

24 September 2021

Brendan Whittle Director
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Dear Ms Frazer

The Committee Clerk
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The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the provisions of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill.

The Bill sets out a range of proposals stemming from the Gillen Review, (2019) and the Review of the law on Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Offences Against Children. These provisions serve to enhance public safety and to improve the experiences of victims of sexual offending in Northern Ireland.

The HSCB welcomes those provisions set out in the Bill which broaden the definition set out in the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 to include live streamed images in the definition of exploitation for sexual purposes. Similarly the creation of a new offence of adults masquerading as children seeks to bridge the gap in the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. This development engages with contemporary concerns as to the use of online and social media platforms as a means to establish contact with children and introduces a robust suite of measures, alert to the range of contexts and 'angles of approach' that might be exploited by adults intent upon grooming children.

The HSCB would also welcome the proposal that references to 'child prostitution' and 'child pornography' be removed from the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. Such terminology serves to mask the subjective abuse and trauma endured by children and the devastating impact of such trauma upon



childhood and child development for those children who experience sexual abuse.

The HSCB takes note of and welcomes the proposed provisions which would bring the offence under Article 68 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (abduction of children in care, etc.) into the scope of existing SOPO provision, by including the offence in the list of specified offences.

Yours sincerely

Brendan Whittle
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& Executive Director of Social Work