

Children's Advocacy in Children's Hearings national scheme – Good Practice and Issues Arising

Scottish Government National Progress Report

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Part 1 - Introduction

1. In this early period of the scheme's implementation and noting the backdrop of the particular challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic, it was felt it would be helpful to partners to develop and share a 2020-21 report. This report aims to highlight areas of good practice and areas for further progression over the coming period. It has also to be noted that necessary virus suppression restrictions on face-to-face meetings meant broad system and practice changes had to be applied during the period covered. Some of these are detailed later in this report.
2. Following a successful expressions of interest exercise in 2019, 10 organisations were selected¹, who together provide a Scotland-wide network of children's advocacy services for children's hearings. Funding for the provision is managed by the Scottish Government via annual Grant awards. The funding commenced in March 2020 under a multi-year arrangement extending initially to 2021-22.
3. The provision of children's advocacy services for children's hearings is set out in statute. Section 122 of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 was commenced from 21 November 2020 (initially planned for 27 April 2020 but delayed due to Coronavirus). Section 122(2) of the Act places a duty on the chair of every children's hearing to inform the child about the availability of children's advocacy services. Ministers have a duty to make provision for, and enter into arrangements to ensure access to, independent advocacy services for children involved in the Children's Hearing System. The children's hearings national advocacy service is demand led.
4. The Children's Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference Group² (ERG) continues to support the design, delivery and implementation of the national scheme.

Information collated to inform this report

5. This report is based mostly on reflections provided to the Scottish Government Children's Hearings Advocacy Team from grant management discussions and reporting from the 10 advocacy organisations. As well as fulfilling a grant requirement, these grant management discussions helped to gain intelligence from advocacy organisations as to how the service was operating in their areas, and about any practical issues that had emerged. We hoped to hear information about good, innovative practice as well as seeking to understand any barriers identified by the organisations, and get ideas about how to resolve them. This allowed us to provide advice and support to our wider delivery partners, to identify common themes, and escalate matters as appropriate.

¹ Quick reference list of provider organisations [Children's advocacy in children's hearings: portfolio of provider organisations - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/Children's%20advocacy%20in%20children's%20hearings%3A%20portfolio%20of%20provider%20organisations)

² [Children's Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference Group - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/Children's%20Hearings%20Advocacy%20Expert%20Reference%20Group)

6. Information prepared for the Children's Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference Group meetings by key partners at Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) around preparatory arrangements and implementation experiences during this period have also informed this report. Our thanks go to all involved.
7. The report intends to outline key outputs across the year. This is demonstrated in: data reported, scenarios discussed, matters resolved, barriers identified and good practices picked up. This report will be of interest to everyone with an interest in children's advocacy in children's hearings.

Part 2 - Children and Young People's Feedback and demonstrating outcomes

One child quoted to the advocacy worker: "It's good to know I've got someone now that's genuinely just for me to help me get through it (the Hearing)"

8. The advocacy organisations are required to evidence how they are following the [National Practice Model](#). The National Practice Model specifies the core values and beliefs informing advocacy in the Children's Hearing System under this scheme and supports them with detailed, practical guidelines for advocacy workers and advocacy organisations. The Principles and Standards express in clear, concise language, the underlying beliefs and behaviours children should be put into practice by those providing advocacy around children's hearings. Each Principle and its underlying Standards and Outcomes are accompanied by a set of Practice Guidelines and a set of Indicators.

Principle 1: Advocacy puts the child or young person first.

Principle 2: Advocacy seeks to understand and explain what is going on.

Principle 3: Advocacy workers only work for the child or young person.

Principle 4: Advocacy is for all children and young people who wish to take up the offer of Advocacy.

9. This section aims to highlight a few examples of the feedback and outcomes reported to the Scottish Government. Potentially identifiable details have been anonymised to protect the identity of children, young people and their families.

Example 1

10. Feedback from a 14 year old who did not agree with the Statement of Facts attached to the Grounds of Referral to the Children's Reporter. The young person was referred for advocacy support after their initial Hearing had taken place and a referral had been made to the Sherriff. The advocacy worker provided information to the young person in respect of his right to instruct a solicitor to represent him in court, and further supported him to instruct and meet with a solicitor. The solicitor was able to negotiate amended Statements of Facts with the Children's Reporter which the young person felt happy to accept and the solicitor presented to the Sherriff. The young person said to the advocacy worker. **"I wouldn't have been able to get a solicitor myself"**.

Example 2

11. Advocacy service was contacted by a head teacher of a school. He wanted to refer a young person aged 15 for advocacy support. The young person was a student and was facing a challenging time within a new kinship placement. The young person was subject to compulsory measures and had social work involvement. **Due to recent incidents with the family, he had been moved**

from one kinship placement to another which the head teacher stated was affecting his mental well-being and behaviour at school. The young person did not have a bed, and was sleeping on the floor of a living room in a house with a number of other young people. This caused concern as the young person had been performing well at school until recent incidents occurred. **The head teacher explained that that the young person had consented to the advocacy referral and that he himself had stated that he felt that he was not being listened to by social services.**

On meeting the young person the advocacy worker introduced themselves, the service and explained the role of advocacy. The young person's guidance teacher was also present. As the young person was over the age of 12, he was happy to give consent and engaged very well throughout the initial meeting. The worker and young person discussed his kinship placement and the circumstances that led him there. He explained his relationship with his mother, grandfather and aunt had broken down and he would not continue in the kinship placement any longer and had recently absconded.

He explained that aside from not having a bed or privacy, he was having trouble sleeping which is affecting his school performance and is being used as an informal carer for other young people who live in the house. The young person explained that he did at one point have a lawyer a few years prior but did not know who it was. **The worker asked if he would like her to help retain a legal representative for his Hearing and the young person said 'yes'.**

Another issue was that the young person could not be contacted by social work, school or advocacy, as he did not have access to a mobile phone.

The advocacy worker and the young person arranged to meet again before his virtual Hearing. After the meeting, the advocacy worker called Clan Childlaw and outlined the young person's views on what had been happening for him. A solicitor from Clan Childlaw called back the next day and said she would be happy to represent the young person at his upcoming Hearing but there may be a challenge with the timeframe as she needed time to go through his Hearing papers with him.

Authorisation was sought by the advocacy worker to obtain a mobile phone for the young person so he could be contacted by his advocate, solicitor and social worker.

A positive conversation took place with the social worker. The advocacy worker informed them of her involvement and the involvement of a solicitor. She explained the social work perspective on what had been going on for the young person and what the recommendations were for the Hearing. The young person had mentioned that he had spoken with his solicitor and felt more confident about his upcoming Hearing. **The worker and young person then discussed the Hearing process and created a views statement for his Hearing. Although he wanted to attend his Hearing, he wanted the worker to read the statement on his behalf.**

At the virtual Hearing, the young person engaged positively. His solicitor asked for a deferment so she and the young person could have more time to prepare for the Hearing. **The young person's views were heard and he was given the opportunity to address all panel members and social work which he felt he had not been able to do before then.** An interim variation was added to his Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) where he would reside in a foster placement with carers that he knew and with whom he was comfortable living.

