



SCOTTISH  
CHILDREN'S REPORTER  
ADMINISTRATION

# Child friendly scheduling of Hearings report



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## Background to the child friendly scheduling projects

Multiple strands of engagement work with children have highlighted that children's Hearings can be frightening and disempowering experiences that leave them feeling that their voices have not been heard.<sup>1,2</sup> To allow children to exercise their article 12 rights it has been advocated that: "*Hearings should be planned to the individual needs of children and their families*"<sup>3</sup>. This would include ensuring that "*children's Hearings should take place at a time and place that works for the child*" and "*[does] not adversely impact on their life or education*".<sup>1</sup>

The Hearings for Children Report (2023) recommended that children should be given a range of options to support them attending their Hearings, including: being flexible around Hearing times and locations to accommodate the needs and preferences of children and their families; considering whether it might be appropriate for Hearings to take place later in the afternoon or in the evenings, or perhaps even at the weekend; holding Hearings in places that are closer to where children live, and where children feel comfortable and safe; asking children what they need to feel safe and able to take part in Hearings; allowing children to decide where people sit in the Hearing; making sure that children are aware of all of their rights; and making pre-Hearing visits available to all children. These recommendations built upon the 40 Calls to Action made by Our Hearings, Our Voice which were incorporated into the Hearings for Children Report.

In response to these recommendations, SCRA developed Child Friendly Scheduling. Child Friendly Scheduling is a program of quality improvement work being undertaken by SCRA to promote children's voices being included in decisions about their Hearings. The program includes four pilots designed to explore the best ways of capturing children's views and ensuring that they are better supported to attend and engage in Hearings. The pilots were conducted in Ayrshire, Fife, Grampian, Moray and Renfrewshire. The child friendly scheduling pilots focussed on identifying whether small alterations to how Hearings were scheduled could improve children's knowledge of their participation options, and result in a greater sense of ownership over their Hearings. The projects also aimed to establish whether these changes could result in fewer late starting, cancelled and deferred Hearings. Details of how the pilots varied can be found in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> Duncan F (2020) The Independent Care Review: The Promise. Glasgow: The Independent Care Review

<sup>2</sup> Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) (2020). 40 Calls to Action. Stirling: Our Hearings, Our Voice. Available via: <https://www.ohov.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Inside-Page.png>

<sup>3</sup> Mackie, D (2023). Hearings for Children: Hearings System Working Group's Redesign Report. Glasgow: The Independent Care Review.

**Table 1: Differences in the delivery of the Child Friendly Scheduling pilots**

	<b>Ayrshire</b>	<b>Fife</b>	<b>Grampian and Moray</b>	<b>Renfrewshire</b>
<b>Hearing preferences gathered</b>	through social workers, teachers or advocacy workers speaking to the child	through children completing the seating plan, customise my Hearing and my decisions pages in the taking control of my Hearing scrapbook	by SCRA staff directly contacting children	through asking social workers to check the suitability of provisional arrangements with children and families
<b>Type of information gathered</b>	when and where Hearing to be held; preference for remote or in-person attendance; option of attending from school; how child can be supported to share views with panel.	where child wants to sit in Hearing, what will help child feel safe at their Hearing, and what they want to happen at the Hearing	what support is needed to prepare for the Hearing, preferences around how the Hearing is conducted, what name child would like to be referred by, how child wants to participate in Hearing, language that they don't like/understand.	details of conflicting appointments
<b>Scheduling of pre-Hearing visits</b>	opt-in	opt-out of attending a visit at a specified time and date	opt-in	opt-in
<b>Who was included in the pilot?</b>	156 children aged 9-17 attending review Hearings	25 children aged 12+ attending grounds Hearings	28 children aged 12-18 attending review Hearings	165 children aged 0-18 attending review Hearings

## How did we measure the benefits of child friendly scheduling?

Perceptions of the child friendly scheduling pilots were gathered through 8 focus groups conducted with SCRA personnel responsible for managing and delivering the projects. These focus groups sought to identify the perceived benefits and detriments of child friendly scheduling for children and families, as well as exploring barriers and facilitators to gathering Hearings preferences. A further focus group was undertaken with participation workers in Fife in order to explore in more detail how the ‘taking control of my Hearing’ scrapbook had been used by children and families. This data was supplemented by a review of project data gathered by the teams delivering the child friendly scheduling pilots. This included: information on the level of engagement with the pilots by children and families; whether children’s requests could be met; reasons for not meeting children’s requests; feedback from children, families and professionals on the usefulness of child friendly scheduling; and information on the number of late starting, cancelled and deferred Hearings.

