

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 18 January 2024

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Scottish Child Interview Model and Bairns Hoose Pathfinder Update

1. Summary

- 1.1. When a child discloses that they have been abused the investigation of the abuse allegation can be a challenging and traumatic experience for the child. Renfrewshire has worked in partnership with 4 other local authorities, Police Scotland, the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration and Children 1st, a national charity to improve the way investigations are carried out through the North Strathclyde Partnership.
- 1.2. The North Strathclyde Partnership Team consists of social workers and Police Officers who are trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model, and recovery support workers from Children 1st. The team provides a child centred trauma responsive approach to child interviews and a recovery support programme. A fundamental principle of the partnership is that trauma informed recovery is embedded into the process, from the point of disclosure for children.
- 1.3. The partnership with Children 1st is unique in Scotland and has resulted in the North Strathclyde Partnership being able to offer children who are victims of abuse or witnesses to crime to access Scotland's first Bairns Hoose. The Bairns Hoose is the Scottish delivery of a Scandinavian model of support and protection for children.
- 1.4. Children 1st was able to secure funding from the People's Postcode Lottery to allow it to open the Bairns Hoose. The Bairns Hoose is now operational from a location in East Renfrewshire.
- 1.5. The Scottish Government announced funding of £6million to support the development of the Bairns Hoose model across Scotland. The first phase of funding has been identified to support pathfinders and the North Strathclyde Partnership has been successful in securing pathfinder status.

- 1.6. This report provides information on the North Strathclyde Partnership, the Scottish Child Interview Model, the first Bairns Hoose in Scotland and the current position in relation to the Pathfinder application.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Education and Children's Services Policy Board is asked to:
 - a) note the contents of the report.
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3. Background

- 3.1. Partner agencies across Renfrewshire have significant responsibilities in relation to the protection of children from abuse and harm. Some children will have experienced abuse and harm and the role of agencies is to prevent further abuse whilst investigating the abuse or harm which has already occurred. It is recognised that abuse and harm are traumatic experiences and the investigation of this can be further traumatising.
- 3.2. As part of the continuous agenda Renfrewshire joined with a number of other local authorities, Police Scotland, the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration and Children 1st, a national charity, to form the North Strathclyde Partnership Joint Investigative Interview Team in August 2020. This team includes Social Workers, Police Officers, and Children 1st Bairns Hoose, Children's Recovery staff and operates from the Eastwood Health and Care Centre in East Renfrewshire.
- 3.3. The members of the North Strathclyde Partnership are East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, and Renfrewshire Councils, Police Scotland (G and K Divisions, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration and Children 1st, a national charity. The Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service and the Sheriffdom of North Strathclyde are active partners in the work.
- 3.4. The Scottish Child Interview Model is the approach to joint investigative interviews of children. Joint investigative interviews are carried out when a child requires to be interviewed by police and social work when it is suspected that they have been the victim of abuse to detect a potential crime against them, and to gather evidence about their safety. The Scottish Child Interview Model interview is also used when a child is a witness to a crime.
- 3.5. The Scottish Child Interview Model was developed in response to the Evidence and Procedure Review of the Scottish Courts Service in 2015. This review considered how to obtain the best evidence from children and vulnerable witnesses.
- 3.6. The North Strathclyde Partnership provides a child centred trauma responsive approach to child interviews and a recovery support programme. A fundamental principle of the partnership is that trauma informed recovery is embedded into the process, from the point of disclosure for children. Children 1st Bairns Hoose Trauma Recovery Team provide recovery support to the child who has been interviewed and their family.

- 3.7. In November 2022 the North Strathclyde Partnership won the Scottish Social Services Awards Excellence in Children's Services category. This was in recognition of the innovation involved in creating the partnership and in developing a trauma and child centred approach. The North Strathclyde Partnership was the first area to introduce the new Scottish Child Interview Model.
- 3.8. From the onset of creating the partnership the ambition was to deliver a Bairns Hoose based on the Barnahus model in place in Iceland. The vision was to ensure a child-friendly, multidisciplinary, and interagency model for responding to children who have been victims and witnesses of abuse. The purpose of Barnahus is to offer each child a coordinated and effective child protection and justice response, and to prevent traumatisation and re-traumatisation during investigation and court proceedings. The model in Iceland and other Nordic countries is that a child visits the Barnahus for the joint interview with police and social work, their medical, to give court evidence and to start their recovery journey all under one roof.
- 3.9. Initially the Partnership team was collocated in a police office before moving to accommodation in East Renfrewshire. The joint interviews were generally conducted in a police office which had been adapted to be more child friendly. Children 1st were able to secure funding from the People's Post Code Lottery.
- 3.10. Children 1st were successful following a funding bid to The People's Postcode Lottery for the first Bairns Hoose in Scotland. The funding bid was led by Children 1st in association with Victim Support Scotland, University of Edinburgh, and Children England.
- 3.11. Following the award of funding from the People's Postcode Lottery, the first Bairns Hoose in Scotland was opened by Children 1st in August 2023. The Bairns Hoose known as the Wee Hoose is located in East Renfrewshire and it is used by the North Strathclyde Partnership team for their joint investigative interviews, and for the children's recovery. Within the Wee Hoose there is an interview room, a court suite from which children can give their evidence in court remotely, a children's recovery room, and a room which can be adapted as a health suite.
- 3.12. To date, partnership data shows the number of children making a clear disclosure during interviews is upwards of 80%.
- 3.13. One of the strengths of the partnership has been the routine monitoring and evaluation of the overall investigation process including decision making around planning of interviews, balancing good practice of preparing the child, accounting for their individual needs in interview planning and ensuring best possible evidence capture. However, there is an acceptance that our current processes are still causing further distress and traumatisation for children and their families and need to improve.
- 3.14. The purpose of a Bairns Hoose is to ensure that children and young people who have been victims and witnesses of abuse or violence (and in the case of Scotland, this will initially be extended to children under the age of criminal responsibility who have caused harm) receive appropriate assessment, treatment, and support from the moment they disclose abuse, or abuse is suspected or alleged. It is to avoid subjecting children to multiple interviews by

