

Children 1st

Safeguarders
Panel Team

Safeguarders Panel Team Report 2020 - 2022



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Introduction

Children 1st has been operating the national Safeguarders Panel since 2013. The role and functions of the Safeguarders Panel Team (SPT) include recruitment, selection, training, managing appointments and complaints, and supporting and monitoring the performance of Safeguarders across Scotland. We work with the Scottish Government, Safeguarders, and all those involved in the Children’s Hearings System, to ensure that a child’s best interests are at the heart of any Children’s Hearing or related court proceeding.

This biannual report, coming after more than two years of living with COVID-19, will reflect on 2020-22, in particular the impact of the global pandemic and how Safeguarders, and we in the SPT, have navigated our way through this. At a time of such significant and widespread change in the Children’s Hearings System, we are excited to drive and support improvements, including a greater focus on children’s human rights, within both the Safeguarders Panel and the wider system. We are especially delighted at the opportunities we have had to engage with children and young people and hear their views, something we had long strived to do but which has only come to fruition in recent years. In 2022 we published [“Children and Young People’s Views on the Role of the Safeguarder”](#). Some of the quotes from children and young people included in that publication are captured throughout this report.

“It makes you feel like you can trust them if they’re friendly. You can kind of automatically tell if someone is kind and if you can trust them.”



Policy developments

Scotland has the ambition “to be the best place in the world to grow up” so that children are “loved, safe, and respected, and realise their full potential”. This was further highlighted by the publication of **The Promise** as part of the Independent Care Review in February 2020.

The Promise Scotland continues to work with organisations across the Children’s Hearing System and wider social care sector to deliver on this ambition. The Hearings System Working Group will oversee the redesign of the Children’s Hearing System. Its aim is to produce clear collective proposals to redesign the Children’s Hearing System and develop a legislative framework which is built around the needs and voices of children and families with lived experience of the hearings system.

We have been encouraged by the ongoing plans for full incorporation of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** into Scottish law, and we will continue to embed children’s human rights both into the work of the SPT and Safeguarders’ practice.

The Children’s Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced children’s advocacy into the Hearing System and this long-awaited change became fully operational in November 2020. The SPT and Safeguarders regularly liaise with Advocacy Workers, with the goal of ensuring that children’s views are clearly represented. The SPT continues to work with partners to provide clarity about the differences between the role of Safeguarder and Advocacy Worker to help ensure the most appropriate person is appointed for children.



on 26 July 2021, the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 came into force. The new legislation:

- Strengthens siblings' participation rights in Children's Hearings, while also emphasising the duty of local authorities to keep siblings together when looked after away from home (where possible) or to support them remaining in regular contact if they do end up living separately. In response to this, the SPT developed an online training module outlining these changes and their significance for Safeguarders and their practice.
- Allows Safeguarder reports to be shared with local authorities, a change which was very much welcomed by the SPT to ensure greater transparency and multi-agency working to support better outcomes for children.
- Strengthens the voice of the child in proceedings; it is now presumed that all children, regardless of age, are capable of sharing their views, and they must also be allowed to share those views in the manner they prefer. The voice of the child remains crucial in discussions with Safeguarders about their practice and the new legislation strengthens the need for these conversations to continue.



Overcoming the challenges of COVID-19

The pandemic undoubtedly created a number of challenges for both the SPT and Safeguarders. Fortunately, the SPT had the resources available to maintain full-service delivery while working from home and keeping safe. Remote working has continued with office space available when required. Safeguarders also experienced a testing time as they had to quickly adapt to different ways of working. While some adjusted to the “new normal” quickly, we were also heartened that, over time, those for whom the change came less easily were still able to adapt their practice.

