



**Children's Hearings
Improvement Partnership**

Fife Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership

Better Hearings Update February 2020

Background to Better Hearings in Fife

In October 2016 the national Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) published a paper: The Next Steps Towards Better Hearings. The aim was to improve the experience of children and families attending Children's Hearings.

In Fife, significant improvement work has been undertaken under the umbrella of Better Hearings. Currently this work is overseen by the Fife CHIP. An operational practice group sits alongside the CHIP carrying out the work required to achieve the aims of Fife's Better Hearings Action Plan.

This report outlines progress in Fife during 2019...

Panel Member training

In January, the year kicked off with SCRA delivering an input to the new intake of panel members in Fife. The session gave the new panel members and insight into the role of the Reporter and is arguably the first step in introducing them to the Better Hearings agenda. Speaking afterwards, Carron Bell from SCRA commented: "It's been lovely to catch up with panel members who attended and to hear from them about how useful they found the session."

Further training for experienced panel members was then held in February. The focus of the training, which was also provided by SCRA, was on improving decision making and recording of written reasons. This was a well-attended evening session at Fife House.

Partner awareness raising

Training was also held for NHS staff. In March, the first of two sessions for 2019 was delivered by SCRA to over 15 health visitors and other health professionals as part of the NHS report writing course. Feedback from these sessions has been positive with a clear appetite for it to continue. Then in May Police Scotland's Youth Volunteers in Fife received an input on the Children's Hearings System.



Round table discussions

In June, SCRA facilitated an evening of round table discussions. Panel members considered the challenges and benefits of well managed Hearings; health and safety; legal reps in Hearings; and limiting numbers in Hearings. Reporters were on hand to provide information/clarification, as required, to the group of panel members.

Joint training event

2019 was rounded off with a hugely successful joint training event in November. Over 80 panel members, social workers and reporters came together at the Dean Park Hotel in Kirkcaldy. The evening was opened by Fife's Area Convener, Judith Bell and Fife Council's, Linda Sheret. Fife Council's newly appointed Chief Social Work Officer, Kathy Henwood, provided an overview of the evening ahead which was entitled "How can we support children to attend their Hearings?"

Attendees were provided with a presentation by Carron Bell, SCRA's senior practitioner, to better understand the legal tests applicable in Children's Hearings. Attendees then broke into smaller groups and worked through a scenario with a set of questions relating to the topic. The evening encouraged discussion between panel members, social workers and reporters, and

highlighted the complexities of the differing roles and responsibilities. Attendees came back together for the last part of the evening to share feedback on their group discussions.

Here's some feedback from the event...

"Really enjoyed this event. Good opportunity for social work, CHS and SCRA to engage and work together..."

"Excellent presentation...easy to follow, discussion very robust and evening well organised."

"Most valuable as a panel member was hearing the challenges and discussions from the social work perspective."

"A very good event and useful for future Hearings."

"Very good, keeps us up to date and fresh."

"Most valuable was meeting social workers and other professionals involved in panels. It sometimes feels as though we are on different sides of the arena, but everyone has the same aim which is to keep children safe."



What's coming up in 2020?

Improved report writing; decisions and reasons; and participation

The Fife CHIP will continue to oversee Fife's rejuvenated Better Hearings Action Plan. The Better Hearings Working Group will continue to work to achieve the aims of the plan.

Social Work Services and SCRA have worked closely together to review and update a new style initial referral report/hearing report format to be launched in February 2020. The report style will focus on a strength-based approach and along with a new style child's plan should ensure that there is clarity in assessment for children, their families and professionals. The new format of the report will align with the requirement to provide evidence to Children's Reporters for the need for compulsion.

Panel member profiles will be launched in February 2020. Boards will display the profiles outside each of the hearing rooms in Albany House. Children and families will be able to see who is sitting on the panel prior to entering the hearing room. This sits under the "Improved participation" arm of the Better Hearings Action Plan.

Joint training will continue with an event taking place at Auchmuty High School on 29th February. Workshops will be delivered to panel members by Barnardo's; Our Hearings, Our Voice;

Who Cares? Scotland and SCRA. The workshops will consider issues faced by children and young people attending hearings. The day will also provide panel members with the opportunity to network with over 20 agencies who provide support to children and young people by way of lunchtime market stalls.

Later in 2020 a further joint training event bringing together CHS, social work and SCRA will take place building upon the success of previous years. This will be joint led by Social Work, SCRA and CHS.

SCRA and Social Work (Katie Pacholek, Chris Moir and Linda Sheret) will continue to liaise/meet regularly to ensure that there is a positive and effective partner connection with a focus on improving and sustaining practice to underpin legal process and children's rights (e.g. PHP's/No Order principle and Better Hearings Action Plan) in relation to the children we work with.

Reporters will liaise more directly with social work area teams throughout 2020 through attendance at social work team meetings. This will develop positive working relationships and enable an opportunity for discussion about themes/practice.

In a move away from Hearing observations, links will be made with the newly qualified social workers forum and SCRA will deliver mock hearings targeting newly qualified social workers and multi-agency partners. Sessions will take place on 21st April and 8th September 2020.

During 2020 we will also focus on ways in which we can meaningfully involve young people in Better Hearings work. As such, Fife Area support team will be exploring ways to involve young people in panel member recruitment and selection.

How can you be involved?

If you have a suggestion for an area of improvement, please do not hesitate to contact your organisation's representative on Fife's Operational Practice Group:

Social Work Services: Linda Sheret, Michael Scanlin, Dan Smith & Nicola Ardell

SCRA: Katie Pacholek & Carron Bell

Fife CHS: Claire Gibson

Fife Panel Area Support Team: Judith Bell, Eleanor Johnston & Jim Trail

Education Services: Gordon Wardrope

Health: Debbie Wilson

Barnardo's: Murdo Mathers



Produced by
Fife Children's Hearings Improvement
Partnership,
February 2020

