

# ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER ADMINISTRATION



ENSURING POSITIVE FUTURES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE





# ABOUT OUR REPORT

This report covers the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

It summarises SCRA’s achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan.

You can view all our information online, including a full set of our annual audited accounts and our Official Statistics and interactive statistical dashboard at [www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk).

For accessibility, if you would like an unformatted version of this report, please get in touch.

# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD:</b> A welcome message from our Chair Michelle Miller	04
<b>OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU:</b> SCRA’s Vision, Values, Our Outcomes and Our Customer Commitment	06
<b>OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE:</b> Some of our highlights from 2018/19	08
<b>PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS:</b> A round up of some of our key areas of progress and achievements in 2018/19	10
<b>OUR STATISTICS:</b> Some of our key statistics in 2018/19	24
<b>OUR BOARD:</b> Information about our Board	26
<b>LOOKING AHEAD:</b> Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Officer, Neil Hunter reflects on 2019/20 so far	28





# FOREWORD

**Foreword by SCRA Board Chair Michelle Miller**  
Welcome to our Annual Report, I was very pleased to take up the Chair of SCRA in May 2018. It's been a busy and productive year, and this annual report gives some insight to the range of challenges we face, as well as the many successes delivered by our staff in fulfilling SCRA's key role in the Children's Hearings System.

Just under 13,000 children and young people were referred to the Children's Reporter this year. That is a further small, but welcome fall in the numbers of children and young people in Scotland who may need compulsory measures of protection.

We have also seen a further small decrease in the use of emergency Child Protection Orders, after a sharp rise in 2015/16. Despite these reductions, the recent trends of younger children being referred on the grounds of lack of parental care and exposure to domestic abuse have continued. The degree of complexity in Reporters' investigations and decision making remains an important component of our work.

The SCRA Board has put a great deal of effort into supporting the maintenance of our operational performance, and this year we have seen progress against most of our agreed key indicators.

We have marginally missed some important targets, such as decision making and scheduling of

Hearings, and this continues to be of concern to the Board, reinforcing the need for continued focus and diligence in these areas, given their direct impact on children.

Whilst resources remain very tight for SCRA, we have made progress on reducing sickness absence levels, as well as ensuring front line operational posts are filled as quickly as possible. We remain committed to the best performance we can possibly deliver for children and young people in the Hearings System and to supporting our staff in that delivery.

The reductions in staff absence reflect our commitment to the workforce. This year, we report extensively on our health, wellbeing and equalities programmes - all of which are aimed at promoting high levels of job satisfaction for SCRA staff.

It is our staff's enthusiasm and motivation which help us deliver positive and welcoming support to children and young people every day. Our wider workforce initiatives, training and professional development programmes described throughout this report add further to this.

We have prioritised and accelerated the modernisation and improvement of our Hearing rooms across Scotland. This programme of work is sometimes the most visible and high impact part of our engagement and participation work with

children and young people. It has been, and will continue to be, driven by their ideas, experiences and creativity at a national and local level. In addition, SCRA was at the forefront of the launch of Stand Up for Siblings in 2018.

The strong Ministerial commitment in March 2019 to strengthen the law to keep brothers and sisters together when a care placement is being made will help us progress this important work. SCRA's research team has played a pivotal role in bringing evidence to the fore in the quest for change.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all SCRA's partners in helping us deliver our key priorities in 2018/19. To make it work effectively, the Hearings System by its very nature requires the highest possible co-operation and joint work, whilst respecting and observing our individual legal roles and responsibilities.

Beyond our day to day work together, we also work to promote longer term improvement and we remain committed to our wider programmes, such as Better Hearings and through the national Youth Justice Strategy.

I hope you find this report of interest and a useful insight into the work of SCRA. I look forward to continuing to work alongside you in future years.



# OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU

## OUR VISION



Our vision sets out what we want the world to be like for children and young people in Scotland. Our vision is - “Vulnerable children and young people in Scotland are safe, protected and offered positive futures.”

## OUR VALUES



Children and young people’s experiences and opinions guide us. We are approachable and open. We bring the best of the past with us into the future to meet new challenges.

## OUR OUTCOMES



In our 2018/19 Business Plan we had three key outcomes - a progressive, user focused service ~ high quality decisions and effective collaboration.

## OUR CUSTOMER COMMITMENT



This is the commitment we give to children, young people, families and our partners about how we will treat them and what they can expect from us.





