



The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Five Year Review of SBNI's Equality Scheme 2018 – 2023

September 2023

Any request for the document in another format or language will be considered

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1. Introduction

Like all public bodies, the SBNI has committed to reviewing its Equality Scheme under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) every five years. Ultimately, the purpose of the review is to take learning and set direction for the coming years by critically evaluating the way the organisation has implemented Section 75 over the past five years.

The review is a process of self-assessment. As specified by Equality Commission guidance¹, the review involves looking at what has been achieved, what remains to be done, and lessons learned. It should be based on evidence. The guidance states that the collection and consideration of additional quantitative and qualitative data may be necessary, alongside use of existing information from previous Annual Progress Reports on the implementation of Section 75.

This report presents the key findings from the review. Background information on the organisation and the methodology of the review is included in the opening section. The scope and structure of the concluding section is designed to cover the Equality Commission's requirements in relation to a summary of the main findings.

2. Background

2.1 The Organisation

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how relevant partners will co-operate and work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland, and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they do.

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 preventing the impairment of children and young people's health and development, ensuring they grow up safely and securely and are provided with effective care, all of which collectively enable them to attain greater success in adulthood. Safeguarding also extends to protecting children and young people from abuse or neglect, when it occurs, including the promotion and protection of children and young people's rights.

¹ Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2016): Guidance on conducting a 5 year review of an equality scheme.

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

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

Further detail of the membership, functions and procedures are provided for in the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (Membership, Procedure, Functions and Committee) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (the SBNI Regulations as amended). 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 Health 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 (DoH), the Public Health Agency, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Education Authority, District Councils, the Youth Justice Agency; the British Medical Association and the Children's Court Guardian Agency Northern Ireland. There is also representation from the voluntary sector from Action for Children, Barnardo's 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 and rights 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 strives to improve learning, enhance practice and ensure that children's voices are at the centre of all that is done by the organisations and professionals who together make up the child protection system.

By doing this, the SBNI believes that the system will work in a more coordinated and effective way and year on year children will be better protected and kept safer.

The objective of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland by coordinating the work and ensuring the effectiveness of each person or body represented on the SBNI Board.

The SBNI Board is supported by a small Central Support team comprising seven members of staff. The SBNI undertakes its aims and objectives through a series of committees and panels on areas like Child Protection, Child Sexual Exploitation, Domestic Violence & Abuse, Mental Health and Online Safety.

The SBNI also has five local area safeguarding panels co-terminus with the five trust boundaries, and a Case Management Review (CMR) Panel.

2.2 Review Methodology

This review was undertaken by the SBNI in partnership with the other regional HSC organisations, supported by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) Equality Unit. It involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The desk-top based collection of in-house data was undertaken, such as the collation of figures on training and equality screenings. The SBNI's Annual Progress Reports 2018-19 to 2021-22, as well as quarterly screenings reports for 2022-23, were key sources of data.

The Director of Operations and the Business Support Manager led on the completion of a self-assessment tool, which examined key areas of Section 75 implementation. Members of the various SBNI committees provided input into the completion of this tool.

A focus group was held by the Equality Unit on behalf of SBNI and its regional partner organisations with members of Tapestry, the staff disability network of the 11 regional HSC organisations.

The findings from a focus group with members of the Equality Forum, which brings together the equality leads in the 11 regional HSC organisations, were also taken into consideration in the review.

Interviews and a focus group were held with members of the Business Operations Team, to explore lessons learned, key priorities and actions for equality scheme implementation over the coming years.

Lessons learned and the key priorities and actions for Equality Scheme implementation over the coming years were discussed at the BSO Client Equality forum meeting, of which SBNI is represented.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Business Planning, Policy and Decision-Making and Governance

3.1.1 Business Planning

The SBNI's strategic plan references its corporate values that directly impact on what we do and how we do it. One value, namely 'We are open, honest and transparent in our dealings with children and young people, our members, partners and staff and we respect diversity and promote equality in all that we do', outlines our commitment to act with integrity, transparency and objectivity, promoting a culture of equality and diversity.

The Plan also refers to SBNI's commitment to the promotion of good relations between people of differing religious belief, political opinion and, or racial group.

