

**JOINT CENTRAL
CHILDREN'S PANEL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
ON THE PROPOSALS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AREA SUPPORT TEAMS**

Whilst the Joint Children's Panel Advisory Committee welcomes the opportunity to comment on and contribute to the proposals for the establishment of AST teams, it notes with disappointment the National Convener's proposal for the establishment of a Joint Central/West Lothian AST.

The Central Regional Children's Panel comprising members from Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling was established in 1975 and has retained its original boundary following Local Government Re-organisation in 1996 to the present day.

The JCPAC would provide clarification on the Joint Central/West Lothian SCRA locality which co-incidentally mirrors the proposed AST boundary.

Reporters from Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling will shortly be relocated to offices within Ochil House, Springkerse, Stirling with the West Lothian Reporters remaining within their current location. The day to day running of the Falkirk office will be overseen by the West Lothian Local Authority Reporter, with the partnership working arrangements for Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling being undertaken by the Stirling/Clacks Local Authority Reporter. This model effectively retains a Joint Central approach.

In this regard, the JCPAC would again request that consideration be given to the establishment of a Joint Central AST retaining its existing boundaries and allowing good practice and partnership working to continue and develop within this area.

In the absence of set consultation questions, the following observations have been provided on the consultation paper and encompass the views of the JCPAC.

1. ***Geography and Boundaries: The existing Joint Central Children's Panel Advisory Committee has been operating since the local government reorganisation of 1996. It comprises Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire and stretches from Bo'ness in the east to Tyndrum in the north west and from Strathblane in the south to Dunblane in the north.***

Boundaries are shared with Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, Fife, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian. Amongst other partner organisations, there are continuous boundaries with Central Scotland Police and Forth Valley NHS.

The JCPAC notes that the contents of this section of the document are reflective of the Joint Central position only and that no information is provided in relation to the demographics of West Lothian.

In this regard, the JCPAC would highlight that West Lothian Council has shared boundaries with City of Edinburgh, Falkirk, North Lanarkshire, the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire. It also has extensive partnership working with the 5 Lothian and Borders areas for Edinburgh and is served by Lothian and Borders Police and NHS Edinburgh, the details of which have all been omitted from this section of the document. In addition, West Lothian Panel Members are

trained with the Edinburgh Training team covering City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and Scottish Borders.

The JCPAC has concern over the sheer size of the proposed AST covering 4 local authority areas which are all very diverse. Panel Members from these areas are currently not trained together and in practical terms, Panel Members/JCPAC Members attending Hearings/training within the West Lothian area will incur additional travel time and mileage expenditure.

Therefore, the JCPAC would offer alternative options for the National Convener's consideration, namely:-

- The establishment of a Lothian/Borders AST, or
- The establishment of an Edinburgh/West Lothian AST

Both these models would reflect areas of commonality and existing shared partnership working arrangements.

2. ***Size of panel to be supported by the proposed AST: This proposed arrangement would require to support approximately 265 panel members: 47 in Clackmannanshire, 69 in Falkirk, 48 in Stirling and 101 in West Lothian.***

The JCPAC acknowledges the reasoning behind the proposed merger, however, would highlight that the proposed arrangement would result in the Joint Central/West Lothian AST serving the second largest panel in Scotland and would be the only model to encompass four council areas.

In this regard, the JCPAC would express their opinion that the existing Joint arrangement supporting 164 Panel members which is manageable, effective and held as a measure of best practice throughout Scotland should be retained.

2. ***Existing Joint/cross boundary CPAC or Panel working: as already mentioned, the Joint Central CPAC arrangement works effectively and has done so since 1996. There is also a concurrent panel membership scheme in place, allowing panel members to serve on any panel within the Joint Central area.***

In addition, there is a similar concurrent arrangement in place between Falkirk and West Lothian panels and I believe that these concurrent/joint working arrangements lend themselves to an effective AST structure.

The JCPAC would advise that this statement is misleading and in no way reflects the true nature of the present involvement with West Lothian.

