

# Cross-Party Group on Social Work

25 October 2023 and 19:00-20:15

Minute

Present

MSPs

Collette Stevenson  
Fulton MacGregor

Invited guests

Ronnie Barnes – panel member and speaker  
Chloe Riddel – The Promise Scotland and speaker  
Gordon Main – Our Hearings our voices  
Abbie– Young person from our hearings our voices  
Lisa - Young person from our hearings our voices  
Sheriff David Mackie

Non-MSP Group Members

Alison Bavidge  
Emma Young  
Edward McKim  
Alistair Brown  
Frank Reilly  
Jon Gray  
Jo Savege  
Emma Watt  
Julie Wilson  
Charlie McMillan  
Suzanne McGuinness  
Caroline MacKinnon  
Aileen Hemming  
Ruth Buchanan  
Colin Turbett  
Dee Fraser  
Danielle Shull  
Joyce Johnston  
Sarah Anderson  
Claire Young  
Joanna Macdonald  
Judith Turbyne  
Calum Gallacher  
Russell Hogarth

Ben Farrugia  
Jude Currie  
Patricia Munteanu  
Alison Wales

## Apologies

Paul O'Kane MSP

Iona Colvin

Julie Lusk

Kate Ramsden

Karen Hedge

Megan Farr

Rob Gowans

John Dalrymple

Prof. Gary Spolander

## Agenda item 1

Fulton introduced the meeting, welcomed everyone and apologised for the short notice change of time and truncated meeting due to chamber business overrunning.

Fulton asked for the minutes of the previous meeting to be proposed and seconded.

Fulton proposed the minutes of the last meeting.

Danielle Shull seconded the minutes of the last meeting. The minutes were thereby approved.

## Agenda item 2

Chloe Riddell and Sheriff David Mackie, who chaired the hearings system working group, presented to the group on the report *Hearings for Children*.

Chloe explained the Hearing system working group consisted of *Children's Hearings Scotland*, *Scottish Children's Reporter Administration* and *The Promise Scotland*. Chloe then ran through a presentation on findings of the report and how the report was produced. This included the report's chapters; the success of the redesign, the scaffolding, the pathway to the reporter, the introduction of advocacy, legal advice and the Reporter, the reason's the Children's Hearings System has become involved in a child and family's life, the decision-making model, the people making decisions in a Hearing, the participation & preparation before a Hearing, the voices and involvement of children and families, the people working alongside children and their families, the decisions available to the Panel and the support for children & their families, the oversight, enforcement, and accountability overview of a child's order, the accountability of the Children's Hearings System, and the implementation of the recommendations.

Sheriff David Mackie added how significant the process of collaborative redesign was and emphasised that the process allowed everyone involved to be heard from, especially young people. Sheriff Mackie added that the design process spoke to young people from across the country and that the experiences and what they were being told were very similar. Sheriff Mackie also highlighted the importance of seeing this as inquisitorial – not a contest - with the best interest of the child at its heart. The child's plan is therefore a top priority in this within this system and serves as a key thread running through everything.

Fulton MacGregor thanked Chloe and David for their excellent presentations and welcomed the next speaker.

## Agenda item 3

Gordon Main from Our Hearings Our Voice was joined by two young people from the project, Lisa and Abbie, who presented on a project that collected the voices and perspectives of young people in Scotland who have had experience with children's hearings.

Gordon introduced Lisa and Abbie and gave a short introduction with a slide explaining Our Hearing's Our Voice, which outlined that it is an independent Board for children and young people in Scotland who have experience of the Children's Hearings System. The Board is for Children and young people aged 8-18. The focus is to create a shared understanding and long-term improvement in the Hearings System based on children and young people's experiences.

Gordon handed over to Lisa who talked about the consistency of panel members. She said not having the same panel members and having to retell their story again and again was a particular challenge. She also mentioned the lack of power and voice that children often feel when decisions are made about them behind closed doors, and communicated to them at the same time as they are communicated to the wider group at hearings.

