

# Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

## A Property Strategy For The Children's Hearing System 2017 - 2022

### **Purpose Of This Document**

Property is a key resource that is at the centre of the Children's Hearing System and provides the space within which the quality of our services is judged. Good quality facilities can contribute towards good quality hearings and outcomes. Property also represents a high proportion of the overall cost of delivering our services to children and young people. For these reasons we need to ensure that we are able to provide the right property, of the right quality, with the right facilities, on a sustainable basis.

The purpose of this document is to set out our vision for the properties that are used, or accessed, by the Children's Hearings System across Scotland. This Property Strategy document will set out:

- The features and qualities that our property needs to provide to ensure that appropriate and suitable facilities are available to everyone who accesses the hearing system
- The progress we have made, and the further work we need to do, to achieve these aims
- How we will work with our key partners in the Hearing System to make this happen

We need to live within our means and provide our facilities and services with the capital and revenue funding that is available to the Hearing System. However, we also need to promote and develop improvements to the services we provide and the experience of children, young people and families. This Property Strategy will help inform our decision making over the next 5 to 10 years. Together with our partners our decisions will take clear account of the needs of children, young people and our wider communities. This will be based on the best evidence available about quality and experience of the hearings system.

It is recognised that good quality facilities will contribute towards the development of our services to meet public expectations. Our strategy also reflects and refers to wider Scottish and UK Government policies to ensure that the best possible value is obtained from the use of our property assets. This Strategy is aligned with the SCRA Corporate Plan which sets out the organisation's vision and their contribution to the strategic direction for the Hearing System. The aim of this strategy is to ensure that property contributes towards the achievement of the vision and outcomes stated in those plans.

## **Responsibilities of key partners in the Children's Hearing System**

### **SCRA**

SCRA holds the statutory responsibility to provide suitable accommodation and facilities for and on behalf of the Children's Hearing system and to deploy staff throughout Scotland (Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011). The Act also states that facilities for Hearings must be provided, so far as practicable, in every local authority area and that they need to be dissociated from criminal courts and police stations.

### **CHS**

CHS has equivalent statutory duties under the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 for appointing members of the Children's Panel. Children's Hearings should consist, so far as practicable, only of members of the Children's Panel who live or work in the "relevant local authority" for the child who is attending the hearing.

Ensuring that we provide a suitable and appropriate location for children's hearings to take place is an important objective for each of the key partners in the Children's Hearing System. To meet this objective, we will endeavour to hold hearings in places that are local for the families, are fully accessible and also minimise the travelling time required, as much as possible.

### **A consultative approach to delivery**

SCRA is committed to ensuring that we discharge our legal and professional responsibilities in an open and transparent way. We value dialogue and partnership with other bodies involved in the Hearing System and will always seek to develop open and clear dialogue in our decision making.

Where change is planned to the properties that SCRA manages on behalf of the Hearing System we will take into account the views of our partners and stakeholders such as CHS' Area Support Teams, Local Authorities and children, young people and families to deliver the best outcomes possible. Our decision-making will be guided by the core objectives of this strategy along with the research and evidence available – whether existing or commissioned - to help us make the right decisions about changes to the Hearings estate.

The degree of consultation will be proportionate to the change proposed. Where SCRA proposes significant change to existing property provision we will embark on a full consultation exercise with key stakeholders. For minor changes – such as physical alterations to property - these will be discussed, considered and the most appropriate mechanism for local consultation agreed with CHS.

Children, young people and their families should be encouraged and facilitated to influence improvements to the Children's Hearings property in their area. This can be achieved through existing engagement and participation mechanisms or by undertaking specific local events with children and young people. In many areas of Scotland local Champions Boards are being created that include young people with experience of the care system. The Young Peoples Board for the Hearing system which is in development will be influential in ensuring young people's views and experiences are taken into account and inform the future provision and design of our property and facilities.

## What we have

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

In 2015/16, our buildings provided workspace for 396 staff (FTE) and approximately 34,900 Hearings were held in our Hearing suites across Scotland.

