

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AREA SUPPORT TEAMS

RESPONSE BY MORAY CHILDREN'S PANEL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Introduction

The Moray Children's Panel Advisory Committee (CPAC) fully acknowledges the challenges and difficulties facing the National Convener and the Board of Children's Hearings Scotland in leading forward the new system.

After reviewing the documentation, the Moray CPAC can understand the reasons behind the National Convener's proposal of a Highland and Moray Area Support Team (AST). However, due to a number of reasons that will be set out in this response, the Moray CPAC are of a view that this proposal will not be beneficial for Moray and as such lay case for a Moray AST.

Geography

At paragraph 12.6 of the Consultation Document, the National Convener states that "Moray is considerably closer to Inverness than to Aberdeen". We believe that this statement holds no purpose as although Moray *is* slightly closer to Inverness, consideration has to be given to Highland as a whole, as Moray would be working with Highland and not Inverness.

If you consider taking the 4 corners of the Moray border and their distance to Inverness, it is as follows:

- 22 miles from the West Moray border at Brodie to Inverness;
- 47 miles from the South Moray border at Tomintoul to Inverness;
- 55 miles from the South-East Moray border at Keith to Inverness; and
- 60 miles from the East Moray border at Cullen to Inverness.

However, as stated, these are only distances to Inverness. Consideration also has to be given to travel to hearing centres throughout Highland including Wick, a further 103 miles from Inverness.

Highland covers a largely rural area of 30,659km², which if merged with Moray's also largely rural area of 2,238km², would create an AST covering a very rural land mass of 32,897km², an area bigger than the country of Belgium. This would involve long periods of travel for AST members in both Highland and Moray, possibly involving over-night stays which would have a cost implication to the AST.

Proposed Structure

Within paragraph 12.7 of the Consultation Document, the National Convener states that "The disparate geography of the area is a major factor and in formulating my proposal for a joint Highland/Moray AST, I wanted to avoid creating additional burdens for members and panel members in terms of having to travel greater

distances to meetings or hearings.” I feel this is contradicted by the fact that due to the greatly increased rural land mass, members and panel members from Moray will have much greater distances to travel, as stated above and this could have a negative effect on the service provided.

It is noted in a number of the proposed mergers that “a joined up approach may fail to deliver effective support for individual panel members or that some authorities may lose their identities within a larger grouping...this concern could be addressed through the establishment of AST sub-committees”. This would therefore see us revert back to having our own “AST” with a larger group meeting to discuss what is happening locally. This flags up two issues;

- We end up with basically the same structure we currently have but with an added layer on top; and
- This would create more meetings and therefore more distances to travel which would again contradict what the National Convener states in paragraph 12.7 of the Consultation Document as previously mentioned.

By having two sub-ASTs, the risk of inconsistency throughout the Highland/Moray AST increases.

Moray prides itself on the standard of our monitoring system and recruitment, something that the Moray CPAC has had to work very hard at achieving. By merging with Highland, and this is in no way critical of their system, we could see our standards affected as we work together to achieve a common standard.

Conclusion

As a very small CPAC, Moray have achieved a very proud recognition of the work that we do with the resources at hand and we feel that this can continue into the new set-up being implemented by the Children’s Hearing System. By merging with a larger authority, it could see the hard work of the Moray CPAC effectively lost and the AST would be starting from scratch.

With that, I propose that Moray becomes a stand-alone AST. As a Moray CPAC, the quality of service we have provided with the limited resources we have has been recognised on a national basis, and for the benefit of the children, families, members and panel members of Moray, this service should long continue on a local basis.