

67th Meeting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Wednesday 11 June 2025

2.05pm– 4.30pm

MS Teams

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

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

Name	Title & Organisation	Present	Apology
Ms Bernie McNally	Independent Chair Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland	✓	
Dr Tom Cassidy	Director of Women & Children's Services, WHSCT	✓	
Dr Naoimh White	GP representative of N.I. General Practice Committee	✓	
Ms Bronagh Muldoon	NSPCC Head of Services NI	✓	
Ms Mary Aughey	Director of Woodlands JJC, YJA	✓	
D/Chief Superintendent Zoe McKee	Detective Chief Superintendent, Public Protection Branch, PSNI	✓	
Ms Amanda Stewart	CEO, Probation Board NI	✓	
Ms Natalie Whelehan	Chief Executive Children in Northern Ireland	✓	
Ms Una Turbitt	Assistant Director of Pupil Wellbeing and Protection, EANI		✓
Mr Colin Reid	Head of Safeguarding, EANI (deputising OBO Ms Una Turbitt)	✓	
Dr Ciara McKillop	Director of Hospital and Community Care and Social Services, SPPG		✓
Ms Pamela Mooney	Social Work Lead for Family Support and Safeguarding, SPPG (deputising OBO Dr Ciara McKillop)	✓	
Ms Lyn Preece	Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work, SEHSCT		✓

Mr Maurice Largey	Assistant Director of Fostering, Adoption, Permanence, Children's Disability and SET Connects (deputising OBO Ms Lyn Preece)	✓	
Mr Colm McCafferty	Director of Children & Young People's Services and Executive Director of Social Work, SHSCT	✓	
Dr Joanne McClean	Director of Public Health, PHA		✓
Ms Heather Reid	Interim Director of Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions, PHA		✓
Ms Emily Roberts	Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and Young People, PHA	✓	
Ms Alicia Toal	Chief Executive Officer, VOYPIC	✓	
Ms Maura Dargan	Director of Women, Children & Families Division/Executive Director of Social Work, NHSCT		✓
Ms Tracy Magill	Interim Executive Director of Social Work/Director of Children's and Young People's Services (deputising OBO Ms Maura Dargan)	✓	
Ms Michele Janes	Director of Barnardo's NI	✓	
Ms Kerrylee Weatherall	Interim Director of Children's Community Services, BHSCT	✓	
Mr Philip O'Hara	Interim Director and DLP, Down & Connor Safeguarding Office representing the SBNI Interfaith Committee	✓	
Ms Edel McKenna	Chief Executive Officer, Children's Court Guardian Agency Northern Ireland	✓	
Ms Angela McCann	Director of Environmental Services, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council		✓
Mr Richard Harvey	Head of Service, Environmental Services, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council		✓
Mr Andrew Thomson	Independent Chair of the CMR Panel	✓	
Ms Mary Rafferty	Independent Safeguarding Panel Chair, Western and Northern areas	✓	

Mr David Douglas	Interim Independent Safeguarding Panel Chair, Belfast and Southern areas	✓	
Mr Simon Rogers	Non-Executive (Lay) Member	✓	
Mr Gerard Guckian	Non-Executive (Lay) Member	✓	
In Attendance			
Ms Alex McCoy	Board Secretary SBNI		
Ms Teresa McAllister	Interim Director of Operations SBNI		
Dr Jacqui Montgomery Devlin	Professional Officer SBNI		
Ms Deirdre Grant	Professional Officer SBNI		
Ms Sheila Simons	Interim Professional Officer SBNI		
Ms Sarah Mason	Chief Executive Officer, Women's Aid		
Professor Colm Walsh	Presenter for "A Review of Child Criminal Exploitation and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland: Elevated Risk, Uneven Response", Queen's University Belfast		