A post-hearing phone call took place with the young person to ensure he understood the decisions made and any jargon used at his Hearing. The young person was happy with the outcome and thanked the advocacy worker for her help.

The young person had another Hearing and the outcome was that he should reside at his foster placement until he is able to get a place in Supported Care. For this Hearing, the advocacy worker met with the young person at his school before and after the Hearing which ensured that he was both prepared and able to understand the outcome.

His advocacy worker was able to discuss with the young person the benefits and drawbacks of his Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) in preparation for his turning 16. **This led him to take an informed view on what he would like to happen in the near future.** The advocacy worker and young person's allocated social worker have a positive relationship which allowed for full and frequent communication as well as another referral.

Example 3

12. A 14 year old girl was initially referred to the Reporter by a social worker on the grounds that "her conduct has had, or is likely to have, a serious adverse effect on the health, safety or development of her or another person." The girl had suffered several periods of exclusion from school due to failure to attend, volatility and non-compliance. The girl did not like her original social worker and refused to engage, resulting in the referral to the Reporter with a recommendation that she be placed on a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO). By the time the Hearing was called, the girl had been allocated a new social worker who she liked and respected more. When the Grounds Hearing was conducted, the girl became so upset and agitated that the Hearing decided to defer, sending her case to the Sheriff for Proof.

It was at this point her new social worker, with the girl's agreement, referred the case to the advocacy service. Although initially somewhat hesitant, she engaged with her advocacy worker during several meetings and as her trust grew, she was able to share her views and explain the issues she felt she faced within school. In turn, her advocacy worker was able to represent her views at the Hearing negating the stress she felt on the previous occasion. **The social worker stated, "The young person struggles to trust adults but after meeting [her advocacy worker] for the first time she advised "she's actually really nice"**. The advocacy worker represented the young person's

views at a subsequent Hearing, meaning she did not need to attend. This has produced a positive outcome for the young person, where her views have been heard without her having to be put through unnecessary distress. This is in line with the GIRFEC principles, ensuring we get it right for every child”.

The girl told her advocacy worker that she “felt that social work was against me. I can trust you because you say what I want”. The decision of the Hearing was influenced by the young person’s views being heard and acknowledged. She was discharged from supervision under the Children’s Hearing System with a recommendation of voluntary measures to better support her at school.

Example 4

13. A referral was received by an advocacy service for a boy aged 9 who had a Hearing due in two days. The advocacy worker visited him at school to ask him if he wanted advocacy support and if so, what his views were for his Hearing. The boy said that he would like to attend the Hearing and “tell them” himself what he wanted. He asked if they both could go (boy and the advocacy worker), and the advocacy worker confirmed that this was possible and she would arrange it by either seeing if he could use a computer at school. If not, she would bring him a computer for him to use for the meeting. The boy said he would like to try and tell the Hearing what he wanted, and he would like his advocacy worker to add anything he had forgotten. The advocacy worker arranged for the boy to attend the Hearing from the head teacher’s office using her computer and arranged that on the day the head teacher would help him to join the meeting while the advocacy worker joined from her computer at home. The advocacy worker provided contact details for the school to the Reporter and got the Chair’s permission to share the link with the head teacher. On the morning of the Hearing, the boy successfully joined and told the Hearing himself what it was like living where he was, and that he wanted to see more of his mum. The advocacy worker was able to ask the boy questions to help him share his view at the Hearing. This was a good example of the child, advocacy worker, school and the children’s hearing working together to enable the child to give his views himself at the Hearing.

Example 5

14. A young person was supported by an advocacy worker to convey their views at their Hearing in relation to letterbox contact with a family member. As a result of advocacy support, a decision aligning with the wishes of the young person was made.

Example 6

15. At a Hearing, a young person was able to return, with support, to living at the family home. During a follow-up call with the advocacy worker after the Hearing the young person requested counselling. The advocacy worker was able to discuss this with the school and a go-to teacher that the young person could talk to was identified. This support requested through advocacy will be instrumental for the young person being able to remain in the family home. A young person commented to their advocacy worker that she knew she could speak up for herself but having them at the Hearing was good, just in case.

A written compliment received from a local panel member said “I’ve never been so clear on what a child wanted from their Hearing! It was one of those moments where the penny dropped and I thought this is just brilliant! The views of the child were absolutely at the centre of our discussion.”

Verbal feedback from Reporters in another area stated that having views of children and young people through advocacy has made a huge difference to the children’s hearing panel members’ confidence to decide without deferring.

Supportive work of Our Hearings, Our Voice Board Members

16. In November 2020, the Scottish Government made a successful project bid to Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) to support parts of the programme of work to develop the children’s hearings advocacy scheme. We asked the Board for help to improve and develop child/young person appropriate information about children’s advocacy for children’s hearings.
17. The feedback we received from the OHOV Board Members who joined the workshops included:
 - [the dedicated website about children’s hearings advocacy.](#) It was good (cheery, colourful, visual, simple, organised, informative, helped you understand what advocacy is) but it could be better. Put the website in Gaelic, make sure the colours are right for people with dyslexia or visual impairments, make the language easier to read for young ones, add a section for young people’s own experiences to hear how it works from them.
 - **the leaflet.** These were not good for children and young people – boring, needed fun fonts, more input from children and young people, not something children/young people would pick up, not easy for younger children.
 - **promoting independent advocacy to children and young people.** They told us the best ways to promote could include – adverts to reach larger audience, mention it in hearings and in schools, put posters in schools, social work buildings, children’s health clinics, and interactive media e.g. video and social media.

18. We used this feedback and made the website better, making changes to keep it clear and simple, and the OHOV Board Members shared their experiences of what advocacy means to them. This features on the children's hearings advocacy website here: [How advocacy can help - Hearings Advocacy \(hearings-advocacy.com\)](http://hearings-advocacy.com)
19. The OHOV Board Members ideas helped to develop posters that have been printed and distributed to the children's hearing centres and we are working on getting the posters to the other places suggested.
20. The resources developed, including the poster in a downloadable and printable format, are available on the children's hearings advocacy website resources tab: [Resources - Hearings Advocacy \(hearings-advocacy.com\)](http://hearings-advocacy.com)
21. There is more to do around evaluating how well things are working. Views of children and young people will be an essential part of this and we will ask the OHOV if they would be interested in helping to design evaluation tools. The OHOV Board Members also reminded us that Champions' Boards and other children and young people's networks could help too. We want to find ways to do this well and will explore opportunities.

Part 3 - Key themes and outputs reported by the advocacy organisations

Evidence of children and young people supported by advocacy at their Hearings

22. This data is from financial year 2019-20. It is information that has been reported to Scottish Government from advocacy provider organisations as part of the Grant reporting requirements. The information recorded mostly covers the period from when the services officially launched from November 2020 although the services were active in some local authority areas a little earlier.
23. From the information on new referrals made to the organisations for children's hearing advocacy, **543 children and young people accessed advocacy**. Of the referrals reported, 527 were to the primary provision and 16 to the alternate with the main reason being to mitigate conflict for siblings being supported.
24. It is probable the reported number of referrals is an under representation. Some children and young people will already have been accessing advocacy from organisations through other provision (for example services commissioned by the local authority) and have then transferred, as intended, between arrangements. These children and young people would not have been recorded as new referrals. Of the information that has been available, the breakdown by local authority area is as follows:

New referrals to the children's advocacy provider organisations

25. This information on new referrals for independent advocacy for children's hearings was provided by the 10 provider organisations in Grant monitoring reports.