Safeguarders were able to familiarise themselves with digital technology to participate in Virtual Hearings for children and young people, as well as engaging with children, families and professionals remotely. When Safeguarders did visit some children and families in person, they had to overcome the difficulty of communicating effectively while still respecting restrictions such as the wearing of masks and social distancing. We therefore saw Safeguarders using their experience and creativity to keep building relationships with children and young people despite the challenges, ranging from playing football or jumping on the trampoline together in the garden, to having multiple short video calls with a child to build up trust and enable them to share their views.

The SPT were grateful for Safeguarders offering flexibility to cover different local authority areas when allocations cover was low due to COVID-19 infection rates.

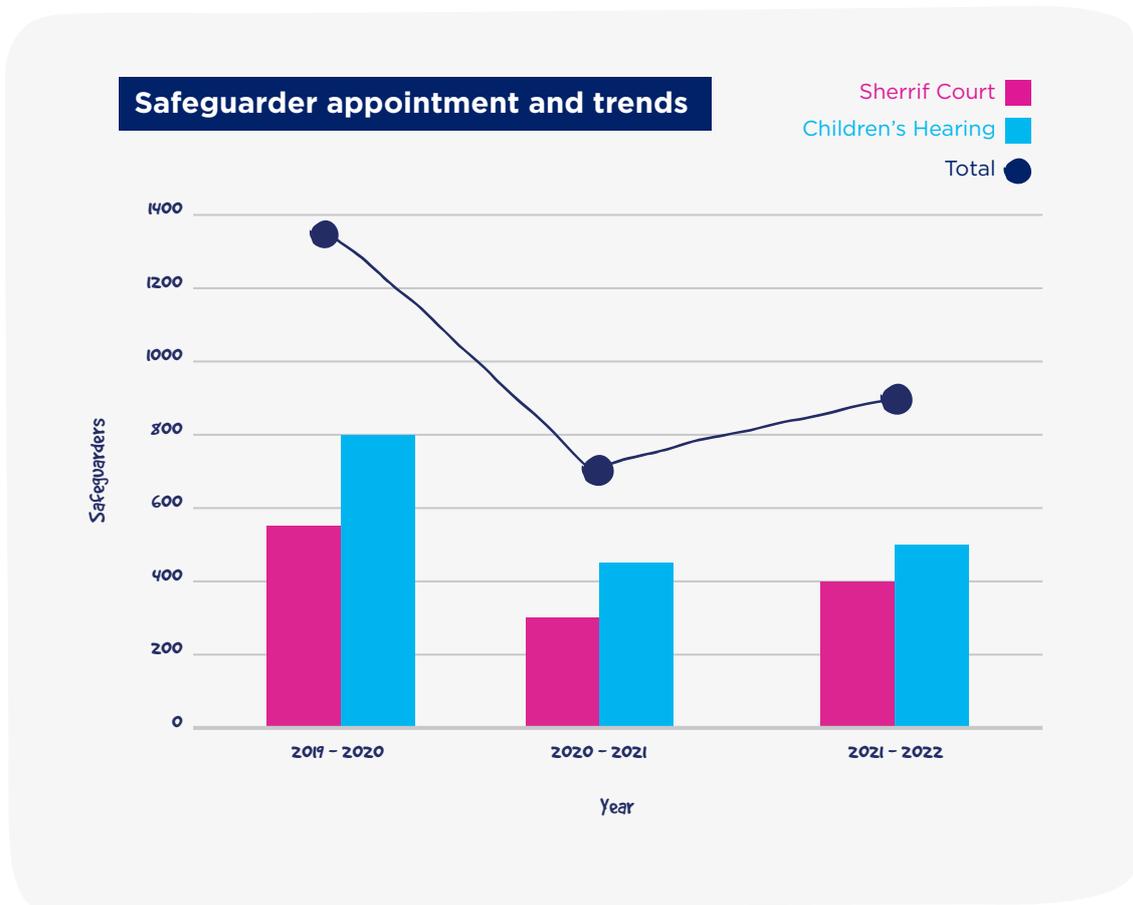
“A Safeguarder should be hopeful that the panel or sheriff will make the right decision for the child.”



