



**Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
Minute of SCRA National Partnership Forum
Held on Tuesday 9 February 2021**

SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

Present:

Monica Sweeny, Chair **(MS)** - Branch Secretary
Lynne Hobbs **(LH)** – Locality Reporter Manager
Neil Hunter, **(NH)** – Principal Reporter/ Chief Executive
Paul Mulvanny **(PM)** – Senior Operational Manager
Helen Etchells **(HE)** – Senior Operational Manager
Susan Deery **(SD)** - Head of Human Resources

		Timescale	Action
1.	Apologies Ross Mackenzie and Melissa Hunt		
2.	AOB None		
3.	Note of Previous Meeting – 24 November 2020 Agreed as an accurate record.		
4.	Matters Arising Covered within the agenda.		
5.	COVID 19 Pandemic – Recovery Plan and Risk Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NH noted that the planned for optimistic start to 2021 has been challenged with the national lockdown which came into force on 5th January 2021. • We had hoped to start to see the benefit of additional staffing and making significant progress on outstanding. • Quarter 4 is very much a continuation of previous quarters with increase in virtual hearings and decrease in f2f hearings with most staff working from home. Capacity being impacted by home-schooling. • SD had circulated the amended risk assessments which have been further reviewed by Health Protection Scotland at the start of January 2021. • These have been circulated to LRMs, not for further full assessment, but for refresh and reminder to staff about the importance of FACTS. We will ensure there are regular reminders on Connect • HE noted that the response at start of January was really swift and testament to staff to rebalance hearing diaries. • The benefit of the break over Christmas has quickly been impacted by lockdown and home schooling • HE noted that MS and LH had provided feedback on the operational plan which was framed very much in terms of pandemic response 		

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan focuses on staff wellbeing and allowing staff to recover whilst we address the work that needs to be done • The plan ensures that we have all our enablers are in place, recovery team, hearing room's equipment, staff wellbeing. • Lisa Bennet/Donald Lamb will develop how we track recovery so we know how we are getting through the work and where children are in the system. • Referral numbers are on the high side but teams are taking opportunity to get on top of that whilst hearings are low • PM noted that we are taking a systematic wide response to this as different partners are coping with the lockdown as well and noted that good local partnership will support our recovery. • MS asked whether SCRA would start a COVID-19 testing programme. SD advised no plans for this as we are not in a health care setting and all appropriate mitigations in place • All noted that the vaccine programme felt very promising • It was noted that there had been an increase in staff absence since January (around 6%) – 4 COVID-19 cases and around 50% of absence for stress related reasons. Staff wellbeing was noted as the right focus for priorities 		
6.	<p>Digital Update</p> <p>Virtual Hearings RRD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCRA and CHS want to improve the VH platform and met before Christmas – led by Lawrie McDonald there is a structured methodology of piloting and testing • The group are really focused on a long term future model for VHs – beyond necessity they will be with us as a choice and we need to invest in good quality VH platform. • Focus on development of VH Administrator who is doing pre-hearing work and advice and discussion with professionals/ CYPF but also reaching into the hearing itself and providing cohesive support in terms of dealing with drop outs and those that can't connect. • This should remove the stressful circumstances for Reporters when 3 or 4 participants can't connect. • VH model is flipping our preoccupation with software into support for Reporter and panel chair. • It is labour intensive but we are refocusing internal staffing capacity to support the pilots. • A parallel platform has been developed with Brightwire and we will use this platform to host VH and other supporting activity such as hearing papers. • What we learn from this pilot platform will be built into the core CSAS system. • HE confirmed the four pilots sites as Central, SE, T&F and 		

