25 January 2021

Dear Convener,

Barnahus in Scotland: Next Steps

I refer to my previous commitment in Parliament to keep the Justice Committee updated regarding the development of Barnahus in Scotland.

As you are aware the Scottish Government committed to developing Scottish standards for the Barnahus concept, forming a framework for a child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced trauma.

Last year we commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), in partnership with the Care Inspectorate (CI), to develop Barnahus standards, based on the European PROMISE quality standards which outline best practice for countries who wish to develop the model.

Unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 resulted in the suspension of the development of Barnahus standards, whilst frontline services prioritised immediate responses to the pandemic.

Since the Scottish Government’s first commitment to exploring how Barnahus could operate in Scotland, the child protection landscape has changed in terms of redesigning children’s systems for children in care and on the edge of care, with an increased focus on prevention and early intervention for child victims and for children who are suspected of causing harm.

Consideration has therefore been given to how we might build on learning from COVID-19 and the current Children and Families, Health, and Justice policy landscape to support the continued co-design of the draft standards for consultation.

I am therefore pleased to inform the Committee that, with agreement from HIS and CI, the Barnahus standards development work has recommenced under a revised timetable, as a two-phased approach comprising of a scoping phase and standards development phase.
Phase 1 will focus on reviewing the interdependent work-streams, national and international policy and practice to inform a revision of the scope of the standards. This will ensure that the Barnahus standards are fully aligned to implementation of The Promise and other related work-streams including the incorporation of UNCRC into Scots law, publication of revised National Child Protection Guidance, GIRFEC, evaluation of the Scottish Child Interview Model, the new clinical pathway for healthcare professionals working to support children and young people who may have experienced child sexual abuse, and implementation of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019 and the Forensic Medical Services (Scotland) Bill. It will include further engagement with stakeholders and those with lived experience.

Phase 1 will also identify learning from ongoing work on Barnahus pilot projects or integrated centres, including the House for Healing project led by Children’s 1st, Equally Safe Multi-Agency Centre (ESMAC), the Lighthouse and the Galway Barnahus. Findings will be published as an evidence summary report that will inform both the redrafting of the Barnahus standards and the methodology adopted.

Phase 2 will focus on redrafting the standards with a view to publishing the draft standards for consultation by the end of 2021, and for them to be finalised by summer 2022.

The Committee may also wish to note that arrangements to establish a national governance structure will coincide with Phase 2 of the Standards Development work and such governance structure will report to the National Child Protection Leadership Group as overall governance of policy relating to children’s wellbeing.

I’d like to thank the Justice Committee for its continued interest in improving the response to children who have experienced abuse and trauma.

I will continue to update the committee as appropriate, and look forward to continued engagement with the Justice Committee going forward.

HUMZA YOUSAF