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November 2005

**Fast Track Children's Hearings Pilot – Final Update (1 February
2003 to 30 September 2005)**

Prepared by:
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
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Summary

The Fast Track Children's Hearings pilot was introduced to the Children's Hearings System to deal with children and young people identified as persistent offenders¹. It ran from 1 February 2003 to 30 September 2005, and aimed for the Hearings System to:

- respond more quickly;
- reduce re-offending; and
- put an early stop on offending behaviour.

During the period of the pilot:

Children who persistently offend:

- 459 children and young people entered the pilot and 246 left the pilot
- 17% girls, 83% boys
- 63% were aged 14 and 15 years old
- 8% of all children referred to Reporter for offending in the pilot areas were persistent offenders

Impact of Fast Track:

- Faster - 57 days from receipt of offence referral to Hearing decision for persistent offenders compared to 72 days for other offenders
- 53% of persistent offenders were referred to Hearings, compared with 15% of other offenders
- 61% of persistent offenders were subject to Supervision Requirements on 30 September 2005
- Impact on levels of offending is inconclusive and requires further analysis

¹ An 'offending episode' is defined as one offence referral to the Reporter. Children identified as persistently offending have 5 or more offending episodes in 6 months.

Introduction

Children and young people are referred to the Children's Reporter because they are alleged to have committed offences and/or because there are concerns about their safety and welfare. It is the Reporter's job to investigate each case and decide if compulsory measures are necessary to address the child's behaviour or protect him/her from harm. In these cases children are referred to Children's Hearings. In other cases the Reporter may decide that voluntary measures are more appropriate or may discharge the case because of lack of evidence, or the child may already be subject to compulsory measures.

In 2004-05, in Scotland, 50529 children and young people were referred to the Reporterⁱ. 17494 of these children and young people were referred on offence grounds. A small proportion of the children and young people referred for offending in Scotland (about 7%, 1260 individuals), persistently offendⁱⁱ. The Scottish Executive has set a target to reduce the number of persistent young offenders by 10%, by 2006ⁱⁱⁱ. The Fast Track Hearings pilot was started by the Scottish Executive in February 2003. It aimed to speed up cases of persistent offenders and reduce their levels of offending, in line with the Scottish Executive's National Standards for Scotland's Youth Justice Services. It was carried out in six local authority areas: Dundee; Scottish Borders; East Lothian and North, East and South Ayrshire.

Children and young people are identified as persistently offending, and entered the Fast Track pilot, if they have been referred to the Reporter for offending five or more times in the previous 6 months. They could also enter the pilot at the discretion of Reporters^{iv}.

Research on the Fast Track pilot was commissioned by the Scottish Executive and carried out by Glasgow, Stirling and Strathclyde Universities. The final report on this research was published by the Scottish Executive in 2005^v. The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) also carried out research on the pilot – 'On the Right Track. A Study of Children and Young People in the Fast Track Pilot'^{vi}.

This final update report gives facts and figures about the whole period of the Fast Track pilot, and the children and young people involved in it. It has been produced by SCRA, from data recorded in our Referrals Administration Database (RAD), in response to a request from the Scottish Executive. The report supplements and updates some of the information contained in the above two more comprehensive research reports but does not change their findings.

Findings

Children identified as persistently offending

Numbers of children

During the period 1 February 2003 to 30 September 2005, 459 children and young people (79 girls and 380 boys) joined the Fast Track pilot. This is 8% of the total number of children and young people referred to the Reporter for offending in the pilot areas over the same period.

At 30 September 2005, 213 children and young people (181 boys and 32 girls) were involved in Fast Track, as 246 had left the pilot during this period.

Table 1. Number of children and young people identified as persistently offending in the pilot areas

Pilot area	Number of children	
	On 30 September 2005	Total*
Dundee	68	173
East Lothian & Scottish Borders	22	51
North Ayrshire	51	103
South Ayrshire	24	64
East Ayrshire	48	68
All Pilot areas	213	459

*All those individuals who have ever been identified as persistent offenders including those who have exited Fast Track.