Local authority	Primary provision	Alternate provision
Aberdeen City	20	
Aberdeenshire	16	
Angus	16	
Argyll & Bute	4	
Clackmannanshire	3	
Dundee	11	
Dumfries & Galloway	39	
East Ayrshire	16	<5
East Dunbartonshire	5	
East Lothian	16	<5
East Renfrewshire	2	
Edinburgh	32	<5
Falkirk	12	
Fife	44	
Glasgow	19	<5
Highland	9	
Inverclyde	6	

Perth & Kinross	59	
Midlothian	13	<5
Moray	3	
North Ayrshire	53	
North Lanarkshire	10	
Orkney	1	
Renfrewshire	34	
Scottish Borders	9	
Shetland	0	
South Ayrshire	17	
South Lanarkshire	21	
Stirling	2	
West Dunbartonshire	12	
West Lothian	9	
Western Isles	14	
Unattributed		6
TOTAL	527	16

Sources of referrals

26. **The main source where referrals were made was from social work representing 88%.** Other sources of referrals included 7% from family or self, 2% from another advocacy provider, the other 3% covering carers, school and safeguarders.

Sex and Gender

27. Of those children and young people who responded and from the data reported on sex and gender, **47% were male and 53 % female.** Some chose not to say and less than **1%** identified as transgender or non-binary.

Ethnicity

28. Of those children and young people who responded and from the data reported on ethnicity, **78% identified as White Scottish or British.** A further **9%** White other, **2%** Polish, **9%** preferred not to say, and less than **1%** identified as Black, Asian British, or Mixed race.

Age of children and young people receiving advocacy services

29. Of all children and young people supported by advocacy services; **2%** were aged under 5 years olds (65% of these were 4 years old); **53% were aged from 5 to 10 years old;** **38%** were aged from 11 to 15 years old; and **6%** were aged 16 or 17.

Method of participation

30. **Over 500 children and young people were supported at their Hearings in the period.** Organisations reported this in varying levels of detail. Standardising the level of detail we receive from organisations in future years is an area we will continue to work towards – it is important to plan on the basis of robust data. 46% reported on the number of Hearings attended with no further details around the method of participation. Of the other 54%, information tells us for these Hearings:
- 11% were physical meetings attended by the child/young person and their advocacy worker;
 - 20% were physically meetings with the advocacy worker attending on behalf of the child/young person;
 - 32% were virtual meetings attended by the child/young person and their advocacy worker;
 - 32% were virtual meetings attended by the advocacy worker attending on behalf of the child/young person; and
 - 2% were specified as virtual meetings for Court proceedings where child and/or advocacy worker attended.
31. There was also numbers reported where the child's views were submitted to Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) in writing before the Hearing. This was not consistently reported in a way that permits any weight to be accorded to the data. Changes to how this information is captured will inform future data collections.

Signposting to other services

32. This category of information was lightly reported in the initial period of service start up. From the information received, signposting to other service activity included referring to the alternate advocacy provider to manage conflict for sibling groups, to solicitors and other advocacy provision including My Rights, My Say, and for Child Protection case meetings.

Relationships between the advocacy organisations

Outputs - Scottish Government working with the advocacy organisations continue to work together on enhanced data reporting. Organisations have adjusted and improved data management systems to meet the service reporting criteria.

Scottish Government continues to monitor the validity of the data to evidence benefits for children and young people and inform assessments of resource and allocation requirements for the services. A data reporting template was produced in May 2021 to try to provide more consistency across all the reporting categories.

33. All of the provider organisations have commented on the very good relationships that have been built up between the providers themselves, and between providers and Scottish Government. The establishment of a National Providers Network, of which all 10 of the portfolio organisations are members, has proved an invaluable source of support and guidance for some organisations, new to child advocacy, or new to children’s hearings advocacy. Sharing of documents was commented on by most of the smaller organisations with a request to especially thank the Chair of the National Providers Network, Tracey McFall from Partners in Advocacy for her willingness to share documents and provide advice and support.
34. A National Providers Network note commented that “partnership outcomes across all providers will be vital to ensure the Scottish Government has the learning across the whole project and the impact it is having on a national basis. The National Providers Network has a key role in this, not only to help build and sustain relationships but also to help upskill the organisations who have never worked with children, provide consistency in approach and ensure that they can review project delivery and impact every year.”
35. The National Providers Network initially identified three elements to support the forming of the group and implementation of the service: A Terms of Reference document; clear communication with, and for, children and young people; and Outcomes and Reporting.
36. Similarly, the Children’s Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference Group (ERG) is highly valued by the advocacy providers. The ability to discuss matters, not only with the Scottish Government but also with the other public bodies and professionals surrounding the child at their Hearing is hugely appreciated by all providers.
37. Everyone felt the Scottish Government team were approachable, ‘understood the issues’ and offered advice or actions to address barriers/situations. Providers had kindly remarked that the government team “got it” and were very much of the mind-set that the partners were all in this effort together to benefit the children we serve.

National Provider Network (NPN)

38. The network of ten organisations who provide independent advocacy to children and young people at children’s hearings in Scotland have an important role in helping children and young people’s voices to be heard, their wishes taken into account and their rights upheld. The organisations created the National Providers Network from summer 2020. The network developed shared aims with the purpose of supporting the national coverage of independent advocacy in the most consistent and cohesive way possible. The underpinning ethos of the network was to ensure children and young people had access to independent advocacy when they needed it in the Children’s Hearing system. A key function of the National Providers Network was to collaboratively work together to share practice, learning and challenges.

39. In March 2021, it had become clear there was a great opportunity to align outcomes measurement across all providers where possible by developing an outcomes framework and tools that would enhance our understanding of the experiences of children and young people in the Hearings system. From the summer of 2021, the network partners agreed a focus on improving how they could evidence the impact of the advocacy role for those they support. In particular, they wanted to develop:
- Tools to measure outcomes that are suitable for the children and young people they work with
 - Consistency in the outcomes used across the network
 - A means to collect evidence from a range of sources
40. The project on measuring and evidence outcomes has been taken forward and resources will be shared on conclusion of the work.

Outputs - The National Providers Network has demonstrated very effective collaborative working between provider organisations, with a shared agenda to raise and address practice matters to provide the best possible professional advocacy service for children and young people.

Scottish Government have committed to continue to be available, transparent and honest with providers and partners and to remain open to suggestions and ideas to provide enhancements to the service.

The work of the National Providers Network and the Children's Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference Group is invaluable in driving forward ambitions for the advocacy provision.

