

EVALUATION OF THE KEEPING THE PROMISE COMMITMENT STANDARDS PILOT



Report author: Dr Catherine Nixon
Commissioned by: Jenny West



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Executive Summary

The **Keeping The Promise (KTP) Commitment Standards** pilot was launched by the **Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)** to improve the participation of **Relevant Persons (RPs)** in Children's Hearings. The pilot aimed to reduce deferred hearings and enhance the experience of RPs through the provision of trauma-informed, relational support.

Piloted in **Ayrshire, Glasgow, and Lanarkshire, Dumfries & Galloway (LDG)** between **June and September 2024**, the initiative involved: proactive contact with RPs, transport guidance, provision of advocacy information, virtual hearing access and additional supports to attend hearings. Staff were trained in neurodiversity, trauma, and communication barriers to ensure sensitive engagement.

Key Findings

- **Reach:** 40% of RPs were successfully contacted, with higher engagement in Ayrshire and LDG (45–49%) compared to Glasgow (25%).
- **Support Uptake:** 3–8% of contacted RPs required additional support, with requests focused on travel expenses, virtual hearing access, and advocacy. Requests for support were more common among those coming to grounds hearings and those with additional support needs.
- **Positive Impact:** 83% of RPs found being contacted helpful, and 78% wanted contacts to continue. Staff reported improved relationships and reduced anxiety among RPs.
- **Operational Insights:** LSAs were identified as best placed to deliver relational support and demonstrated the necessary skill set when provided with appropriate training and support. Assistant Reporters faced time constraints. Staff highlighted the need for clearer guidance, role boundaries, and ongoing training.
- **Limitations:** The pilot did not reduce deferral rates but did help prevent data breaches and administrative errors.

The pilot demonstrated that relational engagement can significantly improve the felt experience of hearings for RPs, particularly those with additional support needs or attending for the first time. Based on these findings, **Phase 2** of the project has been approved and is underway in **LDG and Ayrshire**, with a view to informing a potential national rollout.



Introduction

Barriers to participation in legal proceedings for parents and caregivers

Parents with additional health and social care needs are over-represented within child protection proceedings. These needs can include higher than average rates of intellectual and developmental disabilities, learning and communication difficulties, mental health disorders and substance misuse/abuse (Burch et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2023; Pearson et al., 2021). Increased levels of mental ill-health and substance misuse among parents of children referred to child protection proceedings are often seen in conjunction with complex trauma histories, exposure to domestic and interpersonal violence, and poverty. It is also not uncommon for parents to have been the subject of child protection proceedings as a child (Broadhurst et al., 2017; Cusworth et al., 2022; McGarrol et al., 2022; Nixon and Henderson, 2021).

Complex trauma histories, combined with additional health and social care needs, can affect the ability of parents to effectively participate in child protection hearings. Mental health disorders, substance use, neurodiversity and learning disabilities can contribute not only to poor attention spans, but also affect how information is understood and processed. This can be exacerbated by the use of formal and difficult to parse legal language within proceedings (Collings et al., 2018). There is also some evidence from the medical literature to suggest that individuals with additional support needs and histories of trauma are less likely to attend scheduled appointments (Ellis et al., 2017; Chapman et al., 2022; McQueenie et al., 2024).

Although there is no data on the impact that additional health and social care needs have upon the participation of children and families within the Children's Hearings System, the Independent Care Review identified that *"hearings struggle to operate in a manner that recognises the trauma of the children and families who appear before them"* (Duncan, 2020 p39). This statement reflects a wealth of evidence highlighting that children and families: 1) find hearings to be confusing, adversarial and disempowering experiences; 2) often feel that preference is given to the voices of professionals and that their views are not adequately sought or acted upon within the decision making process. To remedy this, the Independent Care Review argued that *"a concerted effort must be made to hear more from parents and wider family members with children who are on the edge of or are in care"*. This would include decision makers making a *"particular effort to understand and act upon quieter voices, including infants and nonverbal children and those with learning disabilities. No group should ever be considered hard to reach"* (Duncan, 2020 p32).

