

# **Child Protection Senior Officials Group (CPSOG) Report**

**September 2018 to  
February 2022**

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## Foreword

**Seán Holland,**  
**Chair of the Child Protection Senior Officials Group**



I am pleased to present the first report of the Child Protection Senior Officials Group (CPSOG). This Group provides strategic direction and a joined up approach to the issue of Child Protection across Northern Ireland, within the overarching policy framework set out in [Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#).

This first report is intended to reflect the broad programme of work taken forward by CPSOG. It demonstrates significant progress across government in connection with child protection against a backdrop of significant Covid-19-related pressures on services and staffing. Of course, this was a period when the protection of children became an even more pressing issue for us all.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the work of the CPSOG and acknowledge this would not be possible without the continued commitment of members, CPSOG sub-group and a range of stakeholders.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seán Holland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**SEÁN HOLLAND**

Chief Social Work Officer/Deputy Secretary

## 1. Development of CPSOG and its Structure

CPSOG was established in 2018 bringing together two existing Senior Official Groups which had focused on addressing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) specifically in relation to the implementation of remaining recommendations from the 2014 Marshall report into Child Sexual Exploitation and work to address Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The CPSOG work plan has since expanded to take in a range of areas including emerging child protection issues such as considering observations made by the UNICEF Committee on the Rights of the Child. This includes addressing the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people and oversight of the online safety strategy.

The group is chaired by the Deputy Secretary for Social Services Policy / Chief Social Work Officer within the Department of Health (DoH). Other core members include:

- The Department of Justice (DoJ)
- The Department of Education (DE)
- The Department of Finance (DoF)
- The Department for Communities (DfC)

In the period September 2018 – February 2022, CPSOG met eight times. Secretariat support is provided by the Department of Health. The Department of Justice has provided support in relation to the development and running of the CPSOG sub-group and other working groups which have been set up.

### CPSOG Responsibilities

The CPSOG is responsible for providing the strategic direction and ensuring a joined up approach to the issue of child protection across the Northern Ireland Executive. The group is a key mechanism for the identification of issues which impact or have the potential to impact positively or negatively on the protection of children in Northern Ireland, and which require a shared response. Members of the group collectively agree how these issues should be addressed, by whom and the timescales for delivery. In particular it:

- Promotes a shared understanding of individual work-streams related to child protection and wider vulnerability across relevant areas of the Executive alongside promotion of collaborative working where possible;
- With the approval of respective Ministers, agrees actions in response to emerging issues of a child protection nature, being clear about which actions will be taken forward by which department, and which require a collaborative approach;
- Addresses potential or known barriers to service improvement or policy progression;
- Provides a shared response to relevant external reviews and reports as they arise;

- Provides advice to respective Permanent Secretaries, Ministers and Assembly Committees on emerging issues of a child protection nature, which the CPSOG determines require a cross-departmental response;
- With the approval of Ministers, seeks to identify and/or pool resources to fund activity where necessary and appropriate.

### CPSOG Sub Group

CPSOG is supported at an operational level by a sub-group which was established in 2021. The group includes officials from government departments (DoH, DoJ and DE) and representatives from relevant agencies including the former Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), (now the Strategic Planning and Performance Group, SPPG of the DoH), the Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland (SBNI), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Education Authority. Subject to approval from CPSOG, representatives from other government departments can also be asked to join this group where this would contribute to delivery of operational work related to the CPSOG work plan. Other non-departmental organisations may also be invited to attend specific meetings as necessary to inform this work. Secretariat support for meetings alternates between the Department of Health and Department of Justice. sub-group responsibilities include:

- Providing connectivity between CPSOG and the SBNI or individual member bodies of the SBNI to ensure a joined up approach to operational and strategic priorities;
- Sharing information to improve knowledge and consistency in addressing child protection issues at an operational level;
- Identifying emerging child protection issues that could be raised at CPSOG;
- Contributing to a joined up approach when implementing actions arising from the CPSOG work plan.

Subject to approval from CPSOG, representatives from other government departments can be asked to join this group where this would contribute to delivery of operational work related to the CPSOG work plan. Other non-departmental organisations may also be invited to attend specific meetings as necessary to inform this work. The sub-group can also set up time limited task and finish groups related to specific pieces of work involving relevant members of the sub-group and representatives from other organisations as required to inform this work.

## 2. Overview of key areas of work

### Child Sexual Exploitation

The Child Sexual Exploitation work plan includes the following programme of work:

- i. Marshall recommendations
- ii. Leonard recommendations
- iii. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) recommendations
- iv. Scoping of Barnahus model

#### (i) Marshall Recommendations

The Marshall Report “Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland Report of the Independent Inquiry” was published in November 2014. It considered how child sexual exploitation (CSE) takes place in Northern Ireland and explores how children and young people, parents, communities and professionals can work together to understand what is happening and take steps to ensure that we support children and young people to enter healthy relationships and avoid abuse. Since its inception in 2018 CPSOG has monitored implementation of any remaining recommendations on a cross Departmental basis.

As of February 2022, 16 of the 17 key recommendations and 56 out of 60 of the supporting recommendations in the Marshall Report have been completed.