Advocacy worker's role within Hearings

41. In 2020, a couple of organisations reported being asked by the local Reporter not to attend the Hearing. This linked to IT and technology difficulties in managing virtual Hearings. The IT platform that SCRA were operating to enable virtual Hearings allowed a limited/fixed number of connections at any one time nationally. It was essential to minimise the numbers as too many connections made the whole platform unstable. Whilst asking advocacy workers not to attend the Hearing was perceived by some as the "easy option", it was not only advocacy professionals who were asked not to attend the Hearing. However, as with every Hearing, all duties were being followed regarding the need to consider children had had the opportunity to express their views and these needed to be considered.

42. Advocacy workers say that they challenged this reported position. They continued to insist on each occasion that the rights of the child/young person are upheld along with other reasons why the advocacy worker needed to attend. SCRA had no issue with just challenge of the position by Providers and if a child wished to be supported by an advocacy worker, then they should be.
43. Another issue arose around the opportunities to discuss the role of advocacy with a child. If a child was not present at a Hearing, it was reported that advocacy was not discussed. It was unclear if the child had been given the opportunity to hear about and take up advocacy support. Discussions with the providers, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) resulted in an agreement that the practice note could be more explicit to allow a discussion about the child's views, and whether they had been obtained, during the Hearing. SCRA agreed to place more emphasis in the practice note - that allowed for the ethos surrounding advocacy in the hearings to become more apparent.

Other professionals' roles in the Hearings

44. A small number of advocacy organisations reported issues with other professionals and organisations operating in the Hearings space. The types of matters raised included challenges in relationships with social work - ensuring that professionals acknowledged and understood the added value of an independent advocacy service. A particular example was raised where there was confusion around wider family support from services. A Scottish Government intervention helped to provide a fuller understanding, and this resulted in more referrals flowing to the advocacy organisation from social workers for children and young people to find out more about independent advocacy and get support at their Hearings if they wanted it.
45. Some concerns were raised following feedback from Children's Panel Members about social work sometimes appearing to 'gate keep' referrals. A range of examples were noted. They all ultimately highlighted a need for all professionals and agencies around the child to continue to work together to ensure the role of independent advocacy is understood, discussed with a child/young person at the earliest point, and encouraging a referral to be made into the advocacy service.
46. Organisations identified a few practice issues around late referrals being received. Another topic of discussion around referrals that has been raised with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration - locally and nationally - has been the routes into advocacy services. Action has been taken to ensure that advocacy workers are being informed about upcoming Hearing dates for those children and young people who have an advocacy worker supporting them.

Engagement with local authorities, Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, Children’s Hearings Scotland, alternate providers

47. All of the providers reported on their networking activities and communication with local authority staff, Children’s Reporters and alternate providers in their area. Many had also forged links with schools and educationalists. Everyone agreed that the success of the service to date has been closely linked to the good relationships and collaborative, partnership working.
48. Whilst there were very good examples of good networking producing positive outcomes, there unfortunately were also a couple of instances where things were not always running smoothly and a further concerted effort, or intervention from Scottish Government, was required.
49. A number of organisations have developed and delivered “awareness raising” sessions. These have taken different formats, e.g. bite sized videos, Zoom participatory meetings (relevant local organisations invited) presentations to Children’s Panel Members, and participation in children’s hearings training events hosted by Children’s Hearings Scotland.
50. In terms of strengthening strategic engagement, organisations reported a wide range of activity, including: regular attendance at practice improvement fora, child protection sub-groups, advocacy working groups, Corporate Parenting Boards, Children’s Right’s working groups, local governance groups, and the national Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP). Some concerns have been raised by local areas that the resource initially allocated will not be sufficient to meet demand. Concerns have also been raised by local partners about the limited time available to advocacy workers to engage with children and young people. In some areas, referrals to advocacy had been made late, meaning on some occasions the advocacy worker has had only a couple of days to engage with the child/young person. Self-evidently, this could be problematic due to the time it takes to build trusting and productive relationships. We have made clear in local areas that any learning, gaps or identified need should be raised at the National Providers Network and Expert Reference Group. Referral timings are being discussed and improved on a localised basis but should matters not improve then escalation will be required through the National Providers Network, Expert Reference Group and ultimately at national government level. It should be noted though there exists the potential to ask the Hearing to defer if the required discussions between the child and the advocacy worker have been unable to take place.

Publicity and promotion materials

51. During the year, the [dedicated website for children’s hearings advocacy](#) has been developed and launched. We continue to monitor usage and make tweaks to ensure it is a useful source of information for children and young people. As mentioned earlier in the report, we worked with Board Members from Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) to ensure the content is child friendly and engaging for young people. We hope to continue to work with OHOV young people to develop further publicity and promotion materials.

52. All organisations reported awareness raising activity in support of the advocacy service in their local area. Examples of work included awareness raising with child protection colleagues, head teachers, local solicitors, school nurses, Police Scotland, children's residential homes, safeguarders, other third sector organisations working with children and young people and Corporate Parenting Boards.
53. One organisation mentioned an online service specifically for young people that was developed to use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to expand reach, and these were regularly updated with posts and information. One organisation also wrote out to all children and young people needing support and provided free post envelopes. Letters to children from the advocacy workers asked how they were feeling, and included quizzes, pictures, drawings etc. - inviting responses in any way that felt right for children. Several pictures and drawings were received back.
54. Some organisations are developing a new self-referral system that will generate more referrals and spread, by word of mouth, the advantages of the advocacy provision. This new system will be child friendly, allowing children and young people to self-refer or others to make referrals on their behalf out with normal "office" hours at times that suit them.
55. One organisation worked with a local social enterprise company on the design aspect of information leaflets developed for children and young people and potential referrers. By taking into consideration the different ages and stages of children and young people the designer consulted with children and young people in relation to its work and will be using feedback gained from that process in the final design.

Recruitment and Training

56. Advocacy organisations used the first part of 2019-20 preparing for the service to go live.
57. Advocacy workers were recruited through a variety of means - generating a very broadly skilled and knowledgeable workforce. For example, some roles were filled by staff already practicing advocacy within the organisations, and others were recruited into specific new dedicated roles. At least one enhanced recruitment supported by partner agencies where a person with care experience was successfully recruited into an advocacy project worker post.
58. Recruitment processes in most cases had to be adapted and managed completely virtually as a consequence of Coronavirus. All posts were successfully filled and attracted strong candidate pools. By August 2020 the majority of recruitment had concluded with the exception of some capacity for alternate provision.

