

# Reducing Violent Crime and Raising Confidence in Policing and the Criminal Justice System Debate on the Address

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November

## Summary

- Barnardo's welcomes the inclusion of the Victims and Prisoners Bill and the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill in the King's Speech. These Bills offer the opportunity to take action to tackle child abuse and exploitation, and to ensure that children who are victims of crime are protected and supported.
- The Victims and Prisoners Bill must be strengthened to better protect and support child victims of crime. This includes by ensuring that there is **a funded duty on the relevant authorities to commission sufficient specific support services for child victims**, including therapeutic and mental health services. This should also include the **commissioning of advocacy services** – including Child Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (CHISVAs) and Child Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (CHIDVAs).
- The Victims and Prisoners Bill should also **include a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation** as recommended by the Education Select Committee. Too often, child victims of exploitation are criminalised for their own abuse, and this is often because of a lack of understanding about criminal exploitation.

## 1. Victims and Prisoners Bill

- We welcome the inclusion of the Victims and Prisoners Bill in the King's Speech. The Bill offers a key opportunity to ensure child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, domestic abuse, and child criminal exploitation are better supported.
- We believe that the Bill could be further strengthened to ensure the needs of child victims and witnesses are embedded in legislation, to ensure that children receive better support and treatment.
- Child abuse and exploitation is prevalent across society, and ultimately we know that the scale is much larger than data suggests, with many child victims going unidentified.
  - The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse estimate 500,000 children to be sexually abused every year in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> In England, in the year to 31 March 2023, there were 15,020 risk assessments made which identified concerns about child sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup>
  - In the year to 31 March 2023, there were 160,140 risk assessments made in England which identified concerns about the child's parent/ carer being a victim of domestic abuse, representing almost a third of all episodes with assessment factors recorded.<sup>3</sup>
  - 14,420 risk assessments were made in England in the year to 31 March 2023 which identified child criminal exploitation as a factor.<sup>4</sup> This is an increase of more than 4,000 instances from the previous year. Research by the Children's Commissioner for England has put the number of children at risk of exploitation at 27,000.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, 2023. [Child sexual abuse in 2021/22: trends in official data](#)

<sup>2</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2023. [Children in Need: Reporting year 2023](#)

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2023. [Children in Need: Reporting year 2023](#)

<sup>4</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2023. [Children in Need: Reporting year 2023](#)

<sup>5</sup> Children's Commissioner for England, 2019. [Keeping kids safe: improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation](#)

- Despite the scale of the problem, child victims are often going unidentified, and unsupported.
- Barnardo's research has shown that child victims are being left without adequate support, creating a postcode lottery. Barnardo's FOI data found that, in the year prior to March 2023, 68% of local authorities and 39% of Police and Crime Commissioners had not commissioned any child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation support services for victims.<sup>6</sup> Further, research by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that just 29% of survivors who wanted support for their children were able to access it.<sup>7</sup>
- These children have often lived through unimaginable trauma and require specialist support – such as access to counselling and therapeutic services - to help work through this. It is vital that the criminal justice system and victim support services are equipped to be able to provide this support to child victims and witnesses.
- As well as supporting child victims, investment in specialist support services makes economic sense. Barnardo's and Pro Bono Economics evidence found that, for every £1 invested in specific support services for child sexual exploitation, it can save the taxpayer up to £12.<sup>8</sup> These savings are shared by multiple agencies and Governmental departments.
- It is also key that child victims have access to child-specialist advocacy services, to support them to navigate the complex criminal justice system, and sign post them to other services when needed. These should come in the form of Child Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (CHISVAs) and Child Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (CHIDVAs).
- These are also few and far between; an FOI request by the NSPCC found that less than one quarter of local authorities said that they provide dedicated support for children and young people in the form of an independent and specially trained advisor.<sup>9</sup>
- There is also no statutory definition of child criminal exploitation in England, which means that child victims can be criminalised for their own exploitation, rather than appropriately safeguarded and supported.
- In 2021, Barnardo's made a Freedom of Information request to police forces across the UK about CCE.<sup>10</sup> 30 police forces responded, but only one police force was able to provide any data on CCE. Many police forces asked about how CCE is defined, demonstrating how misunderstood CCE is.
- Taking a criminal justice approach to CCE, rather than a safeguarding one, can lead to exploitation not being identified, and children not having access to support services, having long-lasting impacts on child victims.
- Through the Children's Coalition working on the Victims and Prisoners Bill, which includes NSPCC, Barnardo's, The Children's Society, and other likeminded organisations, we are calling on Government to strengthen the Victims and Prisoners Bill for child victims. This includes calling for the Bill to:
  - Expand the definition of victim to include those who do not report an offence through the justice system;
  - Expand the definition of victim to ensure that all children under the age of 18 years old, who have experienced harm as victims or witnesses to a crime, not just those affected by domestic abuse, are within scope of the Bill and have access to special measures;

