



Safeguarders Panel Team

Annual Report 2022-2023

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Introduction

Children 1st are contracted by the Scottish Government to manage the national Safeguarders Panel, a role we have been delighted to undertake since 2013. As the **Safeguarders Panel Team (SPT)**, this means we are responsible for 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 rights and best interests are at the heart of any Children's Hearing or related court proceeding.

This Annual Report looks back at 2022-23, and reflects on the work that has taken place within our own service, as well as key developments that have taken place during this exciting time within the wider Children's Hearing System.

The Promise and Hearings Support Working Group

During 2022-23, the **Hearings System Working Group (HSWG)**, which was set up by **The Promise Scotland** to make recommendations regarding the redesign of the Children's Hearing System, engaged extensively with stakeholders. This included 12 sessions with young people, 11 sessions with parents and carers, and a number of sessions with professionals. As well as over 500 hours of discussion, they also commissioned both research and a collaborative design project which involved a range of people working in the Children's Hearing System, including Safeguarders.

Along with The Promise Scotland, the SPT arranged a number of sessions to facilitate the participation of Safeguarders in this work. Safeguarders were invited and contributed to the design sessions, and were able to share their views with the HSWG. Additionally, Children 1st met with the HSWG to discuss the valuable role that Safeguarders play in the Children's Hearing System, as well as wider issues regarding the redesign of the System. The Promise Scotland stated they were grateful for the engagement and support regarding this work from both the SPT and from Safeguarders.

The Redesign Report "**Hearings for Children**" was published in May 2023, and recommendations are currently being considered by Government and wider Children's Hearing partners.