Safeguarder appointments and trends during the pandemic

Emergency measures introduced by the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 doubled the timeframe for the review of interim measures and the period in which families or professionals were allowed to submit appeals. This often resulted in Safeguarders being involved in single appointments for extended periods of time which subsequently impacted on overall availability.

As can be seen from the graph below, however, the COVID-19 pandemic did lead to a significant reduction in the number of Safeguarder appointments for children overall, whether by a Children’s Hearing or by the Sheriff Court. We started to see some signs of this recovering towards the end of 2021-22. We will continue to monitor this over the course of the coming year, and work to ensure the coverage of Safeguarders across Scotland meets any increase in demand.



2020-21

1,137

children were referred to SPT

Glasgow, Fife and Perth & Kinross

The three local authorities where Safeguarders were appointed most frequently by a Sheriff Court

Glasgow, Fife and North Lanarkshire

The three local authorities where Safeguarders were appointed most frequently by a Children's Hearing

2021-22

1,416

children were referred to SPT

Glasgow, Dundee and Fife

The three local authorities where Safeguarders were appointed most frequently by a Sheriff Court

Glasgow, Dundee and Fife

The three local authorities where Safeguarders were appointed most frequently by a Children's Hearing

130

Safeguarders on the Panel, on average over the past two years

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dumfries and Galloway, East Lothian, Midlothian, Moray, Scottish Borders, Shetland and South Ayrshire

The local authorities with the least (0) Safeguarder appointments from Sheriff Court

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Shetland and South Ayrshire

The local authorities with the least (0) Safeguarder appointments from Sheriff Court

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Midlothian, and Shetland

The local authorities with the least (0) Safeguarder appointments from a Children's Hearing

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Shetland

The local authorities with the least (0) Safeguarder appointments from a Children's Hearing



Work of the Safeguarders

Panel Team

Children's human rights

Respecting, protecting and fulfilling children's human rights is at the heart of everything the SPT does.

Earlier this year, we were delighted to launch a new version of our website, with the aim of making it more accessible for children, young people and their families: www.children1st.org.uk/safeguarders. We knew that it had to be clear to children and families exactly what the role of the Safeguarder is. Our [video](#) and new [leaflet](#) explain this role in child-friendly, accessible ways.

We have improved the feedback process on our website to encourage children, families and professionals to share their experiences with us, as part of our vision to be excellent, transparent, accountable and respectful. We have also pushed ourselves to be more proactive at involving children and young people in our work. In February 2022, the SPT published the report "[Children and Young People's Views on the Role of the Safeguarder](#)", sharing it with Safeguarders to help emphasise the importance of keeping the child at the centre of everything they do.

We have involved, and continue to involve, children and young people in our Safeguarder recruitment process, including participation in interviews, so that children and young people have direct influence over the selection of Safeguarders.

Finally, we are pleased to have developed robust mandatory training on children's human rights for Safeguarders.



Regional support model

Our move to a regional support model, where there are now two Support Managers each in the north, east and west regions of Scotland, has helped us to strengthen our relationships with Safeguarders and tailor support to the needs of the local Safeguarder community.

A regional model has been key to building local connections with the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA), Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS), and advocacy organisations (amongst many others). A core aim for the SPT is to continue to drive improvement and develop partnership working, locally and nationally.

Peer support and learning amongst Safeguarders has been encouraged by our move towards regional working, with group support sessions being held across the three regions. These have been lightly facilitated by Support Managers, with the aim being for Safeguarders to share their own practice approaches and learn from each other.



Learning and development

Continuing professional development (CPD) should have a direct and positive impact on Safeguarders, children and young people, families and the professionals and partners we work alongside. CPD is about ensuring Safeguarders develop their confidence, creativity, flexibility, and practice. Due to the restrictions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting public health measures, there has been a shift to online learning for Safeguarders over the past two years.