Beyond recommending that there is a need to better listen and incorporate the views of children and families into the decision-making process, the independent care review also highlighted that there was a need to ensure that all barriers to participation in child protection proceedings should be identified and removed. This would include: ensuring that any information that is sent to children and families is accessible and written in plain English; understanding the effect that trauma and neurodiversity can have upon the ability of individuals to attend and participate in Hearings; and ensuring that children and families can be supported to have their voices heard within proceedings (Duncan, 2020)



Promoting participating in hearings by relevant persons

The Keeping The Promise Commitment Standards project was launched by SCRA as a means of attempting to promote better participation of relevant persons (RPs) within hearings. It also aimed to reduce the number of deferred and cancelled hearings associated with the non-attendance of RPs. The Keeping the Promise Commitment Standards were piloted in three localities, namely Ayrshire, Glasgow, and Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway (LDG), between June and September 2024. Each site conducted the test slightly differently in order to assess which role would be best placed to contact RPs and when this should be done. Details of how the test were delivered can be seen in Figure 1. Training was provided to all staff involved in the project on issues such as the impact of neurodiversity, speech and language difficulties and trauma on communication styles.

Figure 1: Method of piloting adopted by each locality involved in testing the KTP commitment standards

Ayrshire	Glasgow	Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RPs attending annual reviews contacted 5-6 weeks in advance of hearing by LSAs.• Timing of contact with RPs carefully chosen to allow provisional date of hearing to be set based upon children's requests as part of child friendly scheduling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RPs attending annual reviews contacted 1 week in advance of hearing by Assistant Reporters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RPs attending grounds hearings and annual review hearings contacted 1 week in advance of hearings by LSAs. Attempts to contact occurred upto 24 hours prior to the hearing.

Each RP was sent a redesigned version of the hearings notification letter 10-20 days in advance of the children's hearing taking place. The letters had been written in plain English and contained digital links (QR codes and URLs) that could be used to access directions to the hearing centre, information about advocacy and legal services, and a virtual tour of the hearing centre. After the letter had been sent, SCRA personnel were asked to make telephone contact with RPs to: 1) confirm receipt of the letter; 2) check address and contact information; 3) offer additional support and information around the hearing. The support and information that could be offered to RPs included: the provision of support around transport and travel information, including how to claim expenses; guidance around attending hearings remotely; and identifying what, if any, additional support needs RPs might have around attending hearings.



Aims of the evaluation

To explore what, if any, benefit the introduction of the Keeping The Promise Commitment Standards had upon the participation of relevant persons in hearings an internal evaluation was conducted. There were seven key aims to this evaluation:

- 1) to understand what proportion of RPs could be contacted prior to hearings?
- 2) to understand what benefits providing additional information and support to RPs had upon hearings attendance and participation
- 3) to gather views on the format and content of new hearing notifications letters
- 4) to understand when support and information should be offered to RPs
- 5) to identify which processes worked well in relation to contacting RPs
- 6) to identify which roles within SCRA are best placed to provide additional information and support to RPs and what level of resource investment is needed to support this
- 7) to understand what support staff members would need to provide information and support to RPs if the approach was rolled out nationally.

Methods

SCRA personnel within the three localities were asked to complete a pre- and post-hearing survey to capture key information around their interactions with RPs. The pre-hearing survey contained questions designed to gather information about: 1) whether RPs could be contacted; 2) how long it took to contact RPs; 3) what support needs RPs had and whether they differed by role in the hearing; 4) how the offer of information and support was perceived by RPs; 5) views of RPs on changes made to the hearing notifications letters and whether they had used the digital links contained within the letters. The post-hearing survey focussed upon gathering RPs views about the supports that they had been offered in light of attending the hearing.

Pre-hearings surveys were completed for all 291 RPs eligible for inclusion within the pilot, while post-hearings surveys were completed for 36 RPs. The Ayrshire locality also submitted a detailed spreadsheet of all of the hearings that they had tested the commitment standards with between June and December 2024. This included detailed information around both the number and outcome of contacts made with RPs. Descriptive statistics were used to explore the level of engagement staff had with RPs, the reach of different components and RPs views on the benefits of being offered additional information and support. Where data was available on the administrative time taken to deliver specific project elements, projected costs for rolling out the commitment standards were calculated. The data were also matched with case files to examine whether engagement with the project by RPs had resulted in fewer deferred hearings.

