

NI GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY

BOARD MEETING – 8th September 2021

- Present:** Mrs Gemma Loughran, *Chair*
Ms Dawn Shaw, *CEO*
Ms Veronica Callaghan, *Non-Executive Director*
Mr Fred Smyth, *Non-Executive Director*
Mr Lee Wilson, *Non-Executive Director*
- Apologies:** Mrs Gillian McGaughey, *Non-Executive Director*
- In Attendance:** Mr Sean Brown, *Corporate Services Manager*
Ms Teresa Fallon, *Assistant Director*
Miss Patricia O’Kane, *Assistant Director*
Ms Sheina Rigg, *Implementation Manager for Trauma Informed Practice Project, SBNI (point 51.21)*
- Minute Taker:** Mrs Ann Andrew, *Administration Manager*

START TIME: 9.30am

Meeting by zoom

51.21 SERVICE DELIVERY PRESENTATION

- 51.21.1 Mrs Loughran welcomed Ms Sheina Rigg, Implementation Manager (Social Care) for the Trauma Informed Practice Project, SBNI. Ms Rigg provided the background to the Trauma Informed Practice Project (TIP) and outlined the aims and progress made on the project to date.
- 51.21.2 She provided an overview of trauma, adverse childhood experiences and detailed the project areas being supported to implement SIM/USD Model.
- 51.21.3 Ms Rigg highlighted a number of areas for discussion eg Implications for practice in NIGALA, Training Opportunities, Applying the Sequential Intercept Model and the Universal Service Delivery process to NIGALA services, Collaboration across agencies, Lifespan factors and how TIP interfaces with other approaches in Family and Childcare Services.
- 51.21.4 Ms Callaghan queried how TIP works alongside Signs of Safety (SoS); Ms Rigg confirmed this is not a separate model and should integrate with all elements of SoS.

- 51.21.5 Mr Smyth asked about the information/metrics used in the project and Ms Rigg noted that the National Children’s Bureau was used to conduct the measurements involved.
- 51.21.6 Ms Shaw noted that Ms Rigg will also be providing training for NIGALA Guardians. In addition, she has also agreed to have an input in resources for online learning for the wider staff group.
- 51.21.7 Mrs Loughran noted her thanks to Ms Rigg for joining the NIGALA Board Meeting and providing a very interesting and comprehensive analysis of the Trauma Informed Practice Project.

52.21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 52.21.1 Mrs Loughran provided an opportunity for the Board members to identify any conflict of interest in respect of today’s agenda; none were noted.
- 52.21.2 Mr Wilson asked that it be noted that he is a member of the NISCC Board. He indicated he would excuse himself from any conversation involving NISCC, as required.

53.21 MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

- 53.21.1 The minute from the last meeting of the NIGALA Board on 8th July 2021 was approved as an accurate record, proposed by Ms Callaghan and seconded by Mr Wilson.

54.21 MATTERS ARISING

- 54.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the Action List from the last meeting and the Board noted the progress on the actions detailed.

55.21 CHAIR & NON-EXECUTIVE’S BRIEFING

- 55.21.1 Mrs Loughran provided an update for Board members in respect of a number of areas and members were also invited to share.

- 55.21.2 **NIGALA Meeting with the Minister of Health:** Mrs Loughran noted she felt the Board had an excellent meeting with Mr Swann, Minister of Health. She indicated it was also very helpful to know that the Department had followed up on a number of issues discussed, after the meeting. An invitation to the Minister to meet with the Board sometime in the future will be arranged.
- 55.21.3 **HSC Chairs Meeting:** Mrs Loughran confirmed she continues to attend the HSC Chairs meeting with the Minister and Non-recurrent funding is currently one of the biggest issues for discussion.

56.21 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BRIEFING

- 56.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *CEO Briefing* and Ms Shaw spoke to her report detailing NIGALA activity since the last meeting of the Board. She focused of the two months since the last Board meeting, and highlighted the progress made on the Action Plan. She specifically noted:-
- 56.21.2 **Meeting with DoH:** Ms Shaw indicated that the follow-up meeting with the DoH after the meeting with the Minister was very useful. She confirmed that the £156k that was applied for annually with DoH will now become recurrent as from 1st April 2022
- Ms Shaw indicated that the issue of 'delay' was discussed and the NIGALA paper was particularly helpful, highlighting that delay is due to a number of factors. She noted that Ms McDaniel is engaging with HSC Trusts, HSC Board and NIGALA to look at delay from an HSC perspective and examine what the factors are.
- 56.21.3 **Staff Engagement Sessions:** Ms Shaw indicated that the planned staff engagement sessions will now be run by zoom. She noted it was disappointing that these were not face to face sessions as planned, but given the current climate, this is the most appropriate way to undertake the planned sessions.
- 56.21.4 Mr Smyth noted he was pleased to see the Action Plan and progress made to date. He agreed the staff engagement sessions were important and suggested that perhaps members of the Board could attend some of the sessions and, without being operationally involved, be supportive. Mr Smyth highlighted the need for the Board to be visible. Mrs Loughran agreed and noted she would also be happy to join at the beginning or end of the staff sessions. Board members will be made aware of other opportunities throughout the year that they can link into with staff. Ms Shaw confirmed she was more than happy for any of the Board members to join the planned follow up engagement sessions.

- 56.21.5 Ms Callaghan indicated that the SCG Committee is planning to also run sessions with staff in the New Year about updates in practice and links to governance, etc and this too will be a good opportunity for board members to attend.
- 56.21.6 Mr Smyth reinforced the good outcome from the department meeting and noted how crucial it was to share information and access the appropriate data. Ms Shaw indicated that a report on Operations will come at the end of each quarter to the Board meeting for information. She confirmed further work has been done with trend data provided to the DoH and our own.
- 56.21.7 **Action Plan:** Mr Wilson referred to *Governance Arrangements (no:12)* and he highlighted that the Agency already had an Information Governance Committee which had agreed that this was not the appropriate time to make changes. He noted that the RAG rating should therefore be *Orange* rather than *Red*. The Board were in agreement.
- 56.21.8 Mr Wilson referred to *Corporate Team (no:10)* and referred to the fact that job evaluations are put on hold. He stressed this would mean that individuals were not being rewarded for the duties they are currently doing and stressed that because a review is being undertaken does not take away from anyone's right under AfC to ask for an evaluation of their job. He queried if there was an HR perspective or any implications to this for NIGALA? Mr Brown indicated he has spoken with individuals concerned who understand the situation but this was a point very well made.
- 56.21.9 Ms Callaghan stressed she was very supportive of Mr Wilson's comment and noted he had described this correctly under agenda for change. She noted her working experience of job evaluations was that all job roles could be looked at in that process. She noted that if the process was started it should not be paused.
- 56.21.10 Mrs Loughran noted she agreed in full. She stressed our most precious resource is our staff and any request for a job evaluation should be responded to positively.

ACTION: The Action Plan should be updated to reflect changes discussed:-

- ***Governance Arrangements (no:12) - RAG Rating of 'Red' to be amended to 'Orange'.***
- ***Corporate Team (no:10) – Any individuals who have requested a job evaluation should be given the opportunity to have the evaluation continued. Everyone should be made aware that requests for job evaluations will be progressed.***