In the three comparison areas, 200 children and young people (30 girls and 170 boys) were identified as persistently offending during this period – 41 in Renfrewshire, 52 in Perth & Kinross and 107 in Fife.

Children and young people could exit Fast Track if they had completed the programmes to address their offending and there were reductions in their levels of offending, or if they had not offended in the previous 6 months, or if they were over 16 years and were no longer subject to Supervision Requirements, or were aged over 17 years and 9 months. 246 children and young people (199 boys and 47 girls) left the pilot – this is 54% of those who joined the pilot. The table below shows the number of children and young people who entered and left the pilot each month.

Number of children and young people who entered and exited Fast Track each month

2003

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Entry	56	26	17	11	12	15	7	18	23	16	12
Exit	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	4	4	4	4

2004

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Entry	14	9	9	9	13	14	25	8	21	14	12	10
Exit	3	3	9	11	8	8	12	9	13	10	20	8

2005

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept
Entry	10	10	7	13	3	13	7	14	11
Exit	17	6	20	10	18	12	9	6	13

A higher number of young people entered Fast Track in February 2003 than in any other month. The 'surge' represents those young people who, at the start of the pilot on 1 February 2003, either already met the persistent offending criteria or were at their fifth referral. Eleven of these 56 children and young people were still in the pilot at its end on 30 September 2005.

Ages of children and young people

Over half (63%) of children and young people identified as persistent offenders in the pilot areas were 14 or 15 years old when they entered the pilot². Seven per cent were less than 12 years of age.

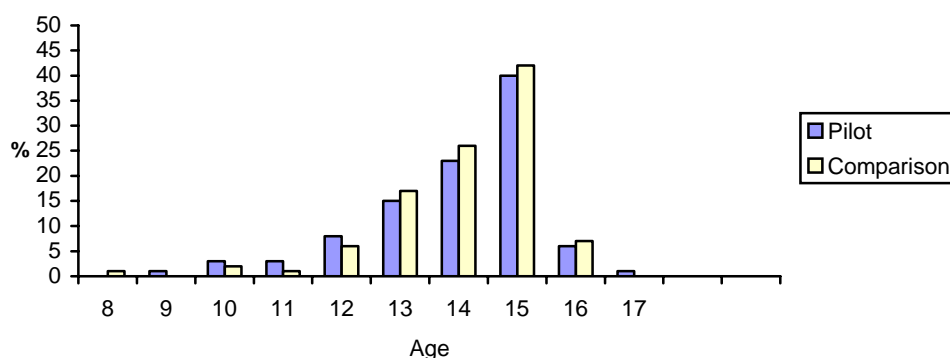


Figure 1. Age of persistent offenders in pilot and comparison areas at entry to fast track

² Young people only remain within the Children's Hearings System at ages 16 and 17 years if they are already subject to a Supervision Requirement, or the case is remitted from Court.

