

62nd Meeting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

Wednesday 12 June 2024

3.15pm – 4.00pm – Zoom Virtual Platform

Public Minutes

RECORD OF ATTENDANCE

Name	Title & Organisation	Present	Apology
Ms Bernie McNally	Independent Chair Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland	✓	
Mr Tom Cassidy	Director of Women & Children's Services, WHSCT		✓
Mr Stephen McLaughlin	Assistant Director of Social Work, WHSCT (deputising OBO Mr Tom Cassidy)	✓	
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 Lindsay Fisher	Detective Chief Superintendent, Public Protection Branch, PSNI	✓	
Ms Paddy Kelly	Director, Children's Law Centre		✓
Ms Amanda Stewart	CEO, Probation Board NI	✓	
Ms Pauline Leeson	Chief Executive Children in Northern Ireland		✓
Ms Una Turbitt	Assistant Director of Pupil Wellbeing and Protection, EANI	✓	
Mr Brendan Whittle	Director of Hospital and Community Care and Social Services, SPPG		✓
Ms Catherine Cassidy	Deputy Director of Social Care, SPPG (deputising OBO Mr Brendan Whittle)	✓	
Ms Lyn Preece	Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work, SEHSCT	✓	
Mr Colm McCafferty	Director of Children & Young People's Services SHSCT	✓	
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 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	✓	
Ms Kerrylee Weatherall	Interim Director of Children's Community Services, BHSC		✓
Dr Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin	Head of Safeguarding, Council for Social Witness, Presbyterian Church in Ireland representing the SBNI Interfaith Committee		✓
Mr Philip O'Hara	Interim Director and DLP, Down & Connor Safeguarding Office representing the SBNI Interfaith Committee (deputising OBO Dr Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin)	✓	
Ms Dawn Shaw	Chief Executive Officer, Children's Court Guardian Service Northern Ireland	✓	
Mr Richard Harvey	Acting Director of Environmental Services, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council		✓
Ms Diane Hill	Chief Executive Officer, Include Youth	✓	
Mr Andrew Thomson	Independent Chair of the CMR Panel	✓	
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		

Summary of Actions

Action No.	Action:	To be completed by:
1	The updated CMR Process Review Report to be circulated to Board members.	SBNI CST
2	An update to be provided to the SBNI Board in respect of the progress of the Steering Group established to take forward the recommendations made in the CMR Review Report.	Mr Andrew Thomson
3	Invitations for 2025 Board Meetings to be sent to the diaries of all members.	SBNI CST
4	An update to be provided to the SBNI Board in respect of the development of the Action Plan for the CJINI Joint Inspection Pilot of Child Protection Arrangements in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area.	Ms Una Turbitt

Summary of Board Approval

The minutes from the Board Meeting on 17 April 2024 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
The SBNI Section 12 Audit Report was approved.
The 2025 Board Meeting Dates were approved.

Preliminaries: Apologies, Quorum, Conflict of Interest, Complaints

The chair welcomed SBNI members to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Mr Tom Cassidy, Ms Bronagh Muldoon, Ms Mary Aughey, Ms Paddy Kelly, Ms Pauline Leeson, Mr Brendan Whittle, Dr Joanne McClean, Ms Heather Reid, Ms Kerrylee Weatherall, Dr Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin and Mr Richard Harvey. The chair noted that Mr Stephen McLaughlin is deputising on behalf of Mr Tom Cassidy, Ms Catherine Cassidy is deputising on behalf of Mr Brendan Whittle and Mr Philip O'Hara is deputising on behalf of Dr Jacqui Montgomery Devlin. The chair further welcomed Detective Chief Superintendent Lindsay Fisher to the membership of the Board. Detective Chief Superintendent Lindsay Fisher will be acting as Board representative for the PSNI going forward.

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 did not raise any additional business.

1 62/24P Previous Minutes

- 1.1 Members agreed the minutes from the last Board meeting on 17 April 2024 as a factual and accurate representation of the meeting.

