

**Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland**

**Strategic Plan**

**2018 – 2022**

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**Foreword**



As the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) it gives me great pleasure to present to you our Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022. This is the SBNI’s second strategic plan, it builds upon the high standards and existing strategic priorities set out in our 2013 – 2017 plan.

This strategic plan sets out the direction for the SBNI over the next four years, taking into account the views of; children and young people, their parents and carers, our member bodies and the partner organisations we work with, Department of Health priorities, and the wider public. All of this is within the context of the current financial constraints on the public purse along with health and social care reform and restructuring.

In particular, we have decided to concentrate on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to underpin our work and focus our efforts on the delivery of this strategic plan. This will provide a regional framework to protect children, as well as helping us to understand better both the child’s and the parent’s needs.

Local, national and international research provides compelling evidence that taking a trauma-informed approach to child protection, has the potential to either prevent or mitigate against adverse childhood experiences and consequently, help to address the risk of future intergenerational abuse.

There are approximately 433,000 children and young people in Northern Ireland out of a population of over 1.8 million citizens. This represents 24% of the population. Our work is vital in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all these children and young people. The SBNI is made up of 20 different organisations plus three independent panel chairs, two lay members and a GP representative. These are the key agencies that are mandated to protect children and young people from risk and harm and where harm has occurred, to protect them from more harm.

We come together in partnership and collaboration in the SBNI to make sure this happens consistently and to the highest standard. This can only be achieved by the hard work, dedication and commitment of the hundreds of people who work for our member bodies and our other partners, each one playing their part in keeping children and young people safe and secure.

It is the overall objective of the SBNI to coordinate child protection work and ensure the effectiveness of what is done by our members. I want this plan to set out a clear path of how we intend to do this, the priorities we will focus on doing and how we will measure this work to make sure we are achieving what we set out to achieve.

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

Finally, I would like to commend this plan to you. The SBNI Board and I are keen to hear your views on it and I hope you will share these with us.

If you require this document in an alternative format (such as large print, Braille, disk, audio file, audio cassette, Easy Read or in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English), please contact [Michael.ohare@hscni.net](mailto:Michael.ohare@hscni.net)



**Bernie McNally OBE**

**Independent Chair**

**Introduction**

We use the term safeguarding[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 enables 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.

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

* To 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 the safeguard and promote 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).

The SBNI is managed and directed by a Chair appointed 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 Public Health Agency, the Probation Board, the Police Service for Northern Ireland, the Education Authority, District Councils, the Youth Justice Agency and the Guardian ad Litem Service. There is also representation from the voluntary sector from Action for Children, Barnardos NI, Children in Northern Ireland, the Children’s Law Centre, Include Youth and the NSPCC. There are also two lay members and three Panel Chairs on the SBNI. Each of the 20 member bodies is represented on the SBNI Board by a senior member of staff. Their common purpose is to help safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland and help protect them from all forms of risk and harm.

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

This Strategic Plan has been prepared to cover the period April 2018 to March 2022. It sets out the strategic direction of the SBNI and provides a guide for the work it will collectively do for the next four years. Its aim is to set out how the SBNI will fulfil its responsibility to coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each person or body represented on the Board, for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

The key high level strategic priorities of the SBNI from the previous plan still remain as relevant as ever.

The SBNI will continue to:

* Work in partnership with other agencies, service users and communities to ensure children and young people are living in safety and with stability;
* Provide leadership and set direction for the safeguarding system across Northern Ireland;
* Respond in a timely manner to new and emerging concerns;
* Drive improvements in the current child protection system;
* Continue to build the capacity of the SBNI to enhance the knowledge and skills of the entire membership to ensure the Board is providing effective, evidence-based responses to the safeguarding challenges now and in the years ahead.

In addition the SBNI now proposes to adopt a strength-based, trauma-informed approach to safeguarding children and young people, underpinned by research relating to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)[[2]](#footnote-2).

This significant research indicates that exposure to ACEs, including childhood abuse and neglect, has a negative impact on the child’s later-life health and well-being. The research found that many adult diseases and developmental disorders begin early in life, exacerbated by toxic stress in childhood. The research shows that the experience of four or more ACEs in childhood is a strong predictor of later health risks, diseases and developmental disorders. The research also indicated that people with six or more ACEs died nearly 20 years earlier on average than those without ACEs, making ACEs one of the leading determinants of poor health and social dysfunction.

The SBNI hope that a trauma-informed approach will help professionals within their organisations better understand what has happened to the children and young people in their care. It will also help them respond more compassionately and more appropriately to children and young people, which will ultimately lead to better outcomes over the long-term.