Living Groups

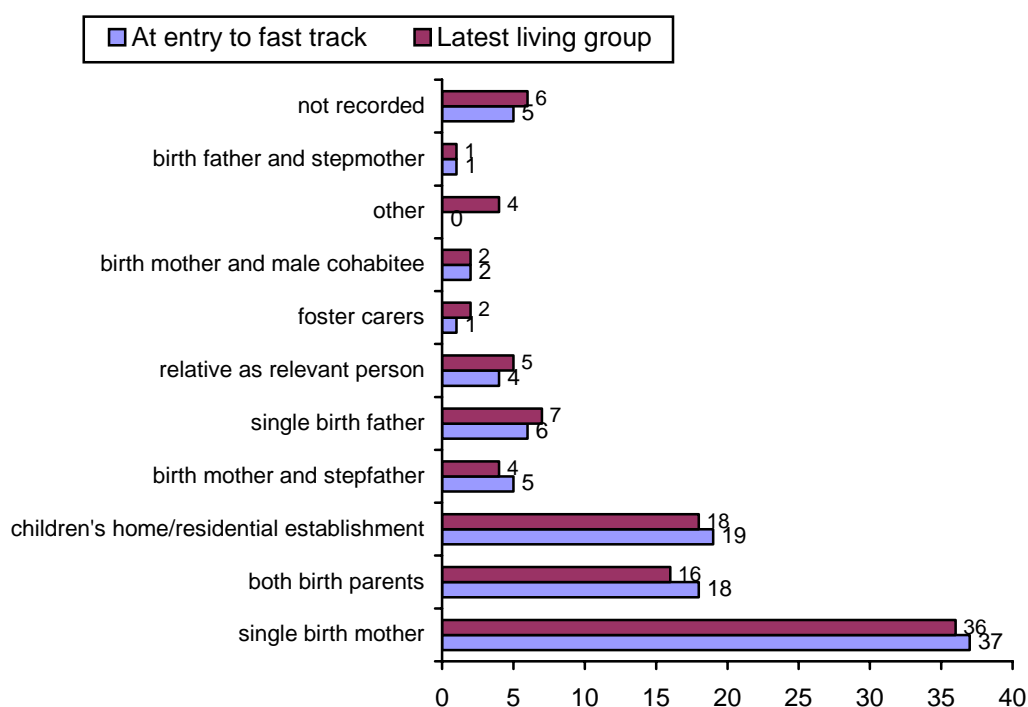


Figure 2. Living groups of persistent offenders in pilot areas %

Figure 2 shows the living groups of children and young people identified as persistent offenders in the pilot areas when they entered the pilot and at their last referral to the Reporter in the period to 30 September 2005 (latest living group). The most common living group was recorded as living with a single birth mother (37% at entry to the pilot, 36% latest living group). There was little change in the pattern of living groups of children in the pilot from entry to end September 2005.

Offenders and offences

Children and young people identified as persistently offending made up 8% of all children referred for offending in the pilot areas but they accounted for 43% of alleged offences.

Table 2. Children referred for offending in the pilot areas and those identified as persistent offenders

Pilot area	No. of children referred for offending	No. identified as persistent offenders	% identified as persistent offenders
Dundee	1423	173	12%
East Lothian & Scottish Borders	712	51	7%
North Ayrshire	1399	103	7%
South Ayrshire	815	64	8%
East Ayrshire	1171	68	6%
All Pilot Areas	5520	459	8%

The 459 children and young people identified as persistently offending in the pilot areas had been referred to the Reporter for 10338 alleged offences over the period

of the pilot. In comparison, the 5051 other children and young people referred for offending had been referred for 13616 alleged offences.

Types of offences

Breach of the peace (19%), assault (17%) and vandalism/malicious mischief (17%) were the most recorded types of crime referred to the Reporter for children and young people identified as persistently offending. These were also the offences most commonly referred to the Reporter for other offenders – i.e. breach of the peace (16%), assault (17%) and vandalism (23%).

Table 3. Offences referred to the Reporter in the pilot areas between 1 February 2003 and 30 September 2005

Offence classification	Persistent offenders		Other offenders		Total
	No. offences	% of total offences	No. offences	% of total offences	
Assault	1807	17%	2346	17%	4153
Breach of the peace	2021	19%	2231	16%	4243
Carrying offensive weapon	185	2%	289	2%	474
Possession of drugs	112	1%	273	2%	385
Road Traffic Act offence	487	5%	563	4%	1050
Theft by housebreaking	385	4%	298	2%	683
Theft by OLP (non-motor vehicle)	88	1%	174	1%	262
Theft by OLP (motor vehicle)	116	1%	53	0.4%	169
Theft by shoplifting	614	6%	779	6%	1393
Theft of motor vehicle	216	2%	96	0.7%	312
Theft – other	795	7%	926	7%	1721
Vandalism/malicious mischief	1769	17%	3180	23%	4949
Other offences	1743	18%	2408	18%	4151
Total	10338	100%	13616	100%	23954

Re-referrals on offence grounds

The definition of persistent offending - and criteria for entry to Fast Track - is 5 or more offence referrals to the Reporter in a 6 month period. A key objective of Fast Track was to reduce this offending behaviour. If the pilot met this aim, there should have been a reduction in the number of offences once the work undertaken in the pilot took effect.