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	<p>Glasgow and dates are rolling out over 4 weeks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been real buy in from localities thus far and strong enthusiasm for staff to resource the pilot. • MS confirmed that some staff were concerned about their roles and how important it was for consultation. Acknowledge that we will still need some transactional functions but there is a real opportunity for more outward facing roles. • NH confirmed that we are not planning for any headcount reduction as a result of roles changing. <p>CSAS Transition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PM noted that since the last meeting we successfully transitioned remaining localities onto CSAS • Not underestimating the scale of this for localities particularly during the pandemic and a huge credit to all of staff group involved. • There are different members of staff at different stages of their use of CSAS and we have had to provide some additional support. We were able to deploy a small team of 3 staff on the ground to H&I and 2 members virtually. • Started to deliver workshops on services and this will still be necessary this side of March. • Update on the standard operating model and focusing on 3 work streams – 1. model aligns with work around better hearings, the promise etc 2. how we deliver the service – taking best practice and optimising that and 3. how we run our offices. CSAS does change the transactional nature of how we operate in offices. • A survey for reporters and support staff will go out shortly to gauge user confidence on the use of CSAS. • Important message that we are at the beginning stages of CSAS and there will be incremental change and improvements to this system over the next few years. • Currently 65/70 change requests already – need to develop a change control board – LMcD will lead that and will feed into strategy groups – one for CHS and one for SCRA so that both bodies can make their own investment decisions. • 2021/22 is a year of consolidating CSAS – 2022/25 looking outwards at services we want to provide to children, young people and their families with the knowledge that we have a platform that will do that for us. • LH noted that it's starting to feel better and starting to see benefits of system and staff are now helping others. • NH it's been amazing that people help each other across localities and those that have a strong mastery of the system – lot to be optimistic • EMT did acknowledge the painful process for people. • MS noted that one thing that has come out of the pandemic is 		

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	how cohesive SCRA is as an organisation – where we have seen good collaboration between localities and that the Vanguard teams were good exemplars of that.		
7.	<p>Staff Survey Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NH provided an update on the outcomes of the staff survey Q37 – what one learning point from lockdown do people want to see the future, which was the choice of working more flexibly in the future. Some of the responses reflects that people were forced to work at home and the sense of intrusion and the emotional impact of work. This is important in how we design support for people in the future. Other points were the need for SCRA to be more effective in managing change and information flow and communication. Good feedback that many people saw the positive potential for future flexible working beyond the pandemic. The biggest challenge was not being connected face to face with colleagues. Staff missed being part of a team and it felt positive that people valued being part of a team. We need to understand more about what's driving workload and complexity There was some good feedback in relation to comms which was generally found to be good. At some points comms were felt to be overwhelming but PM/HE coordinated comms across the working week with Localities to rebalance that. There were mixed results for health and wellbeing. Good use of the FAQs and 1:1 with line managers and support from peers – reasonable use of the tools that were put in place but low take up of EAP and other activities. 47% and 27% agreed regular and helpful info on wellbeing – doesn't feel too bad and high levels of 75% feeling reasonable comfortable coming back into the office. MSands and HE reconvened the mental health group again to drill down on those aspects of mental health. 1 in 4 not really able to balance current priorities with personal life – 70% saying OK most of the time. Some might need additional support and opportunity to work in a different environment. Team briefs were the highest ranking of communications, followed by the importance of f2f and 1:1 discussions with line managers There was stark commentary in relation to VH connectivity and technical support. Section 6 – CSAS – lot of concern about the timing of CSAS, although staff felt well informed (76%), inadequate time for training or access to floor-walking support and lack of helpful training materials. Low 70% getting good support from line manager. 		