# YEAR AT A GLANCE 2018/19

## APRIL

Corporate Plan 2018/19 is launched detailing how SCRA will deliver our key commitments to children and young people

New data breach guidance is issued to help keep our data as safe as possible

SCRA Business Plan 2018/19 published

## MAY

Our Communications Commitment for children and young people is launched

SCRA Equalities & Inclusion Strategy 2018-21 published

Maximising Attendance Strategy relaunched to support staff at work

## JUNE

Pre-Hearing film for young people launched

Staff Health and Wellbeing survey issued

Research paper published on Adoption and Permanence planning in Scotland

## JULY

Report - Contact Decisions in the Children's Hearings System published

Revamp of going to court flyer for young people

Our Official Statistics 2017/18 are published

## AUGUST

Programme and guest speakers for our Staff Event revealed

Updated staff Learning & Development brochure available

Judicial review relating to the deemed relevant persons provisions published

## SEPTEMBER

SCRA supports Our Hearings, Our Voice recruitment campaign

Complexity in Child Protection article published in Adoption & Fostering Journal

SCRA calls for equality for care experienced children and young people

## OCTOBER

Annual Staff Survey 2018 launched

SCRA supports Care Experience Week

Updated Complaints Handling Procedure issued

## NOVEMBER

Our 'Arranging a Hearing' guide for children/young people with autism is published

SCRA's Women into Leadership Network is launched

SCRA backs Carer's Rights Day

## DECEMBER

SCRA leads CHIP "complexity" seminar which compares the changes in children/young peoples' lives over 13 years

Staff Equalities Monitoring campaign comes to an end

Staff support Who Cares? Scotland's festive appeal

## JANUARY

Call for staff to become Mindfulness champions

Launch of our second Corporate Parenting annual report for young people

Reporter's dissertation Children's Reporters' Attitudes toward Young Offenders is published

## FEBRUARY

Publication of SCRA's Annual Workforce Report for 2019/20

Staff across the country take part in Purple Friday for the second year running

Mental health first aid training available for staff

## MARCH

Equalities outcomes and mainstreaming report published

Dementia awareness training for staff held jointly with UNISON

SCRA marks first anniversary of Stand Up For Siblings





# PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS ...



More information about our Business Plan activity is available [here](#).

## SCRA'S PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2018/19

Throughout the year, our focus has been on delivering the core outcomes as outlined in our Business Plan 2018/19.

### OUR THREE KEY OUTCOMES WERE:

**1. A PROGRESSIVE, USER FOCUSED SERVICE:**  
Anticipating the needs, expectations

and priorities of all children, young people and their families that come in contact with us.

**2. HIGH QUALITY DECISIONS:**  
Ensuring that we consistently achieve the stretching professional standards that we set for ourselves.

**3. EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION:**  
Enhancing alignment of our activity with that of other agencies with

whom we work to jointly progress core areas of service delivery.

We successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan during 2018/19:

**66%** - COMPLETED

**27%** - PARTLY COMPLETED

**7%** - NOT COMPLETED



# OUR PERFORMANCE AND TARGETS

Our performance for 2018/19 reflects the continued work undertaken in recent years to improve services to children, young people and families.

Overall, five of the 10 targets within our 2018/19 Business Plan were met with two rated as amber (nearly meeting the target) and three as red (target missed).

Of those met, performance in 'percentage of initial Hearings proceeding to disposal' is particularly important for children, young people, and families as this ensures, where possible, decisions about compulsory measures are made at the earliest possible opportunity. The 79.5% outcome for this measure was 2.5pp above the target and 0.1 percentage points (pp) below 2017/18.

Also met was our target for short term absence, which at 1.8% was 0.2pp below the 2% target and a 0.4pp improvement from 2017/18.

The 'percentage of decisions on referrals within 50 working days' indicator increased by 1.4pp to 77.6% from 2017/18 and was rated as amber against the 78% target.

Continued focus on performance around this measure ensures that children and young people are receiving a timely service from SCRA.

After three years of increase, Hearing scheduling was down 0.9pp in the year to 74.8%, leading to the indicator being rated as amber and missing the target by 1.2pp.

Three further targets were narrowly missed in the year and rated as red:

Staff long term absence, at 3.0%, was 1pp above the 2% target, despite improving by 0.7pp against 2017/18. SCRA continues to put policies and procedures in place to ensure that staff are supported to return to work, where appropriate, at the earliest possible date.

The revenue budget was underspent by 1.8% (below the 1% variance target). The underspend will be used to

support 2019/20 budget plans and offset anticipated pressures. The capital budget was underspent by 9.8% (below the 5% variance target). This excludes digital project budgets and spends. This was mainly due to slippage of a building upgrade and some minor work. The underspend will be carried forward into 2019/20.

SCRA's performance against targets can be seen in detail in Table 7.3 of the [Statistical Analysis 2018/19](#).

## OUTCOME 1: A PROGRESSIVE, USER FOCUSED SERVICE

### EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION

Following an ambitious broadening of the scope and detail of our approach to equalities and inclusion, we published a revised Equalities and Inclusion Strategy Report in May 2018. This report set out how we would meet our Public Sector Equality Duty and mainstream equality across all parts of our organisation and in the provision of our service to children, young people and their families. We then published our Equalities Mainstream Report in March 2019 demonstrating our continued commitment to developing and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion

in our culture and behaviours and as an intrinsic part of our day to day business and decision making. SCRA is fully committed to eliminating discrimination and providing an environment based on fairness, equality, cultural diversity, dignity and respect where everyone is supported to flourish and fulfil their potential, irrespective of their sex, gender identity, care experience, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, faith, age or socio-economic background.

SCRA is committed to promoting the practice of equality and diversity in all its services, operations and dealings with employees, children, young people and their families and all partner agencies. SCRA aims to ensure that it employs and deploys a workforce that is diverse and equipped with the right mix of skills and experience to deliver a quality service to children and young people.

