

**Response of Renfrewshire Children's Panel to Consultation Paper on
Establishment of Area Support Teams**

I refer to your email dated 29 July, 2011, enclosing the consultation paper issued by the National Convener Children's Hearings Scotland on the proposed area support team structure and thank you, on behalf of Renfrewshire's panel members, for the opportunity to submit comments on the issues raised within the consultation document entitled "Proposals for the establishment of Area Support Teams".

Enclosed for your attention is the completed Respondent Information Form. Renfrewshire Children's Panel are happy for the content of this response to be made public.

We wish to record that it has not been possible to fully consider the implications of the proposals for the establishment of Area Support Teams (ASTs), due to the lack of detail relative to the operational arrangements of the proposed structure but that Panel members are willing to engage with you further in respect of your proposals to ensure that the structure for the AST adopted in the Renfrewshire area ensures that panel members are fully supported and that children and young people who attend hearings receive a service that fully meets their needs.

Clarification is required as to whether it is intended that the AST once established will support the existing Children's Panels in the East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire areas or a combined East Renfrewshire/Renfrewshire Panel. The panel members take the view that the National Convener must be positive in her actions and do what is necessary to ensure that panel members are equipped, trained and supported to carry out their duties without worrying about budgets, policies or the political whim of the moment. The panel members are not worried about the make up of the AST as long as they can carry out their hearing duties and remain attending and hearings within the Renfrewshire area. There is no appetite for cross boundary working and relationships between the two areas cannot be described as amicable and no joint training has been undertaken to date.

Renfrewshire panel members have an excellent relationship with other stakeholders involving the following:

- regular meetings with locality social work team managers to address issues in a proactive and pre-emptive manner
- joint training events with social work
- chairing a liaison group with SCRA, Education and Social Work
- regular meetings with SCRA Authority Reporters and Office Manager in addition to the required meetings regarding the rota etc.

In addition Renfrewshire is recognised by the CHTU as an exemplar panel in providing training support to our new recruits involving support visits by panel chair and deputies during training, appointment of buddies and arranging of observations of hearings on demand. We are anxious that this standard remains post formation of AST but recognise that the people needed to achieve this standard will be significantly more than the one panel member proposed. Currently one panel chair, two deputy chairs, a dedicated rota secretary and two tutors currently carry out the support function required for our panel members and are additionally supported by other panel members on occasion for the organisation of visits to residential establishments etc.

Based on current levels of panel membership it is anticipated that the Renfrewshire/East Renfrewshire AST would support approximately 110 panel members. It is doubtful whether 2 panel member representatives would be sufficient to provide the level of pastoral support required and we believe that the panel member representatives on the AST should be proportionately appointed as has been applied to the CPAC appointments to the AST.

The figures in Appendix 2 would seem to suggest a shared panel option with a very crudely constructed number of 15.4 sessions required per panel member per annum which in no way reflects the actual disparity in workload between the two areas. Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire may be close geographically but are worlds away in workload and practice. (eg Renfrewshire have more hearings in a week than East Renfrewshire have in a month and East Renfrewshire are allocated 60 mins per hearing compared to Renfrewshire's 45 mins). These statistics would suggest that pastoral support is more likely to be needed in Renfrewshire and also supports the argument above for proportionality in panel member appointments.

The ASTs will depend largely on the commitment and goodwill of volunteers and the operation of the AST's will require to be very flexible to ensure panel member participation. It should be noted that most panel business is carried out outwith working hours and therefore any attempt by AST's to focus business within normal working hours would not be supported by panel members.

The panel members respectfully suggest that the number of members in the AST from each of the categories be reconsidered to better reflect the proposed roles and current practices.

The panel members are largely in agreement with the comments of the local authority and CPAC regarding the AST proposals with the exception of the insistence of independent areas where panel members are not worried whether we are part of a combined or independent panel as long as no detriment ensues.

We hope that the above comments will be considered during your analysis of all of the responses received.

Derek Brama

Chair of Renfrewshire Children's Panel