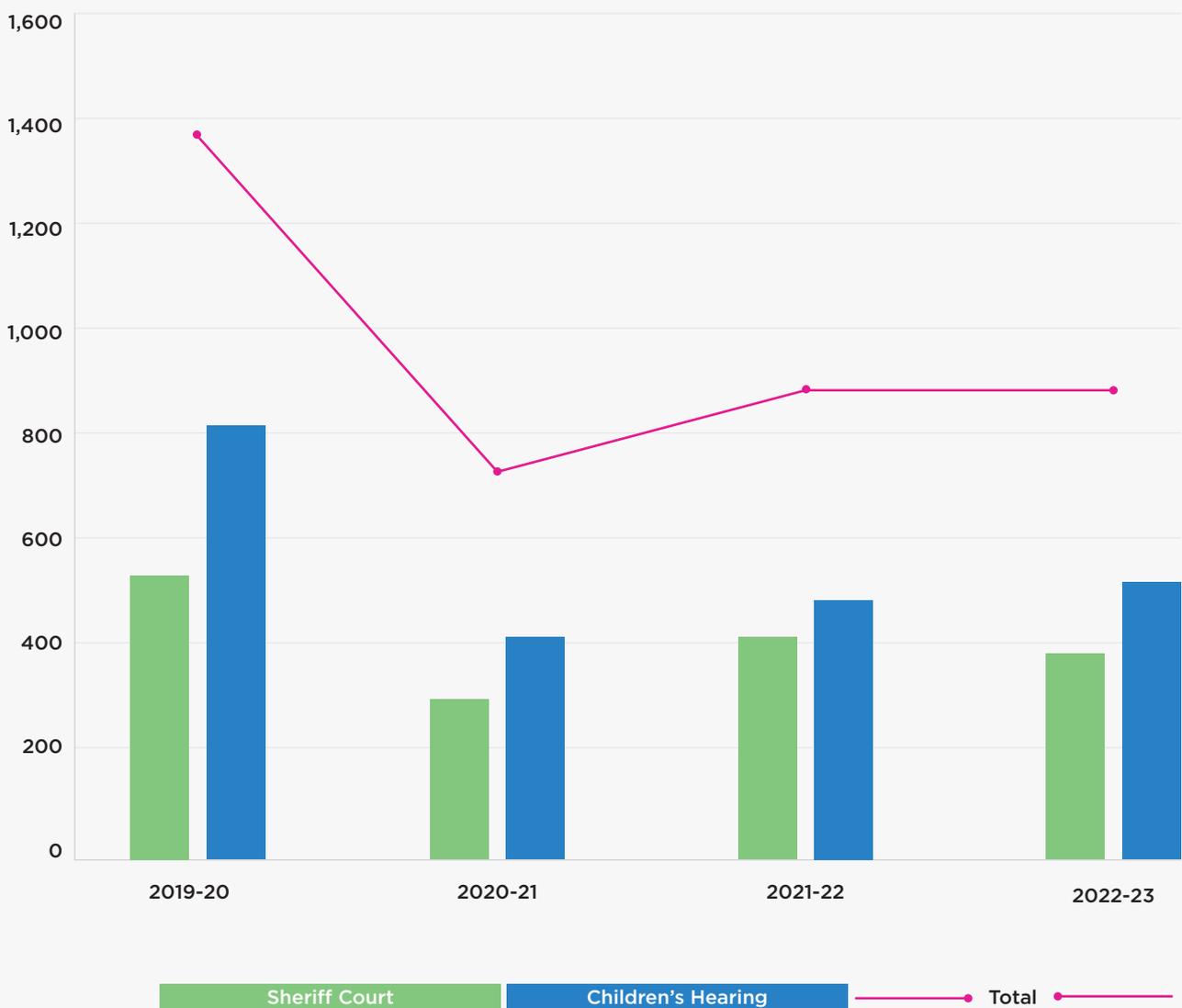


Safeguarder Appointments

Once a Children’s Hearing or Sheriff have made the decision to appoint a Safeguarder, the SPT have two working days to match a Safeguarder with the child. This timeframe has been deliberately kept short to minimise delay for the children and young people at the centre of this process.

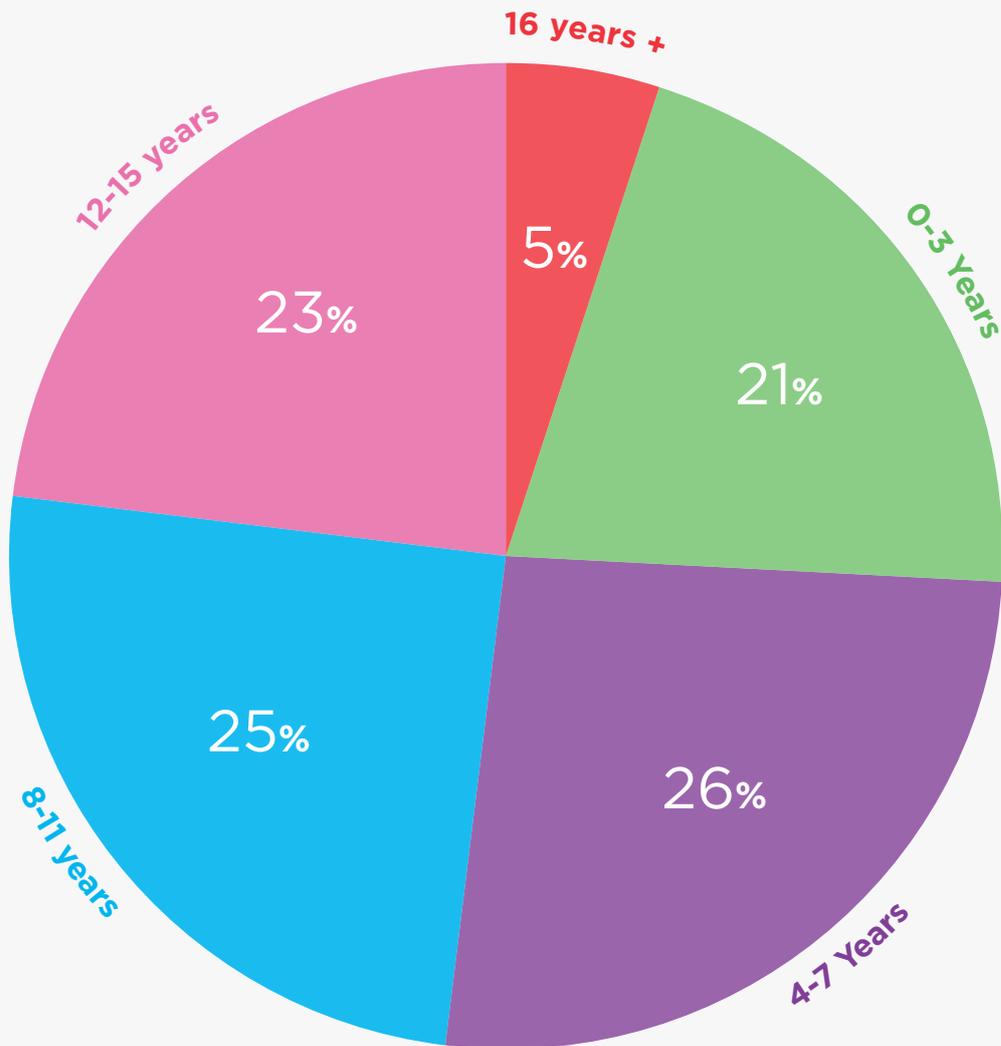
As can be seen from the graph below, referral numbers have not yet returned to pre-COVID levels. Ongoing monitoring is required to ascertain if this is now reflective of the “new normal” within the Children’s Hearing System.

