

SCRA PROPERTY STRATEGY

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to outline the SCRA vision for our properties across Scotland.

- It will suggest how the estate should be developed and maintained over the next 8-10 years.
- It will inform decision making over this period

There are a number of drivers of change:

- Economic - there will be less capital (and revenue) available going forward
- We have reached the end of a planned capital programme
- Legislative - the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Bill is scheduled for implementation by April 2012
- Volume of work - there are early signs of decreasing volume
- Needs of those using the buildings are not currently been met consistently

The purpose of our buildings is to provide:

- A safe, constructive environment in which to administer and conduct Children's Hearings.
- A safe office base for staff.

Current stock

Significant steps have been taken over the last 10 years to improve the estate and create fit for purpose modern properties that provide a suitable environment for everyone who uses our buildings. Further work is necessary to address the poorest properties in our estate or where lease expiries are approaching or cost savings can be achieved.

What must we provide

SCRA has a statutory responsibility to provide suitable accommodation and facilities for Children's Hearings and deploy staff throughout Scotland (Local Government Etc. (Scotland) Act 1994). The Act also says that facilities for Hearings should be provided for each local authority area but that they may be located in another local authority and that they need to be dissociated from criminal courts and police stations. The 2010 Children's Hearings (Scotland) Bill, reaffirms this responsibility, and states that SCRA must provide facilities to hold Children's Hearings in each local authority, where practicable.

What we have

The property estate has the following composition, value and cost at April 2010:

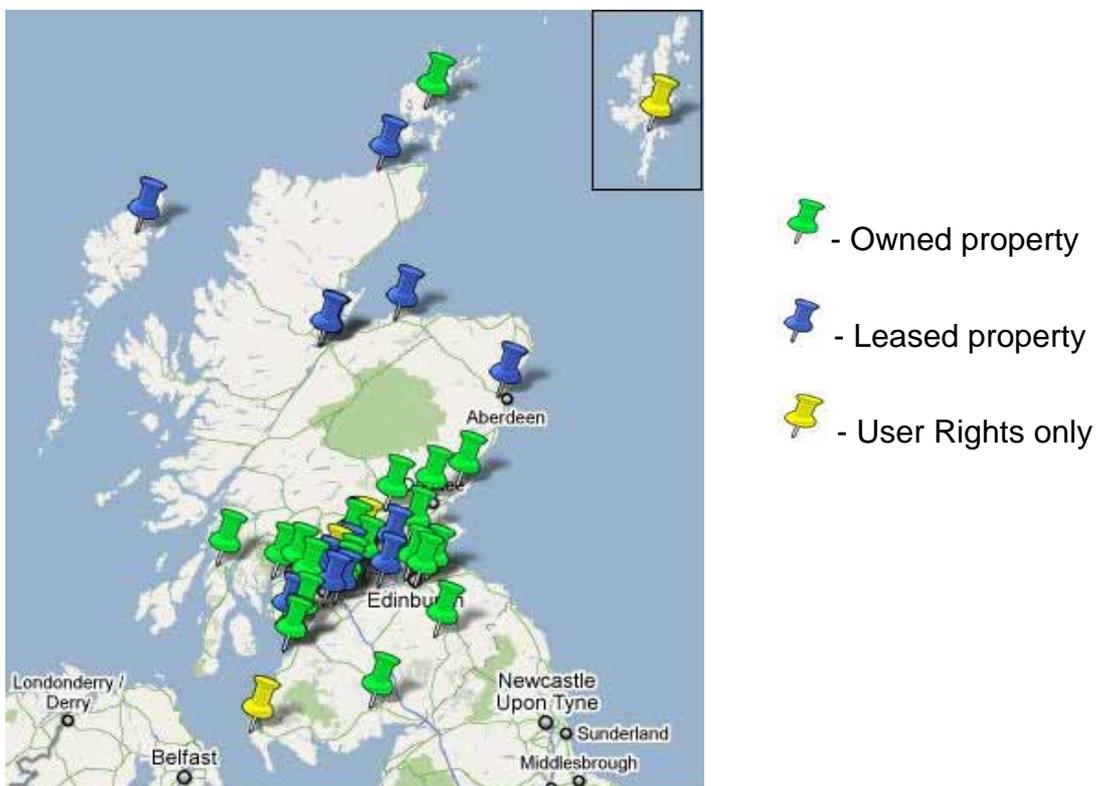
Number of Properties Owned	24*
Number of Properties Leased (incl. User Rights)	21
Outreach Hearing Centres	46
Asset Value (as at 31/3/10)	£7.632M
Rent Liability	£1.306M pa
Repairs and maintenance budget (2010/11)	£239.5K
Capital Budget for Minor Works (2010/11)	£100K

* includes 2 properties in process of sale and 2 leased out

Our buildings currently house 571 FT and PT staff and in 2008/09 42,866 Hearings were held in our Hearing suites across Scotland.