The survey and administrative data gathered was supplemented by focus groups undertaken with the management teams and frontline staff involved in the project within each locality. Overall, 8 data collection sessions were undertaken, with staff separated by both locality and role. The focus groups focussed upon identifying:



1) perceived benefits and detriments for RPs, other hearings participants, professionals and SCRA; 2) common barriers and facilitators to implementation; 3) the perceived impact of the pilot on late, deferred and cancelled hearings.

Findings

How contactable were RPs during the pilot

SCRA staff were able to contact 40% of the RPs included within the pilot. The level of contact varied slightly across localities with Ayrshire and LDG making contact with 45-49% of RPs compared to 25% in Glasgow. Of those who were contacted, 79% (n=90) had been invited to attend a review hearing, while 21% (n=24) had been invited to attend a grounds hearing. Half (51%, n=58) of the RPs spoken with were the mothers of children referred to a hearing. Fathers accounted for 27% (n=30), while foster carers and other family members, including kinship carers accounted for 7% (n=8) and 18% (n=20) of the sample respectively.

SCRA staff identified that the biggest barrier to contacting RPs was the accuracy of contact information held by both SCRA and social work. At the start of the pilot, 39% (n=113) of the RPs eligible for inclusion within the pilot were identified as having an incorrect telephone number stored in CSAS. It was also recorded that 51% (n=149) of the RPs either had no email address or an incorrect email address stored within CSAS. Through engaging with social work the proportion of RPs with incorrect contact details was reduced to 26% (n=75) for telephone numbers and 40% (n=115) for email addresses. Being unable to obtain correct contact information was a source of frustration for staff involved in the project as it meant that not all RPs could be offered the same level of information and support.

What supports were requested by RPs

Overall, 3-8% of the RPs eligible for inclusion in the pilot in each area could be contacted and required additional information or support. Looking at the information and supports sought from RPs, our analysis identified that:

- 24% of RPs contacted requested information on claiming travel expenses
- 10% of RPs contacted requested information about virtual hearings
- 9% of RPs contacted requested information about advocacy and legal representation for RPs
- 9% of RPs requested information about advocacy and legal representation for children
- 17% of RPs contacted asked for support to overcome barriers to attendance at hearings and were granted permission to attend the hearing virtually. These barriers included the distance they needed to travel, safety concerns relating to conflicts with other RPs, the impact of health issues, and how to resolve diary conflicts relating to work commitments and medical appointments



- 83% of RPs contacted found the pre-hearings contacts to be useful, and 78% wanted to see them offered to RPs in the future.

Benefits of providing additional information and support to RP

The majority (78%) of those contacted as part of the pilot stated that they wanted SCRA to continue providing support to RPs once the pilot ended. This view was broadly shared by SCRA staff involved in the pilot as they had enjoyed being able to build connections with families and offer support.

“I think it’s quite good and I want to keep phoning them. When they come in happy that you’ve spoken to them. They seem happy that you’ve got in touch, even if they’ve been there before”.

“There is a really positive feel about it, and we’ve already reflected back as a group that it is a really good thing to be doing due to the positivity coming back. We’ve had people on the phone who have said that the phone call has been useful to them and thanked us from calling them”.

Providing information and support to RPs prior to hearings was considered by staff to help alleviate some of the anxiety that could be felt in the run up to attending a hearing. This was also reflected in feedback from RPs: *“it helped my anxiety”*. Staff involved in the pilot also felt that contacting RPs prior to the hearing was useful as it provided an opportunity to check whether RPs had everything that they needed to prepare for the hearing, including: whether or not they had received and understood the hearings notification and papers; were aware of their rights to legal representation and advocacy; and were able to travel to the hearing centre.

