CHILDREN'S COURT GUARDIAN AGENCY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
BOARD MEETING – 19th December 2024

Present:	Mrs Gemma Loughran, Chair Ms Edel McKenna, CEO Ms Veronica Callaghan, Non-Executive Director Mr David Douglas, Non-Executive Director Mr Lee Wilson, Non- Executive Director
In Attendance:	Mrs Ursula Crickard, Assistant Director Mrs Ann Andrew, Corporate Services Manager (Interim) James, Leah and Chrissie from CCGANI Youth Board
Minute Taker:	Ms Roisin Clarke, PS (Agency staff)

START TIME: 9.30am

Mrs Loughran welcomed everyone and thanked Ms Clarke for her minutes from the previous Board meeting.

76.24 SERVICE DELIVERY

76.24.1 Mrs Loughran welcomed representatives from the Agency's Youth Board. James, Leah and Chrissie shared facets of the work they have been involved in over the past 12 months and also spoke about their ideas and plans on how they hope to take CCGANI Youth Board into 2025 and beyond.

76.24.2 Ms Loughran, Ms Callaghan, Mr Douglas and Mr Wilson asked the young people the following four questions, listening to their views and acknowledging their points :-

1. How will we make sure your views about the service as being heard?
2. How will your views be shared with professionals who have power and influence?
3. How will we promote participation so that other children and young people can also share their experiences and ideas to help improve our services?
4. How will we make sure you can see what has changed and improved as a result of the Youth Board's feedback and participation work?

76.24.3 After an informative discussion the Board thanked the young people and invited them to keep in contact with the Board and to ask for help and guidance when needed. Mrs Loughran reiterated how their work and vision for the

CCGANI Youth Board were respected and applauded by all members of the Board.

77.24 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

77.24.1 Mrs Loughran provided an opportunity for the Board to identify any conflict of interest in respect of today's agenda. None were noted.

78.24 MINUTE OF THE LAST MEETING

78.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Board minute from the last meeting on 24th October 2024.

78.24.2 Mr Wilson asked for a minor amendment to point 68.24.2 to reflect the Agency was 'given' incorrect advice, rather than 'followed' incorrect advice. This was agreed.

78.24.3 Mr Wilson referred to point *69.24 – Scheme of Delegated Authority*. He indicated he felt the document should include reference to the various limits for specific purchases. Mrs Loughran indicated it was agreed at the last Board meeting and should remain unchanged at present; any future amendments can be discussed at the Audit & Risk Committee.

78.24.4 The minute from 24th October 2024 was approved, proposed by Ms Callaghan.

79.24 MATTERS ARISING

79.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Actions from the last meeting and progress against each was noted.

- ***65.24.4 Cases Discharged without Guardian appointment***: Mrs Crickard provided a verbal breakdown of the types and incidences of cases discharged without a Guardian appointment. Mrs Loughran thanked Mrs Crickard for an excellent piece of work and for the assurance this provided the Board.

  Mrs Crickard referred to an occasion in respect of an unaccompanied minor/immigrant child where a Solicitor failed to feedback to the Agency that the case had been discharged without a Guardian having been appointed. Mr Douglas noted his concern but recognised this was beyond the control of the Agency. Ms Loughran advised that the Solicitor Panel members be contacted and made aware of the importance of keeping the Agency informed on such occasions. Mrs Crickard agree to highlight this.

Ms Callaghan advised this should be kept under review and the Board be regularly updated on such instances going forward. She asked that the SCG Committee also receive this information.

ACTION: Mrs Crickard to contact Solicitors Panel and reinforce the need to keep the Agency updated on court outcomes.

ACTION: Data in respect of cases discharged without Guardian appointment to be reported regularly to the SCG Committee and the Board.

80.24 CHAIR AND NON-EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

80.24.1 **Non-Executive Board Member Vacancy:** Mrs Loughran advised the Minister has made his final decision on the Non-Executive Board Member (legal) appointment. Details of the appointee have not been shared to date but Mrs Loughran indicated she would confirm these as soon as they were available.

