



**Children's Hearings
Improvement Partnership**

Fife Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership

Better Hearings Update May 2021

Introduction

The last Fife CHIP update in October 2020 described the gradual resumption of face to face hearings that had taken place since July, and was optimistically looking ahead to the reintroduction of multiple face to face hearings per day. We all anticipated that we were working towards business as usual by early 2021, but best laid plans...!

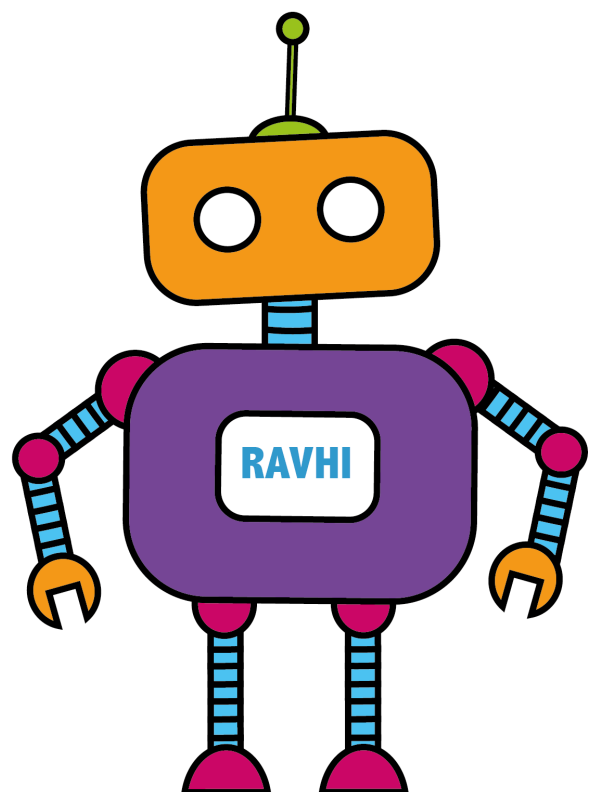
However, the resilience and adaptability of all those involved in Children's Hearings over the last 14 months has been testament to their commitment to the children and young people of Fife.

We are again at the point of reintroducing face to face hearings and this update details all that has happened over the last 6 months to improve the experience of children and families in Fife.

Virtual Hearings

With the return to only virtual hearings in January 2021, Fife benefitted from being one of the first areas to pilot the use of Microsoft Teams for hearings. The pilot has been supported by SCRA's RAVHI Team (Remote Attendance Virtual Hearing Interface) and in readiness for this pilot, the CHS area support team worked with RAVHI to provide familiarisation sessions to over 100 local panel members to ensure they could support children, young people and their families to have the best virtual hearing experience possible.

The pilot is currently being formally evaluated but feedback from all participants has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of the stability of the platform and the functionality it provides.



Resumption of face to face hearings

We have been working as a partnership to plan for the reintroduction of face to face hearings from 28th June. The enhanced cleaning regime that was in place prior to Christmas 2020 will continue, alongside the electrostatic misting of Albany House to ensure the safety of all attendees.

Improvements to tech: Since the last face to face hearings were held in Albany House, both physically distanced hearing rooms have been digitally networked and now have Cloud Conferencing Units in situ to facilitate improved virtual participation in face to face hearings when necessary.

Increasing hearings: The reintroduction of face to face hearings will support the gradual increase in the number of hearing slots available. Since Christmas 2020 this



Please stay 2 metres apart

That's three really big steps!



SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER ADMINISTRATION

has averaged 20 per week, the resumption of face to face will facilitate an initial increase of a further 20 hearings per month.

Increasing children's attendance at hearings

4DX in Fife: Staff across the partnership are currently involved in a 12 month project supported by leadership development consultants, Franklin Covey. The project has been nicknamed '4DX' which refers to Franklin Covey's 4 disciplines of project execution.

Routed in the principles of The Promise, the project has the overall goal of increasing the number of children living safely at home in Fife. However, one of the sub-goals identified is to increase the participation of children aged over 6 at decision making meetings, which specifically includes Children's Hearings. Attendance at Hearings has

been consistently low over the last year (currently averaging 36% attendance per week since 01.03.21) so the focus of this project is welcomed.

