

**Believe in  
children**



**Barnardo's  
Scotland**

**21 February 2018**

## **First Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Girls**

### **Call for evidence: February 2018**

### **Gender Equality: Attitudes and Culture Change...in public life, in work and in learning systems**

Many thanks for this opportunity to contribute to the thinking of the First Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Girls. We look forward to ongoing engagement with this important process.

In responding to this call for evidence, we have concentrated on experiences drawn from our services specialising in the arena of gender based violence, including service for women and children affected by domestic abuse, services for children affected by Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE); and services where we provide interventions with those perpetrating gender based violence, including for young fathers carrying out domestic abuse and for young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour.

Before commenting on the wider system, it is worth noting that as an organisation we are also taking steps to recognise the impact of gender (in)equality on our own work. Barnardo's Scotland recognises that a gendered based approach provides a framework within which we can understand more fully and respond more effectively to gender based violence, including domestic abuse and child sexual abuse. In particular, we are as an organisation committed to developing our response to domestic abuse by implementing the Safe and Together model. Underlying this model is the need for a cultural shift, where we move away from holding women responsible for men's violence to them and to children, and rather seek to make visible and hold accountable the perpetrator of abuse for his actions, and the harm he does to the woman and the child(ren).

### **Equally Safe**

We are very supportive of Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls.<sup>1</sup> We have noted below

---

<sup>1</sup> Our detailed comments on the draft delivery plan for Equally Safe can be found at [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/2017.06.30\\_web\\_equally\\_safe\\_delivery\\_plan\\_response.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/2017.06.30_web_equally_safe_delivery_plan_response.pdf)

several very positive steps that we were delighted to see within the delivery plan produced by the Scottish Government last year.

It is interesting to reflect, however, that even within this document, specifically focussed on addressing structural gender inequalities to eradicate gender based violence, there is arguably evidence of implicit gender bias: actions under priority 2 focus on increasing the participation of women and girls in traditionally male dominated, high status areas such as sport and politics. While these are important and ambitious aims, these specific activities arguably reinforce issues around occupational and civic segregation by not valuing those areas currently of lower status where women have traditionally participated. As well as raising the participation of women and girls in existing high status areas, we would have liked to see actions which raised awareness and esteem of arenas where women and girls may currently undertake a civic role (for example school related civic activities) but which are perhaps not valued to the same extent as traditionally male dominated arenas. It is crucial that we encourage discussion around, and thereby seek to break down, gender based stereotypes around fields of activity as well as seek to improve access to those activities.

While this is a relatively minor point within a very welcome document, it reminds us of the risk that implicit biases can slip in to all aspects of public life, and we must remain alert to this.

### **Domestic abuse**

Barnardo's Scotland has continually been a strong supporter of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill, which we believe demonstrates important progress towards more effectively recognising the full range and ongoing nature of the behaviours of perpetrators of domestic abuse. With other organisations we argued strongly for the Bill to reflect the way that women and children experience domestic abuse together. We were extremely pleased to see the inclusion of an aggravator recognising the adverse impact of a perpetrator's abuse on children, and the duty to consider whether a Non-harassment order is needed to protect the children as well as the women. We would hope that the presence of legislation that more effectively recognises the way that women and children experience domestic abuse together would contribute to better understanding in our society of the impact of domestic abuse on women and children.

As noted above, we are implementing the Safe and Together model among our own practitioners (across specialist and non-specialist services, to recognise that domestic abuse may be relevant to children and families referred into a wide range of our services. One core component of Safe and Together is intervening with domestic abuse perpetrators, to reduce risk and

harm to the child(ren); this represents an important shift away from the current position where perpetrators are often invisible in our systems and not held accountable for their behaviour. We are therefore pleased to see an increasing perpetrator focus in policies and strategies such as Equally Safe, but we recognise that there is still a way to go with this.

