

Stronger from the Start Alliance Draft Terms of Reference (January 2024)



Who we are/aims of the group: The Stronger from the Start Alliance is made up of member organisations from across the third sector in Northern Ireland, who are committed to collaborating in the best interests of infants and their families. Activities are coordinated by a Steering Group (see below for further details). We are working together to amplify infant mental health in Northern Ireland and to campaign for meaningful change in policy, practice and life experiences.

Stronger from the Start was established in response to the absence of sufficient actions and outcomes relating to infant mental health within the draft Mental Health Strategy for Northern Ireland, issued for consultation in 2021.

The group brings a collective voice to campaigning and lobbying for the importance of the first 1001 days, and the need to prioritise babies, infants and their families in strategy development and service delivery.

Key asks: The Alliance is committed to a call for action on the following priorities as set out in our 2022 Manifesto:

- **Leadership & Collaboration** - There must be a clear commitment to improve infant mental health. This should be supported by investment and action in all relevant strategies and policies to reduce adversity in infancy and support early relationships.
- **Improving Evidence & Policy** - Insights, data and evidence about infant mental health must be collected, shared and used to inform policies and service delivery.
- **Workforce Development** - There must be a skilled and supported multidisciplinary workforce with capacity to meet the mental health needs of infants and their families.
- **Service Development** – An infrastructure of resourced, evidenced and high-quality services is essential to ensure all babies and their families can access the right support at the right time to protect and promote their mental health.

Target audience: The target audience for Stronger from the Start messaging is primarily government departments, political parties, and all those commissioning, funding or delivering services for infants and their families.

Membership: Membership of the Alliance is open to all third sector organisations across Northern Ireland who have an interest in best supporting infants and their families and who are in alignment with the ethos and purpose. Organisations can request to join the Alliance by contacting the Chair. Membership will be reviewed every two years, with member organisations asked to confirm that they wish to remain on the Alliance. There is no cap on the number of organisations who can join.

Meetings: There will be no formal meetings for the wider membership, with engagement undertaken via email, and activities led by the Steering Group (see below). Members will be kept up to date on activities via a short, bi-annual newsletter prepared by the Steering Group.

Activities: By becoming a member of the Alliance, organisations and individuals agree to:

- Promote the Alliance and 'Key Asks' through sharing information/resources where appropriate through your networks of influence, research and policy work.
- Amplify and support the Alliance's communications and campaigning activity, using your communication and media channels to increase our reach and impact
- Support events and activities led by the Alliance

Specific lobbying and influencing activities will be undertaken on behalf of the Alliance by the Steering Group (see below), in line with the key asks above. It will not always be possible to invite members to 'opt-in' to every communication, therefore in joining the Alliance, members are endorsing campaign messaging as agreed by the Steering group (the 'Key Asks'), and members will be kept informed of activity and outputs.

- For communications within the scope of the key asks set out above, members will be given a short period to opt-out of a communication. The overarching SFTS logo will be used to represent collective membership, rather than individual logos.
- Where the Steering Group feels a communication moves beyond the Manifesto commitments, an 'opt-in' agreement will be required from members, and the Steering Group will endeavour to share draft copy in a timely manner to facilitate this. In this case, only logos of members who have endorsed the message will be included.

Stronger from the Start Alliance - Steering Group

Aim: The Steering Group will coordinate and oversee the Alliance activities, communicate with membership and take a lead in collective lobbying and engagement activities to promote the importance of infant mental health, on behalf of the wider Alliance membership.

Membership of the Steering Group: Membership of the Steering Group is drawn from wider membership, therefore represents third sector organisations with a remit for babies, infants, children and families in Northern Ireland. Steering Group members must attend meetings regularly, and actively commit time and resource to the work of the group, bringing skills including but not limited to policy influencing, administration, communications and design.

The following organisations currently represent the wider membership:

- Action for Children
- Barnardo's NI (Chair)
- East Belfast Sure Start
- NSPCC
- National Children's Bureau
- Save the Children
- South Belfast Sure Start
- Tiny Life
- Women's Aid



The nominated individual from each organisation should endeavour to attend meetings to ensure consistency, however may be represented by a relevant colleague at a meeting if unavailable.

Membership of the Steering Group will be a two-year term, reviewed after one year to ensure representation of relevant skills and experience, and that member organisations have ongoing capacity to commit time and resources.

The Chair welcomes expressions of interest from relevant organisations. New steering group members will be invited/considered by existing members and agreed by majority vote, informed by how the skills and potential contribution of the applicant organisation aligns to the needs of the group at the time. Membership will be capped at 12 member agencies.

Quorum: Where decisions must be taken at a meeting, a quorum of **a third of total membership plus one** members should be present. Otherwise, decision-making should be held until the next meeting (if time allows) or undertaken via email.

Secretariat: The Steering Group is Chaired by Roberta Marshall (Barnardo's NI). Barnardo's and NCB will provide administrative support to facilitate meetings. As above, all members of the Steering Group are committed to contributing time and expertise to advance the work of the Alliance. The positions of Chair and Secretariat will be open for review by members after a period of two years.

Time commitment/meetings:

The Steering Group will meet for two hours every other month (alternately face to face and online) with an online option available for those who can't attend face to face. Activity will be progressed between meetings via email, and additional meetings may be scheduled should activities require. The Chair will work with the Alliance to develop agenda items and invite proposals of topics from Steering Group members (in reasonable time). All meetings will be minuted.

Activities: Communications and lobbying activities will be identified by the Steering Group as issues arise. As above, where messaging aligns to the key asks of the Alliance, an opt-out approach will be taken for member organisations. Where the Steering Group feels the messaging may go beyond the core asks/manifesto of the group, an opt-in approach will be taken.

The Steering Group will also develop and share a bi-annual newsletter with Alliance membership to keep members informed of activities. Short-term 'task and finish' groups may be established should activities require.