

Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy

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Statement from the Chief Executive

The Public Health Agency (PHA) as both a member and the corporate host organisation for the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) has a legal and professional duty to work in collaboration with other agencies to effectively address the vulnerability experienced by many children and young people.

Co-Operating to Safeguard Children and Young People ¹ clearly states that the Public Health Agency (PHA) has functions in health improvement and health protection and has a duty to meet and promote the universal health and social well-being needs of all children and young people under the four key functions of:

- Health and social wellbeing improvement;
- Health protection;
- Public health support to commissioning and policy development; and
- HSC research and development.

Children and young people have an absolute right to be kept safe and free from abuse and neglect. They deserve to live in nurturing environments so they can thrive and achieve their full potential. The PHA's role is to lead health and social improvement, tackle health inequalities and provide professional input to commissioning of health and social care services to address local needs including any new and emerging safeguarding themes. The PHA firmly believes that a public health approach is the best way of making life better for children, ensuring they are safeguarded and where necessary protected. As a multi-disciplinary, multi-professional body with a strong regional and local presence, the PHA is absolutely committed to using its resources and influences to effectively safeguard the children and young people of Northern Ireland.

All PHA staff should be vigilant and be able to recognise and appropriately respond to indicators that a child or young person may be in need or at risk of harm. The PHA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy define the values, principles

¹ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/co-operating-safeguard...>

and standards that must be evident when discharging PHA responsibilities that both directly and indirectly impact on children and young people. The policy includes four key statements, with specific criteria to ensure compliance. Implementation of this policy is mandatory and will be monitored through the PHA Assurance Framework.² It is expected that all staff embrace this policy in the best interests of children and young people.

Dr Eddie Rooney
Chief Executive

² PHA Assurance Framework

Definition

Safeguarding Children is the process of preventing impairment of children's health and development and of ensuring they are growing 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 from abuse or neglect when it occurs, including the promotion and protection of children's rights (SBNI 2012)³

Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the PHA contributes to safeguarding children and young people in a manner that reflects the:

- Rights and needs of children and young people,
- Lead role and responsibilities of the PHA,
- Legislative and professional frameworks that underpin safeguarding practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff understand the PHA's commitment to safeguarding children and young people and their individual, team and organisational responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and young people.

Scope

This policy is relevant to all staff employed by the PHA. The principles and four key statements of the policy must be reflected in practice and decision making including commissioning processes.

³ www.safeguardingni.org

Governance

It is the responsibility of all PHA staff to adhere to this policy. Directors and senior managers will have responsibility to ensure the overall adherence. Quality assurance measures should be applied through existing governance arrangements.⁴

Core Safeguarding Children Values and Principles

- Child abuse is a public health and societal problem that needs to be addressed through public health initiatives;
- Prevention, early identification and early intervention is key to effective safeguarding children practice;
- The rights of children must be respected⁵;
- Safeguarding children practice and processes must be child centred;
- The participation of children and young people must be promoted if services are to be sensitive to the needs of children and young people;
- The ‘best interests’⁶ of the child is of paramount importance when making decisions about the need to intervene so as to protect them;
- Parents and carers must be respected as the primary care givers for their children;
- The needs of families differ and should be responded to through a range of evidence based services including universal, targeted and specialist approaches;
- Safeguarding children practice needs to be of a regionally consistent high standard;
- Statutory, voluntary and community agencies including the PHA must work together effectively to safeguard children and young people;
- Research, development, innovative practice and learning needs to be supported.

⁴ PHA Quality Assurance Framework

⁵ http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf

⁶ As defined by Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

Policy Statement 1

Respecting the Rights of Children and Young People

The PHA approach to safeguarding children is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Criteria:

1. The best interests of children are of primary concern when decisions affecting them are being made, including decisions relating to service commissioning and service development;
2. PHA policy and business plans reflect the need to create environments that support parents, families and communities to nurture and protect children so that they reach their full potential, taking account of religious, cultural and ethnicity factors;
3. PHA staff facilitate the participation of children and young people in a manner that reflects their evolving capacities and thus takes account of the particular vulnerabilities of some groups of children to abuse and neglect, such as those with disabilities, separated children, and care-experienced young people;
4. The views and opinions of children are listened to and given serious consideration in matters that affect them;
5. The PHA publishes relevant information in a child friendly manner using a range of media;
6. The rights and responsibilities of parents are respected.

Policy Statement 2

Interagency Partnerships

The PHA will work in partnership with key voluntary, statutory and community agencies to ensure that children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted.