Since the implementation of our property strategy in 2010, we have made the estate smaller and more flexible:

	<u>April 2010</u>	<u>April 2016</u>
Number of Owned (Core) Properties	24	19 *
Number of Leased (Core) Properties	21	14 *
Outreach Hearing Centres	46	31
Overall Area (Net SqM)	15,690SqM	13,966SqM
Asset Value	£7.632M	£5.020M **
Rent Liability	£1.306M	£1.210M *
Hard FM Services (Repairs) budget	n/a	£186.7K
Soft FM Services (Cleaning) budget	n/a	£197.2K
Capital Budget available for Minor Works	£100K	£225K

\* Excludes properties in process of disposal

\*\* Asset value at 31 March 2015

In addition to disposing of property that has become surplus, we have freed up space within our premises to lease to private organisations or to share with other public bodies. Between leasing/sharing arrangements and space that is not currently in use, the space physically occupied by SCRA as at April 2016 is around 3,653 SqM lower than the overall area at 10,313 SqM.

## What we need to do

Our buildings need to provide:

- A safe, suitable and appropriate place in which to administer and conduct Children's Hearings.
- Safe, suitable and appropriate office facilities for our staff to carry out our work.
- Safe, suitable and appropriate facilities for Panel Members and other key agencies to operate from

Significant steps have been taken over the last 10 years to improve the core hearings estate and create fit for purpose, modern facilities that provide a suitable environment for everyone who uses or accesses our buildings. Further work is necessary to improve the

poorest performing properties in our estate, to address approaching lease expiries and to achieve cost savings where possible.

Where opportunities become available, we are reducing the cost of owning and operating our properties. This is to ensure that we provide best value to the public purse as SCRA discharges this function on behalf of the whole Hearing System. Most of the running costs for our properties are directly related to the size of the premises we occupy and we aim to continually improve our space use efficiency.

## **The Outreach Hearings Estate**

We know that a big challenge remains in our Outreach estate, where premises are hired on a daily basis to hold hearings. The quality of these premises is not consistent across the country and they do not meet the standards we have set for our core estate. The feedback we have received from our partners and families indicates that they would like to see improved property provision in a number of locations.

Going forward, to continually improve property provision as a part of our service delivery, we have captured the key elements of our strategy over 5 themes:

1. Meeting the needs of property users – property standards for the Hearing System
2. Flexible service delivery
3. Location and quality of hearing centres
4. Sustainability
5. Working in partnership

Improved property provision will always be considered in the context of available financial resources, to take opportunities to reduce costs over time and to ensure that property provision is sustainable in the longer term.

## **Meeting the Needs of Property Users – property standards for the Hearing System**

It is SCRA's objective to provide a suitable and appropriate environment for everyone who accesses or uses our services. Our buildings need to be sufficiently accessible and flexible to meet the needs of a range of different users.

### **A safe, comfortable experience for children, young people and families**

All our Hearing Centres should be conveniently located as well as child and family friendly. We will have facilities, furniture, and decoration that helps children and families feel safe, welcomed and to 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 two separate waiting areas available for each Hearing Room for this purpose. We want to create the right environment for children and young people in hearings and are progressing a programme of work, with young people, to improve the "feel" and impression of our hearing centres with the aim of encouraging greater participation.

## **Safe and sufficient facilities are available for our partners**

Panel Members are one of our key partners for the delivery of Children's Hearings. SCRA will consult with Children's Hearings Scotland to ensure that the needs of Panel Members are met and the facilities, equipment and systems used are provided with safety in mind. We will gather feedback on Panel Member's experiences of using our properties, as well as proposed changes to our property provision.

## **A safe and comfortable environment for our staff to work**

We want to provide a good working environment for our staff that is safe, pleasant, productive and flexible. 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 ICT network

Our Property Design Standards set out how we will create and deliver facilities that meet the above criteria and will contribute towards our environmental responsibilities. These will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the hearing system.

## **Flexible Service Delivery**

The way we work has changed and continues to change. The CHS/SCRA Digital Strategy for the Children's Hearing System will create greater flexibility in service delivery and enable improved information sharing between Hearing System partners. SCRA's objective is to ensure that the buildings we use are increasingly enabled to support the need for greater flexibility and connectivity.