SCRA's approach over 2018/19 has been to go beyond the compliance obligations and to develop an inclusive ethos within the organisation based on fairness, equality, cultural diversity, dignity and respect. In 2018, SCRA publically supported the Who Cares? Scotland campaign to recognise equality for children, young people and adults who have experience of the care system. SCRA recognises care experience as a "tenth protected characteristic" and we continue to review our practice, policies and processes to reflect this. Our Equalities Strategy and Mainstream Report 2019 provides an overview of key achievements and mainstreaming progress made within SCRA in 2018/19:

#### I. EQUALITIES NETWORK SUB GROUPS

We established six Staff Network sub groups of our Equalities Network which together cover all of the protected characteristics. A member of our Equalities Network facilitates each sub group. The sub groups report directly to the Equalities Network and have been proactive in providing guidance and support to meet the equality duties, as well as sharing good practice and producing briefings and awareness raising for staff.

#### 2. EQUALITIES AMBASSADORS

SCRA benefits from a group of Equalities Ambassadors - dedicated front line staff from across Scotland who volunteer to support their colleagues and promote equality and diversity across our activities. We have increased dialogue with our Equalities Ambassadors and other staff groups to monitor progress towards SCRA's equality outcomes. In May 2018, the Equalities Network and Equalities Ambassadors attended a development day to reflect on progress made, identify areas of good practice and agree future priority areas for development.

Some highlights include:

- We commenced an Easy Read letter pilot in the Ayrshire Locality in February 2018.
- Staff have had the opportunity to access mental health awareness training delivered by SAMH and to develop as mental health first aiders to support staff within and across our localities. Dementia awareness training was well attended by staff across several localities and we have recruited fourteen mindfulness ambassadors to train and deliver mindfulness sessions across our localities.
- We continued to raise awareness of the public sector equality duty through our staff intranet, our National Reporter in-house magazine and Team Briefs issued by our Principal Reporter/CEO. All staff have access to a diversity calendar and guidance and materials to promote and raise awareness around faith, disability, LGBT, gender equality and other protected characteristics.
- Working collaboratively with our Equalities Ambassadors and HR Business Partners, we published a series of awareness raising briefings for staff. In November 2018, we promoted World Mental Health Day and launched our briefing for managers on supporting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.



- We produced briefings for staff on disability and the reasonable adjustments and supports that can be offered in the workplace.

- We supported Carers Day and Carers Week in the workplace and published briefings for staff.

- Further briefings were issued in 2018 to help managers and staff understand the symptoms of menopause and how to support colleague's health and wellbeing.

- A new guide was launched to help staff when arranging a Hearing for a child or young person with Autism. The Guide to Autism stemmed from our work with the charity Reach for Autism. They are a Greenock-based charity helping children and young people with Autism. Young people from the charity helped us develop the guide following a visit to a Hearings centre. The guide will be refreshed and developed further as we learn more about how we can better support children, young people and their parents/ carers with Autism and ensure they can effectively participate in the Hearing. We also co-produced a video with Reach for Autism for people with autism attending children's hearings.

- In October 2018, we launched our Women into Leadership Network. The purpose of the Network is to support and encourage women across all localities/head office and in all roles by inspiring and empowering them to take on and seek opportunities for development, maximise their potential, foster valuable connections, and facilitate success through personal and professional growth. Four Network events are planned for each year and inspirational speakers have been identified to share their experiences of leadership. Two events have been held to date attended by over 50 colleagues.

- We supported two women to attend the annual Women into Leadership conference and two women also attended a "Women in Work" conference in October 2018.

- To support the development of staff and enhance the impact staff equality networks can have on the organisation, SCRA has made provision for staff to attend the Pride in Justice Network. This new network for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex staff and allies working across Scotland's justice partners, focuses on how to work together to increase inclusivity, raise



awareness of LGBTI issues and share best practice in supporting people from LGBTI communities.

### 3. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Our Board and senior leaders were at the forefront of the roll-out of equalities, diversity and inclusion training. During 2018, we launched our locality based diversity and inclusion awareness raising training for staff. The newly designed course identifies legislative requirements and practical responsibilities and forms part of SCRA's mandatory training suite of materials for all staff whether experienced or new to the organisation. Additionally our board members and all staff completed Unconscious Bias e-learning training.

Staff have also had the opportunity to access mental health awareness training delivered by SAMH and to develop as mental health first aiders to support staff within and across our localities. Dementia awareness training was well attended by staff across a range of roles and localities.

### 4. LGBT YOUTH

We continued to work towards achieving the LGBT Youth Charter. We worked in collaboration with LGBT Youth to access training opportunities and consultancy services

ensuring that our policies and practice reflect the needs of children and young people from the LGBT community.

We celebrated Purple Friday in February 2019 with further celebrations planned for this year and we will show our ongoing support of the LGBT community through a robust ongoing social media campaign.

### 5. POLICY REVIEWS

We are promoting requirements to mainstream equality in policy development and policy reviews. During the reporting period we reviewed three of key policies: Equal Opportunities Policy, Dignity at Work and our Recruitment and Selection Policy.

