enhanced checked.
- 3.9 The Chair noted that assurances have been received previously that Enhanced Access NI checks are being carried out on hotel staff. However, in light of the concerns expressed by Ms Janes in relation to Security Staff in particular it was agreed that the SBNI will write to the Mears Group seeking assurances on this particular issue.

Action 1 – The SBNI will write to the Mears Group requesting assurances that all Staff working in hotels housing Asylum Seeking Children and Families are subject to an Enhanced Access NI check.

- 3.10 The Chair noted that the SBNI will continue to address this very live issue. However, in the interim, she emphasised that it is very important that all member agencies look at services that are provided and assess what each agency can do to support these children and families. Each agency should be ensuring that they are carrying out their statutory functions and are being as responsive as possible to asylum seeking children and families in their areas.
- 3.11 Ms McKenzie noted that there are two distinct processes which are ongoing. She accepted that the TEO's sub group is slow in pace and she has raised this. Ms McKenzie advised that she is keen to see the return of information from the Home Office. On the other hand, it was noted that movement has been seen in the meeting that DoH convened on 2 December. The visibly emotive affect that these issues have had on professionals has made an impact on the sense of urgency of work to be undertaken on a practical level and the DoH is striving to

conduct this. Ms McKenzie highlighted that while she appreciates that the timeline to-date has not been what we would have wanted, she is hopeful that there will now be some practical movement in a more systematic fashion.

4 54/22P Children's Social Care Services Review

4.1 The Chair noted her concerns with the recommendation in the Children's Social Care Services Review regarding the implementation of a standalone Children's Services Agency. These concerns have been raised at a DoH and SBNI Accountability Meeting, particularly with regards to how this recommendation was communicated to member agencies. The Chair had requested a copy of the report completed by Professor Jones containing the evidence base regarding the recommendations made, as well as information in relation to comments made about the SBNI. The Chair has been informed that no report, as such, was completed, rather it was a submission to the Minister for Health which remains confidential. The Chair further noted that she and Ms McKenzie attended a meeting with Professor Jones on 05 December and robust discussion was undertaken to challenge his misconceptions on the role of the SBNI, as well as the involvement of Adult Services, Mental Health Services and Social Workers in the Child Protection system which is under immense pressure in Northern Ireland.

4.2 During discussion, Ms Dargan commented that on behalf of the Directors of Social Work that Professor Jones review has been a "journey" in respect of Children's Social Care Services. She acknowledged the engagement with Trust staff at all levels. Although she can appreciate the lack of engagement with the SBNI as a collective, it is her view that Professor Jones has engaged with agencies on a multiagency basis and is listening to what is being said. Directors agree with Professor Jones that Children's Services, particularly Children's Social Work Services are in a crisis and that this is systemic, endemic and chronic and that this cannot be overcome without radical change. Trust Directors have discussed the potential distraction of the process involved in setting up a single, arms-length body and are of the view that if this is the direction of travel it will need to be accompanied with adequate staffing levels,

a workforce plan and sufficient resourcing at all levels. The position is that this is one of many options.

- 4.3 Ms Leeson highlighted that CiNI have been engaged by the DoH to undertake the parental engagement of this review and she has been impressed by Professor Jones' engagement with parents. When the proposals within the review are released, Ms Leeson reported that CiNI will be examining the evidence and potential for change and making their own submission in response to this.
- 4.4 Mr McCafferty endorsed the views expressed by Ms Dargan and added that there are chronic and long-standing social work deficits and staffing issues across the board with little hope of replenishment in the near future. He feels that other solutions do need to be explored.
- 4.5 The Chair noted that Professor Jones has indicated that he would like to meet with members of the SBNI and it has been agreed that a meeting will be arranged with Professor Jones where the views of the SBNI member agencies can be shared. The Chair clarified that she is not disputing the chronic crisis across Children's Services, but she does have concerns with the solution that has been proposed.

Action 2 – The SBNI will engage with Members regarding their availability to meet with Professor Jones to share their views in relation to the Children's Social Care Services Review.

- 4.6 Mr Cassidy commented that reorganisation alone will not be a solution to the current situation and there would have to be additionality with regards to retaining workforce and making frontline statutory Family and Child Care Services an attractive place to work. Directors have indicated that this solution can not be put off and needs to be dealt with urgently to ensure that it operates in a robust and sustainable way.

5 54/22P Governance Update: Risk Register (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P2A, BM54-12.22P2B and BM54-12.22P2C)

- 5.1 Mr Guckian presented on two risks. With regards to risk **1119** in relation to the provision of a designated doctor to attend the SBNI Board, it was noted that this remains as a high risk. Efforts to mitigate this risk are ongoing with the DoH.
- 5.2 Mr Guckian noted that a new risk **1422** has been added. This is in relation to procurement delays with PaLS. If funding is to be spent within a certain period of time and we are unable to procure these services, it could lead to a failure to utilise our budget and meet the objectives of our business plan. This risk has been rated as high in the first instance and this will be reviewed on an ongoing basis based on mitigations that are put in place.
- 5.3 Ms McLoughlin reported that Ms Roberts has asked if the Board could consider the risk of the non-appointment of the Director of Nursing post within the PHA. There are no imminent plans to recruit to this post.

