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David Linden MSP
Deputy Convener
Criminal Justice Committee

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Dear David,

National Review of Group-based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

I write to update on the comprehensive programme of work that the Scottish Government and our partners are taking forward to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE), and in particular to welcome the publication of the Phase 1 Report of the National Review of Group-based CSAE and Child Criminal Exploitation.

Ministers commissioned this work to establish facts and be a catalyst for change.

I am grateful to the four Inspectorates involved in the review, and to the local partners, practitioners and stakeholders who contributed..

The report provides critical insights into the nature and extent of group-based CSAE, and child criminal exploitation, in Scotland. The Scottish Government accepts each recommendation and will work urgently to implement the changes needed.

I am committed to ensuring that the lessons identified through the review inform our ongoing work to strengthen prevention, protection and support arrangements across Scotland. We must ensure that responses continue to evolve in light of emerging evidence, learning and lived experience.

The important findings of this report sit alongside the statutory public inquiry into Group Based CSAE which we have established to be chaired by expert Professor Alexis Jay, as well as the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, Police Scotland's review of group-related CSAE cases, and the efforts of the National CSAE Strategic Group and its partner organisations to strengthen prevention, detection, disruption and victim and survivor support.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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Work to establish the Group-Based CSAE Inquiry continues to progress. Drafting of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference is now at an advanced stage and I met recently with Professor Jay to discuss these with her. The Chair will shortly undertake engagement with victims, survivors and representative survivor organisations to help inform the finalisation of those Terms of Reference and ensure that the Inquiry is shaped by the experiences and perspectives of those most directly affected.

Alongside this, preparations are being finalised for the launch in the coming weeks of the Truth Project, which will provide a dedicated opportunity for victims and survivors to share their experiences and contribute to improving Scotland's response to CSAE. Further information on the project's operation and engagement arrangements will be made available in due course.

Given the significance of this work, I intend to provide a fuller update to the Scottish Parliament this Autumn. This statement will address the findings of the inspectorates' Phase 1 Report, progress on the establishment of the Inquiry, and the next steps in relation to the Truth Project and wider programme of work related to tackling CSAE.

I trust that this update is helpful to the Committee and I look forward to continuing to engage with members as our determined work to protect children from this abhorrent abuse progresses.

Yours sincerely,



MÀIRI MCALLAN