Summary of Actions

Action No.	Action:	To be completed by:
1	The chair to report back to the September Board in respect of progress on the consultation on the SBNI Strategic Plan.	Chair
2	The “A Review of Child Criminal Exploitation and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland: Elevated Risk, Uneven Response” Report to be disseminated to members.	Board Secretary
3	The Education Authority Child Protection Support Service Annual Report 2023-2024 to be disseminated to Board members.	Board Secretary
4	PSNI to retrieve statistics, if available, on referrals generated within ‘Operation Encompass’ relating to ‘child on parent abuse’.	D/Chief Superintendent Zoe McKee
5	NI Affairs Committee, Westminster – Board members to forward to the chair any issues or suggestions to be considered when the chair attends the hearing on 02 July 2025.	All members

Summary of Board Approval

The minutes from the Board Meeting on 16 April 2025 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
The proposed provision of a deputy to attend a of a Child Protection Registration Stage 2 Appeal Panel was approved.
The Finance End of Year Report was approved.
The 2026 Board Meeting dates were approved.

Preliminaries: Apologies, Quorum, Conflict of Interest, Complaints

The chair welcomed SBNI members to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Ms Una Turbitt, Dr Ciara McKillop, Ms Lyn Preece, Dr Joanne McClean, Ms Heather Reid, Ms Maura Dargan and Ms Angela McCann. The chair noted that Mr Colin Reid is deputising on behalf of Ms Una Turbitt, Ms Pamela Mooney is deputising on behalf of Dr Ciara McKillop, Mr Maurice Largey is deputising on behalf of Ms Lyn Preece and Ms Tracy Magill is deputising on behalf of Ms Maura Dargan. The chair advised that Ms Magill is Interim Director in the NHSCT, whilst Ms Dargan is off. She will act as Board member until Ms Dargan's return. The chair further noted that Mr Colin Reid is leaving the Education Authority (EA) on 04 July 2025. She wished Mr Reid well in the next phase of his career and thanked him for his service.

Conflict of Interest

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

Complaints

The chair advised that no complaints have been received.

Chair's Business

The chair advised that Ms Teresa McAllister has been appointed as SBNI Interim Director of Operations, while Ms Helen McKenzie is off. In addition, the chair welcomed Ms Sheila Simons. She advised that Ms Simons has joined the SBNI for 4 days per month to assist with committee delivery. The chair further reported that the SBNI has made some progress with the Public Health Agency (PHA) and Department of Health (DoH) in respect of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which sets out the PHA responsibility for the SBNI's corporate hosting arrangements, recruitment of staff and management of finance. There had been some debate around the recruitment of staff, but an agreement has now been reached in respect of same. This means that the recruitment process for the permanent Professional Officer post has now commenced, and is being undertaken within the PHA through an internal trawl in the first instance, as is a requirement of the PHA and Trade Unions.

The chair further thanked all members for their attendance and contribution at the SBNI Board Development Day on 14 May 2025. She advised that information gathered

from Board Development Day has now been used to create a document, which will be used in the consultation with children, young people, parents and carers. A more formal public consultation process on the SBNI Strategic Plan 2026-2030 will commence thereafter, and it is hoped that this will be presented at the December Board for approval.

ACTION 1 – The chair to report back to the September Board in respect of progress on the Consultation on the SBNI Strategic Plan

The chair advised that a social media ‘Sextortion Campaign’ has been developed in conjunction with the SBNI and PSNI. This campaign will be launched in July 2025. In addition, the SBNI Online Safety Coordinator, Ms Orla O’Hagan attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace in May 2025 in recognition of her work on the Online Safety Strategy. The chair offered her congratulations to Ms O’Hagan on this excellent achievement.

1 67/25P Previous Minutes

- 1.1 Members agreed the minutes from the last Board meeting on 16 April 2025 as a factual and accurate representation of the meeting.

2 67/25P Matters Arising

- 2.1 Complete
- 2.2 Complete
- 2.3 Complete

3 67/25P A Review of Child Criminal Exploitation and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland: Elevated Risk, Uneven Response (Please refer to Board Paper BM67-06.25P1)

- 3.1 The chair invited D/Chief Superintendent McKee, to introduce the presentation on the Review of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland.

