

Barnardo's Scotland Response to Petition's Committee Meeting – 7th February 2012

Barnardo's Scotland would like to thank the Petitions Committee for inviting us to respond to the recent evidence given by the Minister for Children and Young People at the Tuesday 7th February meeting of the committee where it considered our petition (PE1393) on child sexual exploitation (CSE).

We would also like to thank the committee for its ongoing work on our petition, which has now achieved a number of its objectives.

Research

We were pleased to hear the Minister announce at the meeting that the Government has commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to carry out research that will “bring together all the information on the scale and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland”. We look forward to seeing the terms of reference for this research as well as the findings when they are published in June this year.

We would like to see the Scottish Government establish an Advisory Group to review the findings of the research when they are published in June.

2010 National Child Protection Guidance

We are also pleased that the Government has committed to working with Barnardo's Scotland to improve the 2010 national child protection guidance. We are looking forward to further meetings with the Government about when and how these discussions will be taken forward and the timescales given to make the necessary changes.

CSE Toolkit

The Government stated in its response of 3rd October that it would consider how specialised toolkits would support the national risk assessment toolkit for child protection. It hinted in that response that CSE could be covered in a specialist toolkit. In the Minister's statement to the Committee there was little mention of the proposed specialised toolkit.

There was reference to a revised version of guidance on child protection for health professionals (the pink book), however, this

would only be for one group of practitioners working with children. We believe it is crucial that all those working with children, including teachers, social workers, GPs, school nurses, and others should have the tools to identify CSE and know to act when it presents itself. This is why Barnardo's Scotland believes that local protocols developed by local authorities designed to work across all agencies are crucial in the work to prevent CSE and to effectively support any victims.

Local Authorities and Local Protocols

We are pleased that the Minister has agreed to consider the issue of local protocols with the Scottish Child Protection Committee Chairs Forum in March. However, we still have a number of concerns regarding this area.

We believe that local protocols rolled out across Scotland and held to account by central government would be a vital tool in the prevention and support of CSE across all areas of Scotland.

The Minister and Philip Raines in response to the convener's question about concerns of a "postcode lottery for the care of young people, both for the services that they get and the detection of exploitation and the protection of young people" suggested that the Care Inspectorate assessed how good local authorities are at child protection.

We do not believe that the Care Inspectorate via its previous inspections under the Care Commission were in a position to ensure that children and young people were being properly protected against child sexual exploitation. Those inspections were designed to ensure that children that came into contact with services were properly dealt with. It was not in a position to ascertain service provision or support for a problem that was largely unknown to a local authority, nor was it in a position to review against services that were not in existence or against local protocols that hadn't been developed. It would be highly unlikely for the issue of CSE to have been on the agenda of the Care Inspectorate during those inspections.

Barnardo's Scotland is aware that there is an ongoing review being carried out by the new Care Inspectorate into the review process of multi-agency inspections of children's services. We understand that under new plans while the whole population of children will be looked at, there will be a focus on vulnerable children and specific areas of vulnerability will be identified as key themes of inspections. Barnardo's Scotland would like to see consideration given to making

CSE a key theme and including it in the first tranche of the multiagency inspections of Children's Services.

Apart from in those areas where we know there are robust protocols and procedures, such as in Glasgow City Council, it is very difficult to know what kind of postcode lottery currently exists in Scotland regarding the prevention, detection of CSE and support to the victims. We hope that the research commissioned by the Scottish Government will address some of these issues.

We are still very disappointed that all but Glasgow City Council **chose not to respond to the Committee's call for evidence.**

The Convener suggested during the session that the Committee might consider visiting Barnardo's **Scotland's CSE service to learn** more about how the service operates and to see a good example of how local protocols can work. We hope that the Committee will give serious consideration to visiting our service.

We also believe that the Committee would benefit from visiting those local authorities that were asked to give evidence, but did not and see what protocols and procedures they currently have in place to prevent and support the victims of CSE. The findings the committee make would help support the ongoing work of Barnardo's **Scotland in this area, as well as inform the Government's ongoing** deliberations regarding whether or not to consider using new, updated local protocols on CSE.

Social Media and mobile technology

Throughout our petition we have continually highlighted our concerns regarding the changing role of the internet, social media and mobile technology in child sexual exploitation. This was something that the committee highlighted in the recent session. We agree with the suggestion made by Mark MacDonald MSP that the Committee write to social media/mobile firms, such as Blackberry to ask how they are working to prevent such technologies being used to sexually exploit children.

Going Forward

We would be keen for the Petitions Committee to continue with our **petition and to support the work of Barnardo's Scotland and the** Scottish Government in this area.

We would suggest that this work would include the Committee:

- Visiting Barnardo's **Scotland's CSE service in Glasgow** to see the importance of local protocols and how a co-ordinated multiagency approach can help prevent CSE and support victims.
- Visiting other local authority areas to review activity relating to preventing and supporting the victims of CSE in those areas.
- Reviewing the conclusions of the deliberations of the meeting of the minister and the Child Protection Committee Chairs Forum in March regarding local protocols
- Writing to social media providers regarding their work to prevent and tackle CSE
- Reviewing the research findings published in June 2012.

Finally, we would like to re-emphasise our experience that CSE is one of the most hidden forms of child abuse, and that effective action to tackle it must be cross-cutting, involving coordinated activity by Police, Procurator Fiscals, Social Work, Health, Education and the Voluntary Sector services as well as greatly increased public **awareness. The committee's work so far has led to a renewed focus** on this issue in Scotland, and we hope the committee will continue to play a significant role in increasing the protection of children in Scotland from this horrific form of abuse.