The one key recommendation left is;

Recommendation	Update – February 2022
<b>K14 – proposals for legislative change - DoJ</b>	<p>In February 2019, the Department consulted on the recommendations of the Marshall Report relating to changes in the law as part of its wider review of the law on child sexual exploitation and other child sexual offences in. A summary report of consultation responses was published in September 2020.</p> <p>This review and consultation process has led to the inclusion of a number of legislative proposals within the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill, which was introduced into the Assembly on 5 July. The Bill completed final Stage in the Assembly on 15 March 2022, and is awaiting Royal Assent.</p> <p><b><i>The relevant provision of the Bill involves amending the current Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove references to ‘child prostitution’ and ‘child pornography’ to help minimise stigmatisation and</li></ul>

Recommendation	Update – February 2022
	<p>victim blaming in such cases and widen the scope of the definition of ‘images’ relevant to those offences so as to include ‘live streaming’. This is designed to ensure that the law is in keeping with updates in modern technology and to lessen any ambiguity in interpretation by the courts at a future stage;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create the new offence of adults masquerading as a child. This involves tackling behaviours in child grooming by adult offenders at an earlier stage and is considered a pre-cursor to the existing offences of child grooming and sexual communication with a child. This new offence will be unique to Northern Ireland;</li> <li>• Widen the existing legislation in place for abuse of position of trust legislation so that those who are in a position of trust in the areas of sport or religion are brought within scope of its offences. A delegated power has been included in the provision to enable the Department to extend the areas prescribed in the Bill, where there is evidence to support the need for further legal intervention.</li> </ul> <p>Whilst not specific Marshall Report recommendations, the Bill is introducing a number of further protections in this area to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of the new offences of up-skirting and down-blousing;</li> <li>• Creation of the new offence of cyber-flashing;</li> <li>• Extending the scope of the current offence of disclosing a private sexual photograph or film to cause distress in order to bring ‘threats to disclose’ within its scope;</li> </ul> <p>Remaining policy areas of the Marshall Report, reviewed and consulted upon by the Department and which require legislative change will be progressed in the next political mandate.</p>

Progress against the four remaining supporting recommendations is included below:

Recommendation	Update – February 2022
<p><b>S24 – RQIA involvement of young people in inspections of children’s homes – RQIA</b></p>	<p>RQIA attended VOYPIC’s “Manifestal” on 19 August 2021, engaging with approximately 60 young people over the course of the day. This was a one-day festival which brought together care-experienced children and young people to start work on a ‘Manifesto for Change’ which will set out the main actions they consider those in power should take to make life better for young people with lived experience of care. A follow-up meeting with VOYPIC staff has also taken place.</p>
<p><b>S29 – knowledge of modern methods of communication/ social media developments – DE</b></p>	<p>The Executive approved the Online Safety Strategy at its meeting on 24 November 2020 and the Department of Health, on behalf of the Executive, published the Online Safety Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland on 9 February 2021 (Safer Internet Day).</p> <p>The SBNI is progressing the recruitment of an Online Safety Coordinator. DE has identified a pressure in future year’s budgets for the delivery of education related actions in the strategy. The future budget position is extremely challenging and remains uncertain at this time however the Department of Education has secured funding for 2022/23 to implement relevant actions in the strategy.</p>
<p><b>S44 - The Department of Justice should continue to seek to develop and improve the experiences of young witnesses, taking into account research and learning from other countries.</b></p>	<p>The Gillen Review into Serious Sexual Offences in Northern Ireland set out a wide range of recommendations which, taken together, will improve the experiences of victims who are children. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to develop and launch a child-specific SOLA scheme (Sexual Offences Legal Advisers), equivalent to that launched for adults last April;</li> <li>• Ongoing work to develop a full Remote Evidence Centre (REC) for Belfast which will include separate child-friendly facilities (temporary provision is already in place for Belfast and Craigavon);</li> <li>• Ongoing operation of the voluntary protocol to expedite serious sexual offence cases (in Belfast) involving child witnesses under 13 years of age. We are continuing to work to develop a permanent protocol with the intention of rolling this out on a phased basis, subject to available resources;</li> </ul>



