



Barnardo's NI

Response to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Draft for Consultation

April 2021

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. We work with approximately 12,000 children, young people and families annually across more than 40 different services and programmes. We deliver a wide range of services across Northern Ireland, from providing family support and early intervention, to working directly with children and families who have experienced adversity and need our support.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Public Prosecution Service (PPS) Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. Our comments are informed by our experience of supporting unaccompanied children through our delivery of the regional Independent Guardian Service. Since April 2018, we have provided Guardians for separated and unaccompanied children, including some who were victims of suspected human trafficking.

We also have a range of other relevant service delivery experiences. Since December 2015, we have delivered a service in collaboration with other local voluntary organisations to provide intensive support to refugees placed in Northern Ireland as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, supporting families and children to cope with both trauma and integration in Northern Ireland. We also have a varied portfolio of mental and emotional health and wellbeing services, reflecting an ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) -aware and trauma-informed practice ethos. In addition, our regional service, Safe Choices, is a specialist child sexual exploitation service, which supports children, young people and families affected by complex sexual abuse, and can provide specialist therapeutic support for children trafficked internally for sexual exploitation.

This response will focus on the elements of the policy that pertain to children and young people who are victims of trafficking.

- 1.1. Barnardo's NI welcomes the development of this policy and the recognition of the complexities of trafficking cases, particularly where child victims are concerned.
- 1.2. We welcome the references to children throughout the policy, and the recognition that child victims will need extra support both throughout the prosecutorial process and beyond, after the process has concluded.
- 1.3. Furthermore, we welcome the emphasis on working collaboratively with others, including support services. Barnardo's NI strongly urges the PPS to establish contact with the Barnardo's NI Independent Guardian Service as soon as it is identified that a trafficked child is involved.
- 1.4. The Independent Guardian Service, delivered by Barnardo's NI since 2018, supports unaccompanied and separated children in Northern Ireland who may have been trafficked. The role of Independent Guardians is to ensure that the welfare and asylum rights of children are upheld, and to hold those responsible for meeting children's needs accountable for their role. The Guardians guide and support children through the complex asylum process and ensure they have a legal representative with extensive experience in immigration and asylum work, including expertise in trafficking. A key element of the Guardian's role is to ensure that the children voice, wishes, and feelings are heard and represented with all professionals involved in their case and to advocate for the best interests of the child.
- 1.5. Therefore, we recommend that the PPS should actively liaise with the Independent Guardian Service in all cases where trafficked children are involved. Not only will this ensure that the needs of trafficked children are met throughout the prosecutorial process, but it will also ensure that tailored, specialist support is provided to trafficked children beyond this process.
- 1.6. In addition, Barnardo's NI would urge that 'special measures' are always provided for trafficked children and young people in the prosecutorial process. Children who have been trafficked have experienced significant trauma, and special measures would go some way to ensuring that the judicial process does not re-traumatise those children. Liaising with the Independent Guardian Service throughout this process will allow for the best interests and voice of the child to be heard and considered in a safe and supportive way.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We would be happy to engage further with the Public Prosecution Service as it seeks to further develop and implement this policy.

For further information, please contact:

Trása Canavan

Senior Policy & Public Affairs Lead

Barnardo's NI

trasa.canavan@barnardos.org.uk