different agencies in different locations and to ensure high-quality evidence is collected to inform both legal and protective measures. The Barnahus model is that professionals come to children, rather than children being taken to different services and re-telling their story each time. Children have informed this model with their feedback from their experiences in the Child Protection and Justice System.

4. Bairns Hoose Pathfinder Phase

- 4.1. In 2022 the Scottish Government set up a National Bairns Hoose Governance Group with the aim of bringing the Bairns Hoose model to the whole of Scotland. The expectation is that agencies work together across Children's Services, Health, Justice, and that local Chief Officer Groups decide how many Bairns Hooses are needed in each area.
- 4.2. On 31 May 2023 Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate published Scotland's Bairns' Hoose Standards. The standards set out what the Bairns Hoose will mean for children and their families as well as for professionals supporting them. Children who have had experience of the protection and justice process participated in the writing of the standards.
- 4.3. The plan is to develop Bairns Hoose in Scotland in three phases. The first is the Bairns Hoose Pathfinder Phase 2023-25 and the Scottish Government announced £6million of funding to support this development of the pathfinder phase. The second is the Bairns Hoose Pilot phase from 2025, and the third is the national rollout of Bairns Hoose from 2027.
- 4.4. On the 30th of October 2023, the North Strathclyde Partnership were successful in their application to become one of the 6 Bairns Hoose Pathfinder sites in Scotland. The other multi agency sites are Fife, Tayside, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, and the Outer Hebrides.
- 4.5. The purpose of the Pathfinder Phase is to learn about the systems, practices and culture change required to facilitate transformational change. One of the essential criteria for becoming a pathfinder site was that the partnership includes the participation and engagement of children and young people in the development of the service.
- 4.6. The Pathfinders sites will trial the Bairns Hoose Standards, continue to implement the SCIM model of interviewing, take part in collaborative learning, and inform the development of a 'Bairns Hoose Blueprint' for the piloting of Bairns Hoose in Scotland.
- 4.7. A further output of the first phase will be a Pathfinders Findings Report with a set of conclusions, along with a toolkit to support partnerships during the pilot phase. We will work closely with Pathfinder partnerships in a collaborative way to identify measures of success and gather data and intelligence. The intention is to gather data at the end of the Pathfinder phase that will act as the baseline for the evaluation of the pilot phase.
- 4.8. Delivery of Bairns' Hoose will be the responsibility of Chief Officers' Public Protection Groups however the Scottish Government has made some financial investment to support these transformative systems change. The Pathfinder Sites will have access to apply for this funding. The Pathfinders

sites will also receive support from a community of learning and implementation advisors.

- 4.9. The North Strathclyde Partnership welcome this next phase on the journey to Bairsns Hoose being fully implemented across Scotland. Further reports will be provided to the Education and Children's Services Policy Board as the Bairsns Hoose in this area develops.
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Implications of this report

- 1. Financial**

None.

- 2. HR and Organisational Development**

None.

- 3. Community/Council Planning**

Our Renfrewshire is safe: Providing good quality response to children who disclose abuse is central to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in Renfrewshire are provided with an opportunity to recover in a safe and nurturing environment

- 4. Legal**

None.

- 5. Property/Assets**

None.

- 6. Information Technology**

None.

- 7. Equality and Human Rights**

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report.

- 8. Health and Safety**

None.

- 9. Procurement**

None.

- 10. Risk**

None.

- 11. Privacy Impact**

None.

- 12. Cosla Policy Position**

None.

13. Climate Risk
None.

List of Background Papers

None.

Children's Services
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7 December 2023

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