Recommendation	Update – February 2022
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A working group has also been established to scope and develop arrangements to test Pre-Recorded Cross Examination, again initially with child witnesses under 13 in Belfast. However, there is currently no identified launch date for a pilot, which can only be progressed subject to additional funding being identified; and</li> <li>• PSNI has also completed a review of achieving best evidence (ABE) and made recommendations for a dedicated ABE cadre (which would have benefits for child victims and witnesses). However again, PSNI plans to develop a dedicated ABE cadre would be subject to additional funding being identified.</li> </ul> <p>The Department of Justice has established a multi-agency, cross-departmental Steering Group that is providing strategic direction and overseeing the coordinated implementation of Gillen Review recommendations relating to children. This will include consideration of a Barnahus-type facility for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Scoping work relating to the health elements of a Barnahus-type model will start in February 2022 and is expected to conclude by April 2022, with the production of a report. DoJ has also recently commenced a review and refresh of their 2019 Barnahus Scoping Study of the justice elements of the model.</p>
<p><b>S47 - The DoJ should ensure that both statutory case management and statutory time limits are introduced in Northern Ireland. Both have already been the subject of clear recommendations by the Criminal Justice Inspection in Northern Ireland.</b></p>	<p><u>Statutory Time Limits</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial discussion regarding the introduction of STLs was some time ago, and there have been a number of initiatives and changes in the justice system in the intervening period. In addition, the required response to the pandemic has necessitated that the justice system work differently throughout and, as we navigate a period of recovery, going forward. Plans on the way forward regarding STLs will be informed by a number of factors including progress made to recover the justice system following the pandemic.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Update – February 2022
	<p data-bbox="587 342 858 376"><u>Case Management</u></p> <ul data-bbox="595 421 1390 1892" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="595 421 1390 712">• The Justice Act (NI) 2015 Act allows for the development of case management regulations which would impose duties on the court, prosecution and defence. The Act requires the Department to consult with the Lord/Lady Chief Justice, Direction of Public Prosecutions, the Bar Council and the Law Society. Opinions vary regarding the nature and extent of regulations required;</li> <li data-bbox="595 757 1390 969">• Sir John Gillen in his review into serious sexual offences, whilst highlighting the need for effective case management, did not favour introducing statutory case management. The lack of flexibility in regulations as opposed to bespoke directions, he suggested, would provide a statutory straitjacket;</li> <li data-bbox="595 1014 1390 1261">• The Lord Chief Justice introduced a Crown Case Management Practice Direction, with Vulnerable Witness and Defendant protocols in 2019, following work by the Crown Court Liaison Committee which was led by Mr Justice Colton. The Direction and Protocols address a range of issues which can impact on delay and the experience of victims;</li> <li data-bbox="595 1305 1390 1563">• Since the original decision to legislate there have been a number of developments which have the potential to impact on the Department’s approach to developing regulations, for example Committal Reform, which requires Court Rules to support case management and best practice models which justice leaders agree is the Indictable Cases Process;</li> <li data-bbox="595 1608 1390 1892">• As with STL, the required response to the pandemic has necessitated that the justice system work differently throughout and, as we navigate a period of recovery, going forward. Plans on the way forward regarding case management will, therefore, be informed by a number of factors, including progress made to recover the justice system following the pandemic.</li> </ul>

Updates are provided by CPSOG members against the outstanding actions at CPSOG meetings.

#### (ii) Leonard Report Recommendations

The SBNI commissioned Marcella Leonard to undertake a review into how its member agencies are effectively responding to and managing CSE in Northern Ireland, this report was published in July 2020.

Unconnected to this review, the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) undertook an inspection of the Criminal Justice agencies response to and management of CSE. The SBNI Independent Review Team liaised with the CJINI Inspectors to share methodology and learning where appropriate and beneficial. The 15 case files examined for the SBNI Review were also assessed by the CJINI review team. The approach helped inform respective findings, although the evidence and recommendations remained separate to each.

#### (iii) Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) Report Recommendations

The CJINI report into how the criminal justice system deals with CSE was published on 30th June 2020. It made two strategic recommendations including that the DoJ takes forward a cross-Departmental strategic response to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation, which is linked to any existing and future strategic plans for child protection and that a comprehensive child sexual exploitation problem profile is developed.

#### Response to Leonard and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) Reports

The SBNI CSE sub-group is leading on the implementation of the Leonard report recommendations some of which align with recommendations from the CJINI report. There are a total of 14 recommendations in the Leonard report, of which four are strategic and ten operational. The Leonard report is broken into three areas: governance and oversight; operational; and preventative. As of February 2022, 3 Leonard recommendations have been completed, with the other 11 in progress. Two of the CJINI recommendations are now completed. The Chair of SBNI and Chair of the SBNI CSE sub-group attend CPSOG meetings to update on progress in relation to implementation of the Leonard Report recommendations and overlapping recommendations from the CJINI report.

#### (iv) Scoping of Barnahus model

The recommendation to consider a Barnahus style model in Northern Ireland is a direct recommendation in the report of Sir John Gillen on the handling of serious sexual offences cases.

The Barnahus (Children's House) model is an interdisciplinary, multi-agency, child-centred, service for children and young people who have experienced some form of

sexual abuse, including exploitation. It is a place where professionals work together under one roof to investigate suspected child sexual abuse cases and provide appropriate support to child victims. It delivers medical, forensic, investigative and advocacy services, social care, and therapeutic support in a homely, child-friendly and safe environment.

A DoJ scoping study in 2019 examined the justice elements of the Barnahus model and sought to identify how voluntary and public sector organisations in Northern Ireland could work together to provide children with access to justice while avoiding re-traumatisation/re-victimisation of children and providing high professional standards for their recovery. It examined child house models in the UK and other jurisdictions and set them in the Northern Ireland context to help identify the opportunities that a Barnahus-type service may present and challenges that may need to be overcome if a model was to be developed in Northern Ireland. The scoping study concluded that there are many services available in NI with good examples of collaborative working but they are not typically placed in a child-friendly environment or under one roof. It concluded that although some practices and procedures have been tailored to a certain degree to reduce re-traumatisation of child victims of sexual assault, there is still some way to go before criminal justice organisations can provide greater reassurance that the child's journey through the criminal justice system does not contribute to re-traumatisation. It also concluded that the adversarial system and approach to obtaining evidence from children, although showing signs of improvement with some examples of best practice, has not been fully adapted to take into consideration the cognitive and emotional development of children, their vulnerability due to their age, the effects of trauma and the unique nature of the crime. Best practice in interviewing and questioning does exist but it is not necessarily consistent across all areas and all professionals.

