

ROTA and MANAGEMENT OF HEARINGS SUB-GROUP

MINUTES

THURSDAY 12th OCTOBER 2023, 3.30pm

In attendance: Nicola Harkness, Marion Robinson, Derek Bramma, Edi Hanley, Jacqueline Doherty

Apologies: None

Rota

Now looking for availability for Jan to Mar. SCRA will add information with regards to which hearing slots are required.

Once we move to the TSM then the rota will be issued every two months. As we are likely to move over April/May we may still have the April to June rota organised before the move across.

There are now only 2 virtual hearings per month. PMs unable to sit on face to face hearings will be prioritised for these slots.

The alternate Tuesday slots which were virtual are now f2f and start at 10am – to avoid congestion as the other f2f session begins at 9.30am.

Thursday hearings have now been changed from a 9.30am start to a 1.30pm start – this avoids clashes with court callings.

Suggestion had been made that the AST promote CSAS for swaps as this is the method CHS hope to move to with new TSM. However at this time it is better for PMs to continue in the manner swaps are currently managed – PMs should contact Renfrewshire PMs to seek a swap and then inform LPRs or contact LPRs to ask them to help arrange a swap. This is easier for AST to keep track of swaps and will minimise disruption and confusion for our volunteers.

With new TSM there will be a designated email address or contact number which PMs can use for swaps – including out of hours – but finer details still to be finalised. Specific details have still to be finalised.

Only 14 applicants from latest recruitment drive, therefore this might put pressure on the rota. Suggestion that if East Renfrewshire has surplus applicants then potentially they could join Renfrewshire team, although noted that East Renfrewshire PMs might be required elsewhere.

Recruitment is significantly down nationally.

Note that we need to be careful asking Renfrewshire PMs to cover other areas as it is important that we prioritise Renfrewshire hearings.

Management of Hearings

Sabbaticals

3 in total - 2 M
 1 F

There remains 3 ghost PMs but they have been removed from our stats.

Resignations

1F has resigned and 1F currently unable to complete duties

Panel Strength

Panel Member strength is as follows:

74 PMs in total – 55 F and 19 M

71 active – 54 F and 17 M

Chair qualified 29 PMs – 19F and 10M. Noted that not all chair.

22 active chairs – 14F and 8M Of these two have completed MoH training and just require PDA to be finalised.

There was a discussion around need to have PDA finalized as previously PMs could chair after completing MoH training and indeed were required to do so in order to have the necessary observations.

Hearing Statistics – 14th August to 13th October

- Deferrals – 21

Of these hearings: 7 RP/child not in attendance, 1 no advocate, 4 reports late/missing, 2 insufficient information, 1 safeguarder not in attendance, 2 grounds at court, 1 SW not in attendance, 3 RP hadn't received papers, 1 LR not in attendance, 2 interpreter issues

3 hearings - 2 reasons given, 1 hearing – 3 reasons*

Advocate unavailable	Child unavailable / SW unavailable *
No interpreter	
RP hadn't received papers	LR was attending court
Mum not in attendance	Child not in attendance
No social work report	
Family failed to attend	
No up to date SW report **	
Child (age 14) failed to attend grounds	
SG not in attendance	
RP not in country	
Grounds still at court	
Grounds still at court	
RP in prison only receive 1 of 2 sets of papers	
No SW report	
No family in attendance	
Report not to family in time	
f2f in secure unit rather than virtual requested ***	
No social work report	
Late issue of SW report	
Insufficient information to consider SW recommendation	

Interpreter left	
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** - recommendation to leave secure with no alternative place of residence secured.

*** - this hearing also requested continuity.

Deferral on 1st September was unfortunately avoidable as hearing could have been postponed. PM contacted SCRA on 25th August and was informed that no reports received and weren't expected. The order wasn't due to expire and no interim changes had been identified as being needed by SW. The reporter spoke to SW on afternoon of 31st August and was informed that the family had been advised not to attend as the hearing would be deferred, with no interim measures required.

Reason for SCRA proceeding with such hearings is to make SW accountable for failing to provide report. Discussion followed about impact of this on families and PMs. It is understood that parties need to be held accountable, however consideration needs to be given to PMs as currently they view SCRA's treatment of them in such cases as being very dismissive and of little consequence.

All agreed that this should be reviewed in order to find a more suitable outcome for all.

Deferral on 26th September due to interpreter leaving after over 2.5 hours of discussion. Hearing to be called once RP returns from Poland. Panel continuity has been requested.

- Swaps

August - 13 f2f 1 v September – 13 f2f 4 v October – 5 f2f 36 Total

- Cancelled hearings

11 in total; 5 no cases allocated 2 reporter annual leave 1 RP not in country 1 staff training
2 no reason given (7th September and 2nd October)

Reporter annual leave PM were only informed session was cancelled when PM made contact 5 days before. Reminder to be issued to SCRA staff.