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under half of staff didn't know the longer term impact of CSAS • Q49 – stark/brutal comments on the impact of transition on staff and the quality of the experience they had. It was tough reading and EMT didn't set out on this to cause stress and concern for staff. Some aspects of change always create degree of uncertainty but this was a bruising experience – we will learn lessons from this. If we hadn't transitioned to CSAS when we did, the anticipation of CSAS would still be dominating our conversations. We're now through the first phase of it, staff are more confident and we can start to change the narrative now. • The Team Brief tries to set out the things we're doing that help respond to the staff survey. VHs was high up and we're focusing on that. Hearing room hardware upgrades, training and support around CSAS, RAM upgrades, Time to Talk day. • MS noted many positives in staff survey and expectations are that we'll build on those. But from a UNISON point of view in relation to CSAS, it was the timing of it when it coincided with pandemic. But there are learning opportunities there around training and support which may have been different if staff had been able to be in offices. However, it was the right decision to push ahead there just wasn't enough support put in place to carry it out. • NH committed to reflecting on this and he was clear on accountability on decision making and noted there were shortcomings on the approach to take place and the inability to turn things round quickly. We don't expect another significant change like this for many years. • MS noted the positions and advised that UNISON will be conducting a survey with staff as well on pay and another on the conditions they want moving forward. • NH noted that we were shifting some investment in our estate to providing increasingly better hearing facilities for young people and working environments for our staff. 		
8.	<p>Health, Wellbeing & Staff Survey Group Update</p> <p>NH noted that staff survey had been covered in item 7. However, it was noted that the biggest thing we could now do is to support the Mental Wealth Group work towards achieving its standards as that will add significantly to the supports we have already in place for staff.</p>		
8.	<p>Equalities Network Update</p> <p>SD advised that the Equalities Network would be meeting on 17th February and would focus on structure and governance of group, the 2021/22 EDI outcomes and the 2020/21 mainstreaming report. The Group noted it was good to see the network meeting again.</p>		

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9.	<p>HR Sub Group Update</p> <p>SD provided a verbal update on concluding the review of the Discipline, Grievance and Investigation Guidelines policy, the implementation of Wellness Action Plans and Vicarious Trauma Supports, homeworking risk assessments and the agreed cycle of policy review for 2021 as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standby Policy • Staff Code of Conduct • Whistleblowing Policy • Exit Interview Policy • Agile/Flexible Working Policy • Fixed Term Workers Guidance • Pro-rating Dependent Care 		
10.	<p>Policy Update</p> <p>NH provided an update in the following policy areas;</p> <p>The Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LB/AH leading this out. 3–5 years continued approach to incremental change and improvement in hearings system. Focus on extending better hearings has key aspects of the promise with more fundamental change over 5–10 years. • Implementation of UNCRC will have an impact on the Promise • Solely volunteer composition in children’s hearings and how we might support any devolution of change • Rights respecting children’s hearings – what do they mean by that – lots of detailed discussion on this issue <p>16-17 year olds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of comments were positive about the change. NH is chairing a group of Crown Office/ Justice bodies and CHS, to try to get ahead of it. Firstly, it’s about victim’s rights, secondly investment in LA capacity to provide supervision and support for CYPF in older age range and thirdly scoping the scale for potential demand for children’s hearings and potential investment in SCRA/CHS. NH hopes to conclude that work by the summer to input to SG who will make the change to age of referral to PR. <p>Incorporate of UNCRC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed the potential timescale for full incorporation – which ranged from 6 months to 6 years. • Concerns about staff, capacity and skills/confidence in working with this older population and potentially more serious offending. 		

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	<p>All three of the above are now interlinked.</p> <p>MS noted the need for investment in an already stretched workforce.</p>		
11.	<p>Financial Update</p> <p>RMcK provided a written update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMT reported a forecast revenue underspend of £322k to the Board in December. This acknowledged significant in-year savings on non-staff lines arising from the pandemic. SG has provided additional funds to SCRA both this year and next in full support of SCRA's spend on organisational recovery, including the Virtual Hearings Team. Property and IT teams are working to spend out on capital despite the challenges faced by the pandemic and strains on global technology supply chains. • EMT meets tomorrow (Wednesday) to discuss the 21/22 budget. EMT fully anticipates being able to close the provisional budget gap and present a balanced budget to the Board next month that allows fulfilment of key business priorities including the organisational recovery plan. The 21/22 provisional budget includes a pay award in accordance with the maximum permitted under 21/22 pay policy <p>Hoping any slippage in this year can be carried into next year.</p>		
11.	<p>New Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lot of change in policy environment – which have practice implications and we need to be aware of any unintended consequences. • SG Pay Policy Guidance 		
	<p>Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 11 May 2021, 10:00-12:30 Tuesday 10 Aug 2021, 10:00-12:30 Tuesday 09 Nov, 2021. 10:00-12:20</p>		