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Margaret Mitchell
Convener
Justice Committee

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Dear Convener,

I undertook in February to write to you to provide an update on timescales for work to explore Barnahus in Scotland, and I would like to again extend my thanks to you and the Committee for making time in March to share the learning from your visit to the Norway Barnahus. It was helpful to hear first-hand your thoughts about the potential benefits of moving towards a similar approach in Scotland.

As noted in my letter of 12 December, the Scottish Government has commissioned the development of Scotland-specific standards for Barnahus, based on the European PROMISE Quality Standards which have been developed using best practice from the Nordic countries.

This work is being led by Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. This reflects the cross-cutting nature of Barnahus and the need to ensure wide engagement across health, justice and children's services to effectively explore how the concept can operate in Scotland.

The initial stage, involving scoping work to set out the parameters of the Standards, is now underway. This will culminate in the publication of a short scoping report by June 2019, which will then be subject to consultation during summer. An outline timetable for the work is at Appendix A.

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Alongside this, a core development group of lead stakeholders and professionals is being identified, and it is anticipated that work to develop the detailed standards will begin in August 2019, with an initial draft available for wider consultation by the end of 2019. We intend to publish the final standards in early summer 2020, allowing time to consider and incorporate learning from the consultation.

This approach is highly collaborative and based on tried-and-tested expertise within Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. I believe that by building in time for extensive consultation and review, we can ensure that the wide range of delivery partners and stakeholders across disciplines and sectors with an interest in Barnahus can shape this work.

At our meeting in March we discussed the need to bring stakeholders, including the legal community and the public, with us on a journey towards Barnahus in Scotland. This work will provide a roadmap for this journey. Alongside this, the Scottish Government will consider how some elements or principles of Barnahus can be tested in appropriate multi-agency settings. For example, the pre-recording of evidence, such as joint investigative interviews and evidence by a commissioner, could potentially be included in any test sites.

I am grateful for the Committee's continued interest in and support for work to improve how we respond to child victims and witnesses and I will continue to share progress on this with the Committee.

Best Wishes,
H. Yousof
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