2 62/24P Matters Arising

- 2.1 Complete
- 2.2 Complete
- 2.3 Complete (Please refer to Board Paper BM62-06.24P1)
- 2.4 Agenda Item 3

2.5 Complete

2.6 Complete

2.7 Complete

2.8 The chair reminded members that the CMR Process Review Report was approved by members at the Board meeting in April 2024. Immediately after its approval, the Review was sent to the DoH for their review and amendment, and was subsequently discussed at the SBNI/DoH Accountability Meeting in May 2024. The DoH requested that amendment was made to recommendation 3 and recommendation 5, as outlined below;

(i) Recommendation 3: Amendment to the regulations and CDOP should be disaggregated

(ii) Recommendation 5: Alternative means of disseminating good practice should be specific, in relation to the removal to Regulation 17 (3), regarding the criteria for CMR notification for good practice.

ACTION 1 – The updated CMR Process Review Report to be circulated to Board members.

Following the suggestions made by the DoH, Ms Marie Roulston was consulted and was agreeable to the revisions. The CMR Process Review Report is now fully approved and a Steering Group has since been established to take forward these recommendations. This Steering Group will be chaired by Mr Andrew Thomson and he will report back to the Board on the progress in respect of same.

ACTION 2 – An update to be provided to the SBNI Board in respect of the progress of the Steering Group established to take forward the recommendations made in the CMR Process Review Report.

3 62/24P SBNI Section 12 Audit Report (Please refer to Board Paper BM62-06.24P2)

- 3.1 Ms McKenzie drew members attention to the Section 12 Audit Report, which was circulated to members in advance of the meeting, and provided an overview of the findings discussed within the report. On discussion of same, she noted that the platform for completion of this Section 12 audit had been adapted from previous years, and on this occasion, responses were submitted via an online form. Feedback in respect of this adapted process has been positive, and participants have noted that it has been a much more manageable process than it had been previously. Ms McKenzie thanked members for their submissions to the audit and reported that there has been a 100% compliance rate with regards to submissions, with assurance now provided by all member agencies. For this Section 12 audit, there had been work undertaken to engage councils and Ms McKenzie was pleased to highlight that all councils have now completed the audit. She reported that it is clear that each council is at a different stage in fulfilling their statutory obligations in relation to safeguarding, and further work will be undertaken through the Local Government Safeguarding Network to support each council on their safeguarding journey.
- 3.2 Ms McKenzie further reported that the Section 12 Audit is part of the SBNI's Governance and Assurance Framework, particularly with relation to continuous learning. Every agency is now in receipt of an individual response letter in relation to their submissions and permissions have now been received for exemplar responses to be shared with other agencies. Ms McKenzie highlighted that an area of identified improvement is in relation to members understanding of effectiveness, and future audits will have a greater focus on effectiveness throughout all of the criteria. In addition, there is some further work to be undertaken by the SBNI Central Support Team (CST) in relation to standardisation and consistency of language used in the questions and safeguarding criteria. Ms McKenzie further noted that the DoH is currently reviewing its Guidance to the SBNI, and this may impact on the requirement for the Section 12 audit to be undertaken by specific named bodies on the Board.

- 3.3 On discussion, Ms Turbitt commented on criteria 39, which is in relation to interagency training. She advised that the within the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) Report, there has been challenge made with regards to interagency training opportunities, as well as agencies wider understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. Ms Turbitt enquired as to whether this was highlighted at all within the Section 12 Audit responses. Ms McKenzie advised that this was an identified area of improvement, and it was evident that there had been some interchange with multidisciplinary, rather than multiagency training. Although Ms McKenzie accepts that there are extensive resourcing challenges across agencies, she reminded members that it is important that training is provided on a multiagency basis where possible.
- 3.4 Mr O'Hara reported that he has submitted a response to the Section 12 Audit on a voluntary basis, in his position as Interim Chair of the Interfaith Committee and Chair of the Down and Connor Safeguarding Office. In terms of internal governance, Mr O'Hara advised that the response was approved by the Bishop of Down and Connor. Although a challenging piece of work, he feels that it has been a very useful opportunity to provide assurance that any functions the Catholic Church are involved in are cognisant of the safeguarding needs of children and young people. Mr O'Hara further reported that the ethos of the audit will now be implemented within the Interfaith Committee, and it is hoped that work can now be undertaken with other churches in relation to some of the criteria measured within the audit. The chair thanked Mr O'Hara and advised that it is hoped that the Section 12 Audit can assist with providing a framework of safeguarding standards, and enable agencies to identify gaps within their own organisations.
- 3.5 The SBNI Section 12 Audit Report was approved.

