

**FAO: Chief Social Work Officers
Heads of Children's Services**

1st April 2020

Dear Colleague,

At Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS), we appreciate the strain on Social Work resource at the moment.

We want to work more closely with our Social Work partners in each of the 32 HSCP/Local Authorities to make the task of sharing information and representing the view of the professionals and children and families within hearings as easy as possible. CHS has been working closely with SCRA during the current crisis to ensure that children who require the legal security provided by the children's hearing systems have it. We have done this in a number of ways:

- For the last two weeks and for the next 2 weeks children's hearings have been held 'virtually' with a reporter and 3 panel members. In this two weeks we have protected the orders of around 500 children.
- SCRA has prioritised making decisions for those children whose orders were likely to lapse due to time scales, or needed to be put before the panel due to acute vulnerability. Hearings have been reduced by about 50%.
- Where available, Reporters are endeavouring to seek the views of family members through legal representatives and sharing this with the panel members. A Sheriff this week refused an appeal against

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a recent hearing decision on the basis that such information was available at the time of the hearing.

As we go forward we want to make hearings as participative as possible, including the views of multi-agency partners, or at the very least Social Work, children and families.

We can't do this without understanding how the current crisis is having an impact on how you are able to provide services locally within each of the 32 HSPC/LAs. We wish to implement improvements to how we are currently doing things with you in a way that does not additionally create unnecessary burden to the current challenges you face, and that are realistic in light of the current crisis.

To this end, the identification of a single point of contact within each local authority Social Work team would enable CHS and SCRA to establish a clear channel through which we can understand your local issues, and disseminate any developments we need to share.

If we could please have the names of your designated contact by close-of-play on Tuesday 7th April 2020, we can then quickly establish a communication chain between them, the CHS Area Support Improvement Partners and SCRA Locality Reporter Managers. At a national level we will continue to work closely with SWS too, thereby ensuring at a local and national level we are identifying issues and developing solutions together, alongside Social Work.

Kindest regards,

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