59. Organisations developed induction and orientation specifically aligned to the National Practice Model and the other frameworks underpinning the new services. Much of this was adapted for completion remotely (from home based working). PVG clearances were also obtained. National Practice Model training sessions were developed in-house. One provider offered the opportunity to other providers to join their staff training sessions.
60. Staff recruited before end of August 2020 completed the mandatory 'making advocacy real in the modernised children's hearings system' training delivered by Clan Childlaw. A total of 79 advocacy workers and managers completed the training.
61. The mandatory pre-service training was designed to provide a legally informed understanding of the Children's Hearing system including the rights and duties of the child to support advocacy workers to understand how they need to fulfil their roles supporting the child/young person within this legal framework. The training covered modules including: Background and Referral, Children's Rights, Relevant Person's Rights, Who's Who, Hearings Decisions, and Leaving Care. It was delivered through a combination of theory based reading, recorded presentations and a facilitated interactive session.
62. Post-course evaluation was captured, and used to inform the plans for on-going training needs. The Scottish Government convened a meeting of the Expert Reference Group Training and CPD training sub-group members in November 2020 to review the feedback to develop plans for the ongoing mandatory training aspect and broader training and CPD needs of the children's hearings advocacy workforce. The longer-term ambition to provide children's advocacy workers with a professional qualification remains in our focus.
63. Some good examples were shared whereby local councils provided advocacy workers access to their eLearning platforms to allow them to complete Child Protection training remotely.
64. The Scottish Government asked organisations to provide details for those staff who have joined organisations after August 2020 and need to undertake the mandated training. The second round of induction training was planned to be delivered from 1 June 2021 in two components:
 - Self-study part (approximately 4 hours of training) involving the completion of e-learning models of: reading, pre-recorded video presentations, quiz to test learning and a certificate on completion. This covers the same five modules to be completed within 4 weeks: Background and Referral; Who's Who; Children's Rights; Hearing Decisions; and Leaving Care.
 - This would be followed by an interactive session (approximately 2 hours of training) involving practice discussion using case studies. This will likely be facilitated online using Zoom or another web conferencing tool. Two dates were arranged for September.
65. Any new staff starting will be able to complete the self-study e-learning immediately on taking up their role.

66. All staff who completed the 'induction' level training will also be invited to complete annual refresher training sessions to update and develop their knowledge and understanding of the law. For example, this may include developments like the new participation rights for siblings commencing from July 2021.

Advocacy Practice

67. All organisations have been adapting to the fluid nature of the on-going Coronavirus pandemic measures. Individual advocacy has been delivered via a blended model, including digital. Organisations have offered the opportunity, where preferable, to engage face-to-face (ensuring situations are risk assessed) with the child/young person within the local community such as schools or local community facilities, or via digital means, where this has been preferable or indeed necessary, due to stricter lockdown rules. A range of methods have been used for remote contact including Google Hangouts, telephone, Zoom and WhatsApp. As mentioned under the technology discussion earlier in this paper, there have been a number of challenges. For example, it has proven difficult in some cases to contact children when all communication has been through parent's or carer's phone, and ensure that children have privacy to speak openly with their advocacy worker. One organisation have resorted to "old school" methods - handwritten letters where children and young people have limited internet access and time has allowed.
68. The preference of most advocacy workers is to meet with children/young people face-to-face to build relationships of trust, confidence and to develop good, effective communications. In the later part of 2020 when some restrictions and guidance on movement and contact eased to different degrees in local areas, it was possible for some organisations to safely increase the number of face-to-face meetings, much like the Children's Hearing System in recovery phases.
69. Barriers in late 2020 included some schools refusing entry to advocacy workers where they considered the pupils had limited understanding of social distancing.
70. One advocacy organisation summed this challenge up; "We do not see recent digital developments due to coronavirus restrictions and more traditional ways of engaging with children and young people as an 'either-or'. We want to give children and young people the choice of approaches that suit them and as an organisation, we have a role in helping empower children and young people to choose which approach is best for them. Learning from recent national events concerning coronavirus created opportunity to resource alternative approaches about how we engage, communicate and create opportunities for children and young people to fully participate in sharing views and choices. One of these approaches is Digital Talking Mats – originally developed for adults with learning disabilities." A number of the organisations have invested in using this approach. Those who have been using it for longer have reported a positive response from children and young people.

71. Where practice examples/case studies have been provided to Scottish Government, they have proven really beneficial in aiding our understanding of the range of circumstances and challenges facing advocacy organisations. We encourage all providers to provide us with “good news” stories, as well as highlighting difficulties and challenges.

Children under 5 years of age

72. The Scottish Government met 12 May 2021 with the multi-agency team from Glasgow Infant and Family team (GIFT) to learn more about their work they do in relation to children under five years of age. We were able to learn from them their experiences of working with / understanding / advocating for infants and very young children within vulnerable families. Some of our providers have reported working with children under five, but that has tended to be the exception rather than the working practice. This is an area we would like to explore further.

Policy intent

73. Scottish Government is very grateful for the advice, knowledge and explanation of practice by advocacy providers that have resulted in ongoing positive adaptations to policy. We will continue to work with providers and the Expert Reference Group members to ensure our policy works well for children, and for those working with them. We have provided clarification to policy on the following issues:
- Out of authority placement – local provider takes on the advocacy work and liaises with the “home” authority when the child moves location to ensure a smooth transition/handover.
 - Difficulty gaining access to grounds of referral - approaching Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) for copies of papers – even with a signed mandate from the child, is not permissible. Some advocacy workers were experiencing difficulties seeing the grounds of referral due to Coronavirus restrictions that prevented face-to-face meetings, these would usually be shared by the child/young person. Relaxation of the restrictions appears to have resolved this issue.
 - Late referrals – more work to be done with raising awareness and ensuring referrals are coming in reliably from all legitimate avenues. Organisations have been working with SCRA both locally and nationally regarding referral routes into the services and ensuring that advocacy workers are being informed about upcoming Hearing dates for children and young people they are supporting.
 - Gap in communication between senior managers and practitioners – difficulties getting to speak to social workers under current circumstances/pressures – sub group of the Expert Reference Group reconvened to discuss what more can be done to get to practitioners.

Outcomes Reporting

74. One organisation has developed and embedded an internal outcomes based approach aligned with the national GIRFEC³ framework. Children and young people's outcomes are focussed on evidencing the impact of the advocacy role. Each child/young person will work towards a maximum of 2-3 outcomes. These are assessed by the advocacy worker with direct involvement from the child/young person and the level of involvement in the process is determined by their age, stage and any additional support needs they may have. A grading system of 1-5 is used: 1 meaning the outcome has been achieved and 5 meaning significant support is required to achieve the outcome:
- Increased awareness of Rights
 - Contribute to planning and decision making
 - Views and opinions voiced and acted upon
 - Able to report safety concerns/complaints
 - Learn advocacy and associated tasks
 - Access information on health, rights or support
75. Another organisation has been developing evaluation questionnaires which fits with both the National Practice Model and Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) Independent Advocacy Outcomes. An online survey will be the first preference (due to coronavirus) with a paper option available. Options were being considered about how best to involve children and young people in this development process (given social distancing restrictions).
76. Another organisation has scoped out the purchase of a young person specific outcomes tool. The preferred option is a physical slider board which the young person themselves uses to place themselves on a sliding scale of 1 to 10 in respect of a variety of questions. This could be used at the beginning and end of the advocacy relationship to track confidence, understanding and outcomes before and after advocacy support. As a tactile tool, it is more attractive to young people than questionnaires or forms.
77. Work has started in developing a national outcome reporting tool. This will provide consistency across Scotland and will be invaluable in providing an evidence base for Scottish Government officials to go to Ministers to discuss expansion and appropriate resourcing of the advocacy provision. The group of providers are working with Wren and Greyhound to create a bespoke national outcome reporting tool.

