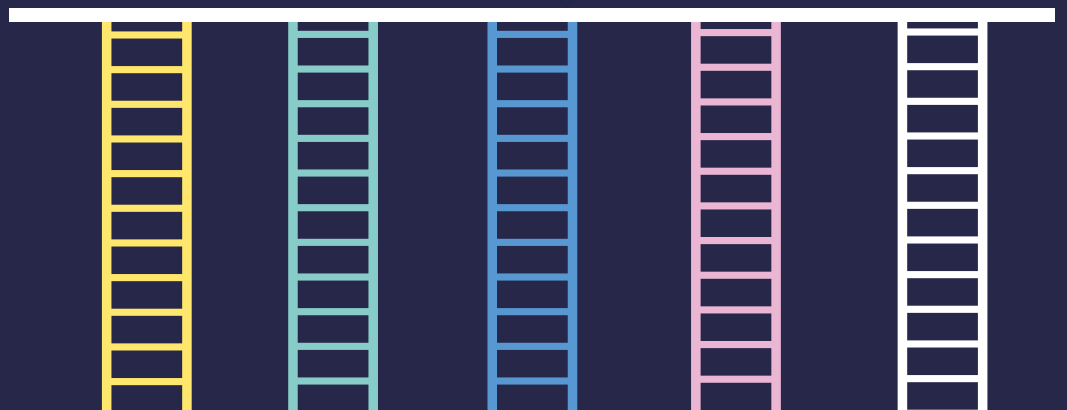


What will recommended changes to the Children's Hearings System look like for children and families?

Hearings for Children: The Redesign Report
Summary of recommendations



One

The success of the redesign of the Children's Hearings System

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Where children are safe and loved, the right support will be in place to enable them to stay at home with their families and communities.
 - When children and families need help and support at any point in their life, it will be available when they need it, for as long as they need it, regardless of whether they are engaged with the Children's Hearings System or not. It will feel coordinated and consistent, with clear, sustainable ways to access holistic whole family support, mental health, and other important wellbeing services.
 - Restorative Justice and Family Group Decision Making will be consistently available across Scotland and routinely offered, where appropriate.
 - The people working alongside children and families, including social workers, will be happy, healthy, skilled and supported with enough time to get to know them well.
 - There will be enough happy, healthy, and skilled social workers to work closely alongside children and families so that they know them well, and are able to share relevant and important information with the Children's Hearing.
 - Scotland's decision makers will work closely together to understand more about the relationship between poverty and families who have experience with the Children's Hearings System.
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Two

The scaffolding of the Children's Hearings System

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Everyone in the Children's Hearings System, from the Reporter to the Chair, will work closely alongside children and their families, will listen to their voices and will make decisions alongside them wherever possible.
 - The entire Children's Hearings System will understand children and their needs in the context of their entire family and the complexity of family circumstances.
 - The language used in Hearings will be non-judgmental. The way that people speak about children and families will feel supportive, easy to understand, and consistent across Scotland.
 - Sheriffs will be specially trained to work alongside children and families. Experiences in the Sheriff Court will feel similar to a Hearing.
 - Everyone in the Children's Hearings System will be trained in working alongside children and their families, understanding what their rights are and how the things that have happened to them in their lives have an impact on who they are and what they do.
 - Children and families will understand their rights and how to access them.
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- When possible, every child attending a Hearing will have a Child's Plan which will be at the heart of the Children's Hearings System. Every Child's Plan will be created the same way and children and families help with this.
 - The Child's Plan will set out the support needed for children and also for their families.
 - Change will feel coordinated across the Children's Hearings System and the people and organisations working together to operate the system will meet with the Scottish Government to decide how they should work together.
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Three

