

The Children's Hearings System – The Route to a National Body

By Gordon Watt, Head of Children's Hearings Branch

Discussions about how to improve the Children's Hearings system have been taking place over the last few years. Many of you will have contributed your views. A decision has now been taken.

On 18 January 2008, Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years, announced the Scottish Government's intention to create a national body to bring together the different bodies that make up the Children's Hearings system.

The Minister explained that this national body will co-ordinate and streamline the different functions carried out by the various bodies such as the work of the Children's Reporter service, the delivery and administration of Children's Hearings and the recruitment, training, monitoring and support that affects you as panel members. He also made it very clear that the local dimension that underpins the system will not be lost. Panel members will continue to be recruited from local communities and will serve those local communities.

The First Minister has indicated that the national body must be in place before the Parliamentary elections in 2011.

So how is all this going to be achieved?

Legislation is required to bring about structural change and changes to the supporting arrangements. The go ahead has been given to develop a Children's Hearings Bill with the aim of introducing it to the Scottish Parliament in June 2009.

In order to develop legislation we need to gather views on the best way to set up a national body. Informal discussions have already been taking place with different representatives of the hearings system including the Children's Panel Chairmen's Group.

What follows is an outline of the current thinking around the actions that will have to be taken with indicative timings to enable the national body to be up and running by the First Minister's deadline. **It must be noted though that the timings provided could well be subject to change – they are not set in stone.**

Firstly, a consultation paper on the general policy will be issued for consultation for a 12-week period (likely to be May – July). The responses will then be considered in the early autumn (Sept – Oct) which will contribute to the development

of a draft Bill most likely towards the end of the year (Nov – Dec).

If this all happens as set out above then a draft Bill should be issued for consultation at the start of 2009 again for a 12 week period (Jan – March). The draft Bill is then refined in light of the consultation with the aim of having it introduced to Parliament in June.

The Bill then moves through the three Parliamentary Stages starting with Stage 1 in December 2009 approximately. MSPs vote to agree whether the Bill should proceed or not. If it does, it is very carefully scrutinised and amendments can be put forward by MSPs which are then voted on at Stage 2. Stage 3 is the last chance to make any changes and the final vote is taken. This is likely to be in or around February 2010.

If the Bill is passed it then has to receive Royal Assent to become an Act. This would be in May 2010 at the earliest.

If everything goes according to plan then a shadow National Body can be set up with the aim of becoming fully operational by April 2011.

Consultation

The consultation paper which will be issued soon will be asking questions around how the new body might be constructed and how the various functions can best be delivered as well as considering improvements to the existing system that will not need legislation. It is really important that we obtain your views.

You will each receive a copy of the consultation paper. What will help you to feed your comments back to us? Your local Panel Chair will be organising local events and will be pleased to receive any thoughts or ideas that you might have.

I urge you to please take this opportunity to help shape the future of the Children's Hearings system.



By Gerard McEneaney, Chair of CPCG

By now you will all be aware of the recent announcement regarding the restructuring of the Children's Hearings System and the confirmation that a national hearings system is to be the way forward. This follows on from the consultations that took place during 2006 and 2007 and after the delay caused by the recent Scottish Government elections.

I am delighted that Scottish Ministers have made good their pledge to reform the Hearings System and I believe that the fact that this is to happen so soon after the election is an indication that this new administration is fully behind Scotland's unique Children's Hearings System and the near 3,000 panel members.

In this edition you will see more about how the Scottish Government proposes to take this forward and some of the timescales involved. There is no doubt that the aim of a national body is ambitious, and rightly, because what we want to see in place in 2010/11 is a system that is robust enough to meet the needs of children and families, secures better outcomes for children and provides more consistent support to panel members. These are some of the issues that the CPCG have campaigned for.

The CPCG were at the forefront of the last consultation and it is the intention of all members of the CPCG to ensure that your views are sought and given to the Scottish Government when the next round of consultations begin.

Shortly, your local chair will discuss with you the details of the consultation and the events in your area. I know that all panel members give up a great deal of time to the Hearings System, however, with so much at stake I would urge all panel members to take part in the forthcoming consultations and to help shape the hearings system that will be required to deal with the ever increasing complex cases that we are being asked to deal with.