- 3.2 D/Chief Superintendent McKee introduced Dr Colm Walsh to the membership of the SBNI Board. She noted that Dr Walsh has undertaken research and produced a report titled “A Review of Child Criminal Exploitation and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland: Elevated Risk, Uneven Response”. This report investigates the prevalence, context, and organisational readiness to address CCE in Northern Ireland, drawing on research evidence, spatial data analysis, and a survey of 85 professionals.

ACTION 2 – The “A Review of Child Criminal Exploitation and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland: Elevated Risk, Uneven Response” Report to be disseminated to members.

- 3.3 Dr Walsh delivered a PowerPoint presentation in respect of the ‘Review of CCE and Organisational Readiness in Northern Ireland’. He advised that this work takes cognisance of key findings from previous research on CCE, considering what is known about the risk factors and drivers and where professionals can expect to find concentrations of CCE, as well as to consider the readiness of organisations to respond to this risk. Methodologically, the report maps CCE risk factors in specific communities, particularly Belfast, Derry City and Strabane. These areas consistently show overlapping vulnerabilities, including education underachievement, youth density, deprivation, violent crime, and paramilitary activity, factors which heighten the risk of exploitation. Feedback from professionals following completion of the organisational readiness survey reflects systemic issues around clarity of protocols, role designation, and access to training and supervision. Dr Walsh advised current systems in place are fragmented, underdeveloped and inconsistently applied across sectors.
- 3.4 The chair thanked Dr Walsh for an excellent presentation on a very interesting piece of work.
- 3.5 Mr Cassidy also thanked Dr Walsh for an excellent presentation. He enquired as to whether the research showed the prevalence of children and young

people who are exploited by paramilitary organisations, or whether in the context of Northern Ireland, there was a reluctance to respond given the prevalence of paramilitary organisations in these specific areas and family attitudes in respect of same. He sought clarity as to whether this was perceived as a barrier to organisations in terms of their overall response to CCE. Dr Walsh advised that, whilst this has been present in previous studies, the survey given in this particular report was framed in terms of organisational readiness, rather than in relation to the barriers of practitioners. He accepts that there are absolutely concerns in organisations, particularly in respect of personal safety and this will impact on decisions that are taken. He reported that a comparative study has been undertaken between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in relation to CCE, and there are some contextual differences indicated within this study. Furthermore, information is included in the literature review of this report in respect of family attitudes and how this can impact those young people who may be at risk of CCE. Ms Grant added that there has been a number of multiagency workshops undertaken in relation to CCE, and the issue of family attitudes and personal safety were raised at these workshops. Work, including a Safety Workshop, is to be undertaken by the CE Committee in respect of same..

- 3.6 D/Chief Superintendent McKee advised that the PSNI is in the process of reviewing its own organisational readiness for responding to CCE, given that it is now reporting against this area. She feels that this presentation has been exceedingly helpful, and thanked Dr Walsh for his input.
- 3.7 The chair reported that it is not surprising that the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, where criminal behaviour is prevalent, are most at risk of CCE.
- 3.8 In terms of work to be undertaken following this report, Ms Grant advised that the CE Committee are working to develop an accredited Risk Assessment Tool. This will be codesigned with Dr Walsh and a number of other agencies. A number of workshops are to be undertaken in relation to this Risk Assessment Tool. Furthermore, the Committee is currently in the process of developing CCE

Guidance, which will be used to influence training materials. The training material will be used to raise awareness of CCE, and to equip staff in relation to how to respond to CCE and build capacity across their systems and organisations. Ms Grant advised that Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) has designed child friendly guidance in relation to CCE and its wider definition, as well as the CCE action plan. Service pathways are also being considered in relation to awareness raising, as well as how referrals can be made to the child protection system in respect of CCE and how these are subsequently responded to.

3.9 The chair enquired as to whether any learning gleaned in respect of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) can be used to influence work in the area of CCE. Ms Grant advised that the work undertaken in relation to CSE has been built upon, particularly in relation to the CSE toolkit as there are a number of commonalities between the two areas.

