

Ministear airson Òigridh agus Clann
Minister for Children and Young People

Aileen Chaimbeul BPA
Aileen Campbell MSP



F/T: 0845 774 1741
E: scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

David Stewart MSP
c/o Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



Ur faidhle/Your ref:
Ar faidhle/Our ref:
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Dear Dave,

Public Petitions Committee Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation

Thank you for your letter of 13 September 2013 requesting an update about the work of the Short-life Working Group which is considering child sexual exploitation. As you know, I undertook to write to the Committee again to update it generally about our ongoing work to address this important issue. This letter provides that update including the work of the Short-life Working Group.

Ministerial Short-Life Working Group

The Short-life Working Group is yet to report to Ministers. In light of that, Committee Members will appreciate that I cannot report in detail at this time about the work of that Group.

That said, I can confirm in broad terms some of the areas that the group is reviewing. The Committee already received the remit of the Group from my officials in May. As part of that remit, the Group has been considering the range of provision already in place Scotland, from national guidance through to how the criminal justice system addresses child sexual exploitation. It has also been reviewing activity underway elsewhere - again taking account of existing provision in Scotland when doing so.

Update to National Child Protection Guidance and Local Protocols

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring fast and effective protection is in place for children at risk, including from abuse. This includes children at risk from sexual exploitation. Our 2010 national child protection guidance clearly set out our expectations for robust local procedures to be in place for all children at risk. That guidance was created as an electronic document to be refreshed regularly in order to stay current. To that end, our work is continuing with Barnardo's Scotland and other stakeholders, to

Cidhe Bhictòria, Dùn Èideann, EH6 6QQ
Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ
www.scotland.gov.uk

consider how the guidance might yet be further strengthened. This includes around how it addresses child sexual exploitation.

I also expect the refreshed guidance to confirm key areas where local partners should have more detailed arrangements in place. I expect one of those areas to be child sexual exploitation. We plan to work with local partners, where asked, to help shape any arrangements that they agree for child sexual exploitation.

I expect the updated guidance to be broadly complete by December but - and as I confirmed in May - we will of course take account of the Committee's work before finalising this.

Forth Valley Pilot

Committee Members are aware that we are currently testing data monitoring and self-evaluation tools in the Forth Valley area (Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk Councils) developed by the University of Bedfordshire. The data monitoring tool is designed to enable local areas to gain a better understanding of the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in their areas to improve data on local prevalence. The self-evaluation tool helps local areas determine how well they can respond to child sexual exploitation in terms of support and prevention.

I can confirm to Committee Members that the pilot of these tools began in the Forth Valley area in September with a seminar launch led by the University. As you know from my earlier update about this we had expected the pilot to begin in July. I understand that a reason for delay has been work required with the University and to ensure the best application of these tools to local circumstances. Committee Members are aware from my earlier update about this that the design of the pilot and the timings around it needs careful consideration by local partners. Their advice here will help to maximise the value of this exercise as it progresses.

The local Working Group that is overseeing the pilot recently met on 30 September 2013 and I understand from my officials that work is now well underway. Actions include the development of a strategic plan, mapping of local services currently available, designing and implementing preventative work and with a view to using the data monitoring tool from November to monitor local prevalence.

Committee Members are already aware that the Scottish Government can only offer a firm view about the timing of any wider roll-out of the tools once the outcome of the pilot is known but we expect work here to be concluded as soon as possible.

I plan to write again to the Committee in November to ensure that it is generally updated about our work in this important area.

I hope that this additional information is helpful.

AILEEN CAMPBELL