³ [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Children and Young People – their involvement in service improvement

78. Some examples of young people' voices being heard were:

- Young people involved in the development of video material.
- Workshops with young people from the Board of Our Hearings, Our Voice to advise on development of publicity materials, such as leaflets, posters and the dedicated website.
- One organisation identified 2 young people (with experience of the Children's Hearing System) who volunteered to be involved in giving their views and feedback on publicity materials, communications and what worked well/not so well for them.
- Button Mice is used as a tool for communication with children and young people. They have been endorsed and promoted by a Child Protection Committee in East Ayrshire area for some 3 years. Buttons Mouse boxes are in many of the schools, and police, social work and health also use them with children. There are many stories about the mice, dealing with loss, abuse, neglect, coronavirus, feeling safe, etc. The evaluation report after year one showed that they had a huge impact on the children who used them. They are designed using evidence based research around trauma and therapeutic play so are designed to support children and help them to talk about their issues. One organisation started work with these in relation to children attending children's hearings and using the mouse sized replica of the Hearing environment to help them understand the process and to talk about their thoughts. Find out more on Buttons Mice Facebook Page or on twitter @ButtonsMice.
- One organisation appointed a former MSYP onto their Board of Trustees.
- Another organisation mentioned getting feedback from young people at different parts of their children's hearing journeys. They have reviewed existing approaches to capturing the views of children and young people, referrers and partner agencies. Feedback will be sought at various stages of service delivering using iPads, Survey Monkey, questionnaires and review processes that involve children and young people. Feedback from children and young people will also be shared with key partners to influence improvement in local policy and practice. The approach to service feedback will also involve the participation of children and young people in co-designing and evaluating materials.
- Another organisation had an internal short-life working group develop resources to help them to capture a child's experiences of the Hearing and how advocacy helped them to understand the process, participate in their Hearing, and explain the outcome and their rights.
- A Mind of My Own platform online platform allowing children and young people to express their feelings and views digitally was explored with a view to organisations using this, however, a number of drawbacks of the app were identified and not all organisations felt they would want to use this.
- Most organisations mentioned sourcing several approaches about how they engage, communicate and create opportunities for children and

young people to fully participate in sharing their views and choices. One of these approaches is the Digital Talking Mats.

- One organisation is using their own learning from working with children and young people during lockdown. They concluded the first preference will be to undertake feedback/evaluations via a telephone survey conducted by a member of the team who has not had direct involvement with the person. An online survey and paper form will also be available where this is required or requested.

79. A dedicated website about Hearings Advocacy ([Home - Hearings Advocacy \(hearings-advocacy.com\)](https://hearings-advocacy.com)) was developed. Other publicity materials and activity has included developing posters and leaflets. Direct input from Our Hearings Our Voice Board has helped to develop these resources. Information about the national scheme is also available on the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub⁴. The advocacy organisations funded to provide the national scheme have also promoted services with local partners involved in children's hearings to ensure children and young people know how they can get advocacy support

Systems, process and procedure

80. Organisations considered and, where necessary, made changes to case management systems/software to meet the reporting criteria. Adjustments were necessary to keep work with children and young people confidential and separate from work done by the adult team by implementing a permissions system.

81. Organisations' work also included updating and revising important policies and procedures to meet the new project. Some of these were specifically updated in line with Coronavirus guidance on safe working practices. Various revisions were made, including child protection policy; complaints procedure and complaints form including child and young person's versions; risk assessment policy for individual advocacy; personal safety and lone working policy. In addition individual organisations reported:

- a child friendly complaint form and complaints procedure, which includes information about complaints escalation, are available to download from the children's hearings advocacy page on their website. Information on making a complaint is also included in their 'Having an Advocacy Worker' information pack which is given to children and young people at the start of working together
- Staff and Supervision Policy have been reviewed, and in one case it was mentioned this integrated twice-yearly appraisals as well as an annual Professional Development Plan process
- one organisation mentioned it has developed new guidance on 'working remotely' with children and young people in line with the different digital approaches being used and this forms part of the staff induction.

⁴ [The Children's Hearing: What Educational Practitioners should know | Learning resources | National Improvement Hub](#)

Use of alternate provision and Unmet Demand

82. The use of alternate provision is not uniformly being applied across Scotland. Some organisations have not used their alternate provision at all, whilst others have used the provision in limited circumstances. This has prompted a call to review the alternate provision to establish whether the three circumstances – choice, consistency and conflict – are the best way to understand how alternate provision can work. The sibling contact support (from July 2021) may provide more use of the alternate provision, particularly the “conflict” aspect. We will monitor that situation carefully. The National Providers Network will give consideration to the alternate provision and amendments that may be necessary to how we use that resource.
83. Organisations who have used the alternate resource have reported it being used where there has been a perceived conflict of interest. This mainly comes into play where there is either a single advocacy worker in a location, or where more than one child in a family is looking for advocacy support. Three organisations have reported referrals for alternate provision. The numbers of cases has been small and has mostly been used for the purpose of managing conflict for sibling groups. The working practices between primary and alternate providers appears to be developing well within the local areas.
84. The children’s hearings advocacy provision by design works alongside existing advocacy. It should only enhance the offer available for children and young people - specifically to support them at their children’s hearings. The provision was designed to be insulated from existing capacity for advocacy in wider children’s services - so that those local authorities who had already invested in children’s advocacy were not penalised. Where the local authority has already contracted an advocacy organisation to work with the child or young person, this new provision will not, and should not replace that work.
85. In terms of unmet demand there has not been a great deal to report due to Coronavirus, and the reduction in actual Hearings being held. There have been some reports of capacity issues. One organisation reported being unable to support a child through their Hearing due to the capacity of the advocacy worker in a particular area. That situation was resolved by the provider creating a short waiting list, and as the provider who works over multiple local authorities it was also possible to move personnel around to meet the spike in demand.
86. One organisation highlighted requests for advocacy issues other than Children’s Hearings. This was becoming common for both young people and referrers requesting advocacy for other issues out with the funding terms/provision. Examples included, for Looked After and Accommodated Children Reviews, Family Group Decision Making meetings and Section 11 court proceedings. The organisation recorded six specific requests like this in one-quarter reporting period.

87. The same organisation reported some young people weren't able to access an advocacy service at all, and others, like that detailed in the following case study, were those they were able to do some work with but who also required advocacy around other, related issues:

Case Study: Our limited remit when Children's Hearings and Section 11 proceedings are both involved

One of our advocacy workers has been supporting a child who is on a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) but also involved in family court proceedings regarding contact and residency (Section 11). The child has strong views about contact that they wanted to express to the people making decisions about their life. However, once the advocacy worker found out more about the situation, it became clear that decisions about contact were all being made in the family court and not in the Children's Hearing System. Court dates were happening regularly to discuss contact and the child wanted to have their say, but the advocacy worker had to explain that she could not help the child do this in the court because she could only help the child at their Hearing. This was confusing and frustrating for the child, who could not really understand why the advocacy worker could help them communicate with some decision-makers but not all of them. As the child saw it, the family court was making important decisions about their life and they wanted the advocacy worker's support to express their views to the court, so they felt listened to. It was also very frustrating for the advocacy worker not to be able to support this child to express their wishes to all the professionals involved in the child's life.

