

## CONSULTATION PAPER ON AREA SUPPORT TEAM STRUCTURE

### RESPONSE FROM NORTH LANARKSHIRE PANEL

- (1) **Please describe the geographical location and composition of your area: position; urban/rural mix; population; key connotations etc., and the boundaries you share with other local authorities.**

North Lanarkshire Council has the fourth largest population of all Scottish Councils with a population of 326,320 people as at 2009, 157,088 are male and 169,232 are female. 22% of the population is under 18 years of age, 60% being classed as adults of working age and 18% pensioners. 1.3% of the population are ethnic minorities.

The largest townships in North Lanarkshire are Cumbernauld, Coatbridge, Airdrie, Motherwell, Wishaw and Bellshill and the neighbouring authorities are East Dunbartonshire, Falkirk, Glasgow City, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Lothian. North Lanarkshire is predominantly urban with some rural areas to the north and east of the authority.

- (2) **How many Panel members, Panel Chairs, CPAC members and Sub-CPAC members do you currently have?**

North Lanarkshire Children's Panel currently has 156 Panel members headed by a ministerial appointed Panel Chair, two ministerial appointed Depute Chairs and two locally appointed Area Chairs/rota compilers. The CPAC currently has two Council appointed CPAC members both of whom are elected Members and three ministerial appointed CPAC members. In addition the CPAC has two Sub-Committees, responsible for monitoring and assisting with recruitment, selection and re-appointments and have four members each with both Sub-Committees being chaired by a member of the CPAC.

- (3) **Describe any existing joint working arrangements, partnerships and shared services with other providers situated in close proximity.**

Historically there have been no formal joint working arrangements with other authorities/CPACs/Panels apart from an informal arrangement with South Lanarkshire Council to share the venue for pre-service training, as far as possible, in alternate years and in 2010, at the request of North Lanarkshire CPAC Chair, South Lanarkshire CPAC members assisted at the information night and at recruitment and selection. This arrangement was a one-off.

As of Oct 2011, South Lanarkshire have a shortfall in the amount of Panel members they require to cover the amount of hearings per rota, North Lanarkshire Panel Chair has now offered assistance and the process is starting to be put in place for concurrent membership to be set up.

- (4) **Can you identify elements of good practice in your existing arrangements? Please describe.**

North Lanarkshire Children's Panel, due to the size of the Authority has always required to be split into 2 areas. This in the past had proved to be divisive, we have worked very hard in the last 6 years to bring both areas together therefore building a more cohesive panel both in respect of training events and in making it easier for panel members to sit in any of our 3 hearing rooms in North Lanarkshire, this has been very successful.

Training attendance numbers have risen significantly.

In North Lanarkshire we place pastoral care of panel members of high importance, the panel chair, deputes and area chair/rota compilers are on hand to offer guidance and support at all times, this is very important given the nature of some of the cases we see. Panel members have frequently said to us that they appreciate having people they know to discuss difficulties with.

It is important that the amount of people providing that support equates to the people requiring it therefore I feel it would be detrimental to the hearing system to create large unmanageable areas, we appear to be going backwards in time.

An important aspect of the job of the Panel Chair and Deputes is to liaise with the social work locality managers, locality reporter managers and representatives of other agencies, this keeps the channels of communications open and offers the chance to ensure a good, secure working partnership.

The attendance by chair and deputes in North Lanarkshire at Child Protection Committee, Youth Justice Forum, CPAC & Sub CPAC meetings, CPCG meetings etc. is a valuable exercise as this ensures and information gathered can be imparted, when appropriate to the members thus keeping the local news and knowledge up to date.

**Are there areas of practice in need of improvement? Can you identify gaps in Provision?**

North Lanarkshire CPAC/Panel has embraced the standardisation agenda and currently operates the national application form and the national monitoring form and has always been supportive of further standardisation, particularly in the key areas of recruitment and selection and re-appointment. Indeed North Lanarkshire CPAC and Panel have been disappointed that the standardisation momentum has stalled as a consequence of the overall review of support for the Children's Hearing System in Scotland. With regard to re-appointments, the stipulation that appointments should be made for three years or, by exception, one year has always been the source of frustration. Every Panel member is different, particularly in relation to availability and skills and it is felt that more flexibility in relation to the re-appointment period may be beneficial as an aid to retention. Whilst accepting that a standardised approach to the process of re-appointments may be desirable there must be local flexibility to take account of local circumstances.

**(5) Please describe current local training arrangements, including travel to training venues and budgets.**

Currently the budget for training provided by the Council has been seen as adequate on the basis that at no time has a training request been refused by the Council. North Lanarkshire CPAC/Panel enjoys a mix of training involving area training nights, CPAC training events and training provided by the Children's Hearing Training Organisers at Glasgow University. The training provided by the University of Glasgow has the added advantage of involving Panel members from other areas which gives and insight to Panel member issues in those areas.

Pre-service training has by and large been undertaken locally either in Hamilton or in Motherwell which has a distinct advantage in creating a team spirit with all trainees from a particular area training together. North Lanarkshire CPAC/Panel feel that there would be distinct benefits in continuing this practice.