## What did we learn about what children want to happen during Hearings?

The number of children who provided Hearings preferences varied based on the approach taken by SCRA. Gathering views directly from children, either via a member of SCRA staff or via a trusted professional resulted in the highest number of views being returned (46-52%, Figure 1). Providing children with the option of completing and returning pages from the customise my Hearing scrapbook resulted in the lowest number of preferences being returned (20%, Figure 1).

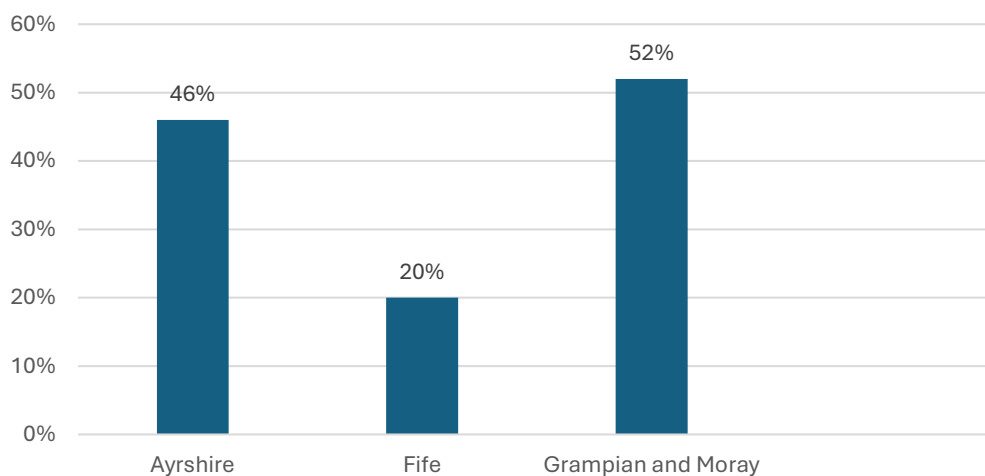


Figure 1: Percentage of children providing a Hearings preference

## What preferences did children share with SCRA?

In Fife, the most frequently returned page of the taking control of my Hearing scrapbook was the seating chart where children could indicate where and with whom they wanted to sit at their Hearing. Focus groups conducted with SCRA staff in Fife identified that when filling these pages in children tended to identify *“who they wanted to sit next to rather than where they wanted everyone to sit”*.

In Ayrshire and Grampian and Moray the most commonly provided information related to times and dates that children did not want their Hearings to be held, as well as information about why these should be avoided. The type of information shared focussed on the importance of children not missing out on special occasions such as *“birthdays”, “school shows”, “school trips”, “sports days”* and *“prize givings”*. It also highlighted the importance of children not missing out on school or particular aspects of school that they liked. For instance: *“they particularly enjoy home economics and would rather avoid coming out of those lessons”*. The information provided by children also included insights into whether they wanted to speak in private with the panel members and accommodations that could be made to make children feel emotionally safe and supported during their Hearings. This included making panel members aware of any learning and attentional difficulties children had, arranging for them to not have to share the same space as adults they felt uncomfortable or unsafe being around, and making panel members aware of things that helped children feel safe. For instance:

*“A child who had had bad experiences in Hearings because he always came in with his hood up and he had had panel members asking him to take his hood down said ‘can you let the panel members know I put my hood up as a way of protecting myself. When I am anxious I put my hood up and it makes me feel comfortable so if someone tells me to take it down I’m not going to say anything”*.

In Grampian and Moray, nearly all (91%) of the children provided information about how they would like to be addressed during the Hearing. In many cases this highlighted children’s lack of comfort with panel members and other professionals referring to them by nicknames, In Renfrewshire, where the process to Hearings scheduling focussed on social workers, children and parents agreeing that a provisional Hearing date was mutually acceptable, the key learning obtained was that *“a lot of the dates are changed for childcare”* reasons.