“There’s a gran I contacted who didn’t even know she was allowed to come even though the hearing letter was to invite her to the hearing. She was like ‘oh I thought I wasn’t allowed’. That was confirmation of the value of this because she’s obviously been getting these letters and been overwhelmed”.

Staff felt that the pre-hearing phone calls humanised SCRA by providing RPs with a named person that they could speak to about their concerns. Many of the staff involved in the pilot felt that this had improved the felt experience around hearings for the RPs they had spoken with.

“She said that this has been the best hearing that she’d ever had. It was great for her to have one point of contact as she’s had problems in the past and she’s never been able to speak to the same person, and people said they would phone her back and they didn’t. She just said it having that one person that she could contact made this the easiest, less stressful hearing she’d ever been to”.

“It’s about whether someone has felt valued. They may have asked questions that they would never have asked. They might call their social worker after the call to ask additional questions. It is all those little bits that matter. So even if there is no effect on deferrals... if people have come and had a better experience, or even just had less anxiety in anticipating the visit, then it is worth doing”.



Staff believed that making pre-hearing phone calls to RPs reduced the risk of non-attendance at hearings by providing additional opportunities to: 1) reschedule hearings to take into consideration the availability of RPs; 2) make accommodations to hearing arrangements to address conflicts between RPs; 3) make accommodations to allow supportive others to attend the hearing with the RP; 4) address financial barriers to attendance; 5) reassure RPs with disabilities about what arrangements already existed or could be put in place to ensure their participation in proceedings. They also described how the phone calls provided additional opportunities for RPs to discuss concerns around the attendance of children at hearings and what, if any, accommodations could be put in place to support their participation.

“I had one case where it was really beneficial. Mum and dad weren’t together and mum didn’t want to come to the hearing and be in the same room as her ex-partner and his new partner as there had been a bit of a clash in the past. I got the reporter to give her a call back and the reporter agreed that she could attend virtually. In that instance it was quite good as if we hadn’t phoned her I don’t think she would have showed up at the hearing”.

“One of the dads said that they have ADHD and felt that they were always being spoken over by the social worker, and that they never get heard. And because of his ADHD and that anxiety, when he gets interrupted... that’s him. He can’t go back in and pick up where he left off and he was like ‘it happens all the time and I don’t always get my view across’. He’s now got an advocacy worker. I put notes on and made the Reporter of the Hearing aware of it so that if it does happen they can interject if they see the social worker doing it. We also reassured him that his advocacy worker could pick up from him”.

“His granny said ‘oh hen, I’ll never get him to attend his hearing’. So I said ‘what if we could do it virtually? Do you think he would join from the house?’ ‘Well, maybe, maybe’. So I says to her ‘have you ever used Microsoft Teams?’ ‘No, no, I’ve never’. ‘Ok, Well leave it with me’. And I asked her if she would be happy for her social worker to come to the house and she can sit with you and you can do it that way? ‘Aye, no bother’. So I contacted her social worker and said is there any chance you can go and support gran and grandson to join”.

Although the pre-hearings contacts offered some benefits to RPs, the offering of additional information and support had no effect upon hearing deferral rates. These were consistently between 22-24% for hearings where all, some or none of the RPs had been provided with additional information and support. While there was no effect upon the rates of deferral, staff were able to identify instances were potential breaches of personal information being identified and prevented. They were also able to identify and rectify errors in hearings administration.

“We’ve prevented breaches. One where social work sent in an address form saying what mum and dad’s addresses were, and I managed to speak to dad the next day and I said can I just check your address and he said his address and I said that’s not the address we’ve got. And he said what have you got, and when I told him he said I’ve not been at that address for about three years. I’ve changed address twice since then”.



When it got to checking that she had the papers I noticed that the social work report had come in and it had gone to the reporter and that they had read it and failed to action it, so I was able to contact the reporter and we were able to deal with the social work report. But when I contact mum she was like I've not got any papers. So then I managed to get dad and he said the exact same thing. So I backtracked it all and discovered that a colleague had thought she had sent it to the print hub but it hadn't gone. If I hadn't checked then that hearing wouldn't have gone ahead".