Expenses for attending training events are given in accordance with the attached guidance on expenses.

**(6) How would local training arrangements continue to add value and quality in light of the forthcoming changes?**

North Lanarkshire Panel/CPAC are committed to the Kilbrandon ethos and it is important that training is provided on a local basis particularly if it relates to an issue pertinent to the North Lanarkshire area eg. alcohol addiction/substance abuse. It is important that training on demand is available for topics of this type.

**(7) Which local training arrangements/events would you like to preserve? What would be the costs involved in doing so?**

It is extremely important that the local aspect of training remains, this gives panel members an insight into local issues and agencies.

The Panel Chair can use this forum to inform of national and local issues.

It also provides an opportunity for panel members to get together and discuss matters that may be concerning them.

The topics for these training/information evenings need to be decided by the panel members. Whoever is monitoring panel members must be able to identify training needs and in turn arrange for this to happen.

Ongoing training is imperative for panel members to ensure they deliver the best outcomes for the children and families.

Panel members are unaware of the budget for training events, as panel chair I have never been refused funds for any training event I felt necessary.

**(8) What new local training would you like to see in place?**

I would be very concerned if the training above was not continued.

Personal development must be encouraged therefore some form of online distance learning programme could be developed.

A programme of on demand training could be organised by the CHTU e.g. short sessions dealing with specific topics, delivered locally offering different attendance times.

**Please describe the accessibility of and arrangements for travel to Hearing Centres.**

The number of hearing rooms in North Lanarkshire has significantly decreased since 1996, We now only have 3 hearing rooms to cover our large authority.

Earlier this year SCRA made the decision to close the hearing room in Airdrie, refurbish the Bellshill Hearing Centre and relocate to there. Following complaint from the Panel Chair a discussion period was entered into and SCRA were requested to source appropriate premises in the Airdrie locality however this search was not successful and the cases usually dealt with in Airdrie are now held at Bellshill. This has caused extra travelling time for panel members, representatives from social work, education etc., more importantly to children and families.

The acceptable travelling time set by SCRA for families of 1 hour to a hearing seems to be excessive particularly when a large proportion of the families attending hearings can lead chaotic lifestyles and can be in crisis.

**(9) How could travel arrangements be improved?**

Travel arrangements could be improved if there were more Hearing Centres across the North Lanarkshire area accessible by train or by bus.

**(10) What level of expenses are currently paid to Panel members in your area? What are these figures based on?**

Details of the current level of payments are contained in the guidance on expenses, a copy of which has been attached with the NL CPAC response.

North Lanarkshire Panel are aware of changes, downwards, to the level of travel expenses paid in other areas. The expense level in North Lanarkshire has remained unchanged reflecting the fact that there is a recognition that Panel members should not be out of pocket when attending hearings.

**(11) In your view, what should be the level of expenses in moving to a standardised payment across Scotland?**

Panel members give freely of their time and expertise to the Children's Panel therefore no one should be out of pocket.

I do not think it would be prudent for CHS to drop any expense level, everyone should be paid the same level.

**(12) What is the current budget in your area for Panel member training and expenses?**

I am not aware of the expenses these are dealt with by the Local Authority.

**(13) Do you foresee other potential issues and resource needs for Panel member training and in implementing the new structures?**

North Lanarkshire Panel assume that there will be induction training in relation to the provisions of the Act and in particular any changes in terms of support emanating from the changeover from the Scottish Government to Children's Hearings Scotland.

**(14) How can current key roles carried out by Panel Chairs and Panel members, CPAC Chairs and members, CPAC Clerks and the local authority in support of the Children's Panel, be transferred most efficiently to the Area Support Team?**

The wish of North Lanarkshire Panel is that the Area Support Team area will cover North Lanarkshire Council area. North Lanarkshire Children's Panel is the second largest in Scotland and do not consider that anything could usefully be gained by joining up with one or more other areas. For example South Lanarkshire Council's deprivation factors and geography is quite different from North Lanarkshire Council in terms of training needs and the types of hearings.

In general terms the question is difficult to answer until the Area Support Team area has been determined. However should the Area Support Team area replicate the current North Lanarkshire Council area there should be a seamless transfer in terms of Children's Panel members. As regards the Clerk to the CPAC, the continuing involvement of the local authority in any support arrangements will be a matter for the elected Members of the Council and until a decision has been made, the issue of transferring that role cannot be commented on at this point.

**(15) What would you like to see the Area Support Team deliver?**

North Lanarkshire Panel find it difficult to look beyond the current role of the CPAC in terms of monitoring, re-appointments and recruitment and selection. It is unclear from the Act what other role within its Terms of Reference could be undertaken. Against that background it is difficult to envisage the Area Support Team delivering anything other than what the current CPAC delivers at present.

**(16) What training will be required for members of the Area Support Teams to enable them to carry out their roles/functions effectively?**

The answer to this question really depends on the answer to question (17). If the roles and responsibilities of the Area Support Team mirror the current CPAC the only training envisaged would relate to the roles of the National Body/National Convener and any new standardised approaches to current responsibilities.