## Did children make unusual requests in relation to their Hearings?

Focus groups conducted with SCRA staff identified that there had been some concerns that children would make “*odd ball*” or “*unusual*” requests in relation to their Hearings. These concerns were not borne out in practice, with the majority of children asking for things that could be easily fulfilled. Across the four sites, there was only one young person who asked for something that was outwith the scope of the project; i.e. a request for their “*own flat*”.

## Did children want to attend evening or weekend Hearings?

The Hearings for Children Report (2023) recommended that consideration should be given to Hearings being held at evenings and weekends. This option was available to children as part of the pilots held in Ayrshire, Grampian and Moray. This created some concern among staff around how these would be fulfilled if children requested “*a lot of evening or weekend Hearings*”. In reality, none of the children included in the pilot requested these, with the Ayrshire team reflecting that children were “*very clear that they did not want weekend and evening Hearings because they have activities*”. Instead, what the staff found was that they were more likely to be asked to hold “*more afternoon Hearings, and more Hearings after school*” so that disruptions to children’s education and extracurricular activities were minimised.

## Did children want to attend Hearings from schools?

The Hearings for Children Report (2023) recommended that consideration should be given to whether Hearings should be held in other environments than Hearings centres. To reflect this, a secondary aim of the Ayrshire pilot was to assess whether offering children the option to attend their Hearings via a video link from school was something that would be of benefit. Of the children who returned a preference form, just one child took up this offer. When asked about the low uptake of this option, the Ayrshire team concluded that although Hearings centres could be traumatic environments for children, they serve the purpose of keeping away from other spaces in children’s lives. For instance: “*we thought that people don’t want to come to Hearing centres but actually that [attending Hearings from the school] was very rarely taken up and people wanted to have their Hearing in a Hearing building or virtually. They didn’t want to mix that with school, and didn’t want whatever trauma that sometimes comes from their Hearing to be in their school premise*” Where requests for virtual Hearings were made, they tended to reflect children wanting to attend a Hearing with a trusted adult who needed to attend virtually rather than wanting to attend from a certain location.

## Did child friendly scheduling lead to more pre-Hearing visits?

One of the aims of the pilots was to better advertise the existence of pre-Hearing visits, which allow children to come into Hearings centres prior to their review Hearing so that they can meet SCRA staff and view where their Hearing will be held. In Grampian, none of the children in the pilot took up the offer of coming to a pre-Hearing visit: *“none of them took up the offer of the pre-Hearing visit... they never do”*. This experience contrasted with that of Fife, where 40% (n=10) of the children attending grounds Hearings attended the pre-Hearing visit. This was considered a significant improvement by SCRA staff, who noted that there had been an increase *“from 0 to I think it’s about 10 pre-Hearing visits” over a three month period*. The increase was widely attributed staff adopting an opt-out approach that involved inviting children to attend a pre-Hearing visit at a specified time and date rather than asking children to opt in to these visits.

## How successful were SCRA at meeting children’s requests?

Overall, the project teams in Ayrshire, Grampian and Moray fulfilled 93-97% of the requests made by children. This included meeting the requests of two or more children when Hearings needed to be scheduled to allow for discussion of sibling groups. Where requests were not fulfilled in these areas, our analysis identified that this was mainly due to safety concerns. In Fife, all of the requests made by children were fulfilled. This was achieved by sharing any information that children provided via the ‘taking control of my Hearing scrapbook’ or at pre-Hearing visits with the Children’s Reporter who would be conducting their Hearing. For instance, one of the team recalled writing a Reporter’s note in relation to a young person who shared information at their pre-Hearing visit *“specifically around contact with their mother that hadn’t been included in the paperwork”*.

In Renfrewshire, the fulfilment of Hearing preferences took the form of rescheduling Hearings to suit the needs of families. This was something the team felt had not always been possible in the past; resulting in Hearings being cancelled or deferred at short notice: *“it’s less hassle to move things around when they are letting us know. They [social workers] are phoning and asking if we can accommodate the families wishes and it’s easy enough to move things in the diary because it is more free than it was when we were waiting till the end. Two weeks before it is filled up, and there is no place to go”*.



