

Stronger from the Start Alliance

Terms of Reference January 2026



Who we are:

The Alliance is made up of member organisations from across the third sector in Northern Ireland. We are working together to amplify the importance of infant mental health in Northern Ireland and to campaign for meaningful change in policy, practice and life experiences. Our vision is that every baby and infant in Northern Ireland enjoys the best start in life. We are committed to collaborating in the best interests of infants and their families.

The Alliance successfully campaigned for and welcomed the explicit inclusion of infants within the Mental Health Strategy for N Ireland 2021-2031, particularly those actions which promote and improve early emotional wellbeing to set the foundations for life. We lobby for the recognition for the importance of 1001 days and the need to take preventative action and an early intention approach to policymaking, strategy development and service delivery.

Key asks:

The Alliance is committed to a call for action on the following priorities:

- **Leadership & Collaboration** - There should be a clear commitment to improve infant emotional wellbeing. This should be supported by investment and action in all relevant strategies and policies to reduce adversity in infancy and support early relationships.
- **Improving Evidence & Policy** - Insights, data and evidence about infant emotional well being and brain development should be collected, shared and used to inform policies and service delivery.

- **Workforce Development** – We need a skilled and supported multidisciplinary workforce with capacity to meet the early emotional wellbeing and brain development of pre and postnatal infants and their families.

- **Service Development** – We need an infrastructure of resourced, evidenced and high quality services are essential to ensure all babies, infants and their families can access the right support at the right time to protect and promote their early emotional wellbeing and brain development.

Target audience:

We aim to work with elected representatives, civil servants and local champions and families to deliver our vision.

Membership:

The alliance is open to all third sector organisations across Northern Ireland who have an interest in best supporting infants and their families and who are in alignment with the ethos and purpose. Organisations can request to join the alliance by contacting the Chair. There is no cap on the number of organisations who can join the alliance. The organisations logo will then appear on our manifesto. The list of supporting organisations will be updated every 2 years.

Meetings:

There will be no formal meetings for the wider alliance, with engagement undertaken via email, and activities led by the Steering Group (see below).

Activities:

By joining the Alliance, organisations and individuals agree to:

- Promote the Alliance and ‘Key Asks’ from the Stronger from the Start Manifesto through sharing information/resources where appropriate through your networks of influence, research and policy work.
- Amplify and support the Alliance’s communications and campaigning activity, using your communication and media channels to increase our reach and impact
- Support events and activities that promote the emotional wellbeing of babies and infants.

Specific lobbying and influencing activities will be undertaken on behalf of the Alliance by the Steering Group in line with the key asks above. It will not always be possible to invite members to ‘opt-in’ to every communication, therefore in joining the Alliance,

organisations are endorsing campaign messaging as set out in the manifesto and members will be kept informed of activity and outputs.

- For communications within the scope of the manifesto, the overarching SFTS logo will usually be used to represent collective membership, rather than individual logos which will appear on the Manifesto.
- Where the Steering Group feels a communication moves beyond the Manifesto commitments, an 'opt-in' agreement will be required from organisations and the Steering Group will endeavour to share draft copy in a timely manner to facilitate this. In this case, only logos of members who have endorsed the message will be included.

Stronger from the Start Alliance - Steering Group

Aim:

The Steering Group will coordinate and oversee the Alliance activities and take a lead in collective lobbying and engagement activities to promote the importance of infant emotional wellbeing, on behalf of the wider Alliance membership.

Membership of the Steering Group:

Membership of the Steering Group is drawn from wider membership of third sector organisations with a remit for babies, infants, children and families in Northern Ireland. Steering Group members must attend meetings regularly and actively commit time and resource to the work of the group, bringing skills including but not limited to policy influencing, administration, communications and design.

The following organisations currently represent the wider membership:

- Barnardo's NI
- East Belfast Sure Start (chair)
- NSPCC
- National Children's Bureau
- Save the Children
- Splash Sure Stat
- Home Start
- Action for Children
- Tiny Life

The nominated individual from each organisation should endeavour to attend meetings to ensure consistency, however, may be represented by a relevant colleague at a meeting if unavailable.

Membership of the Steering Group will be a two-year term, reviewed after one year to ensure representation of relevant skills and experience, and that member organisations have ongoing capacity to commit time and resources.

The Chair welcomes expressions of interest from relevant organisations. New steering group members will be invited/considered by existing members and agreed by majority vote, informed by how the skills and potential contribution of the applicant organisation aligns to the needs of the group at the time. Membership will be capped at 12.

Quorum:

Where decisions must be taken at a meeting, a quorum of a **third of total membership plus one** members should be present. Otherwise, decision-making should be held until the next meeting (if time allows) or undertaken via email.

Secretariat:

The Steering Group is Chaired by Tracey Ripley McElvogue (East Belfast Sure Start). Barnardo's and NCB provide administrative support to facilitate meetings. As above, all members of the Steering Group are committed to contributing time and expertise to advance the work of the Alliance. The positions of Chair and Secretariat will be open for review by members after a period of two years.

Time commitment/meetings:

The Steering Group will meet for two hours every other month (alternately face to face and online) with an online option available for those who can't attend face to face. Activity will be progressed between meetings via email, and additional meetings may be scheduled should activities require. The Chair will work with the Alliance to develop agenda items and invite proposals of topics from Steering Group members (in reasonable time). All meetings will be minuted.

Activities:

Communications and lobbying activities will be identified by the Steering Group as issues arise. Short-term 'task and finish' groups may be established should activities require.