Safeguarder appointments and trends



Age of children with a Safeguarder

A Safeguarder can be matched with a child or young person of a range of different ages, as can be seen below:



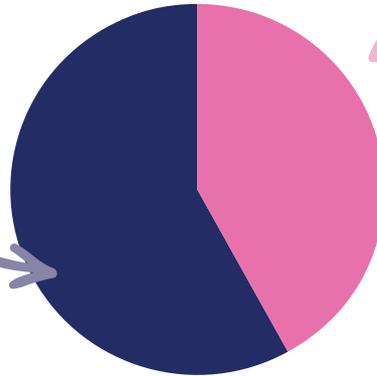
The next page gives a flavour of some of the patterns across Scotland in terms of Safeguarder appointments; *for a full breakdown of appointments by Local Authority, please see the Appendix.*



899 Safeguarder appointments were made in the year 2022-2023

58%
(523)

Safeguarder appointments were made by a Children's Hearing



and 42%
(376)

Safeguarder appointments were made by a Sheriff Court.

Dundee, North Lanarkshire, Edinburgh & Glasgow:

the local authorities where Safeguarders were appointed *most frequently* by a Children's Hearing

Glasgow, Fife, Dundee:

the local authorities where Safeguarders were appointed *most frequently* by a Sheriff Court

Midlothian, Orkney Islands, Shetland:

the local authorities with the *least* Safeguarder appointments (1) from a Children's Hearing

Dumfries & Galloway, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Midlothian, Orkney Islands, Shetland:

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

for 93%

of all appointments, the SPT matched a Safeguarder to a child on the same day or within one day of the referral being received.

In the year 2022-23,

136 Safeguarders were matched with

1,425 children.



Work of the Safeguarders Panel Team

Updates to guidance and policies

Performance Support & Monitoring Framework

The purpose of the [Performance Support & Monitoring framework \(PSMF\)](#) is to describe the support available to Safeguarders via the SPT, as well as the arrangements for monitoring and assessing performance against the Practice Standards. This enables us to assist Safeguarders in carrying out their role and ensures the best possible outcomes for children.

Our previous PSMF was written in 2016, and the way in which we support Safeguarders, as well as the landscape in which we operate, has evolved extensively in this time. We therefore recognised the need to update this Framework to describe, for example, the regional development of much of our support, as well as the accredited peer mentoring service which is valued by many Safeguarders in their role. Alongside this, our learning and development programme has, in the main, moved online. This was first trialled during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it allowed us to see the significant benefits of this approach for Safeguarders, reducing travel requirements, as well as allowing flexible access to learning.



Practice Standards and Practice Standards Guidance

The Safeguarder Practice Standards apply to all Safeguarders appointed to the national Safeguarders Panel. Their purpose is to set out the overarching principles under which Safeguarders are expected to operate, and to help those who are in contact with them to understand the role and therefore what they can expect of the Safeguarder. The Practice Standards are also used by the SPT to support Safeguarders to identify areas for learning, development and improving their practice.

The [Safeguarder Practice Standards](#) were revised in 2022, with the last review prior to this having taken place in 2015. A key aim of this review was to provide Safeguarder Practice Standards which better reflect the current and future policy and practice landscape, including that articulated in 'The Promise'. For instance, statements from 'The Promise' relevant to the Standards have been included to demonstrate how Safeguarder practice can contribute to Scotland's ambition for children.

All seven Standards have been developed to keep children's rights and the concept of best interests at the heart of Safeguarder practice. Each Standard is linked to specific articles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**, so that a Safeguarder can identify clear links between their role as a Safeguarder and their duty to uphold and fulfil the rights of the child.



The 7 Safeguarder Practice Standards are:

Standard 1

The child's View

In all actions concerning the child, the Safeguarder must, in the best interests of the child, enable the child to exercise their right to be heard and express a view through the Safeguarder's practice and child's participation in the process.

