



## **Scottish Government Consultation on a National Care Service for Scotland**

### **Response from Barnardo's Scotland - October/November 2021**

#### **Overview**

Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 16,300 children and young people in over 140 specialised community-based services across Scotland, and 95 shops across the country directly supporting the services. Our work includes: fostering and adoption services and support; tackling sexual exploitation and abuse; supporting young carers; helping young people into employment and supporting families experiencing poverty.

We are informed by experience from our services, and from the children and young people we work with, to develop our policy positions and influence change on the basis of what works and what matters to the people who use our services.

Barnardo's Scotland currently works in partnership with 29 local authorities, several health boards and national agencies including Police Scotland, Scottish Prison Service and Skills Development Scotland.

Barnardo's provides practical, financial and emotional support and we work across a range of thematic areas including:

- Children and young people with disabilities
- Perinatal mental health and early years
- Children affected by abuse and exploitation
- Families affected by parental substance misuse
- Families affected by parental imprisonment
- Schools-based work

Barnardo's Scotland agrees that the creation of a National Care Service would mark a seismic shift in the delivery of adult and children's social care in Scotland. We are primarily concerned with the section on including children's services and the potential impact of this on the children and young people we support. We have set out our response to these questions, informed by practice and the direct experience of our services.

For more information, please contact Kirsty-Louise Hunt (Senior Policy and Public Affairs Lead for Barnardo's Scotland) at [kirstylouise.hunt@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:kirstylouise.hunt@barnardos.org.uk)

#### **Q23. Should the National Care Service include both adult and children's social work and social care services?**

It is not possible to recommend, from the current level of detail provided in the consultation document, whether or not children's services should be located alongside adult services within the proposed National Care Service (NCS).

The reason for this is that a key justification of the proposal to include children's services appears to be the acknowledgment that child and adult services are inextricably linked and that separating the governance of the two would be difficult. Whilst we welcome this recognition

and agree that adult and children's services are linked, the needs of adults who receive social care and children who receive social care are very different and often require different responses and resources.

Barnardo's Scotland is concerned that the evidence underpinning the consultation relies on the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (IRASC), which did not consider or include the voices and experiences of children and young people or the services that support them.

However, we recognise the ambition that including children's services in the NCS could provide an opportunity to ensure greater integration and more consistency in health, social work and social care delivery, especially concerning the most vulnerable children and families. We also recognise the commitment from the Scottish Government to bring forward a National Care Service Bill in 2022 and believe that if adult social care services are to be elevated to national oversight, then some form of change for children's services will also be required.

We therefore believe that any proposals to include children services within a NCS must not progress without carrying out a full impact assessment on the effect on children and young people, similar to the IRASC, and which fully considers how this proposed structural change interacts with The Promise.

We believe that if children's services are to be included within the NCS, we must ensure that:

- There is a specific focus on supporting children and young people and improving outcomes for all children, especially the most vulnerable, in line with The Promise.
- There is a focus on ending uncertainty of funding cycles and providing certainty and continuity of service provision.
- Services are co-designed and co-produced with children and families who use them.
- There is a focus on investment in early intervention and prevention such as family support.
- There is clarity on how the third sector interacts with, and is represented within, the NCS structure.

Barnardo's Scotland is committed to keeping The Promise and we are working to deliver the outcomes of the [Independent Care Review](#) in line with [Plan 21-24](#) and [Change Programme One](#). We consider The Promise to be our key driver in considering organisational change and we believe that any changes to the structure of children's social work and social care services must be in line with, and for the purpose of, keeping the Promise we have made.

Whilst the consultation references the need to work closely with the implementation of The Promise, there is very little detail in the consultation proposals of the impact on children's services in relation to information sharing and partnership working with education or other local authority services.

As a UK-wide organisation, Barnardo's is also aware that there are ongoing discussions on social care reform in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – through the Health and Care Bill in England and Wales<sup>1</sup> and a consultation on the Integrated Care System Framework in Northern Ireland, where a health and social care board which is accountable to Ministers already exists. At Barnardo's Scotland, we would urge the Scottish Government to look again at comparative approaches across the UK, particularly Northern Ireland, to consider any potential learning that could benefit the creation of a National Care Service for Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> Barnardo's, 2021. Written submission to the Health and Care [Bill](#) (England and Wales).

## **Q24 Do you think that locating children's social work and social care services within the National Care Service will reduce complexity for children and their families in accessing services?**

### **a. For children with disabilities**

Barnardo's Scotland provides a range of services which support children with disabilities and additional support needs. This includes the APNA service which operates in Glasgow and provides home care support and activities to prevent social isolation for children with disabilities, particularly in black and ethnic minority communities. Many of the families that APNA supports also face a language barrier, which further complicates their ability to access services and often leaves families feeling isolated. The success of APNA is through recognising this need and recruiting bilingual staff and ensuring an understanding of the culture and traditions of all families that we support.

Children with disabilities and their families can often face barriers around engaging with multiple professionals to access support. The creation of a NCS has potential to reduce this complexity if it truly integrates health and social care and supports children with disabilities in their transition to adulthood, but caution is needed around the potential to create additional barriers between education and housing. If the NCS is simply 'adding' professionals to the mix that families need to engage with, this will not reduce complexity.

### **b. For transitions to adulthood**

The direct experience of our services which support care experienced young people in transition to adulthood is that this period of a young person's life can be extremely challenging, with support often dropping off suddenly once the young person turns 18. We therefore consider that locating children's social work and social care services within a single NCS is an area which has potential for reducing complexity and ending the 'postcode lottery' of available support, and can see some potential benefits in creating a single system.

