

Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill

Glasgow City Council

General Comment

Glasgow City Council Social Work Services welcomes the proposal to establish a National Confidential Forum (NCF) to give adult survivors abused in residential care as children an opportunity to be heard. Within Glasgow we have a specific service for childhood/adult victims of sexual abuse and have experience of working with adult survivors who were abused while in the care of the local authority/other child care organisations. Previously one senior officer was responsible for co-ordinating all historical abuse allegations. Both the work of the project and senior officer has highlighted to professionals the need for survivors of childhood institutional abuse to be heard, for their experiences to be validated and for the necessary support services to be in place to support such victims.

In response to the key areas to be considered, Glasgow would wish to make the following comments:

Status of the NCF housed as a sub-committee of the Mental Welfare Commission

In responding to this issue in the consultation document, Glasgow recognised the importance of locating such a Forum out with statutory bodies as many victims would not feel comfortable or would be willing to engage with such bodies. We were unclear at that time where such a Forum could or should be located and note the proposal for the Forum to be located within the Mental Welfare Commission. The Mental Welfare Commission may be seen to be independent of statutory bodies such as social work, police etc, but for some there may be a stigma attached to the Forum sitting within the mental health arena.

Overall Glasgow would agree that there is a need for the Forum to sit outwith Scottish Government and statutory services and the Mental Welfare Commission may be an appropriate body. Any such body requires to be able to work independently and be able to raise issues of concern, share learning and good practice. Central to this process is the need for victim's experiences to be validated and that patterns and trends are identified and recommendations made which will support better informed practice which prevent future abuse.

Functions and Powers of NCF

The functions and powers are defined predominately in Sect 26 of the Bill which puts the victim at the centre of the process and we would strongly agree that victim's accounts should be treated sensitively and in confidence.

By building up a picture of individual victim experiences the NCF should be in a stronger position to identify key learning and to make recommendations which will support professional practice and accountability and prevent further abuse occurring in the future.

Support for Participants

We highlighted in our initial response that it was important to ensure that victims are properly supported during any contact with the NCF and that support services will require to be enhanced to ensure that victims are not left inadequately supported. In many instances, support will require to be available after the adult has participated in the Forum. If support is not available this could lead to victims feeling re-victimised and isolated with their experiences and this would be counter to what the NCF would be wishing to achieve.

We note in Part 6 provision is made for information to be shared with the police or in court proceedings (civil or criminal) where it is considered that an individual may be committing an offence against a child and can be identified. While it is crucial that victims feel safe and that their information will be held confidentially, it is important that information is shared where there are future risks to children or adults.

Conclusion

Glasgow City Council welcomes the Bill and the proposal to establish a National Confidential Forum. The Council has experience of working with adults who have been victims of abuse whilst in local authority care, and workers have been witness to the impact such behaviour has had on individuals. It is crucial that any Forum is fully supported by victim services who can support adults through the whole process.

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