The pathway to the Reporter

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- The Children's Hearings System will be engaged in the lives of children and their families at the right time.
 - People referring children to the Reporter will keep in mind the importance of the developmental milestones of little children.
 - The Reporter and the workforce will work closely together alongside children and families and listen to their views about the help and support that would make the most difference in their lives.
 - The people who work alongside children and their families will work together and have a clear understanding of the referral process. The Reporter will be more involved to help with this.
 - Intensive family support services will be available before the birth of a child. The Reporter will be able to work with expectant parents earlier to avoid rushed and emergency decisions.
 - The Criminal Justice System and the Children's Hearings System will feel coordinated and provide reassurance on rights and access to them.
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Four

The introduction of advocacy, legal advice and the Reporter

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- The way that the Reporter works will change. Reporters will work closely with children and their families and listen to their views.
 - Advocacy support will be immediately offered at the point of referral to the Reporter, and will eventually be extended to the family, in addition to the child. This offer will be repeated at different stages of the process.
 - Children will be fully informed of their right to legal representation. There will be a review to ensure the current ways to access legal aid and their right to legal support is upheld.
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Five

The reasons the Children's Hearings System has become involved in a child and family's life

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Children and families will understand the reasons they have been referred to the Children's Hearings System. These will be written in a rights-based way and the process will feel more supportive. The good and happy things in children and family's lives will be talked about as well as the things that are difficult.
 - Grounds will be agreed in a separate process before children and families attend a Hearing.
 - Where possible children and families will meet the same Sheriff if they are in Court and their experiences in Court will be similar to their experiences in their Hearings.
 - There will not be long waits while grounds are being established.
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Six

The decision-making model

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- A Children's Hearing will not feel confrontational. The main objective will be to think about what is best for the child and the way this happens will feel calm, coordinated and safe.
 - There will be a consistent, highly-qualified Chair of the Panel and two Panel Members.
 - To ensure the best decisions are made by the Hearing, the process of how decisions are made by the Panel will change:
 1. The Panel, children, and families will feel better prepared for the Hearing and involved in the decisions about how it should happen.
 2. The Hearing will take place and then there will be a break for everyone to have a rest and reflect.
 3. The Chair will share a verbal decision in a way that will be understood. A larger written decision, also understood by children and families, will be shared shortly after the Hearing.
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Seven

The people making decisions

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- All Panel Members will be able to work closely alongside children and families and they will be kind, empathetic and respectful.
 - The Chair will become a familiar face for the child as they follow them through their journey in the Hearings System. The Chair will know the child's background so they will not need to retell their story at every Hearing. Having a better understanding of the child's story will also support the Chair and the Panel make the best decisions.
 - Upholding the family's right to a fair Hearing and right to family life will be an important part of the Chair's role.
 - Children and families will feel safe, listened to and respected that their Hearing is being managed as the Chair will have the skills needed to 'hold the room'.
 - The Chair will know how to follow up on the big decisions made in a Hearing and have a responsibility to hold others accountable for actions they agreed to.
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- During a Hearing, everyone in the room will be supported to share their view and the discussion will not be overwhelmed by the strongest voice.
 - Children and families will not feel overwhelmed by the number of people in a Hearing as everyone in the room will be a clear role. This means that Reporters will only attend a Hearing when they have a meaningful contribution to make, and it is in the best interests of children and their families.
 - When possible, the Reporter attending the Hearing will be familiar to the child and their families as it will be the same Reporter they engaged with as part of the referral processes and establishment of grounds.
 - The other meetings and processes that children and families may be part of relating to their protection, care and support will feel part of the same system and children and families won't be confused about the purpose of them.
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Eight

The participation and preparation before a Children's Hearing

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- The preparation phase before a Hearing will feel more detailed and inclusive, ensuring children and families are involved and children feel ownership over their Hearing.
- Communication about the Hearing will be sent in the name of the Chair, making interactions with the Hearing feel more streamlined and less confusing to children and families.
- Before a Hearing, children and their families will be given an opportunity to meet the Chair in a 'get to know me' meeting so they are a familiar face at the Hearing, and to learn more about the process.
- When possible, Hearings will take place at a time and place which causes the least disruption in the lives of children and families. They will be able to share their preferences and feel the system is being flexible to meet their needs.
- The Chair will be able to make decisions about how the Hearings will look and feel without needing to get the whole Panel together.
- All communication from the Hearings System will be easy to understand. Children and families will be supported when papers are received.
- Children will be encouraged to attend their Hearings and supported to make sure their voices are heard. If children do not come to their Hearing there must be ways to include them in the processes anyway and to listen to their views, even if they are very little.