3.10 Ms Whelehan referenced the lower rates of educational engagement in areas cited within the report. She sought clarity as to whether work is being undertaken in respect of trying to increase this educational engagement. Dr Walsh advised that the purpose of this study was to gather an evidence base of all risk factors collectively, rather than to target specific interventions for specific individuals. The next challenge will be in relation to how these interventions and specialist support can be provided by organisations.

3.11 The chair thanked Dr Walsh for a very interesting and thought-provoking presentation.

4 67/25P Education Authority Child Protection Support Service Annual Report 2023-2024 (Please refer to Board Paper BM67-06.25P2)

4.1 The Chair welcomed Mr Colin Reid to present on the Education Authority (EA) Child Protection Support Service (CPSS) Annual Report 2023-2024.

- 4.2 Mr Reid delivered a PowerPoint presentation in respect of the EA CPSS Annual Report. He advised that the CPSS works regionally with all schools, Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) and the EA, supporting and leading in safeguarding and child protection. The CPSS facilitates the EA to fulfil its statutory functions as set out in legislation, regulations, and guidance. The service has 20 full-time and three part-time Designated Officers for Child Protection. The team has specialist knowledge of safeguarding practice in the context of education. Leadership is provided by a Head of Service who is supported by a senior manager. The CPSS operates an advice service to all of the education and youth service settings across Northern Ireland, including a total of 1200 schools. Mr Reid advised that calls to this CPSS helpline have doubled over the last 5 years, with 9101 calls received. Some of these calls are complex, and the volume of calls is unsustainable with the current staffing resource. Mr Reid further agreed that the CPSS Annual Report will be circulated to members following this meeting of the Board. In terms of moving forward, Mr Reid highlighted that it is his view that areas of interest will include radicalisation and extremism, the Education Safeguarding Forum, Elective Home Education, Children Missing from Education (CME), regulation of teachers and vetting and barring interfaces.

ACTION 3 – The Education Authority Child Protection Support Service Annual Report to be disseminated to Board members.

- 4.3 The chair thanked Mr Reid for an informative and interesting presentation, reflecting a comprehensive overview of the work that the CPSS is involved in and the complexities and volume of referrals.
- 4.4 D/Chief Superintendent McKee highlighted the Operation Encompass service, and stated that she believes this is an excellent scheme, but is currently somewhat marred by technical issues. However, these issues are nearing resolution and the scheme should be effectively in place on commencement of the next school year. There has been a significant resourcing impact on the PSNI, but it is hoped that this is also nearing resolution. The chair added that it

is reassuring that schools are supportive of Operation Encompass, and that feedback received has been positive.

- 4.5 Ms Mason updated members that the EA has asked Women's Aid to undertake a scoping survey and needs analysis of non-statutory Early Years Providers in relation to possible introduction of Operation Encompass into these settings, in order to understand the requirements of that sector.

This review concluded at Easter time, and Women's Aid continue to work with the EA to incorporate resources from the Social Action Youth (SAY) project in schools. Mr Reid added that the CPSS is aiming to make resources available to Trusts in respect of Operation Encompass, to enable rollout to non-statutory Early Years Providers, as rollout by the EA is challenging given current resourcing.

- 4.6 Ms Stewart referenced the issue of extremism and radicalisation of children and young people, particularly in light of the civil unrest occurring across Ballymena and surrounding areas, and the issues that this causes for newcomers and migrant children in schools. Mr Reid advised that the EA has set up an emergency response in respect of the ongoing riots, and is mindful of the trauma that is caused to families in Northern Ireland. He is mindful that the CPSS may receive an increased number of referrals in respect of these issues in their day-to-day case work.

- 4.7 Ms Simons sought clarity as to whether figures are available on referrals to Operation Encompass in relation to child on parent abuse, as she is mindful that there have been an increased number of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) received in relation to this type of abuse. D/Chief Superintendent McKee advised that a central spreadsheet of data is kept by the PSNI, but she is unsure if this information is available. Ms Aughey added that, anecdotally, the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) is seeing an increase in child on parent violence and non-fatal strangulation.

