

Response to the Consultation on Proposals for the Establishment of Area Support Teams (ASTs) by the National Convener

I would like to make the following points in response to:

The Proposal to combine the existing panels of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City into one Area Support Team (AST).

1. Page 6 of the consultation document states *'There are clear benefits to be gained by ASTs working across existing CPAC boundaries, to achieve national consistency, share existing good practice and learning, consolidate partnerships with service providers and existing arrangements for the sharing of panel members and joint training'*

- National consistency can be achieved by having a national panel and national standards, which will apply to ASTs irrespective of whether they are operating individually or jointly.
- The sharing of existing good practice and learning is not dependent upon ASTs working across existing CPAC boundaries. It is dependent upon the effective implementation of national standards and nationally delivered monitoring.
- Service providers will continue to be resourced from the relevant local authority area as the proposed ASTs only pertain to the Children's Hearing System. There seems little point in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, even if combined into one AST, consolidating partnerships with service providers from a local authority area that will not be providing them with a service.

2. Page 6 of the consultation document also states *'I do not intend to create Area Support teams of more than one local authority area where the costs of operating would outweigh any gains of joint working.'* I would suggest that the creation of one joint AST of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City along with two sub-committees in order to provide enough support for the two panels as is proposed, would do just that. It would create in effect three bodies, which would result in increased administration costs, an increase in the number of meetings that have to be attended and a consequent increase in expenses for travelling to the meetings.

3. The Consultation Document clearly states that any new arrangements need to deliver consistency and better support for panel members and that agreement has to be reached with local authorities in order for the proposed new structures to be put in place. It is difficult to find any benefits at all to the proposal to combine Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City a feeling, which is shared by the majority of panel members, the CPACs and the local authorities of both areas.

The Recruitment, Roles and Responsibilities

1. That the panel member representative on the AST should be elected by the panel members from the relevant AST area and accountable to the panel members who have elected them.

The proposed new structures are an ideal opportunity for panel members to have a say in how they are represented both locally and nationally and how information can best be disseminated to them.

2. Monitoring should be removed from the ASTs because

- It is difficult to achieve the aims of the Act to deliver better consistency and support for panel members if monitoring is to be delivered locally by volunteers. Monitoring should be delivered nationally and subject to national standards.
- There is a conflict of interest if the same body that is responsible for recruitment is also responsible for monitoring as a critical evaluation does not reflect well on the recruitment process
- Independence could be compromised in that if the same body is responsible for both recruitment and monitoring it could be argued that it is cheaper and less time consuming to retain bad panel members than recruit and train new ones.

3. The Roles of Clerks and Panel Secretaries in the ASTs

If Aberdeenshire is to retain their panel secretary as suggested clarification is needed on what the role of the clerk would be.

Mary Fawcett – Aberdeenshire Panel Member

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