57.21 FINANCE REPORT

- 57.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Finance Report* and Mr Brown updated the Board on the financial planning for 2021-22. He provided an overview of Allocation monies and Forecast spending for 2021-22 along with a detailed breakdown of NIGALA's spend.
- 57.21.2 Mr Brown indicated that all monies bid for have been received, however the core budget is still not sufficient to deliver what is expected; the confirmation of the £156k to becoming recurrent monies is a huge step forward for the Agency.
- 57.21.3 Mr Brown discussed the expected deficit at the end of the year on the core budget which will come from staff costs and the goods & services budgets. He highlighted that staff travel is also an increasing cost now that more visits are taking place. It is expected that any pay awards will be funded by the DoH.
- 57.21.4 Mr Wilson thanked Mr Brown for the well-presented information clearly showing fixed costs against variable costs. The budget for staff travel is hard to influence given it is a role requirement of the guardian. Ms Callaghan highlighted that staff should not be undertaking the long distances as they did before the pandemic and good governance as to the appropriateness of use of staff travel should be addressed. She stressed the need for the senior team to monitor travel appropriately.
- 57.21.5 Mr Brown indicated the Agency does have a Travel Policy but it is not as prescriptive as saying what guardians should do/travel to. Ms Shaw stressed that the Agency does want to limit unnecessary travel but Guardians will complete travel in cases as they think it is required. Mr Wilson agreed there should be caution around limiting travel which might impact/risk Guardians not getting a true picture of a case background. Mrs Loughran was in agreement and indicated a reduction in travel should relate more to Trust meetings, etc. She stressed if Guardians felt the quality of their work was being affected by an inability to travel to meetings then this would be a professional issue for concern.
- 57.21.5 Mr Smyth referred to the recurrent monies and suggested it would helpful to have a detailed map of how and when these monies will be spent. Ms Shaw agreed that whilst we can spend the recurrent funding however we wish, it is essential we monitor plans, risks and outcomes to ensure we are investing it appropriately. Ms Shaw noted she and Mr Brown have regular scheduled monthly meetings to discuss the budget.

ACTION: Mr Brown to prepare a detailed map for budget spend for 2022/23. This will come to the Board as part of the planning for 2022/23.

57.21.6 The *Finance Report* was proposed for adoption by Mr Wilson, seconded by Mr Smyth.

58.21 ACCOMMODATION UPDATE REPORT

58.12.1 Mr Brown spoke to the *Accommodation Update Report* and referred members to the detailed office plan for NIGALA in James House. He noted that NIGALA is based on the 1st floor overlooking the Lagan River and has a dedicated area with the office layout based on collaborative working. In addition NIGALA also has a room on the ground floor which will be used for meeting visitors, children and families.

58.12.2 Mr Brown indicated that he and Ms Shaw would be meeting with the planners on Friday and will visit Goodwood House to have sight of their desk layout. They will also be discussing colours and materials.

58.12.3 Mr Brown confirmed that a *Reference Group* has been set up with staff to facilitate feedback into the project.

58.12.4 He indicated that the licence fee (lease) for James House will cost £70k per year. It is hoped that any costs saved on rent will be reinvested to help with invigorating the Agency.

58.12.5 Mr Wilson queried if the Agency would be moving to shared service IT Assist when we move to James House and if so would this be compatible with HSC?. Mr Brown indicated this was not his understanding and HSC networks will continue to be used. He highlighted that HSC have a higher security threshold than IT Assist and it therefore this would be a huge risk for all ALBs if this changed.

58.12.6 Mr Brown noted that clarification is awaited from BSO about their role before and after the move and he will follow this up and provide confirmation to the Board.

ACTION: Mr Brown to confirm the role for BSO IT (HSC) in James House and inform Mr Wilson.

59.21 NIGALA FRAUD POLICY

- 59.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Fraud Policy* and Mr Brown spoke to same. He indicated the only change to the policy from last year, is on Page 9, and meets a request by the Audit & Risk Committee to have 'Fraud' as a standing agenda item at each meeting.
- 59.21.3 Mr Smyth indicated there was no mention of Covid in the Policy; this was acknowledged and Mr Brown confirmed it mirrored other HSC Policies.
- 59.21.2 Mrs Loughran endorsed the NIGALA Fraud Policy and the Board approved same, proposed by Mr Smyth and seconded by Ms Callaghan.