Views on the new hearings notifications letters

The pilot also involved the testing of new hearing notification letters that were designed to be easier to read, and included digital links and QR codes that could be used to access information on advocacy and legal provisions, directions to the hearings centre and a virtual tour of the hearings centre. The staff involved in the pilot generally liked the changes that had been made to the letters; considering them to be more accessible than the letters that had previously been sent out to hearing participants. They also reported having received positive feedback on the readability of the letters from both RPs and professionals working with children and families. A broadly similar view was shared by RPs. Of the 101 RPs¹ who answered questions about the new hearing notification letters, 72% thought that they were easy to understand, while 67-68% stated that the letters were clearly written, accessible and contained all of the information they needed. Three fifths (56%) of those surveyed felt that the letters could be understood by anybody.

"They prefer the new letters. The old letters were just text overload. There's been good feedback about how it looks now, it's plain, it's simple and it's not just all these words.... The hearing details stand out more".

"The agencies seem to like them. They've noticed that they're different, and they think that they're much easier for children and families to read. Barnardo's really like how easy it was to read with the pictures and the icons".

Although the letters were generally well received, some of the staff members we spoke with felt that the placement and bolding of the text stating that children must attend their hearing had caused some anxiety among RPs. This was particularly true in cases where a child had never come to a hearing. Although staff were concerned about the anxiety that the letters had caused, one locality highlighted that there had been *"more than the usual"* amount of pre-hearing panels held since the pilot had begun. This resulted in the team wondering whether or not the placement and bolding of the text was actually encouraging requests for children to be excused from hearings or whether this was coincidental.

"It's the your child must come bit. There've been a number of times where they've said to me on the phone 'but they've never come, do they really need to come'. That bit has always been in the letter that they need to attend, but they have been seeing it and getting panicked".

¹ Please note that there is a degree of uncertainty around this data. This is due to the fact that the new hearings notification letters were not implemented at the start of the project and some RPs will have received the old hearings notification letter. As there was no place within the survey to allow for information about whether the old or new hearings notification letter had been issued our analysis assumes that the new letter style was received if questions on the letters have been completed. There was also a high level of non-response to these questions, with only positive answers recorded by staff; suggesting that not all of the questions were asked



The use of QR codes and digital links within the letters was not as well received by RPs, with only 20% of those surveyed saying that they liked the inclusion of these within the letters. Overall use of the links was low, with just 1 in 7 (14%) of the RPs stating that they had used a QR code or URL to access information. The poor usage of the links was explained by: 1) the majority of the RPs having previously attended hearings and therefore not requiring additional information; 2) RPs lacking the skills and/or technology to use the links. While it was recognised that those attending hearings for the first time might find these links helpful, staff members felt that there needed to be a focus upon ensuring that professionals working with children and families were aware of the links so that they could support relevant persons to access this information.

“I like the virtual tours and things like that and I think they would be really beneficial for somebody coming for their first time. I think it might be more beneficial to be pushing these things with the social workers as I don’t think they would be accessing these things by themselves”.

Views on which RPs should be offered support and when this should occur

Staff involved in the pilot were generally supportive of the pilot being rolled out more widely; however there were mixed views on whether all RPs should be contacted prior to the hearing. Staff involved in the pilot highlighted that many of the RPs who were attending annual reviews did not require or want additional information and support. This, combined with the low reach of the pilot, resulted in some staff stating that it could be “a lot of effort for very little return”.

“I phoned dad and all I got back from him was ‘yeah, yeah, I’ve been through the system. I’ve been to hearings as a boy’. He didn’t want to hear anything as he knew the system and knew what was happening as he had came himself”.

It was identified that RPs frequently told staff that they would have found the offer of support to be more helpful the first time that they had been invited to a hearing. However, whilst some members of staff felt that it would be best to target direct offers of support at RPs who had never been to hearings before, others felt that support should be offered universally as some RPs could lack the confidence to ask for modifications or adaptations to be made to hearings. It was also identified that some RPs continued to be unaware of their rights within the hearing.

“I think it’s quite beneficial to phone them as it gives them that opportunity to voice where they do have a concern and an issue. They would never have phoned first”.

