

Creating Effective Safety



TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Child Protection and Welfare Strategy 2017-2022

Where Are We Now?

Tusla – Child and Family Agency is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. Since its establishment in 2014, we have led the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland.

Tusla represents a fundamental shift in the provision of family support, child protection, educational welfare and alternative care services. Central to our vision is the development of services that ensure children are safe and achieving their full potential. It also recognises from a rights perspective that children and families should be active participants in the development and delivery of our services.

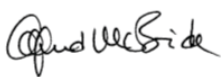
CEO Foreword

Welcome to Tusla's new Child Protection and Welfare Strategy.

This document sets out our strategic vision to provide an appropriate, proportionate and timely response to children at risk or in need of support in Ireland. There are six elements, or cogs, to the strategy, all of which are interconnected and will work together to transform how we protect children.

Tusla has recently selected the Signs of Safety as our national approach to practice, the first cog in the strategy. The Signs of Safety is an innovative, strengths-based, safety-organised approach to child protection casework grounded in partnership and collaboration with children, families and their wider networks of support.

This is an extremely important moment for Tusla as we work to transform our child protection and welfare services and ensure that children and families actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives. The delivery of this strategy will be supported by detailed implementation plans under each of the cogs and I look forward to working with children, families, Tusla staff and our key stakeholders to ensure our new Child Protection and Welfare Strategy is implemented across Ireland.

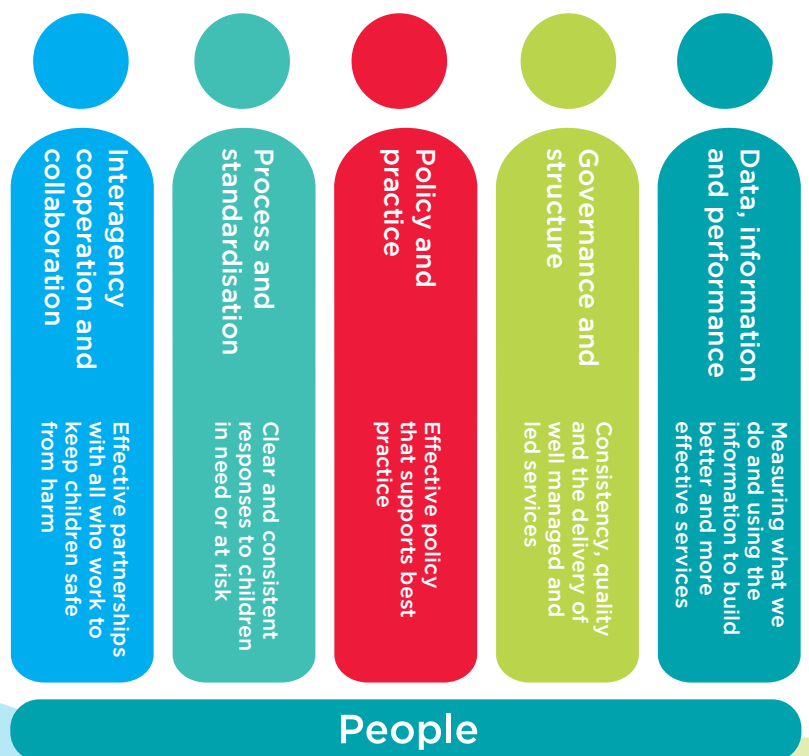


FRED MCBRIDE
Chief Executive,
Tusla – Child and Family Agency

What Have We Learned?

Tusla's new Child Protection and Welfare Strategy arose out of a review of Tusla's core responsibilities under legislation, including the Child Care Act 1991 and the Children First Act 2015. In addition, the Strategy has been informed by Government policy, including *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people, 2014 – 2020*, *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* and the current revision of Children First. A central purpose of the Strategy is Tusla's renewed commitment to meet our statutory obligations and embed the revised best practice principles of Children First in our practice.