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- All children will be supported to understand what was discussed and what decisions were made.
 - The Panel will have access to the Child's Plan and information about children and families that is shared with the Panel will reflect their voices and make sense to them. The important people in a child's life will be involved in the discussions where appropriate.
 - Children, families, and the workforce will be given the time needed to read the information they receive before a Hearing takes place.
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Nine

The voices and involvement of children and their families

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Children and families will feel empowered to be involved in their Hearings and recognised by those working alongside them, including Panel Members, as the expert of their lives and their stories.
 - The decision-making process will be inclusive and give children and families the feeling of working alongside the Panel to make the best decisions possible. Their rights and the choices about how they want to share their views and participate will be clear.
 - Children and families will be actively encouraged to participate and share their views in Hearings.
 - There will be special ways to listen to younger children.
 - The use of recording and written transcriptions in a Hearing will be considered. Improvement work will continue to explore other uses of technology to support children and family to share their views.
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Ten

The people working alongside children and their families

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Everyone in the room at a Children's Hearing will have clear roles and responsibilities which will be explained to children and families. They will use clear language and will be respectful to each other.

Eleven

The decisions available to the Children's Hearing and the support for children and their families

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Children and families will receive the help and support outlined in the Child's Plan, which will be linked to the child's order.
- Orders will be more specific about the help and support children and families need and will protect safe, loving, and supportive relationships.
- Children will not live in Secure Care for longer than need and their rights will be upheld.
- Wherever possible, the same Chair should be present at Hearings for brothers and sisters too.
- Wherever possible, children must remain with consistent caregivers when it is not possible for them to remain safely at home.
- Panels will think carefully and take into consideration what it means for a child to be away from their family.
- Children will be able to see the important people in their lives when it is safe for them to do so.



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- Children and families will be provided with help and support after a Hearing takes place.
 - The specific needs of 16 and 17 years olds will be met by organisations working together within the Children's Hearings System.
 - Children will not be in the Children's Hearings System for longer than needed.
 - Children, families, and those working alongside them will understand what needs to happen to 'exit' the Children's Hearings System.
 - Children and families will feel the appeal process is understandable, accessible, and timely.
 - When possible, the Sheriff in the appeals process will be familiar to the child and their family.
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Twelve

The oversight, enforcement, accountability and review of a child's order

What will these changes look like for children and families?

- Although the decisions of the Hearing will continue to be focused on the child, the Hearing will consider the importance of support for the whole family.
 - The people responsible for making sure an order is implemented with have more power to make sure children and families are receiving the support that was promised to them.
 - Children, families, the important people in their lives, and those working alongside them will be able to keep in touch with the Hearing about how things are going.
 - Review Hearings will be a supportive place for open and honest conversations about progress, strengths, and challenges.
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Thirteen

The accountability of the Children's Hearings System

What would these changes look like for children and families?

- Children and families will feel the improvements organisations will continue to make.
 - The right organisations will share the right information at the right time to make sure they understand if the lives of children have improved.
 - There will be one place to go to make a complaint about the Children's Hearings System.
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Fourteen

The implementation of the recommendations

What would these changes look like for children and families?

- The redesign of the Children's Hearings System will truly transform the lives of children and their families.
 - Change will happen. And everyone will work together to make sure it does, alongside children, families and adults with experience of the Children's Hearing System.
 - A plan for change will be led by the Scottish Government.
 - What children and families say is working well in different areas across Scotland would be implemented nationally.
 - There will be clear communication about these changes for children, families, and those who work in and around the Children's Hearings System.
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