

PE1393/D

**PE1393: Barnardo's Scotland response to further evidence collected by the Petition's Committee**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the evidence collected by the Petitions Committee following the consideration of our petition on 6 September 2011.

We are disappointed that of all the organisations asked to contribute additional evidence only three chose to respond. The fact that only one of the three local authorities responded is perhaps indicative of the problem of lack of engagement on the issue of child sexual exploitation and the patchy implementation of the 2003 guidelines.

We fully support the response given to the Committee by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) and agree with the sentiments set out in **the Scottish Government's** response. The response by Glasgow City Council highlights a number of examples of good practice within the local authority area, which could be replicated across Scotland. We would urge other local authorities to consider the evidence submitted by Glasgow City Council.

**Research**

There is clear recognition from the responses that there is a need for research into the nature and prevalence of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Scotland.

Since the Committee first considered our petition, the University of Bedfordshire has published research examining the scale and nature of the problem in England. Unfortunately the research did not include Scotland, however, the researchers made it clear that they would expect to make similar findings in Scotland.

The report highlighted a lack of evidence across the country and a need for robust data on the scale and nature of the problem. Worryingly the report found thousands of children and young people are currently being exposed to child sexual exploitation and that with more robust data this figure could turnout to be even higher.

It also found that local guidelines in England were not being followed in local authority areas, which contributed to a lack of knowledge of the scale and nature of the problem. A lack of awareness among practitioners and professionals, as well as parents, guardians and young people were also highlighted as a concern by the report.

Following the report the Office of England's Children's Commissioner has launched a two year inquiry into the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in England. This has been a move that has been welcomed by Barnardo's in the UK.

ACPOS, in its response, **stated that it 'fully support[s] a period of national research into child sexual exploitation, its causal factors, and impact on successful intervention, diversion, and support strategies'.** Barnardo's Scotland would agree with this.

**The Scottish Government indicated in its response that it is 'actively exploring how new research would best serve the various issues raised within this petition' and 'hope[s] to set out plans in the near future.'** We are pleased that the Government has acknowledged a need for new research and intends to set out plans for this, however, we would have hoped for a firmer commitment from the Government on when and how it is to achieve this.

The recent developments in England have meant that Scotland is at risk of falling behind the rest of the UK in its approach to tackling child sexual exploitation. Scotland has traditionally been at the forefront of tackling child sexual exploitation in the UK, including establishing the UK's first ever dedicated CSE service.

### **Dealing with CSE nationally and locally**

**The response given by ACPOS highlights that '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'. This is something that Barnardo's Scotland agrees with.**

The Scottish Government in its response indicated its willingness to consider covering the issues of child sexual exploitation in a specialist toolkit designed to support a national toolkit for frontline practitioners in assessing vulnerable children and young people at risk.

This is a sentiment supported by Barnardo's, however, we would ask the Government give a more detailed commitment with regards to this, identifying what steps it plans to take and, in particular commit to clear timescales for when it would commission and deliver this work.

Given the lack of awareness around the issue of child sexual exploitation, any development of a specialist toolkit should be supported with dedicated support material and training for practitioners. Training of practitioners and raising awareness of the issue of CSE would be crucial in order to ensure that any specialist toolkit developed would be of value.

A specialist toolkit would also need to be evidenced by research, such as what we have called for in our petition.

The Scottish **Government's response makes it clear that the National Guidance on Child Protection** is to be their main reference point for local authorities and we welcome their commitment to regularly enrich the material contained within the document.

With regards to CSE we believe that there is still insufficient material within the National Guidance. CSE is referenced several times, however the document does not give a clear definition of CSE, unlike the 2003 guidance document. There are also aspects of child sexual exploitation that are missing from the guidance, such as references to **dealing with child sexual exploitation via the 'lover-boy' and 'inappropriate relationships' models**. The document also does not distinguish between CSE issues relating to gender, which can be markedly different. We would like the Scottish Government to set out clearly when and how the national guidelines will be enriched and the mechanisms they will use to achieve this.

In the evidence submitted by Glasgow City Council and from our experience of working with them in this area it is clear that they have established local protocols and systems for dealing with CSE. We know, however, that other local authorities are not in the same position and action must be taken to ensure that local authorities are properly equipped to deal with CSE.

Whichever route the Scottish Government decides to go down with regards to equipping local authorities and practitioners with the tools they need to tackle this problem it must be backed up with effective monitoring and data collection.

Local authorities must be held accountable for their work in CSE otherwise vulnerable children and young people will be put at risk.

### **Offences under the Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005**

In their response ACPOS has suggested that 'tracking reported cases within the criminal justice system [should] form part of any research conducted.' Barnardo's would agree with this and we hope that research will lead to more post-legislative scrutiny of the 2005 act.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude we thank those that have made responses to the Committee on the content of our petition. We welcome the commitments made in the Scottish Government's response.

We would, however, ask that the Petitions Committee consider asking the Minister for Children and Young People to attend a future meeting of the Petitions Committee to set out how the Government can give a more detailed explanation of those commitments.

In particular we would like to see the Scottish Government:

- set out a clear timescale for research with clear terms of reference.
- develop a specialised CSE toolkit to support the national toolkit for practitioners with clear timescales for delivery and dissemination, supported by training and support materials for practitioners.
- ensure that CSE is defined and comprehensively referenced to cover all types of CSE in the National Child Protection Guidance as early as possible.

#### **For more details please contact:**

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