To allow a closer examination of re-referrals, all persistent offenders identified in pilot areas between February 2003 and March 2005 were separated by the month in which they first entered Fast Track. The number of offences referred to the Reporter in the 6 months before, and after, they entered the Fast Track process was compared as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Numbers of alleged offences referred to the Reporter for children and young people identified as persistently offending in pilot areas between February 2003 and March 2005³

Month identified as PO	Number of POs	No. of offences referred to Reporter		% change in number of offences
		During 6 months <u>before</u> entry to Fast Track	During 6 months <u>after</u> entry to Fast Track	
February 03	56	847	555	-34%
March 03	26	283	175	-38%
April 03	17	123	106	-14%
May 03	11	80	71	-11%
June 03	12	103	124	+20%
July 03	15	114	99	-13%
August 03	7	46	47	+2%
September 03	18	157	147	-6%
October 03	23	184	171	-7%
November 03	16	122	128	+5%
December 03	12	89	76	-16%
January 04	14	182	96	-47%
February 04	9	81	70	-14%
March 04	9	70	96	+37%
April 04	9	74	104	+41%
May 04	13	94	83	-12%
June 04	14	104	125	+20%
July 04	25	206	176	-15%
August 04	8	67	21	-69%
September 04	21	225	210	-7%
October 04	14	101	78	-23%
November 04	12	98	52	-4%
December 04	10	63	93	+48%
January 05	10	66	49	-26%
February 05	10	72	19	-74%
March 05	7	57	14	-75%
All	398	3708	2985	-19%

Overall, there was a 19% reduction in the number of offences in the 6 months after entering Fast Track, compared with the 6 months before. However, this varied over the period of the pilot, as shown above.

In the comparison areas, 161 children and young people were identified as persistently offending in the period 1 February 2003 to 31 March 2005. Comparing the 6 months before being identified as a persistent offender to the 6 months after, a 44% reduction in the numbers of offences was observed.

In the rest of Scotland (i.e. excluding the pilot and comparison areas), 1267 children and young people were identified as persistently offending in the period 1 February 2003 to 31 March 2005. As above, when the 6 months before being identified as a persistent offender to the 6 months after were compared, a 35% reduction in the numbers of offences was observed for these individuals.

The above trends in reduction in offending need to be considered with caution. As noted in the Scottish Executive's evaluation of the pilot, monitoring patterns over 6 months is short-term and cannot predict longer-term trends or determine the success

³ The data in this report is on offences referred to the Reporter, and does not include other offences that had been dealt with in the criminal justice system.

of interventions. Monitoring periods of 1 to 2 years are more usual in determining post-intervention trends^v.

Other grounds for referral

Children and young people referred to the Reporter on offence grounds have often been referred previously or at the same time on other grounds. An analysis of the other grounds that children and young people identified as persistent offenders were being referred on after entry to Fast Track was carried out.