## Where there any barriers to gathering and fulfilling children's Hearings preferences?

There were a number of key barriers identified to both gathering and fulfilling children's Hearings preferences. These often varied by the approach adopted by the localities who were delivering child friendly scheduling.

### ***Obtaining up-to-date contact information for children and families***

In Grampian, the gathering of Hearings preferences relied on SCRA staff contacting children directly. One key barrier to this was that not all of the children had up-to-date contact information held by either SCRA or social work. Both Ayrshire and Renfrewshire used their pilots as an opportunity to improve the quality of the contact data held for children, with varying degrees of success. In Ayrshire, the gathering of contact information was suspended due to trusted adults (mainly advocacy workers and teachers) being unable to provide this information to SCRA as they did not routinely hold it. In Renfrewshire, however, the use of Hearings checklists resulted in addresses being routinely supplied by social workers.

### ***The quality and storage of disability data***

In Grampian, the issue of data quality was also raised in relation to the quality of information that SCRA held on children's capacity to provide Hearings preferences. There were several instances where SCRA staff contacted children who had language and communication difficulties that prevented them from sharing their views. This included asking to speak with a non-verbal child. Although SCRA usually held information about children's capacity, the information was often only recorded in social work reports and therefore not easily accessible to those making the phone calls. It was identified that if SCRA staff were to continue contacting children directly that this information needed to be kept up-to-date and centrally stored: *"it needs to be up-to-date before we start making the phone calls. We need to make sure we have all the relevant and correct information"*.

### ***Gatekeeping by parents, caregivers and trusted adults***

In both Ayrshire and Grampian and Moray, one of the key barriers to gathering the views of children was gatekeeping from parents, caregivers and trusted adults. In the majority of cases this gatekeeping was designed to protect children. For instance, staff members in Ayrshire, Grampian and Moray identified that one of the main reasons for them not being able to gather Hearings preferences was because parents and caregivers did not want the child to attend the Hearing or because they had concerns that asking the child for their Hearings preferences would cause them distress.

### ***Pressures on partner agencies and trusted adults***

Partner agencies were generally supportive of the child friendly scheduling pilots being conducted: *“people were really positive about it and the will was absolutely there to support it”*. This was largely attributed to the ability of partner agencies to *“link it to The Promise”* and *“their corporate parenting responsibilities”*. Although partner agencies were enthusiastic, there was a recognition among SCRA staff that the Covid-19 pandemic, the ongoing cost of living crisis and budgetary constraints were continuing to place additional pressures on partner agencies. It was also highlighted that the ability of social work departments to support additional activities was being hampered by high levels of staff absence and vacancies. As such there was a desire among SCRA staff to ensure that child friendly scheduling did not *“feel more of a burden”* or *“be extra work for them to do”*. In Grampian and Moray this resulted in SCRA staff taking on the role of contacting children directly. In Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Fife, however, it resulted in SCRA staff testing different approaches to working with partner agencies. Renfrewshire focussed on building relationships with social work administrators in order to reduce the number of requests that were being made directly to social workers. This approach was considered to have worked well: *“they have been brilliant as they are the ones chasing for it [checklists and reports] and making sure we get it back”*. It was also felt that the combination of *“front loading”* Hearings preparations and the earlier scheduling of Hearings allowed for changes to Hearings to be made more easily and had the potential to reduce workloads in the longer term by reducing the number of cancelled and deferred Hearings.

In Ayrshire it was decided that the preferred approach would be for advocacy workers and teachers to gather the information from children due to both *“the levels of vacancies within social work”* and the impact that *“staff absences, staff handovers and staff change overs”* could have on the pilot. This approach presented its own challenges. These included education staff not always having the time to gather Hearing preferences and local advocacy services being challenged by the impact of long-term sickness and absences. In Fife, the pilot benefited from the funding of participation officers by the local authority. These individuals were employed to support children who were due to attend Hearings by identifying and helping to address any barriers to their attending. An informal discussion group with the participation workers identified that they had been actively promoting the use of the ‘taking control of my Hearing’ scrapbook to children and their families, and encouraging them to fill it in.