A further indication that the new Minister for Children and Early Years, Mr Adam Ingram, is a keen supporter of the Hearings System was his decision to join panel members at this year's national school in Dunblane, this despite the fact that Mr Ingram, a keen football supporter, could have been at Hampden to watch Scotland take on Italy. The Minister, although disappointed by the earlier result, seemed to enjoy chatting to panel members and hear from them, first hand, some of the complex issues that they deal with on a daily basis. I was extremely grateful to the Minister for taking time out of his busy schedule to come along and meet panel members and for his enthusiastic support of the Children's Hearings System.

Aberdeenshire Long Service Award Ceremony

By Claudia Leith



(left to right) – Ruth Buchan, David Atkinson, Yvonne Crichton, Roger Darnell, Mary Fawcett, Alan Burns, Peter Cook, Janet Liversidge, Peter Grainger, Anne Williams, Zara Strange, Enya Norris, MaryAnn Booker, George Whyte, Tom Rooney, Alex Cowie, Bob Antczack, Cliff Whitney, Moraig Gray, Bill Bayfield, Flora Paterson, Claudia Leith

Aberdeenshire Children's Panel held their first Long Service Award Ceremony on 1st November 2007 at the council's Woodhill House headquarters in Aberdeen.

Provost Bill Howatson presented 19 members who have served more than seven years with "The Ron Hutcheson Certificate of Long Service" and seven members with more than 15 years' service received an engraved glass award.

The ceremony was hosted by Aberdeenshire CPAC and committee chairman Brian McCann welcomed those attending.

The Long Service Award was a fitting tribute to the late Ron Hutcheson who was a member of Grampian and Aberdeenshire Children's Panels and the CPAC for many years. His widow Maureen made a donation to Aberdeenshire Children's Panel which will fund the continuing recognition of long service by its members.

Renfrewshire Civic Reception

By Claus Boyle

Renfrewshire's Provost, Celia Lawson, has paid tribute to the men and women who volunteer to help some of the most vulnerable children in Renfrewshire.

On 25 February 2008, Provost Lawson hosted a civic reception for the members of Renfrewshire Children's Panel. The event celebrated the work that Renfrewshire's 77 panel members and 15 trainee panel members do.

Provost Lawson said: "Members of the Children's Panel play a unique and important role in making sure that children and young people have the right supports to give them the best chance in life.

Within Renfrewshire we have a vision that all of Renfrewshire's children should be supported to reach their full potential. The Children's Panel's contribution in helping achieve this should not be underestimated. They deal with difficult cases and give up significant amounts of their free time to help.

We are extremely grateful for their contribution and look forward to this continuing in the future."



(left to right) – Judy Brunton, Barry Cunningham, Kelly Glass, Flora Smith



(left to right) – Nan Robertson (Chair, Renfrewshire CPAC), Provost Celia Lawson, Claus Boyle (Chair, Renfrewshire Children's Panel)



(left to right) – Andrew Docherty, Isabel Nichol, Bill Slack

NATIONAL SCHOOL 2007

Ministerial Visit

by Eleanor Manson, Children's Hearing Branch

The annual National School took place at the Hilton Dunblane Hydro on 16-18 November 2007. The theme was "Looked After?" and was designed to explore the issues which affect children and young people who are looked after or looked after and accommodated. The aim was to look at how Panel members could contribute to a more positive experience and better outcomes for these young people.

The event was attended by Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years. Mr Ingram was delighted to have an opportunity to meet with the delegates before giving his speech.

In his speech he said: "From National Government to individual parents – we all have a collective responsibility for all Scotland's children and young people to make sure that they get the best possible start in life and, if they are vulnerable, to make sure they get all the care and help they need as early as possible. By giving young people the support they need and the chance to develop their full potential, together we will all contribute towards making Scotland smarter, safer and stronger, wealthier and fairer, healthier and greener."

He said that the Scottish Government is fully committed to strengthening the Children's Hearing System, to improving children's experiences at hearings and to improving the support for all panel

members across Scotland. He finished by saying, "We have in Scotland a system that is distinctive; a system that is recognised as a model of good practice around the world; a system that we should all be proud of. I know I am."