172 of the 213 children and young people (81%) in the Fast Track Pilot on 30 September 2005 were also referred on one or more non-offence grounds during the period of the pilot. The main points to note, of these 213 children and young people:

- 61% were also referred because they were beyond the control of any relevant person
- 38% were referred on the ground of falling into bad associations or being exposed to moral danger
- 29% were victims of an offence
- 21% were referred for misuse of alcohol and/or drugs
- 20% had failed to attend school
- 16% were referred on the ground of lack of parental care

Table 5. Other grounds of referral for persistent offenders in pilot areas in the pilot on 30 September 2005

Grounds for referral ^{vii}	Children identified as persistently offending	
	Number	%
a. Is beyond the control of any relevant person	130	61%
b. Is falling into bad associations or moral danger	82	38%
c. Is likely to suffer unnecessarily or be impaired seriously in his/her health or development due to lack of parental care	33	16%
d. Is the victim of a Schedule 1 offence	62	29%
e. Is a member or likely to become a member of the same household as a victim of a Schedule 1 offence	less than 5	less than 1%
f. Is a member or likely to become a member of the same household as a Schedule 1 offender	less than 5	less than 1%
h. Not attending school	42	20%
j. Alcohol or drugs misuse	45	21%
k. Solvent abuse	5	2%
l. Is a child who is accommodated by a local authority or who is subject to a parental responsibilities order, whose behaviour is such that special measures are necessary for his/her adequate provision in his/her interests or in the interests of others.	Less than 5	1%
i. Has committed an offence	213	100%

These data support the more comprehensive findings of SCRA research on children and young people involved in the pilot which looked at their histories in the Children's

Hearings System^{vi}. This research showed that children and young people identified as persistent offenders had complex referral histories with most (62%) being first referred to the Reporter on non-offence grounds. The backgrounds of these children and young people were characterised by substance misuse (56% of those in the research sample), problems with school attendance (84%), social adversity (63%) and a third had parents/carers who engaged in offending behaviour.

Time Interval Standards at the end of the pilot

One of the aims of Fast Track was to speed up the Children's Hearings System for children and young identified as persistently offending. The target for this was to reduce the time taken to reach and implement Hearings' decisions - "the time taken from police caution and charge to the implementation of Hearing decision should be reduced to 80 working days by March 2006"^{viii}. During the period of the pilot, the Fast Track areas worked to this standard and the other standards in Scottish Executive's National Standards for Scotland's Youth Justice Services, and all other areas were working towards meeting these same standards.

We collate information from receipt of referral to the Reporter to Hearing decision (for cases that proceed to Hearings); this is shown in the tables below together with the relevant standards^{viii}. These tables show the times taken for offence referrals for persistent and other offenders in the pilot and comparison areas. Also included are tables on non-offence referrals, to help assess if Fast Track had a wider impact on the Hearings System than just on offending.

Receipt of referral to Reporter decision

- **The Reporter will make a decision about a referral within 10 weeks (50 working days) of receipt (National Standard 4).**
- **The Reporter's decision about need for a Children's Hearing shall be made within 28 working days of receipt of referral (Fast Track Hearing Pilots Guidance Booklet).**

The average times taken in working days from receipt of offence and non-offence referrals to the Reporter's decision to refer to a Hearing or other agencies for action are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Time in working days from receipt of offence referral to final Reporter decision⁶

	Number of working days (<i>current target</i>)	
	Persistent offenders	Other offenders
Pilot areas*	(28 days)	(50 days)
Dundee	32	68
East Ayrshire	32	57
North Ayrshire	22	45
South Ayrshire	21	41
East Lothian	17	34
Scottish Borders	24	34
Average**	27.5	52
Comparison areas	(50 days)	(50 days)
Fife	58	77
Perth & Kinross	35	45
Renfrewshire	51	61
Average	51	67

* The figures for individual areas represent the average number of days for that area

** The overall average is calculated using *all* individual cases *not* using the area totals

Table 7. Time in working days from receipt of non-offence referral to final Reporter decision⁶

	Number of working days (<i>current target</i>)	
	Persistent offenders	All other children
Pilot areas*	(50 days)	(50 days)
Dundee	54	107
East Ayrshire	40	77
North Ayrshire	24	46
South Ayrshire	22	49
East Lothian	27	38
Scottish Borders	50	46
Average**	36	62
Comparison areas	(50 days)	(50 days)
Fife	76	110
Perth & Kinross	33	80
Renfrewshire	49	79
Average	56	90

* The figures for individual sites represent the average number of days for that area

** The overall average is calculated using *all* individual cases *not* using the area totals

⁶ Excludes referrals where no Reporter decision had been made by 30 September 2005.