### ***The timing of requests for Hearing preferences***

When children were to be asked for their Hearings preferences acted as a barrier to these being gathered in some cases. In Ayrshire, it was identified that there was a mismatch between SCRA required information about Hearings preferences, and when advocacy workers usually engaged with children: *“quite often they will say ‘I don’t know if I am still*

*working with that young child' because they are only really involved when they are leading up to a Hearing, which is too late for us". In Grampian and Moray, however, it was identified that there was often a mismatch between when SCRA staff were available to seek children's views and when children could be contacted: "we don't work at night time, so we are not able to catch them after tea time. We have a very small window after school and before dinner time, and then our staff are going home for the day. That's a bit of a barrier".*

### ***Children not answering calls and feeling anxious***

In Grampian many of the children did not answer the phone, which staff attributed to children avoiding phone calls from a number that they did not recognise. In order to ensure that children did not feel like they were being "hassled" for information, the team had an approach of "trying 3 times" and then "backing off... if you don't get any success". However despite this approach there were several instances where children revealed that they had felt stressed or anxious as a result of being contacted: "one child said why are you calling me. Go away. You are making me more anxious". Children feeling anxious about providing Hearings preferences was also an issue in Ayrshire where trusted adults were asked to gather Hearings preferences. All of these issues related to the fact that the information being shared was being "put on paper". This was something that some children found to be "quite overwhelming" as they didn't know who was going to see the piece of paper. That the project caused some children anxiety was a learning point for SCRA staff: "we didn't consider that we would make children more anxious by calling or writing to them". Because of the potential for to cause harm it was felt that any further rollout of the initiative should focus on gathering views through trusted adults.

### ***Using a one-size fits all approach to gathering preferences***

Each of the pilots designed materials to be used to gather the views of children. Concerns were raised about the one size fits all nature of these materials in three of the pilot areas. In Fife, the concerns focussed mainly upon the 'taking control of my Hearing' scrapbook. The first concern raised was that the scrapbook was considered "babyish" and "childlike" by adolescents, particularly "teenage boys". It was also noted by SCRA staff that "children referred on conduct grounds" and "children who were not engaging at all" tended not to be interested in the scrapbook. This feedback resulted in both SCRA staff and the participation workers wondering whether future iterations of the scrapbook, if retained, should be produced as "two different versions; one for younger and one for older children". The young people at Our Hearings, Our Voice who codesigned the scrapbook felt that there was more work to be done to understand what children of different ages and capabilities both wanted and needed to allow them to best capture their thoughts and feelings. In Ayrshire, where the initial project scope had been to gather the views of children aged six and over, concerns were raised by other professionals that children who were aged 6-8 might be "too young"

to share their views. Concerns were also raised by education staff in Ayrshire and SCRA staff in Grampian and Moray about the reading level of the language used in forms.

### **Staff confidence and skills**

All of the staff involved in delivering child friendly scheduling were supportive of the programme continuing. However, it was recognised that there was a need to consider in more detail the range of skills and attributes that staff involved in gathering Hearings preferences and conducting pre-Hearing visits might require. In particular it was felt that there was a need for these roles to be undertaken by individuals who were able to *“have a rapport with children”* and who were both *“caring”* and *“empathetic”*. Building on team strengths to identify those individuals who were naturally very suited to talking to children was seen as essential for any further roll out of child friendly scheduling, as was recognising that not all administrative staff have the confidence to undertake person-facing roles. Providing training to staff on *“how to speak to children in a trauma informed way”*, *“language”* and how to deal with children or family members who became upset were considered as key ways of supporting staff to be able to provide child friendly services.

### **Resource issues**

Testing child friendly scheduling resulted in an increased workload for all of the areas involved. In Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Grampian and Moray the increased workload largely reflected the *“frontloading”* of Hearings preparations and the additional time spent contacting children and trusted adults to gather information. In Grampian, it was identified that the majority of the workload had come from checking contact information for children, speaking to social workers about the pilot, checking where children were living and trying to identify any issues that might act as a barrier to children providing their preferences. In Ayrshire, the greatest impact on resources was the amount of time teams spent identifying the trusted individual who would be best placed to gather the information from the children, and then chasing Hearings preferences forms from those individuals. Both areas felt that in order for the projects to be successful in the long term there would need to be more resources identified as child friendly scheduling *“could probably be a full time job for one person”*. The staff members in Renfrewshire shared similar concerns but were confident that in the long run the approach that they were adopting could have benefits such as reducing the number of cancelled, late starting and deferred Hearings: *“It’s like robbing Peter to pay Paul”*.

