NI Prison Service – Child Protection Policy for the NI Prison Service

Barnardo’s Northern Ireland Response

April 2007
1) Introduction

1.1 Barnardo’s NI worked with 11,000 children and their families in communities across Northern Ireland last year. We provide an extensive range of services that aim to support and help children and families. We work with disabled children, young people who are at risk of offending, children in care and families in need of support.

1.2 We also work with both fathers and mothers in prison through our Parenting Matters work and this has given us an experience of the context and impact of prison on families and children and young people.

2) Child Protection Policy and Procedures Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre

2.1 Barnardo’s would like to raise some concerns in-relation to points 1.4 and 1.6 in this document. We do not think that children should be accommodated with adult prisoners under any circumstances and would also suggest that it is in children’s best interests to be escorted to and from court separately from adults.

2.3 Young people in custody need to have access to individual and group therapeutic support given the prevalence of multiple and chronic trauma in their families, community and in the lives of young persons themselves. Interventions at this point of crisis can often provide protection to a young person and help them to stabilise.
3) Child Protection Policy and Procedures for Children Visiting Prison Establishments

3.1 Barnardo’s believes that it is crucially important that the prison service does everything it can to ensure that children and young people who are visiting prisons are kept safe and secure. We are also aware from our work of the need for children to have a choice and be supported to keep in touch, particularly with a parent who is in prison. However the welfare and safety of children must be paramount. On this basis we think that it might be necessary to establish parental responsibility in the first instance.

3.2 We welcome the collecting and recording of details of children visiting prisons and do not feel it would be proportionate to require proof of identification.

3.3 We do think that children under 16 should be accompanied by an adult and that those 16 – 18 can make an unaccompanied visit.


4.1 We welcome the commitment to give staff appropriate and comprehensive training to enable them to implement this policy effectively and with sensitivity.
4.2 We welcome the intention to establish a Child Protection Committee within each prison and build strong links with local ACPC.

4.3 We welcome the intention to ensure that no child will have contact unless it has been established that they are who they say they are and this has been established photographically.

4.4 We also welcome that a prisoner who is deemed to be a risk will not be permitted to have contact with any child unless it has been agreed by the Child Protection Committee.

5) Conclusion

5.1 Barnardo’s welcomes the commitment given within this document to the best interests and welfare of the child.

5.2 We think that the policy outlined should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are kept up to date with best practice.

5.3 We also feel that the procedure should be cross-referenced with SSI inspection of child protection services in NI ‘Our Children and Young People: Our Shared Responsibility’ as some of the learning from this inspection report should be considered and included.

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