



SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER ADMINISTRATION

MEDIA BRIEFING SHEET (1)

A Guide to the Children's Hearings System

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

- Make effective decisions about a need to refer a child/young person to a Children's Hearing
- Prepare for and participate in court proceedings where Statement of Grounds or Hearings findings are appealed, and ensure the wellbeing of children and young people – particularly vulnerable witnesses – are protected throughout the court process
- Support Panel Members (though we are not involved in making Hearing decisions) and ensure fair process in Hearings
- Enable children, young people and families to participate in Hearings
- Disseminate information and data to influence and inform the wider Children's Services community
- Provide premises for Hearings to take place
- Work collaboratively with partners to support and facilitate the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) agenda

Background

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration plays a key role in the Children's Hearings System – the child protection and youth justice system for children and young people in Scotland. The Children's Hearings System aims to protect the safety and welfare of children, and address their behaviour including offending.

About SCRA

SCRA is the national body that runs the network of Children's Reporters based in 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 1st April 1996.

If there is concern about a child's welfare or behaviour, that child can be referred to the Children's Reporter.

It is important to understand that children are not referred to the Children's Panel, Children's Hearing or SCRA. Children and young people are referred to the Children's Reporter.

Children and young people may be referred for a number of reasons, for example:

Children are usually referred by police, social work or schools, but can be referred by anyone, such as a concerned relative.

Once the Reporter receives a referral, they carry out an investigation which may involve requesting a variety of reports from all relevant agencies, before deciding whether or not the child may require compulsory measures of supervision.

- If they are the victim of neglect or abuse,
- Their behaviour is causing concern - for example, not attending school,
- For drug and alcohol misuse,
- They have committed an offence.

If the child does require compulsory measures of supervision, they are referred to a Hearing.

If a child is not referred to a Hearing, the Reporter can make other decisions, such as:

- Action by the family to address the problem,
- Services provided by the local authority, such as voluntary measures,
- Or, there may be insufficient evidence to proceed.

It is important to understand that if a Reporter does not refer a child to a Hearing, it does not mean that nothing is being done to assist the child. It usually means that the child will receive services on a voluntary basis, rather than on a compulsory basis. Neither voluntary or compulsory measures are provided by the Reporter or SCRA, but are the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

Reporter's decisions on each referred child or young person, are completely independent and are made in the best interests of the child.

Children's Hearings

The national Children's Panel is the largest tribunal in Scotland. It consists of approximately 2,700 volunteer Panel Members who sit on Children's Hearings across Scotland.

Each Hearing comprises of three Panel Members who are appointed by the National Convener of Children's Hearings Scotland. At the Hearing, Panel Members review information on the child or young person and their circumstances. They also seek the views of the child or young person, their parent or carers and relevant professionals such as social workers and teachers.

Before making a decision on what measures are necessary to protect the child or young person or address their behaviour, the Hearing considers all the relevant information. All decisions are made in the best interest of the child or young person, and are made at the Hearing in front of them and their parent or carers.

Area Support Teams (ASTs) recruit and review membership of Children's Panels in each of the 22 ASTs across Scotland. Members of ASTs are also volunteers.

Before Panel Members can sit on Hearings, they are subject to a rigorous selection procedure and have to successfully complete extensive training.

For more information on Children's Hearings, including the recruitment and training of Panel Members, visit www.chscotland.gov.uk

For further information, please contact:

Maryanne McIntyre, Press & Communications Manager

Tel: 0131 244 8580

Email: maryanne.mcintyre@scra.gsi.gov.uk

Ensuring positive futures for
children and young people in Scotland
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