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Duncan McNeil, Convener
Health and Sport Committee
MG.17
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear Duncan,

NATIONAL CONFIDENTIAL FORUM : PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Following the Stage 3 debate on the provisions in the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill, I would like to provide the Committee with a brief update on the progress of the National Confidential Forum (NCF) as well as forthcoming steps as part of the implementation process.

The Committee will be aware that the NCF is to be hosted by the Mental Welfare Commission and will operate independently. The Head and membership of the NCF will be selected through a Public Appointments process. These roles are expected to be advertised in February 2014. It will be the responsibility of the Head of the NCF and the Mental Welfare Commission to comment on its functions and outcomes by publishing Annual Reports once the NCF is operational.

Scottish Government officials continue to work closely with the Mental Welfare Commission and other stakeholders to help inform the implementation of the NCF. Attached in Annex A are details of the work currently being progressed.

Finally, at Stage 3 the Cabinet Secretary for Justice responded by acknowledging that *"There was a historic wrong and the Forum will be unable to resolve what happened to the individuals concerned, but it is the start of a process that we hope will help them."* The intention of the NCF has always been not only to offer therapeutic value to individuals by acknowledging their experiences of institutional care, but also to learn from past experiences of abuse and neglect, so that care and health services for children in Scotland can be improved. I am confident that the National Confidential Forum can help in achieving this.

I hope the Committee finds this information of use.

Best wishes

Michael Matheson



1. Good Practice Guidance

Following recommendations from NCF Reference Groups a short-life Working Group has been established. The first meeting took place on 20 November with several stakeholders contributing including church groups, survivor support organisations, representatives of Local Authorities and individual survivors. The Group's objectives are:

- To produce Good Practice Guidance for the intended use of current institutions;
- To raise awareness of the NCF with current institutions;
- To explore what type of role current institutions may have in the context of the NCF;
- To explore other uses for Good Practice Guidance.

My officials would like to stress that this guidance is separate from any workplace guidance or other training that may be proposed for the benefit of NCF staff. Again, this will be an operational matter for the Head of the NCF once they are appointed.

The next meeting of the Group is scheduled for February 2014 and a draft version of the guidance is expected before the end of March 2014.

2. Consultation Projects and Summary

In March 2013 we commissioned consultation surveys to help us inform the NCF and gather the views of the following survivor groups: Physical Health, Mental Health, Women in Care, and Minority Ethnic Communities. We have now received these reports and a final summary of findings is expected shortly.

Additional funding has also been made available to gather the views of survivors in the following areas: Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), LGBT survivors, Male Prisoners, ex-Armed Forces, and Homeless Adults. The findings from these reports are expected in May 2014.

3. Services Mapping Exercise

It is clear to me that the NCF should not replace existing services, but should complement the many national and local agencies and organisations that provide support to survivors and former residents of institutional care. One of the functions of the NCF is to signpost those who participate to other appropriate services. This may include, for example, additional counselling, medical advice, trauma support, or assistance with housing and welfare issues.

We will commission a mapping exercise to establish the types of services that NCF participants may choose to access. The exercise will explore the availability of services throughout Scotland as well as identifying any potential gaps in awareness of service providers in order to support people who have experienced institutional childcare. We envisage that a dedicated website will be created for the NCF and as part of this will host information and links of relevant agencies.

We expect this mapping exercise to be completed by the end of May 2014.