The National School was chaired by Jean Barr, Professor of Adult & Continuing Education with the keynote address being made by Phil Frampton, a journalist and broadcaster who spent all of his childhood in care.

Other speakers included Anna Fowlie, Scottish Government, who spoke about her work on strengthening the corporate parenting function of local authorities and their partner agencies, Jane Aldgate OBE, Professor of Social Care at the Open University, who spoke about Kinship Care, Barbara Hudson, Scottish Director of the British Association for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF) who spoke about Foster Care and Ronnie Hill, Director of Children's Services Regulation, Care Commission, who spoke about Residential Care.

It was hoped that some young people who have been looked after would also take part in the Group sessions. Unfortunately, the young people did not attend as they felt that it would be difficult for them with such a large audience.

For feedback from one of the attendees, please see following page.

NATIONAL SCHOOL 2007

By Laura Purdy, West Dunbartonshire Children's Panel

The first presentation on Friday evening was given by Phil Frampton, who had been in foster care throughout his childhood. He expressed the view that foster care had been a negative experience for him and he felt residential care would have offered him more stability. The workshop that evening included being asked, in small groups, to identify emotions experienced by Looked After children.

On Saturday, a video made by the National Children's Home was shown featuring young people giving their views of being in care. The theme that came through was they all wanted to be listened to.

Looked After at Home, Kinship Care, Foster Care and, on the Sunday morning, Residential Care were explored.

Ronnie Hill from the Care Commission suggested in his presentation on Residential Care that Panel members may wish to consider asking social workers at a hearing, which is considering placing a child in Residential Care, about the outcome of the latest Care Commission check and take that into account before making their decision. (This suggestion sparked lively debate in the groups!)

The main themes throughout the weekend were:

- LISTEN TO THE CHILD
- KEEPING SIBLINGS TOGETHER
- KEEP QUESTIONING THE PROFESSIONALS AT THE HEARING
- PROMOTING STABILITY IN THE CHILD'S LIFE

Renfrewshire Children's Panel MSP Evening

by Claus Boyle, Chair, Renfrewshire Children's Panel

Renfrewshire Children's Panel held a special training event on Monday 3 March in the Glynn Hill Hotel in Paisley.

Four MSPs representing the major political parties in Scotland were invited to attend to take part in a Question Time Forum on the Children's Hearing System.

This was the culmination of months of hard work put in by Flora Smith, Deputy Chair for Renfrewshire involving contacting the offices of MSPs and getting commitments from them to attend.

Every Panel member in Renfrewshire was asked to consider questions they would like to ask the MSPs and specifically relating to issues and possible changes that are presently being considered.

The questions were transferred to individual cards and, on the night, would be read out to the MSPs for discussion.

On 3 March we were not let down and Ross Finnie (Lib. Dem), Annabel Goldie (Conservative) Hugh Henry (Labour) and Bill Wilson (SNP) turned up.

The Chair for the evening was Shareen Nanjiani who apart from being a well known Political Commentator is also a Children's Panel member for Glasgow and as such has a good knowledge of the system.

Some 60 people attended and included representatives from CEPAC, Reporters and local Councillors.

A buffet was prepared prior to kicking off the evening and then the debate started.

Shareen asked individual Panel members to read out their questions and then opened it to discussion from the MSPs.



(left to right) – Hugh Henry MSP, Bill Wilson MSP, Shareen Nanjiani, Annabel Goldie MSP, Ross Finnie MSP

It would seem that parties in Scotland have a high regard for the Children's Hearings System and also have an extensive understanding of how the System operates and the changes which have been introduced and those which are being proposed.

Debates around ASBOs and their usefulness or otherwise ensued, the GIRFEC introduction and the proposed National Body legislation were among the question asked.

As would be expected there was a diversion of opinion as well as broad agreement, with Shareen holding the Chair strongly.

All the MSPs engaged thoroughly and injected good humour into their responses.

As with all events which arouse interest the time passes quickly. Not all the questions could be raised and Shareen had to bring the evening to a close.