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<sup>6</sup> Barnardo's, 2023. [Invisible Children: Understanding the risk of the cost-of-living crisis and school holidays on child sexual and criminal exploitation](#)

<sup>7</sup> Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022. [A patchwork of provision: how to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales](#)

<sup>8</sup> Pro Bono Economics and Barnardo's, 2011. [An assessment of the potential savings from Barnardo's interventions for young people who have been sexually exploited](#)

<sup>9</sup> NSPCC, 2023. [77% of local authorities offer no specialist support for children who have experienced sexual abuse](#)

<sup>10</sup> Barnardo's, 2021. Exploited and Criminalised: [What can the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill do to ensure that children who are criminally exploited receive the care and support they need?](#)

- Place a duty on commissioners to consult providers of children's services and victims, to ensure commissioners include support services for children when preparing their joint commissioning strategies;
- Create a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation;
- Strengthen accountability measures to the duty to collaborate model;
- Strengthen the accountability of the Victims Code of Practice by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to oversee compliance;
- Place a duty on the relevant authorities to commission sufficient and specific support for children and young people who are victims of crime, including abuse and exploitation. This should also include child-specialist advocacy services, including CHISVAs and CHIDVAs.
- Without these measures, we believe that the Victims and Prisoners Bill will fail to ensure that child victims are protected.

## 2. Criminal Justice Bill

- We welcome the introduction of a new Criminal Justice Bill in the King's Speech, and look forward to working with the Government to ensure that it is effective in tackling child abuse and exploitation.
- The proposed criminalisation of the sharing of intimate images could help to address some crimes involving sexual images of children. However, it should not criminalise children who share images consensually with their peers, or when they are exploited to do so. We look forward to working with the Government to ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent this.
- Alongside proposed changes to the reporting of child sexual abuse, investment must be made to ensure that child victims are supported after their disclosure. This should include investment in specialist support services, to ensure that all child victims are able to access these vital services to help with them to come to terms with their abuse and trauma that they have experienced.
- It is also crucial that any changes in reporting comes with investment in training for those working with children, to help them to feel more confident in identifying the signs and indicators of child sexual abuse, and to respond to disclosures.

## 3. Review into Pornography

- Alongside the new legislation announced in the King's Speech, we believe that the Government's Review into Pornography will play a crucial role in child protection, including protection from child sexual abuse.
- Barnardo's, alongside CEASE, have led the call for the disparity between the regulation of pornographic content online and offline to be addressed. Currently, content that would be prohibited offline – and so illegal to own or supply on DVD and Blu-Ray, and for Video on Demand – is prevalent online. This includes content that sexualises children, such as 'barely legal' pornography, content which suggests incest, and content which shows sexual violence, including strangulation and forced penetration.
- We are concerned that this content legitimises violent and abusive sexual acts, and can result in users going on to view more and more extreme content – including illegal child sexual abuse material. Former Chief Constable Simon Bailey told the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse that the ready availability of free online pornography was *'creating a group of men who will look at pornography and the pornography gets harder and harder and harder, to the point where they are simply getting no sexual stimulation from it at all, so the next click is child abuse imagery. This is a real problem'*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, 2022. [The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

- Interviews with offenders who viewed child sexual abuse material in the UK indicate that most had not intentionally sought out child sexual abuse material, but it was the result of 'entrenched pornography use' and spiralling online behaviour.<sup>12</sup> Their initial engagement with child sexual abuse material was often incidental rather than purposeful, and nine out of ten offenders said that they initially found child sexual abuse material through online pop-ups and linked material while looking at pornographic material.<sup>13</sup>
- We look forward to further information about the Review into Pornography, and to working closely with the Chair and Government.

### **Suggested questions**

1. Will the Government commit to placing a funded duty on the relevant authorities to provide specialist services for all child victims of abuse and exploitation through the Victims and Prisoners Bill?
2. Do the Government agree with Barnardo's, The Children's Society and other children's charities that there should be a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation, to aid understanding of the form of abuse and ensure that children are safeguarded and not criminalised?
3. Will the Government ensure that any changes to the reporting of child sexual abuse is accompanied by investment in training for those working with children, to ensure that they are equipped with the confidence and skills to identify signs and indicators of child sexual abuse, and respond to disclosures appropriately?
4. When will the Government's Review into Pornography commence, and what will the remit of the Review be, in particular will it cover regulation of pornographic content which currently would not be certified offline by the British Board of Film Classification?

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### **About Barnardo's**

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2021/22, we reached 357,000 children, young people, parents, and carers through our 794 services and partnerships across the UK. Our goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children. To achieve this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures.

<sup>12</sup> The Police Foundation, 2022. [Turning the tide against online child sexual abuse](#)

<sup>13</sup> IWF, 2013. [New research shows action needed to stop people seeing indecent images of children for the first time](#)