

# NORTHERN IRELAND GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY

**BUSINESS PLAN 2020-21**

## **NIGALA**

NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency

*A voice for Children and Young People  
in Family Courts*

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# FOREWORD

**‘Work across traditional boundaries to address the ever increasing complexity and demands on our services’:** *Health and Social Care Collective Leadership Strategy 2017*

The Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency published a four year Corporate Plan for 2017 -21 to outline its approach to delivering a service to children and young people who are the subject of court proceedings. The preparation for this Business Plan, for 2020-21, has been done in line with the Department of Health budget period for 2020-21. This Business Plan has been the subject of stakeholder consideration and comment and approved by the NIGALA Board. This document sets the Agency’s strategic vision and values, building in an approach underpinned by modelling a culture of collective leadership and collaborative working.

## CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

The challenges outlined in *‘Health and Wellbeing 2016 – Delivering Together’* published in May 2017 and adopted by the NI Executive, places an onus on us all to embrace *‘change’* which is referenced as inevitable. Without new approaches or thinking about how to deliver health and social care in the face of ever growing demand *‘we will increasingly struggle’*.<sup>1</sup>

The *‘New Deal New Approach’* (NDNA) commits to *‘Delivering Together’*, with the Northern Ireland Executive committing to bringing forward *‘positive changes in areas that impact greatly on people’s lives such as the economy, overcrowded hospitals, struggling schools, housing stress, welfare concerns and mental health’*<sup>2</sup>

Children coming into care are some of the most vulnerable members of society. They have often suffered traumatic events early in their lives linked to family disruption and breakdown. As a result

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle O’Neill MLA, Foreword to *‘Health and Wellbeing 2016 – Delivering Together’*.

<sup>2</sup> The New Decade New Approach Deal (January 2020)

family and community supports and networks can be fragmented meaning that life opportunities are dependent on creating new and sustainable supports.

The 'Independent Care Review' in Scotland began its work in 2017 to consider improvements for infants, children and young people who experience care in Scotland. At its centre was the 'lived experience' and wisdom of people, which meant actively listening to the voices of children and young people in care, care leavers, both young and old, families and carers.

How we listen to children in Northern Ireland is a key area for development as it is directly linked to 'better out-comes'. In order to ensure that all children and young people have effective representation, through the allocation of a Guardian by the date of a first hearing, it is imperative for NIGALA to take a more targeted approach to the service it provides taking account of existing capacity and available resources. Ensuring that children are heard and adequately represented by being involved in decision-making about their lives is non-negotiable and a key priority, but not one without its challenges. Building on our commitment to ensure our service to children and the courts is delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible, requires collaborative and relationship based working arrangements. It is necessary to create a shared vision of the future characterised by a culture of engagement, improvement and continuous professional development underpinned through staff support.

Working '*collaboratively*' is the cornerstone of how health and social care is to be delivered through the implementation of '*Signs of Safety*' ACEs and '*Building Better Futures*'. Working with children and families, the priority is to provide compassionate and transparent care while balancing family strengths as well as possible dangers. This change in emphasis is one which requires all professions and organisations to work together to achieve lasting outcomes for children.

NIGALA's journey has been one of developing a collective leadership culture with an emphasis on quality and continuous improvement and learning. Working across organisational and professional boundaries can be challenging but requires a commitment by all stakeholders to achieve improved and timelier outcomes based on robust decision making for children and young people.

Strengthening the commonality of our work and our shared objectives is a key part of our strategic priorities going into 2020/21 and we look forward to this shared journey.

## **QUALITY OF SERVICE**

NIGALA's aim is to meet its duty by listening to children and young people and seeking to safeguard their best interests in Court.

Mindful of the challenges which face us moving into 2020, NIGALA will strive to deliver a quality service based around our five 'Strategic Themes' and which involves placing children at the centre of everything we do, learning from what they tell us, valuing staff and promoting continuous improvement through learning. Our commitment to strengthening relationships with stakeholders is fundamental to our planning going forward into 2020-21. Co-producing on a partnership basis with other HSC organisations will be the foundation of how we meet our statutory and performance objectives for children and young people in the future.

In setting out our Business Plan objectives for 2020-21, we recognise the need to work more collectively and collaboratively while maximising available resources to achieve improved outcomes through shared learning.

# INTRODUCTION

Our business plan sets out the Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem (NIGALA) priorities and key deliverables for the year 2020-21.

Our business plan has four sections:

- Role of NIGALA
- Background to NIGALA
- Management team and structure
- NIGALA objectives for 2020-21

The NIGALA Board will monitor progress against the objectives and the effective running of the organisation at each of its Board meetings.