Standard 2

Relationships

Every child is supported through the Safeguarder's development of effective relationships with all relevant parties.

Standard 3

Independence

A Safeguarder will act with independence within the parameters of the role, ensuring that the best interests of the child are their primary consideration.

Standard 4

Reporting

The child's views and best interests are reflected in the Safeguarders verbal and written contribution into proceedings.

Standard 5

Confidentiality

The Safeguarder must respect the child's, parents' and carers' right to privacy, maintain confidentiality and not disclose information unless in accordance with the law.

Standard 6

Value-Based Practice

A Safeguarder must treat the child, their parents, carers, and people involved in the children's hearing and court proceedings with integrity, fairness, openness, respect, and without discrimination.

Standard 7

Learning and Development

Every child's Safeguarder takes responsibility for their continuing professional learning and development.



[Safeguarder Practice Standards Guidance](#) has also been developed to accompany these Practice Standards. This resource is designed to support Safeguarders to meet the Practice Standards, and therefore to safeguard the best interests of the child. It provides practice tips for the Safeguarder to consider for each Practice Standard.

Complaints Policy

As part of our ongoing desire to reflect and continually improve, we have reviewed our [Complaints Policy](#). Our previous policy was written in 2019, and during this time we have considered feedback from both Safeguarders and others, reflecting on any changes we could make to improve how complaints are handled. In addition, we want to ensure we are continually considering how the rights of children and others are being respected during the complaints process – including those of Safeguarders. These reflections also impacted on changes we felt needed to be made to the policy.

The changes incorporated into our new Complaints Policy include:

- the availability of an independent review by the Scottish Government if either a complainant or Safeguarder is dissatisfied with the investigation or decision, and
- an emphasis on dealing with a complaint as soon as is practical, thus allowing people who participate to have greater recall of events, and the opportunity to conclude a sometimes anxiety-provoking process as soon as possible.

From March 2023, we also as a matter of course started asking for feedback on the complaints process from both the complainant and Safeguarder. We share this feedback with the Scottish Government at quarterly meetings, and in next year's Annual Report, we will publish a full year's overview of these responses.



Regional Support

Since 2022, we have continued to offer small group support to Safeguarders twice yearly. These have included specific topic-based conversations which have been offered in each of the three regions to allow for consistency across Scotland. For instance, in the autumn of 2022, sessions were held which focused on having difficult conversations and strength-based language. Additionally, Safeguarders who were newly appointed in May 2022 were brought together for separate small group discussions, to provide additional support and peer learning in their initial appointments.

Regional groups have adopted a blended approach, giving Safeguarders the option to attend a range of dates, either online or in person (with the exception of Safeguarders in the North region, who preferred online learning on account of the significant travel involved). In response to the appreciation for continued online connection in the North, quarterly regional Forums have been facilitated in this area to allow Safeguarders to discuss local issues. There also continues to be a positive response to monthly Values-Based Reflective Practice sessions, which allow Safeguarders to provide peer support on practice issues in a structured environment.

"Excellent opportunity to discuss an important aspect of our role with fellow Safeguarders. It was extremely helpful to hear other Safeguarders' interpretations, views, and suggestions which I can use to review and reflect on my own practice and to enhance it going forward. The supportive nature of the facilitators really encouraged us to be open and honest in our views."

Safeguarder



Continued professional development

Online learning has continued for Safeguarders over the last year via the **Children's Hearing Scotland (CHS) Learning Academy**. In continuing our focus on Children's Human Rights, this online learning module was completed by Safeguarders as part of their mandatory training, alongside training on trauma.

In addition to mandatory training, in September 2022 we offered three online webinars facilitated by the organisation Each and Every Child, to raise awareness about the importance of language and reframing when talking about care experience.

At the end of the year, and in preparation for the year ahead, we created a more bespoke approach to Safeguarder mandatory training. This allows Safeguarders to identify their individual strengths and gaps in learning, and therefore reach an agreement with their allocated Support Manager of training modules that are suited to their specific needs.

Peer mentoring

Our successful peer mentoring programme has continued to support Safeguarders' learning and development. The feedback from this has been positive with new Safeguarders appreciating the ability to connect with others in the role while setting and achieving clear and measurable learning goals.