Safeguarders' online learning has been facilitated by joint working with CHS, enabling shared learning between Safeguarders and Panel Members on the CHS Learning Academy platform. This collection of online modules continues to grow and develop, with the most recent additions including courses on children's human rights and trauma-informed practice. The platform provides Safeguarders with autonomy over their own learning by allowing them to record external CPD on their own learning log.

We have worked hard to develop peer learning and support amongst Safeguarders. As well as regional group support sessions with Safeguarders, we have developed a Peer Mentoring Scheme. This relies on the expertise present within the Safeguarder community to deliver high quality peer learning and development for colleagues. It was launched in April 2021, with fourteen Safeguarders being trained as a mentor. Matches are personalised for each mentee based on identified areas for development, such as court work or engaging with children and young people, and this approach has been a particularly valuable opportunity for new Safeguarders.

We were delighted that the success of this programme was formally recognised earlier this year with a Scottish Mentoring Network Project Quality Award, and we aim to build on these high standards as the scheme continues to grow and develop.



Recruitment, resignations and Safeguarder profile

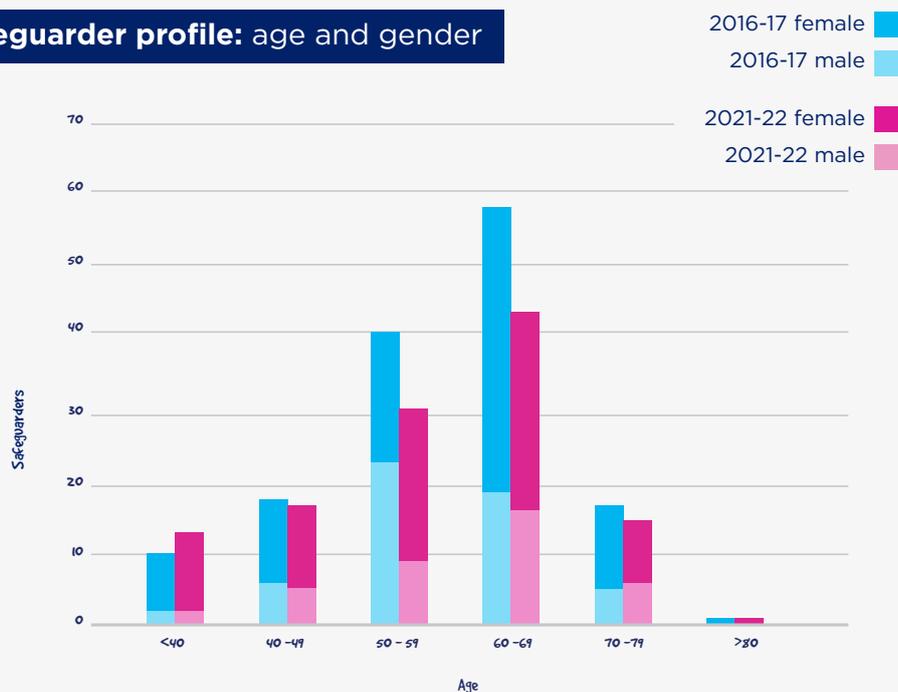
It is the responsibility of the SPT, acting on behalf of Scottish Ministers, to ensure that Safeguarders are selected, trained and supported to have the required skills, the relevant knowledge, and, importantly, the necessary value-base to fulfil their role. Safeguarders must be capable of satisfying key competencies, the most important being an ability to keep the child and their best interests as the central focus in the decision-making process.

Operational need in every local authority area is reviewed quarterly which informs our need for recruitment. Safeguarders are encouraged to make use of 'time out' as required where they can take a break from being contacted about appointments. At any one time, up to 10% of Safeguarders make use of the 'time out' policy, which also influences recruitment decisions.