Criteria:

1. The PHA discharges its own responsibilities to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of children, through a range of commissioned programmes and initiatives across all its functions;
2. The PHA works with key statutory and voluntary agencies when addressing safeguarding children practice issues and participates in Children and Young People Services Partnership arrangements to achieve outcomes for all children and young people;
3. The PHA works with the Health & Social Care Board to promote the health and wellbeing of children and ensure that effective multi-disciplinary and inter-agency safeguarding children services are commissioned and delivered;
4. PHA staff work with Health & Social Care Trusts to facilitate implementation of regionally agreed safeguarding children standards of practice;
5. The PHA works with other agencies to address new and emerging safeguarding themes for example child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and human trafficking.
6. The PHA works with others to promote public awareness about the need to safeguard children;
7. The PHA supports relevant research and development opportunities that contribute to improved inter-agency understanding of issues relating to safeguarding children;
8. The PHA publishes information and data relating to safeguarding children.
9. The PHA fulfils its responsibility as the corporate host of the SBNI

10. The SBNI is included within the PHA annual Internal Audit work plan and audit reports are brought to the PHA Governance and Audit Committee for consideration of those areas where the SBNI provides assurance to the PHA.

Policy Statement 3

Recognising and Responding to Safeguarding Children concerns

All PHA staff have a duty to respond promptly and effectively when they suspect that a child or children are 'in need'⁷, of safeguarding support services or are at risk of significant harm⁸ as defined by the Children (NI) Order⁹

Criteria:

1. PHA staff comply with Regional Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures.¹⁰
2. Children who are thought to be at risk of significant harm are referred to the relevant Health & Social Care Trust Gateway Team using UNOCINI¹¹ documentation, preferably with the consent of parents unless to do so might place the child at further risk;
3. PHA staff will work in an open and transparent manner with families;
4. Children considered to be 'in need' but who are not deemed to be at risk of significant harm are referred to the relevant Health & Social Care Trust Gateway Team using UNOCINI documentation, with valid consent;
5. All staff must inform their line manager of safeguarding children concerns;
6. If staff are unsure regarding their involvement in safeguarding children practice processes or the threshold for referral to Gateway teams without the consent of parents or the young person they will avail of specialist advice, support and supervision;
7. Staff will escalate safeguarding children issues if they feel that safeguarding decisions and actions taken do not adequately protect a child or children;
8. Contemporaneous records are maintained in relation to all practice, liaison, decisions and outcomes in line with data protection principles and records management legislation.

⁷ In Need is defined as:

- a) Unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by an authority under this Part; .
- (b) Health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
- (c) He / she is disabled.

⁸ Harm is defined as ill treatment or the impairment of health or development. Whether the harm is significant is determined by the health and development of the child when compared with that which would be reasonably expected of a similar child.

⁹ www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1995/755/contents

¹⁰ <http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/index.htm>

¹¹ www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_unocini_guidance_revised

Policy Statement 4

Safeguarding Children Training

All staff within the PHA will have access to and avail of safeguarding children learning opportunities at a level and frequency that reflect their role, responsibility and opportunity to safeguard children and young people in line with SBNI Child Safeguarding Learning and Development Strategy and Framework¹²

Criteria

1. Training programmes delivered or commissioned by the PHA are evaluated and updated annually to reflect new legislation, standards and knowledge;
2. All staff avail of safeguarding children and young people awareness training within three months of appointment and three yearly thereafter that focuses on:
 - a. Recognition of child abuse and neglect and how to respond;
 - b. Raising awareness of specific groups of children in need or in need of protection including those affected by domestic violence, parental mental health issues, alcohol, drugs and child trafficking and exploitation;
3. Professional staff involved in the commissioning of services attend a specific training programme and three yearly updates that addresses safeguarding children and young people and the responsibilities of commissioners;
4. Staff adhere to legislation and professional frameworks relating to safeguarding children training and learning opportunities¹³
5. Line managers ensure that each member of staff has an appropriate level of safeguarding children and young people training and learning opportunities;
6. Line managers maintain a record of staff attendance at safeguarding children and young people training.

¹² <http://www.safeguardingni.org/sbni-learning-and-development-strategy>

¹³ Including DHSSPS; SBNI; NMC, NIPEC; GMC & HPC Standards

Further Information

This policy has been Equality screened as required by Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and does not have a 'major impact' for people including those in the nine specified equality categories.

If you have comments or suggestions that will improve this policy, or if you need support regarding the implementation of this policy, please contact:

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