

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



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Dear Philip

REQUEST FOR OFFICIALS FROM SPPG TO ATTEND THE HEALTH COMMITTEE ON THE 12 FEBRUARY 2026 TO PROVIDE INFORMATION IN RELATION TO THE ROLE OF THE INTERIM ADULT PROTECTION BOARD (IAPB) AND ITS WORK REGARDING THE ADULT PROTECTION BILL.

Thank you for your correspondence seeking my officials to brief the Health Committee on the IAPB and its role in the development of the Adult Protection Bill.

Please find the attached a briefing paper ahead of my Officials attending the Health Committee on 12 February 2026. This outlines IAPB work to date and the IAPB sub-group structure.

The officials attending on 12 February will be IAPB members Dr Ciara McKillop, Interim Director, Community Care, SPPG (Chair of the IAPB) and Mr. David Petticrew, Co-Director Community Care SPPG with responsibility for Adult Safeguarding.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely



Mike Nesbitt MLA
Minister of Health

SPPG Briefing for NI Health Committee

'Interim Adult Protection Board for Northern Ireland' (IAPB)

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The IAPB is a 20-member statutory body chaired by the Interim Director of Community Care, SPPG, Ciara McKillop.
- The Board meets bi-monthly and operates via a number of sub-groups, taking forward Adult Safeguarding and Protection improvement work in areas such as data, training, procedures, user involvement and Serious Case Reviews.
- The IAPB has been in existence since 2021 and was set up in anticipation of the enactment of the new Adult Protection Bill, which would in time establish a fully Independent Adult Protection Board. As such, the current IAPB operates in shadow form, effectively as a 'proof of concept', the learning from which will assist the development of an Independent Board in final form.
- Members of the IAPB have worked closely with the Department's Adult Protection Bill Team and Office of Social Services (OSS) to provide input and comment on elements of the Bill as it has developed (i.e. self-harm and neglect, costings, CCTV, capacity and consent).

BACKGROUND

In 2021, the then Health Minister Robin Swann, undertook to bring forward a new Adult Protection Bill for Northern Ireland to help protect care home residents and other vulnerable members of society. This was in response to the first report from an independent review commissioned to examine the health and social care system's response to care failings at Dunmurry Manor Care Home.

1. This review, by CPEA, was commissioned by the Department of Health following the Commissioner for Older People's 2018 'Home Truths' report on Dunmurry Manor. CPEA concluded that adult safeguarding practice did not actively contribute to keeping residents safe at Dunmurry Manor and that family's voices were repeatedly unheard. It also found divergent safeguarding practices across the HSC Trusts. This finding was the rationale for the changes set out below.
2. The CPEA report proposed establishing an Adult Safeguarding/Adult Protection change programme and creating an Adult Safeguarding/Protection Bill. The then Chief Social Worker was asked by DOH to chair a new Adult Safeguarding Transformation Board to oversee this work and to strengthen the governance around adult safeguarding to achieve a more accountable, regional approach.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTERIM ADULT PROTECTION BOARD (IAPB)

Among the key objectives of the reform programme was the replacement of the Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership (NIASP) structure with a new interim structure within the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG). This new group, the IAPB, would have statutory membership only and focus more clearly than NIASP did on statutory adult protection, rather than having a broader awareness raising/ prevention remit.

3. The current IAPB is an interim arrangement established following the standing down of NIASP and has the remit of improving Adult Protection regionally and testing new models and ways of working. As such, it operates in shadow form and learning from it will guide the development of the new Adult Protection Bill and future arrangements.
4. The Independent Board when established in law will be independently chaired and operate at arms-length from the DoH.
5. The Interim Adult Protection Board reports to the Adult Protection Transformation Board referenced above, which is currently chaired by the Deputy Secretary, Social Care and Public Policy, DoH.
6. The IAPB membership is at senior level (typically Director and above) drawn from various statutory bodies i.e. Trusts, PSNI, RQIA, SPPG, NISCC, PCC etc) and is chaired by the Interim Director of Community Care, SPPG. It meets on a bi-monthly basis.
7. **Membership of the Interim APB includes the following:**
 - SPPG – Director of Community Care (Chair)
 - PSNI Chief Superintendent
 - RQIA Chief Executive
 - NISCC Chief Executive
 - HSC Trust x5 Executive Directors of Social Work
 - HSC Trust Directors of MHL D Services x2
 - HSC Trust Directors of Older Services x2
 - PHA Director of Nursing
 - Trust Director of Nursing representative
 - PCC Chief Executive/ Service User Reference Group representative

LOCAL ADULT SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIPS (LASPS)

8. The previous NIASP structure was supported by 5 'Local Adult Safeguarding Partnerships' (LASPs) based in each of the 5 Trusts. This structure remains in place and each LASP continues to support adult safeguarding in their respective locality, plus advise and inform the work of the IAPB itself. The LASPs are chaired by senior managers in each Trust with broad-based statutory membership and members drawn from the Faith and also Independent and Community/ Voluntary Sector.

9. The IAPB has developed a working relationship with the LASPs and LASP members are involved in the work of the IAPB subgroups. This ensures an open line of communication between IAPB and other stakeholders.

IAPB WORKPLAN

10. The IAPB established 5 subgroups to take forward key pieces of work. Each subgroup has representation from the statutory, independent sector, user / carer representation, Trusts and SPPG. These are set out below.
11.
 - A. Performance and Data Subgroup
 - B. Training and Development Subgroup
 - C. Procedures Subgroup
 - D. User Involvement Subgroup
 - E. Adult Protection Learning Reviews Subgroup (SCRs)

Work around the awareness raising and prevention agenda will be taken forward by the Local Adult Safeguarding Partnership (LASP) as above.