Our Locality teams must be able to work flexibly to maximise benefits for the service and to support choice, in how, when and where work takes place. Flexible working policies and information technology are being used to support increased homeworking and more flexible use of workstations within our offices.

All public bodies must make best use of the reducing resources we have. SCRA will work to reduce the amount of physical space that we occupy to concentrate on providing smarter and better quality buildings. We have brought teams together into "hub" buildings and our staff work in open-plan offices to maximise the use of these buildings. Our case management system is changing how we work and deliver our services by providing an electronic case file that can be accessed flexibly from different locations. This is reducing our need for paper files and the amount of space required for storage. As the number of paper files reduces, we will work towards the Government target of 8-10 sqm per person for office accommodation (excluding the Hearing Centre).

Where the Hearing location does not serve as an SCRA office, the use of mobile connected technology will provide staff with the ability to work there, before and after the Hearing, with access to key systems and facilities. This will help staff to make best use of their time and reduce unnecessary travel. Through the joint Digital Strategy with CHS we

will work more collaboratively with our partners and, where this is possible, we will share the use of accommodation and digital infrastructure to minimise costs and travel time.

## Location and Quality of Hearing Centres

The Children's Hearings System covers the whole of Scotland. The travel time required to attend our hearing centres is an important factor for children, young people and their families as well as our Staff, Panel and AST Members. We need to factor this into our planning and make journey times as reasonable as possible.

There are a number of legislative requirements that dictate where Children's Hearings are to be held and 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)

By reorganising our operational teams and structures, SCRA's staff have become more agile and work across Local Authority boundaries. SCRA staff are based in "hub" properties covering a number of Local Authorities, with reporters and other members of staff travelling to service Hearing Centres as required.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will provide three categories of Hearing Centre in properties that are suitable for the needs of our users/partners:

- Our dedicated **Office & Hearing Centres** will be attached to our permanently staffed "hub" buildings that are designed with the needs of our users in mind.
- Our dedicated **Hearing Centres** are provided in local buildings that are designed or adapted to hold children's hearings, but are not permanently staffed. It is unlikely, however, that the demand for our services will require a dedicated Hearing Centre within every Local Authority boundary.
- For these low demand 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 "daily hire" basis, and provided in partnership with our key partners as required.

The environment and quality of the hearing centre will have an influence on the quality of the hearing itself. SCRA wish to ensure that suitable and appropriate hearing facilities are provided for children and families and we will define minimum criteria for the consistent provision of Outreach centres across the country. Children's Hearings are held to consider a range of subjects and SCRA recognises that the design, decoration and furniture used in our hearing centres needs to be both welcoming and appropriate. We will continue to review and develop the most appropriate design and style considerations, in consultation with our key partners, with the aim of maximising the participation and engagement of children and young people and their families.

The provision of Outreach hearing centres is a big property challenge for the hearing system. Whilst Outreach centres provide local facilities in areas where SCRA do not have core property, the quality and suitability of the buildings varies greatly. Recent research by the SCRA Modern Apprentices<sup>1</sup> suggests that :-

- A number of outreach facilities are not suitable for children's hearings;
- They can be intimidating for any child or young person attending a hearing; and
- The number of outreach facilities should be reduced

Our review of Outreach Hearing Centre provision has identified a need for a collaborative approach with our partners to improve the quality of outreach facilities in a sustainable way. SCRA is committed to working with Children's Hearings Scotland and Partners to bring about improvements to the provision of Outreach hearing facilities.

## Sustainability

SCRA is both committed to ensuring that our use of property assets in the Hearing System is sustainable in terms of both the financial resources required to operate our facilities and the impact our services have on the environment. We currently provide at least one hearing venue in every local authority area but in some locations this is proving very difficult to maintain sustainably. We will ensure that an agreed and appropriate number of hearing venues are available to the Children's Hearing System and will explore the opportunities that the Digital Strategy presents for new and alternative service provision.