# ROLE OF THE NI GUARDIAN AD LITEM AGENCY

The Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA) is an Arm's Length Body (ALB) of the Department of Health (DOH) and was established under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

As an organization, NIGALA has a statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the 'voice' of children and young people in the court arena. It provides an independent representation for children and young people subject to potential and actual '*significant harm*' and whose futures are to be decided by the Courts in the respective arenas of Public Law and Adoption.

As these children represent some of the most vulnerable in our society, Guardians Ad Litem endeavor to ensure the needs of children and young people remain the primary focus of judicial decision-making and that the outcomes for them are the best that can be achieved.

## **Our Vision**

To be the "**Voice for Children and Young People in Family Courts**".

## **Our Purpose**

To independently represent children and young people's wishes, feelings and best interests in court for adoption and care proceedings in order to safeguard and promote their welfare.

## **Our Values**

NIGALA has a shared set of values that define our culture in everything we do. These values commit us to;

NIGALA Values



HSC Values



## **Our Duty**

The overall aim of NIGALA is to provide a service to children that contributes to the DoH strategy, to “create a high quality health and social care system, in particular one that is driven by and responsive to, the needs and wishes of patients and clients”.

This aim is delivered through NIGALA’s duty to listen to children and young people and through safeguarding their interests in Court.

## **NIGALA’s Role within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care**

As part of the Health and Social Care Framework for Northern Ireland, NIGALA seeks to support the DoH overall plan to promote an integrated system of health and social care designed to improve the health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. NIGALA seeks to do this by representing the interests of children and young people in legal proceedings and Family Courts and promoting their participation in decisions which impact on their lives.<sup>3</sup>

NIGALA’s performance framework is determined by the DoH in the light of its wider strategic aims and objectives and targets. The priorities and objectives for NIGALA are set out in its annual business plan, the key objectives of which are subject to approval by its Sponsor Branch in the DoH. In common with all ALBs, on issues of governance and assurance, NIGALA is directly accountable to the DoH.

NIGALA’s relationship with other health and social care bodies is characterised by, on the one hand, its professional/statutory independence from health and social care bodies in representing the interests of children and young people in court and, on the other, the need to engage with the wider health and social care in a positive and constructive manner to ensure that it is able to efficiently and effectively discharge its statutory function on behalf of children and young people.

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<sup>3</sup> Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

# APPROACH TO PLANNING

The Business Plan sets out the objectives of NIGALA for the year 2020-21. The Plan has been written to meet;

- An Outcomes Based Approach, which monitors and evidences progress towards desired '*outcomes*'<sup>4</sup> as set out in the Programme For Government;
- Department of Health priorities;
- NIGALA Corporate Plan 2017-2021.

## **Outcomes Based Approach**

The Business Plan is aligned to the strategic direction determined by the Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government and its outcomes and indicators and the strategic aims of the DoH.

## **Programme for Government**

The Programme for Government sets out the big issues facing our society and the challenges that have to be addressed. It sets out a different way of working which NIGALA supports. Namely:

- Focusing on outcomes to improve the wellbeing of people;
- Seeking to make a difference to the things that matter most to people;
- Contributing to a system that works across boundaries, groups organisations and communities for the common good; and
- Collaboration between the public sector, local government, private sector, community sector and voluntary sector and beyond to maximise what can be achieved collectively.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on work of Mark Friedman, Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)

NIGALA contributes to the Programme for Government by fulfilling its statutory functions.

### **Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together**

For the overall health, social services and public safety system, the following key priority areas, underpinned by Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, seek to deliver a model of **person-centered care** focused on prevention, early intervention and supporting independence and wellbeing:

- To ensure the most vulnerable in our society, including children and adults at risk of harm, are looked after effectively across all our services;
- Work to improve the life chances for children in the care system;
- Work with the courts to secure permanence for children more quickly, helping their mental and emotional wellbeing, educational attainment and health in particular;
- To be an employer of choice, investing in the health and wellbeing of its staff; and
- Develop leadership at all levels to create a collective leadership.

This Business Plan has been drafted to allow for flexibility which may be required as Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together is implemented.

### **NIGALA Corporate Plan**

The NIGALA Board has approved a Corporate Plan for 2017-2021.

This corporate plan sets out a number of strategic themes which all NIGALA's activities should contribute to. These are;

1. Putting Children at the Centre of NIGALA Decision Making;
2. Efficient Use of NIGALA's Resources;

3. Valuing Staff and Promoting Learning;
4. Delivery of a Quality Service to agreed standards;
5. Compliance with Legislation and Guidance;
6. Work in partnership with stakeholders to improve outcomes and the experience of children in the Court process.

# MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF NIGALA

## **The Board**

NIGALA has a Board with a complement of 4 non-executive directors and a Chair, all appointed under the public appointments process.

The Board of NIGALA is responsible for;

- Setting the strategic direction for NIGALA;
- Monitoring the performance of NIGALA;
- Ensuring highest standards of corporate governance and personal behaviour;
- Ensuring proper financial stewardship; and
- Appointing and appraising Senior Officers.

NIGALA has a relatively small Management team who deliver the Business Plan as agreed by the Board.

Key roles within the organisation include:

### **The Chief Executive:**

- Is accountable to the Board of NIGALA for the efficient and effective management of the organisation and ensuring it fulfils its statutory functions and meets the objectives agreed by the Board;
- Is the Accounting Officer for the NIGALA and in that capacity is directly responsible to the Permanent Secretary of the DoH in accounting for our use of public funds; and
- Is answerable through the NIGALA Board, to the Minister for Health.

### **Assistant Directors:**

- Lead the Guardian operations in the delivery of the annual operating plan.

**Head of Quality and Training:**

- Promotes quality and good practice in all aspects of NIGALAs activities and work.

**The Head of Corporate Services:**

- Manages corporate services functions of the organisation;
- Manages the governance framework and risk management of the organisation.

# NIGALA OBJECTIVES FOR 2020-21

The NIGALA Board has agreed the objectives set out below for this year. The objectives are set out under the strategic themes agreed by the Board for 2017-2021. The focus of the Plan is to deliver on the core responsibilities of NIGALA.

Throughout the year NIGALA will undertake projects and activities in addition to those referred to its business plan. This will be informed by health and social care service developments (including opportunities for collaborative working) and issues raised through engagement with the DoH, other health and social care organisations and the children and young people NIGALA speaks to. This work will be included in regular reporting to the Board, where appropriate. Where this work is considered a priority by the Chief Executive and is identified as resource intensive it will be brought to the Board for consideration in light of the agreed Business Plan objectives.

Work outside the Business Plan will include NIGALA engaging regularly with key stakeholders to ensure the service provided to children and young people is based on a foundation of quality and best outcomes; this will be done by attending meetings and groupings hosted by HSC organisations, including the DoH, Health and Social Care Trusts, the Regional Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency and other organisations and forums involved in the delivery of health and social care. Examples of this work include;

- NIGALA meeting its obligations as a member agency of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI);
- NIGALA being represented on the SBNI Sub Group on Child Protection;
- Participation in the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Agenda (HSC Trusts, HSC Board, Probation Board);
- Participation in the HSC Leadership Network;
- Professional links with the HSC Executive Directors of Social Work;

- CEO Network for the ALBs;
- Being represented on Local Engagement Partnerships (LEPs- Social Work Strategy);
- Membership of the Information Governance Advisory Group
- Attending Assistant Directors Forum meetings;
- Membership of the Shadow Family Justice Board;
- Attending Principal Practitioner Forum meetings.

NIGALA attendance and contribution to these groups will focus on fulfilling its statutory function to represent the interests of children and young people in Court.

Strategic Theme		Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner
1.	<b>Putting Children at the Centre of NIGALA Decision Making</b> <b>NIGALA will:</b>	<p><b>1.1</b> Represent the interests of children and young people in specified court proceedings in a consistent way and not contribute to avoidable delay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This will be delivered in line with Board approved Key Performance Indicators and reported on at each Board meeting.</li> </ul>	Mar 2021	Senior Management Team
		<p><b>1.2</b> Listen to the views of young people through its feedback system to improve its services, this will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collating the views of the young people it helps and provide an annual feedback report to the Board on children and young people’s experience of NIGALA’s services. NIGALA will seek a response rate of 50% of eligible children and young people.</li> <li>○ A review of the NIGALA Youth Forum and how it contributes to the Agency.</li> </ul>	Feb 2021	Assistant Directors
		<p><b>1.3</b> Review and integrate key strategic initiatives in health and social care this will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Signs of Safety;</li> <li>○ Trauma Informed Practice;</li> <li>○ Building Better Futures;</li> <li>○ Adverse Childhood Experiences.</li> </ul>	Dec 2021	Operations Directors and Head of Quality and Training

Strategic Theme		Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner
2.	Efficient Use of NIGALA's Resources NIGALA will:	<b>2.1</b> Manage its people resources effectively, this will include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improve or maintain sick absence rates from 2019/20 levels</li> <li>○ Managing its staff complement within agreed Headcount</li> <li>○ Ensuring all staff receive an annual appraisal</li> </ul>	Mar 2021	Senior Management Team
		<b>2.2</b> . Review its accommodation and ensure it provides value for money and meets public sector key performance indicators. This will include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Producing a Property Asset Management Plan for NIGALA.</li> <li>○ Participating in the Belfast Optimisation Project and its move to James House, as managed by the Reform of Property Management.</li> </ul>	Dec 2020	Head of Corporate Services
		<b>2.3</b> Meet its breakeven target <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NIGALA will not exceed its surplus by more than £20,000.</li> </ul>	Mar 2021	Senior Management Team