DoH scoping work relating to health provision started in February 2022 and is expected to conclude by April 2022, with the production of a report. DoJ has also recently commenced a review and refresh of the 2019 Barnahus Scoping Study of the justice elements of the Barnahus model. This will take into consideration progress on key elements of the model taken forward under the remit of the Gillen Review, progress in other jurisdictions and new research including the Commissioner's report.

### [UNCRC Responses](#)

CPSOG has reviewed Departmental progress against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) observations relating to safeguarding and child protection in Northern Ireland as well the second Statement on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland (SOCRNI 2) setting out how government has fulfilled its commitment to UNCRC.

CPSOG sub-group will review progress against these calls on an ongoing basis and CPSOG will scrutinise future children's rights statements by the Commissioner as they relate to child safeguarding / child protection to determine whether further cross departmental action is necessary.

## Information Sharing

Guidance on Information Sharing for Child Protection Purposes was published on 31 August 2021 and replaces the Department's Circular, HSS CC 3/96 (Revised) – Sharing to Safeguard – September 2008 (amended May 2009) ("the Circular").

The Guidance on Information Sharing for Child Protection Purposes sets out high level principles and guidance that staff in HSCT children's social services should follow when sharing information for child protection purposes. In keeping with the Department's child safeguarding policy, *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People*, the new guidance will be complemented with regional procedural guidance and information sharing protocols developed by the SBNI for its member agencies. This will help to meet the original policy aim by providing a framework for staff working in child protection to be able to confidently share information in a timely and effective way.

The SBNI policy and procedure in respect of information sharing is available at the following link.

[https://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/p\\_ch\\_protection\\_inv.html](https://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/p_ch_protection_inv.html)

The SBNI is developing guidance for the arrangements in respect of the exchange of information between Agencies in circumstances where a Person of Interest is held / charged / convicted and a notification to an HSCT is required.

## Online Safety

### *Online Safety Bill*

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK is leading on this as it is a reserved matter. DoJ is leading on and co-ordinating input from other Departments in Northern Ireland as required and an Online Safety Bill reference group has also been established. This Bill establishes a new regulatory regime to address illegal and harmful content online, with the aim of preventing harm to individuals in the UK.

### *Online Safety Strategy and Action Plan*

The Executive approved the Online Safety Strategy at its meeting on 24 November 2020 and the Department of Health, on behalf of the Executive, published the Online Safety Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland on 9 February 2021 (Safer Internet Day). Although funding for year one was secured by the Department of Health subject to business case approval, it has not been possible for the Safeguarding Board (SBNI) nor the Department of Education to implement the actions planned for 2021/22, including the recruitment of an Online Safety Coordinator. In the main, this was as a result of COVID-19 and staffing related pressures. The SBNI is in the process of recruiting an Online Safety Coordinator and it is intended that actions originally allocated to 2021/22 can be progressed in 2022/23.

DE has introduced a Safer Schools App which was initially launched in April 2020 and then subsequently updated in November 2021. This is available to all pupils, parents, teachers and schools, which provides access to safeguarding resources and advice including how to stay safe online and when using social media.

CPSOG will provide strategic monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. The CPSOG sub-group, on which the SBNI is represented, will be the link between CPSOG and the SBNI, linking with the Online Safety Coordinator and the SBNI Online Safety Forum. The SBNI is currently developing a new 4 year Strategic Plan in which Online Safety will have more of a focus.

### [Child Criminal Exploitation \(CCE\)](#)

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) occurs where children and young people are exploited and coerced into committing crimes. CPSOG agreed to add CCE to its work plan as a priority area in April 2021.

Prevention of and protection from exploitation is a complex matter, with many risk factors. The response to CCE requires input from a range of statutory and non-statutory partners.

The NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) published an advice paper in July 2021 on CCE setting out recommendations for a strategic response to protect children from harm including abuse, violence, coercion and exploitation by organised gangs and groups. The NICCY paper was considered by CPSOG and it established a task and finish group to make recommendations in 2022 on what needs done to address CCE in Northern Ireland. The Group is being supported by DoH and DoJ with members drawn from a range of agencies/bodies and departments. Children, young people and community and voluntary organisations will also be involved in the development of recommendations. This will be facilitated by the Education Authority and Queen's University Belfast. The group will also take account of the NICCY advice, as well as existing and developing best practice in this area. The Tackling Paramilitary Crime and Organised Crime Team (TPCOC) has been working on behalf of the Executive for a number of years to implement commitments to provide support for young people vulnerable to paramilitary and organised criminal harm and involvement. The Task & Finish Group will seek to make recommendations to broaden that work and create a co-ordinated system wide response to CCE.