### 6. DATA COLLECTION

- We continue to work with our partners in the Blueprint Processing Agenda to agree a standard referral template that will capture protected characteristic data. This will assist us in identifying and responding to the individualised needs of children and young people referred at the earliest opportunity.

- Working with our IT colleagues we developed the current Case Management System to record ethnicity (where known, using the Census Scotland 2011

categories). Work is on-going to ensure the new case management system can record wider protected characteristic data relating to disability, gender and religion sexual orientation.

### 7. EQUALITIES MONITORING CAMPAIGN

In November 2018, we launched a campaign providing information about the purpose and value of disclosing this personal sensitive data whilst reassuring staff that it is optional and anonymous. The campaign resulted in an increase in reporting across most protected characteristics, notably disability (15%), faith or belief (14%) and nationality (9.5%).

### 8. REPORTING DUTIES

In March 2019, we published SCRA's Equalities Strategy and Mainstreaming Report, the Gender, Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap report, the Women into Leadership Action Plan and SCRA's Employee Statistics Report.

### 9. CORPORATE PARENTS AND CARE EXPERIENCE

We continue to embed equality, diversity and inclusion as a theme across our corporate parenting duties and our corporate planning process. Our Head of Human Resources, Equalities Lead and the Corporate Planning and Performance team have worked closely together to ensure equalities and diversity is reflected in our Corporate Plan and our Corporate Parenting Plans 2017-2020.

This will ensure that every aspect of our service provision and employment responsibilities has considered the impact or likely impact of each of the protected characteristics.

## PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

It has been a busy and productive time for SCRA and our commitment to participation within the Children's Hearings System continues apace. During 2018/19, an extensive range of new products and communications has been launched including films and leaflets.



SCRA continues to host and support Our Hearings, Our Voice, a young people's board for the Hearings System. OHOV is an independent board for children and young people from across Scotland between the ages of 8-18, who have experience of the Children's Hearings System. The first group of Board Members were recruited in the autumn of 2018 and came together in Glasgow for the first time in November 2018. Since their first meeting, the young people have spent time building relationships, designed their logo, developed their agreements (for how they will work together) and identified priorities for action, change and improvement.

Building on the success of previous partner training initiatives, we continue to focus on improving our communications with, and training to, partner organisations and professionals who work with children, young people and families involved in the Children's Hearings System. The Participation Officer has been delivering a national training programme on the Children's Hearings System, and promoting SCRA's supporting communications to multiple agencies.

In October 2018 SCRA worked in partnership with Glasgow City Council and Articulate to showcase our first art exhibit of care-experienced young people's work in Glasgow. The artwork came in the form of paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures and was featured for six months in one of our large windows in our office and Hearings Centre in the heart of the Merchant City.

A wide range of projects for people with autism and sensory difficulties have been completed in partnership with Reach for Autism. Working closely with young people with autism, SCRA delivered an awareness session at our Staff Event in September 2018, developed guidance for staff in January 2019, designed and launched a sensory toolkit for all Hearing rooms in March 2019.

SCRA continues to promote employment and learning opportunities for Hearings-experienced young people, and in December 2018 a new Modern Apprentice was appointed in the Edinburgh office. The MA programme will be celebrating its 10 year anniversary later in 2019 which has been successfully in place since 2009.

The majority of SCRA's former Modern Apprentices have obtained permanent employment in SCRA.



Three new Hearing rooms were introduced in March 2019 in Bellshill, Dalkeith and Falkirk (under the new design portfolio created in 2017 by Hearings-experienced young people). SCRA's Participation Group continues to work closely with Localities to trial local and national participation projects, and support the work of the Participation Officer and Communication Team in designing and launching new materials, communications and engagement initiatives.

## CORPORATE PARENTING

SCRA made a clear commitment to children and young people in the 2017/20 strategy about what they could expect from us as Corporate Parents - what you should be able to see, feel and experience when interacting with us. At the start of each year we publish what we will be doing to meet those commitments and then annually

we publish a [report](#) describing what we did. One of the key components in our 2018/19 Corporate Parenting Plan was the delivery and implementation of the Better Hearings standards across all of our Localities and Hearings centres. The standards form a set of multi-agency commitments to children and young people that, when fully implemented, will ensure that the experience of coming to a Hearing is as good as it can be - that children and young people will be well prepared, that the Hearing and all information is well planned and understandable, that there is care and attention to the needs of individuals - and that those are met, that rights are promoted and respected at all stages - and of course that questions are always encouraged and answered - it is about all agencies working together to do the best that they can do for children, young people and families that are experiencing the Hearings System.

Throughout the year we worked with our partners in the Children's Hearings System to identify the things that needed to change and improve - and got to work on them. There has been some real positive changes made as a result - partnership training on preparation for Hearings, work with young people about how they would prefer to give their views in Hearings, and working to make sure the information that we send out is as clear and accessible as possible. We continue this work into 2019/20 with a drive for full implementation across all of our Hearings centres.

## OUR PROPERTY

SCRA is responsible for providing suitable and sufficient facilities to accommodate Children's Hearings. Property is central to the delivery of our services and is one of the organisation's key areas of expenditure.

