

NI GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY

BOARD MEETING – 17th December 2020

Present:	Mrs Gemma Loughran, <i>Chair</i> Mr Peter Reynolds, <i>Chief Executive</i> Ms Veronica Callaghan, <i>Non-Executive Director</i> Mr Fred Smyth, <i>Non-Executive Director</i> Mr Lee Wilson, <i>Non-Executive Director</i> Mrs Gillian McGaughey, <i>Non-Executive Director (joined 11am)</i>
In Attendance:	Mr Sean Brown, <i>Corporate Services Manager</i> Mrs Teresa Fallon, <i>Assistant Director</i> Miss Patricia O’Kane, <i>Assistant Director</i> Mr John Sheldon, <i>QA & Training Manager</i> Mr Martin Quinn, <i>Programme Manager Children’s Services HSCB (Point 73.20)</i>
Minute Taker:	Mrs Ann Andrew, <i>Administration Manager</i>

START TIME: 9.30am

Meeting by teleconference

72.20 INTRODUCTION

- 72.20.1 Mrs Loughran welcomed the Board and Senior Management Team to the meeting. She indicated that Mr Martin Quinn, Programme Manager Children’s Services at the HSCB, will be joining the meeting to provide an overview of services to children and young people.

73.20 SERVICE DELIVERY: REGIONAL HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE BOARD

- 73.20.1 Mrs Loughran welcomed Mr Quinn to the meeting and invited him to provide an overview of the challenges for social care and the response from the five Health & Social Care Trusts in order to safeguard and protect children and young people under these very challenging times.
- 73.20.2 Mr Quinn referred to the impact on staff specifically in Lakewood and FIT, in the WHSCT, with many staff either contracting the virus or self-isolating. The principle underpinning the approach by health and social care is one based on;

- A co-ordinated approach with the focus on the protection and safeguarding of children;
- Effective communication and engagement with stakeholders, families and children;
- Ensuring a consistent and proactive approach.

73.20.2 Mr Quinn noted the data provided by the HSC Trusts to the Board and Department of Health (DOH) showing an increase in the number of children coming into care and the number of children's names being placed on the Child Protection Register. The following data which was recently shared at a meeting of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) on the 02/12/20 was also presented to NIGALA Board;

- **Referrals/Children In Need (31/03/20)**
 - 22,414 children aged 0-17 years on the Social Services caseloads at 31/3/20;
 - Up to 38,000 children referred each year.
- **Children on the Child Protection Register**
 - Numbers of Children on the CPR have been increasing from March 14;
 - There are variations in trends across Trusts;
 - SHSCT and WHSCT have experienced significant increases.
- **Registrations, Re-Registrations and De-registrations in 2019/20**
 - 3,058 child protection referrals;
 - 2,040 registrations to the CPR;
 - 336 of these children had previously been registered (16.5% of all registrations);
 - 1,945 children were removed from the CPR.

73.20.3 In addition, Mr Quinn outlined the actions to address the growing number of unallocated cases which is not only a shared concern for NIGALA but a long-standing problem dating back as far as 2013; increasing from 236 to 804 by March 2020. He also reported on the concerns for under 12's and the growing numbers of 'un-accompanied' children and young people coming to Northern Ireland.

73.20.4 Mr Quinn reported a shortage of new social workers and other problems linked to work-force planning. While there are pressures on Children's Services and the recruitment of new foster carers to what is currently an aging resource, a regional response is now being developed reflecting a more creative and solution focused approach.

73.20.4 In addition to responding to a myriad of challenges, the increasing number of school age children experiencing mental health issues is one priority with the development of CAMHS services into schools being a shared priority for both the HSC Board and the Education Authority.

- 73.20.5 Overall, Mr Quinn described the situation in Northern Ireland as a ‘mixed-bag’ of challenges and solutions reflecting different pressures for each Trust. This led the Board into a wider discussion on the problem of resources more generally both in terms of ‘quantity’ and ‘quality’. Based on necessity, how services are to be delivered in the future will have to change. Mr Quinn supported this analysis by referencing new co-located PSNI/Children Services teams. A multi-disciplinary approach remains the foundation for service delivery with early intervention required to make a difference to children and young people.
- 73.20.6 The Board was keen to hear about direct face to face contact with children with families and Mr Quinn confirmed contact continues to be supported through a ‘risk-assessed’ approach. Recognition was given to the preference that children are seen face to face. For NIGALA the circumstances for each request continues to be considered on a case by case basis and the process for decision making is based on considered discussions between the guardian and manager. The Board was assured that the ‘risk-assessed’ approach being adopted is not intended to be an obstacle and indeed only a minority of applications by guardians are refused. Overall the situation remains fluid.
- 73.20.7 The Board was interested to hear about data sharing and it was agreed that a meeting would be scheduled in the New Year with the HSC Board to explore data exchange relevant to children’s services.
- 73.20.8 Mr Quinn referred to Mr Reynolds’ imminent retirement and acknowledged his thanks to Mr Reynolds for his invaluable support and assistance over the years. He also indicated that Ms O’Kane’s and Mrs Fallon’s attendance at the AD Forum has proven to be extremely helpful.
- 73.20.9 The Board expressed their appreciation to Mr Quinn for attending the Board meeting and contributing to an interesting and informative discussion.