We have reduced the size of the Hearing System estate since 2010 and will continue to manage our properties to minimise the impact on the environment, as far as possible. We are committed to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and the amount of waste we generate.

All Scottish Government agencies and NDPBs are required to follow the requirements of the Scottish Public Finance Manual and the Asset Management Policy. In line with these requirements, when property change is necessary to support our operations, we approach 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 in this document, our focus over the coming years is to reduce the size and cost of our estate while maintaining 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 reduced costs over the longer term, meet the requirements of the Asset Management Policy and deliver one or more of the following benefits:

- Significant improvements to services to children, young people and families

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<sup>1</sup> It's all about change, June 2013

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

We continue to maximise the utilisation of our properties and minimise unoccupied space. The more flexible use of desks and furniture within our offices will support more agile working while information technology and homeworking arrangements reduce unnecessary travel. In our core hearing centres we plan for 80% utilisation of the facility, with the remaining 20% available for emergency Hearings.

We will deliver good value from our properties by reducing our space use requirement where possible 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. As larger property holdings produce more carbon, an overall reduction in the size of our estate will deliver recurring efficiencies and reduce our impact on the environment.

## Working In Partnership

SCRA and CHS have established strong ties and are working together, along with our partners, to develop and improve the Children's Hearing System for everyone who uses our services.

The Scottish Government is committed to a more integrated approach to delivering public services that maximises efficiency and delivers better value for money. SCRA fully participates in the Asset Management arrangements and consults with Scottish Government where property changes are planned. Through our Property Strategy SCRA has reduced the size of our estate and co-locates with a number of public bodies. SCRA has identified a number of strategic areas for addressing poor performance in our estate and will work with Scottish Government and our partners to bring about improvements.

We want to be more flexible and agile to deliver improved services and hearing provision. Where possible and appropriate, we will hold more Hearings in central facilities and continue to bring staff groups together in hub buildings to increase our flexibility. This has allowed us to 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 and we will work with our partners to help ensure the best outcome for all.

Our review of Outreach Hearing Centre provision across Scotland has clearly identified a need for a collaborative approach with CHS and our partners to improve the quality of outreach facilities in a sustainable way.

### **How We Will Deliver The Strategy**

To provide suitable and appropriate accommodation that meets the needs of the Children's Hearing System, SCRA is committed to working collaboratively to ensure that we provide the right property, in the right place on a sustainable basis. An agreed action plan will be put in place to deliver the necessary changes and this will be regularly reviewed and updated.



## How We Measure Improvement

SCRA currently measures the percentage of SCRA core properties which comply with SCRA property standards which is assessed and reported quarterly to the SCRA Board. In addition the SCRA Property Team Plan carries a suite of KPI's that cover the performance of the estate, the size of the estate and the cost of the estate.

### Core strategic objectives

SCRA will always seek to develop open and clear dialogue in our decision making. Where change is proposed under our Property Strategy, the degree of consultation undertaken will be proportionate to the change proposed. To summarise; the core objectives to be delivered through our strategy are:

- **Meeting the Needs of Property Users** - we will endeavour to ensure that we provide a suitable and appropriate environment for everyone who accesses or uses our services. We will gather feedback on their experiences of our properties as well as any proposed changes to property provision.
- **Flexible Service Delivery** – We will ensure that the buildings we use are increasingly enabled to support greater flexibility and connectivity. Options to share the use of premises, facilitated by the joint Digital Strategy, will be explored.
- **Location and Quality of Hearing Centres** – we will endeavour to provide the right property, of the right quality, with the right facilities in the most appropriate location to encourage the full participation and engagement of children and young people and their families. We aim to do this whilst achieving best value overall for the public purse.
- **Sustainability** – we will continue to manage our properties to minimise the impact on the environment, as far as possible, by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and the amount of waste we generate.
- **Working In Partnership** – SCRA will work with CHS and Partners to ensure that the arrangements for excellent partnership working between all the key agencies in the Hearing System is developed and strengthened to meet the needs of everyone who uses our properties or accesses our services.

Signed:

Neil Hunter,  
Chief Executive/Principal Reporter  
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration