

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AREA SUPPORT TEAMS

RESPONSE BY THE MORAY COUNCIL

Introduction

Along with Moray Children's Panel Advisory Committee (CPAC), the Moray Council fully acknowledges the challenges and difficulties facing the National Convener and the Board of Children's Hearings Scotland in leading forward the new system.

After reviewing the documentation, the Moray Council echoes the Moray CPAC's views that we understand the reasons behind the National Convener's proposal of a Highland and Moray Area Support Team (AST). However, due to a number of reasons that will be set out in this response, The Moray Council fully supports the Moray CPAC's views that this proposal will not be beneficial for Moray and as such we lay case for a Moray AST.

Geography

At paragraph 12.6 of the Consultation Document, the National Convener states that "Moray is considerably closer to Inverness than to Aberdeen". We believe that this statement holds no purpose as although Moray *is* slightly closer to Inverness, consideration has to be given to Highland as a whole, as Moray would be working with Highland and not Inverness.

If you consider taking the 4 corners of the Moray border and their distance to Inverness, it is as follows:

- 22 miles from the West Moray border at Brodie to Inverness;
- 47 miles from the South Moray border at Tomintoul to Inverness;
- 55 miles from the South-East Moray border at Keith to Inverness; and
- 60 miles from the East Moray border at Cullen to Inverness.

However, as stated, these are only distances to Inverness. Consideration also has to be given to travel throughout Highland including Wick, a further 103 miles from Inverness.

Highland covers a largely rural area of 30,659km², which if merged with Moray's also largely rural area of 2,238km², would create an AST covering a very rural land mass of 32,897km², an area bigger than the country of Belgium. This would involve long periods of travel for AST members and Local Authority staff in both Highland and Moray.

Proposed Structure

Within paragraph 12.7 of the Consultation Document, the National Convener states that "The disparate geography of the area is a major factor and in formulating my proposal for a joint Highland/Moray AST, I wanted to avoid creating additional

burdens for members and panel members in terms of having to travel greater distances to meetings or hearings.” This is contradicted by the fact that due to the greatly increased rural land mass, members and panel members from Moray, and any local authority staff involved, will have much greater distances to travel, as stated above and this could have a negative effect on the service provided by the AST. This would potentially have a negative effect to the work of the Local Authority staff member’s work, if they are appointed in another position within the Council as well as Clerk to the AST.

It is noted in a number of the proposed mergers that “a joined up approach may fail to deliver effective support for individual panel members or that some authorities may lose their identities within a larger grouping...this concern could be addressed through the establishment of AST sub-committees”. This would therefore see a revert back to having two authority “AST” with a larger group meeting to discuss what is happening locally. This flags up two issues;

- The same structure currently in place would remain but with an added layer on top; and
- This would create more meetings and therefore more distances to travel which would again contradict what the National Convener states in paragraph 12.7 of the Consultation Document as previously mentioned.

Moray’s CPAC prides itself on the standard of their monitoring system and recruitment, something that the Moray CPAC has had to work very hard to achieve. By merging with Highland, and this is in no way critical of their system, standards could be affected as they work together to achieve a equal standard.

Governance and Accountability

You will be aware from the range of recent strategic policy announcements that the Scottish Government continues to regard Community Planning Partnerships and Single Outcome Agreements as key elements of its approach to the delivery of public services, including its agenda for public service reform.

In particular, the Government expects a decisive shift to a preventative approach to be fully imbedded into Single Outcome Agreements and will wish to be able to draw evidence from Single Outcome Agreements in considering the effectiveness of public services and the allocation of available resources in contributing to its strategic priorities.

In so far as there will be a continuing Community Planning Partnership and associated Single Outcome Agreement for Moray, the sense in a Moray based support team must be seen in this content.

The approach suggested for Moray would be entirely consistent with the Government’s programme based on 4 pillars of public sector reform as set out in its response to the Christie report. In the tough and challenging period ahead, this approach would in turn best meet the Government’s emphasis on the importance of prevention, the integration of services at local level and in local leadership.

Conclusion

Moray's CPAC have achieved a very proud recognition of the work that they do with the resources at hand and I feel that this can continue into the new set-up being implemented by the Children's Hearing System, with the continuing support from the Moray Council and the new System. By merging with a larger authority, it could see the hard work of the Moray CPAC effectively lost and the AST would have to start from scratch.

With that, I propose that Moray becomes a stand-alone AST. The quality of service that the Moray CPAC have provided with the limited resources available have been recognised on a national basis, and for the benefit of the children, families, members and panel members of Moray, this service should long continue on a local basis with the support of the Moray Council.

