

**Report to**  
**Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**  
**March 2025**

**1. Dr. Shannon's recommendations**

As previously reported, I am satisfied that each of Dr Shannon's recommendations are either fully implemented or are being implemented on an ongoing basis.

**2. SJAI's child welfare and protection policies and procedures**

I am currently reviewing the SJAI Child Safeguarding Statement and its Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. They are robust and clear but there are opportunities for enhancement. This review will be further informed by the outcome of an audit of cadet divisions mentioned below.

I undertook an audit of the implementation of SJAI's child welfare and protection policies and procedures in SJAI cadet divisions between November 2024 and January 2025. All divisions were scheduled to be audited in November and December 2024, but two divisions, who had their meetings on Friday night, had to re-schedule because their meetings were in schools that were polling stations for the general election. The two divisions were also running first aid courses for new cadets which could not have been fully completed before the end of the year if the audit were to take place prior to the New Year.

I have produced a new edition of the Child Safeguarding Statement, which includes an A3 poster version to facilitate the display of the Child Safeguarding Statement at each premises where SJAI operates. A new risk assessment, based on specific risk themes, is also near completion. This is based on previous discussions with Tusla's Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit.

A recommendation following the audit conducted in each of the SJAI cadet divisions will be an annual one-day workshop for regional compliance officers, cadet leaders, and Divisional Management Teams of SJAI's adult divisions. This workshop will focus on reinforcing the safeguarding requirements of leaders in the organisation to ensure the implementation of Children First for those exercising frontline responsibilities for cadets and youth in SJAI. One of the modules in that workshop will focus on conducting the risk assessment for the purpose of the Child Safeguarding Statement.

As part of the review of the SJAI Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, I am extracting the various child abuse prevention practices and procedures and consolidating them into a separate, comprehensive "Code of Behaviour: For working with children and young people". This will constitute a standalone set of principles and procedures for managing the risk of harm to children availing of the services and activities of St John Ambulance Ireland. Another

module on the above-mentioned one-day workshop will focus on explaining grooming behaviour and how elements of the Code of Behaviour might assist in preventing grooming and the abuse of children.

I do not propose the publication of any of the above-mentioned documents in a piecemeal fashion until all are complete. As already mentioned the current policy and procedures are adequately robust and clear. The one-day workshop will also involve consultation with divisional leaders to inform the further development of SJAI's national risk assessment and Code of Behaviour.

### **3. Awareness within SJAI around Child Protection reporting structures.**

The SJAI Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures are robust and clear in relation to reporting structures. The safeguarding training provided by SJAI clearly explains the procedure and a one page reporting document has been distributed to the divisions for instant reference in the event that a concern arises. I will be auditing this awareness further over the coming months.

The SJAI Child Protection Team are currently participating in a Tusla focus group to facilitate Tusla's development a Child Safeguarding Self-Assessment Tool for organisations working with children.

In Q3 2024, the Communications Officer referred his proposals on the inclusion of photographs in the SJAI annual report to the child protection team for their views and observations.

Overall, it is clear from the audit of cadet divisions that leaders are fully aware of the need to report, the SJAI reporting procedures, the identity of the DLP and Deputy DLP, and how to contact them. Each division reports making calls to the DLP/Deputy DLP seeking advice and support and never having difficulty in making contact. In addition to the Child Safeguarding Statement, each division has on display at its meetings an A-4 poster indicating the contact details of the DLP and Deputy DLP.

Several members who are mandated persons because of their roles (e.g. EMT's and Paramedics) are generally aware of their mandated person status and the importance of reporting harm, but are not all fully cognisant of what it means to be a mandated person. The audit recommends the development of a new mandated persons training module in the EMT training programme. This module would supplement and not replace other safeguarding training already in place. It is my view that this issue does not currently impact negatively on reporting as every member is keenly aware of the need to report suspected child abuse, but it is important that mandated persons better understand their role in the context of child protection.

### **4. Staff awareness of the relevant contacts in Tusla, An Garda Síochána**

There is a very small number of staff at St John Ambulance Ireland Headquarters and all are aware of the relevant contacts. All staff are required to undergo Children First eLearning

Programme and SJAI Safeguarding Course. The DLP and Deputy DLP are also fully aware of the relevant contacts in the statutory agencies.

## **5. Implementation adherence to Children First Legislation/Policy**

I am satisfied that the volunteer management team at SJAI is fully committed to the implementation of Children First legislation and national policy, and indeed wishes to go further and achieve the highest possible standard of child safeguarding and protection.

Safeguarding is a standing item on the Board's agenda. I attended the last two board meetings to brief the board on my work and it is clear that the Board expect such high standards. I will be auditing this further in the coming months.

During the audit, all cadet divisions had the Child Safeguarding Statement on display at their meeting places, but some found it more difficult than others. Those divisions with SJAI premises had the Child Safeguarding Statement displayed on a noticeboard or in a glass case, usually in the entrance hall of the premises. Those without own premises have to bring the statement with them to each meeting to display it. Some displayed it on a wall in the hall where they held their meetings, but others were not in a position to do so. One displayed it temporarily on the reception desk of the premises they use; another on the inside of the door of their storage cabinet, which is left open when they are present in the premises; and two others displayed it on a desk/table in the room/hall where they conduct their meetings. The fact that the Child Safeguarding Statement is in four pages adds to the difficulty but the new A3 poster design should help remedy the difficulty.

The Child Safeguarding Statement in each division is the same one that is issued nationally. The activities and potential risks for each division do tend to be almost identical, but the majority of divisions have added some locally identified risks and control measures into the "Local Measure implemented to reduce risk" column of the risk assessment. A small number made no additions but felt that the national risk assessment was comprehensive enough to address all local risks. The A3 Child Safeguarding Statement will allow for each respective division to add its own name and address to the document and the one-day workshop will improve the leaders' confidence and competence in conducting their risk assessments.

