members, Area Support Teams and the local authority staff that support them, staff at Children's Hearings Scotland, all SCRA staff including managers, Reporters and Assistant Reporters and support staff, social workers, teachers, health workers, safeguarders, advocacy workers, legal representatives, staff at SLAB and everyone who supports them. We also thank the children, families and carers who have given their time to share their views to help us improve. We need to attend carefully to all of their wellbeing, and maximise support for individuals and teams as we plan for service recovery.

The reduction in hearings capacity has led to a build-up of outstanding hearings that now need to be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. We must continue to uphold the rights of the children, relevant persons and their families whilst increasing our capacity to arrange hearings quickly. The backlog includes cases where emergency legislation was used to extend for up to 6 months the duration of CSOs which are now close to expiry, cases of children for whom new grounds require a hearing to be arranged and requests for review hearings from local authorities and families when their circumstances change. In addition, we should be alert to the possibility of an increase in new referrals now that schools have returned and unmet need is identified. This has already been demonstrated in the national data which is being collated weekly. A spike in child concerns and referrals to social work or child protection services has already been observed in August 2020. It is likely that following assessment there will be a proportion of these children for whom the right response will be a referral to the Children's Reporter resulting in a hearing.

Court activity is increasing as the courts re-open and begin to process court applications arising from children's hearings.

The system is still operating below 50% of normal capacity. In order to ensure children have the hearings they need the hearings system will have to increase the number of hearings that can be arranged quickly. Recovery is still at an early stage, and our shared current assessment is that full 'steady state' recovery will not be realised until later in 2021.

The work needed to ensure that every child referred to the Reporter receives the right response at the right time is a broad, complex task. It entails rapid but careful planning, and the right level of resources invested over a sufficient time period to allow an increase in hearings. Every children's hearing requires careful planning and the gathering of key information from children, their families and the team of professionals who support them. This pre hearing work is essential but often goes unnoticed. It can consume significant time and resources. To ensure the best decisions are made for children at hearings we must not skip over these preparatory steps in order to achieve a quicker 'result'. Every child's case is different, and each one demands careful individual attention. Every procedural decision and every hearing must respect the needs, rights and interests of individual children and their families.

Protecting the rights of all: While each child's situation requires distinct consideration, some will require extra planning and support. For example, we must ensure that the voices of disabled children and those with speech, language and communication needs are heard equally; and the experiences of pre-verbal children and babies are no less central to assessment and decision-making processes than that of those who are more able to articulate their feelings and views.

Recognition of extra demand on partners: Optimal participation and upholding of rights in virtual and blended hearings which involve remote participation often requires additional preparation. This has inevitable resource implication; for example in terms of the extra time which social workers, advocacy workers, legal and other representatives need to help children and their families understand and participate effectively in new types of hearings.