One objective within its Business Plan outlines how SBNI will meet its Equality and Disability Legislative requirements including the implementation of its Equality and Disability Action Plans 2018-23, reporting of progress in the Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission NI and undertaking a five-year Review of its Equality Scheme.

3.1.2 Reporting

Equality is a standing agenda item at all SBNI Business Operations Meetings (held a minimum of six times per year) as well as safeguarding and non-statutory committees, at which committee members come together, and includes updates on screenings undertaken and those still required. SBNI Committee members are kept informed of equality issues at regular meetings, including policy development and screening of same. Equality is also a standing item on all case management review reports. In addition, Equality assurance is reported to the Board twice yearly.

The SBNI prepares an annual return which is forwarded to the Equality Unit for collation and forms part of the Equality, Good Relations and Disability Duties Annual Progress Report.

On the corporate side, records are kept of corporate policies and procedures which have been developed and reviewed, in addition to any screenings required. Updates in relation to these are given at SBNI's Business Operations meetings, and are also referred to / discussed and approved as part of the equality standing item at Team meetings.

SBNI has recently reviewed its process for the development, adoption and approval of corporate policies and procedures. When a draft policy is being presented for approval, it will be accompanied by an explanatory cover note for Board members outlining the background of the policy and as appropriate include details of equality screening undertaken, by whom and a summary of impacts on Section 75 groups and mitigations put in place. This process will ensure that Board members are aware of any equality issues prior to approval of policies.

The SBNI's Annual Progress Report includes a summary of Equality and Human Rights Equality Screening and Mitigation – this report is discussed and approved by SBNI's Board for forwarding to ECNI and is published on SBNI's main website.

3.1.3 Policy and Decision-Making

The SBNI is committed to equality screening all policies and decisions. However, this remains a challenge for an organisation with such a low number of employees. In recent years SBNI has made a concerted

effort to increase the number of policies and project plans being screened and published.

The SBNI's Business Plan is equality screened each year and an annual screening programme developed as an appendix. This is shared with relevant senior staff to ensure, where needed, projects and work streams are individually screened.

In addition, where required, policies to support projects and work streams and their outcomes are also developed and screened by business operations team staff.

In terms of corporate governance and how the SBNI meets its statutory and non-statutory functions, equality is an integral part of this as a business plan output.

The list of policies screened between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2023 (see Appendix1) shows that:

- in total 6 policies were subjected to screening
- 3 of these related to corporate affairs
- 3 policies related to specific SBNI functions

From early 2020, and as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Health and Social Care services were significantly reconfigured to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The SBNI has supported the Department of Health and Public Health Agency and reviewed its priorities in order to support the HSC from the outset of the pandemic. In response to the pandemic, a number of standard operational procedures were developed and equality screened where appropriate.

While, in carrying out its functions, the SBNI produces outcomes for all of the Section 75 groups (see Section 3.5), fulfilling the specific duties under Section 75 remains a challenge, specifically in relation to equality screening. Engagement with senior staff in the course of the review has underlined certain preconceptions in relation to equality proofing, Namely, the questions of ownership and responsibility of a policy or piece of work which SBNI may take a facilitator or support role whilst not actually owning the piece of work.

3.1.4 Lessons Learned

- In relation to project and work stream planning, the SBNI has put in place governance arrangements that have shown some success in progressing the mainstreaming of equality considerations. Likewise, the development of an annual screening programme as a result of the yearly screening of the SBNI's business plan is an asset from a governance perspective. This needs to be built on.

3.1.5 Looking Ahead

- We will continue with the development of an annual screening programme based on Business Plan objectives, planned projects and work streams. We will introduce the requirement to report to senior management on progress on undertaking identified screenings.
- To ensure that decision-makers are fully informed of equality issues prior to taking decisions, when a draft policy is being presented for approval, it will be accompanied by an explanatory cover note for Committee members/senior managers outlining the background of the policy and include details of equality screening undertaken, by whom and a summary of impacts on Section 75 groups and mitigations put in place

3.2 Monitoring, Access to Information and Services

As per the SBNI's statutory role and functions, it leads and facilitates various projects and work streams on behalf of the Public Health Agency (its sponsor branch) in partnership with key stakeholders including HSC Trusts and other HSC organisations. This work is usually linked to regional and/or national policy changes. A lot of the monitoring of access/uptake/participation, experience and outcomes for service users therefore is outside of SBNI's authority.