60.21 NIGALA BRIEFING ON RQIA REVIEW REPORT

- 60.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Briefing on RQIA Review Report*. She indicated that most Board Members had attended the recent NICON *HSC Chairs and NEDs Discussion Session: Independent Review into the Circumstances of Board Member Resignations in the RQIA*. She noted this was a very informative meeting and looked at the report which was led by David Nicholl. She referred to the Recommendations in the Paper.
- 60.21.2 *Recommendation 1:* Mr Brown indicated that a bespoke session with Mr Nicholl is to be arranged to lead a discussion on the implications for the Agency. Board members are asked to provide specific areas which they would like to examine in this session. A Board approved action plan should be developed from discussions. He requested that Mr Wilson accompany him to this preliminary preparation meeting; the Board agreed.
- 60.21.3 Ms Callaghan indicated this was a fascinating discussion that she would indeed like to explore further in a follow-up meeting. She noted it was clear the Board should look at strategy as ultimately the Board has an effective oversight on performance. A discussion about what is operational and what is strategy would be helpful to provide an understanding of operational delivery and the fulfilling of our function.
- 60.21.4 Mrs Loughran requested that Board Members provide Mr Brown with suggestions for discussion with Mr Nicholl. Mr Brown indicated the meeting with the Board and Mr Nicholl will hopefully be scheduled for November. Mr Wilson indicated that he is also meeting Mr Nicholl as part of the NISCC Board and will feedback any similar identified issues.

- 60.21.5 Ms Callaghan queried when the next follow-up meeting with the Minister is likely to be. Mrs Loughran indicated she would approach NICON for a possible timescale.
- 60.21.6 *Recommendation 2:* Mrs Loughran referred to the *Partnership Agreement* and it was noted that this cannot be progressed without the input of the Department. Mr Brown noted they would be in contact to take forward. Mr Brown indicated he would circulate the relating documents again for information.
- 60.21.7 *Recommendation 3:* Ms Shaw indicated that *The Adoption & Children Bill* will be discussed at a meeting with Ms Frances Nicholson. If appropriate she will be asked to join the Board meeting to discuss same.
- 60.21.9 The Board approved all recommendations in the *NIGALA Briefing on RQIA Review Report*.

61.21 SUBJECT ACCESS REQUEST (SAR) PROTOCOL

- 61.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *Shadow Family Justice Board – Subject Access Request (SAR) Protocol* and Ms Shaw spoke to same confirming the protocol detailed how subject access requests are dealt with by NIGALA. She confirmed the Social Care Governance Committee has already had sight of the protocol but as the protocol will be submitted to the Shadow Family Justice Board she felt it prudent that the Board had the final sign off.
- 61.21.2 Mrs Loughran indicated she felt it was a good document and Mr Brown highlighted it was consistent with GDPR for dealing with subject access requests.
- 61.21.3 The Board approved the *Subject Access Request (SAR) Protocol*.
- 61.21.4 Ms Shaw indicated that Mrs McGaughey has also agreed to provide a form of words which will sit on the NIGALA website and provide clarity for families, in advance, of what NIGALA can and cannot do.

62.21 NIGALA RENAMING & BRANDING

- 62.21.1 Mrs Loughran referred to the *NIGALA Renaming & Branding* and Ms Shaw spoke to same. She indicated that following discussion with the Board about changing the strapline on the logo it was agreed that any rebranding would need to go through a process, be agreed with the Department of Health (DoH) and have the correct resources to change the brand for letterheads, signage, etc.

- 62.21.2 Ms Shaw referred the Board to the briefing paper outlining a number of key factors which will influence this process. She referred the Board to the recommendations on the way forward and they discussed it in detail.
- 62.21.3 Mr Wilson indicated it would be helpful to secure money for the new branding and engage a professional outside agency who will tailor logo and branding that will focus on the work of a guardian and also fits with the focus on the welfare and the voice of children. The Board were in agreement that the use of an expert in the refreshment and branding would be an important input.
- 62.21.4 The Board referred to the name of the Agency, which has been included in The Adoption and Children Bill, due before the Executive in the near future. Ms Shaw indicated she would be meeting with Ms Frances Nicholson, DoH who could advise on what scope the Agency has to make amendments to the name changes to the Agency and the Guardian ad Litem. Ms Shaw noted that NIGALA is a statutory organisation with a specialist role. The Agency's core business, values and visions should be incorporated into the branding.
- 62.21.5 It was agreed that Ms Shaw should take forward the Renaming and Branding and keep the Board informed.