81.24 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

Chief Executive's Briefing / Update Report

81.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Chief Executive Briefing* and Ms McKenna spoke to her paper highlighting some areas for mention: -

81.24.2 **Unallocated Cases:** Ms McKenna advised of a current waiting list of 180 unallocated cases, relating to 305 children and young people. She detailed the challenges this raises and also referred to the recent report generated by The Children's Social Work Statistics for Northern Ireland 2023/24, highlights as at 31st May 2024, 3999 children and young people were in care. 28% of these would result in public law court application with the need for a Guardian appointment.

81.24.3 Ms McKenna indicated along with Ms Loughran and Ms Crickard attended a 'Foundations for the Future' Conference in November 2024, where the Minister of Health announced that he was unable to secure future support for regional ALB, which was one of the key recommendations contained within the Jones Review of Children's Social Care Services June 2023.

Business Plan Objectives

81.24.4 Ms McKenna referred to the *Business Plan 2024-25 – Action Plan* and the Board noted progress on the objectives.

81.24.5 Ms McKenna indicated the leases for Spencer House and Dobbin Centre are due to expire on 31 July 2024. She indicated that she, along with Ms Casey will be undertaking various accommodation meetings in the coming months to ensure that satisfactory premises are sought for the Agency's two regional offices.

Temporary Interim Management Arrangements

81.24.6 Ms McKenna provided a verbal update on the Agency's temporary interim management arrangements. She indicated that in light of the resignation of Ms Savage (Guardian Services Manager), that it would be prudent to bring forward the Formal Review of the interim management arrangements. After discussion it was agreed this should be brought forward and Ms McKenna and Mrs Crickard agreed to bring a draft proposal regarding permanent arrangements to the April Board meeting.

ACTION: Draft proposal regarding permanent management arrangements to be correlated by Ms McKenna and Ms Crickard for presentation to the April Board meeting.

SCG Learning & Improvement Lead

81.24.7 Ms McKenna made particular reference to the SCG Learning & Improvement Lead which the Agency was regrettably unable to fill. This post has since been resubmitted for evaluation and hope to put it back out for advertisement by the end of Jan 2025.

83.24 FINANCE

Finance Report:

83.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Finance Report for the financial year 2024-25, as at month 7.* Mrs Andrew spoke to the report highlighting the Agency's financial position as at October 2024.

83.24.2 Mrs Andrew shared that the Agency met with Brigette Worth, Finance Director at the DoH on 13.11.24. Ms Worth highlighted the financial position of the

Health sector and impressed the need for all available monies to be passed back. Following this meeting, the Agency met with the Agency's BSO accountant and details of an easement were agreed. A sum of monies was retained due to the implications for additional costs due to the lease/licence position. The Financial Monitoring unit later made contact to confirm that the Agency would not incur any additional expenses and therefore the full retraction should be made. The Agency made a total retraction of £281k.

Financial Planning Scenarios

83.24.3 Mrs Andrew referred to the *Financial Planning Scenarios* which related to correspondence from Brigette Worth seeking detailed financial planning information for the three-year period, 2025/26 – 2027/28. The Agency was asked to detail Inescapable pressures and Savings Proposals to Build to Flat Cash, and Additional Savings proposals to build 1%, for each consecutive year. The Agency completed the supplied template to reflect the savings, service implications and the impact these would have on the Agency. The Agency now awaits the outcome in our allocation letter.

84.24 Annual Report & Accounts 2023-24

84.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Agency's *Annual Report & Accounts 2023-24* and Ms McKenna provided a verbal update.

84.24.2 Ms McKenna highlighted it has now been confirmed that James House will come under the status of a Lease under IFR516. DoF are urgently engaging with LPS to agree an evaluation on the office space, and the Finance Director is keen to get the accounts signed off for all organisations impacted without qualification which complies with the NIAO position.

84.24.3 Ms McKenna indicated she would keep the Board informed of progress.

85.24 Children and Young People

Implementation Plan for the Children & Young People's Strategy

85.24.1 Ms Crickard referred to the *Implementation Plan for the Children & Young People's Strategy* and indicated that there is ongoing work with the children and young people on the Youth Board that will inform the plan. The Implementation Plan will therefore follow at a later date to reflect all workstreams included.