As in previous years, in 2018/19 economic and budgetary pressures remain and require us to constantly review how effectively and efficiently we manage our property assets. We are constantly looking at ways to reduce our costs wherever possible (without detriment to the service we deliver) and prioritise delivery of services across our estate. We continue to review SCRA's estate and surplus property is made available either for sale or lease.

We have renewed the lease of our Ayr Hearing centre, but reduced the amount of space leased by in excess of 50%. In addition, we have leased out surplus space in Kirkwall

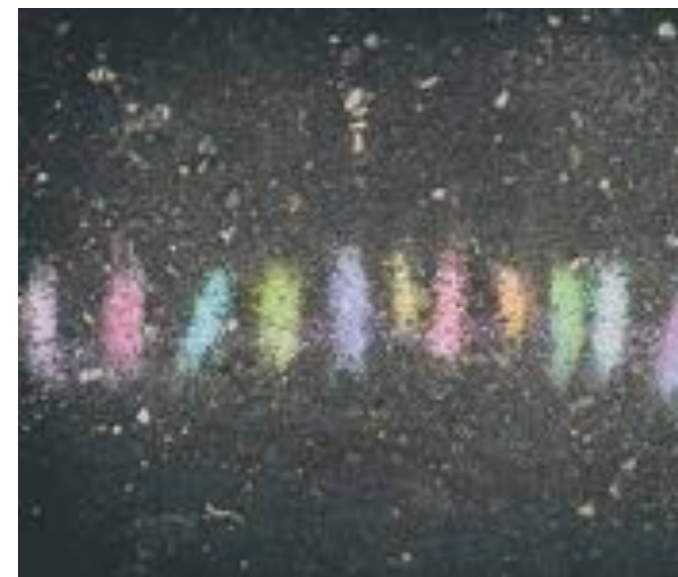
to a government body and created accommodation above our Perth Hearing centre which is available for let.

As in recent years, SCRA's capital expenditure programme has continued to focus on improving and maintaining existing facilities. This included the major refurbishment of our Hearing centre in Greenock that has been carried out to provide an improved Hearing room along with the creation of two new discreet and confidential waiting rooms.

In Glasgow, it has long been recognised that the toilet facilities in the Hearing suite were not up to an acceptable standard. A refurbishment project has been completed that involved completely stripping out the existing toilets, and rebuilding them to provide modern accessible facilities.

Also in Glasgow, a feasibility study was carried out to inform plans for improving the space used by staff on our staff floors.

For the fifth year in succession, we have continued with the roll out of the new style Hearing and waiting rooms in our properties as part of our commitment to provide improved facilities through our Better Hearings work and as a Corporate Parent. We have again employed an interior designer to deliver three themed options, that were developed in consultation with partners and children and young people, to use colour and furniture to provide a relaxed and friendly Hearing room in their building. These new style Hearing rooms have been launched in our Bellshill, Dalkeith and Falkirk centres. It is intended that this programme of Hearing room improvements will continue to be rolled out across all of our permanent Hearing centre locations.





## OUTCOME 2: HIGH QUALITY DECISIONS

### PRACTICE

2018/19 was another busy year covering the full range of providing Practice support and advice to Localities, developing Practice materials, creating and delivering Practice training, managing appeals to the higher courts and working with partner agencies at national level. Particularly significant subjects during the year included work with the Scottish Government on the Age of Criminal Responsibility Bill, working with the Joint Investigative Interview Project on new training for interviewers, dealing with appeals and devolution minutes relating to the definition of 'relevant person', and supporting reporters when relying on hearsay evidence of children.

In terms of materials to support reporters, a large number of Practice directions were updated including those on Relevant Persons, Non-disclosure, Attendance at Hearings, Notifications and Papers, Court Applications, the Good Decision Making Framework, and the Sexual Offences Act.

A new Practice Direction was published in relation to Principles that underpin the Hearings System (including court principles). Several Practice Notes were published including Case Analysis, Sexual Offending, Legal Resources for (j) Grounds, Admissibility of Evidence, and Warrant to Apprehend a Witness. The Practice Note on Precognitions was updated. Submissions were developed and published to support reporters when dealing with appeals to the sheriff; these cover procedural issues and all the points of appeal that commonly arise in our proceedings. Submissions were also developed and published on opposing adjournment in proof proceedings.

Additional practical supports to reporters included: agreeing provision of support from the Witness Support Service (part of Victim Support Scotland) for vulnerable witnesses in our proceedings; refining the Concluded Court Form and simplifying completion; and simplifying,

in partnership with CHS, the process for arranging panel member continuity.

A full schedule of Core Practice training was delivered. In addition, priority training topics for more experienced reporters were identified, resulting in development of a new two-day module on Joint Investigative Interviews and Vulnerable Witnesses and a new two-day module on further Advocacy Skills. Each was delivered twice during the year.

As it had been some time since all reporters undertook the original training on Good Decision Making, a key aspect of the reporter's role, a mandatory two-day refresher course was developed and delivered to all available reporters during the year. This involved twenty events over nine locations. In total, 92 days of internal training were delivered.

