



# National Convener Annual Report 2011/12

Bernadette Monaghan, National Convener,  
Children's Hearings Scotland

**I was delighted to be appointed as the first National Convener of Children's Hearings Scotland. Panel members now have a voice and a National Convener to promote their invaluable contribution, as the highly skilled decision makers within a lay tribunal, helping to deliver better outcomes for Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people.**



The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, confers a number of statutory functions on me as National Convener, these include:

- appointing and reappointing panel members
- taking reasonable steps to involve people under 25, who have been to a hearing, in the development and delivery of training for panel members
- establishing Area Support Teams (ASTs) with the consent of each constituent local authority
- appointing AST members
- providing advice to children's hearings
- publishing annually a report about the implementation of compulsory supervision orders (feedback loop)
- producing an annual report

During this reporting period, I had not assumed responsibility for the majority of these functions, therefore my main objective was to agree AST structures and functions with local authorities. To that end, I held a series of pre-consultation meetings during May and June 2011 with Children's Panel Advisory Committee (CPAC) chairs and clerks, panel chairs and local authority representatives in every area of Scotland. This informed my thinking about the number, location and functions of ASTs. In addition, I asked each group of CPAC chairs and clerks and panel chairs to prepare a paper to provide me with information around a set of questions.

I considered the issues raised in the pre-consultation meetings and the responses to my questionnaire in formulating my proposals for ASTs. My aim was to strike the appropriate balance between national consistency and accountability, with flexible delivery in each area, recognising that



panel members sign up to serve largely on the panel in their local area and that this will not change with the introduction of the national Children's Panel and ASTs.

I therefore made proposals about the structure and location of the ASTs, based on the following criteria:

- geography and boundaries
- number of panel members to be supported
- existing effective cross-boundary working between CPACs or panels that should be preserved
- the minimum number of AST members required
- how the proposed AST arrangement would deliver better support for panel members

The consultation closed on 21 October 2011. In total, 67 responses were received, representing a 38.5% response rate. A report on the consultation was published online in November 2011, including the views of local authorities and the most common questions and comments raised by local authorities and CPACs. Overall, local authority opinion was divided into three categories:

- those who supported the proposals in principle
- those who disagreed
- those who wanted further clarification on various issues before making a decision

Between November 2011 and the end of March 2012, my work focused on producing a detailed and comprehensive response to the issues raised in the submissions and producing a paper setting out AST functions, roles and responsibilities. I have also been working with local authorities to gain their consent to form ASTs, along with the best possible provision of clerk and administrative support, which is critical to the establishment and operation of ASTs.

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