“I spoke to one woman who had been coming to hearings for two years and she didn’t know she could have an advocacy worker”.

Irrespective of which RPs were to be contacted, it was felt that contacting RPs at an earlier stage would provide more opportunities for SCRA staff to support their attendance at hearings. This was considered to be particularly beneficial for annual reviews as it allowed hearings to be rescheduled to avoid planned holidays, medical appointments and work commitments. It also provided relevant persons with



additional time to arrange childcare. Earlier contacts also allowed repeat phone calls to be made, which in turn increased the likelihood of RPs being offered support. This can be seen in the fact that the number of RPs offered support in Ayrshire and LDG was significantly higher than in Glasgow (45-49% vs. 25%).

“We are contacting families 5-6 weeks in advance of the hearing data. It gives them a head up and they’re really appreciating that as it gives them time to sort out children. It’s giving them time to work out their work schedules. We’ve also been able to move a couple of hearings where people have been waiting on hospital appointments or going on holiday”.

Which members of staff should contact RPs?

The “*time consuming*” nature of contacting RPs was considered to be a potential barrier to this task being undertaken by Assistant Reporters, with both LRMs and Assistant Reporters identifying that there had been weeks where the Assistant Reporters had felt “*pressured*” and had to work into the evenings to ensure that all of their hearings related tasks were completed. In contrast, the LSAs involved in the pilot all indicated that they had enjoyed contacting RPs and wanted the task to remain part of their remit should it be rolled out on a national level.

“I think it’s quite good and I want to keep phoning them. When they come in they’re happy that you’ve spoken to them. They seem happy that you’ve got in touch, even if they’ve been there before”.

“There is a really positive feel about it, and we’ve already reflected back as a group that it is a really good thing to be doing due to the positivity coming back. We’ve had people on the phone who have said that the phone call has been useful to them and thanked us from calling them”.

LRMs and LSMs were broadly supportive of LSAs continuing to contact RPs as it was felt that introducing relational work into their role provided opportunities for career development and growth. It was also considered to act as a way of future proofing the role as SCRA explored how automation could be used to support repetitive and time-consuming administrative tasks.

“We have really motivated staff within our team who will look for career progression and will look for variety of work and challenges in their work so we thought that there was a skillset there that wasn’t getting tapped into. We have people who are fantastic at engaging with families and we don’t want them getting bored or demotivated”.

“I would be wary about resources at the moment as it looks like on the face of that this needs LSA resource, and I know that that seems in conflict with a lot of the operation of our service. I think we need to get to a place where we have the full picture in place and are running this alongside child friendly scheduling. If we get to the stage where we have that redesign from the start then we will get a benefit from this, particularly if its paired with automation as that will allow the LSAs to do more relational work with the families



However these views were qualified by stating that there needed to be: 1) careful consideration of how cases were handled by staff members to prevent the “double touching” of files and remove the risk of RPs being contacted multiple times in error; 2) greater understanding of how contacting RPs would interact with other tests of change, including child friendly scheduling. It was also felt that managers should be allowed to retain the ability to assess

“There needs to be boundaries across roles so that LSAs are not duplicating conversations that the reporter might be having but are complimenting each other in different ways. If there is stuff about a pre-hearing visit who does that? Does the reporter go into that or do they leave that bit out because there is going to be someone who phones up and asks?”

The first of these points was raised in relation to the fact that LSAs did not always have the same level of understanding of cases that Assistant Reporters and Reporters had. In some areas this was addressed through ensuring that cases were screened by Reporters for their suitability for being contacted. In other areas, however, LSAs were having to undertake more detailed reading of casefiles than it had originally been anticipated in order to identify: 1) if there were support needs that SCRA were already aware of; 2) gain an understanding of any sources of intra-familial conflict that could act as barriers to participation; 3) any non-disclosure arrangements in place to ensure that information was not accidentally shared with those who were not entitled to receive it.

“The reporters were telling them whether or not contacting them would cause distress or if they felt it wasn’t suitable because the RP wouldn’t cooperate. I guess the point is that they [the support assistants] don’t know the cases so they’re going asking for information”.

“I had to read the HIP to get a good knowledge of the child, the circumstances, what the hearing was for, the relationship between the RPs and family and anything that would make my call personable to the person on the other end and not feel a cold call approach. Using their name, knowing where they are travelling from, if they have been before and who has attended with them. Basically all the small details so they feel they matter during the call”.

It was highlighted by LSAs that having access to this information not only allowed them to feel empowered and confident while speaking to RPs but also provide a more personal approach.

“I read the background reports on the child once i spotted his ASD. I could approach the call in the right way with mum, regarding focussing on how we could make his visit better or to iron out any issues that may stop him coming”.

What supports do staff require to contact RPs?

It was felt that staff members needed to be “enthusiastic”, “confident” and have strong customer service skills to undertake the role of contacting RPs. These customer service skills included the ability to be empathetic, place children and families at ease and being able to de-escalate challenging situations and conflict. Due to the range of skills required, it was highlighted that the staff involved in the pilot had been deliberately selected because of their history of undertaking front-facing roles.



These included working as receptionists or virtual hearings assistants for SCRA or working in roles for other organisations that had a significant customer service function.

“We picked people who were already confident. What has helped is to have people who have been receptionists, who have been able to build on that knowledge of reception”.

“The two who were chosen had lots of experience on reception and they’d been virtual hearings assistants during the pandemic”.

Confidence was considered to be a major barrier to LSAs undertaking the role, with some of those who had been involved in the pilot stating that they had felt “nervous” and “panicked” about making the phone calls to RPs. These feelings were partly exacerbated by the training that had been delivered to enable staff to better recognise the impact of speech and language difficulties, neurodiversity and trauma upon how individuals might communicate and/or experience hearings, as the level of detail provided had caused confusion around how much support RPs should be offered by SCRA.

“The training made it seem like a bigger thing. It seemed like a lot of information on the day, and you’re suddenly starting to think about whether you should be saying.... Like she was talking about autism and whether someone is wearing strong perfume and how that is something to consider before they’re coming to hearings, and we were like ‘oh my god this is huge’.

It was felt that if LSAs were going to be given the role of contacting RPs going forwards there would need to be clearer guidance around the extent of support that RPs could be offered. It was also felt that training and support could be provided around how to initiate conversations with RPs, what information LSAs were expected to share and how, how to have natural and “unscripted” sounding conversations with RPs and how to handle challenging conversations. Being provided with dedicated time to shadow experienced members of staff was considered a key way of helping those new to the role to build up their confidence.

“You don’t know what will come up within a phone call, but it will be within sphere. When we bring others into the project they’ll probably be sitting side by side on the call, buddying up, and the good thing about a Teams call is that you can have your teams call and they can listen to the interaction after you’ve said I’ve got so and so here and they’re training are you ok with them being on the call with us, and approach it that way so that they can hear”

What resources would be required to contact all RPs prior to hearings?

Data gathered on the length of phone calls to RPs identified that the median time spent by staff preparing for and making the pre-hearing phone calls was 15 minutes (range: 3-70 minutes). Based upon this data, we calculated that rolling out the pilot nationally would result in up to 40,000 additional phone calls being made each year. This figure was based upon the assumption that each non-emergency hearing held by SCRA would have 2 RPs in attendance. Achieving this would require a resource of 7.63 FTE posts across the organisation if all RPs engaged with the calls. If it was only possible



to contact 45% of the RPs as per the pilot, the resource required would be 5.43 FTE posts.²

Recommendations

Our evaluation indicates that The Keeping the Promise Commitment Standards were generally well received by RPs and staff, with many wanting to see it continue. There was clear evidence that staff involved in the pilot had been able to provide additional supports to RPs, and that these had been valued and appreciated. While the overall reach of the project was low, insofar as only 3-8% of the eligible RPs required additional information and support, it was clear that where support was required this had a meaningful impact upon the felt experience around the hearings. These benefits appeared to be greatest for those with additional support needs and those attending hearings for the first time. On the basis of these findings it was recommended that SCRA consider rolling out the project more widely.