Primary stakeholder engagement is with Children and young people and their caregivers with whom the SBNI is legally obligated to engage, communicate, listen and respond to what they say. They must be involved in all of our activity. All training and stakeholder engagement and consultation is evaluated in terms of impact on changing culture, knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In relation to events that we organise, the SBNI's Accessible Formats Policy ensures that information can be provided in alternative formats on request

and ensures that venues, information and the way the SBNI conducts its meetings are accessible.

Evaluations following some SBNI events, such as our regular engagement events, are reviewed for equality issues, including access.

SBNI has access to a number of equality data sources, e.g. Census, NI HSC Workforce Census and the Human Resources system used across the HSC (for equality and diversity data for staff). Data from these sources are used, as and where applicable, in the screening of the SBNI policies and decisions.

However, there are limitations to the data available. For example, as the SBNI has an extremely small core central support team (7 staff) it makes equality monitoring data could easily identify a staff member. Also, the completion of the equality and diversity information on the Human Resources system is voluntary and whilst staff are encouraged to do so, data has become less informative.

Equality monitoring for SBNI staff is carried out by self-completion on our Human Resources IT system in relation to all nine equality categories. Summary equality data for the organisation as a whole is downloaded and reviewed quarterly. The most up to date data is shared with staff conducting equality screenings.

Prompts to encourage staff to do so are sent to all SBNI staff regularly. In addition, the benefits for both staff and the organisation of good quality equality data are highlighted at relevant staff events, such as our Disability Awareness Days.

Despite these efforts, completion rates as a whole (across all regional HSC organisations) have not improved for the categories of dependents, sexual orientation, political opinion, ethnicity and disability in particular. Non-completion levels for the above remain at 55-90% (61% for disability). More robust staff data is necessary to inform the equality screening of relevant policies and decisions. More robust data would help fully inform the equality screening of relevant policies and decisions.

3.2.1 Lessons Learned

- The quality of the equality data sets that we most need to draw on for our work has significant limitations.
- There is a lack of equality monitoring undertaken to date of policies equality screened previously. This has an impact on the ability to

improve the equality evidence base, and subsequently improve service provision.

3.2.2 Looking Ahead

- We will continue to reassure and encourage staff to complete equality and diversity information to strengthen the data.
- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others to seek the expansion of equality monitoring of and of those we safeguard within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the various committees, and other officers and their forums.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear at our events we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and SBNI Surveys.

3.3 Engagement

Membership of the various project or working groups are usually comprised of representatives from SBNI's member and partner agencies, e.g. HSC Trusts, the Public Health Agency, and the community, voluntary and independent sectors.

Internally, the SBNI has its Business Operations meeting to share the work of professional staff in the SBNI. A staff team meeting is also held every month. The SBNI has also developed an engagement strategy and follows specific protocols for communicating with children and young people such as the use of Makaton and tailoring information to specific age groups. Statutory committees and task and finish groups meet and work to fulfil objectives in the SBNI's Annual Business Plan and Strategic Plan. SBNI also engage with academia and bring research into practice working with universities locally, nationally and internationally. Engagement is key for the SBNI and liaising with private sector organisations for information and support in areas such as online safety.

As a member of the Equality Forum of the 11 regional HSC organisations, the SBNI has access to some Section 75 groups via its consultation database,

which has been used to consult with on the development of Human Resources (HR) policies, e.g. Gender Identity Employment Policy. The SBNI also has access to other HSC forums, such as Tapestry Disability Staff Forum, to engage and consult with on a range of employment and service issues. To date, the latter has not been approached by the Business Services Organisation (BSO), who provide HR services to the SBNI, as a matter of course in the development of HR policies.

The SBNI has developed an Engagement Strategy. It identifies a range of methods that are used for internal and external engagement – these include staff induction, annual appraisal, internal meetings, health and social wellbeing committee and events, project/working groups, focus groups, online surveys and via social media, project newsletters, SBNI websites, and road shows.

The SBNI work streams are co-produced with a range of relevant stakeholders particular to the subject area. Co-production with children and young people is an important part of the SBNI's work with stakeholders, appropriately addressing accessibility issues to support and encourage full partnership in decision making. For example, CSE has been co-produced since 2013 and is constantly reviewed and updated. Part of this work included a co-designed "shout out" campaign and review which was cross community and young people produced animations and re-focused the message. Young people are involved directly in our strategic plans, influenced our social media policy and consultation and engagement events are held before consulting with professionals.