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Action Plan

In relation to the FGM action, as of January 2022, 4 actions were completed, with 2 ongoing, 3 deferred and one action subsumed into another making 9 actions in total as opposed to the original 10. The details of each action can be seen in the table below.

### **FGM ACTION PLAN (January 2022)**

<b>AP</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Position and Status</b>
1.	Revision of 2014 Multi-Agency Guidelines to take account of FGMPOs and other related developments.	DoH (Child Protection Unit Policy)	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <p><b>Position as of January 2022</b></p> <p>The Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order (Relevant Third Party) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 came into operation in December 2021. This enables HSCTs to apply for FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs) without first seeking leave from a court. The revised multi-agency practice guidelines take account of the Order.</p> <p>The revisions to the guidelines are at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that a draft will be circulated to CPSOG for consideration for members in 2022. Comments will also be sought on the draft from partner agencies such as the SBNI. Once the draft has been considered by these stakeholders and updated as required, it will re-circulate to CPSOG for final review/sign off.</p>
2.	If resource is available, scope whether guidance for the judiciary on the operation of FGM Protection Orders is necessary.	DoF	<p><b>Deferred - pending revision to multi-agency guidelines</b></p> <p>In 2015 Judiciary guidance was produced following introduction of FGMPOs into NI. The Office of the Lord Chief Justice is content to receive available literature and review position following refresh to multi-agency guidelines.</p>

<b>AP</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Position and Status</b>
			<b>January 2022</b>  Once revisions to multi-agency practice guidelines are signed off by CPSOG, DoH will advise DoF officials for their consideration of this AP.
3.	DOF to write to the Office of the Lord Chief Justice to see if judiciary wishes to develop guidance or training for judges on FGM, and to identify any assistance which Departments can offer.	DoF	<b>Deferred - pending revision to multi-agency guidelines</b>  As AP2
4.	Taking account of existing requirements relating to protecting children, consider whether mandatory reporting of FGM should be introduced in Northern Ireland.	DoJ	<b>Closed</b> - CPSOG agreed, in January 2018, not to introduce mandatory reporting.
5.	Taking account of cultural sensitivities, raise awareness about the risks of FGM and the need to protect children and develop practice guidance and care pathways.	DoH / SBNI / PHA	<b>Action closed</b>  October 2018 - materials and resources launched.
6.	Develop maternity guidance	DoH (Chief Nursing Officer / Chief Medical Officer)	<b>Ongoing</b>  At 20 January 2020 meeting confirmed separate guidance for nurses in GP setting not required.



AP	Action	Lead	Position and Status
			<p><b>Position as of January 2022</b></p> <p>Work on the maternity guidance has recommenced after being put on hold due to Covid pressures. The maternity guidance will complement and support wider FGM guidance [see below].</p>
7.	Develop regional training resource and training targeted at Health Care Professionals.	DoH / HSCB / PHA	<p><b>Action closed</b></p> <p>As AP 5 above - regional training rolled out for health care professionals.</p>
8.	Establish a system of data collection and analysis relating to FGM.	DoH / PHA	<p><b>Action closed</b></p> <p>As AP 5 above - NIMATS amended to collect FGM information at antenatal appointments.</p>
9.	Produce final FGM guidance for Social Services.	DoH / HSCB	It has been agreed that these can be subsumed into the new multi-agency guidelines (AP1).
10.	Investigate the awareness of FGM amongst school nurses and consider whether they have a role to play in the prevention and detection of FGM.	DE / PHA	<p><b>Action deferred - pending completion of PHA review of role of HSCT nurses who deliver Child Health Promotion in Schools.</b></p>

### 3. Key Achievements

The table below summarises the key achievements of the CPSOG to date. Greater detail specific to work relating to child sexual exploitation is provided at Annex A.

<b>CPSOG WORK AREA</b>	<b>PROGRESS TO DATE</b>
<b>CSE - Marshall Report Recommendations</b>	72 out of a total of 77 recommendations completed
<b>CSE - Leonard Report Recommendations</b>	3 out of a total of 14 recommendations completed with 11 in progress
<b>CSE - CJINI Recommendations</b>	3 out of a total of 14 recommendations completed with the other 11 in progress
<b>CSE - Barnahus Model</b>	DoH scoping work relating to the health elements of a Barnahus-type model will start in February 2022 and is expected to conclude by April 2022, with the production of a report. DoJ has also recently commenced a review and refresh of their 2019 Barnahus Scoping Study of the justice elements of the model. The consideration of a Barnahus-type model for Northern Ireland will be taken forward by the cross-departmental Steering Group that provides strategic direction and oversees the coordinated implementation of Gillen Review recommendations.
<b>Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)</b>	5 out of 10 actions on FGM Action Plan closed. 3 actions deferred. 2 actions ongoing
<b>Information Sharing for Child Protection Purposes</b>	Publishing of the new Guidance on 31 August 2021
<b>Online Safety Strategy</b>	3 year Online Safety Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland published in February 2021

<b>Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)</b>	A task and finish group was established in December 2021 to make recommendations to CPSOG taking account of the advice from the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People and existing and emerging best practice.
<b>Emerging Child Protection Issues including COVID 19 and UNCRC Recommendations</b>	<p>A Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People’s Plan was developed on a cross-departmental basis with input from DfC, DE, DoJ and DfE.</p> <p>Work is progressing to address all of the safeguarding calls made in UNCRC Observations and NICCY SOCRNI 2 paper.</p>

More information is included in Annex A on examples of key work undertaken by DoH, DoJ and SBNI.