"I think that being offered the chance to be a mentor or mentee to another Safeguarder is a fantastic opportunity. It doesn't matter if you are a new Safeguarder, or an experienced one. We can all benefit from the professional advice and encouragement of our peers."

Safeguarder



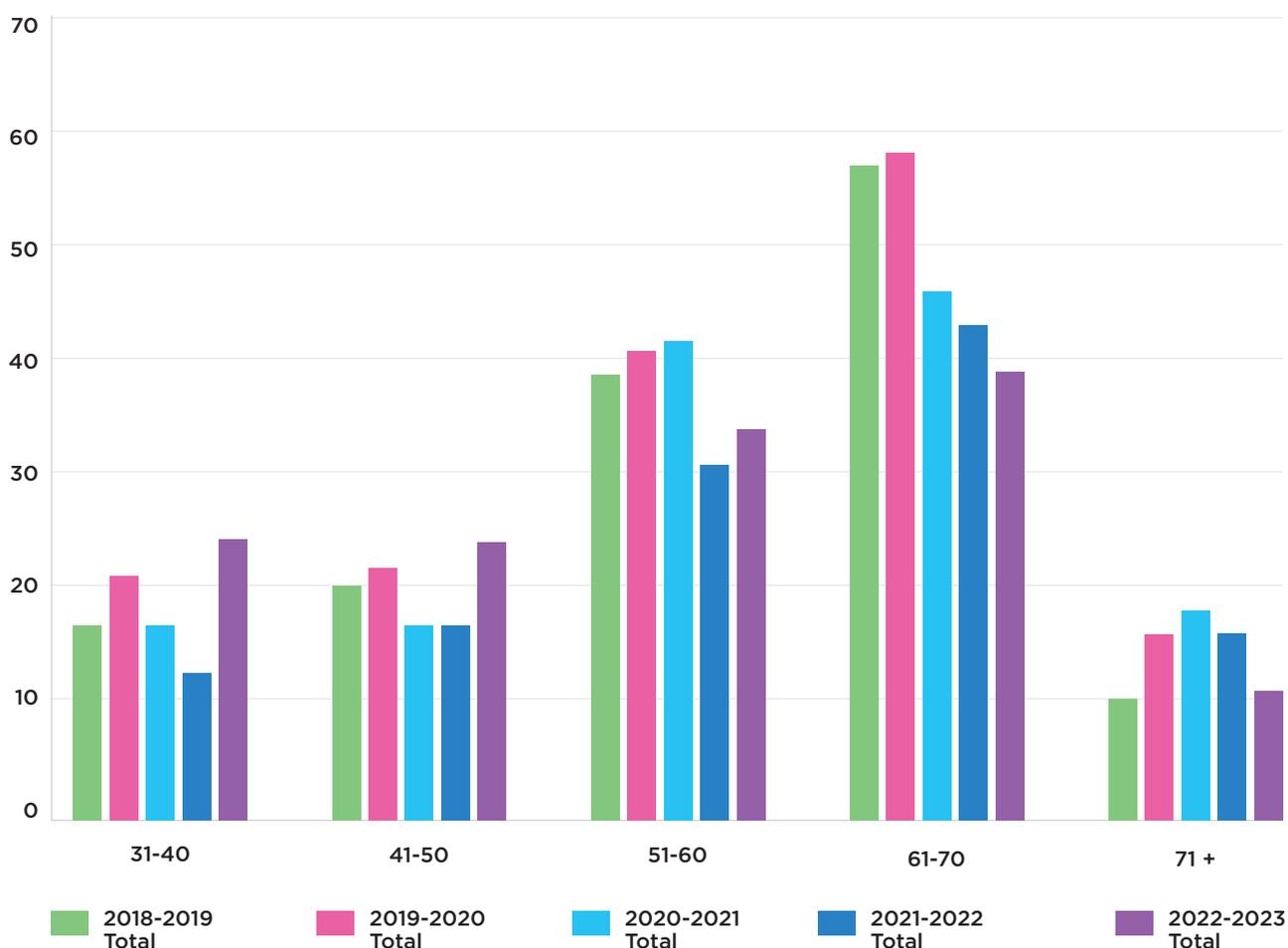
Safeguarder Profile

Since 2022, we have carried out two rounds of Safeguarder recruitment to ensure we are able to continue to meet operational need in each Local Authority area. These collectively resulted in a total of **37 additional Safeguarders** being appointed to the national Panel in the period April 2022 - April 2023. We were delighted that children and young people again provided support to the SPT during the interview and selection process for new Safeguarders.

