



**COMMISSION FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS RESPONSE
TO THE SAFEGUARDING BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND'S
MULTI-AGENCY NEGLECT STRATEGY 2017-2019**

The Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland (the Commission) was established in June 2008 under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (2008).

The Commission is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Executive Office. The principal aim of the Commission is to promote awareness of the interests of victims and survivors of the conflict. It has a number of statutory duties that include:

- Promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests;
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors;
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for the victims and survivors by bodies or persons;
- Advising the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and any Body or person providing services for victims and survivors on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors;
- Ensuring that the views of victims and survivors are sought concerning the exercise of the Commission's functions; and
- Making arrangements for a forum for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors.¹

The Commission welcomes the opportunity to provide a consultation response on the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland's Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy 2017-2019.

The Commission acknowledges SBNI's efforts to develop a strategy to assist agencies who are involved with children and young people to take actions to prevent, reduce and manage the effects of neglect. The Commission recognises that the purpose of the document is to set out clear aims and objectives in order to address neglect and improve outcomes for our children and young people.

The Commission welcomes that the strategy identifies key principles which should underpin how relevant agencies work together to identify, respond and manage the impact of neglect. Collaborative working ensures good service delivery and sharing of best practice. This is essential for practitioners working

¹ The functions of the Commission relate to those set out in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

with vulnerable people and the Commission has included SBNI as a point of reference in our recently revised *Standards for Services Provided to Victims and Survivors*.²

Whilst the Commission is not involved in directly safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, it does recognise the continued impact of legacy issues on the lives of young people and their families. The *Strategy for Victims and Survivors* recognises the societal and ongoing impact of the Troubles on children and young people.³ Therefore, it is appropriate that the Commission's response focuses on 'Setting the Context', detailed in section 4.

The Commission and the Victims and Survivors Forum have considered the intergenerational impact of the conflict. In 2015 the Commission, in partnership with Ulster University, produced the research report entitled, *Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*.⁴ The findings from the research established that the social, political and economic legacy of the conflict was complex, wide ranging and multidimensional. The report noted that traumatic experiences and exposure to violence can lead to adverse mental health and other consequences not only for the person themselves, but also for their children and potentially, their grandchildren, resulting in a trans-generational cycle which impacts upon the well-being of subsequent generations. Specifically, the effects of violence, traumatic experiences and social segregation impact upon parenting practices which affect early attachment and the capacity of the child to self-regulate. Self-regulation difficulties increase the person's risk of mental disorders, behavioural problems and suicide. They also affect how that person engages with their own children when they become a parent. The accumulation of childhood toxic stress, resulting from negative parenting behaviours, exposure to violence and the use of harsh punishment, is associated with adverse mental health outcomes. The research also highlighted that children of survivors of the conflict have been found to have poorer psychological functioning which may be a direct result of the trauma experienced but other indirect factors also play a role. For example, a parent, physically or mentally injured during the Troubles may be unable to care for their child. In addition, the child may become their carer. Injury also places a large burden on the family in terms of relationship and economic problems. Additionally, trauma may contribute to maladaptive parental behaviour, such as intrafamily violence or neglect which subsequently impacts negatively on the child.⁵

Another enduring conflict legacy issue is ongoing paramilitary activity that continues to cause many families throughout Northern Ireland significant harm and distress. As an enduring conflict legacy issue paramilitarism can be viewed as a significant factor perpetuating the trans-generational impact of the

² CVSNI (2016) *Standards for Services Provided to Victims and Survivors*, Commission for Victims and Survivors, p.10.

³ OFMDFM (2009), *Strategy for Victims and Survivors*, Office of First and deputy First Minister, p.9.

⁴ CVSNI (2015) *Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*, Commission for Victims and Survivors.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.33.



Troubles, with serious consequences on mental and physical health. In addition to the routine orchestration of paramilitary style attacks including on children and young people, attacks on security force personnel, coupled with high levels of gun and bomb attacks, reinforces a sense of insecurity and anxiety among many victims and survivors.

The Commission believes that society needs to acknowledge the ongoing impact of the past upon society in Northern Ireland. Our children and young people continue to be impacted by our troubled past and this should be understood at strategic and service delivery levels.

In conclusion, the Commission welcomes the opportunity to submit this response to Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland's Multi-Agency Neglect Strategy 2017-2019. SBNI's continued recognition of the consequences of neglect and work to address this aspect of child maltreatment remains an important element of timely and effective responses in providing families with the help they need. Important to identifying, responding and managing the impact of neglect is ensuring that policy makers and practitioners have a contextual understanding. The Commission would therefore recommend that SBNI acknowledge the impact of the Troubles within the Local Context detailed in section 4 of the strategy.

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