

Response from Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council welcomes The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill. The provisions in this legislative proposal introduces valuable additional protections for the most vulnerable in our community by updating the law on sexual offending in Northern Ireland.

Sexual Offences

The Council supports the proposed changes to the law to include;

- live streamed images of children in its definition of exploitation for sexual purposes, and;
- the introduction of a new offence of adults masquerading as children online

This will result in greater action against offenders who target children using social media and other Internet platforms. These amendments in legislation will ensure the law is in keeping with updates in modern technology.

The Council welcomes the creation of the new offences;

- proposed up-skirting provision, and; □ proposed down blousing provision.

These are important elements of this Bill by extending the current voyeurism offence to provide added protection and ensure the law operates as intended in these areas.

Anonymity and Privacy

The Council endorses the inclusion of provisions arising from the Gillen review, in particular the recommendations to;

- exclude the public from all serious sexual offence hearings, and;
- extend the current lifelong anonymity of the victim of a sexual offence to provide for their anonymity for 25 years after death.

It is of utmost importance that the most vulnerable victims are protected from the indignity and humiliation of having to discuss intimate details in open court.

Trafficking and Exploitation

The Council supports the proposal to remove the requirement for an annual strategy to move to a three year strategy. This represents a sufficient balance between providing an appropriate and proportionate level of assurance that partners can respond quickly to a changing environment while also enabling a partnership approach to agreeing a longer term vision for the protection and support of victims and the prosecution of traffickers.

Planned amendments to the Bill

The Council agrees with the four planned amendments to the Bill put forward by the Department of Justice. These cover the following:

- A legislative fix to reinstate four offences incorrectly removed into Schedule 2 of the Magistrates' Court Order 1981 to allow for the summary prosecution of these indictable offences under Article 45 of that Order;
- Abolition of the rough sex defence;
- An extension to existing revenge porn provisions to include a threat of publication;
 - Provisions to widen the scope and strength of the current law on abuse of trust.

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council endorses the provisions contained within the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill. This legislative framework will improve public safety by updating the law on sexual offending in Northern Ireland and will introduce valuable additional protections for the most vulnerable in our community.