Following an issue where SCRA had asked for PMs to come in early to do an extra case rather than utilise an existing hearing slot (which had yet to be cancelled for PMs) the question was asked as to when hearings are removed from system when it becomes evident they won't be required, e.g. reporter annual leave. These sessions aren't removed from CSAS, although SCRA are aware that they are highly unlikely to be required. 7 days before hearing PMs are advised of cancellation.

Agreement at meeting that PMs should not be asked to come in early to cover an extra case when there is already a slot with 3 PMs assigned on CSAS.

Noted that other areas, rather than advising that a hearing session is cancelled, alert PMs 7 days before that they don't have any allocated cases, but will be on standby. They are then informed 48 hours before if they are required. There was a short discussion around this and agreement at meeting that our current system works well for Renfrewshire so no need to change at present.

- Standby

Two covered by Renfrewshire

1 required on Monday 25th September (public holiday) - CPO for Argyll and Bute

PMs were contacted by email on Friday 22nd, phone call had to be requested. Qu. Is this a result of change to standby procedures? On this occasion email was to provide advance warning, but usual system of receiving a call before 10am in the morning of the hearing if you are required will continue.

- Continuity

1 case.

- Cross-area assistance

1 Aberdeen City, 1 East Ren, 1 North Lanarkshire

- Additional Hearings

4 2WD CPOs (24th August, 11th September, 13th September, 3rd October), 2 8WD grounds (1st Sept, 21st Sept), 2 secure unit hearing (1st September)

On 24th Aug - Initially another PM had agreed to cover but due to issues with CSAS not supporting this all three PMs were asked to come in early and cover this.

There followed a discussion around this and need to agree a future protocol. The additional pressures on PMs to cover an entire session rather than one continuity case or PMs losing out on hearings because they may have a conflict of interest in one case must be considered and should not be dismissed due to an inadequate IT system.

It was noted that other areas manage to have concurrent hearings which allows for 1 PM to be swapped in for one case on a hearing slot. SCRA to explore this; in the meantime LPRs will continue to consider the wellbeing and continuing development of PMs.

It was noted that at a previous secure unit hearing held on The Good Shepherd that PMs couldn't write up in secure unit and had to take them home. Although this isn't ideal, PMs were happy to do this, however going forwards we need to explore reasons why this happened and what can be done. Both SCRA and AST will find out further information.

Request was made that SCRA please consider volunteers time as important. This followed an incident whereby a reporter asked LPR to make arrangements for an 8WD hearing, which the senior reporter then changed without further consultation and giving no consideration to the fact this lead to increased workload for LPR and confusion for 6 PMs. Following several emails and calls LPR was able to clarify situation for all.

Several PMs of late have raised concerns over the amount of time it takes to complete reports for multiple children, due to issues with the IT system – WiFi connectivity issues, having to refresh to avoid information not being saved, no simple cut and paste, etc. When allocating sessions there doesn't seem to be any consideration given to allocating an amber alert to such cases. It cannot be assumed that a case with multiple children can be completed within the same time as a case with 1 child, even if decisions and reasons are the same. Additional time for completing the RoP needs to be considered.

Pastoral Care

5 PMs have received pastoral care.

Follow-up to last meeting

At previous meeting the layout of hearing rooms were discussed, following an issue with a reporter being unable to clearly see PMs. This was to be given further consideration by SCRA whilst looking at remodeling of hearing room 2.

It is hoped Hearing Room 2 will be remodeled before end of year and at that time hearing room 1 will also be reconfigured.

There was also a discussion around new tables for hearing room 2 as AST had been asked to provide some feedback. SCRA are unable to provide any tables other than those suggested by their design team. Therefore it would be impossible to find a solution which is ideal. Agreement at meeting that if not too late SCRA will ask for new tables, in the meantime AST will provide alternative tables for PMs to be made available on request.

Question asked about when a reporter will call a PHP as there seems to be some confusion around grounds hearings and children under 6. Nicola to find out and feedback.

Since the meeting Lesley had been able to provide clarification:

SCRA practice direction talks about arranging a PHP for young children 'unless it is clear that the child is likely to attend anyway' and goes on to say reporter should check this out with SW in advance as part of the preparation for the hearing. Therefore the correct practice would be to clarify this with SW ahead of time where possible.

AOB

Situation at start of week where senior reporter added an emergency case to a hearing slot 24 hours before the case and then advised LPRs that this has happened. This caused several issues:

Should an emergency case need to be added to a hearing slot then the protocol is for SCRA to contact LPRs to make a request. It is then for LPRs to contact PMs

Within 7 days of the hearing, once papers have been submitted – additional cases can only be added following prior agreement with PMS - which will be obtained by LPRs.

Concerns around the senior reporter directly contacting PMs to convene a hearing, this could be perceived as a procedural irregularity or PMs being placed under pressure to sit on the additional hearing.

Senior reporter will be reminded of local agreements and procedures.