#### 4. Forward Work Programme

The last number of years have created unprecedented pressures including the impact of Covid-19 across all sectors. There have been significant staffing pressures in relation to delivery of key services, including frontline child protection services. The Department of Health has established a review of children’s services in January 2022 which will report in 2023. Looking forward, CPSOG will continue to monitor and address emerging child protection issues on a cross Departmental basis. The establishment of a multi-agency and cross Departmental sub-group to support the operational work of CPSOG will help to strengthen and build collaboration and co-ordinate action between organisations to address the child protection areas set out in the CPSOG work plan. In 2022, despite ongoing pressures within the health and social care system, CPSOG is committed to developing an enabling framework for child protection joint inspections. It is working closely with the relevant inspectorates to progress this on a pilot basis. It is also focused on developing a cross-departmental and multi-agency action plan to address child criminal exploitation.

Looking forward, CPSOG will continue to adapt and respond to child protection issues providing a vital strategic focus and ensuring a collaborative cross-Departmental approach to these issues.

The table below provides a summary of the CPSOG forward work programme.

<b>CPSOG WORK AREA</b>	<b>LOOKING FORWARD</b>
<b>CSE - Marshall Report Recommendations</b>	CPSOG will monitor implementation of remaining 5 recommendations
<b>CSE - Leonard Report Recommendations</b>	SBNI CSE sub-group Representatives will report on regular basis to CPSOG on implementation work
<b>CSE-CJINI Recommendations</b>	As above
<b>CSE - Barnahus Model</b>	Scoping work on health related aspects of a Barnahus model and a refresh of the 2019 DoJ Scoping Study of the justice elements will take place in 2022 and reported to CPSOG.
<b>Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)</b>	Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines will be reviewed / approved by CPSOG in 2022.
<b>Information Sharing for Child Protection Purposes</b>	This Guidance will be reviewed, starting in Autumn 2022. The Guidance will be complemented with regional procedural guidance and information sharing protocols developed by the SBNI for its member agencies.
<b>Online Safety Strategy</b>	CPSOG will provide strategic monitoring of the Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. The SBNI is currently developing a new 4 year Strategic Plan in which Online Safety will have a greater focus.

<b>Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)</b>	The task and finish group will make recommendations to CPSOG in 2022.
<b>Emerging Child Protection Issues including COVID 19 and UNCRC Recommendations</b>	CPSOG to continue to agree actions and monitor progress in relation to any emerging child protection issue.

Department of Justice

**CJINI Report – Child Sexual Exploitation in NI – An Inspection of the Criminal Justice System’s response June 2020**

CJINI Operational Recommendation 3 stated, “*Within six months of publication of the report, the PSNI implement a consistent approach to CSE across its five PPU’s within a model that is adequately supervised and resourced.*”

Summary of the Issue

The PSNI Public Protection Branch CSE officers had been part of the wider Child Abuse Investigation Units (CAIU) based in structures mirroring each Health & Social Care Trust. Whilst this Trust structure meant that communication between agencies was effective at a Trust level, there was variance with regards to the service provision, supervision, processes and practices within PSNI CSE when compared across all Trust areas.

Steps taken to address the Issue

In September 2020, PSNI Public Protection Branch separated the CSE officers from the CAIU’s into a standalone team, still allocated on Trust model to maintain essential working relationships with partners, but supervised centrally by 2 dedicated CSE Detective Sergeants and a dedicated Detective Inspector.

Children identified as at risk of CSE can be exposed to harm in a wide variety of ways, however missing episodes are often seen as a key risk factor. PSNI CSE team have introduced a daily review mechanism for all incidents involving those children already at risk of CSE. Regardless of the nature of the report, it will be reviewed by at least a CSE practitioner and a CSE supervisor before 09:00 daily. This allows for critical review and follow up with HSCT colleagues as an early intervention measure.

In addition to this, PSNI monitor missing episodes involving children identified as at risk of CSE. Once a pre-determined threshold is reached, the CSE D/Sgt for that Trust area will contact the relevant HSCT CSE lead to request a joint agency review of the child’s circumstances leading to the missing episodes to seek to reduce the frequency of missing episodes and therefore the risk of harm. This policy of early identification of risk is based on missing episodes but includes all reported incidents where risk of harm is identified. If the missing/concerning episodes continue or the risk is not further reduced, then the matter is escalated via the PSNI D/Inspector and Detective Chief Inspector and HSCT counterparts as required in order to ensure that risk is identified at the earliest opportunity and appropriate mitigation is put in place. This process of checks and balances ensures that both agencies are maximising the intervention and disruption opportunities available to them.

