

Children's Hearings Scotland Consultation

Response From West Lothian Council

West Lothian Council agrees with the principle of collaboration in pursuit of improved outcomes and welcomes the approach taken to develop AST's by way of agreement with local authorities.

Taking into account geographical, historical, social and community factors, the proposal to join West Lothian with Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling would seem the best solution from the various combinations that were available.

A key outcome following the creation of an Area Support Team should be continuity of front line delivery for children involved in the Hearing System, which retains a local dimension, focusing on available local arrangements, but supported and strengthened by national standards to ensure consistent delivery of the best solutions for the child.

Arrangements for AST's must be robust and scalable to ensure that this key outcome is delivered regardless of the size and composition of the area being supported. West Lothian's Hearing System exhibits a high standard of practice, delivered by dedicated individuals. These are qualities that can be transferred to the Area Support Team suggested by the National Convener. As such, West Lothian's CPAC, Panel Members and administrative support are confident that it can work effectively to deliver the proposed solution.

Whilst the proposals are welcome, there are a number of areas of concern which arise. It is requested that further information is provided in a follow up response from the National Convener or in the report on the consultation process to be issued on 21st November 2011.

1. Clarity is needed in terms of strategy. It is not clear what the immediate, short and long term aims are for the set up and functioning of the Area Support model. An indication of identifiable milestones and the anticipated delivery dates would ensure that all parties are aware of key targets and of progress towards them.
2. It would be useful to be provided with a comparison of existing costs for the provision of the Hearing System to the anticipated costs of delivering the change process and the costs for the ongoing provision of the Area Support model. This would instil confidence that the new model would improve economy and efficiency as well as the suggested improvements to effectiveness.
3. In addition to cost comparisons, it would be useful to be provided with details of the efficiencies and improvements which are anticipated as a result of the transition to the Area Support model, together with the anticipated delivery times and costings. Combined with the financial information, this would ensure that local authorities are aware of their role in delivering efficiencies and contributing to the effectiveness of the new system. Such transparency would assist all parties when negotiating agreement on the delivery of AST's through the transition period and beyond.
4. The provision of a timeline for the transition to the Area Support model and what is expected for the first 100 days after transfer would compliment the information requested above.

5. At a local level, given that there are several local authorities involved in the proposal affecting West Lothian, clarity is needed as to what kind of support would be provided from the centre and what would be expected from the constituent local authorities. Clarity is required as to what level of support would be expected from each of the constituent local authorities and how this would be reflected in the service level agreements.
6. The National Convener has declared a preference to negotiate service level agreements with local authorities to transfer the role and functions currently carried out by CPAC clerks. In order to reach agreement with the National Convener, a number of key issues require to be clarified relating to finance, management and resources.
7. Finance – clarity is required on whether reimbursement to local authorities would it be an actual costs basis or through a set budget allocated each financial year.
8. Management – It is not clear as to responsibility for management of the change processes at a local level. For instance, whether resources will be provided centrally or drawn from local authorities, CPAC's and Panel Chairs to assist with the change process. In addition, clarity is sought as to who would be accountable for change at the local level and who will monitor progress and compliance with the processes used.
9. Resources – It is essential that local authorities are provided with an indication of the input expected from them in terms of human resources, facilities, catering and liability for expenses during the transition period and beyond. To compliment this, it would be desirable to clarify the resources to be provided by Children's Hearing Scotland during the transition period and beyond.
10. There is concern over the number of Area Support Team members indicated within the proposal, given the geographical size of the area they will be responsible for and the number of Panel Members they will be expected to recruit and monitor. The current arrangements allow for the creation of sub-CPAC's and these sub groups are relied on in the West Lothian and the Joint Central Area to assist the CPAC in undertaking their responsibilities. Confirmation is sought as to whether sub-AST's will be allowed. West Lothian Council would strongly support the inclusion of sub-AST's in the model. Sub-groups provide a transition pool for succession and change. They provide an opportunity for knowledge and experience to be built up for new members who can later progress to the main group and allow main group members to phase down their commitments, stepping down to the sub-group as a reserve, to help at times of peak activity and to transfer their knowledge and experience to new members.
11. To ensure that Panel Members remain both competent and confident in their duties, it is expected that they undertake 20 -24 hearings per year. The hearing ratios in the consultation paper suggest only 12.4 hearings a year for each of the panel members in the proposed area. Confirmation is sought as to how this will be managed upwards in the longer term, for example by reducing the number of panel members.
12. There is some concern over the size of the panel area in terms of travel distance to the hearing centres. There will be two hearing centres within the area, one based in Livingston and one based in Falkirk. Clarity is sought as to the allocation of Panel Members to hearings within these two centre? For instance, will use be made of Panel Member home address postcodes to minimise the travel to be undertaken by them or will Panel Members be expected to participate in hearings in both centres, to ensure that there is consistency of involvement and experience?

13. Rota generation and management for hearings and observations involve a significant time input. In some local authorities, these rotas are managed by the clerk. West Lothian enjoys the input of volunteers from the panel membership and the CPAC to undertake these duties. Is the intention to continue with this approach or will these tasks be the responsibility of the local authorities? If the expectation is for local authorities to undertake these tasks, this would have a significant budgetary impact compared to the current system.
14. West Lothian Council provides accommodation for a large number of local panel member and CPAC training events. Accommodation is also provided for various committee meetings. Catering arrangements are provided for these events. Will the service level agreements and reimbursement arrangements make provision for these costs?