In addition to the SBNI’s agreed focus on preventing ACEs and building resilience in children and young people, the Board will also lead on a newly established workstream of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP Workstream 4), which aims to better understand the extent to which children and young people in Northern Ireland are impacted by ACEs and to strengthen the understanding of ACEs among professionals working with them, including those involved in child protection, and in the wider community.

Further, the SBNI member bodies have also decided to place a specific focus on three of the most significant ACEs for children and young people living in Northern Ireland over the next four years.

These are:

* Domestic and sexual violence;
* Child and parental mental health;
* Neglect.

Alongside this tri-fold focus on ACEs [prevention/resilience building; developing our understanding of ACEs across professions and within communities; and an emphasis on three of the most significant ACESs], the SBNI will also support the use of the Signs of Safety practice model[[3]](#footnote-3). This is an innovative strengths-based, safety-organised approach to the protection of children and young people. It enables the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and signs of safety that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child’s and family’s situation. This work will be more solution-focussed and will encourage practitioners to take a more trauma-informed approach to practice. Using the Signs of Safety approach, practitioners will work with families to identify the child and parent’s experience of ACEs and the impact of them. They will then have greater opportunity to work in a therapeutic way with children and families to build resilience.

**Objectives**

The SBNI Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 will:

* Contribute to delivering the following Northern Ireland Programme for Government Outcomes
  + Outcome 8: We care for others and help those in need
  + Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life;
* Fulfil our Personal and Public Involvement duties and satisfy the SBNI’s statutory function to promote communication between the SBNI and children and young people;
* Take into account the views of children and young people in Northern Ireland in its implementation;
* Acknowledge the important role played by parents/carers in safeguarding children and young people and promoting their welfare by involving them in its implementation.

**Implementation**

The SBNI Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022 will be kept under review to ensure it takes into account changes in the external environment, best practice, new and emerging concerns, research developments and the needs of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Any changes to this strategic plan resulting from these will be carefully analysed, assessed and agreed with the SBNI member bodies. We will also consult with the Department of Health prior to implementation, as the legislation requires us to do so.

In developing the plan we reviewed the previous SBNI Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017, considered progress to date and identified the continuing challenges in child protection.

We will fulfil any outstanding commitments from our previous four years work. We will continue to work in the areas of child sexual exploitation (CSE), female genital mutilation (FGM), e-Safety and with the faith communities in Northern Ireland represented on the SBNI Interfaith Sub-Group.

In particular, the SBNI will:

* Continue to provide training and general awareness opportunities across all areas of its work;
* Work with schools and the voluntary sector to both increase awareness of CSE from a boys and young men’s perspective as well as focussing on anti-cyberbullying initiatives;
* Specifically in relation to e-Safety, continue to work to keep children and young people safe online and deliver on the intentions contained in the Northern Ireland Executive e-Safety Strategy and Action Plan (in development);
* Specifically commission professional training and awareness in relation to FGM from a Northern Ireland perspective;
* Continue to support and provide assistance to faith-based communities to assist in the sharing of best safeguarding practice;
* Continue to embed the new safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures to ensure standardisation of practice;
* Ensure that the learning from case management reviews is embedded in child protection practice.

‘A Review of the SBNI February 2016’ (the Jay Review), by Professor Alexis Jay, recommended changes to the way the five local SBNI Safeguarding Panels function and operate. Going forward, the SBNI will ensure that the work of the Safeguarding Panels more closely aligns with the objectives, priorities and aims of the SBNI.

In particular, Safeguarding Panels at local levels will:

* Coordinate the implementation of the SBNI strategic plan to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their areas;
* Monitor the implementation of the new SBNI policies and procedures;
* Promote an awareness of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people;
* Where relevant, ensure that the findings of case management reviews are disseminated widely and implemented in full;
* Promote and facilitate communication and engagement with children and young people in the exercise of their statutory duties.

**Strategic Context**

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

This work has been informed, influenced and shaped by international treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, domestic legislation such as the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as well as a number of departmental strategies, policies and priorities, such as the Children and Young People’s Strategy 2017 – 2027 Consultation Document and the cross departmental policy ‘Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People (Version 2 August 2017)’. The Northern Ireland Executive’s draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework issued in May 2016 set out the major societal outcomes that the Executive wants to achieve. We have carefully considered this PfG framework and have identified two outcomes that especially apply to our work. These are:

* Outcome 8: We care for others and help those in need;
* Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life.

The SBNI is committed through this strategic plan and our work to help ensure that these outcomes are realised. The SBNI’s priorities for the next four years therefore reflect, support and complement the PfG.

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

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

All public sector organisations, including all SBNI member bodies and our central support team, are facing substantial budgetary constraints. It is likely that these constraints will continue to be a theme over the years of this strategic plan. It is imperative that the SBNI keeps the impact of any financial constraints under review and makes the best use of available resources to achieve the maximum outcomes. In particular, the SBNI will carefully consider the implications of any effects, as a result of these constraints and pressures, on its strategic and operational intentions, priorities and workplans and be mindful to respond accordingly.

