

## **NOTE OF FACT-FINDING VISIT TO BARNARDO'S**

### **Nature of visit**

1. The Committee agreed to undertake a fact-finding visit to Barnardo's to inform its consideration of PE1393 on tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland. The visit to Safer Choices service in Glasgow took place on Monday 11 June. The following individuals participated:

David Stewart MSP, Convener  
Angus MacDonald MSP  
Anne Peat, Clerk  
Stuart Todd, Assistant Clerk  
Daljeet Dagon, Children's Services Manager  
Brian Houston, Assistant Director Children's Services  
Terry Gallagher, Team Leader  
Carol Munro, Project Worker  
Mark Ballard, Assistant Director Policy and Influencing  
Richard Meade, Public Affairs Officer

### **Discussion**

#### Overview

2. Safer Choices provides support to children and young people aged 18 years and under to identify risk and devise strategies to minimise harm, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation. Barnardo's has provided services to help prevent and support children and young people out of exploitation since 1992. The team engages with children using a range of methods including direct 1:1 work, street work and a four-week prevention programme in schools. 94% of all the young people contacted by the service were from Glasgow City. The service also contributes to work on CSE grooming and aims to increase young people's knowledge about the risks of social media networking.

#### CSE model

3. Child Sexual Exploitation is distinctive to child abuse and neglect in that a different relationship exists between the child or young person and the perpetrator. A key distinction is that the child or young person does not recognise himself or herself as a victim of abuse. It is no longer necessary for the perpetrator to have proximity with the child or young person. The service uses a separate CSE model of practice and support for children and young people.

#### Collaborative approach

4. The Safer Choices team works with a range of agencies and deals with referrals including from parents and schools. It adopts a collaborative approach by working with agencies and referrers in supporting children and young people in awareness raising and developing strategies.

5. The team believes that the sharing of information is necessary by multi-agencies to tackle sexual exploitation. A multi-agency preventative approach will help the most vulnerable children and young people.

### Legislation

6. Concern was expressed that current legislation including the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 and Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005 were not having the desired effect. Police investigations or court cases have tended to fall. This makes it difficult to ascertain the level of the problem of CSE in Scotland.

### Partnerships / forums

7. Barnardo's participates in multi-agency partnerships / forums for example the Strathclyde Police initiative which was set up to share information during a particular Operation set up by Strathclyde Police to investigate a range of issues including child sexual exploitation. The Operation led to around 45 suspects being arrested but there were no convictions due in part to some of the young people involved not recognising themselves as victims of abuse.

### National data

8. One of the drivers for the petition is the lack of information and research on CSE in Scotland; little is known outside of Glasgow and Dundee. There are currently no national figures for the prevalence of CSE so the size of the problem is unknown.

### Social media

9. The service team leader and project worker joined the meeting and outlined the work done with schools and as Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) 'Ambassadors'. The growth in access to websites and social media as well as smart phone technology has put children and young people at greater risk and they are more likely to use social networking sites to build relationships. It was noted that Facebook has indicated that under-13s should be allowed to have accounts and that its age restriction may be removed. Current UK legislation does not preclude Facebook from being used by under-13s but the site's own terms and conditions do.

### Service DVDs

10. Members viewed two DVDs, one designed for professionals to remind all that CSE is everyone's responsibility. The other was targeted at young people and covered issues such as online privacy settings and the safe use of social media networking.