SCRA's Locality Reporter Manager, Katie Pacholek, explains further: "The circumstances of the last year have negatively impacted the ability of professionals to work collectively to support children to attend their hearings. Whilst the project is in its infancy, we are already seeing the benefits of the Franklin Covey model - conversations and actions are happening across the partnership that would not have taken place but for the project."

New Participation Officer post

SCRA have worked closely with Fife Council social work Service Managers to secure funding for a 12 month Children's Hearings Participation Officer post. The postholder will work closely with SCRA to support children aged over 6 to attend their Hearings. This is an exciting venture, which has not been trialled before. The support the post holder will offer is purely informative and practical prior to a Hearing. They will not act as an advocate for the child and will not attend any Hearings. SCRA Fife and Fife Council have also procured 20 digital devices which will be available to children to participate in Virtual Hearings. The devices are expected in June and the Participation Officer will play a key role in maximising the use of these devices.

Social Work Reports

Since the last update in October 2020, significant work has been underway to support the development of the new social work assessment report.

The pilot is now complete with positive feedback received from the practitioners across the three area teams who took part. The social work initial assessment template and guidance will be launched across the children and families teams on 31st May 2021.

The template includes 'at a glance' guidance and a more 'in-depth' guidance to enable practitioners to be as robust as possible in their assessment supported by the 4 essential questions which underpin our strengths based model of intervention:

- 1. What will it take for this child to stay at home or with family?**
- 2. What does this family need to stay together?**
- 3. What are this family's strengths and how can we build on them?**
- 4. How can we get this child back home or to kinship care?**

By using a strengths-based approach with a focus on keeping children at home/within their families, this should strengthen any assessment and referral made to SCRA and be able to evidence the considerations of alternatives before considering the legal route.

In turn, it is anticipated that the template for the SW referral to SCRA can use similar domains and questions to ensure consistency of planning, assessment and recommendations, and in turn form the basis for any report required for a Hearing.

Shortened reports for Hearings

Since March 2020 social workers have been asked to submit shortened, or 'condensed', reports for hearings. This has been challenging, but has supported the move to digital hearing papers and has perceived benefits in terms of children and young people being better able to engage with the hearing paperwork. So that we ensure we find the right balance between accessibility and sufficiency of information, an evaluation of the use of these reports has been undertaken. Responses have been sought from social workers, panel members, Reporters, legal representatives and Sheriffs. The results will be collated in June and the Fife CHIP will use these to inform our ongoing approach to reports for hearings.

Resumption of Training for Health

SCRA senior practitioner Lisa Sutherland has worked closely with health colleagues in Fife to reintroduce training for health professionals on the Children's Hearing

system. 15 staff from various roles joined a session in December, and a further 13 in April.

The training provided 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 were covered - from the reporter's role during the referral stage, to the role of the panel members in a hearing. The presentation also addressed the health professional's role in court proceedings.

Lisa explains: "Adapting training to the virtual environment has been challenging. The aim was to encourage the same level of participation and interaction that is achieved when providing training in person. However, participants engaged in discussion, asked questions and appreciated the specific focus on the health professional's role."

Panel member recruitment

In January, CHS launched an ambitious recruitment campaign to recruit 700 new panel members to the national panel, which resulted in 40 being recruited locally in Fife.

In Fife, CHS were particularly proud to collaborate with Fife College to make sure

that the voice of lived experience of the hearing system was at the heart of local recruitment. People with lived experience were involved in our local campaign from the beginning: shortlisting, interviewing and welcomed the new trainees at a recent welcome evening. CHS are looking forward to increasing the voice of lived experience in all local work.

Panel Practice Advisors



CHS Panel Practice Advisors (PPAs) are a vital element of panel member quality assurance, observing panel members in action and providing feedback. Covid-19 paused their work but observations are core to the panel improvement agenda and Better Hearings, so in November 2019 Fife piloted the return of PPAs. The pilot was a success, with learning captured that is now informing the national return of PPA observations.