All adult volunteers in the divisions receive a copy of the Child Safeguarding Statement and Child Safeguarding Policy and procedures by email when they join and after each review. Parents also receive those documents on the same basis. Members are generally aware of the need to provide a copy of the Child Safeguarding Statement to Tusla, parents/guardians and members of the public upon request. Some felt they should ask why the documents were being sought, but it was made clear to them that the motivation for asking is irrelevant.

As mentioned above, a new risk assessment template is being developed as part of the revised Child Safeguarding Statement. It is recommended that the one-day safeguarding workshop mentioned in my previous report to newly appointed regional compliance officers and to divisional safeguarding officers be extended to all cadet leaders and divisional management

teams as outlined above. It is anticipated that this workshop will more deeply inform the implementation of Children First legislation and policy. I anticipate that the workshop will become an annual event to upskill and update those personnel involved in the leadership of SJAI in safeguarding matters.

## 6. Garda Vetting processes.

The updated Garda Vetting Policy & Procedure 2025 has now been approved by the Board of St John Ambulance Ireland.

### Important changes include:

- **Integration of relevant recruitment processes from the Adult Volunteer process.** The Adult Volunteer Process (new adults, returning adults and cadets transitioning to adult membership) specifies that members must undergo Children First eLearning Programme and the SJAI Safeguarding programme before they can be vetted. This is to prevent divisions allowing people to attend duties when they are vetted but without the appropriate safeguarding training. Members being re-vetted must have completed Children First eLearning and SJAI Safeguarding Training in the same calendar year as their vetting.
- **Police Certificate of Character.** Where a SJAI Member has resided in any other country for 6 months or more, a Police Certificate of Character is required from that country as part of the vetting process.
- **Divisional Manager/Admin to sign NVB1.** To create greater awareness and compliance around verifying the identity of members, the Divisional Manager or Divisional Administrator, will now be required to sign a declaration at the bottom of the Form NVB1 to confirm the verification of the ID produced by the member for vetting purposes, and to confirm that the copies provided to HQ are true copies of the originals.
- **Disclosure Review Group.** A Disclosure Review Group has long been in situ in SJAI for reviewing any vetting disclosures received from the National Vetting Bureau that include a criminal record or specified information. The already robust procedure for the DRG, including an appeals procedure, has been reviewed and integrated into the Garda Vetting Policy and procedures. I am the chairperson of the DRG, which includes the two SJAI Garda Vetting Officers and the Child Protection Team.
- **The vetting of 16 and 17 year old members.** Although they have no responsibility for providing activities to other children in SJAI, members who are 16 and 17 years of age provide first aid treatment to people, which may include children or at-risk-adults. Providing such treatment is one of the relevant work or activities in Schedule 1 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the National Vetting Bureau provide vetting disclosures. The National Vetting Bureau vets people from the age of 16, with written parental consent. SJAI is now commencing the vetting of those members.

**7. Audit of each of the 22 SJAI branches in respect of Children First compliance.**

As mentioned above, I have completed the audit of the cadet divisions and I am currently finalising my report.

**8. All local branches have an onsite designated Child Safeguarding Officer and own bespoke Child Safeguarding Statement.**

It was confirmed as part of the audit of cadet divisions, that an onsite designated Child Safeguarding Officer is already in place at each division. Each Cadet Divisional Manager has taken responsibility for that role. Cadets may make a complaint to their local safeguarding officer, or where that is not an appropriate option for the cadet or the parents, a member of the national child protection team. As outlined above, the activities and risk tend to be very similar in each cadet division, but some local issues have been identified by most divisions. The A3 Child Safeguarding Statement will allow for each respective division to add its own name and address to the document and the one-day workshop will improve the leaders' confidence and competence in conducting their risk assessments, to allow for more individualised/bespoke Child Safeguarding Statements.

**9. Ensuring adequate Child Safeguarding training practices are in place.**

I have completed both the Children First eLearning Programme and the SJAI Safeguarding Course. As the eLearning Programme already deals with how to recognise abuse and the reporting mechanisms, the SJAI Safeguarding course focuses more on safeguarding and preventing abuse. I believe the current training programme is adequate but, as with all programmes, there are opportunities for enhancement of the SJAI course and I will be addressing this with the safeguarding training team over the coming months.

During the audit I have recommended the development of a new training module for mandated persons, such as EMT's and Paramedics to allow them more fully understand their status and obligations as mandated persons.

Also recommended above is training for leaders to further develop their skills in implementing Children First.

**10. Information sessions/focus groups for parents, staff and volunteers.**

Over the coming months, in addition to audits of the local divisions, I propose that SJAI divisions host annual parent nights in order that SJAI may brief parents on important issues in respect of their children, including how their children are safeguarded. Parents will already have access to the SJAI Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures when their children have joined SJAI and any reviewed editions thereafter. It's important that parents are introduced to the local safeguarding officer and get the message at those meetings that their concerns are important to SJAI and their input is valued.

When the policy and procedures review is complete, I plan to work with the child protection team on developing age-appropriate documents for the cadet members of SJAI. This will be

conducted in consultation with a focus group of young members to ensure the content reaches that audience.

**11. Management of child abuse concerns or disclosures of and reporting to DCEDIY.**

I am consulted on every issue that arises in relation to children and have an input into the decision as to whether or not the matter is reported to Tusla and/or An Garda Síochána. To date there have been no child protection and welfare issues that require reporting to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.