88. The Scottish Government have been clear that reporting gaps in service provision – such as the case study above - will help to build the bigger picture of mapping service provision and identifying areas for improvement. The learning captured will inform other areas of advocacy provision for example, in implementing the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 which places a duty on Scottish Ministers to ensure the availability of child advocacy services in family court cases. We will also use evidence to continue to review and adapt the hearings advocacy provision to ensure it follows the principles set out in The Promise.
89. Scottish Government have asked all providers to consider their ability and approaches to working with sibling groups in light of the new laws due to commence from July 2021 giving greater participation rights to siblings on matters of contact. As a result, some are adapting their approaches to be able to provide support for sibling groups. Further work is being progressed within the National Providers Network and Expert Reference Group groups.

Innovative Approaches/Good Practice

90. The use of a "physical" diagnostic tool – the Richter scale – has been very well received by advocacy partners for one organisation. A series of questions designed to allow the child to assess how they feel and move a "marker" on a board is helping the advocacy worker to build up a relationship with the child. Feedback suggest the child is happier moving the marker than trying to articulate what they feel.

91. One organisation has been able to create a young people space (by renting the office next door to their premises). It has a separate entrance so children do not need to move through the office space to get to the conference room. The space has a large TV screen/monitor so the child can connect into their Hearing but feel safe in the space that is familiar. This has the added advantage of the advocacy worker to go on mute and be able to speak to the child and make sure they have said all they wanted to say to the panel members.
92. One organisation was able to use a head teacher's room to allow a child to connect virtually to their Hearing. Going forward the possibility of providing IT kit to schools in the local area to establish a "hearings" space is being scoped out.
93. Pay as You Go Sim Cards / Data - Providers identified that not all families have access to internet or even mobile phones. In addition to this access to data and the cost of that can be problematic for a number of families. Providers have utilised re-conditioned contract phones that are no longer used and have purchased 'pay as you go' pre-loaded SIM cards. Families will have the ability to access to these phones (on loan) to enable children and young people and families to engage and communicate with their advocacy worker in preparation for and to participate in their Hearing.
94. Mini Portable Wi-Fi Dongles - For those providers who support children and young people across both city and rural areas internet access can be inconsistent. Providers identified that portable connections to Wi-Fi will enable the children and young people's advocacy workers to access Wi-Fi while they are working in these areas.

Part 4 - Preparing for service start up and making improvements with partners – Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) and Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS)

95. SCRA Localities were open to contact with providers including during the period of lockdown as a result of Coronavirus. These dialogues continued to be developed as the Children’s Hearing System began to operate in a more recognisable way.
96. Virtual children’s hearings have had some limitations, as the result of the technology that was initially being used to operate them. As a result reporters needed to try to keep attendees to a minimum. However, if a child had the support of an advocacy worker and wants that worker to participate in their virtual Hearing then they made every effort to facilitate this.
97. Children’s Hearings Scotland briefed all panel members and the area support teams. Children’s Hearings Scotland Learning Academy developed a new learning module on the national advocacy scheme in collaboration with Partners in Advocacy, Children 1st and Aberdeen Civil Legal Aid Office. The module is mandatory for all Panel Members. Children’s Hearings Scotland have had 2537 members of the Children’s Hearings System community successfully complete this course.
98. All Panel Members of the Children’s Hearing were briefed by June 2020 and Panel Members could inform children and young people of the availability of advocacy services. However, this key practice change was not fully embedded at this point as a result of the massive operational changes brought about by virtual children’s hearings and the delay in commencement of section 122. This practice began, as standard, from November 2020.
99. Advocacy workers should become involved with a child at the earliest opportunity. That is why SCRA altered their letters to include a sentence informing children and relevant persons about availability of advocacy services; and developed an email to social workers to confirm practical Hearing arrangements stressing the availability of the local advocacy service.
100. Advocacy workers will not be sent the paperwork for a Children’s Hearing. They will gather information from the child who would like them to be involved and from the allocated social worker if that becomes necessary.
101. A cornerstone of the advocacy worker’s relationship with a young person is trust. This develops over time and it is important to realise that effective advocacy support should not be last minute or ‘parachuted’ in for a child in a crisis situation. The support of an advocacy worker will stay in place for as long as a child thinks it is required. The support given by the advocacy worker may change over time and as a child grows in confidence and understanding.

102. If a child wants the support of an advocacy worker then they should be linked into the service. It is for the child to approach the service, not the other way round. Social workers will be talking all children through the benefits of advocacy support and will be linking children with services if they are interested.
103. In a joint update from Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and Children's Hearings Scotland in February 2021, each of the locality areas summarised their key experiences and thoughts from the last few months. This also highlighted areas for further thought and discussion including:
- How the 'trusting' relationship over time can be maintained between an advocacy worker and a child when their involvement is limited to children's hearings.
 - A consistent approach amongst advocacy providers to key decisions (like the decision to manage all advocacy support / input using technology) would be helpful – particularly amongst different providers operating in Local Authority areas which come under a single SCRA locality.
 - A consistent approach to the use of language would be less confusing – particularly using the term advocacy worker rather than Advocates (given the role Advocates can and do have in a number of children's hearings court proceedings).
 - Additional consideration and time needs to be spent on really thinking through information sharing between partners, particularly in areas of the Children's Hearing System where advocacy workers have not previously been involved (like court work). A number of questions specifically around this area of work have already been raised and more definite positions should be developed.
 - A mechanism for gathering independent feedback about the involvement of advocacy workers (from children, families and from decision makers) needs to be developed and that feedback shared for the benefit of everyone. Some Panel Members have suggested that a national approach should be taken to gathering feedback from local areas around the operation of advocacy in Hearings.

Part 5 - Digital innovations to enable children and young people to engage and participation in the Children's Hearing System

Outputs - Providing new ways to engage, communication and help children, young people and families effectively participate in their Hearing.

Scottish Government awarded organisations extra funds totalling £63,000 in 2020-21 specifically to support digital connectivity as part of the Children's Hearings Recovery Programme under the Winter Plan for Social Protection Package. Organisations used the extra funds for devices, data, other smart technologies and adaptations.

