

Advice for Journalists

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

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

SCRA is able to provide the following assistance to members of the media:

Research

SCRA regularly publishes research on children involved in the Children's Hearings System which can assist journalists by giving content and background information for articles. Recent research reports include; the link between child deprivation and compulsory measures, Movement Restriction Conditions (electronic tagging) and young offenders.

Publications

SCRA produces an Annual Report (usually published around late November) which includes statistics on children referred, performance reports and financial accounts. SCRA also produces a Corporate Plan which details the focus and priorities of the organisation over a three year period.

Information

SCRA produces information briefing packs and we also produce guidance leaflets and posters for children and families. SCRA can provide factual information on the Children's Hearings System, including the roles and responsibilities of the Children's Reporter and Children's Hearings.

Statistics

SCRA routinely publishes statistics on its website, such as SCRA's quarterly and annual Operational Performance Reports.

Copies of all these reports, information material and research documents can be accessed at - www.scra.gov.uk



Attendance at Hearings

Journalists should contact SCRA about attendance at a Children's Hearing. There are strict procedures in place regarding media attendance at a Hearing. Section 43 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 set out the procedure for media attendance at a Hearing. The Hearing has a right to exclude a journalist from part or all of the Hearing, if either or both of the following two conditions is satisfied:

- 1) It is necessary to do so in the interests of the child, in order to obtain the child's views in relation to the case before the Hearing. This covers Hearings where the child is unwilling to speak while the journalist is present, either because the matters are of a personal nature or the child is afraid the journalist will report his or her views.
- 2) The presence of the journalist is causing, or likely to cause, significant distress to the child.

The decision to exclude a journalist lies with the whole Hearing – the decision cannot be appealed against. The Hearing can decide whether or not to give an explanation if the decision is taken to exclude a journalist, but it is for the Hearing's Chairman to inform the journalist and give any explanation. They may decide not to give an explanation if the matters discussed were particularly sensitive.

Reporting restrictions - Identification

Media should be aware that there is legislation which governs the identification of children involved in the Children's Hearings System. Under section 44 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 it is a criminal offence to publish any information either intended or likely to identify any child concerned or connected with the case, the proceedings or any appeal. It is also a criminal offence to identify the child's address or school. The legislation not only protects the referred child, but any other child who becomes involved in the proceedings, such as a sibling or a child witness.

What SCRA cannot provide

Media must understand that due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the work undertaken by the SCRA and its Reporters, we are not able to provide information on a number of areas. For example, SCRA cannot comment on individual cases or provide details of individual children or young people referred to the Reporter. In addition, we cannot comment on Reporter and Hearings decisions, or on evidence submitted to Reporters or Hearings.

www.scra.gov.uk

For further information, please contact:
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