Reporter decision to first Hearing

- Hearings will be scheduled to take place within a maximum of 20 working days of the Reporter's decision (National Standard 6).
- Hearings will be scheduled to take place within a maximum of 15 working days of the Reporter's decision.

The average times taken in working days from Reporter's decision to first Hearing are shown in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. Time in working days from Reporter decision on offence referrals to first Hearing (current target)

	Number of working days	
	Persistent offenders <i>(15 days)</i>	Other offenders <i>(20 days)</i>
Pilot areas		
Dundee	18	20
East Ayrshire	12	14
North Ayrshire	12	16
South Ayrshire	15	28
East Lothian	16	19
Scottish Borders	18	21
Average	15	17
Comparison areas	<i>(20 days)</i>	<i>(20 days)</i>
Fife	23	19
Perth & Kinross	17	18
Renfrewshire	15	19
Average	19	19

Table 9. Time in working days from Reporter decision on non-offence referrals to first Hearing (current target)

	Number of working days	
	Persistent offenders <i>(20 days)</i>	All other children <i>(20 days)</i>
Pilot areas		
Dundee	17	13
East Ayrshire	19	15
North Ayrshire	11	16
South Ayrshire	26	19
East Lothian	28	19
Scottish Borders	20	18
Average	15	16
Comparison areas	<i>(20 days)</i>	<i>(20 days)</i>
Fife	16	17
Perth & Kinross	22	14
Renfrewshire	16	19
Average	17	18

Receipt of referral to Hearing decision

The length of time in working days from receipt of referral to Hearing decision (for cases that proceed to Hearings) is shown below. Whilst there is no target specific to this overall period, it accounts for the greater part of the period covered by the 80 day target of the National Standards for Scotland's Youth Justice Services.

Table 10. Time in working days from receipt of offence referral to Hearing decision

	Number of working days	
	Persistent offenders	Other offenders
Pilot areas		
Dundee	58	83
East Ayrshire	56	78
North Ayrshire	57	72
South Ayrshire	59	64
East Lothian	47	53
Scottish Borders	49	56
Average	57	72
Comparison areas		
Fife	82	77
Perth & Kinross	61	79
Renfrewshire	81	84
Average	77	80

Table 11. Time in working days from receipt of non-offence referrals to Hearing decision

	Number of working days	
	Persistent offenders	All other children
Pilot areas		
Dundee	107	122
East Ayrshire	147	121
North Ayrshire	66	107
South Ayrshire	64	92
East Lothian	71	88
Scottish Borders	136	97
Average	84	110
Comparison areas		
Fife	78	117
Perth & Kinross	135	119
Renfrewshire	100	148
Average	94	131

Reporter Decisions

Reporter decisions on children referred on offence grounds received in the period 1 February 2003 to 30 September 2005

Table 12. Reporter decisions on *children* referred on offence grounds

	Pilot areas		Comparison areas	
	POs	Non-POs	POs	Non-POs
Arrange Hearing	84%	13%	68%	12%

Table 13. Reporter decisions on offence grounds referred*

	Pilot areas		Comparison areas	
	POs	Non-POs	POs	Non-POs
Arrange Hearing	53%	15%	38%	13%
Other decisions				
No Hearing – compulsory measures not required	0.2%	1%	0.1%	0.7%
Action under current measures and/or diversion	35%	33%	45.2%	38%
No Hearing – insufficient evidence	5%	6%	5%	5%
No Hearing – no action	5%	39%	8%	36%

*Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Outcomes

Supervision Requirements

At 30 September 2005, 129 of the 213 children and young people (61%) identified as persistently offending in the pilot areas, and remaining in the pilot, were subject to Supervision Requirements. Eighty of the 200 young people identified as persistently offending in the comparison areas were subject to Supervision Requirements at 30 September 2005.

