



Department
of Health

From the Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP
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The Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP
By email to: mactaggartf@parliament.uk

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Dear Ms Mactaggart,

Thank you for your email of 28 January to Jeremy Hunt on behalf of one of your constituents about the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's *It's Time* campaign.

I appreciate your constituent's concerns about support for victims of child abuse. Child sexual abuse is an abhorrent crime and tackling it requires all our efforts. The Home Secretary is leading cross-Government strategy to prevent it, bringing perpetrators to justice and providing child victims with the support that they need.

It is critical that we provide the right support to survivors of such an appalling crime, including mental health support where needed, as this may prevent the onset of later mental illness. Sensitive routine enquiry will therefore be introduced in targeted health services, such as sexual health clinics, to ensure that this happens. Work is also underway to establish how a trauma-informed approach can be taken across health services, and to help provide much earlier identification and support through building trust with children and young people.

The Government is committed to delivering the vision set out in the *Future in mind* report and is transforming children and young people's mental health services to improve access to high quality support across the country. This transformation is being supported by £1.25 billion of additional Government investment, as well as an extra £150 million to help young people with eating disorders.

All clinical commissioning groups have developed local transformation plans (LTPs) to improve local services for children and young people's mental health. Plans must cover the whole spectrum of services from prevention to intervention and address the needs of all local children, including those who have been abused. A bespoke assurance process for LTPs was undertaken by NHS England regional teams in 2015, and assessment will be integrated into the mainstream planning framework from 2016/17 onwards.

NHS England also published the *Commissioning Framework for Adult and Paediatric Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) Services* in August 2015, which outlines the core services in SARCs and referral pathways to other services. These are now being rolled out throughout England and should lead to improved services for those who have experienced sexual assault, including children and young people.

In addition, the Government is improving data on the prevalence of child sexual abuse by introducing a data collection so that commissioners are better placed to manage the provision of appropriate services for children and young people who have been sexually abused.

The Department for Education has also contributed £1.5million to a pilot with NHS England to train single points of contact in schools and specialist mental health services to ensure that schools, which do not necessarily have mental health experts, know exactly how to get help for their pupils.

While the Government wants to emphasise the importance of improving therapeutic services for children who have been abused, clinical priorities are based on diagnoses and on doctors' assessments of clinical need. We recognise that children who have been abused are more likely to develop mental health problems than others; however, some do not. Funding for mental health services is therefore intended to support all children and young people who may experience mental health problems, regardless of the circumstances of their condition.

We are, however, committed to ensuring that specialist mental health assessments are available to children in care, who are likely to have experienced abuse. This is ultimately a matter for the Department for Education, which is responsible for looked-after children. Presently, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is routinely used to assess the mental health needs of children entering care. The Questionnaire is designed to flag up those children who are likely to have diagnosable mental health conditions and may need to be referred to hospital or a community mental health team for further investigation.

I am pleased that the Government has set up the first ever cross-Government Ministerial Child Protection Taskforce to overhaul the way police, schools, social services and others work together in tackling this abuse. The taskforce's work will build on the Government's wide-ranging reforms to create a care system that puts children's needs first.

I hope this reply is helpful.

pp Fian Graig

ALISTAIR BURT

Approved by the Minister and
signed by his Private Secretary
to avoid delay