Strategic Theme	Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner	
3.	<b>Valuing Staff and Promoting Learning</b> <b>NIGALA will:</b>	<b>3.1</b> Develop and strengthen its staff development at all levels. This will include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hosting Professional Development Groups</li> <li>○ Each Guardian to participate in a supervision session and peer support group as part of a learning and improvement framework.</li> </ul>	Jan 2021	Senior Management Team
		<b>3.2</b> Maintain an appropriate staff communication framework on NIGALA and HSC issues. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hosting a minimum of two staff Forums</li> <li>○ Producing a monthly information publication for staff</li> </ul>	Feb 2021	Head of Corporate Services
		<b>3.3</b> Integrate the HSC values into NIGALA	Feb 2021	Assistant Directors
		<b>3.4</b> Promote opportunities to improve staff health and wellbeing in line with Health and Wellbeing 2016: Delivering Together. This will include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participating in the regional Health and Wellbeing Network.</li> </ul>	Dec 2020	Head of Corporate Services

Strategic Theme		Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner
4.	<b>Compliance with Legislation and Guidance</b> <b>NIGALA will:</b>	<b>4.1</b> Meet its statutory function to appoint a Guardian for a child or young person in specified Court proceedings unless the Court is satisfied that it is not necessary to do so in order to safeguard his or her interest. This will be delivered in line with Board approved Key Performance Indicators and reported on at each Board meeting.	Mar 2021	SMT
		<b>4.2</b> Ensure it has appropriate financial management arrangements in place including those for planning, forecasting, procurement and prompt payments. It will also ensure achievement of its breakeven target and presentation of its annual accounts within timescales set out by the DoH.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NIGALA will pay 95% of its bills within 30 days (in conjunction with HSC BSO Shared Services)</li> <li>○ NIGALA will prepare and lay its accounts in line within Department guidance</li> </ul>	Mar 2021	Head of Corporate Services

Strategic Theme	Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner
	<p><b>4.3</b> Meet its Equality and Disability obligations as set out in its Equality Scheme.</p>	Mar 2021	Head of Corporate Services
	<p><b>4.4.</b> Review and integrate emerging key strategic initiatives and legislation in health and social care. This will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strategy for looked after children;</li> <li>○ Online Safety Strategy;</li> <li>○ Family &amp; Parenting Support Strategy (FPSS); and</li> <li>○ Improving and safeguarding social wellbeing: A Strategy for Social Work</li> </ul>	Feb 2021	SMT
	<p><b>4.5</b> Meet its obligations as an Arms-Length Body. This will include producing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Governance statements;</li> <li>○ Effective business planning arrangements</li> <li>○ Appropriate business continuity plans;</li> <li>○ Audit reports on its activities; and</li> <li>○ A dynamic risk register that deals with the primary risks to delivery of the business plan.</li> </ul>	Mar 2021	Chief Executive

	Strategic Theme	Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner
5.	Delivery of a Quality Service to agreed standards NIGALA will:	<p><b>5.1</b> Deliver its service in a consistent and equitable way. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sharing with key stakeholders information on case delays and in particular cases which are running over 400 days.</li> <li>○ Undertaking a targeted audit of cases on the implementation of the new reporting templates in support of the refined Guardian role.</li> <li>○ Attend the committee on “Delay in Public Law Children’s Order Cases”</li> </ul>	<p>Sept 2020</p> <p>Feb 2021</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>	<p>Senior Management Team</p> <p>Assistant Directors</p> <p>Assistant Directors</p>
		<p><b>5.2</b> NIGALA will meet its obligations under the HSC Quality 2020 strategy. This will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Producing an Annual Quality Report</li> </ul>	<p>Nov 2020</p>	<p>Head of Quality and Training</p>

	Strategic Theme	Objectives	Timescale for completion of objective	Owner
6.0	<p><b>Work in partnership with stakeholders to improve outcomes and the experience of children in the court process. NIGALA will:</b></p>	<p><b>6.1</b> Strengthen links and develop opportunities for co-production with HSC organisations, Court services, Judiciary, Solicitors and the voluntary sector via the Shadow Family Justice Board, This will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Contributing to developing the regional strategy for looked after children to include the provision of capacity for measuring regional performance and outcomes;</li> <li>○ Engaging with the Judiciary on fulfilment of NIGALA’s future role;</li> <li>○ Developing a learning network through the 5 (England, Scotland, Wales, NI &amp; the Republic of Ireland) Nations to enhance the service provided by NIGALA and its peers to children and young people in the British Isles.</li> </ul>	Feb 2021	Senior Management Team
		<p><b>6.2</b> Work with the DOH/DOJ on the analysis and design of a regional integrated Care and Justice Campus, from the 2018 Review of Regional Facilities for Children and Young People.</p>	Feb 2021	Senior Management Team

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