



Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Strategic Plan 2026-2030 Consultation

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. In the past year we worked with approximately 18,000 children, young people and families across more than 45 different services and programmes. We are a leading provider of schools-based support, reaching more than 32,000 children in schools across the UK and Ireland through our NI-managed social and emotional literacy programmes.

We deliver a wide range of services, from providing family support and early intervention, to working directly with children and families who have experienced adversity and need our support. Our goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children. To achieve this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures. Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Safeguarding Board's Strategic Plan. In preparation for the production of this Strategic Plan for 2026- 2030, the Safeguarding Board sought to proactively obtain the views of children and young people, and parents and carers to help inform the SBNI Board of the direction and focus it needs to take into consideration. Barnardo's NI conducted a series of public consultation sessions with a range of children, young people, parents, and carers, as well as conducted a public survey as part of this process and has formed the basis of our consultation response. Direct comments and summarised views were obtained from these children and young people, ensuring that the process remained informed by the voices and experiences of those whom this strategy may affect.

Strategic Priority 2: To hear and respond to the voices of children and young people affected by domestic violence and abuse (DVA).

From our consultation sessions, children and young people agreed that addressing domestic violence and abuse was important for a number of reasons:

- There are long term effects from abuse that can affect children and young people for a long time
- Abuse can take many forms
- Domestic abuse impacts children and young people, but isn't always recognised as an issue facing children and young people in their own right



Respondents also agreed that the Safeguarding Board should work with key stakeholders and partner agencies to provide education and raise awareness for children, young people, and parents and carers on healthy relationships, coercive control, and to collaborate on supporting children and young people who are affected by domestic violence and abuse.

Strategic Priority 3: To support children and young people in exercising their rights to enjoy the benefits of the online world free from harm, fear and abuse.

Online safety was a predominant theme for children and young people in Barnardo's consultation sessions:

- There are increasing numbers of children online and digitalisation of learning, socialising and education spaces.
- Online use is changing how we communicate, and the trends on social media are always changing
- Dangers of peer pressure and cyberbullying is increasing

The children and young people consulted agreed with a multi-pronged approach to protecting children online, focusing both on how the Safeguarding Board can work with government to develop and implement online safety measures as well as provide education for children, young people, parents and carers on social media privacy, safety measures, healthy online relationships, and where to get help.

Strategic Priority 4: To help prevent, protect and safeguard children and young people affected by child exploitation (sexual, criminal, radicalisation and other emerging forms of exploitation).

Respondents agreed that the Safeguarding Board should focus on child exploitation for the following reasons:

- Child exploitation can take place anywhere, and it is much more prevalent than we think
- Exploitation can be linked to other issues, such as abuse, addiction, and criminalisation



- Exploitation can take many forms, including physical, criminal, sexual, and labour exploitation, as well as exploitation by paramilitaries

They also highlighted similar actions that the Safeguarding Board should undertake to safeguard children and young people affected by child exploitation, namely access to education for young people, parents, and safe places where children frequent, such as school and youth clubs, to recognise exploitation and how to access timely and trauma-informed support. Respondents also agreed that the Safeguarding Board should work with the government to explore ways to safeguard children and young people.

Final Comments

Barnardo's NI welcomes the draft Strategic Plan and the opportunity for children and young people to inform the development of the Strategic Plan. We have heard from some of our young people involved that "I think it all looks really good!" and "I really like the way everyone's ideas have been listened to and implemented in this work. I don't think anything is missing". We look forward to continuing partnership with the Safeguarding Board to empower children and young people to thrive in safe, supportive environments.

For further information, please contact:

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