Abbie then talked about the language that can be used in hearings and how that affects children. The language used in panel papers for example can be difficult and hurtful for young people.

Lisa then introduced a voice clip from a board member's experience.

A clip for about 90 seconds was played.

Lisa then discussed calls for actions and that they would like social workers to consider these as well. Lisa highlighted the action point on the slide, 'respect my voice by listening believing valuing and including me when making decisions about what happens in my life.'

Abbie then discussed the engagement that OHOV has had with the working group in the production of the report. This included but was not limited to 6 full day sessions, conversations, 40 calls and resulted in change through co-design.

Abbie and Lisa then talked about how children and young people should be supported, the importance of using words that children and young people can understand, making sure young people understand the decisions that are made about them and their family, how recommendations should be implemented, and how children and young people should have a say over when their hearings take place.

These slides continued to show the need for communications to be in easy-to-understand language, for other ways for children and young people to share their views, and in order to make pre-hearing meetings more effective.

Lisa ended by encouraging attendees to read the foreword of the report.

Abbie then discussed the group *Language Leaders* which aims to improve the use of language in the Children's Hearings System. This focusses on language principles, transforming difficult language, stigmatising labels, and a virtual language bin for language.

Lisa and Abbie then shared OHOV's contact details, website and magazine.

Gordon wrapped up the presentation and Fulton thanked Lisa, Abbie and Gordon for the fantastic and thought-provoking presentation.

## Agenda item 4

Fulton introduced Ronnie who spoke about his experiences as a voluntary panel member of nine years.

Ronnie talked about remembering the hearing system coming into being and how progressive and child-centred it was at the time. Ronnie mentioned that the panels recruit widely across the community to be as broad as possible.

Ronnie mentioned that the panel community are interested in the proposition for paid chairs. Ronnie also discussed that it would be possible just now to implement some of the recommendations in the report, especially around consistency.

Ronnie spoke about improvements he has seen in recent times, that *Better Hearings* and advocacy has been improving things in the system. Ronnie reiterated the panel members always want to hear from children and have their voice heard, while accepting there are sometimes flaws in attempting this.

Ronnie mentioned that panel members have ongoing development and how important that is and that the experiences of young people should be central to that.

Ronnie then talked about the process panel members follow for a hearing, discussing the need for panel members to undertake their duties with compassion, consideration, and the ability to act on what children and young people tell them.

Ronnie mentioned that panel members work hard to do the best they can with the tools they have.

Fulton thanked Ronnie for his presentation, and his years volunteering, along with all panel members who volunteer.

Fulton thanked all 6 speakers and opened a Q&A session.

## Agenda item 5

Fulton invited questions from the group membership.

Alison Bavidge highlighted some comments from the chat. Pointing to a question of 5% of budgets being spent on preventative work.

Chloe Riddell answered that it is not a recommendation but a government commitment, noting that it is vital. Chloe invited Sheriff Mackie to respond also.

Sheriff Mackie added that there is no expectation that everything in this report will be acted upon straight away. He noted it is an agenda for transformational change – some of which can be acted on straight away but some which requires further investigation.

Hopefully then spreading budgetary loads. Secondly that so much is to do with states of mind, attitude and practice that don't cost money.

Colin Turbett made a point that resources should be moved upstream and recognises that prevention is better than cure and move resources back into communities.

Alison Bavidge asked if there were any questions for Lisa and Abbie that Gordon could take back.

Russell Hogarth said that it was a fabulous presentation and that the voice of young people must not only be heard but listened to – too often they are not followed up on afterwards. Young people make up 100% of our future and need to be looked after and cared for. We need to ensure young people are given opportunities.

Gordon Main offered OHOV to engage with people further in local areas if helpful and offered to share slides.

## Agenda item 6

Alison Bavidge thanked everyone and committed to writing up a report and sharing the presentations with the group. Mentioned work to be done on tone, language and listening.

Fulton closed the meeting to move onto the AGM.