Action 3 – Ms Roberts will liaise with Ms McKenzie and Ms Brown to consider the risk to the SBNI of the PHA Director of Nursing post vacancy.

- 5.4 The Chair reported on issues and delays with recruitment within the SBNI. Mr Meehan noted that the PHA has recently provided funding to have a dedicated post within HR to provide recruitment support for the PHA as a result of the capacity issues and subsequent delays. As the SBNI is hosted by the PHA, they should be able to make use of this dedicated HR person and Mr Meehan is content to share information in relation to this.

Action 4 – Mr Meehan will share information in relation to the PHA dedicated HR support resource with the SBNI CST.

- 5.5 The Board approved the Risk Register.

6 54/22P Annual Report 2021 – 2022 (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P3A and BM54-12.221P3B)

- 6.1 The Chair referred to the Annual Report 2021-2022 that was circulated in advance of the meeting and advised that this is now in the proofing stages. Once this is approved, it will be sent on to the DoH to be laid before the NI Assembly.
- 6.2 On discussion Ms Craig raised 3 amendments to the Annual Report and agreed that these will be shared with the SBNI CST. Ms Moore further requested clarity as to whether the Annual Report can be shared with wider staff in SOLACE and the timings as to when this can be distributed. Ms McKenzie confirmed that this can be disseminated widely once the final amendments have been made and the final version has been sent to the DoH. The final version will also be sent to Board Members.

Action 5 – Ms Craig will send amendments to the SBNI Annual Report 2021-2022 to the SBNI CST.

- 6.3 The Board approved the Annual Report 2021-2022 subject to proposed amendment.

7 54/22P Policy and Procedures: Child Protection Registration Appeals Process (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P4A and BM54-12.22P4B)

- 7.1 Ms Dargan outlined the Appeals Process in relation to a Child Protection Registration and sought Board approval of same.
- 7.2 The Board approved the Appeals Process in relation to a Child Protection Registration.

7 54/22P Policy and Procedures: Sexually Active Children Guidance (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P4C and BM54-12.22P4D)

- 7.3 Ms Dargan outlined the Regional Guidance for Northern Ireland on Under-age Sexual Activity and sought Board approval of same.

- 7.4 The Board approved the Regional Guidance for Northern Ireland on Under-age Sexual Activity.

7 54/22P Policy and Procedures: Signs of Safety (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P4E, BM54-12.22P4F and BM54-12.22P4G)

- 7.5 Ms Dargan outlined Signs of Safety Good Practice Guidance and sought Board approval of same.

- 7.6 The Board approved the Signs of Safety Good Practice Guidance.

7 54/22P Management of Allegations made against Staff (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P4H and BM54-12.22P4I)

- 7.7 Ms Dargan outlined the Guidance on the Management of Allegations Against Staff of a Child Protection Nature and sought Board approval of same.

- 7.8 The Board approved the Guidance on the Management of Allegations Against Staff of a Child Protection Nature.

- 7.9 The Chair thanked Ms Dargan and the membership of the Policy and Procedures Committee for their hard work in progressing these policies and guidance

8 54/22P Consultations (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P5)

- 8.1 Ms McKenzie outlined that there are currently a number of consultation opportunities that members may wish to respond to on behalf of their respective agencies. These were outlined as follows:

8.1.1 A Call for Evidence by the DoJ, on the abuse of position of trust offences as contained within the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. The Closing date for response is 22 December 2022.

8.1.2 The consultation on the draft Foster Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023, provided by the DoH with a closing date of 23 December 2022.

8.1.3 The Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy Consultation, provided by the DoJ with a closing date of 10 January 2023.

8.1.4 A PPS Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Domestic Abuse has been published for consultation with a closing date of 3 February 2023. Ms McKenzie noted that in addition to any individual member responses to this consultation, the SBNI intends to provide a generic response via the Domestic Violence and Abuse Committee, as part of its work on the Domestic Abuse strategic priority. It was agreed that this response will be sent to members for review in advance of submission.

8.2 Ms McKenzie noted that it would be appreciated if member agency responses to these consultations could be shared with the SBNI.

Action 6 – All member agencies will share their responses to consultations as referred to at Agenda Item 8 in the meeting with the SBNI. These should be sent to; Alex.McCoy@hscni.net

9 54/22P Deputy Secretary/ Chief Social Worker – Change in arrangements (Please refer to Paper BM54-12.22P6)

9.1 The Chair noted that Mr Seán Holland has moved on from his post of Chief Social Worker/Deputy Secretary for Social Services Policy within the DoH and as a result there have been some changes in arrangements. Mr Peter Toogood is now Acting Deputy Secretary with responsibility for the Social Services Policy Group and Ms Aine Morrison is now the Chief Social Worker.

10 53/22 AOB

10.1 Ms McKenzie referred to the DoH review of Information Sharing Guidance consultation and noted that there is an interface for those external to social work within the Child Protection process, including the SPPG and PSNI to submit their response. The closing date of response for any other members is the 12 January 2023.

10.2 The next SBNI Board meeting will be held on Wednesday 15 February 2023.

BM54-12.22PM

10.3 The Chair closed the Public section of the meeting at 4.30pm and thanked Members for their attendance.

Bernie McNally

Independent Chair SBNI