The Practice Team also supported Locality-led training and Practice sessions on request. National external training was regularly delivered to various partner agencies including police, procurators fiscal and joint investigative interviewers.

Twenty-nine cases in the higher courts concluded during the year. These included one judicial review and one appeal against the decision in a judicial review. Of the twenty-seven appeals arising in our proceedings, eight were initiated by us; three proceeded to a full hearing, all of which were successful. Of the nineteen appeals initiated by others, eight were abandoned or not insisted upon, nine were not upheld and two we did not oppose. Particular issues arising in appeals included the interpretation of 'significant involvement' and the use of hearsay evidence. Law Reports were published to support Reporter awareness and knowledge of developments in the case law.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE

As part of our ongoing commitment to Quality Assurance in SCRA, in 2018/19 we continued to deliver our quality assurance case sampling programme. This runs across all our Localities, whereby our Managers and Senior Practitioners review an agreed area of practice and process, using defined and robust methodology.



We report our findings to the Audit and Risk Committee, and use these to develop improvement activities in our operational business, and provide feedback to staff about their practice.

In the past year we have looked at four areas of practice and process:

- In August and September two thirds of our Reporters and Assistant Reporters were observed in at least one Hearing, and were greatly assured at the many examples of our staff undertaking their role at the Hearing, and supporting fair process in a professional, sensitive and skilled manner

- During the past year we completed two reviews of Statements of Grounds. The Statement of Grounds is drafted by the Reporter and provides the legal basis for referring a child to a Hearing. The exercises focused on those drafted by the Reporter for an initial Hearing, and those established at court, to explore how and why Reporters make amendments to Grounds that are established at court. This continues to be an important part of our Quality Assurance programme, and an area where we are seeing a lot of improvement in the quality of our work.

- In February and March we observed 81 of our Reporters conducting procedural business in 23 different court locations. SCRA has never before undertaken any formal observation of practice at court on a national

basis, so this was a new area in our assurance work. We provided a high level of assurance to our Audit and Risk Committee that our Reporters were preparing their case and conducting themselves in court with skill and knowledge.

## OUTCOME 3: EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

### OUR PEOPLE

Supporting our workforce formed a significant part of our work in 2018/19. Actions included; assessing the size and shape of the workforce in response to the 2018/19 financial settlement and considering and responding on issues affecting them which informed, in part, the development of our new workforce plan.

During 2018/19, we welcomed a new Board Chair, Michelle Miller to SCRA and a new Board Member, Tam Baillie.

During the year, we ensured that our staff were key in the early development of our new CSAS digital platform (being developed jointly with CHS) and within this our SCRA case management system. Engagement with staff on these developments was important and we started



a series of visits to Locality offices to discuss the development of our new system. This work continues into 2019/20 and the importance and value of our engagement remains as high as ever.

In addition, our Human Resources Business Partners continued to support Locality Management Teams in managing their local workforce and supported a process of local workforce planning. This led to us filling 82 vacancies in 2018/19.

We commenced a review on one of our key frontline roles, the Assistant Reporter and this will continue in 2019/20.

We held a Staff Event in September 2018 in Glasgow. More than 200 members of staff attended the day in Glasgow with a focus on Year of Young People. The day focused on the individual needs of children and young people, and how to respond to children and young peoples' collective voices.

Our management networks continue to provide opportunities for learning and development for managers as well as the opportunity to hear about and get involved in organisational initiatives, such as recording, partnership, data protection, the digital delivery programme - the list goes on. We supported a group of staff to participate in the Professional Managers Programme.

We trained local Mindfulness Champions and Mental Health First Aiders to provide local support to staff on their mental health and wellbeing. We connected with the Charity of the Civil Servants to publicise the services and support they can provide to our staff.

We refreshed our e-learning platform and launched a number of mandatory and elective training opportunities around administrative and health and safety skills as well as equalities awareness and cyber security. We continued to deliver dementia awareness training alongside in-house refresher training on coaching and, more broadly, the role of the Reporter.

Our policy and guidance focus for 2018/19 was on reviewing our recruitment and selection policy and practices, our dignity at work policy, equal opportunities and providing guidance to staff on the menopause. There was additional focuses on raising awareness among staff on children and young people with autism and also supporting mental health at work. We also commenced

work on developing a new corporate induction programme which will be launched in 2019/20.

We developed our approach to raising awareness of the impact of trauma and adversity on those we work with and on our staff. We will roll out this approach to support staff across our Localities and Head Office in 2019/20.

We participated in the Scottish Government's Developing the Young Workforce initiative and promoted Public Services Careers to young people at Larbert High School

In addition, we maintained our Bronze Healthy Working Lives Award and again offered the flu vaccination to all staff.

# WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

We are a core member of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) which is a Scottish Government led, multi-agency group set up to work together to develop and deliver change for improvement

to the Children's Hearings System. The work of the CHIP formed a key element of our partnership commitment in 2018/2019.

We continue to work with Police Scotland and we are in dialogue with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscals Service and Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service to improve both our service delivery and the experience of our service delivery for children, young people and families. This partnership work will continue as we prepare for the changes brought about by the Age of Criminal Responsibility Act 2019. Alongside Police Scotland, SCRA has now agreed a protocol on the sharing of information with Police Scotland and we continue to work on developing a protocol on the attendance of Police Officers at Children's Hearings.