3.3.1 Lessons Learned

- Where we offer opportunities for individuals to be involved in our work we do not currently know which equality groupings the individuals belong to. Without this information and without targeting any particular equality groupings to encourage them to become involved we cannot be sure that we hear a diverse range of voices. However, the majority of those involved in our work are employed by other HSC employers, who gather the data for these individuals and may not be willing or able to share the data without their consent or due to UK GDPR regulations on the sharing of personal data.
- While dedicated staff forums on disability, sexual orientation and gender identity exist within the HSC, these have not been engaged with in the development of Human Resources policies as a matter of course.

3.3.2 Looking Ahead

- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and SBNI Surveys.
- We will seek assurance from the BSO, our provider of Human Resources services, that engagement with the existing staff forums has been undertaken for any policies they develop on our behalf.

3.4 Ensuring SBNI staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

Whilst the new regional HSC template for Job Descriptions and Personnel Specifications no longer makes reference to the Section 75 duties, all existing SBNI job descriptions include a general statement to 'assist SBNI in the fulfilment of its statutory duty under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and also the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Order 2007.

In addition, and in line with the responsibilities of specific posts, some job descriptions have more explicit references to Section 75 responsibilities and duties such as the Chief Executive, Director of Operations and Business Support Manager.

Equality is not currently included in annual development and performance process with their line manager. However, equality is covered as part of the Business Operations Meetings and 1-1s with line managers. This includes discussions of ongoing challenges and solutions for equality screening.

For key members of staff, e.g. the Director of Operations and the Business Support Manager, objectives reflect their role in the implementation of the equality agenda.

Over the past five years, the SBNI has put robust arrangements in place to ensure that staff complete equality training:

- Completion of the Making a Difference² equality e-learning programme is mandatory for all staff (Part 1 for all staff, Part 2 for line managers).
- This training is one of our actions within our Equality and Disability Action Plans,
- Mandatory training requirements forms part of SBNI's induction programme for all staff. Compliance with all mandatory e-learning programmes is monitored by line managers and updates provided to SBNI's Business Team on a regular basis.

These have proven effective, given that as at 31st March 2023, 6 staff had completed this programme, which is 86% of all our staff.

Moreover, 57% members of staff completed equality screening training over the past five years and 18 committee members attended Equality Awareness Training.

In addition to this, bespoke update sessions and consultancy from the Equality Unit is organised on a case-by-case needs basis.

3.4.1 Lessons Learned

- Reference to the Section 75 duties in all Job Descriptions is essential for making equality everybody's business in the organisation.

3.4.2 Looking Ahead

- We will seek advice from the BSO Human Resources and Equality Services as to whether reference to the Section 75 duties should be reintegrated into the template used for all new Job Descriptions.

3.5 Outcomes

In relation to the workplace, the SBNI has made some progress in identifying and seeking to raise awareness of the needs of staff and key stakeholders within Section 75 groups, through mandatory completion of 'Making a Difference' equality e-learning programme and 'Discovering Diversity' training. In addressing some of these, staff awareness days have proved to be effective in increasing awareness, knowledge and skills of staff and line managers in meeting the needs of colleagues and key stakeholders with a disability. Tapestry (disability staff network) has also given a platform to staff

² The programme was developed jointly by all HSC organisations. Prior to the introduction of this, it had been mandatory for staff to undertake the Discovering Diversity eLearning, again a bespoke package, developed in-house.

who have a disability to raise and discuss disability issues in a safe environment.

In relation to sexual orientation, establishment of the HSC LGB&T Staff Forum and adoption of the regional Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy has raised awareness of issues affecting this group – further work is required however and this will include providing training for staff and line managers in implementing the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy.

Some work to look and consider issues affecting staff with dependents and / or caring responsibilities has taken place including issuing of information on support and help available in NI, production of a carers information leaflet and the development of a Carer's Survey which all HSC organisations conducted with their staff in 2021/22.