74.20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 74.20.1 Mrs Loughran provided an opportunity for the Board members to identify any conflict of interest in respect of today’s agenda. None were noted.

75.20 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING: 27th OCTOBER 2020

- 75.20.1 The minute from the last meeting of the NIGALA Board on 27th October 2020 was approved as an accurate record, proposed by Mrs McGaughey.

76.20 MATTERS ARISING

- 76.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Action List from the last meeting and the Board noted progress on each. There were no outstanding actions for discussion.

77.20 CHAIR & NON-EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

- 77.20.1 **ALB Chair's Meeting with Minister:** Mrs Loughran indicated that the last meeting of the ALB Chairs with the Minister had been scheduled to look at issues of workforce planning. However, this meeting was dominated by discussion about the availability of covid-19 vaccine. She indicated that a number of other ALB Boards are currently experiencing vacancies in Non-Executive Directors. NIGALA is fortunate in this case to have a full Board complement.
- 77.20.2 **Non-Executive Appointment Term:** Mrs Loughran indicated that the appointment term to the NIGALA Board for Mrs McGaughey and Mr Smyth is due to expire on 31st January 2021. Public Appointments Unit were contacted to seek permission to extend the period of office and they have confirmed that the Department is currently preparing to seek the Minister's approval to extend both Mrs McGaughey and Mr Smyth's terms as NIGALA Non-Executive Members for up to 12 months, pending the outcome of a proposed Public Appointment competition.
- 77.20.3 **Recruitment for Position of CEO:** Mrs Loughran confirmed that the Recruitment Panel met on 11th December 2020 and interviews for the position of Chief Executive were undertaken. She indicated that an offer has been made and confirmation is awaited. Mrs Loughran highlighted the outstanding assistance from Alison Andrews (Human Resources BSO) throughout the recruitment process; she also noted her gratitude to Gerry Guckian (Solicitor) who sat as a Panel Member and whose experience and input were immensely appreciated.

78.20 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

- 78.20.1 Mr Reynolds referred to his *CEO Board Paper* providing an update on NIGALA activity since the last meeting of the Board. He made specific mention to a number of areas.
- 78.20.2 **Review of Regional Facilities for Children & Young People:** Mr Reynolds referred to the planned integrated Campus for Children & Young People which is hoped to be in place by March 2022. He detailed the key messages from the Multi-Agency Secure Panel Project and the presenting issues for Children referred to the Regional Secure Panel. Mr Reynolds highlighted the many factors being taken into consideration.

- 78.20.3 Mrs Loughran referred to Mr Quinn's discussion around Social Worker visits. She noted her concern about face to face contact meetings and indicated this had been one area of tension previously identified at Guardian staff meetings. Mr Reynolds stressed the process that NIGALA has followed has been consistent with that of HSC Trusts and is about risk assessing each situation and having a process in place.
- 78.20.4 Mrs Loughran queried if the majority of Guardian visits are remote and if we risk assess similar to HSC Trusts. Mr Reynolds highlighted that HSC Trusts have a different statutory role and requirement to that of NIGALA which will reflect the frequency and need for face to face visits. He acknowledged that zoom meetings are no substitute for face to face meetings but emphasised that at present if Guardians can do meetings remotely then they should continue to do so.
- 78.20.5 Ms Callaghan noted she was under impression that management were proactively raising this with the gals, from a point of reassurance and that there is not a blanket rule that visits shouldn't be undertaken; if a risk assessment has been completed then there is no reason why Guardians shouldn't be visiting. She suggested a more focused view may be required if the Guardian is concerned about something specifically.
- 78.20. Mrs Fallon indicated that all Guardians complete risk assessments before they visit children and young people (eg to visit, observe contact, interview kinship carers, etc). She noted that there are very few cases where the Managers have not agreed with the risk assessment and generally Guardians can complete visits where they feel the need to.
- 78.20 Mrs Loughran agreed that zoom meetings are no substitute for face-to-face meetings and acknowledged the need to also promote the health & wellbeing Guardians and ensure their safe keeping. She noted that she would have concern if Guardians were not undertaking visits other than because of health protection issues. Mr Smyth noted the need to review visits outside of Covid also.

