



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

Embargoed until 00.01 hours on Tuesday 11 November 2008

NUMBER OF REFERRALS TO CHILDREN'S REPORTER FALLS FOR FIRST TIME IN SEVEN YEARS

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) today (Tuesday) announced that for the first time in seven years, there was a fall in the number of children referred to the Children's Reporter.

Following the highest ever number of referrals to the Children's Reporter in 2006/07, SCRA's Annual Report for 2007/08 shows a 10% reduction in the number of children referred. This is the first time there has been a reduction in the number of children referred since 2000/01.

The number of children referred in 2007/08 was 50,314, compared to 56,199 children in 2006/07. Despite this reduction, this is still 5.5% of the Scottish child population.

The decrease is seen partly as the result of partner agencies working together to implement new measures, such as pre-referral screening processes, which are aimed at making sure only children who may be in need of compulsory measures of intervention are referred to the Reporter in line with the purpose of the Children's Hearings System.

The vast majority of children were referred for their own care and protection (40,204 children); with the most common ground for referral being that the child was a 'victim of a Schedule 1 offence' (19,212 children) including cruelty, sexual offences, bodily injury and indecent behaviour against children. The second most common ground

for referral was 'lack of parental care' (15,143 children). 6,240 children under the age of four years were referred on lack of parental care, with 1,655 of these being under one year old.

Despite the decrease in the number of children referred, the number of children on Supervision Requirements (compulsory measures) increased (from 12,644 in 2006/07 to 13,219 children in 2007/08), as well as the number of Children's Hearings held (up from 41,891 in 2006/07 to 42,302 Hearings in 2007/08). These are the highest numbers since the Children's Hearings System began.

Douglas Bulloch, SCRA's Chair said: "A lot of hard work has taken place in the last year working with partner agencies to reduce the number of children being inappropriately referred to the Reporter when there was no evidence of a need for compulsory measures.

"The reduction in referral numbers reflects the effectiveness of these efforts, particularly pre-referral screening processes. SCRA is grateful to our partners for their commitment to these new approaches.

"The trends are not, however, as yet happening evenly across Scotland and in some areas, the referral rate remains above 9% of the child population. We need to continue to work with partner agencies to ensure good practice is implemented right across Scotland to enable the most vulnerable children get the help they need, when they need it."

Commenting on the rising number of children on supervision, Douglas Bulloch, said: "We also need to make clear that despite the reduction in children being referred, it is a concern that an increasing proportion of the Scottish child population is requiring compulsory measures of intervention. This is an area which requires further research to explore the roots of such difficulties and to identify the most effective measures to help children earlier in life. Ideally, before a need arises to make a referral to the Reporter."

Netta Maciver, SCRA's Principal Reporter/Chief Executive, said that the hard work and achievements over the past year, would continue in the year ahead.

She said: "We are moving into a period of change for the Children's Hearings System. As we move to the new arrangements for the Hearings System, we are looking forward to working with our partners to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children and their families are met, and they are provided with the best possible interventions to improve their life chances."

NOTES TO NEWS EDITORS:

SCRA's Annual Report 2007/08 is available from 8am today at www.scra.gov.uk

Netta Maciver OBE, SCRA's Principal Reporter/Chief Executive is available for media interview between 11am and 1pm today, Tuesday 11 November, 2008.

To arrange an interview please contact Lois Boyle/Tom Cassidy at Media House in advance on 0141 220 6040.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is at the centre of the Children's Hearings System – the child protection and youth justice system for children in Scotland. The Children's Hearings System aims to protect the safety and welfare of children, and where appropriate, address their behaviour.

SCRA is the national body that runs the network of Children's Reporters and the 42 local Reporter offices and Hearings Centres across Scotland.

SCRA was formed as a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 and became fully operational on 1 April 1996.

Focused on children most at risk, SCRA's fundamental purpose is to:

- Make effective decisions about a need for compulsion,
- Support Children's Panel Members to make good decisions,
- Enable children and families to participate in Children's Hearings,
- Disseminate information and data to influence, inform and reassure.