



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01393**

### **Name of petitioner**

Martin Crewe, Director on behalf of Barnardo's Scotland

### **Petition title**

Cut them free: Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation in Scotland

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to (1) commission new research on the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland; (2) report back on all action points set out in the 2003 Scottish Government guidance on Vulnerable Children and Young People Sexual Exploitation Through Prostitution; (3) review and develop dedicated Scottish Government guidelines on child sexual exploitation, updating the 2003 Scottish guidance and incorporating the relevant parts of the 2010 National Child Protection Guidelines.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

Barnardo's Scotland is the leading charity in Scotland tackling the problem of child sexual exploitation. For the last twenty years we have provided services to help prevent and support young people out of exploitation, as well as campaigned and lobbied government for greater recognition and action of the problem. We are seriously concerned that the true nature of this problem is not known and is on the increase. Barnardo's Scotland believes that children have the right to grow-up free from abuse and exploitation.

Barnardo's Scotland has worked constructively with the previous Scottish Government on these issues, but received no commitment on these calls. The new Government has been made aware of our calls and has answered Written Questions in Parliament (S4W-00124-125) on whether they plan to update or revise guidelines. It has made no firm commitment.

We have also engaged with a range of other organisations across Scotland including the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland (APCOS) on these issues. Currently the University of Bedfordshire is carrying out prevalence research on child sexual exploitation in England and the Welsh Assembly has recently completed a review of its guidelines on child sexual exploitation. It is now time for similar work to be carried out in Scotland.

The 2003 Scottish Government guidance on Vulnerable Children and Young People Sexual Exploitation Through Prostitution, included a commitment to commission research into the scale and nature of child exploitation in Scotland and this research has not yet been carried out.

There is clear cross party concern for CSE issues and we would like to see a clear commitment from the Scottish Government to ascertain the scale of the problem and

provide adequate resources to tackle it.

## Petition background information

Barnardo's defines child sexual exploitation as:

*"Any involvement of a child or young person below 18 in sexual activity for which a remuneration of cash or 'in kind', is given to the child or young person, or a third party or person. The perpetrator will have power over the young person by virtue of one or more of the following - age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength and intellect."*

The term 'child sexual exploitation' is used to cover a broad spectrum of activity from seemingly 'consensual' relationships or informal exchanges of sex for attention, accommodations, gifts or cigarettes through to serious organised crime.

Children and young people from any socio-economic or ethnic background can be at risk. Young men are vulnerable to sexual exploitation as well as young women. Increased vulnerability created as a result of disrupted family life, domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse and parental drug or alcohol misuse can increase the chances of a child or young person being exposed to sexual exploitation.

Young people who go missing regularly, misuse drugs and alcohol, have poor mental health/wellbeing, and who are not in school or stable accommodation or who are looked after care may be at higher risk as well.

There are currently no national figures for the prevalence of child sexual exploitation so the size of the problem is not known. The police and our services in Scotland are concerned that organised child sexual exploitation is on the increase.

The growth in access to websites and social media, as well as mobile phone technology has put children and young people at greater potential risk, as perpetrators of exploitation are increasingly using these platforms to make contact.

The effect of sexual exploitation on a child or young person can be long term and highly damaging. It can lead to difficulties in making and sustaining relationships with others, feelings of worthless and shame, loss of confidence and low self esteem. Young people can be subject to physical and sexual violence, be put at risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Their families can suffer threats, violence and significant psychological distress, disruption and even fragmentation as an impact of sexual exploitation. Parents or carers may feel inadequacy or despair at their inability to protect the child or young person.

Children and young people that are victims of sexual exploitation can display disruptive and difficult behaviour and often fail to recognise or acknowledge that they are being exploited. This presents practitioners with many challenges in providing the support they need to escape exploitation. The grooming process may be so effective that young people believe they are in a real relationship of that they are in control.

In a recent NFP Synergy Public Opinion Survey of a 1000 people in Scotland, 75% of those asked said that they were very or extremely concerned about CSE in Scotland. Respondents were more concerned about CSE than the issue of homelessness, global poverty and animal cruelty.

We are also concerned that Written Answers in Parliament (S4W-00126 – 00128) have recently revealed that there has been only one conviction of child sexual exploitation offences under the 2005 Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act, which was introduced to address crimes relating to child sexual exploitation.

This may be because perpetrators of such crimes are being charged under different legislation for different crimes. The result, however, is that the legislation is clearly not having the desired effect. It also helps make it difficult to ascertain the level of the problem of CSE in Scotland. The ability to identify gangs and organised child sexual exploitation is also diminished if the police are charging under other offences and not

## CSE.

We are concerned that the current level of child sexual exploitation in Scotland is far higher than is currently known and that without robust data and information, many children and young people are being put at risk of being exploited.

Considering the current economic environment and the pressures on local government funding it may be difficult for local authorities to justify additional spending on the provision of services to support and prevent child sexual exploitation without robust evidence to show need. Currently Barnardo's provides services in Glasgow and Dundee, but new evidence may show need for more services in Scotland's other cities or in rural Scotland.

The 2003 guidelines do not address recent legal changes, such as the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 and Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009. The 2003 guidelines also only focus on improving the help, support and protection of children and young people who have run away or have been sexually exploited through prostitution. The guidelines also do not take into account the growth in use of the internet and other mobile technology.

The 2003 guidelines also included a number of different action points, such as a requirement of local authorities to produce local protocols to deal with CSE in their areas. A number of these action points have yet to be achieved in full and we believe that they should be revisited and developed as part of new guidelines.

In a response to a parliamentary question (SW4-124) on Scottish Government plans to update the 2003 guidelines, the new Minister for Children and Young People, Angela Constance, answered that the 2010 National Guidance for Child Protection has superseded the 2003 guidelines. We believe that the 2010 guidance does not adequately cover all areas of child sexual exploitation. It only highlights child sexual exploitation in complex cases and serious organised crime under the title of 'Abuse by organised networks or multiple abusers'. The guidance references networks, abductions, institutions and prostitution, but many cases of child sexual exploitation are perpetrated by individuals and this is not adequately accounted for in this guidance. There are clear gaps. The 2010 guidance does not require Local Authorities to develop local protocols, which was a requirement of the 2003 guidelines. We believe that local protocols are crucial in order to ensure that adequate action is taken at a local level. The 2010 guidance is not an adequate replacement and that a specific dedicated set of guidelines should replace the 2003 guidelines.

Barnardo's Scotland is calling on the new Scottish Government to:

- Make good on the 2003 commitment to carry out research into the nature and scale of CSE in Scotland.
- Report back on all action points contained within the 2003 guidance.
- To revise 2003 and 2010 guidelines to develop new Scottish Government guidelines to include all areas of CSE, reflect recent changes in legislation and the growth in use of the internet and mobile technology.

### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01393>

### Related information for petition

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

**NO**

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

0

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

N/A

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**