Since 2020, we have progressed two recruitment campaigns resulting in a total of 33 successful appointments to the national panel. Both recruitment campaigns were targeted to specific geographical areas where operational need was increasing and Safeguarder numbers were declining. All Safeguarders completed six days of pre-appointment assessment and training online as well as one induction day.

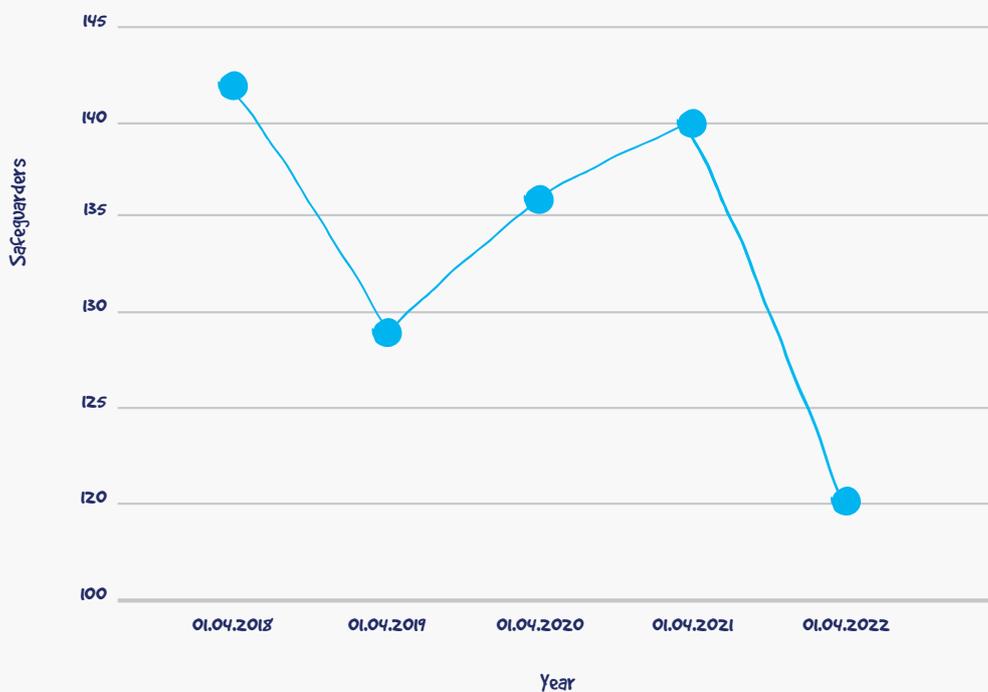
We have reviewed our recruitment process in order to attract a more diverse panel in terms of age, employment background and life experience, although we know there is still more work to do. While applications from individuals with social work and legal experience are high, we have recently welcomed far more applicants with backgrounds in education and health.

Safeguarder profile: age and gender



The SPT has seen an increase in the number of Safeguarder resignations in the last year. Feedback from exit interviews tells us that changes in a Safeguarder's personal circumstances is the main factor influencing decisions to move on from the national panel. The total number of resignations in 2020-21 and 2021-22 was 11 and 19 respectively, in comparison to 13 in 2018-19 and 8 in 2019-20 (pre-pandemic). Alongside other factors this has an effect on the current number of serving Safeguarders:

Number of serving Safeguarders



"Somebody who isn't one size fits all"

