

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
ON THE PROPOSALS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AREA SUPPORT TEAMS**

Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling and West Lothian

Falkirk Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on and contribute to the proposals for the establishment of Area Support Teams in Scotland.

In relation to the proposed AST model for Joint Central/West Lothian, Falkirk Council would express its preference that the existing Forth Valley boundary be retained thereby allowing the existing good practice and partnership working to continue and develop within this area.

However, Falkirk Council acknowledges the National Convener's reasoning behind the proposed merger with West Lothian and accepts that there may be advantages to this proposal, primarily due to the shared boundary with the Joint Central/West Lothian SCRA locality.

In the absence of set consultation questions, the following observations have been provided on the consultation paper and encompass the views of the Council. The words **in bold** are taken from the consultation document.

1. ***Geography and Boundaries: The existing Joint Central Children's Panel Advisory Committee has been operating since the local government reorganisation of 1996. It comprises Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire and stretches from Bo'ness in the east to Tyndrum in the north west and from Strathblane in the south to Dunblane in the north.***

Boundaries are shared with Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, Fife, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian. Amongst other partner organisations, there are conterminous boundaries with Central Scotland Police and Forth Valley NHS.

The contents of the submission in this document currently only reflect the position of the Joint Central area. No information on West Lothian geography has been provided nor is there any discussion of the fact that the proposed area would bring in a different police force and health board.

2. ***Size of panel to be supported by the proposed AST: This proposed arrangement would require to support approximately 265 panel members: 47 in Clackmannanshire, 69 in Falkirk, 48 in Stirling and 101 in West Lothian.***

Falkirk Council acknowledges the reasoning behind the proposed merger. However, it would take this opportunity to highlight that the proposed arrangement would result in the Joint Central/West Lothian AST serving the second largest panel in Scotland and would be the only model to encompass four council areas.

3. **Existing Joint/cross boundary CPAC or Panel working: as already mentioned, the Joint Central CPAC arrangement works effectively and has done so since 1996. There is also a concurrent panel membership scheme in place, allowing panel members to serve on any panel within the Joint Central area.**

In addition, there is a similar concurrent arrangement in place between Falkirk and West Lothian panels and I believe that these concurrent/joint working arrangements lend themselves to an effective AST structure.

Falkirk Council would advise that this statement does not reflect the actual nature of the concurrent membership arrangement established with West Lothian.

As stated, Panel Members within Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Children's Panel have a long standing history of joint working and the concurrent membership scheme allows panel members to serve on any panel within the Joint Central area.

However, the concurrent membership arrangement between Falkirk and West Lothian differs from that of the Joint Central arrangement. The Falkirk/West Lothian concurrent membership Scheme was established in 2008 when assistance from all neighbouring authorities was sought by West Lothian during a period of crisis. West Lothian also established similar concurrent membership schemes with other local authority areas at that time as a short term solution. The Scheme is used infrequently with only 3 male Panel Members from Falkirk holding concurrent membership. In addition, this concurrent membership arrangement has subsequently expired.

There was no reciprocal arrangement in place allowing West Lothian panel members to sit on Hearings within the Falkirk area.

4. **How would this proposal deliver better support for panel members locally: There is an opportunity to consolidate and build on existing joint arrangements and good practice, operating within a single national framework that would ensure greater consistency and provide for the training of a more competent and confident panel members.**

Falkirk Council would highlight that no joint training arrangements currently exist for the Joint Central/West Lothian area. Panel Members from Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Children's Panels are training by the Children's Hearings Training Unit based within St Andrews University whereas West Lothian panel members are currently trained by the Edinburgh Training Unit. For reasons of consistency, Falkirk Council would suggest that this situation be addressed.

5. **Membership of the Proposed AST, as a minimum: I propose that core AST members should comprise existing Ministerially-appointed CPAC Members, 1 Panel Member per constituent local authority, 4 local authority nominees and 1 Clerk.**

This would appear to be a reasonable composition for the proposed AST.

The Council would observe that the Clerk does not comprise part of the AST. The Council asks that further and speedy consideration be given to proposals to support ASTs. When the potential exists for staff transfer to Children's Hearings Scotland, it is important that concrete proposals are made by the National Convener in relation to the clerking of ASTs at the earliest opportunity.