

The Promise Scotland submission of 1 March 2023

PE1977/D: Require social services to inform biological fathers of concerns about their children

The Promise Scotland is the organisation established to support and monitor the implementation of the Independent Care Review. This is the organisation's clear focus and purpose, ensuring that Scotland's children grow up loved, safe and respected, and it is through that lens that we offer our views on this petition.

One of the underpinning themes of the Independent Care Review was for the need for universal family support, including for families who have had their children removed. This should include the offer of "therapeutic support, advocacy and engagement in line with principles of intensive family support." The Promise Scotland believes this family support should be fully inclusive of fathers and different type of family situations.

The Promise Scotland does think it is important to be mindful of the circumstances in which children might be removed from their families. As noted in the Independent Care Review's Evidence Framework, domestic violence can be one of the contributory factors within a family setting that can lead to children entering the orbit of the child protection or care system. In such a situation, it is important to be mindful of whether informing a father of concerns would in fact enhance the child's wellbeing and safety, or could potentially increase the risk to other family members.

Another key underpinning of the Independent Care Review is about the voice of children and young people. In particular "children's voices and their experiences must be the focus of inspection and investigation processes." There may be cases where a child specifically requests that their biological father is not made aware of any concerns. In such a situation, we believe that the workforce should be empowered to respect the voice and rights of children.

It is these types of particular situations that mean point 4.10 of the existing National Child Protection Guidance 2011 states: "Inclusive protection and support of children also involves engaging with the risks

and strengths presented by fathers and/or the men that are most significant to the child's safety and wellbeing."

The National Child Protection guidance should be used to support what the Independent Care Review identified as "reflective practice" which "supports the development of a workforce that can manage risk in a relational rather than a process driven way." It is not clear that imposing an automatic duty as requested by the petition upon the workforce would be consistent with the management of risk in a relational rather than process driven way.

It is clear that the underpinning motivations of this petition are rooted in the need to protect and safeguard the wellbeing of children. This is a sentiment which The Promise Scotland would fully support and we appreciate the efforts of the petitioner to ensuring that Scotland is a place where all of our children grow up safe, loved and nurtured. However, we are not confident that requiring social services to inform biological fathers of concerns in all cases would in fact support this aim, or would be consistent with the aims and actions of the Independent Care Review.

I hope this response will be helpful for the committee as it considers the petition and The Promise Scotland would be happy to clarify or provide further detail.