During 2018/19, we continued to co-chair the Hearings Management Group with Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) and we are currently involved in the review of the group. SCRA is an active member of the Tri-Partite group with CHS and Social Work Scotland.

We are actively involved in current work around the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scottish domestic law. We have been involved in roundtable discussion about incorporation and we will respond in full to the Scottish Government. SCRA welcomes this focus on children's rights and we continue to look at how we can make improvements in the service we deliver to children and young people.

We welcomed the news that the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland will be raised to 12 and we are working with Victim Support Scotland to ensure that our communication with the victims of the behaviour of children under 12 is sensitive and effective. SCRA will continue to work with the Scottish Government to review the impact of the change to the age of criminal responsibility and we will be doing further research work to look at the offending behaviour of young people between 12 and 17 to inform discussions about whether the age of criminal responsibility should be raised further.

We provided input to the review of the Framework for Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) in relation to the offending behaviour of young people and to the review of the Youth Justice Standards. We also provided input to the Scottish Government Restorative Justice Action Plan and we fully support the vision for the development of restorative justice services across Scotland.

We are involved in the national review of the 2014 Child Protection Guidance. We sit on the steering group and we have a core group of interested professional staff who are providing comment about the new Guidance as it is being written.

Advocacy for children and young people in the Children's Hearing System continues to be something we look forward to - but is closer to becoming a reality. SCRA is involved with partners and the Scottish Government in working to implement the Advocacy provisions of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act (Section 122) in 2020.

We are involved in working to develop communication materials for children and families about the provision of Advocacy services; we are involved in the development of the training which will be given to Advocacy workers and we are also involved in discussions around the statutory rules and regulations which will need to be developed for the sector.





Finally, our local teams have been working with partners to deliver 'Better Hearings' in each local authority in Scotland. To support this local work we are providing core information to Child Protection Committees and we are developing information which can be used by our staff and partners in local children's services planning.

## OUR RESEARCH

SCRA completed its research on: 'Home Compulsory Supervision Orders (home CSOs) - effectiveness of decision making and outcomes' in March 2018. This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government and sought to answer the question - Do home CSOs work?

The research looked at this from the perspectives of those involved and most affected - young people, parents, social workers, Children's Panel Members and Children's Reporters; by following the cases of 343 children and young people from when their CSOs were made to up to two years later; and by developing a tool to measure levels and changes in wellbeing concerns for children and young people.

The research is reported in six reports and a summary paper:

### REPORT 1: RESIDENCE AND CONTACT CONDITIONS

### REPORT 2: WELLBEING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### REPORT 3: CARE PLANNING AND INTERVENTIONS

### REPORT 4: PROFESSIONAL TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS IN CHILDREN'S HEARINGS

### REPORT 5: DECISION MAKING IN CHILDREN'S HEARINGS

### REPORT 6: THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS

These were due to be published by the Scottish Government and SCRA in 2019/20.

In May 2018, an article on SCRA's research: 'The Next Steps Towards Better Hearings', was published by the UK Ministry for Justice in its Family Justice Research Bulletin on new and forthcoming research and analysis



for the family justice system. This shows that the Better Hearings approach is being recognised, not just in Scotland, but across the UK.

In June 2018 SCRA, in collaboration with Liverpool Hope University, published a paper: 'Adoption and permanence planning in Scotland: impact of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 on key processes and timescales' (Hanson, L., Henderson, G. and Kurlus, I., Child & Family Social Work, 1-8). This research looked at 300 cases of looked after children who went onto be adopted or go into permanent care settings, and compared permanence processes under the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 with those under the 2007 Act. The research found that legislative change in itself had little impact, instead it was the effectiveness of its implementation by services.

In October 2018 SCRA, in collaboration with Robert Gordon University, published a research paper, 'Changes

in out of home care and permanence planning among young children in Scotland, 2003 to 2017' (Woods, R. and Henderson, G., Adoption & Fostering 42(3), 282-294). This paper reported on the increase in permanence planning for children under 3 years old and a trend in removal of children from their parents at birth. The research also found that these children were usually not returned to their parents' care, were not raised by extended family members, and were separated from one or more of their siblings. These findings strongly imply that the policy change in Scotland towards early intervention and permanence is resulting in changes in practice.

At the beginning of 2019, SCRA started a new research project: 'Sexual exploitation of children and young people involved in the Children's Hearings System'. This research is being carried out in collaboration with Barnardo's Scotland. It seeks to answer the questions:

- What are the pathways of children and young people to becoming at risk of sexual exploitation?
- When child sexual exploitation (CSE) vulnerability indicators first emerged, were these recognised as such by agencies and interventions made to protect and support the young person?
- What are the backgrounds, vulnerabilities and trajectories of young men most at risk of sexual exploitation in Scotland?
- Is CSE considered in decision making by Children's Hearings on young people at risk of or victims of sexual exploitation?

The research will be carried out over 2019/20 and will report in summer 2020.