Children's Feedback Mid-Year Report

85.24.2 Ms Crickard referred to the *Children's Feedback Mid-Year Report* for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. She indicated there were a total of 373 closed cases which represented 595 children. Feedback was not applicable to 304 children and 291 children were eligible to complete feedback. Of the feedback forms sent out, 37% were returned. The Board noted the breakdown of feedback, usage of the app and paper questionnaire, and reviewed the answers provided to the feedback questions by the children and young people.

Mrs Crickard noted her thanks to Ms Casey for completing the report.

86.24 Draft Business Plan 2025-26

86.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the draft *Business Plan 2025-26.* Ms McKenna spoke to the plan highlighting the objectives detailed. She discussed these with the Board and indicated the plan needs to be submitted to the DOH in January 2025.

86.24.2 The Board agreed the draft Business Plan 2025026 and Mrs Loughran asked Board members to forward any further comments to Ms McKenna by early January 2025.

87.24 Quality Report 2023-24

87.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Quality Report 2023-24. The Board noted the report and approved same. Mrs Andrew indicated this would be published on the Agency's website and shared with the Department.

88.24 Policies

88.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred the following policies. Mrs Andrew noted the policies were all recently approved and ratified in BSO.

a. ***Conflict, Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace Policy and Procedure:*** This is a Regionally agreed Policy that has been subject to consultation with regional TU colleagues. Features include:
   - Inclusion of OJLC approach;
   - Better clarity on roles and responsibilities;
   - Clearer guidance on steps to resolution;
   - Formal introduction of the pre-investigation screening tool.

b. ***Secondment Guidance for Line Managers and Employees:*** These guidelines have been developed and consulted locally.

c. ***Fixed Term Workers Policy:*** This Policy has been developed and consulted locally.

d. ***Supporting Performance Improvement Policy:*** This is a Regionally agreed policy that has been subject to consultation with regional TU colleagues. Features include:
   - Developed with HSC Values and Open Just and Learning Culture in mind;
   - Encourages performance improvement in a more structured and positive (i.e. language) way;
   - Clear roles and responsibilities;
   - Focussed on early intervention through 1-1's etc;
   - Informal, formal and appeal stages;
   - Fast track option available if parties agree the employee and role are not a good fit.

88.24.2 The Board approved the policies and Ms McKenna agreed to email staff about their approval and adoption by the Agency.

ACTION: Ms McKenna to circulate agreed policies to staff.

89.24 Departmental/ Other Correspondence

89.24.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Correspondence shared with Board members for information:-

a. DoH – Changes at Director level within the Social Care & Public Health Policy Group.

b. DoH Finance Circular – HSC(F) 23-2-24 – The Payment of Remuneration of Chairs and Non-Executive Members Determination (Northern Ireland) 2024

c. DoH Finance Circular – HSC(F) 24-2024 – Payment of Travelling and Other Allowance to Members (No.2) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2024

d. DoH Circular ACA 02/2024 – Commencement of section 133 of the Adoption and Children Act (NI) 2022 – definition of 'harm'

89.24.2 The Board noted the correspondence and Mr Wilson confirmed the Audit & Risk Committee have also had sight of same.

90.24	**Board Committee Meetings since last Meeting of the Board**

SCG Committee

90.24.1 Mrs Loughran indicated that a meeting of the SCG Committee had taken place on 5th December 2024.

9024.2 Ms Crickard spoke to her shared report providing an overview of the Committee business. She made particular reference to the Domestic Homicide Training presented by Professor Jane Monckton-Smith. The Board indicated they were very impressed with the quality of work being undertaken.

91.24	**Any Other Business**

91.24.1 There was no other business for discussion.

92.24	**Confidential Business**

92.24.1 There was no confidential business for discussion.

END TIME: 12noon

DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: 6th February 2025, 9.30am

ACTION LIST

Ref	Action	By Whom	Progress Noted for Meeting
79.24.1	Mrs Crickard to contact Solicitors Panel and reinforce the need to keep the Agency updated on court outcomes. Data in respect of cases discharged without Guardian appointment to be reported regularly to the SCG Committee and the Board.	Mrs Crickard Mrs Crickard	
82.24.3	Draft proposal regarding permanent management arrangements to be correlated by Ms McKenna and Ms Crickard for presentation to the next Board meeting.	Ms McKenna Mrs Crickard	
88.24.1	Ms McKenna to circulate the agreed policies to staff.	Ms McKenna	