On behalf of all those present I would like to thank the MSPs and Shareen for an exhilarating and entertaining evening.

Minister Opens Hamilton House

By Maryanne McIntyre, Press and Communications Manager, SCRA

The official opening of SCRA's newest offices and Hearings Centre took place last month.

Adam Ingram MSP, the Minister for Children and Early Years, officially opened the new Children's Hearings Centre and SCRA offices in Hamilton House on Tuesday 22 January.

The Minister toured the Children's Hearings Centre and offices to see how the new premises create more comfortable and efficient facilities for SCRA staff, children and families and Panel members.

The new Children's Hearings Centre and offices opened its doors in Hamilton House in January 2008. The Minister's visit marked the official opening of the premises which brings together more than 60 staff from SCRA offices across North and South Lanarkshire, and SCRA regional headquarters for Central West Scotland.

More than 60 invited guests from partner organisations, including police, social work and voluntary organisations attended the opening. A number of local Panel members also attended the opening.

Brian Lister, Reporter Manager for Central West Region, welcomed the Minister and guests to Hamilton House.

He also thanked everyone involved in the move to Hamilton House and said it provided excellent facilities for everyone



involved in the Children's Hearings System.

He added: "We are extremely proud of the Children's Hearings Suite – its focus is on children and families and it provides a conducive and relaxing environment for children and their families when they come to a Hearing. The building also provides excellent facilities for staff and Panel members."

Officially opening the facility by unveiling a commemorative plaque, Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years, said: "Hamilton House is a great example of how long-term commitment to partnership can benefit all within the system – staff, partner agencies, our volunteers and most importantly the children and families who are at the centre of Scotland's unique Children's Hearings System.

"Within the last few days I announced that this Government will be establishing a national body to ensure a stronger, more consistent service and better delivery right across the country. But that does not mean that the local links, local delivery or indeed the role of the local volunteer will be affected – they are the backbone of the system and I cannot overemphasise their value.

"That's why this purpose-built facility, which will provide a local service for use by local people and vulnerable local children and families, is so important."

Douglas Bulloch, Chair of SCRA, thanked the Minister for officially opening the building, he said: “I am delighted to welcome Mr Ingram here today to open this new purpose-built facility for the Children’s Hearings System in Lanarkshire. Hamilton House provides excellent facilities for children and families attending Hearings, as well as providing comfortable accommodation for staff and Children’s Panel members.

“One of SCRA’s core functions is to provide suitable accommodation to enable children and families to participate in Children’s Hearings. The opening of our new premises in Hamilton is part of SCRA’s wider property programme which aims to continually enhance Children’s Hearings’ accommodation across Scotland. It also reflects SCRA’s commitment to working with our partners in the Children’s Hearings System to ensure vulnerable children get the help they need when they need it.”

The new accommodation provides facilities for Children’s Hearings in South



(left to right) - Bill Routledge (Panel member), Patricia Kirk (Panel member), George Burton (CPAC), Babs Paterson (Panel Chair), Julie Cox (Panel member), Brian Watt (Panel member)



(left to right) – Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years, Douglas Bulloch, Chairman, SCRA, Brian Lister, Reporter Manager, Central West Region

Lanarkshire, while North Lanarkshire Hearings continue to be held locally in Bellshill, Airdrie and Cumbernauld.

The new premises are located on the ground and first floor of Hamilton House, which is a new office development, where the remaining offices will soon be occupied by the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland and the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland.

The new Children’s Hearings Suite provides purpose-designed facilities for children, families and partners, with waiting rooms, interview rooms and toilets with baby-changing facilities.

The open plan working environment for staff includes provision of meeting rooms, greatly improved storage, and private study booths that can be used by staff and visitors alike, and Children’s Panel members also have dedicated facilities for their use.

Your Extranet Needs You

By Phil Reid, Children's Hearings Branch

The Children's Hearings Extranet - www.extranet.chscotland.gov.uk - was introduced in June 2002 as a step towards achieving the objective of improving communication within the Children's Hearings system. The Extranet is a password-protected website linked to the Children's Hearings public website. Both sites are maintained and developed by the Scottish Government's Children's Hearings Team, with the help of 2F3 Internet, a small web design company based in Edinburgh.