The SBNI’s commitment to adopting a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach to child protection with a specific focus on ACEs, will influence all its activities over the next four years. It is central to this strategic plan and will be fully reflected in future business plans.

The SBNI has decided to use an Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) framework to help it define the outcomes it wants to achieve as a result of its work and how this can be measured. To assist in this task, the SBNI will engage external support to help us embed an OBA approach to our work. The SBNI expects this will lay the foundations for the systematic use of OBA in helping improve safeguarding and welfare outcomes for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

In line with the recommendations of the Jay Review, the DoH is proposing to rationalise the current Children’s Partnership Arrangements in Northern Ireland. This proposal is currently within a public consultation process. Any changes to the current SBNI structure and composition will require new legislation and may require some realignment of objectives and priorities identified in this strategic plan. We will closely monitor the progress of this new legislation and review and revise this strategic plan and supporting business plans, as appropriate.

**Mission, Vision and Values**

**SBNI Mission Statement**

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

**SBNI Vision Statement**

Our vision is that all children and young people are seen, heard and protected in order that they grow up in safety, thrive and fulfil their potential.

**SBNI Values**

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

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

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

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.

We are all accountable to one another and to those we safeguard and protect.

**Strategic Priorities**

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

1.1 To disseminate and facilitate the embedding of the 2017 Regional Core Child Protection Policies and Procedures to protect and safeguard children and young people to ensure greater consistency and standardisation of practice.

1.2 To develop, disseminate and facilitate the embedding of the 2018 Regional Practice Guidance of the 2017 Regional Core Child Protection Policies and Procedures to ensure greater consistency and standardisation of practice in order to protect and safeguard children and young people.

1.3 To raise awareness of child protection and safeguarding issues by developing an engagement and communication strategy to ensure that children, young people, families and communities are more aware of these issues and how to get help if concerned.

1.4 To ensure the SBNI Safeguarding Panels engage with children and young people, parents and practitioners to hear their views on the child protection and safeguarding system in order to improve practice.

**Strategic Priority 2: To provide a voice to children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence[[4]](#footnote-4) and abuse.**

2.1 To work with government departments and their agencies to prevent domestic and sexual violence and abuse (DSVA) from occurring and to tackle child sexual exploitation.

2.2 To work with partners engaged in the DSVA arena to raise awareness among parents/carers and professionals of the effect of DSVA on children and young people.

2.3 To work with partners engaged in the DSVA arena to promote education for children and young people in how to recognise, respond and seek help in relation to DSVA.

**Strategic Priority 3: To improve outcomes for children and young people affected or potentially affected by neglect through promoting the early recognition and improvement of agency responses.**

3.1 To promote early intervention with the aim of preventing children and young people experiencing neglect.

3.2 To increase awareness of neglect with children and young people, their parents/carers and staff.

3.3 Through the Safeguarding Panels ensure the views of children and young people, parents/carers and staff inform practice in relation to neglect.

3.4 To work with partner agencies to provide training in how to improve the recognition, assessment, and responses to children, young people and families experiencing neglect.

**Strategic Priority 4: To provide a voice for children and young people affected by mental health issues.**

4.1 To work with government departments and agencies to reduce the incidence of those affected by mental health issues.

4.2 To work with partners to raise awareness among parents/carers and professionals of the effect of poor mental health on children and young people.

4.3 To work with partners to promote awareness for children and young people in how to recognise, respond and seek help in relation to mental health.

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

**Monitoring and Review**

The SBNI believes that its plans and priorities for the next four years are ambitious and challenging and will require everyone to work together to make them happen. The SBNI believes that the realisation of these plans will positively impact on its objective of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Glossary**

**ACE** Adverse Childhood Experience

**ACEs** Adverse Childhood Experiences

**CSE** Child Sexual Exploitation

**DoH** Department of Health

**DSVA** Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse

**EITP** Early Intervention Transformation Programme

**FGM**  Female Genital Mutilation

**LAC**  Looked After Children

**NCB**  National Children’s Bureau

**NI**  Northern Ireland

**NSPCC**  National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

**OBA** Outcomes Based Accountability

**PfG** Programme for Government

**SBNI** Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

1. Definition of safeguarding can be found at Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, Version 2 August 2017 p.g.12 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences. Ensuring a better deal for children in Wales. Professor Mark A. Bellis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Signs of Safety: A Solution and Safety Orientated Approach to Child Protection Casework. Steve Edwards and Andrew Turnell. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sexual violence within the context of an intimate partner relationship [↑](#footnote-ref-4)