



*Inverclyde Children's Panel*

Our Ref: HC

Date: 21 October 2011

Ms Bernadette Monaghan  
National Convener  
Children's Hearings Scotland  
Area 2E South  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

Dear Mrs Monaghan

**Inverclyde Children's Panel Advisory Committee and Inverclyde Children's Panel –  
Response to Consultation on Proposals for Establishment of Area Support Teams**

The Inverclyde Children's Panel Advisory Committee and Inverclyde Children's Panel welcome the creation of the National Children's Panel and its goals of ensuring that panel members are fully supported to a consistently high standard, and that children and young people have a high quality experience when attending hearings across Scotland.

We recognise that, whilst the day to day role of panel members will not change, the move to a National Panel will aim to achieve national consistency, delivered locally.

However, we consider that the justification for linking Inverclyde and Argyll & Bute appears to be very limited, and would argue that no case has been made for such an arrangement.

We have a number of concerns in terms of the practicality of such arrangements, and question whether the new arrangements are likely to provide any savings. Indeed, we believe that the new system will in fact incur additional costs.

The Inverclyde CPAC and Children's Panel have concerns around the proposals, particularly in respect of the lack of any similarity of character between the two areas. It does seem unusual to propose to link two Councils with no common land boundary, which would result in travel through other Council areas for meetings.

It is the view of the Local Children's Panel Advisory Committee and the Children's Panel that Inverclyde should operate a stand alone AST as an alternative to any link up with other Councils. This was a position taken prior to the announcement of the proposals and remains our view.

There are further issues around the delivery of the AST model, particularly as there is a requirement for the National Convener to consult with local authorities and reach agreement on her proposals. The Act provides for each constituent local authority to nominate one person to serve on the AST, and it is understood that it could be possible to make further nominations from constituent local authorities that may or not be accepted.

**Inverclyde Children's Panel Advisory Committee, Inverclyde Council, Municipal Buildings Greenock PA15 1LY**

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I - Cpac Response

There is a wide disparity in the size of panels being supported by AST arrangements as proposed by the national convener; therefore, it has been difficult to establish the criteria against which amalgamations have been proposed.

The view of the Inverclyde Children's Panel Advisory Committee and Panel Chair is that such a proposal would not be workable without the continuance of the existing local arrangements for operating and monitoring panels. It is their view therefore that the introduction of the AST model proposed by the National Convener would add an additional layer of bureaucracy, namely the need to maintain a regional structure of AST which would have sub AST arrangements mirroring the existing local arrangements.

The document indicates that Council budgets as presently exist will be retained by them, with an expectation that they would be required to meet the costs for Councils in engaging in the new system i.e. the delivery of the SLA requirements to the National Conveners specifications. However, it is not clear what the standards are that would be required to be met as part of the SLA, nor what the commitment might be to the funding of a lead Clerk. The document seems to identify that there should be one Clerk for Argyll & Bute/Inverclyde, but does not make it clear whether or not that would be a full time post. In this regard, the view of Inverclyde Council staff is that even with its merged arrangements, there would be nowhere near a full time role for a Clerk in administering the amalgamated area.

In respect of the Council's view, the proposals detailed in the Consultation do not clearly identify how they will improve the outcomes for children. There does not appear to be any economies of scale generated from the grouping created that would allow the AST to recruit a number of full time staff to undertake the role of Clerk or, alternatively, to buy in the services of a full time Clerk, with the costs of that being shared by a number of local authorities. If that economy of scale is not achieved, the status quo is likely to be more efficient than an amalgamation of two very distinct Council areas.

It is felt that the proposed arrangements could have a detrimental impact on volunteers working in the panel system in Inverclyde and may not be conducive to the recruitment and retention of volunteers over the medium term.

An amalgamation with Argyll & Bute would result in increased travel costs due to the geographies indicated, although the document indicates the National Convener sees this as "a manageable travel distance".

Finally, there are a number of questions which remain unanswered at present:-

1. What will be the duties and roles of the ASTs and who within the ASTs will undertake these?
2. What flexibility do ASTs have to appoint additional members for additional tasks and how can an AST ensure adequate geographic representation on ASTs where there is more than one authority?
3. Do joint ASTs have the ability to rotate the chair position year by year and is this a decision for them to make?
4. How is the funding for ASTs to be split between Local Authorities and CHS?

5. Can you clarify what the compulsory training will consist of?
6. 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?
7. Will there be an Appointment Day for CPACs when all members transfer across or will this be flexible depending on the level of negotiation between local areas? If it is a fixed date, will this be co-terminus with the transfer of Panel Members to the National Panel?

Yours sincerely

Clerk  
Inverclyde CPAC

