



F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

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Dear Colleague,

I am writing to express my thanks for your contribution to the External Advisory Group of the Child Protection Improvement Programme over the past months.

The External Advisory Group has been invaluable in shaping the programme's priorities and direction of travel, and has done so in order to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children and young people. As a member, you have contributed your time and professional expertise. Many of you have also provided an useful conduit to the views and perspectives of your wider networks, organisations and, most importantly, the children, young people and families that are at the heart of the Child Protection Improvement Programme. I am grateful for the commitment you have shown to this shared agenda.

The Child Protection Improvement Programme doesn't end with the making of these recommendations. John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and I share a firm determination that this programme should build on the strengths we already have, and result in tangible, lasting improvements in areas that need change. And we are equally clear that to get this programme right, both now and throughout its implementation, we need to work collaboratively. Co-operation and joint working has marked the way in which the Child Protection Improvement Programme has been taken forward and the recommendations developed. This gives me confidence about our collective ability to work together to drive forward this programme of improvement into next year and beyond.

I have now received a report on the programme's progress and will consider the report and subsequent recommendations over the coming weeks. Shortly after that, we will ask the External Advisory Group to meet again to discuss the implementation of recommendations flowing from the programme.

In the meantime, I wish you a happy Christmas and hope you enjoy a well-deserved festive break.

MARK MCDONALD