## TECHNOLOGY

2018/19 saw a high level of activity in the first year of the Digital Delivery Programme between Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) and SCRA to replace the existing case management system and create an integrated platform between both organisations. Leidos Innovations UK Ltd have completed an intensive period of requirements checking that provided CHS/SCRA with confidence that the Project will be delivered within the price identified in their tender response.

The development of the Core System and Applications Solution (CSAS) Project has been progressing well with a wide range of skilled and knowledgeable personnel involved from both organisations. The governance structure has been well established and the Project has already undertaken two external audits with no significant concerns or issues identified.

Staff continue to be actively engaged with the Project and a Digital Leads Group has been created to support the sprint activity with the Digital Consultation Community. The Digital Leads will ensure that colleagues back in the office have sight of how the system will look, are aware of functionality and know how things will be done in the future. The Organisational Readiness Leads are engaging with staff and volunteers to plan how testing and training guides will be developed over the coming year.



# OUR STATISTICS 2018/19

You can view our Official Statistics  
2018/19 - including our interactive  
dashboard - on our website  
[www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk)

12,869

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
REFERRED

31,653

CHILDREN'S HEARINGS HELD

84.6%

HAD CARE AND  
PROTECTION REFERRALS

14 AND

15 YEARS

IS THE MOST COMMON  
AGE OF REFERRAL

9,206

CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
ON CSOs

24.6% WITH  
A CPO WERE AGED  
UNDER 20 DAYS OLD

LACK OF PARENTAL  
CARE IS THE MOST  
COMMON GROUND

562

CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE ON CPOS



# OUR BOARD

## CHAIR

**Michelle Miller (appointed 2018)**

**Carole Wilkinson (retired 31 April 2018)**

## BOARD MEMBERS

**Bernadette Docherty (retired 31 August 2018)**

**Catherine Robertson (re-appointed 2017)**

**Anela Anwar (appointed 2014)**

**Sam Anderson (appointed 2016)**

**Martin Toye (appointed 2016)**

**Suzanne Vestri (appointed 2016)**

**James Edgar (appointed 2017)**

**Tam Baillie (appointed 2018)**



**SCRA operates under the direction of an eight person Board. As a Non-Departmental Public Body, SCRA's Board - although acting independently - is ultimately accountable to Scottish Ministers, and Board Members are appointed by Ministers.**

**Our Board Members reflect a wide range of experiences and backgrounds in relation to children and young people. The Board plays a significant role in setting the strategic direction of SCRA, and in challenging the organisation to ensure we deliver our plans.**

**More information about our Board, including a full Register of Board Members' Interests, can be found on our website at [www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk)**

# LOOKING AHEAD

**Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Officer reflects on the first six months of 2019/20...**

In the course of the next 12 months SCRA, alongside Children's Hearings Scotland, will begin the first stage of implementation of our digital strategy with a full upgrade of our core recording and Hearings management systems.

This marks the beginning of our overall transformation of how the Hearings System will offer future choice, facility and opportunity for children, young people and their families to engage with their Children's Hearing and vastly increase the opportunity for channels of digital engagement in coming years.

This will build on the work we are collectively doing now under the direction of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) to implement our evidence-driven Better Hearings programme across Scotland.

Better Hearings activity is already emerging through innovation, practice development and improvement across the country and is fundamentally based on strong local partnerships, deep understanding of children and young people's experiences and views of the Hearings System. We all have a clear commitment to work together to make the future experiences of children, young people and families better in the Hearings System. Our Better Hearings work will also help towards achieving the best possible decision making and outcomes for children and young people.

We are rightly proud of the professionalism and commitment of all SCRA staff. Every day they make detailed decisions about the future care of children and young people and ensure that compulsory measures of care are considered by Children's Hearings only where justified or necessary. They are therefore key guardians of children and young

people's rights. In 2019/20 the development, care and wellbeing of our staff will be central to our work. We already have a strong programme of health and wellbeing at national and local level, driven by our regular and ongoing staff survey work which drives our programmes. We will work jointly with our staff partners UNISON to ensure that the wellbeing of our workforce is central to our organisational life and activity.

Our commitment to employee wellbeing is in part driven by our commitment to equality and diversity in our organisation, in the work it does and how we approach our future direction. Seeing everyone in the world we work in as an individual with huge potential, strengths and skills, their right to be treated with respect and dignity and to be supported in their individual development is key to the kind of organisation SCRA wants to become. We will continue to prioritise this approach - because it is all encompassing and transformative for our staff and for children and young people that we seek to serve.

High quality decisions for children and young people who may need care, protection and support with the full force of the law is at the core of what we do.

Our performance in assessing and making these decisions as quickly as possible has improved year on year since 2013/14, but they are short of where we want and aim to be and this will continue to be one of our key priorities in 2019/20 - making the right decision, at the right time to ensure that children and young people are helped effectively. We do this in partnership at national and local level and this will continue to define SCRA's approach in the next 12 months and beyond.

Thank you for reading this Annual Report for 2018/19. We look forward to working with you in the next year in making the Children's Hearings System the very best that it can be for children and young people.





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**[WWW.SCRA.GOV.UK](http://WWW.SCRA.GOV.UK)**