### **What were the benefits of child friendly scheduling?**

SCRA staff identified a number of key benefits in relation to child friendly scheduling. These could be broadly grouped in terms of benefits for children and benefits for SCRA and its partner agencies.

### **Benefits for children**

Children who shared their views about how they wanted their Hearings to be conducted were considered to have a greater sense of ownership over their Hearings by SCRA staff. Feedback from children and trusted adults also suggested that children appreciated being asked their opinions around how their Hearing should be conducted. For instance, one key worker fed back to the team that *“the young person really appreciated being asked and wanted to fill in the form himself. It meant a lot to the young person to be asked”*. Another young person wrote *“thank you for asking me what I wanted”* on the bottom of their form.

Beyond appreciating being asked for their views, there was some evidence from the Grampian pilot that child friendly scheduling opened up discussions about other aspects of the Hearings process. For instance: *“I spoke to the foster carer who wasn’t exactly sure of how the Hearing system worked and didn’t know that they could ask for an excusal for the child. I outlined what would happen if the child [non-verbal] wasn’t there and it put their mind at rest a little better because they were then able to submit a child excusal request”*. The Renfrewshire team also identified that including a prompt about whether children should be excused from their Hearing within the checklist had resulted in the need for pre-Hearing panels being identified at a much earlier stage: *“we are getting to know 8 weeks in advance, which gives us plenty of time to schedule it in and it means we can excuse the child weeks before their Hearing”*.

There was some evidence from the pilots that providing children with information and inviting them to pre-Hearing visits had resulted in some children being supported to attend Hearings for the first time. For instance: *“what I do know is that we have had a child who never came to Hearings before who actually came to her first Hearing after speaking to an SCRA staff member. She had been on supervision for a wee while, but she actually came to the Hearing centre and engaged”*. The use of pre-Hearing visits was one of the aspects of child friendly scheduling that was considered to promote greater attendance. For instance, in Fife, one team member reflected that *“the children are not only coming to the grounds Hearing, but I have noticed they will come to any Hearings that follow the grounds if it’s not agreed. ICSO after ICSO. They have been coming to them as well”*. This was ascribed to pre-Hearing visits making coming to a Hearing feel *“less scary”* as children were able to see where the Hearing would be held, meet some of the people who would be present on the day and *“see what the place and area that is making their life decisions looks like”*. Pre-Hearing visits were also considered another opportunity for children to share their preferences with SCRA staff. For instance, one of the Ayrshire team recalled how the pre-Hearing visit had *“really helped”* one young person who had not previously attended a Hearing due to provisions made under the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act. *“This was him considering coming along for the first time, and he did a pre-Hearing visit. He had some difficulties so he had*

*a lot of questions, and the visit took quite a long time, but in the end he was saying 'I don't want to see this person or this person'. And he was very specific about not wanting to be in the room with school so we were able to do everything that he asked".*

Gathering Hearings preferences allowed SCRA staff to make small accommodations to how Hearings were arranged and conducted. These accommodations were considered to support children to exercise their article 12 rights. This was something that staff felt could only benefit decision making as it provided panel members the opportunity to hear children's views. There were several examples given of this. The Grampian team described how one young person was allowed to *"attend her Hearing in an adjoining room, which reduced her anxiety leading up to the Hearing and on the day"*. While on the surface this seems like a relatively minor accommodation for a young person, the team highlighted that by supporting her to attend in this way she was able to *"communicate by text to her social worker and she would pass on the comments, and the young person could see what was going on but not be part of it"*. The large impact of small actions for children was also captured in relation to being able to tell panel members that a young boy who wore his hood up in Hearings did so because he felt anxious. The team felt that for him, being able *"to narrate that it was an anxiety thing"* had a *"really powerful impact on the panel"* that was able to *"change the tone of a Hearing completely"* as instead of being asked to remove his hood, the panel made no reference to it and encouraged him to share his views.