It was clear from the evaluation that the LSAs involved in the pilot wanted to continue offering this service to RPs moving forwards, and had more capacity to do so than Assistant Reporters. LRMs and LSMs were broadly supportive of this, but wanted greater understanding of how other tests for change, including child friendly scheduling would interact with the Keeping the Promise Commitment Standards approach. They also highlighted the importance of ensuring that there were clear lines of communication between Reporters, Assistant Reporters and LSAs to ensure that RPs were not being contacted repeatedly and to prevent the double touching of cases. Based upon these findings it was recommended that a full decision on rolling out the commitment standards should not be made until the findings of other tests of change and their impact upon service delivery could be considered together.

Should SCRA decide that the contacting of RPs should be undertaken by LSAs moving forward, the following recommendations were made in relation to ensuring that they have the skills and confidence necessary to undertake the role:

- Training on the impact of speech and language, neurodiversity and trauma on communication and participation in hearings should continue to be rolled out to all staff to support understanding of the challenges faced by children and RPs.
- A suite of resources should be created that provide staff with clear guidance around the length, focus and scope of calls made to RPs.
- Consideration should be given to including a role play based element to training for staff asked to make contact with RPs in order to provide them with the opportunity to practice their phone manner and think through how they might handle different types of interactions with RPs.
- Individuals who are due to contact RPs for the first time be provided with the opportunity to shadow or buddy a member of staff who has shown a natural

² The reason that this figure is not 55% of the original predicted FTE is that we have assumed that all phone calls with no contacts would still result in an administrative cost of around 10 minutes due to the need to cross-check case files, contact social workers for new contact details and make repeat phone calls to try and engage the RP.



affinity and has relevant work experience for undertaking person-centred and relational work.

Next steps

Following the successful pilot of the Keeping the Promise Commitment Standards and the positive feedback from both staff and Relevant Persons (RPs), Phase 2 of the project has now been approved and is underway. The next steps focus on scaling and embedding the approach within the LDG and Ayrshire localities, with a view to informing a potential national rollout. Key actions include:

Implementation of Phase 2 (June – September 2025)

- Phase 2 will run from 2nd June to 26th September 2025, targeting all RPs attending grounds hearings in LDG and grounds and review hearings in Ayrshire.
- LSAs with proven skills from Phase 1 will lead the delivery of support.
- The Ayrshire site will pilot contacting RPs via text messages to improve accessibility and engagement.

Measurement and evaluation

- To measure uptake in the second phases, LSAs will track the number of advocacy, pre-hearing visit, and transport assistance requests made by RPs.
- To measure whether support requests are successfully communicated to hearings, during the second phase of testing Reporters and Assistant Reporters will manually record:
 - the percentage of reasonable adjustments passed to panel members.
 - whether panel members mindfully considered the information provided.

Training and resource development

- A national training plan is being developed by HR to build LSA confidence and capability in relational work with children and families.

Digital Integration and Operational Alignment

- The following digital projects were commissioned to support Phase 2:
 - A text messaging service for RPs.
 - A system to record support needs and relational data.



- Alignment of phase 2 of the KTP Commitment Standards with Child Friendly Scheduling and other customer care initiatives will avoid duplication. Moving forward, SCRA will look at integration of all customer care related projects into a National Standard for family centred scheduling

Risk Management and Locality Support

- Monthly reviews during phase 2 of testing will assess:
 - Resource levels and operational capacity within LDG and Ayrshire.
 - Staff confidence and workload balance.
- Identified risks, for instance those related to LSA skill gaps and operational pressures, will be mitigated through targeted support and training.

Strategic Oversight and Planning

- The Strategic Programme Board will oversee progress and ensure integration with the wider Protect Programme Framework and Target Operating Model (TOM).
- The research team will conduct an evaluation of Family Centred Scheduling as it is rolled out across the country. This will include conducting qualitative interviews and focus groups with children, RPs and practitioners, including social workers, advocacy workers, panel members and SCRA staff. Ethical approval for this work is currently being sought with a view to the research being conducted between January and June 2026 as localities come on stream.



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