We currently have both staff offices and/or Hearing locations in each local authority. Depending on the level of work in these areas we have one or more buildings to accommodate demand. In areas with low demand, in remote areas, or to comply with DDA legislation, we use facilities provided by others on an ad hoc basis. These are our Outreach Hearing Centres (OHCs). OHCs are predominantly daily hires and are frequently within a Council building.

The map below shows the location of our staff offices and dedicated Hearing Centres, as at March 2010:



Meeting the Needs of Property Users

A safe, comfortable experience for children

All our Hearing Centres should be child-friendly. We will have facilities, seating, and decoration that helps children and families feel safe, welcomed and reduce anxiety. Sometimes this means that separate waiting rooms are required so that children and families are not put in difficult situations. We aim to have at least two separate areas available for each Hearing Room for this purpose.

Safe and sufficient facilities for Panel Members

Panel Members are one of our key partners in delivering Children's Hearings. We will work together with Panel Members to ensure that their needs are met in our buildings and we will gather their feedback on their experiences of our properties, as well as proposed changes to our property provision.

A safe and comfortable environment to work

We know that staff and partners working in SCRA buildings need one or more of the following:

- Safety and security
- Sufficient working space
- A comfortable working environment
- Meeting space
- Access to the SCRA (ScotsConnect) network

The specifics around how we deliver the above and contribute towards our environmental responsibilities are defined in our Property Standards.

Flexible Service Delivery

Teams must be able to work flexibly to maximise benefits for the service and to support choice for teams, in how, when and where work is delivered. Flexible working policies and information technology will be used to support increased homeworking and fewer dedicated workstations within our offices.

Our aim is to have fewer but smarter offices. We intend to have open-plan offices which will maximise the use of the buildings. A new casework tool (planned to be completed by 2012) provides an electronic file that can be accessed anywhere – and reduces/removes the need for paper files and storage space. Reducing the number of paper files will enable us to meet the Government targets of 10-12sqm per person for office accommodation (excluding the Hearing Centre).

If the Hearing location does not serve as an SCRA office, staff will be provided with the ability to work here, before and after the Hearing with network and printing facilities. This will help make best use of staff time and will minimise travel. We will also seek to work collaboratively with partners, where this is possible, by sharing accommodation to minimise costs and travel time.

Location and Quality of Hearing Centres

There are a number of legislative requirements for Hearing Centres that dictate where they are located. The future SCRA will be more agile in working across Local Authority boundaries. The locations of Hearing Centres will be based on the principle that they will ensure:

- Reasonable journey times and ease of access, considering what is local for the area and available public transport links
- Suitable and sufficient facilities for the catchment area
- Best value is achieved through an appropriate balance between the quality of facilities available and the distances to be travelled (within reason)

Staff will be based in properties responsible for multiple Local Authorities (a “hub” approach), with reporters and other members of staff travelling to service Hearing Centres as required.

We will provide three categories of Hearing Centre in properties that are suitable for the needs of our users. Our dedicated Hearing Centres will either be attached to our staffed “hubs” or provided in local buildings designed with the needs of our users in mind. It is unlikely, however, that the demand for our services will require a dedicated Hearing Centre within every Local Authority boundary. In these areas, Outreach Hearing Centres will be our 3rd category of hearing provision and the primary way we deliver our services. We anticipate that these Outreach Hearing Centres will be used on a “pay by use” basis, when required.

Asset Management and Value for Money

All Scottish Government agencies and NDPBs are now required (Scottish Government Asset Management Policy, 2009) to approach property decisions in the following order:

- Remodel/reconfigure existing space
- Extend where opportunity is available
- Replace where this is the only option

Given the context outlined above, our focus over the coming years will be to maintain our core properties to a high standard.

A business case and option appraisal to build, purchase or lease new property will only be submitted to the Scottish Government for approval if the project can deliver significantly reduced costs over the longer term, meets the requirements from the Asset Management Policy and delivers one or more of the following benefits:

- Significant improvements to services to children
- To ensure continued availability of accommodation
- Opportunities for co-location with partners
- Significant environmental benefits and active reduction of our carbon footprint

We will aim for maximum utilisation of our properties, through providing a staff workstation ratio of 80% and planning for 80% utilisation of Hearing suites, with the remaining 20% available for emergency Hearings.

We will deliver good value from our properties by focusing on a “hub” approach and sharing facilities where this delivers economies of scale. All investment decisions to lease, buy or build will be supported by a business case and whole-life costs will be taken into account. An overall reduction in the estate will deliver one-off disposal proceeds and recurring efficiencies as well as reducing our impact on the environment.

Working in Partnership

SCRA aims to be more flexible and agile but it is possible that our Partners may be subject to constraints. We want to take the opportunity to hold more Hearings in central facilities, and base staff in hubs to increase our flexibility. This should reduce our operational costs and improve our productivity, but reduced cost to SCRA may mean increased cost for our partners. They may have to travel more and have reduced productivity. There is a strong need for excellent partnership working which can help ensure the best outcome for all.