The Extranet was put together with you in mind. Unlike the main public website, access to the Extranet is restricted to Panel members, CPAC members and Clerks and other hearings system partners such as Training Officers. It provides information and guidance that we hope you will find useful and relevant to your role within the hearings system.

The Extranet includes a directory that lists contact details for the various partners within the hearings system, including Panel Chairs and CPAC members.

In response to your suggestions for improving the site, we've added the following features over the last year:

- A post-it forum, where Panel members and others with login access can share their views on matters relating to the hearings system
- An events diary to which Panel Chairs and CPAC Clerks can add items, in order to publicise events of interest in their area to a wider audience

- For CPAC Clerks, the templates we need them to complete before submitting their CPAC's recommendations on appointments

We'll be working on the following pages over the next few months:

- Frequently Asked Questions (suggestions for this section are welcome: hopefully we'll be able to provide the answers!)
- Guidance circular

We are always happy to consider your suggestions for developing the site further. Please let us have your comments/suggestions by taking a few minutes to complete the online questionnaire available via the Extranet home page.

Every year we welcome newly appointed Panel members by sending each one a letter containing their Extranet login details. As in previous years, this exercise will be carried out as soon as possible after 16 May.

If you are a serving Panel member, or other partner within the hearings system but don't have your login details, you can obtain these via the Extranet home page.

Now that you've read this why not visit the site today? Check out the guidance, try out the forum, if appropriate add items to the events diary. Your Extranet needs you.

If you have any queries regarding the Extranet, please contact Phil Reid, Children's Hearings Team, Scottish Government on 0131 244 5483 or e-mail phil.reid@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

CPAC SEMINAR 2008: CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

By Joan Rose, Training Officer, Queen Margaret University

The CPAC Seminar will take place at Dunblane Hydro on 9 and 10 May 2008. The seminar starts at 3.30 pm on Friday and we expect to finish by shortly after 3.30 pm on the Saturday. The Seminar will be chaired by Professor Alan Gilloran, a vice-principal of Queen Margaret University. The keynote speaker is Alan Finlayson, who was involved in the hearings system from the earliest days and has a wealth of experience as a reporter and subsequently a sheriff. Although he is now retired, Alan is still involved in the system as a consultant and in the training of children's reporters. The after-dinner speaker is Professor Elaine Sutherland, Professor of Child and Family Law at the University of Stirling. (Elaine was also directly involved in the system for five years as a safeguarder.)

The seminar was planned to consider, amongst other items, the following issues: whether we celebrate sufficiently the shared values of the system, linking back to the Kilbrandon principles; is the system genuinely a national Scottish system with consistent standards of best practice? who should take responsibility for national identity? what are some of the challenges in

moving towards consensus and being open and willing to considering other ways of doing things in a changing world?

Since the subject of the seminar was chosen, we have heard about proposals for more joined-up working by children's panel advisory committees and, of course, the recent announcement of the move towards a single national body to oversee the Children's Hearings System. One of the desired outcomes of the seminar is to ensure common purpose to achieve best possible outcomes for children and young people who come to Hearings – no matter where in Scotland they may live.

The final group session at the seminar will have the opportunity to prepare questions on strategic issues to be put to a "Question Time" panel, chaired by Professor Gilloran and with representatives from Children's Hearings Branch, SCRA, the Children's Panel Advisory Group and Children's Panel Chairmen's Group on the panel.

The Minister, Mr Adam Ingram MSP, will attend the reception and dinner and will address delegates during the course of the reception.

And finally...

This edition of *The Communicator* has been produced by Claus Boyle, Chair, Renfrewshire Children's Panel and Eleanor Manson, Children's Hearings Branch.

The Communicator is your publication and we would like to hear from you. Let us know what is happening in your area. Are you doing something that would be of wider interest to other Panel members?

Articles should be sent to:

Claus Boyle - clausdee1@aol.co.uk

or

Eleanor Manson

The Scottish Government

Workforce and Capacity Issues Division

Children's Hearing Branch

Area 2(C) North

Victoria Quay

Leith

Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Eleanor.Manson.@scotland.gsi.gov.uk