Where it has not been possible to adequately reduce the CSE risks to a child, it is necessary for the HSCT to have the child presented to a Restriction of Liberty (Secure Care) Panel. This multi-agency panel will consider the application as presented by the Trust and if the threshold for secure accommodation, set out in Article 44 of the

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, is met then the child is granted a secure placement in Lakewood Children's Home. The PSNI CSE D/Inspector was invited to the panel as a voting member in June 2021; as a result of the prevalence of children at risk of CSE being presented to the panel, and in order to provide the PSNI input and specifically the operational awareness of the additional risks presented by CSE in a policing context. This has enabled rapid de-escalation of risk to the child, and improved joint agency decision making; as well as a more effective whole organisation policing response through close liaison with multi-agency vulnerability hubs to ensure children and young people receive the level of support needed.

### Outcomes

The outcomes of the new structure include:

- Visibility for CSE as a standalone specialism, reflecting the importance of the role particularly within the wider Child Abuse and Protection arrangements within PSNI;
- A unified governance structure for CSE with consistency in professional practice and accountability across all 5 Trust areas;
- Patterns and trends involving young persons at risk and those who seek to do them harm can be more readily identified;
- Improved file timeliness, which measures how quickly the PSNI are able to submit a prosecution file to the Public Prosecution Service, and is a key factor in reducing the attrition of victims from the criminal justice process. This has seen a net reduction from 160 days in Jan 2021 to 131 days in August 2021. Speedy access to justice is a key issue when considering children at risk of CSE and the single supervision structure is improving the PSNI ability to deliver that;
- Improved sanctioned outcome rate. This reflects where the police investigation has been able to be progressed to the point where a decision can be made regarding a prosecution. This figure is historically lower in sexual crime than in other areas, often affected by the victim no longer wishing to proceed with the complaint for a wide variety of reasons. The ability of police to support the victim through the criminal justice process can reduce that attrition from the process. PSNI CSE single supervision structure has seen the sanctioned outcome rate climb from 13.6% in January 2021 to 20.0% in August 2021; and
- The supervisory oversight, and unified governance created as a result of CSE being treated as a stand-alone specialism, has allowed for regional multi-agency training and strategic engagement to take place throughout the reporting period between PSNI and SBNI and HSCT and also with the Education, Youth Services and Ancillary Services sector.

## **Department of Health**

### **The Marshall Report**

This report published in 2014 looks at how child sexual exploitation (CSE) takes place in Northern Ireland. It explores how children and young people, parents, communities and professionals can work together to understand what is happening and take steps

to ensure that we support children and young people to enter healthy relationships and avoid abuse. As part of this report, there was a total of 17 Key Recommendations and 60 Supporting Recommendations published.

Supporting Recommendation 52 stated that, “*DHSSPS [Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the former name for the now-DoH] should ensure that the revision of Circular HSS CC 3/96 (Revised), Sharing to Safeguard: Information Sharing about Individuals who may pose a Risk to Children, is accompanied by clear guidance to workers that will give them the confidence to act appropriately*”.

### Summary of the Issue

As part of the recommendations in the Marshall Report, one of the key areas was information sharing between agencies. Access to relevant and up to date information for child protection purposes often means that personal and maybe sensitive information has to be shared with and by Health and Social Care Trusts.

### Steps Taken to address the Issue

Work on this guidance began in 2016 between DoH and SBNI, culminating in a public consultation between May - August 2019 on new draft information sharing guidance. Progress post-consultation was delayed by the collapse of the Executive but this work was taken forward again in 2021, resulting in the publication of the new guidance on 31 August 2021. The new guidance revoked Circular, HSS CC 3/96.

### Outcomes

The new guidance sets out high-level principles and guidance that staff in HSCT children’s social services should follow when sharing information for child protection purposes. In keeping with the Department’s child safeguarding policy, Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People, the new guidance will be complemented with regional procedural guidance and information sharing protocols developed by the SBNI for its member agencies. This guidance provides a framework for staff working in child protection to be able to confidently share information in a timely and effective way. The guidance replaces HSS Circular 3/96 (Revised) – Sharing to Safeguard – September 2008 (amended May 2009). A review date of the Guidance has been set for autumn 2022.

## **Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland**

### **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) through the work of the SBNI CSE sub-group 2018 - 2021**

#### **1. Introduction**

This example details the progress of multi-agency partnership, engagement and cooperation concerning Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) through the SBNI CSE sub-group. Between 2018 - 2021 there has been considerable work undertaken to progress the recommendations of 2 strategic reviews concerning Child Sexual Exploitation, namely: ‘Getting Focused and Staying Focused’ led by Professor John Pinkerton Queens University Belfast and ‘An Evaluation of how the Safeguarding



Board for Northern Ireland member agencies are effectively responding to and managing Child Sexual Exploitation within Northern Ireland' written by Leonard Consultancy. Alongside these 2 reviews the SBNI, through the work of the CSE sub-group, continued to ensure the recommendations attributed to SBNI from the report, 'Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland - Report of the Independent Inquiry' (Marshall 2014) were actioned. The CSE sub-group is currently chaired by PSNI Detective Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally and comprises senior management representation from local Health and Social Care Trusts, Education Authority (EA), NSPCC, the Youth Justice Agency and Barnardo's NI Safe Choices Project.