Barnardo's provides a 16+ service which includes residential accommodation, supporting tenancies and support up to the age of 26 for care experienced young people who are transitioning to adulthood. We also deliver a project called 'Gap Homes' which uses 'gap' sites which are too small to be commercially viable but which are suitable for a small number of houses and provides a warm and comfortable home for care leavers. There are currently two gap homes in Renfrewshire and have plans to expand the project in Scotland and across the UK. However, some questions remain for us over the remit of the NCS and how the new body will interact with local authorities and the NHS. For example, housing support is often a huge challenge for the young people we support who are transitioning to adulthood and is a major focus for our services. As we presume that housing will remain with local authorities, we would not want this to create unnecessary or additional barriers to accessing support for young people. Steps need to be taken to ensure services are joined up across all public bodies – structural change by itself will not reduce complexity.

### **c. For children with family members needing support**

Our 2020 'Challenges from the Frontline Revisited' joint report<sup>2</sup> with the NSPCC highlighted the impact of inequality on families in Scotland, with escalating need from an increasing number of families with complex challenges. The pandemic has only increased these pressures, with the isolation of lockdowns, disruption to routines, loss of support networks, as well as increased

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<sup>2</sup> <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2402/challenges-frontline-revisited-adversities-scotland.pdf>

levels of poverty and other adversities in many households. We also know families who were already disadvantaged have been disproportionately impacted over this period.

We support a whole-family approach and deliver a range of family support services across the country, ranging from early help and support through to intensive interventions when children and young people are at risk of statutory measures of care.

A NCS has the potential to help end the 'postcode lottery' of available support. However, the service must not add unnecessary layers of bureaucracy or create additional barriers. For example, we work with families who as a result of complex needs engage with multiple professionals around income maximisation, housing and education etc. If the NCS is an additional public body that is separate from the local authority (who presumably will still hold housing and education), there are questions over whether this will unintentionally create additional structural barriers to individuals and communities accessing holistic, joined up support.

## **Q26 Do you think there are any risks in including children's services in the National Care Service?**

There are risks of including children's services within the NCS without proper consultation with children and families and the services that support them, and without full consideration of the potential unintended consequences of re-organisation. Based on our experiences of delivering frontline services to support children and families, Barnardo's Scotland consider that there are a number of unanswered questions and areas which require further information from the Scottish Government before proposals for including children's services in the NCS are taken forward and have set out these risks below.

- **Focusing on structures over culture change is a potential distraction from delivering The Promise**

Ultimately the biggest risk in including children's services within the NCS is the potential to prioritise structural change over cultural change. Barnardo's Scotland is committed to implementing The Promise and we are already engaged in a range of work internally and with our partner organisations to make the necessary changes that will achieve culture change, to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up, feeling safe, loved and respected.

The Independent Care Review was a lengthy and considered process that took time to consider the voices and direct experience of children and young people; something which this consultation has not included. The impact of Covid-19 has also stretched frontline services to the limit, with many of our staff members working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to continue to support children and families who were most affected by lockdown and most in need of support. We have received feedback from across our services questioning whether there is capacity within the system to embark on huge structural change at the same time as attempting to recover from the pandemic.

We would therefore welcome much more detailed information and discussions from the Scottish Government which maps how the creation of the NCS sits alongside the existing timescale for delivering The Promise and ensures that a focus on creating new structures does not derail the important progress required to fulfil our promise to Scotland's young people by 2030.

- **Risk of fragmentation between education and other services**

We work in over 400 schools across Scotland, and we consider that education is the key universal service for children and young people. Structurally separating social work and social care from schools runs a risk of undermining the huge amount of partnership activity which takes place across local authority departments to jointly address the needs of children and young people.

In Glasgow, for example, we are aware of extensive partnership work between schools and the Health and Social Care Partnership. Our Glasgow Family Learning Service provides school-based family support workers who support children and families within the school community. Our experience of successful integration often centres around the school community. In the creation of a NCS which disbands Integrated Joint Boards and replaces them with Community Health and Social Care Boards which are separate entities from the local authority, what measures will be put in place to guarantee continued partnership working within education?

- **Risk of children and young people's services becoming 'lost' within the larger system of adult social care due to inadequate funding**

Scotland has an ageing population, and the cost of social care is expected to continually rise. Research by Marie Curie predicts that by 2040 there could be up to an additional 10,000 people in Scotland requiring palliative care at end of life<sup>3</sup>. The numbers of people receiving or interacting with the social care system in adulthood far outstrips the numbers of children and families in contact with social work services – but the needs of children and families are distinct and require a different approach.

We feel that the consultation document is vague on the issue of cost and of the baseline figures of investment. We note the statement: "This Government has committed to increase investment in social care by 25%, but public resources are still limited". We want to see investment get to families and children on the frontline, and for services such as family support to be fully funded as part of our commitment to keep The Promise. We do not want to see children's services swallowed up within a bureaucratic system where funding does not get to the frontline services which need it most.

- **Ensuring local knowledge is maintained and not lost within a national structure**

Local knowledge of communities and the people that Barnardo's Scotland is there to support is invaluable. We are unclear from the proposals to create Community Health and Social Care Boards about what impact this would have on local services – for example, would the new boards mirror local authority boundaries or health board boundaries? Will there be new, additional boundaries created and, if so, will this add to geographical complexity of availability of services? Although we would welcome more consistency in availability of service provision across Scotland, we would not want this to be at the expense of easily accessible, recognisable, and most importantly local support services for children and families. We would also welcome greater clarity over how the third sector will be included within the National Care Service and whether there will be voluntary sector representation on community health and social care boards.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/policy/briefings-consultations/scotland-briefings/marie-curie-palliative-care-need-by-2040.pdf>