Panel Members within Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Children's Panel have a long standing history of joint working and, as detailed within the consultation document; the concurrent membership scheme allows panel members to serve on Hearings within the Joint Central area.

However, the concurrent membership arrangement between Falkirk and West Lothian differs from that of the Joint Central arrangement. The Falkirk/West Lothian concurrent membership Scheme was established in 2008 when assistance from all neighbouring authorities was sought by West Lothian during a period of crisis. West Lothian also established similar concurrent membership Schemes with other local authority areas at that time as a short term solution. The

Scheme is used infrequently with the three male Panel Members holding concurrent membership having sat on panels only a handful of times. In addition, this arrangement expired in May 2011.

There was no reciprocal arrangement in place allowing West Lothian panel members to sit on Hearings within the Falkirk area.

The JCPAC would also take this opportunity to highlight that the Joint Central area has also contributed significantly at a national level, the details of which have been omitted from the document. This includes regular attendance at:-

- Children's Panel Advisory Group (CPAG)
- Children's Panel Chairs Group (CPCG),
- Children's Panel Advisory Group (East Area) comprising the Chairs and Clerks of Fife, Dundee, Angus and Joint Central.

In addition, Joint Central has contributed to:-

- Clerking of the CPAG & CPAG (East Area)
- Membership of the Policy and Development Group, Standardisation Group, Implementation Working Group and Publicity Working Group
- Previous chair, Mr D Forsyth presented evidence, along with other members of the CPAG, to the Scottish Parliament Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee in relation to Children's Hearings (Scotland) Bill.
- The current JCPAC Chair, Mrs C Cameron is also actively involved at a national level.

3. ***How would this proposal deliver better support for panel members locally: There is an opportunity to consolidate and build on existing joint arrangements and good practice, operating within a single national framework that would ensure greater consistency and provide for the training of a more competent and confident panel members.***

At present there are no joint arrangements with West Lothian.

As previously stated, the demographics of the four local authority areas differ greatly and Joint Central already works extensively on a Forth Valley partnership basis. The model proposed would result in the Joint Central/West Lothian AST being the only AST in Scotland requiring support from four separate local authority areas.

The JCPAC would take this opportunity to highlight that it is currently provided with a high level and standard of support in the form of a dedicated Clerk employed by Falkirk Council, Lead Authority in the Joint Central partnership working arrangements. The Clerk is able to utilise resources to assist at pressured times such as recruitment.

In addition, local clerical support is provided to panel chairs/members within their own constituent authorities, which allow the local element to be retained.

The JCPAC also notes that no joint training arrangements currently exist for Joint Central/West Lothian. Panel Members from Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Children's Panels are training by the Children's Hearings Training Unit at St Andrews University whereby West Lothian panel members are currently training by the Edinburgh Training Team.

To enable greater consistency of panel members, the training for the Joint Central/West Lothian area would require to be provided by the same training provider.

And finally, the JCPAC would express their concern in relation to the difficulty of finding AST members who would have an overall grasp of the concerns of 4 very different authority areas. Having representation at JCPAC meetings from each of the 3 authorities works well but should it be expanded to 4 local authority areas, would make this kind of dialogue and interaction unwieldy.

4. ***Membership of the Proposed AST, as a minimum: I propose that core AST members should comprise existing Ministerially-appointed CPAC Members, 1 Panel member per constituent local authority, 4 local authority nominees and 1 Clerk.***

Whilst the composition of the AST seems reasonable, the JCPAC would request clarification on the undernoted:-

- (a) What will be the duties and roles of the ASTs and who within the ASTs will undertake these?
- (b) What flexibility do ASTs have to appoint additional members for additional tasks?
- (c) How practically will the chair position work within joint ASTs?
- (d) How is the funding for ASTs to be split between Local Authorities and CHS?
- (e) What are the appropriate monitoring arrangements (3.1.12) and how will these be determined? Will there be consultation on these before they are put in place?

In addition, the JCPAC would also highlight that the extensive contribution played by panel chairs, deputies and facilitators have not been acknowledged within the body of the consultation document.