## **2. SBNI CSE sub-group Activity 2018 – 2021**

The Marshall Report 2014 published 17 recommendations and 60 supporting recommendations to safeguard the well-being of children and young people at risk of CSE. One of these recommendations was for the SBNI to raise awareness of CSE to both professional and the general public. The CSE sub-group coordinated the 2019 six week tour of Chelsea's Story (live play originally commissioned in 2015 as Chelsea's Choice) to 50 post primary schools across Northern Ireland. Each performance was delivered to at least 200 school children per performance, with an overall reach of 10,000 young people. The performance addressed areas such as healthy relationships, unhealthy relationships, Safe Internet Use/Sexting, Consent, the Grooming Process, avoidance of "Victim Blaming", methodologies used by perpetrators and where to go for help and advice. Resources designed by young people for young people were made available and focus groups were held following performances with teachers and young people to facilitate and reflect on the performance. The response from audiences was very positive.

- "Please bring the play back to school for others to see".
- "It was a superb performance. Our pupils were very attentive and enjoyed the performance and understood the key messages"

The play was also delivered to the following professional audiences across five additional performances during a sixth week of the tour:

- Student Teachers from Stranmillis and St Mary's teacher training colleges
- Social Work students from Ulster University and Queens University Belfast
- Education Authority staff
- Police Student Officers the Police College
- SBNI Board members and members of the five local safeguarding panels



In addition, there was significant collaboration with Hospitality Ulster to raise awareness and publicise the role of hotels, pubs and clubs in combating CSE. Extensive training was rolled out, Taxi drivers were also trained. The DVLA and Department for Infrastructure developed a strategy to make this available as part of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) module, which all taxi drivers could complete. Any taxi company wishing to apply for a contract with the Health and Social Care Trusts are required to demonstrate that their employee drivers have undertaken a CSE awareness raising module.

Safeguarding Panel's organised workshops focussing specifically on CSE with boys and young men attracting over 135 participants from across various agencies.

In May 2019, the PSNI in collaboration with the SBNI CSE sub-group hosted a '10,000 volts' workshop for multi-agency partners working with CSE. The workshop was designed to bring together multi-agency stakeholders who work with victims of CSE to explore, through the specialised use of technology and from an individual and organisational perspective, what is working well and what the challenges are in this very complex area of work. The technology allowed the immediate collation of information from practitioners across a range of disciplines working in this complex and challenging area.



The contributions of the participants at this event were analysed and an evaluation was provided to the PSNI and SBNI towards the end of 2019. This analysis was consistent with information being collated as part of the research for the 'CSE

Evaluation Report; a Multi-Agency Evaluation', in terms of staff reports of their experience.

In July 2020 the SBNI published the, [CSE Evaluation Report; a Multi-Agency Evaluation 2020](#)' (Leonard Consultancy) to examine, both at a strategic and operational level, how the member agencies of the SBNI have been addressing CSE from prevention to intervention within Northern Ireland, since Marshall (2014) and the SBNI 'Thematic Review' conducted by Professor John Pinkerton in 2015, [Getting Focused and Staying Focused](#)

All SBNI member agencies participated in the evaluation process and the recommendations resulting from the evaluation, for completion by the SBNI, are managed through the CSE sub-group. The Evaluation made 14 recommendations in respect of how the improvements made in the management of CSE could be consolidated and developed. The SBNI CSE sub-group oversees the Governance and Action Plan in respect of the range of recommendations and reports progress to the SBNI Board. The Chair of the CSE sub-group and the Independent Chair of the SBNI are also invited to report to the Child Protection Senior Officials Group with respect to the action planning process of both the CSE Evaluation and the Criminal Justice Inspection in Northern Ireland Report (published in June 2020) into CSE in NI.

Also in 2021, the SBNI CSE sub-group formed a task and finish group known as the Boys and Young Men Advisory Group, to further recommendations from the CSE Evaluation concerning boys and young men to highlight the barriers to disclosure and identification of boys as victims or at risk of CSE. The terms of reference for the task and finish group are as follows:

- To work collaboratively to raise awareness that boys and young men in Northern Ireland are impacted and victimised by Child Sexual Exploitation.
- To consider how multi agencies can work collaboratively to offer services that meet the needs of this target group, improving services for Boys and Young Men.



The Chair of the group reports to the SBNI CSE sub-group regarding work and development of the Boys and Young Men Advisory Group. SBNI held 3 webinars focussing on the impediments to recognising CSE in boys and young men facilitated by the author of the three briefing papers Dr Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin.



The SBNI continues to have a key role to play in highlighting and managing the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland. Much of this activity is undertaken through the SBNI CSE sub-group. Through this group the SBNI has been able to provide consistent momentum since 2013, undertaken collaboratively to progress and address the issues associated with CSE and to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland. By raising awareness of the issue, improving practice, and increasing support for children and young people who are being sexually exploited or are at risk of being sexually exploited, the SBNI member agencies continue to strive to help keep them safe. The range and breadth of activity undertaken by the sub-group continues to drive forward best practice in addressing child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland.