



**Children's Hearings
Improvement Partnership**

Fife Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership

**Better Hearings Update
May 2022**

Introduction

Since the last Fife CHIP Update in November 2021, the Fife CHIP has continued to push forward with improvements whilst operating in the challenging post-lockdown environment. Despite the challenges brought about by the Omicron variant in early 2022, work has continued at pace to increase children's participation; ensure children's rights are upheld; improve their experience at the Hearings centre; and upskill those involved in Children's Hearings.

Children's Hearings – relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions

In line with Scottish Government guidance, SCRA is continuing to encourage masks to be worn in all public areas in the Hearings Centre. Masks can be removed when seated in the Hearing room. Distancing of 1m will continue to be adhered to for all Hearings. SCRA also remains committed to the delivery of Virtual Hearings and improvements continue to be made to the processes associated with these Hearings.

Children's Hearings Participation Officer – secondment extension

Working closely with SCRA and social workers, Fife's Children's Hearings Participation Officer has now supported over 80 children to attend their Hearings. The success of this work has resulted in Fife

Council extending this secondment until May 2023. Feedback from children and families continues to be positive:

“Made me feel not as scared to go to the meeting place and felt ok about going, it wasn't as scary as i thought”

“I thought I would have to go and talk alone but was ok because 'the lady' said I didn't have to and I got to take my gran which made me feel better”

“Thank you for your help, you didn't just help the children you helped me [mother] feel less nervous about these meetings”

New Sensory Room at SCRA Glenrothes

To coincide with World Autism Acceptance Week 2022, SCRA's first sensory corner was launched within the Glenrothes Hearings centre on 28th March.

The corner has been specially designed for children and young people with

neurodiverse conditions and additional support needs. It is bright, colourful and accessible with padded walls, a light-up water feature, a sensory engagement station and up-lit stars on the ceiling. Situated in a waiting room, it can be accessed before, during and after a Hearing.

Katie Pacholek, Locality Reporter Manager in Fife said: “Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Those who have used the room so far have described feeling calmer and more relaxed before their Hearing; being able to go through notes peacefully; and being put in the right mood. Although designed for children with additional needs, this is a resource that will benefit all those who attend the centre.”

A range of provisions for children, young people and families with a variety of needs are also available to support families attending Children's Hearings. Sensory kits including fidget toys are now handed out to all children – just ask if there's anything else that SCRA staff can help with.



New legislation – sibling participation rights – SCRA inputs to social work teams

As highlighted in the last CHIP Update, since the end of July last year, 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

Fife CHIP has recognised that this is a challenging new area. As such, SCRA's senior practitioner's Carron Bell and Claire Veitch will be visiting area social work teams from the start of May to provide further information on what this new legislation means for professionals involved in the Children's Hearing process.

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

Condensed Reports – next steps

Throughout the pandemic Fife CHIP agreed that any report submitted to SCRA should be no longer than 4 pages (excluding the front page and the last page with recommendations).

This served a purpose during that period but from feedback gathered from panel members and social workers, we have learned that while a short, concise report is helpful it can also be restricting for more complex cases.

Therefore, from 9th May 2022, SCRA will accept reports that are no longer than 8-10 pages in length.

This is to enable reports to be focussed - on evidence, analysis and recommendation - whilst at the same time allowing all relevant information to be included. If a case has been open for some time, the emphasis needs to be on relevant information. Where appropriate, any older information should be removed from the report rather than updating and adding on to the end.

Following this direction will allow reports to remain accessible to children and families, whilst at the same time providing full information to panel members.

Barnardo's Advice Line

Barnardo's Fife has announced the launch of a new Children's Rights Advice Line

which is available to care experienced young people in Fife. Children and young people can call the service and speak to a Children's Rights worker for independent advice about their rights and entitlements. The advice line is open Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00 and the telephone number is 08000 287 251.



Children's Hearing Advocacy Funding

Independent advocacy for children and young people in Children's Hearings will continue for a further year following the Scottish Government issuing its offer of funding for the year 22 – 23. In the year 21-22 Barnardo's Hear 4 U Service supported children in over 180 hearings and will continue to be the primary provider of advocacy to children in Fife.

All children that have a Children's Hearing are entitled to be offered an advocate to help share their views. One young person told us:

"I am shy and don't like going to these meetings and I find it hard to speak to people I don't know. I feel people will judge me, but my advocate told me I would be

okay at the meetings and helped me when I got stuck when speaking"

If you would like to make a referral for an advocate ahead of a hearing, just email fifeservices@barnardos.org.uk for a referral form.

4DX – ongoing work for us all

In March the 4DX multi-agency improvement project that had been ongoing for the previous year came to an end. 119 professionals from across Fife took part in the project. As a result of their work, 110 children returned home to parents or kinship carers.

One element of the project with particular relevance to the Hearing system, was the goal of increasing children's participation in their Hearings. Over the course of the project significant work was undertaken and some excellent examples of multi-agency working resulted in a 10% increase in children's attendance during the course of the project. But this work is not complete and this important area of work will continue to be a focus for Fife's CHIP but the Partnership invites you to consider what you as an individual could do to support a child's attendance?

Training Update

Multi-agency training event coming October 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 and had previously announced an intention to hold an event in early 2022. Due to a combination of factors, the event will now take place in early October.

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!

Education – Child Protection update

Fife Education Services is fully committed to ensuring all workers who come into direct or indirect contact with children, young people and other family members have access to learning and development opportunities which provide them with the appropriate level of knowledge, skills and values needed to carry out their roles and responsibilities in child protection effectively.

A Child Protection Training Strategy and matrix have been devised to ensure that all

Education staff are aware of their learning and development pathway.

Child Protection Co-ordinators and Depute Co-ordinators are now undertaking a full day 'Safeguarding and Protecting your School Community' training course during which they receive an input from SCRA on the role of the reporter and education's role in Children's Hearings. Fife CHIP members worked together to develop this input and feedback from course participants thus far is being used to improve future sessions.

Police Scotland - SCRA Training Session

Following a joint review of Police Scotland's referral guidance in Fife and a joint case sampling exercise in November 2022, SCRA staff attended Police Headquarters on 10th May to deliver an input to Concern Hub staff. The focus was on the role of the Reporter and ensuring appropriate referrals by the Police to SCRA. After 2 years of online sessions, the opportunity for face to face learning was welcomed by all!

National Hearings System Working Group

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 Hearings System Working Group has spent time scoping an Issues List and in March 2022 they published a list of 56 questions across 5 categories.

These questions will guide conversations and deliberation as the Group works toward creating detailed proposals for the redesign of The Children's Hearings System.

The questions are constructed with an underlying commitment that Scotland's children, young people and families who engage with the Hearings System can fully participate in decisions that impact their lives and their rights are upheld.

The work of the Group will have an impact on all those involved with the Children's Hearings System. You can read more about the working group on [The Promise website](#).

Panel Members – Hearings for the child

Published on 16.05.22, CHS's new Head of Practice and Policy has written an article for the Law Society for Scotland Journal: [Hearings for the child](#). Of interest to all, the article makes clear the role of the Panel Member in the Hearing room and importantly that Hearings have to promote equal treatment, be fair and open, and ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of the child.