Throughout the year, there have been 20 Safeguarder resignations, mainly due to personal circumstances and individuals no longer able to offer the time commitment required to carry out the role. Three Safeguarders did not seek reappointment in 2023 and, prior to reappointment, two Safeguarders were removed from the national Panel, based on recommendations made by the SPT and agreed by the Scottish Government. By April 2023, the total number of serving Safeguarders was 132.

In any recruitment round, we aim to attract a diverse panel in terms of age, employment background and life experience. While our female: male ratio currently sits at approximately 2.5:1, the number of younger individuals (31-40 years) successfully applying for the role has generally been increasing year on year, while the number of Safeguarders aged >70 is decreasing.

Age profile of Safeguarders over the past 5 years



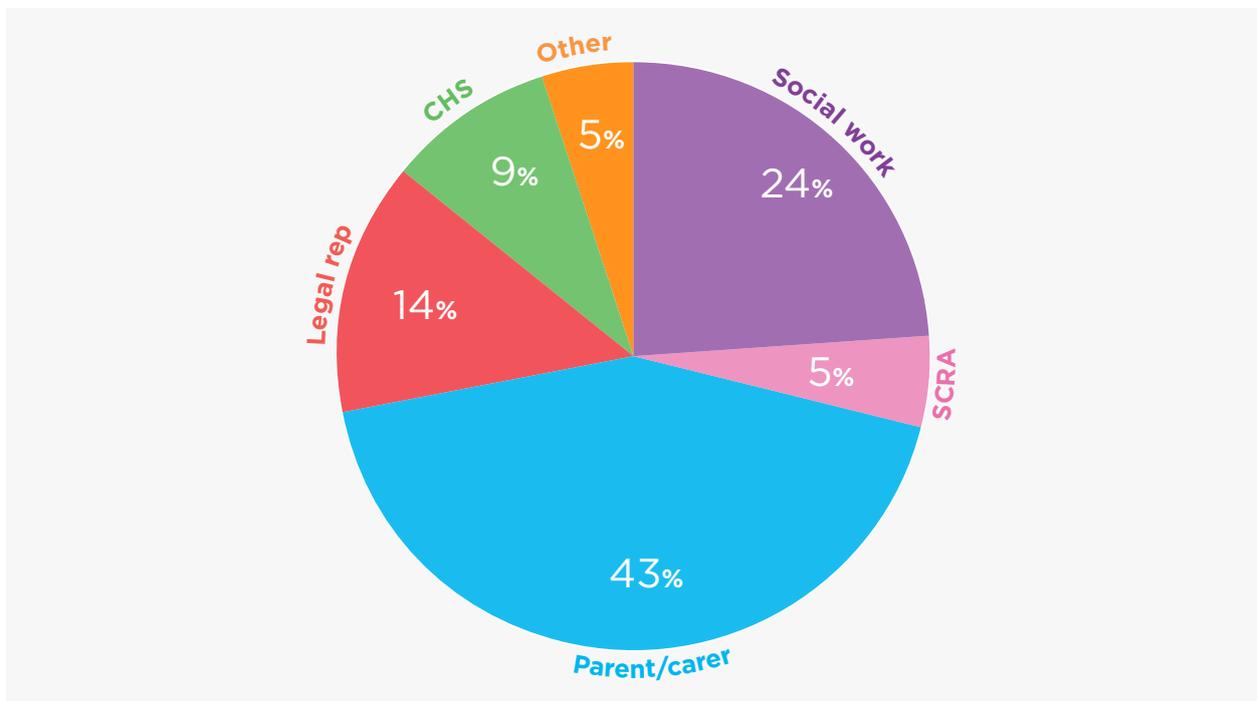
Feedback and Complaints

The SPT welcomes feedback on Safeguarder practice in order to affirm positive Safeguarder practice, develop improvement, and to support Safeguarders' accountability.

When we receive positive feedback regarding Safeguarder practice, we share this with the Safeguarder and their Support Manager as evidence of their performance. In this year we received **18 positive feedback forms**, and 9 of these named a specific Safeguarder.

Our new Complaints Policy describes the process through which concerns and complaints are managed by the SPT. This year we received **21 complaints** in total.

