

PE1393/B

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Minister for Children and Young People

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Convener

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Ur faidhle/Your ref: PE1393

3 October 2011

Dear Convener

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1393

You invited comment from the Scottish Government, following the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of Petition **PE1393**, on tackling sexual exploitation, on 6 September 2011.

The Scottish Government welcomes the chance to explore the important issues raised in this Petition. The protection of Scotland's children – keeping them happy, healthy and safe from harm – is a key priority for the Scottish Government and we have set out an ambitious programme of work to carry this forward. As part of that developing work, we welcome the contributions that Barnardo's is making by highlighting these important issues, which will inform the progress of that work going forward.

The Scottish Government has carefully considered the three requests made by Barnardo's.

In regards to the request to commission new research, we are committed to working closely with partners to monitor the nature of the risks which effect children and the evidence base required to illuminate key issues. As a result, the Scottish Government is actively exploring how new research would best serve the various issues raised within this Petition and we hope to set out our plans in the near-future.

As well as the commitment to carry out research, all the other action points in the 2003 guidance have either been met or have been superseded by new guidance, approaches and practices which have been developed since its

publication. In addition, we would draw attention to the following sets of actions we intend to progress.

First, a national toolkit to support frontline practitioners in assessing vulnerable children and young people at risk of significant harm is currently under development. This is due to be piloted before the end of this month and published in final form in Spring 2012. This 'general' toolkit will be supplemented by a range of more specialist tools needed by practitioners. We have already commissioned such tools to cover the difficult areas of parental substance misuse and neglect. We will explore how this work can be extended to cover the issues raised by this Petition.

Second, the Scottish Government acknowledges that the risks facing children and young people since 2003 have changed significantly and this has been reflected in our revised National Guidance on Child Protection, which was published in December 2010. The Guidance entailed a comprehensive review of child protection issues and practices across Scotland, involving a large range of stakeholders, including Barnardo's, in its development. The issues which are now known to be connected to child sexual exploitation – such as online safety, runaways, systematic and complex abuse, forced marriage, child trafficking and, in some circumstances, underage sexual activity – are covered separately and in significant detail in the Guidance.

Our intention is to enrich the existing material in the Guidance. It was specifically designed to be a 'living' document which would be updated on a regular basis. Officials will explore with the Scottish Child Protection Committee Chairs Forum how this can be taken forward before the end of the year. As part of that review work, we will explicitly include the issues raised by the Petition as part of that review.

Kindest Regards

ANGELA CONSTANCE