12. Each IAPB subgroup is chaired by an IAPB member. The membership of subgroups can include the community/ voluntary, independent and charitable sectors, SPPG, Trusts, RQIA, Public Health Agency (PHA), PSNI, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).

A. Performance & Data Subgroup:

The subgroup was established to identify how to improve regional performance monitoring and identify the key data requirements around this.

13. The sub-group has developed an interim data template and guidance which has been agreed by all 5 Trusts. SPPG continue to work via the data subgroup to improve and standardise information returns. The sub-group is currently reviewing the draft legislation and considering the data that will be required in the future in terms of performance monitoring (KPIs).
14. Next Steps:
 - Completing work on an ASG dashboard for the IAPB that will enable members to have accurate and robust data for the region.
 - Developing Key Performance Indicators to assist the IAPB oversee operational improvements.

B. Training & Development Subgroup:

The purpose of this subgroup is to develop a training plan that aligns with the Adult Protection Bill. The sub-group is developing this workplan alongside the Office of Social Services.

15. The model under development will mean that training will be delivered at different levels depending on job role; for example, Adult Protection Social

Workers (APSW) will receive the highest level of training on the powers and duties in preparation for introduction of the Adult Protection Bill.

16. The sub-group has also scoped the current training provided regionally and considered areas for future development.
17. The Office of Social Services (OSS) has assisted this work by undertaking an audit of the various organisations which would require some broad-based training on the enactment of the new Bill.
18. Workstreams have now been established to review the current regional HSC training profile. Each workstream is tasked with reviewing specific sections of the training to identify, potential gaps and opportunities and develop the protection element of the current training offered.
19. Next Steps: On completion of the above, this work will support the development of new regional training programmes tailored to occupation and role.

C. Procedures Subgroup:

This subgroup was established to review and update the NI Adult Safeguarding Operational Procedures. The initial focus of the procedures sub-group has been the revision of the Adult Joint Protocol (AJP) which sets out the process for how Health and Social Care and PSNI to work together in cases of suspected abuse.

20. The PSNI and Health and Social Care Trusts are jointly trained in Joint Protocol for responding to adults in need of protection and at risk of harm. They work in partnership to ensure that adults at risk of harm or in need of protection have equal access to the justice system when harm/abuse constitutes a potential crime.
21. The Joint Protocol will be a live document, amended as required as the reform process develops. Once the current version is finalised, the Joint Protocol subgroup will oversee the development of a training package and work with DOH, SPPG, Trust and PSNI colleagues to implement and oversee a live review process to support improvement.
22. Next Steps: Undertake a review of the current Adult Safeguarding operational procedures and identify early changes which can be made in preparation for the new Bill's enactment.

D. User Involvement Subgroup:

The User Involvement subgroup was established in response to the CPEA and COPNI reports which recommended the need for greater involvement of users and families.

23. The Patient Client Council (PCC) have supported IAPB with this work.
24. The PCC set up and managed an 'Engagement Platform' to provide a central point for user involvement with the IAPB.

25. At the request of the Engagement Platform members, IAPB assisted the PCC to enhance the user involvement approach. Efforts were made to promote membership through public events, press and social media. This area of work was and continues to challenge IAPB.
26. Alternative methods of enhancing involvement have been developed, a number of family members, advocates and support agencies are represented on all of the IAPB sub-groups and are key to the development of the various workstream products.
27. The Patient Client Council (PCC) continues to host the 'Engagement Platform' where information relating to the Interim Board is shared. In addition, an IAPB representative provides regular updates and seeks assistance on a specific issue basis from the Platform.
28. Next Steps: Based on learning to date and current involvement experiences, the next step will be for IAPB to engage further with PCC to advance best practice models for engagement.

E. Serious Case Reviews (SCR) Subgroup (Adult Learning Reviews):

29. The draft Bill will introduce Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). SCRs are multi-agency reviews that look into the circumstances surrounding the death of, or serious harm to an adult at risk and in need of protection. The purpose of SCRs is system learning i.e. to establish whether there are lessons to be learned from a case about the way in which agencies and professionals work together and to action change as a result.
30. A SCR sub-group was established by IAPB to identify and develop a SCR model for NI. The key objective was to research and scope SCR models in other jurisdictions in order to identify a model that would be suitable for NI.
31. The subgroup members were assisted by academics from Queens University Belfast to identify a number of models which had potential to be adapted to suit NI.
32. In order to avoid confusion with other processes such as Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs) Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) and to better capture the SCR purpose, they will be re-named in the legislation as 'Adult Protection Learning Reviews'.
33. Next Steps:
 - The draft SCR model will be shared with the IAPB when finalised.
 - It will be shared as part of a wider consultation with all stakeholders.
 - Following that, the subgroup will develop a set of SCR operational procedures.

Key Learning from IAPB - relevant to the establishment of the final Adult Protection Independent Board:

- Address user engagement issues at the outset and get buy-in and input early on. A number of user models can be tried and can operate together, with flexibility about level of input and commitment.
- Models of direct user and carer membership of the future Independent Board need to be considered, including membership of Independent Sector and Community/Voluntary Partners.
- Adult Protection is the cornerstone of the Independent Board and the reason for its creation, but remit needs widened to incorporate a Prevention Agenda.
- Linkages and engagement with LASPs and their local awareness raising and prevention work needs strengthened.
- The future chair and staffing structure of the final Board needs careful consideration to ensure they are wholly independent and seen to be so, also that the new Board has the capacity and resources to fully discharge its remit.
- Access to accurate and timely data to identify performance trends and provide assurances that adult safeguarding and protection are fit for purpose is essential and is will be an on-going process with IAPB and its replacement.
- Training requirements will likely require further refinement as it becomes clearer what level of knowledge and expertise is required to support the Bill itself, but also safeguarding generally.