Source of complaints



As with the past two years, the majority of complaints were raised by either parents/carers or Social Work services. To look in more detail at trends; in 2021-22, we received 23 complaints, with this figure being 13 in 2020-21. The 21 complaints we received this year is therefore within the expected range. To put this further into context, when considering the 899 Safeguarder appointments in 2022-23, this equates to complaints being raised in **just over 2% of cases**.

Of the 21 complaints received, 20 were resolved through our Initial Enquiry process, rather than requiring Formal Investigation. For 12 of these, the Practice Standards were found to have been met, although in five cases action was nevertheless agreed with the Safeguarder for practice improvement. In a further five complaints, the Practice Standards were either found to be only partially met (one case) or not met (four cases). These therefore led to action plans being agreed with the Safeguarder in all case but one, where the Safeguarder was subsequently removed from the Panel.

In three cases there was insufficient evidence to proceed with the complaint process, while one complaint is yet to be concluded.



A photograph of four young women standing in a field of tall grass, seen from behind. They are all reaching up with their hands to form three heart shapes against a bright, clear sky. The scene is bathed in the warm light of late afternoon or early morning.

Future Plans

There are several areas on which we are excited to focus over the next 12 months as part of our core aim of the continued growth and development of our service.

Service review

As we come to the end of the 2020-24 contract period for managing and operating the national Safeguarders Panel, we find ourselves at a natural point for reflecting on the changes we've sought to make over the past 4 years. These have included the move to a regional model, the widescale review of our policies, deepening our engagement with children and young people, and an update of our website and resources; all designed to further embed children's human rights across our work.

We are therefore in the process of carrying out a wide-ranging review of the service, to re-examine our work so far and to support our future development. This will include actively seeking feedback from a range of stakeholders, including Safeguarders themselves.

Fees review

Following delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have recently restarted work on a review of the Safeguarders Panel fees and expenses structure. Our aim here is to ensure our system is as straightforward, clear and fair as possible for everyone who uses it, but particularly for the Safeguarders we work alongside. We will continue to work closely in consultation with Safeguarders and the Scottish Government on this process.

Guidance on Legal advice and representation

There are rare occasions where a Safeguarder finds that they themselves need either legal advice or representation in order to fulfil their role. Currently, Safeguarders are asked to contact the SPT with their request, which we then pass on to the Scottish Government. Following feedback from Safeguarders about their experiences of this process, we have been developing new guidance that will aim to make it clearer and more transparent, and which will lead to Safeguarders getting a timely and clear-cut response. This in turn will better support them in their role to protect the best interests of the child or young person.

Future Learning & Development opportunities

The development and launch of an online 'Best interests' training module will continue our focus on Children's Human Rights. The aim of this is to support Safeguarders to recognise and balance what is in a child's best interests in every individual appointment. Further modules currently being developed for launch in the near future include Child health inequalities and Child development.

As we look to the future, and the opportunities this will provide for working in a transformed Children's Hearing System, we also recognise the importance of continuing to support Safeguarders to meet the challenges that this will pose. We look forward to an ongoing conversation which will ensure that both Safeguarders and the SPT are working to respect, protect and uphold the rights and best interests of children across Scotland.



"We look forward to an ongoing conversation which will ensure that both Safeguarders and the SPT are working to respect, protect and uphold the rights and best interests of children across Scotland."

Safeguarders Panel Team

Safeguarder Allocations and Availability Across Scotland: 2022-2023:

Local Authority	Safeguarders	Appt by hearing	Appt by court
Aberdeen	8	15	17
Aberdeenshire	7	13	6
Angus	10	17	21
Argyll & Bute	10	4	2
Clackmannanshire	11	22	8
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	3	2	1
Dumfries & Galloway	6	16	0
Dundee	18	43	56
East Ayrshire	13	12	6
East Dunbartonshire	14	10	2
East Lothian	12	13	0
East Renfrewshire	10	16	0
Edinburgh	20	37	21
Falkirk	14	29	21
Fife	17	26	65
Glasgow	29	37	80
Highland	12	23	5
Inverclyde	9	20	6
Mid Lothian	10	1	0
Moray	6	6	0
North Ayrshire	12	12	0
North Lanarkshire	18	38	2
Orkney Islands	2	1	1
Perth & Kinross	12	17	11
Renfrewshire	18	13	6
Scottish Borders	7	11	4
Shetland Islands	3	1	0
South Ayrshire	13	7	3
South Lanarkshire	13	22	3
Stirling	11	7	5
West Dunbartonshire	21	19	21
West Lothian	11	13	3

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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