63.21 BOARD COMMITTEE MEETINGS SINCE LAST MEETING OF THE BOARD

- 63.21.1 Mrs Loughran noted that there has been one meeting of the *Social Care Governance Committee* since the last meeting of the Board. The meeting was held on 31st August and the *SCG Assurance Report* details the business discussed.
- 63.21.2 Ms Callaghan added a few extra points of interest to members. She referred to the CAFCASS Prioritisation Report previously shared by Mrs McGaughey; she highlighted the need to monitor Guardians who carry an especially have high number of cases and noted the impact of high caseloads; quality assurance and decision making can be monitored through regular audit and case file management, case plans and case closures. The NIGALA Supervision policy will also strengthen the support in place.
- 63.21.3 Ms Callaghan referred to the issue of delay which is monitored from 400+days in NIGALA. She indicated she was of the opinion that all cases in CAFCASS have a 300 day delay to start with.

- 63.21.4 Ms Shaw indicated that NIGALA will share the information learned from the Data with the Board via the Operations Reports on a quarterly basis. Better performance management structures might be able to assist but these do not exist at present.
- 63.21.5 Ms Callaghan discussed the role of the solicitor and how to monitor the quality of their work. There was discussion and it was agreed that the SCG Committee function is to simply provide assurance around the equity of allocation of cases to Solicitors.

64.21 DEPARTMENTAL/OTHER CORRESPONDENCE

NIAO – NIGALA Audit Certificate 2020-21

- 64.21.1 Mr Brown referred to the *NIAO – NIGALA Audit Certificate 2020-21* and confirmed the *Annual Report and Accounts* were laid before the Assembly on 31st August 2021.

Restart Sponsorship and Governance Activities 2021/22

- 64.21.2 Mr Brown referred to correspondence from DoH confirming *Restart Sponsorship and Governance Activities 2021-22*. He confirmed that the Department will make contact with NIGALA in respect of taking forward the *Partnership Agreement* which will replace the Management Statement, and also the new *Corporate Plan*.

65.21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Social Work Awards

- 65.21.1 Mrs Loughran indicated that the *Social Work Awards* is being held tomorrow. NIGALA has two shortlisted nominations and Ms Shaw and Mrs Fallon were attending ceremony.

66.21 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

- 66.21.1 The Board updated on confidential business.

Mrs Loughran thanked all who had prepared papers for the meeting and complimented them on the quality of those papers”

END TIME: 12.30pm

DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: 21st OCTOBER 2021, 9.30AM

Chair of the Board

ACTION LIST			
Ref	Action	By Whom	Progress Noted for Meeting
20.21.5 Chair & Non-Executive Directors Briefing: HSC Structures	Mr Brown & Ms Shaw to look at the Future Structures of the Health Service in Northern Ireland and bring for discussion to the next Board Meeting.	Mr Brown/ Ms Shaw	
39.21 Operations Report	Information on Caseloads to be shared with the Board before circulation to staff.	Ms Shaw Ms O’Kane Mrs Fallon	
56.21 Chief Executive’s Briefing: Action Plan	The Action Plan should be updated to reflect changes discussed:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Governance Arrangements (no:12) - RAG Rating of ‘Red’ to be amended to ‘Orange’.</i> • <i>Corporate Team (no:10) – Any individuals who have requested a job evaluation should be given the opportunity to have the evaluation continued. Everyone should be made aware that requests for job evaluations will be progressed.</i> 	Ms Shaw	
57.21 Finance Report	Mr Brown to prepare a detailed map for budget spend for 2022/23. This will come to the Board as part of the planning for 2022/23.	Mr Brown	
58.21 Accommodation Update Report	Mr Brown to confirm the role for BSO IT (HSC) in James House and inform Mr Wilson.	Mr Brown	