



**Children's Hearings  
Improvement Partnership**

---

# **Fife Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership**

## **Better Hearings Update November 2021**

## Introduction

Since the last Fife CHIP Update in May 2021, we have seen legislative changes impact on practice and management of Hearings; improvements have been made to the tech supporting virtual participation in Hearings; and we have seen a return to our programme of training for those involved in the Hearings System.

The Fife CHIP has been working hard to push forward with improvements whilst operating in the post-lockdown environment we find ourselves in.

## New legislation – sibling participation rights

As of the end of July, new participation rights exist in a Children’s Hearing. These participation rights, which mainly affect brothers and sisters, give some people rights in a Children’s Hearing that they didn’t have before.

The rights are:

- to be notified of the Hearing
- to provide a report for the Hearing
- to get some of the Hearing papers
- to be allowed to attend for part of the Hearing
- to have a representative at the Hearing

To ensure that brothers and sisters who meet the criteria are identified and afforded their rights, members of the CHIP working group have agreed that this

information will be provided to SCRA, and thereafter Children’s Hearings, by way of a Sibling Contact Information Report. This is a simple form that can be appended to the report provided by social workers to a Hearing. The form is to be completed by social workers for each sibling not living with the child, and each individual who is not a sibling but with whom the child has lived and with whom they have an ongoing sibling-type relationship. SCRA will support social workers to complete this form.

If you would like further information, you can also visit the [Stand Up for Siblings website](#).



## Children’s Hearings – tech improvements

Last month saw a review of the Hearing room tech available in Albany house to support virtual participation in face to face Hearings.

New cameras have been fitted to the conferencing units and sound quality has been improved for those participating virtually.

SCRA continue to offer a blend of virtual and face to face Hearings. Health and safety measures – including 2 metre distancing and masks when moving about - remain in place to ensure the safety of all those attending the Hearing Centre.



## Children’s Hearings Participation Officer

The Children’s Hearings Participation Officer – a joint venture between Fife Council and SCRA – has been in post since June and is achieving significant results in terms of children’s attendance and participation in their Hearings. Since June, Charlotte has assisted 42 children to attend their Hearings who when first contacted indicated they would not be attending. And feedback from children and their families has been positive:

*“It feels empowering, to be able to share my views without people telling me they are wrong”*

*“I didn’t know they wanted to talk to me, I’m happy as they will get to listen to me and how I feel”*

*“It doesn’t seem as scary now, I know what to expect”*

And feedback from social work colleagues has also been positive. Following Charlotte’s involvement a child’s social worker remarked: *“I saw a confident, brave young person during the Hearing that I don’t usually see.”*

Charlotte’s role is purely to support children to attend Hearings where they would like to.

There is still a key role to play for all others involved to ensure the child is able to participate effectively when they do attend. What could you do to support a child in a Hearing?

## Independent Advocacy in Fife

The Hear4U service is providing independent advocacy for children in Fife. The team are supported by Barnardo's Rights Service to ensure that all children who would like the assistance of an advocate in a Hearing are given the support they request.

Data from July – Sept 2021 shows that social workers continue to be the primary source of referrals and advocates attended 39 Children's Hearings on behalf of a child, or with a child.

Feedback from children and young people has been overwhelming positive. Of the 10 children who provided feedback, 100% of children said that the support made a difference and if they were going to attend a similar meeting in the future, they would like the worker to help them again.

## Education – child protection update

Rona Weir (Education Manager: Health and Wellbeing) has confirmed that Education's Child and Protection Partnership Group recently reformed and will take a strategic

oversight of child protection developments across Education.

This group is made up of school leaders (who represent all sectors of education), leads from Fife Educational Psychology Service and officers from within central Education leadership. The group will be led by Education's newly appointed Quality Improvement Officer (Child Protection and Wellbeing) Gavin Waterston, who takes up his role in mid-October. Gavin will also become Education's representative at the Fife CHIP.

## Deferred Hearings – room for improvement?

In Fife, CHS have established and held their first meeting of the Fife Promise Programme Team with members from the panel community. Area Improvement Partner, Claire Gibson, explains: "This group will coordinate the local promise activity in Fife and also act as a link between our local work in our Fife panel community, the work across Scotland in other panel communities and work with partner organisations."

The group's first project will focus on the Hearing deferral rate in Fife. Claire explains: "In Fife we want to reduce the time that children and young people spend in Children's Hearings, removing unnecessary drift and delay to the legal decisions needed for their care and protection. Our first project will put a spotlight on the deferral of Hearings and work to reduce the number of unnecessary deferrals for the children in Fife.

"Of course, a panel's ability to defer a Hearing is important and, at times, required. However, looking at the story the data tells us, we know that in Fife more hearings are deferred than other areas and we want to explore and understand the reasons for that and work together to change it and keep the promise made."



## Training – back in full swing

### Multi-agency training Event coming early 2022!

Over the years we have held very successful annual joint training events with Social Work, CHS and SCRA. We were unable to hold the event last year, but we are now looking to reinstate this training in late January, early February 2022.

Given this event attracts upwards of 80 people annually, we are acutely aware that not everyone will feel comfortable meeting physically therefore we recently sent out a survey to social work staff and the panel community asking for feedback on preferences in holding the event virtually and/or physically. The bonus about the face to face event is that there will be refreshments!

The joint training will focus on exploring how we can improve practice by learning from each other - both in terms of our respective roles, as well as the challenges

that inevitably arise. There will, of course, be a focus on The Promise and the voice of the child and how this is prioritised into our everyday practice. The evening will centre around the following key areas:

- Children's attendance at hearings, including Advocacy
- New legislation - sibling contact
- Deferrals and Safeguarder appointments

Look out for the email confirming the date of the joint training soon!

## Health

Further training specifically for health colleagues in Fife was delivered in June and September.

The training provides an overview of the role of the reporter, the role of health professionals within the children's hearing system (including the current approach to reports in panel papers and attendance at hearings), and finally some guidance on report writing. The various stages of decision making are covered - from the reporter's role during the referral stage, to the role of the panel members in a hearing. The presentation also addresses a health professional's role in court proceedings. Dates will continue through 2022.

## Foster carers

The first post-lockdown Children's Hearing training session for foster carers took place on Tuesday 5 October 2021. Delivered by SCRA senior practitioner, Carron Bell, the session was attended by foster carers with

a range of experiences. The online course covered a number of key issues, including the legal tests for relevant person status and non-disclosure provisions; attendance at hearings; and the different ways that foster carers can support children and young people to participate in their hearings, including liaising with Charlotte Guild, our Children's Hearing Participation Officer.

It was good chance to discuss some of the important changes that have been made to the law around rights for siblings and how these changes may impact the children and young people foster carers are looking after. After the training Carron commented: "There was real value in being able to reconnect with those supporting children and young people and to answer their questions related to the Hearings System."

## **National news: System redesign – Hearing System Working Group**

The recently established national Hearings System Working Group met for the first time on Monday 6 September.

The Hearings System Working Group – a partnership between SCRA, Children's

Hearings Scotland and The Promise Scotland - will facilitate a redesign of the Children's Hearings System.

The group will prepare detailed proposals for the redesign of the Children's Hearings System. This will include, agreeing a vision; analysing the practice, legislative, budgetary and structural blocks to implementation of the vision; and agreeing proposals for legislative change.

The voice and views of people with lived experience of the system will be at the heart of the redesign process. The first meeting, which was led by independent Chair, David Mackie, looked at key areas of focus and initial priorities.

You can read more about the working group on [The Promise website](#).



## **#Keep The Promise**