

Cabinet Secretary for Justice

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Margaret Mitchell MSP
Convener
Justice Committee

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Dear Convener

Programme for Government 2018-19 and the Equally Safe Delivery Plan sets out the Scottish Government's commitment to exploring the application of the Barnahus concept for immediate trauma-informed support for child victims of serious and traumatic crimes within the context of Scotland's healthcare and criminal justice system. I have been informed that the Committee is considering Barnahus as part of its scrutiny of the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) (Scotland) Bill. I am therefore writing to provide an update on how the Scottish Government is taking forward this work.

Since my appointment I have made clear my determination to improve the experience of victims across the justice system. I am clear that the system as a whole, and where appropriate other public services including in health and in child protection, must continue to improve the response to child victims and witnesses working in partnership with justice agencies.

Barnahus provides Scotland with an opportunity to design a genuinely child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced trauma. The concept brings together a number of key agendas for the Scottish Government, including the commitment to help reduce the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and support the resilience of children and families, the priority set out in Equally Safe to maximise the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people in the context of eradicating gender-based violence, and the Programme for Government commitment to incorporate the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Today, the Scottish Government announced the commissioning of Healthcare Improvement Scotland in partnership with the Care Inspectorate to develop Scotland-specific standards for Barnahus, based on the PROMISE quality standards.

The development of Scotland-specific standards will provide a roadmap to identify how to deliver a child-centred, multidisciplinary, wrap-around response to child victims of traumatic crimes and their families and carers. This process will also allow us to fully consider, in consultation with key stakeholders, the challenges associated with developing the Barnahus approach in the context of Scotland's adversarial legal system. For instance, while the "one forensic interview" approach, which is in place in many Barnahus models across Europe, would not be feasible in the Scottish adversarial system at this time, consideration can be given to how the existing ways evidence is pre-recorded can be incorporated as part of the adaptation of the concept for Scotland.

This joint approach to developing standards is evidence based and highly collaborative, and will ensure that the wide range of delivery partners and stakeholders across disciplines and sectors with an interest in Barnahus have a voice in this process. This activity will build on Healthcare Improvement Scotland's work last year to develop standards for Healthcare and Forensic Medical Services for People who have experienced Rape, Sexual Assault or Child Sexual Abuse, as part of the Chief Medical Officer's Taskforce on Forensic Medical Examinations.

In terms of timescales for this work, it is anticipated that the scoping stage will begin in early 2019. Work to develop standards will take around 12 months, incorporating time for extensive consultation.

Once published, the standards will form a framework for health, justice and local authorities to understand what is required to improve our collective response to child victims and provide a roadmap for developing our approach to Barnahus approach in Scotland. I will keep Parliament updated on progress.

HUMZA YOUSAF