Issues affecting all staff, and in particular those with dependents and/or caring responsibilities and disabilities, will remain a priority. Some feedback received during COVID-19, and a home working survey of BSO staff and Tapestry members, highlighted that staff do have caring responsibilities in these areas. Feedback such as this, and from individuals, could help inform what action is required to support staff now and at any time this is needed in the future.

The SBNI has continued to encourage all staff to complete their equality and diversity information on HRPTS as a means of ensuring complete data and understanding of what is required to support staff. Completion of this information is voluntary - some staff have expressed unease at providing such information for fear of being 'identified' in such a small organisation, and some are unsure of the importance or need for this information. However, the SBNI will continue to reassure staff, emphasising their information is completely confidential and is important in ensuring the organisation can support all staff and take appropriate action to improve work policies and practices.

The SBNI has been liaising with the Leadership Centre to look at implementing a staff development programme and formalising how we work and what our needs are as staff and as an organisation. This will include assessing how we interact and treat each other in relation to staff and service users from the section 75 groups and how we manage that.

A review of the equality screening process and the project methodology and process has identified possible impacts in terms of access to meetings and information and cite mitigations such as:

- use of Accessible Formats Policy and regional interpreting/translation contract (age, disability, ethnicity)
- flexibility in location/time of meetings (gender/dependents)
- use of neutral venues (religion/political opinion)
- use of approved HR recruitment processes (reasonable adjustments).

3.5.1 Lessons Learned

- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to produce outcomes for staff. We want to build on this to widen the focus to include other equality groupings.

3.5.2 Looking Ahead

- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of those we work to safeguard within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the various SBNI committees and other groups and their forums.
- We will work in partnership with other HSC organisations in providing training to our staff and line managers in implementing the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our committees/groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and SBNI Surveys.

3.6 Leadership

The SBNI's Director of Operations is the equality lead and, supported by the Business Support Manager, acts as the main driver for the equality agenda. SBNI is a member of the HSC Equality Forum facilitated by BSO's Equality Unit, who meet on a quarterly basis to share good practice in the implementation of Section 75 and to plan joint work. At a strategic level, the

BSO's Equality Unit represents member organisations on a number of regional groups, reporting back to the Forum as and where required. The equality lead engages with the Equality Commission at key points.

SBNI Committee members are kept informed of Equality issues at their regular meetings, providing comment and feedback.

Members of SBNI's Business Team are involved in Section 75 implementation in a number of ways:

- Annual progress reporting: scrutiny of progress and direction setting for the coming year
- Discussion and where required taking action on Equality Scheme issues brought to the team through any of SBNI's workstreams or committees and the BSO's Equality Unit
- Equality screening of annual Business Plan and development of screening programme
- Equality and Disability Action Plans: consideration of progress reported to them on an annual basis and what additional steps are required to achieve these.

Senior managers play an important role by:

- Contributing to annual progress reporting by identifying relevant initiatives in their area of responsibility
- Undertaking screening of projects and work streams where appropriate in discussion with and assisted by the Business Support Manager
- Ensuring training attendance of relevant staff
- Contributing to Equality and Disability Action Plans, achieving actions outlined within timescales agreed.

In the main, the SBNI provides active leadership externally by seeking to use its influence on other organisations: equality screenings are shared with the Department of Health and/or the respective HSC organisation who has asked the SBNI to facilitate the programme of work.

Implementation of the Equality and Disability Action Plans is primarily managed by the Business Support Manager (as the equality lead) and led by the Director of Operations, but individual actions require participation and involvement of all staff.

Visibly promoting and celebrating diversity constitutes a further key aspect of active leadership on Section 75 implementation. For example, two disability awareness days are organised each year and all staff are encouraged to participate in these, read information provided, attend information sessions etc. Details of the HSC Tapestry Disability Staff Forum are also shared with

staff, who are encouraged and facilitated to attend meetings within their working day.

3.6.1 Lessons Learned

- Active Section 75 implementation over the last five years has been led and supported by the Business Support Manager across the organisation. The Business Operations Team is a good fit from a reporting and governance perspective and it is essential there continues to be active ownership of the equality and diversity agenda across the organisation.
- Getting the timing right is important in relation to influencing senior decision-makers and creating and maintaining a culture of equality and diversity.
- Working in close partnership with the other 10 regional HSC organisations through the Equality Forum produces important benefits for small organisations in particular, including access to resources and prompts on deadlines. Likewise, awareness of progress across partner organisations can strengthen arguments of the need to bring about progress in one's own organisation. There remains scope for strengthening of sharing of good practice across the forum to enable the organisations to learn from each other.
- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to visibly promote and celebrate diversity. We want to build on this to widen the focus to include other equality groupings.
- Our role in identifying and promoting best practice in safeguarding provides a unique opportunity to visibly promote equality and diversity.