104. Between March 2020 and April 2021 the Children's Hearing System was adapting as best it could to the changing needs and challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic. It had a direct impact on meetings, timeframes and the support systems around young people. New ways of conducting meetings, communicating, and involving young people were being piloted, with mixed results. Who Cares? Scotland captured information during a practice sharing discussions amongst advocacy workers and more formal feedback obtained from them and some young people via a survey in April 2021. The survey provides interesting reflections from advocacy workers who have been involved in the mobilisation of this service. A lot of this information was considered within the digital connectivity funds bid under the Winter Plan for Social Protection Package.
105. All of the organisations reported issues with the technology for virtual Hearings – Vscene.
106. A lot of discussion was had around the access to technology and telephone or internet connectivity for children and young people, and families to actually participate in the relationship building aspect of their advocacy support in the run up to the Hearing, and participating in the Hearing itself. Some, or indeed most of the organisations have already purchased devices or data to support those children and young people who did not already have access. In the case of one organisation, the decision was made to purchase tablets rather than phones so that children and young people could use the device for educational purposes too.
107. As part of the Scottish Government's Winter Plan for Social Protection – Children's Hearing Recovery, the providers of the national children's hearings advocacy scheme identified a range of digital, participative approaches to support children and families to engage with the Children's Hearing System. Additional funding up to £63,000 shared between the organisations was made available in February 2021 to enable providers to facilitate creative ways to work with children and young people and some of the approaches across the providers are explained here.

108. The National Providers Network welcomed the resources to help find new ways to engage, communication and help children, young people and families effectively participate in their Hearing. In addition, the opportunity to invest in smart technology will help continue to provide a high quality COVID adaptive advocacy resource that supports the child or young person have their voice heard, wishes considered and support better decision making from the children's hearing in improving experiences and outcomes for children and young people.
109. The providers collectively continue to discuss and learn from these approaches through the National Providers Network.

Tablets / IT Equipment/ Technology

110. A number of providers have purchased tablets and data packages to be used by the children and young people's advocacy workers when supporting children and young people who experience digital inequalities/exclusion to prepare for and in their Hearing. The aim is for these tablets to be used in face to face meetings to gather views in a variety of different ways. The tablets are easily cleanable and so will ensure we meet health and safety requirements. The tablets also allow flexibility of use and can be loaned temporarily to a child or young person in circumstances where they have no other alternative to participate in their Hearing. Due to the portability, the option to use the tablets to attend remotely can be enabled from schools, homes or other venues away from the advocacy offices.

Mini Portable Wi-Fi Dongles

111. For those providers who support children and young people across both city and rural areas internet access can be inconsistent. Providers identified that portable connections to Wi-Fi will enable the children and young people's advocacy workers to access Wi-Fi while they are working in these areas.
112. Providers have developed a digital consent form, which can also be easily used on the tablets. In line with the technology providers also identified that outcomes and feedback tools will be explored with the new equipment.

Improved spaces for digital children's hearings/meetings – responsive to coronavirus regulations and guidance

113. Some organisations have purchased digital equipment e.g. screens, wide lens camera/ speaker for conference calls and made changes to their office facilities turning meeting rooms into a safe video and conference spaces, which can be used by children and young people to be supported in person by their advocacy worker and attend the Hearing remotely. The technology and layouts enable the advocacy workers to keep socially distanced with improved audio and visual means to participate in video conferencing.

Pay as You Go Sim Cards / Data

114. Providers identified that not all families have access to internet or even mobile phones. In addition to this access to data and the cost of that can be problematic for a number of families. Providers have utilised re-conditioned contract phones that are no longer used and have purchased 'pay as you go' pre-loaded sim cards. Families will have the ability to access to these phones (on loan) to enable children and young people and families to engage and communicate with their advocacy worker in preparation for and to participate in their hearing.

Portal+

115. The Portal+ is smart technology that can be loaned to families to aid remote meeting with their advocacy worker. This device can be used on the floor or table, wherever the child is more comfortable, and enable remote interaction such as Lego building, drawing or other creative tools to support the child have their voice heard and views explored in regards to their Hearing. A safe loaning policy was developed for parents/carers in the safe use of this technology. The Portal+ can be used with MS Teams, Google Hangout or Zoom.

Digital Talking Mats

116. Some providers purchased packages with licences for use by children and young people's advocacy workers. Use of Digital Talking Mats aid independent advocacy workers to gather the views of children and young people for children's hearings with improved and additional communication tools. Talking Mats are installed on new touch screen tablets so they can be used for face-to-face meetings and on the advocacy workers computers for screen sharing when in video meetings with children and young people if working remotely.

Boardmaker

117. One organisation invested in the communication tool that can be used to participate, engage and communicate with children and young people. The purchased licenses enable all advocacy workers to have Boardmaker available for use on their laptops and/or iPads and for children and young people to access Boardmaker on their own device or one provided. This Boardmaker is a software programme that is widely used to support children, young people (and adults) who have difficulties with reading, writing, speaking, listening or interacting. Using pictures and symbols children and young people can be supported to express their views and opinions. The software also contains an extensive library of resources and provides access to forums for staff to share knowledge and experience of using Boardmaker 7.

Part 6 - Funding and expenditure 2019-20 and 2020-21

118. To support the start-up of the national scheme, the Scottish Government awarded 10 organisations who made successful applications through the Expressions of Interest exercise, Grant funding. This was in anticipation of section 122 of the Children (Scotland) Act 2011 and the associated Regulations scheduled to go to the Scottish Parliament for scrutiny and approval in spring. The coronavirus pandemic delayed the parliamentary process of scrutiny until the autumn of 2020, and the commencement of the national service underpinned in statute became fully operational from 21 November 2020.
119. The first round of Grant Offers started in March 2020. The 9 organisations, identified as primary providers were awarded Grant funding for the expenditure to support recruitment of staff and put systems and processes in place to be able to deliver the new national scheme. A total allocation of £203,000 was made through Grant Offers and this was based on organisations anticipated costs provided in applications. Of this total allocation, £112,489.83 was claimed as actual spend.
120. For the financial year April 2020 to March 2021, the Scottish Government renewed the Grant Offer and made awards to the 10 successful organisations to deliver both the primary and alternate children's hearings advocacy provision. The funding allocation for the year was £1.5 million, this included funds to support the mandatory training of the advocacy workers provided by Clan Childlaw and spot purchase arrangements. In this full year, the total claimed as actual spend was £909,915.18. This funding by large supported the primary provision, with £40,293.50 claimed for the delivery of alternate provision. The spot purchase arrangement by invoice was not used.
121. In this same year, further Grant Offer awards were made to the 9 primary provider organisations to support greater safety and digital capacity for advocacy and the children and young people organisations were supporting to manage the impact of coronavirus on the Children's Hearing System. This was to support recovery and the changing needs for children and young people to be able to participate in their children's hearings and beyond e.g. personal digital devices that would both allow them to engage with advocacy but also assist with home schooling as needed. This expedited Grant funding was allocated under the Winter Plan for Social Protection – Children's Hearings Recovery Project. A maximum total of up to £63,000 was divided between the 9 organisations, of this £53,378.90 was claimed as actual spend.
122. Up to end March 2021, the total investment from the Scottish Government directly to the children's hearings advocacy scheme totalled £1,099,784.73.

Part 7 - Acknowledgments

123. The Scottish Government Team would like to thank all of the providers and partner agencies who shared information with us. From our perspective the more information we have, the easier it is for us to provide evidenced, balanced options to Scottish Ministers as we seek to enhance, expand the children's advocacy in children's hearings provision, and to inform policy development in other areas, such as The Promise.
124. We are really pleased with the "can do" attitude and the willingness to work together to make sure we are giving the best support to children and young people through their Hearings journey.

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Scottish Government
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