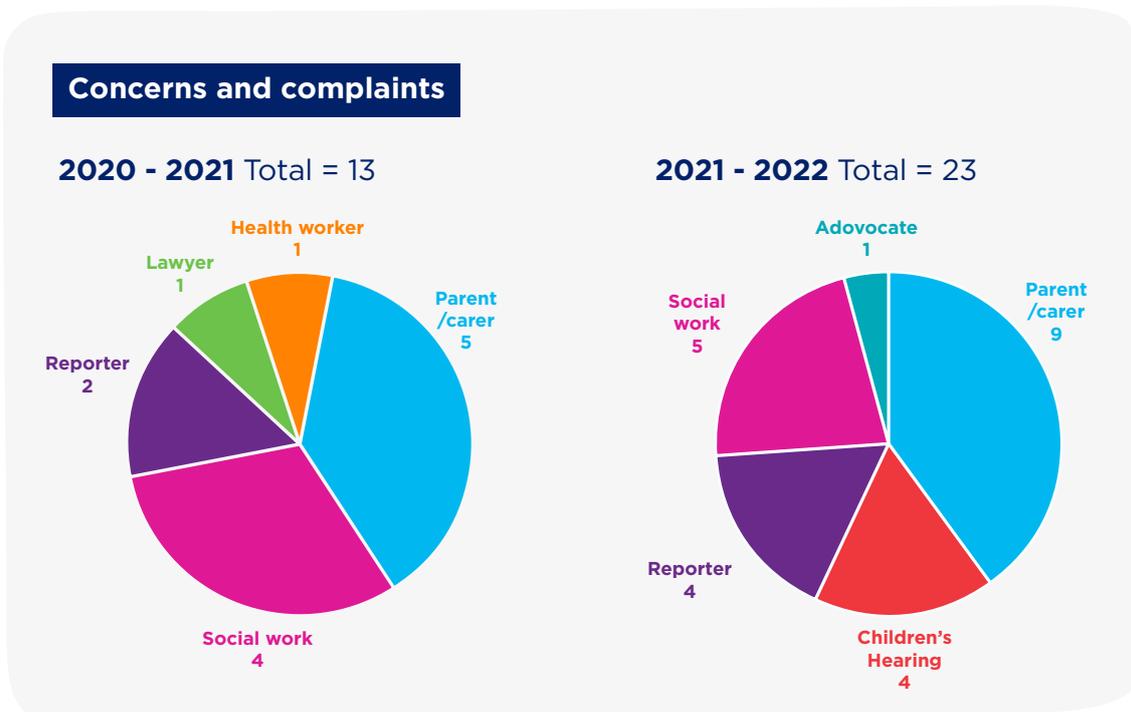
Feedback and Complaints

Another role of the SPT is to deal with concerns and complaints that are raised about Safeguarders' practice. This is an important aspect of Safeguarders demonstrating accountability to children, families, and other participants in the Children's Hearing System, with this accountability being based upon the Practice Standards for Safeguarders.

Concerns are raised in a relatively small percentage of appointments. In 2020-21 there were 13 concerns raised, with this increasing to 23 the following year. Although this appears to be a significant jump, this number has fluctuated over the years – for instance, we saw 27 concerns being raised in 2019-20. While concerns are always taken seriously, it is important to recognise that 23 concerns equates to just 2% of the 896 Safeguarder appointments across 2021-22.

Our Complaints Policy has consciously been developed with the intention of enabling concerns to be resolved without formal investigation when appropriate. This allows us, in most situations, to be able to resolve issues, reach a conclusion and take learning from the experience to drive improvements in practice, but without engaging in unnecessary formal investigations. Sometimes, however, these are still needed; in both 2020-21 and 2021-22, two formal investigations were carried out. Additionally, some further complaints were concluded through initial inquiries. Over the past two years, two complaints have been fully upheld, while six have been partially upheld.

The concerns and complaints that we receive continue to be raised by a range of participants in the Children's Hearing System.



Plans for the future

Over the coming 12 months, we are excited to have the opportunity to focus on a number of areas, the main themes of which are a continued emphasis on children's human rights and greater connection with Safeguarders and our key partners.

We have been working hard to develop a wide range of guidance and policies, with many of these new documents being due to launch over the coming period. These include the revised Performance Support and Monitoring Framework, an updated Complaints Policy, and new Practice Standards for Safeguarders which will be released alongside reworked Guidance on the Role of the Safeguarder.