3.6.2 Looking Ahead

- We will highlight and demonstrate our commitment to the equality and diversity agenda to new leaders, such as Committee members, when they join, including through training.
- The Equality Forum will dedicate more time to the sharing of good practice initiatives at its quarterly meetings.

- Over the next five years, we will widen our efforts to draw attention to equality and diversity issues relating to ethnicity and race in the first instance.

4. Conclusions

4.1 How has the scheme's implementation benefitted individuals within the Section 75 groups?

In relation to the workplace, the SBNI has made progress in identifying and seeking to address the needs of staff and candidates with a disability. Staff awareness days have proved to be effective in increasing awareness, knowledge and skills of staff and line managers in meeting the needs of colleagues with a particular disability. In addition, Tapestry has given a platform to staff who have a disability to raise and discuss disability issues in a safe environment.

The SBNI facilitates and leads programmes of work in partnership with the DoH, HSC Trusts and other regional HSC Organisations to deliver regionally agreed professional resources and tools, which are subsequently implemented by these stakeholder partners. The impact on Section 75 groups within the safeguarding board and workforce in implementing these may not be fully known.

4.2 How are leaders within the authority engaged in the scheme's implementation?

The SBNI's Director of Operations is the equality lead and, supported by the Business Support Manager, acts as the main driver for the equality agenda.

The SBNI Committee members and senior managers are kept informed of Equality issues at their regular meetings, providing comment and feedback, and approving the Annual Progress Report.

Members of the SBNI's Business Operations Team are involved in Section 75 implementation in a number of ways:

- Annual progress reporting: scrutiny of progress and direction setting for the coming year
- Discussion and where required taking action on Equality Scheme issues brought to the team by committee members, staff members and the BSO's Equality Unit
- Equality screening of annual Business Plan and development of screening programme

- Equality and Disability Action Plans: consideration of progress reported to them on an annual basis and what additional steps are required to achieve these.

Senior managers play an important role by:

- Contributing to annual progress reporting by identifying relevant initiatives in their area of responsibility
- Undertaking screening of projects and work streams in discussion with and assisted by the Business Support Manager
- Ensuring training attendance of relevant staff
- Contributing to Equality and Disability Action Plans, achieving actions outlined within timescales agreed.

4.3 Challenges and how they have been overcome

The key challenge over the past five years was the integration of equality considerations in all core work of the organisation, which in many ways is the key challenge in implementing Section 75 overall. Whilst it cannot be argued that this challenge was fully overcome during the period covered by the review, important progress has been made, first and foremost by seeking to integrate equality into structures and processes, both those already in existence and those created primarily for other purposes, such as:

- Making equality a standing agenda item at regular meetings of the Business Operations Team, Integrating a section on equality screening in all Project/Initiative Plan templates
- Integrating equality into the process for the development, adoption, approval and review of corporate policies and procedures.

4.4 Good Practice

Beyond the measures identified in the previous section, the disability awareness days represent good practice, in the main by focusing on the lived experience of people within individual equality categories and on how staff can best support their colleagues belonging to these.

4.5 Lessons Learned

4.5.1 Business Planning, Policy and Decision-Making, and Governance

- In relation to project and work stream planning, the SBNI has put in place governance arrangements that have shown some success in

progressing the mainstreaming of equality considerations. Likewise, the development of an annual screening programme as a result of the screening of SBNI's Business Plan is an asset from a governance perspective.

4.5.2 Monitoring, Access to Information and Services

- The quality of the equality data sets that we most need to draw on for our work has significant limitations.

4.5.3 Engagement

- Where we offer opportunities for individuals to be involved in our work we do not currently know which equality groupings the individuals belong to. Without this information and without targeting any particular equality groupings to encourage them to become involved we cannot be sure that we hear a diverse range of voices. However, the majority of those involved in our work are also involved with other HSC organisations, who gather the data for these individuals and may not be willing or able to share the data without their consent or due to UK GDPR regulations on the sharing of personal data.
- While dedicated staff forums on disability, sexual orientation and gender identity exist within the HSC, these have not been engaged with in the development of Human Resources policies as a matter of course.