The most common type of Supervision Requirement for the 129 children and young people in the pilot on 30 September 2005 was at home with parents or other relevant persons (54% of the young people), followed by residential school (19%) and local authority home (13%).

General Findings

Children identified as persistent offenders

The majority of children and young people identified as persistent offenders in the Fast Track pilot were boys and were aged 14 or 15 years. They have complex referral histories, with on average 22.5 offences per child during the period of the pilot, compared with 2.7 offences per child for other children referred to the Reporter for offending during this period. A majority (81%) of those in the pilot at 30 September 2005 had also been referred on non-offence grounds during the period of the pilot. These findings compliment those of SCRA research on persistent offenders which found that the majority (62%) of persistent offenders involved in the Fast Track Hearings pilot were first referred to the Reporter on non-offence grounds. 44% of these persistent offenders were first referred to the Reporter before they were 8 years old due to concerns about their care and protection. These findings are supported by earlier SCRA research on youth offending in Glasgow which found that over 60% of children who had 10 or more offence referrals had first been referred on non-offence grounds^{ix}.

Offending

Overall in the 6 months after joining Fast Track, there was a 19% reduction in the number of offences referred to the Reporter compared with the 6 months before. However, this varied throughout the period of the pilot with no clear trends emerging. In the comparison areas, there was a 44% reduction in levels of offending. As noted by the Scottish Executive's evaluation of the Fast Track pilot, 6 months is too limited measure the effects of interventions, periods of up to 2 years are necessary. Without further research it is not possible to draw further conclusions on this, as many factors will play a part such as differences in police practice, availability of resources, etc. In addition, the data in this report is on offences referred to the Reporter and does not include other offences that had been dealt with in the criminal justice system. It therefore provides only an indication of offending patterns, and should be viewed with caution without further information on whether there were other offences that had been dealt with in the criminal justice system.

Speed of cases

Fast Track appears to have been successful in speeding up the time taken to deal with cases referred to the Reporter. In general, SCRA is meeting the target times for persistent offender cases in the pilot and persistent offender cases are being dealt with more quickly than other cases.

Persistent offenders' cases are dealt with more quickly than those of other offenders in the pilot areas - the overall process from receipt of offence referral to Hearing decision was on average 57 working days for persistent offenders but 72 working days for other offenders.

Fast Track also appears to have a positive impact on the times taken to deal with other offence cases and non-offence cases in the pilot areas. In the Fast Track areas for offence cases of non-persistent offenders, it took on average 72 working days from receipt of referral to Hearing decision compared with 80 days for similar cases in the comparison areas. For non-offence cases in Fast Track areas it took on average 110 working days compared with 131 days for non-offence cases in comparison areas.

Conclusion

The data in this report lend further support to the conclusions of the Scottish Executive's evaluation of the Fast Track pilot^v, namely:

'The verdict from the evaluation of Fast Track is definitely positive with regard to time-scales, but not proven with regard to impact on offending.'

ⁱ Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. Annual Report 2004-05.

ⁱⁱ Scottish Executive and Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (2005). Scottish Youth Justice Performance Update Report 2004-05.

ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish Executive (2002) National Standards for Scotland's Youth Justice Services. A Report by the Improving the effectiveness of the Youth Justice System Working Group

^{iv} Scottish Executive (2003) Fast Track Hearings pilot. Guidance Booklet.

^v Scottish Executive (2005) Fast track children's hearings pilot. Final report of the evaluation of the pilot.

^{vi} Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (2005). On the Right Track. A Study of Children and Young People in the Fast Track Pilot.

^{vii} Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Section 52.

^{viii} Scottish Executive (2001) Blueprint for the Processing of Children's Hearing Cases: Inter-agency Code of Practice and National Standards, Second Edition

^{ix} Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (2003). Study on Youth Offending in Glasgow.