4 62/24P Department of Health (DoH) response to SBNI re a Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) in Northern Ireland (Please refer to Board Paper BM62-06.24P3)

- 4.1 The chair advised that that she has written to the Department of Health (DoH) in relation to the establishment of a Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) in

Northern Ireland, and a response has since been received which was circulated to members in advance of the meeting. In their response, the DoH has indicated that the implementation of a CDOP has not been further progressed, as a result of resourcing issues. In addition, in a subsequent Accountability Meeting between the SBNI and DoH, DoH colleagues have advised that a timeline for progression of CDOP is not currently known. The chair accepts that this is a disappointing response. In the absence of a functioning CDOP in Northern Ireland, the chair further highlighted that discussions are ongoing to explore other options which may provide an interim process for the multiagency review of child deaths which do not meet the criteria for CMR. The PHA is currently working to develop a multiagency Sudden Unexpected Death in Childhood (SUDIC) protocol, and whilst it is accepted that this does not mitigate the need for a CDOP, it is hoped that its implementation will assist with ensuring a more robust process for reviewing sudden and unexpected child deaths.

5 62/24P Finance End of Year Update Report 2023-2024 (Please refer to Board Paper BM62-06.24P4)

- 5.1 The chair drew members attention to the SBNI Finance End of Year Update Report that was circulated to members in advance of the meeting. On discussion of same, the chair noted that the SBNI has achieved a breakeven position at financial year end.
- 5.2 There were no further queries or comments in relation to the SBNI Finance End of Year Update Report.

6 62/24P Guidance for Health & Social Care Trusts on Information Sharing for Child Protection Purposes (August 2021, Revised August 2023) (Please refer to Board Paper BM62-06.24P5A, BM62-06.24P5B & BM62-06.24P5C)

- 6.1 The chair advised that in August 2021, the DoH published a Guidance document for Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of Information Sharing for Child Protection Purposes. At the point of publication, the DoH advised that the Guidance would be revised in August 2022, and it was noted that this revised guidance became available in April 2024. At the point of initial publication in 2021, the DoH had requested the SBNI Policy and Procedure

Committee integrate the Guidance into Regional Policy and Procedure. The committee had commenced work on this request in 2021 and early 2022 but this was later paused whilst the revision was being undertaken. Upon receipt of the revised document in April 2024 the Policy and Procedure Committee have recommenced the work on the integration and updates will be provided to the SBNI Board in respect of the progress of same.

7 62/24P Workforce Pressures and HSCT's Industrial Action - Impact on Child Protection System

- 7.1 Ms Dargan outlined the ongoing pay dispute, involving all Health and Social Care staff across each of the five Trust areas. She advised that there had been significant developments in this pay dispute at the beginning of 2024, and it had concluded with a pay deal awarded in most areas. However, NIPSA had determined that they were not content to stand down 'action short of strike' for Children's Social Work Services, as they were concerned in respect of work pressures and extensive caseloads experienced by frontline childcare social workers, primarily in Family Support and Intervention, Looked After Children (LAC) and Gateway teams. In addition, NIPSA have raised issues in relation to vacancy levels, staff recruitment and retention of staff. Since February 2024, there have been a series of ongoing negotiations in relation to these issues and although some progress has been made. NIPSA have indicated that they feel an additional payment is necessary for frontline social workers, to acknowledge the immense pressure that they are operating under as a result of vacancy levels. There has been no resolution to this to date. NIPSA has since advised that they plan to escalate 'action short of strike' and would now move to strike action on a rolling basis across each of the five Trust areas, as outlined below;
- Escalated 'action short of strike' commenced in the BHSCT on 25 April and this will run until July
 - Escalated 'action short of strike' commenced in the NHSCT on 02 May and this will run until August
 - Escalated 'action short of strike' commenced in the SEHSCT on 03 June and this will run until September

- SHSCT and WHSCT are expected to follow in escalated 'action short of strike', although commencement dates are not yet known and will be determined by NIPSA. It is likely that all five Trusts will then run on an ongoing basis in the 'action short of strike' stage.