In the experiences of our services, part of our systems which often enable a perpetrator of domestic abuse to continue their abuse are systems of child contact. Enabling non-harassment orders to protect children in cases of domestic abuse is an important step forward, but it is also important that we recognise and tackle the cultural attitudes towards gender and domestic abuse which are part of what allow child contact to be used as an arena for abuse. As noted above, one of our concerns about current attitudes to domestic abuse is that we as a society often hold the woman to account for stopping the man's violence – and this is something that we are seeking to address in our practice by implementing the Safe and Together model. In a contact scenario we might see for example a perpetrator of abuse refusing to return a child (as part of their coercively controlling behaviours) and the blame for this is placed on the woman as her not effectively managing the relationship or working harder to keep the family together, where what we would want to see is the perpetrator of abuse held responsible for his abuse.

### **Child sexual abuse (CSA)**

We are pleased to note that child sexual abuse, including child sexual exploitation, is recognised in Equally Safe as gender based violence, though we have raised concerns about the relative absence of these from the delivery plan. In particular we have noted concerns about the absence of child sexual abuse, including exploitation, from the performance framework for Equally Safe. We are currently unable to say confidently how many children are sexually abused, including sexually exploited, in Scotland; it is difficult to address cultural stereotypes about child sexual abuse when we do not have basic information about what is happening.

Current attitudes around gender present barriers to our recognising and responding effectively to child sexual abuse. For example, one respondent to a 2017 survey about CSE knowledge noted: "I think you have to be very careful with this. Sometimes girls do try it on with the taxi driver for a free lift."<sup>2</sup> Sara Rowbotham, speaking in Scotland in November, commented on the tendency to apply promiscuity as a value judgment particularly to girls

---

<sup>2</sup> Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2017), Responding to Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Night Time Economy, p.17 <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/night-time-economy/responding-to-child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-in-the-night-time-economy/>

and gay men.<sup>3</sup> We continue to see children described in terms such as 'exploring their sexuality' or 'being a teenager', and therefore not being recognised or responded to as children who are abused. We also find differences by gender in responses to children who are abused - we find that boys are not always identified as affected by CSE, but rather referred into our services in relation to criminal behaviour, including harmful sexual behaviour, or going missing for example, and child sexual exploitation is only subsequently identified.

### **Health and wellbeing in schools**

It is important to note that young people are not exempt from holding gender biases (see for example Scottish Government's 2016 report on attitudes to violence against women).<sup>4</sup> It is vital that our young people's spaces, including crucially educational spaces, enable young people to explore, discuss and challenge their understandings of gender. High quality, age appropriate education and systems around health and wellbeing in schools are crucial.

One aspect of health and wellbeing education is parenthood. Part of the cultural attitudes that enable perpetrators of domestic abuse to not be held accountable for their abuse in our child protection or child contact systems is that men are not held to as high standards as women as parents. In our work we seek to address this, for example developing in one of our services specific interventions for young fathers displaying abusive behaviour. We have also found in our work with young men in other contexts, such as youthwork in Polmont Prison, that our young people are asking for information about parenthood because they want to be good fathers. It is vital that the 'P' in Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHPE) receives appropriate attention.

It is not only the content of lessons that need to tackle issues around gender, but also the culture and systems of schools. In our work we often find that peers can be a vital source of support to young people affected by CSA – but can also be those carrying out abuse against other children. We have found that schools often struggle to tackle peer abuse, for example requiring the abused child not to come to school (because the school states they cannot be kept safe when the abuser is in the same school), or failing to robustly respond to a child who has bullied another into sending naked images (because the school states they are concerned the other will be criminalised for those images). Schools must be supported to provide safe

---

<sup>3</sup> Children in Scotland annual conference, November 2017

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2016), Young People's Attitudes To Violence Against Women Report On Findings From The Young People In Scotland Survey 2014, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/10/3285/0>

spaces for children and young people, in which gender based violence will be responded to, and gender stereotypes challenged.

Barnardo's Scotland, February 2018