4.5.4 Ensuring SBNI staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

- Reference to the Section 75 duties in all Job Descriptions is essential for making equality everybody's business in the organisation.

4.5.5 Outcomes

- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to produce outcomes for staff. We want to build on this to widen the focus to include other equality groupings.

4.5.6 Leadership

- Active Section 75 implementation over the last five years has been led and supported by the Business Support Manager across the organisation. The Business Operations Team is a good fit from a reporting and governance perspective and it is essential there continues to be active ownership of the equality and diversity agenda across the organisation.
- Getting the timing right is important in relation to influencing senior decision-makers and creating and maintaining a culture of equality and diversity.
- Working in close partnership with the other 10 regional HSC organisations through the Equality Forum produces important benefits for small organisations in particular, including access to resources and prompts on deadlines. Likewise, awareness of progress across partner organisations can strengthen arguments of the need to bring about progress in one's own organisation. There remains scope for strengthening of sharing good practice across the forum to enable the organisations to learn from each other.
- To date, we have mainly focused on disability in our efforts to visibly promote and celebrate diversity.
- Our role in identifying and promoting best practice in safeguarding provides a unique opportunity to visibly promote equality and diversity.

4.6 Going Forward

4.6.1 Business Planning, Policy and Decision-Making, and Governance

- We will continue with the development of an annual screening programme based on Business Plan objectives, planned projects and work streams. We will introduce the requirement to report to the Business Operations Team on a regular basis on progress on undertaking identified screenings.
- To ensure that decision-makers are fully informed of equality issues prior to taking decisions, when a draft policy is being presented for approval, it will be accompanied by an explanatory cover note for Committee members/senior managers outlining the background of the policy and include details of equality screening undertaken, by

whom and a summary of impacts on Section 75 groups and mitigations put in place.

4.6.2 Monitoring, Access to Information and Services

- We will further encourage staff to complete equality and diversity information to strengthen the data.
- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others in our various committees in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of those we safeguard within Northern Ireland.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear at our events we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and SBNI Surveys.

4.6.3 Engagement

- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and SBNI Surveys.
- We will seek assurance from the BSO, our provider of Human Resources services, that engagement with the existing staff forums has been undertaken for any policies they develop on our behalf.

4.6.4 Ensuring SBNI staff assist the organisation in implementing Section 75

- We will seek advice from the BSO Human Resources and Equality Services as to whether reference to the Section 75 duties should be reintegrated into the template used for all new Job Descriptions.

4.6.5 Outcomes

- To improve the quality of available equality data sets, we will use our influence with others in order to seek expansion of equality monitoring of those we safeguard within Northern Ireland. We will engage with the SBNI committees, and other officers and their forums.
- We will work in partnership with other HSC organisations in providing training to our staff and line managers in implementing the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy.
- In order to better gauge how diverse the voices are that we hear in our project groups we will:
 - benchmark what other HSC organisations have done to improve engagement with Section 75 groups, and how they collect equality/diversity information of service users involved in their work
 - pilot collecting equality/diversity information on a voluntary basis as part of our online events booking system and SBNI Surveys.

4.6.6 Leadership

- We will highlight and demonstrate our commitment to the equality and diversity agenda to new leaders, such as Committee members, when they join, including through training.
- The Equality Forum will dedicate more time to the sharing of good practice initiatives at its quarterly meetings.
- Over the next five years, we will widen our efforts to draw attention to equality and diversity issues relating to ethnicity and race in the first instance.

Appendix 1

List of policies equality screened from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2023

Year	Policy Title	Decision
2018-19	Final Equality and Disability Action Plans	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online: an e-Safety Strategy and Three Year Action Plan for Northern Ireland 2019 – 2022	Screened out with mitigation
2019-20	Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland (SBNI) Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) Trauma Informed Practice Workforce Development Project	Screened out with mitigation
2021-22	Business Plan 2021-22	Screened out with mitigation
2021-22	SBNI Strategy for Engaging with Children and Young People	Screened out with mitigation
2022-23	SBNI Business Plan 2022-23	Screened out with mitigation