Research as well as the findings of HIQA inspections, the National Review Panel and our own quality reviews can assist us in understanding and improving child protection and welfare practice. A critical and detailed analysis of these reports identified the themes below which inform our new Strategy:



Tusla's Strategic Objectives

The Signs of Safety will be implemented as our national approach to practice. The Signs of Safety reflects our best practice principles, which are fundamentally underpinned by the principles of 'Children First'. Children and families will be at the centre of assessment and decision-making and the approach will be strengths-based, evidence-based and outcome-focused.

Clear thresholds will be defined for child protection intervention, including transfer to/from alternative care, case closure, and diversion to partner organisations. An increased level of analysis and judgement will be promoted to improve consistency in determining the appropriate response pathway for children and families ensuring they receive a proportionate and timely response.

To create and embed a system-wide learning environment will require the development of learning pathways and learning tools for staff. Space and time to embed learning will be facilitated to ensure effective learning and development of staff across the entire organisation.



Meaningful measures will be developed that will allow us to assess how successfully we are achieving our child protection and welfare strategic objectives. These measures will include examining outcomes for children and families, for staff and for the organisation.

Structures and processes need to be established to support staff and leaders in using their professional judgement to make risk-sensible decisions and to work in a more participative manner with children and families. Organisational culture reform will support the new national approach to practice and the development of career pathways for all staff.

Growing proactive relationships with our partners will involve actively building and maintaining productive relationships with our key internal and external stakeholders at every level of the organisation. Building proactive relationships must also include relationships with children, families and their extended networks.

Where Are We Going?

Vision

To provide an appropriate, proportionate, timely response to children “at risk / in need”, sharing responsibility and control with families and communities through co-created solutions and interagency collaboration.

All staff will engage with children and families using one national and consistent approach. The Signs of Safety will inform our work through its core principles, disciplines and tools. With every child and family, we will aim to achieve shared goals and a shared understanding of their problems so that we can develop plans that make children safer in their everyday lives surrounded by the people naturally connected to them.

Children and families will get into the right service at the right time for the right reason. This will enhance the work already completed under our service delivery framework. We will be explicit about our thresholds, assisting others in understanding that there are different response pathways.

Child protection is everyone’s business and achieving our vision cannot be done without the support of all our stakeholders. Tusla will lead child protection and welfare interventions but we need our key stakeholders to be engaged to support children being safe. Greater clarity of purpose internally will lead to a greater understanding externally and one practice approach will bring a shared language and understanding to this complex area of this work.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TUSLA’S CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE STRATEGY WILL TRANSFORM IRELAND’S CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE SERVICES:

Staff will grow and develop in an environment that supports a learning culture. This will be structured and embedded throughout the organisation. We will share our best practice and strive towards what works best for children and families. Space and time will be needed to embed learning across the organisation and with our key stakeholders.

We will promote innovation, strong analysis and risk-sophisticated practice, building and developing our practice leaders and our champions. This will also mean providing significant support to, and challenging, our staff. The reform of organisational culture will be driven by a new practice approach and a more creative and collaborative working environment.

We will measure what counts and make it meaningful for all. It is not enough to merely say and do; we must be able to demonstrate that our interventions have a positive impact and that we achieve better outcomes for children. The voices of families, children, stakeholders and our staff will be essential.

Children First Principles

CHILDREN FIRST SPELLS OUT 10 KEY PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD INFORM BEST PRACTICE IN CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE. THESE PRINCIPLES ARE EMBEDDED IN ALL ASPECTS OF TUSLA'S NEW CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE STRATEGY, INCLUDING THE SIGNS OF SAFETY, OUR NATIONAL APPROACH TO PRACTICE.

10

Child protection is a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary activity. Agencies and professionals must work together in the interest of children.

8

Parents and guardians have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family.

9

A balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents, guardians and families. Where there is conflict, the child's welfare must come first.

7

Children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. They should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that affect their lives.

5

Early intervention is key to getting better outcomes. Where the State must intervene to keep children safe, the minimum intervention necessary should be used.

6

Children should only be separated from parents or guardians when other means of protecting them have been exhausted.

4

Interventions by the State should build on existing strengths and protective factors in the family.

2

The best interests of the child should be paramount.

3

The overall aim is always to intervene proportionately to support families to keep children safe from harm.

1

The safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.

The Journey Ahead

