

Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill

Dumfries and Galloway Council

The inclusion in the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill of a National Confidential Forum is a significant step forward for victims who have been subject to abuse while living in statutory care. This acknowledges the valuable contribution that ex-residents have to make and gives a confidential forum in which to share their story in an open and acknowledging environment. This legislation is clear and sets out the functions of the NCF. The governance arrangements which are in place appear to be robust and transparent. The creation in statute of the NCF will give ex-residents the following:

- the right to tell their story
- acknowledgement that their past abuses are being taken seriously
- clear governance arrangements in place for reporting these
- protected environment in which to tell their story
- shared responsibility for further action to be taken if risks are still identified to be present
- public acknowledgement by Government that this is a serious and important matter for the people of Scotland

The payment of expenses is an important aspect of this Bill which will enable rather than prevent ex-residents attending panels. The fact that there is financial provision for a support person to attend is essential in ensuring that ex-residents are fully supported before, during and after participation at a session of the NCF.

Many ex-residents will never have told their story and the Bill, by acknowledging this, is frank in setting out that not everyone's experience of statutory care has been a positive one.

The Bill does not address the issue of time bar or compensation, which are outstanding matters for many ex-residents who have come forward but the NCF can be seen as a significant step forward in the healing journey of those who have been abused as children while in statutory care settings.

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