

**Barnardo's NI**

**Response to the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's  
Corporate Planning 2020-23**

**October 2019**

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. We believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, and our service provision reflects that philosophy.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's Corporate Planning 2020-23. Our comments are informed by our experience of delivering the Barnardo's NI Parenting Matters service in Northern Ireland's prisons since 1996, which focuses on improving the lives of children affected by parental imprisonment by developing and maintaining links between children and their imprisoned parent.

We also have a varied portfolio of mental and emotional health and wellbeing services, reflecting an ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) - aware approach and trauma-informed practice ethos. This response makes some general comments on the consultation document before providing more in-depth comment on Enhanced Combination Orders.

**1. General comments**

- 1.1 Barnardo's NI agrees with the aim, vision and values as outlined in the consultation document.
- 1.2 In particular, Barnardo's welcomes the move towards considering the individual first, as demonstrated in the aim "*changing lives for safer communities*". This aim also reflects a holistic approach adopted by PBNI where the individual is seen and treated in the context of their history, needs and environment.

- 1.3 Barnardo's strongly welcomes the document's reference to the trauma and ACEs experienced by service users in the probation system. By recognising that many individuals have complex needs, we can begin working to address them and we welcome PBNI's move in this direction.
- 1.4 Barnardo's has invested in a journey of becoming more trauma-informed and responsive. We have committed to training all our staff and volunteers across the UK on the impact of trauma on children and adults in the next three years. By becoming a trauma informed organisation, we can show compassion, empathy and understanding for our service users and our colleagues. We would be happy to share our learning and experience of trauma informed practice with PBNI.
- 1.5 We also welcome the 'Guiding Principles' outlined in the document. In particular, we welcome the commitment to partnership and collaborative working. Our experience working closely with PBNI has reflected PBNI's genuine commitment to partnership and collaboration with the community and voluntary sector. As a partner working closely with PBNI, we can use our experience and expertise to improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.
- 1.6 Barnardo's NI strongly believes that early intervention is key to stopping the cycle of intergenerational trauma and offending. Improving and strengthening family relationships is key to this early intervention work with families.

## **2. Enhanced Combination Orders**

- 2.1 Barnardo's NI welcomes the continued commitment by PBNI to the roll out of Enhanced Combination Orders (ECOs). As a partner in this programme, the Barnardo's Parenting Matters team has received positive feedback on ECOs from Probation staff, service users, and their families.
- 2.2 The roll out of ECOs has allowed courts to consider each case holistically, taking into account factors such as the mental health of the individual and issues such as addiction.
- 2.3 Barnardo's would like to see the ECO programme rolled out regionally, with training and awareness raising for judges and court personnel. As part of this roll-out, we must consider what support is being offered to families in their communities. ECOs provide an opportunity to link families with their local Family Support Hub (29 regionally), which will provide wider support and help maintaining family relationships.

- 2.4 The ethos of collaborative working has been key to the success of ECOs and it is essential that this continues when the programme expands. The good working relationship between PBNI staff, and staff in the community and voluntary sector has facilitated the strengthening of family ties as individuals move back into the community.
- 2.5 In order to achieve a successful regional implementation of ECOs, the programme would need mainstream funding that gives a permanency to the programme. This would allow service users to feel secure in the longevity of the support, and would encourage the development of expertise of staff working in this area.
- 2.6 We welcome the commitment to openness in PBNI's values. The open working relationship that PBNI has demonstrated with partner organisations and individuals has been a key factor in its success. Ensuring that an open approach to communication continues while ECOs are rolled out regionally will be essential, along with maintaining a single point of contact for partner organisations.
- 2.7 Finally, we welcome the Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach taken by PBNI in measuring progress and success. This allows alignment with priorities in the Programme for Government and ensures that the wider effects of PBNI's work are captured. Barnardo's NI has adopted an OBA framework in its service evaluation which will allow us to clearly demonstrate the outcomes of programmes like ECOs in all areas including education, health and communities.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation document and we look forward to the publication of the final Corporate Plan. We would be happy to engage further with the Department to reflect the experiences and views of the families we support.

For further information, please contact:

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