

Aberdeen City Children's Panel Advisory Committee (CPAC) and Aberdeen Children's Panel joint response to the proposals to establish Area Support Teams (AST) in Scotland.

The Aberdeen City CPAC and Children's Panel Chair do not believe that the amalgamation of the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Panels, as proposed, is the most beneficial way forward for the City Panel, and we would make the following points:-

The creation of a single AST which is then sub-divided into a committee for each of the City and the Shire will, in effect, recreate the current situation but with the disadvantage of an additional layer of administration. It is felt that far from improving on the current situation, this will lead to a fractured and inefficient organisation with fragile lines of communication and the requirement for a system of delegated and non-delegated authority leading to delays and a degraded service to panel members.

It is anticipated that the Sub-Committees will require to meet separately to discuss local issues, however the (Joint) AST will also require to meet. This will inevitably lead to an increase in meetings with a consequent rise in the cost of travel, catering, room bookings and attendance of the clerk and volunteers who already give up a considerable amount of their precious time.

The proposal places great emphasis on the current levels of co-operation and collaboration between the City and Shire panels. We feel that a false impression has been made in this respect. Although three of the four sessions of pre-service training are attended by trainees from both panel areas, this is as a result of the Children's Hearings Training Officers need to amalgamate these sessions in order to fit in all the training required for different areas on an annual basis. It is important to note that the third session of pre-service training, which has a local element, is not jointly undertaken, and this underlines the recognition of the very real differences between the two areas.

If the two areas each have their own dedicated AST, it is expected that Aberdeen City Council will agree to maintain the current level of support through the clerk, panel secretary and other administrative staff. The Council would not, however, be willing or able to provide a dedicated clerk to service a combined AST as has been suggested.

Finally, it is generally agreed that the functioning of the Aberdeen City Panel and CPAC is of a high quality and that it provides a well organised and managed service to the children and families of Aberdeen. Details of the good practice which has evolved in the City can be found in the previously submitted business case for a dedicated AST for Aberdeen City.

In the final analysis, we do not believe that the proposed amalgamation will bring any potential benefits to the children and families of Aberdeen City, and indeed, we are extremely concerned that it may actually impair the excellent support which is currently provided to Aberdeen City panel members.

Isobel Scorgie, Aberdeen Children's Panel Chairperson; and
Meg Stratton, Aberdeen CPAC Chairperson

