

Paula Bradshaw MLA  
Northern Ireland Assembly  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw, Stomont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Dear Paula

**AQW 46943/22-27 – STEPS BEING TAKEN TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN SPORTS SETTINGS**

You recently submitted an Assembly Written Question AQW 46943/22-27, asking that I detail any steps my Department is taking to safeguard children and young people participating in sports settings.

I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely



**Gordon Lyons MLA  
Minister for Communities**

This is an operational matter for Sport NI, they have advised me as follows:

Within the sports sector, Sport NI works in partnership with the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit to provide a safeguarding advisory and guidance service for the sector. The objectives for this service provision are:

1. Provision of safeguarding quality assurance systems;
2. Provision of education and training to both funded and non-funded governing bodies of sport;
3. Provision of communication, information, and guidance services to the NI sports sector;
4. Provision of support to programmes for children and young people;
5. Provision of support to multi-agency strategy groups where appropriate and attendance at other stakeholder led meetings/forums as scheduled;
6. Provision of sport focused child protection advisory services to the NI sports sector; and
7. Provision of support and advice to Sport NI and its staff as and when required;
8. Delivery of workshops and tutor support, as required.

Through these contractual arrangements with NSPCC, Sport NI supports the sector to ensure legislation and best practice with respect to safeguarding is followed and that the sector is supported appropriately. It also ensures that all Sports Governing Bodies funded by Sport NI meet the required safeguarding standards for the voluntary sector. This includes

but is not limited to National Governing Bodies (NGBs) having child safeguarding policies, a designated safeguarding officer, safer recruitment procedures to include vetting via Access NI, attendance at safeguarding training, and clear reporting procedures.

Sport NI and DfC are represented on the Safeguarding in Sport Strategic Group, chaired by an independent safeguarding expert, Marcella Leonard MBE. This group works with statutory agencies to examine any gaps in safeguarding and improve communication and trust between the voluntary sports sector and statutory agencies. Representatives from the Safeguarding Sport Strategic Group are engaging with the Department of Health to tighten the law around vetting here in NI to make vetting a legal requirement, as it is already in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. However, responsibility for introducing legal requirements and regulations on sports/voluntary or statutory agencies to adopt safeguarding best practice rests with the Department of Health.

Sport NI have also recently launched an adult safeguarding service for the sports sector with Volunteer Now, which will operate until March 2027. This will provide guidance, advice and support to the sports sector, including sports clubs, regarding adult safeguarding queries including violence against women and girls. Contact details can be found on our website at <https://www.sportni.net/performance/safe-sport/adult-safeguarding/>

Sport NI has made <https://onlinesafetyhub.safeguardingni.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/AI-Guidance-NI-final.pdf> available to sports clubs from the IWF, SBNI, PSNI and NCA relating to child sexual abuse material generated by artificial intelligence.

Sport NI also directs sports clubs to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland at <https://onlinesafetyhub.safeguardingni.org/artificial-intelligence-and-emerging-tech/>

This information, along with what to do if you have a safeguarding concern, is published at <https://www.sportni.net/performance/safe-sport/child-safeguardingvulnerable-adults/>.

Sport NI also provides guidance on using images of young people on its website at <https://www.sportni.net/about-us/safeguarding/photography/>.

Where new, updated guidance is published, Sport NI will source this through its partnership with NSPCC and ensure this is made available and easily accessible to sports clubs.

Sport NI are also represented on the UK wide Safe Sport group where they are contributing to a new framework and standards to be adopted by each of the UK Home Country Sports Councils. This is currently at Options Appraisal stage and feasibility study for the proposed options.