ACTION 4 – PSNI to retrieve statistics, if available, on referrals generated within ‘Operation Encompass’ relating to ‘child on parent abuse’.

- 4.8 Ms Janes thanked Mr Reid for an excellent presentation. She commented on the area of extremism and radicalisation of children and young people, referencing the recent civil unrest in Ballymena and surrounding areas. She congratulated the PSNI and the NHSCT on the excellent work they have undertaken to support the families affected. She noted that, whilst she is aware of the racism experienced by newcomers to Northern Ireland, there are also a lot of children born in Northern Ireland who may have a different ethnic background, and these families are also being targeted and are frightened in their homes and schools. In addition, Ms Janes expressed concern with the criminal exploitation of children, as the recent civil unrest has highlighted. She emphasised that consideration needs to be given by the Board in relation to these issues.
- 4.9 The chair reported that she has recently visited Fane Street Primary School and was extremely impressed by the work that they are undertaking, with a very culturally diverse population of pupils, with over 47 languages spoken by the children. Mr Reid agreed and noted that 92% of the pupils attending Fane Street Primary School do not speak English as their first language. He echoed that Fane Street Primary School is a beacon of good practice and compassion.
- 4.10 The chair thanked Mr Reid for an interesting and helpful presentation and thanked the CPSS for the excellent work that is being undertaken.

5 67/25P Child Protection Registration Stage 2 Appeal Panel Membership
(Please refer to Board Paper BM67-06.25P3)

- 5.1 The chair welcomed Ms Edel McKenna to present on the Child Protection Registration Stage 2 Appeal Panel Membership.

- 5.2 By way of context, Ms McKenna advised that, following a number of Judicial Review (JR) Proceedings on which the SBNI were co-joined in respect of 'Appeals of Child Protection Registration', combined with outworking recommendations from the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO), the SBNI Policy and Procedure Committee undertook a full revision of the 'Child Protection Registration Appeals Process'. This revision was approved by the SBNI Board in 2023. Since this time, SBNI has been joined to further JRs in respect of the Child Protection Registration Appeals Process, one of which is still ongoing. The Policy and Procedure Committee has therefore kept a watching brief on the implementation of the revised policy. Ms McKenna advised that the 'Child Protection Registration Appeals Process' is a two-stage process. The second stage requires the establishment of a three-person panel. She highlighted that the chair of this panel must be a member of the Local Area Safeguarding Panel, with knowledge and experience of the Child Protection Case Conference process, and this chair will be appointed by the local Assistant Director for Safeguarding in the relevant Trust area. In addition, the remaining two panel members should consist of senior managers from agencies other than that of the chairperson, and these members should also have knowledge and experience of the Child Protection Case Conference process. One panel member must be from Social Services, and no panel member should have been involved in the Child Protection Case Conference that prompted the appeal. Ms McKenna noted that participation in a Stage 2 Appeal Panel can be time and labour intensive within a restrictive and prescribed timeframe. The membership of the Local Area Safeguarding Panels has indicated that, at times, given the time commitment involved, they struggle to make themselves available to participate in the Stage 2 Appeal Panel. This is especially relevant for some smaller regional member agencies whose operational managers sit on several Local Area Safeguarding Panels. She reported that, during a recent training workshop, the Local Area Panels requested that consideration is given to allowing a 'deputy' with appropriate knowledge, skill and experience of the Child Protection Process to participate in the Child Protection Registration Appeals Second Stage Panel, and approval was sought from Board members in respect of same.

- 5.3 The chair sought clarity as to whether this deputy would be of the same grade as the Safeguarding Panel member, with the same level of knowledge and expertise on the Child Protection Case Conference process. Ms McKenna confirmed that the deputy would be of the same grade, and would be another senior manager within the organisation.
- 5.4 Mr Douglas advised that the workplans for Local Area Safeguarding Panels have included the provision of training and support to Appeal Panel members, and this means that they can approach the Independent Safeguarding Panel chair for mentoring and support as and when required. The approval of a deputy will be welcomed by Safeguarding Panel members.
- 5.5 The chair enquired as to whether other revisions to the Child Protection Registration Appeals process are working well. Ms McAllister advised that the biggest issue prevalent in some JRs is in relation to the request of a number of parents to have their records expunged when they have been successful in their appeal to overturn the original decision to register their child. This is something that the Policy and Procedure Committee is not wholly able to resolve, and this has been accepted by the High Court. Ms McAllister advised that the issue in expunging records is in relation to both the facility to do so given that records are held electronically, but also there is some debate that records should be held that an Initial Case Conference had been convened, but the decision making therein in respect of child protection registration, was eventually overturned upon appeal. The Policy and Procedure Committee has been liaising with representatives from each of the Trust areas in respect of the introduction of Encompass, and a temporary workaround has been developed, whereby a specific narrative will be added to the child's record. Furthermore, 'Civica' the company designing and delivering Encompass, is working to develop a facility to include a decision-making process into the new electronic system which is to be introduced to Children's Services. Ms McAllister further reported that, since the Appeals Process was revised, there have been no appeals received based on the areas that were subject to the revision. The only area subject to judication in the ongoing appeal is in relation to the request of the family to have an entire new Case Conference forum set up, with different

membership included. Senior Council have been appointed in respect of same, and this is currently being worked through. However, it is the view of the Policy and Procedure Committee that this is not possible.

- 5.6 Ms McAllister advised that a data analysis exercise has been carried out in respect of the number of appeals undertaken across the region. The figures indicate that the number of appeals received are quite low, with a total of nine undertaken over the period of one year. Ms McAllister noted that it is hoped that, developing the confidence of Safeguarding Panel members to carry out appeals, will assist to speed up the process.
- 5.7 The proposed provision of a deputy to attend a of a Child Protection Registration Stage 2 Appeal Panel was approved.

6 67/25P SBNI input to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls from an Online Safety perspective

- 6.1 The chair advised that she has been requested to attend Westminster on 02 July 2025 to give evidence to Parliament's Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (short enquiry) on the subject of the nature and prevalence of violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland; to hear about issues with women's and girls' online safety specific to Northern Ireland; how women and girls in Northern Ireland experience online abuse, including cyberbullying and sexual harassment. Part of the aim is to scrutinise the UK Government's efforts to end violence against women and girls. The chair requested that all members share any issues or suggestions that they believe should be raised and considered when she attends the hearing.

ACTION 5 – NI Affairs Committee, Westminster – Board members to forward to the chair any issues or suggestions to be considered when the chair attends the hearing on 02 July 2025.

- 6.2 D/Chief Superintendent McKee advised that the PSNI is giving evidence at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 18 June 2025, in reference to the topic

of violence against women and girls. She suggested that it may be beneficial for the PSNI and SBNI to liaise with regards to areas that should be raised for consideration. Ms McAllister added that Women's Aid has also been invited to give evidence, and this will be provided by Ms Sonya McMullan.

7 67/25P Finance End of Year Report (Please refer to Board Paper BM67-06.25P4)

7.1 The chair drew members' attention to Finance End of Year Report that was circulated to members in advance of the meeting. She advised that the SBNI has achieved a breakeven position at the end of this financial year, and all of its spend has been adequately and appropriately accounted for.

7.2 There were no further comments or queries in respect of the Finance End of Year Report.

7.3 The Finance End of Year Report was approved.

8 67/25P 2026 Board Meeting Dates (Please refer to Board Paper BM67-06.25P5)

8.1 The chair drew members' attention to the 2026 Board Meeting dates that were circulated in advance of the meeting.

8.2 The 2026 Board Meeting dates were approved.

9 67/25P Venue of September Board Meeting

9.1 The chair advised that the next Board meeting in September is to be held in person in the Dunsilly Hotel, 20 Dunsilly Road, Antrim, BT41 2JH.

10 67/25P AOB

10.1 There was no further business raised.

10.2 The chair closed the Public section of the meeting at 4.30pm and thanked members for their attendance.

Bernie McNally

BM67-06.25PM

Independent Chair SBNI