



SCOTTISH

CHILDREN'S REPORTER

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Dear Mr Tomkins

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF POLICING STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Thank you for your letter of 5 August inviting a contribution from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) to your independent review of policing in Scotland. We have provided comments on sections 1 to 4 of your letter as these are the areas of direct relevance to SCRA's engagement with Police Forces across Scotland.

We hope these comments are helpful and we would be very happy to respond to any request for clarification or further explanation.

Questions

1. What do you perceive are the key issues affecting your service to the public at present?

SCRA depends on close partnership working with a variety of agencies to deliver its service to children and young people to full effect. SCRA's partnership with the Police is especially important and vital to SCRA's role and purpose on two levels:

- Firstly, the majority of referrals of children to the Children's Reporter come from the police. In 2007-08, 89% of all referrals received came from the police (99.6% of all offence referrals and 83% of all care and protection (non-offence) referrals).
- Secondly, as a key partner in local multi-agency forums on child protection and youth justice.

In recent years, there have been reported increases in the number of children referred to the Reporter who were not in need of compulsory measures of supervision. Some of these increases related to police policy to refer to the Reporter, the children of parents/carers involved in domestic abuse incidents even though there was no apparent basis for considering compulsory measures. This is now being actively addressed through the use of local pre-referral screening initiatives and the last 12 months have recorded reductions in the numbers of children referred to the Reporter (for compulsory measures) as children are being increasingly referred for more appropriate local services and support.

This change in referral practice is not universal however and not every Police Force has adopted one or other of the pre-referral screening approaches available. Arguably, therefore, children in Scotland are experiencing different levels of support and intervention at the point of crisis dependent on the policy of the relevant Police Force.

To fully integrate services and resources at local level, there should be greater opportunity for agencies and the police to inform each others priorities at strategic level. SCRA would welcome involvement in such strategic planning.

Information sharing between SCRA and the police is essential to both. SCRA is working with police forces and ACPOS to improve understanding and approaches to sharing information. SCRA's active participation in the SPR2 project will deliver the automatic transfer and receipt of police reports to the Reporter by the end of 2008. It remains a more significant challenge to consider the sharing of information for intelligence and risk assessment purposes.

2a. What aspects, if any, of your planned development are likely or ought to have an influence on policing in Scotland over the next 5 years?

The Scottish Government has proposed that a single agency will be created to encompass all parts of the Children's Hearings System, including SCRA, which will be operational by 2011. This may have an impact and/or change the relationship between SCRA/Children's Reporters and the police but at this stage is difficult to predict.

As noted above, improvements in technology will more readily and accessibly facilitate the exchange of information between SCRA and the police.

2b. What changes, if any, do you anticipate in the environment in which you operate which are likely or ought to have an influence on policing in Scotland over the next 5 years?

Scottish Government policies such as the *Getting it Right* agenda, reducing youth offending and antisocial behaviour place greater onus on integrated approaches to address these issues. These will have an impact at strategic level but also to front line police who may become more involved in contributing to partners' assessments of children's needs. Aligned to *Getting it Right*, there will be an increasing onus on joint planning and partnership working at national and local levels.

Wider social and technological changes will have an impact on the police and all other agencies concerned with child protection. Two areas in particular are and will have an influence:

- Drug and alcohol misuse by parents is a common feature in the lives of children referred to the Reporter, and the numbers of children affected and the risks they face appear to be growing. The police are often the front line agency that identifies such children; their role in making appropriate referrals for local services and support (other than making a referral to the Reporter where compulsory measures are deemed necessary) is critical in protecting such vulnerable children.
- Access of children to the internet and targeting them for purposes of grooming and abuse. The numbers of children at risk will only increase with ever greater access to mobile phones, PCs at home, etc.

3. What do you see as the important issues affecting police service delivery?

Community confidence in the police and other agencies involved in youth justice is a key factor in the success of service delivery. The police and others have done much to improve community confidence at national and local level, but there are still perceptions (often not based on evidence) that young people are commonly involved in crime and antisocial behaviour and that not enough is being done to tackle this.

Communities need to be better informed both of the true extent of youth crime and what is being done to address it, to build greater confidence and trust in the youth justice system. Linked to this, the provision of information to victims of youth crime is now recognised as an important influence in improving the confidence of service users.

4a Are there any broad principles which might help to determine what aspects of policing need to be concentrated at each of the three broad levels of organization? In other words, what should determine the aspects of policing which need to be locally managed and delivered, what should determine what needs to be managed at group or regional level and what should determine what needs to be managed if not delivered at a level higher than most of the forces in Scotland, ie supra force?

4b Do you believe that all Scottish police forces are currently able to respond to broader strategic issues that impact on communities but may not have manifested themselves in specific incidents or reports to local police?

In answer to both questions above, SCRA would suggest that child protection should be one of the strategic issues that should be addressed at all three levels of organisation in the police, and that it should be a distinct area of responsibility. The police are arguably the most important service in first identifying children who are at risk, and this essential role should be recognised.

Relatively little is known about the group of young people involved in offending and aged between 15 and 18 years as they move from the Children's Hearings System to the criminal justice system, in particular the impact of the transition on offending and recidivism. SCRA would suggest that this group requires separate consideration at all three levels of organisation.

SCRA is committed to working with Police Forces in Scotland to develop the fullest understanding and support for the Children's Hearings System as Scotland's distinctive and successful juvenile justice and welfare based system. SCRA is already contributing to the training of new police recruits through our contribution at Tulliallan College. It is vital that new police recruits to Scotland's Police Forces understand the welfare-based approach in Scotland and the explicit connections that must be made between offending behaviour by young people and their care and protection needs which, in many instances, are often evident before the emergence of unacceptable behaviour.

Police officers are ideally placed to be both positive and powerful advocates for Scotland's uniquely integrated approach.

Please feel free to make further contact if you would like to explore any of the above responses in more detail. I am happy to be involved further in this review.

Yours sincerely,

Netta Maciver
Principal Reporter/Chief Executive