Viewing these through the lens of children's human rights has been a key focus of revision, as has listening to the responses from Safeguarders and key partners in the Children's Hearing System who we have consulted with.

Over the next year we will formally consult with Safeguarders on a range of issues including the support and training provided by the SPT so that we can more clearly understand the views of the whole Safeguarder community on these important issues.

We will continue strengthening the regional model through which support managers link with Safeguarders and partners. Over the next year, our support managers will facilitate regional group support sessions to support practice improvement on communicating with children and families. They will also build on the new online training by supporting Safeguarders to look at how they can respect, protect and fulfil children's human rights in their practice. From 2023, we will be holding yearly Regional Forums, where an external speaker will be invited to share their expertise, before Safeguarders are then given an opportunity to make connections and discuss local issues with other Safeguarders in their region.

With our future plans, we want to revitalise the values and vision of the national Safeguarders Panel. We recognise that the policy and practice landscape has shifted significantly and are aware that these changes need to be considered alongside how we focus on our core purpose. We will engage with Safeguarders to make sure that we are supporting a Safeguarders Panel that is looking forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead.



Appendix

Safeguarder Allocations and Availability across Scotland: 2020-21

Local Authority	Safeguarders	Appt by hearing	Appt by court
Aberdeen	6	7	11
Aberdeenshire	6	8	9
Angus	12	17	12
Argyll & Bute	10	6	3
Clackmannanshire	11	9	24
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	3	1	0
Dumfries & Galloway	5	26	2
Dundee	20	29	65
East Ayrshire	14	15	4
East Dunbartonshire	14	7	4
East Lothian	12	10	0
East Renfrewshire	13	12	0
Edinburgh	19	38	17
Falkirk	13	12	36
Fife	20	42	42
Glasgow	28	42	96
Highland	11	15	8
Inverclyde	10	9	2
Mid Lothian	11	8	0
Moray	11	4	1
North Ayrshire	13	28	0
North Lanarkshire	18	42	3
Orkney Islands	3	4	10
Perth & Kinross	15	10	21
Renfrewshire	19	15	0
Scottish Borders	6	8	3
Shetland Islands	3	1	0
South Ayrshire	13	11	0
South Lanarkshire	14	29	4
Stirling	11	7	16
West Dunbartonshire	21	25	17
West Lothian	12	10	7

N.B. Safeguarders may choose to cover more than one local authority within reasonable travelling distance

Safeguarder Allocations and Availability across Scotland: 2021-22

Local Authority	Safeguarders	Appt by hearing	Appt by court
Aberdeen	6	12	9
Aberdeenshire	6	11	2
Angus	12	11	17
Argyll & Bute	10	4	2
Clackmannanshire	11	6	19
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	3	0	0
Dumfries & Galloway	5	24	0
Dundee	20	20	22
East Ayrshire	14	12	2
East Dunbartonshire	14	10	5
East Lothian	12	12	0
East Renfrewshire	13	12	1
Edinburgh	19	32	7
Falkirk	13	10	36
Fife	20	41	36
Glasgow	28	36	72
Highland	11	16	5
Inverclyde	10	9	2
Mid Lothian	11	0	0
Moray	11	1	0
North Ayrshire	13	17	3
North Lanarkshire	18	32	4
Orkney Islands	3	2	1
Perth & Kinross	15	12	23
Renfrewshire	19	7	7
Scottish Borders	6	11	0
Shetland Islands	3	0	0
South Ayrshire	13	18	0
South Lanarkshire	14	24	12
Stirling	11	4	8
West Dunbartonshire	21	17	17
West Lothian	12	1	1

N.B. Safeguarders may choose to cover more than one local authority within reasonable travelling distance



www.children1st.org.uk/safeguards



**The Scottish
Government**

**Children 1st is contracted by the Scottish Government to assist
with the management and operation of the Safeguards
Panel in terms of Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011
(Safeguards Panel) Regulations 2012.**

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