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NHS Highland Response to Child Sexual Exploitation in Scotland – Petition
PE1393

The issue of child sexual exploitation is of concern to NHS Highland, Highland Council and all partner agencies. The Highland Child Protection Committee – membership of which includes the chief officers with responsibility for child protection from NHS Highland, Highland Council and Northern Constabulary – has responsibility for raising awareness of child protection issues, co-ordinating prevention activity, providing child protection guidance and training, implementing national child protection initiatives at local level and assuring quality responses to child protection concerns.

There are a number of inter-agency guidelines and policies in place to help support staff in the recognition of children and young people at risk of harm, including sexual exploitation. This guidance includes:-

- Child protection Inter-Agency Guidelines (2011)
- Highland interim guidance on child protection and underage sexual activity
- Highland Underage Sex Protocol (HUSP) (2011)
- National Guidance on serious case and critical incident reviews
- Protecting children in Scotland who may have been trafficked
- Child trafficking assessment tool
- Safe and Well guidance.

The protocol for all suspected cases of child trafficking in Highland states that they be referred to the Head of Integrated Children's Services who will ensure that the appropriate bodies are informed in accordance with national guidance.

Children are being increasingly exposed to age inappropriate and sexualised popular media. This, coupled with a marked increase in internet access within the population and the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, requires research to be carried out in order that we are better able to understand the impact this may have on the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

NHS Highland fully supports Barnardo's call for new research to be commissioned by the Scottish Government and for the 2003 guidance to be updated in line with societal changes in recent years. It is essential that staff are aware of the extent of the problem in Scotland. Current research will enable development of quality local policies and enhance staff understanding of child sexual exploitation.