79.20 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 79.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Finance and Performance Report*.

Finance

- 79.20.2 Mr Brown updated the Board on the Agency's financial position as at the end of October 2020. He indicated that financial pressures to date have been offset against savings in areas such as travel costs. He suggested this be kept under review and future consideration be given to what is essential travel.

- 79.20.2 Mr Brown noted that all accruals have been tied off as we head into the last quarter. Mr Wilson requested that 'income' be included on the finance table going forward. Mr Brown agreed to include this from next month.

ACTION: Mr Brown to include 'income' on the finance table going forward.

- 79.20.3 Mr Brown indicated that he has looked at several scenarios for 2021-22 and a number of business cases will be required in order to address the in-house financial pressures. He noted specifically increased salary costs, increased rental costs and the need for a rebuild business case to address staffing issues.
- 79.20.4 Mr Smyth suggested that business cases should be prepared early and robust supporting information should be available. He noted that travel costs seem to be the Agency's biggest discretionary expense and potential contingency; additional work will need to be completed around this. Mr Smyth also highlighted the need for a business case for a proposed 5 additional guardians to include the rationale for such appointments including the fulfilment of our statutory duty and the other benefits in terms particularly of efficiency. Ms Callaghan noted her agreement and reinforced the financial pressures on the HSC at present and that the Agency will need to be prepared for a difficult year. It was agreed that before submitting the Business case, NIGALA will consult with Sponsor Branch to ensure maximum co-operation.
- 79.20.5 Mr Reynolds referred to the number of children in care and the impact this has on the resources; regional data is available. He stressed that management need to have the ability to be reactive and be able to address issues quickly eg unallocated cases. Workforce planning is a longstanding issue and the need for quality staff that are available when required has never been more essential.
- 79.20.6 Mrs McGaughey indicated that the NI Court & Tribunal Service is starting to review its pattern of court work over the next 6 months. She indicated due to the nature of the current restrictions there may be a number of court venues which cannot be used for Children Order and Adoption cases in which guardians are involved due to the number of parties involved. Mrs McGaughey noted this will be another impact to the work of NIGALA.

Performance

- 79.20.7 Mr Brown referred to the performance and workflow management reports. He indicated a number of actions have been taken to address the number of unallocated cases and a copy of this letter to staff has been circulated for information.

- 79.20.8 Mrs Fallon indicated that she is currently on her 4th week of Allocation. There were well over 80+ cases currently on the waiting list and the management of these cases awaiting appointment is not a doable task. She confirmed that the Senior Management Team met last week to consider options and the challenges faced with allocation. All options were look at and it was agreed that one additional case would be added to each Guardian. Operational Managers then met and gave consideration to each individual before allocating them an appropriate case.
- 79.20.9 Mrs Fallon indicated that whilst most guardians were receptive and took a case were in agreement with the strategy, about 6-7 people cannot reached at this time. She stressed that whilst this brought the numbers down on the waiting list, an additional 16 cases were in turn added onto the list just last night. Mrs Fallon emphasised this is not a problem that is going to go away and caseloads for Guardians have increased significantly with a current average of 17 cases.
- 79.20.10 Ms O’Kane highlighted that some Guardians are very anxious and worried about the high caseloads. She reiterated the Agency’s duty of care to its staff.
- 79.20.11 Mr Sheldon noted he was in agreement that managers need to try something else, but, regardless of strategy it is clear that the Agency cannot cope with the amount of intake that it has. He stressed the first months of 2021 will be extremely difficult.
- 79.20.12 Ms Callaghan noted that she does not see the rising trend of case appointments decreasing in the near future and a map trend by area and additional regional data is going to be crucial in order to manage workload.
- 79.20.13 Recruitment of Guardians was discussed and Mrs Fallon also stressed the additional numbers of staff required supervision and the pressure this brings must also be considered. Mr Brown provided background on the proposal for another additional 5 Guardians being recruited.
- 79.20.14 Mr Reynolds indicated that Ms O’Kane will be undertaking an evaluation of the Principal Guardian Practitioner position in the New Year. SMT are having a workshop in January 2021 to look at the workforce requirements and the pressure on the Assistant Directors. Ms Callaghan noted the complexity of issues around supervision and highlighted the policy should reflect the Framework. She acknowledged the pressure on Assistant Directors cannot be continued. Mr Reynolds noted a report will come to the Social Care Governance Committee in the first instance.

