

Crime Business Area – Public Protection Portfolio

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ACPOS RESPONSE TO:

Scottish Parliament Public Petition – Child Sexual Exploitation in Scotland

ACPOS Child Protection Working Group welcome the opportunity to respond to the questions arising from the Public Petitions Committee in respect of Petition PE1393, and offer the following responses.

Q1. What are your views on the issues raised in the petition?

ACPOS Child Protection working Group fully support a period of national research into child sexual exploitation, its causal factors, and impact on successful intervention, diversion and support strategies. ACPOS will fully participate in any such research and feel it would provide a sound basis for future development of guidance and services

Unfortunately the abuse of children is a fact and feature in our society and whilst we continue to work with our partners to address the causal factors, it will remain incumbent on the police service to ensure that we can deliver a policing response to these matters that offers the highest standards of professionalism and integrity, protecting children whilst also serving the wider needs of society.

ACPOS have developed national guidance to ensure that across Scotland the police will engage in preventing, protecting and investigating child abuse using a systematic and structured approach, informed by experience, 'best practice', and in line with existing legislative and policy guidance. While the value of consistency of practice and approach is recognised the police response must also reflect local policies and procedures. Consequently national guidance cannot always offer all that is needed and may require supplementation with guidance that addresses specific needs/issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation.

Comprehensively reviewing the 2003 Scottish Government guidance on sexual exploitation through prostitution and ensuring that any new guidance produced reflects and co-ordinates with other existing guidance and policy is crucial to effective realisation of this work. The

new approach must complement and interact with a suite of Government policy agendas and support the key partnerships that have been integral to the development of the national approach to child abuse thus far.

As stated during committee discussion, sustained partnership engagement and the implementation of local protocols has not been achieved following the work completed in 2003, therefore it is essential that any new work undertaken has the full and active support and long-term participation of the key agencies/organisations/persons involved.

ACPOS also agree that given the unprecedented pace of change in ICT, detailed prescriptive information on the use of the internet and social networking etc. should not be provided however any research and guidance must take account of the impact, risks and benefits posed by this industry.

Experience tells us that the policing response requires to be flexible, to suit the needs of the individual case and ensure the protection and continued safety of the child and their family, whilst ensuring that expectations within wider society are met and those who offend against children are identified and appropriately dealt with. With the ever-changing nature of the threat towards children the policing response must remain pro-active to ensure that we are able to deliver the highest standards of response.

Q2. Can you provide the Committee with details of how these types of offences are being charged and what other offences the perpetrators might be being charged with?

As has been previously suggested the fact that there has only been one conviction in respect of the legislation included in the Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 does not reflect the number of charges that have been made under the Act. ACPOS cannot provide how many charges have been made at this time but would suggest that tracking of reported cases within the criminal justice system forms part of any research conducted.

Other offences that may be used include a variety of sexual offences under statute and common law including Rape, Indecent Assault, Assault, Lewd and Libidinous practices and Breach of the Peace. The enactment of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 also provided a range of protective offences that criminalise sexual activity with children and include Abuse of Position of Trust and predatory sexual behaviour towards children.

Awareness raising is also extremely important to ensure that both children and young people and practitioners/professionals recognise "Sexual Exploitation" when disclosures of abuse are made.

I trust these comments are of assistance,

Yours sincerely,

Iain Livingstone
Assistant Chief Constable, Crime and Operational Support