7.2 Ms Dargan further reported that NIPSA have indicated that they would take full strike action on a rolling basis, and there were 3 days of strike held between the 08-10 May in BHSCT. It is expected that a notification will soon be received in the NHSCT in relation to a three-day strike period. The experience in BHSCT was that although not all childcare teams were involved, there were around 8 teams impacted, which included Gateway, Family Intervention Teams (FIT) and LAC Teams. Ms Dargan noted that derogation processes can be implemented in instances of a full-day strike, and parts of the system can be closed to ensure that emergencies can be addressed. However, 'action short of strike' is extremely problematic to manage, and makes it difficult for Trusts to continue to deliver good quality services.

7.3 Ms Dargan referenced the management of unallocated cases and noted that as vacancy levels are extremely high at around 20-30%, there is now a sustained experience of managing unallocated cases, with around 1500 children at any point in time who do not have an allocated social worker. More recently, there are over 400 LAC who do not have an allocated social worker. There has always been an unmet need, but this has increased significantly. Ms Dargan noted that Trusts have developed robust governance processes in respect of the management of unallocated cases, but the 'action short of strike' initiated by NIPSA has involved members not undertaking work on unallocated cases. Trusts are working to implement mitigations, and it has been agreed that there will be a response to child protection, children on the edge of care and placement breakdown concerns. NIPSA are supportive of this and are keen to deliver as safe a strike as possible.

7.4 The chair sought clarity as to whether there is a suggestion that the additional payment request cannot be fulfilled, and therefore the strike action cannot be resolved. Ms Dargan advised that negotiations are still ongoing, and Agenda

for Change structures need to be considered within this. Trusts do not have authority to increase pay, and this will be a Departmental decision, with funding implications to be considered.

- 7.5 Ms Preece noted that Trusts will benefit from the student social workers who will be entering post within the coming months, but urged caution that even with this cohort there will still be vacancies and staffing deficits in each of the Trusts. This will mean that Trusts will still experience challenge with their ability to manage unallocated work. There are 279 student social workers who will be entering the system, but not all of these students will choose to work in Trusts, or within Children's Services.
- 7.6 Ms Dargan noted that as a parallel process, Trusts are working with DoH colleagues to consider the workload for social workers, and the portfolio that should be managed by a professional social worker. It is hoped that this piece of work will enable Trusts to introduce other grades of staff who can support with non-social work tasks.
- 7.7 Ms Stewart advised that there are over 200 social work staff in the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), and she is content to support Trusts in any way that she can, within possible remits and whilst remaining cognisant of the pressures also faced in PBNI.
- 7.8 The chair highlighted that it is important that all member agencies are aware of what is happening in Trusts, and the overall impact that this may have on services. The chair thanked members for bringing this issue to the attention of the Board.

8 62/24P 2025 Board Meeting Dates (Please refer to Board Paper BM62-06.24P6)

- 8.1 The chair drew members attention to Board Meeting dates for 2025, and requested members approval of same.

8.2 The 2025 Board Meeting Dates were approved.

ACTION 3 – Invitations for 2025 Board Meetings to be sent to the diaries of all members.

9 62/24P AOB

9.1 Ms Turbitt advised that the development of the Action Plan in relation to the CJINI Joint Inspection Pilot of Child Protection Arrangements in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area is currently underway. An update will be provided in respect of same at the next SBNI Board Meeting.

ACTION 4 – An update to be provided to the SBNI Board in respect of the development of the Action Plan for the CJINI Joint Inspection Pilot of Child Protection Arrangements in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area.

9.2 The next SBNI Board meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 September 2024. This will be held at the Dunsilly Hotel, 20 Dunsilly Road, Antrim, BT41 2JH.

9.3 The chair closed the Public section of the meeting at 4.00pm and thanked members for their attendance.

Bernie McNally

Independent Chair SBNI