ACTION: Business Cases for 2021-22 to be prepared at an early stage and shared with the Board. NIGALA to consult with Sponsor Branch to ensure maximum co-operation.

80.20 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2021-22

- 80.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Draft Business Plan 2021-22*. Mr Brown explained that the Business Plan format is set by the Department and follows a similar layout each year. He indicated that at the last meeting of the Board Ms McDaniel had indicated that the 2021-22 Business Plan should roll over from the current plan and also include an objective about the rebuilding of services.
- 80.20.2 Mr Brown took the Board through each of the objectives and there was discussion about any proposed amendments or additions to same.
- 80.20.3 The Board indicated they approved the draft Business Plan 2021-22 subject to their proposed amendments. The Business Plan should then be circulated to staff and stakeholders for comment.

81.20 COMPLAINTS POLICY

- 81.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the NIGALA Complaints Policy and Mr Brown highlighted the background of the Policy and took the Board through the revisions noting the amendments made to process. He indicated the Policy has now been aligned to mainstream thinking and developments in complaints handling within the HSC.
- 81.20.2 Mr Reynolds indicated that the Panel Regulations for NIGALA will not change at this point. Mrs McGaughey referred to the Adoption & Children Bill indicating this will provide a realistic opportunity for the process to be updated.
- 81.20.3 The Board approved the revised NIGALA Complaints Policy.

82.20 COVID-19 UPDATE

- 82.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Covid-19 Update* and Mr Brown provided a verbal update confirming that communication has been received in respect of the Covid-19 Vaccination Programme. FAQs in respect of this and a general update from the Public Health Agency has been shared with staff.
- 82.20.2 Mr Brown indicated that he would anticipate medical staff being a priority in the vaccination programme in the first instance. Mr Wilson queried if Board Members would be included in the vaccination programme with the Agency; Mr Brown indicated he was unsure but would seek clarification on this.

- 82.20.3 Mr Brown indicated that he did not see any major change to the use of office space in the near future. He noted that he was in attendance at a meeting of the Corporate Managers of the ALBs and all are approaching this in the same way by working remotely.

ACTION: Mr Brown to seek clarity on whether Board members will be included in a vaccination programme for NIGALA.

83.20 BOARD SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS SINCE LAST MEETING

- 83.20.1 There were three meetings of Board Sub-Committees since the last meeting of the Board.

- Audit & Risk Committee – Meeting 3rd November 2020
- Information Governance Committee – Meeting 12th November 2020
- Social Care Governance Committee – Meeting 22nd October 2020

- 83.20.2 Mrs Loughran indicated that papers from each Sub-Committee have been circulated to the Board for information highlighting the business discussed at each. Mrs Loughran sought confirmation from each Sub-Committee Chair that there was nothing arising from the reports for the attention of the Board; they confirmed this was the case.

84.20 DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

- 84.20.1 Mrs Loughran referred to correspondence received on 7 December 2020, *Deployment of the Covid-19 Vaccine in Northern Ireland*, Ref: HSS (MD) 82/2020. A copy has been circulated for the information of the Board.

85.20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 85.20.1 There was no other business for discussion.

Thanks

- 85.20.2 Mrs Loughran noted her thanks to the Executive Team for their hard work all year, and especially in preparation for the Board meeting. She indicated the quality and detail of work entailed have been exemplary.
- 85.20.3 Mrs Loughran indicated that Mr Smyth was moving on professionally and offered him best wishes in all future endeavours.

- 85.20.4 Mrs Loughran wished all Board Members a very Happy Christmas. She indicated she has found the first 9 months of her appointment as Chair of NIGALA to be extremely interesting and noted her appreciation of the hard work and energy of each member, through what has been a very challenging year.

86.20 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

- 86.20.1 Confidential Session updated on a number of areas.

END TIME: 12.30pm

Chair of the Board

A C T I O N L I S T

Ref	Action	By Whom	Progress Noted for Meeting
79.20 Finance and Performance Report	Mr Brown to include 'income' on the finance table going forward.	Mr Brown	<i>Complete</i>
	Business Cases for 2021-22 to be prepared at an early stage and shared with the Board. NIGALA to consult with Sponsor Branch to ensure maximum co-operation.	Mr Brown Mr Reynolds	<i>Complete</i>
82.20 Covid-19 Update	Mr Brown to seek clarity on whether Board members will be included in a vaccination programme for NIGALA.	Mr Brown	<i>Complete</i>