Having Hearings preferences heard and enacted was considered a way of supporting children to exercise their article 12 rights within Hearings. For instance, in Fife, the 'taking control of my Hearing' scrapbooks were considered particularly beneficial for supporting the views of children to be shared. Both SCRA staff and the participation workers stated that they had received *"positive feedback from carers and parents with younger children who were sitting down to doing the scrapbook with them"* and that the *"younger kids really loved it"*. They also provided examples of how they had been used by families to support the views of children being shared: *"there was a girl who had filled in her book who had been excused and dad said she loved the book. She loved filling it in and having her voice heard, even though she wasn't there, because she had filled out what decisions she wanted to happen"*.

### ***Benefits for SCRA and partner agencies***

In focus groups conducted with SCRA staff there was a general sense that the use of child friendly scheduling had contributed to fewer deferred or cancelled Hearings. Looking first at deferred Hearings, our analysis indicated that there was no difference in the rates of deferred Hearings for: 1) children who did and did not attend pre-Hearing visits; 2) did and did not provide their Hearings preferences to SCRA staff. However,

there was some evidence from the Ayrshire pilot that the provision of Hearings preferences resulted in fewer late starting Hearings, with 30.3% of Hearings where a preference had been provided starting late compared with 52.0% of Hearings where a preference had not been provided.

Although child friendly scheduling did not reduce the number of deferred Hearings during the pilot, it was felt that there had been other benefits to SCRA and partner agencies. The first of these benefits was that the components of child friendly scheduling had helped to demystify and humanise SCRA. This was considered important by staff as *“people don’t know what we do most of the time, and it can be quite intimidating with the Reporter sitting in the corner taking a note and they don’t really speak very much”*. It was also felt to offer an opportunity for children and their families to experience some continuity during a time that was very difficult for them. For instance in both Fife and Grampian the teams made a conscious decision that the individual who had gathered Hearing preferences or conducted a pre-Hearing visit would be available on the day of the Hearing to greet the child.

*“We always try to make a point, if we are free, to go speak to them so it’s a familiar face, because it’s a scary environment. It’s daunting walking into that room with people. As a child, if they have a familiar face and they can ask for you, then they know who that person is and you’re just there as a support person”*.

Beyond humanising SCRA, it was felt that the projects had helped SCRA staff develop better relationships with staff in other agencies. This was particularly evident in Ayrshire and Fife where participation workers, advocacy workers and education staff were involved in supporting the gathering of views from children. It was also evident in Renfrewshire, where the relationships developed between social work administrators and SCRA personnel was considered to promote better sharing of information.

## ***Will child friendly scheduling be continued?***

All of the staff involved in conducting the pilots wanted to see child friendly scheduling continue due to the benefits that were identified for children. Based on these assertions and the evidence gathered it was recommended that SCRA pilot a national approach to child friendly scheduling that combined those elements which had been identified as promoting children’s article 12 rights without causing children additional distress. The elements to be piloted would include:

- SCRA should work with partner agencies to identify a trusted adult who can gather Hearings preferences from all children over the age of 8.
- SCRA should normalise the provision of pre-Hearing visits from all children over the age of 8 through the use of opt-out appointments, with this element of child friendly scheduling initially focussed on those who have never been to a Hearing or have additional support needs.
- SCRA should ensure that there is continuity of personnel for children and families, so that the individual who delivers a pre-Hearing visit also welcomes them to their Hearing.
- SCRA should offer the 'taking control of my Hearing' scrapbook to all children aged 5-11. They should also work with children, families and partner agencies to identify a resource that is suitable for older children and children with special educational needs to complete.
- SCRA should offer all children the opportunity to complete a seating chart for their Hearing in order to indicate where they and others should sit.
- SCRA should work to improve the quality of disability data held on children and families.

During 2025 child friendly scheduling will undergo further testing within four locality areas, namely Ayrshire, Fife, Renfrewshire and South East. Proposals are being developed by SCRA's research team to evaluate the implementation of child friendly scheduling within these test sites. The proposed evaluation will focus on gathering the views of children, their caregivers and stakeholders involved within the Hearings process. It will explore: 1) the perceived impact of child friendly scheduling on children's wellbeing and participation in Hearings; 2) potential barriers and facilitators to rolling out child friendly scheduling at a national level.





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