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Dear Michael

HISTORIC ABUSE IN CHILDREN'S HOMES AND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

I am writing to update you on the progress we have made in taking forward the package of measures I announced at the debate on 1 December.

As you will know the relevant files held by the Scottish Executive are now available for public inspection. A webpage giving advice on how to access these files has been set up and can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/education/accessstoinfo/residentialestablishments>.

The Scottish Information Commissioner has completed his examination of the procedures for the identification and provision of access to records carried out by my officials. His report has now been published and I am pleased that his findings show that the Executive has taken all reasonable steps to trace and open all historical records that it holds relating to institutional children's homes and residential schools in Scotland.

The helpline service operated by Who Cares? Scotland to assist people who want information about how to access information held by the Executive and to provide a referral service for people who want to access services such as counselling and legal services went live on 8 February.

We are currently considering the remit and membership of the proposed Short Life Working Group with INCAS to ensure that it fits with other work being taken forward to provide support to survivors of childhood sexual abuse.



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On the Independent Expert, my officials consulted with INCAS to draw a shortlist of suitable candidates. From that list, Tom Shaw, formerly Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Northern Ireland emerged as the strongest option. We now need to reach agreement with Mr Shaw on his remit and start date.

My officials have met regularly with INCAS and in addition to providing funding to enable them to circulate information more widely amongst their membership we are working with them to identify other ways in which we might provide support; including how we might fund a research post to assist INCAS members further in their search for information held by us or other organisations. We await the decision of INCAS as to how best to structure the organisation to allow it to employ staff. That will then enable us to agree priorities for financial support to allow them to develop their work. My officials are next meeting INCAS on 13 July.

I hope you find this update helpful; I will, of course keep you informed as work progresses.



PETER J PEACOCK



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