



Annual Report 2022/2023

Care. Connect. Protect.



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION



About our report

This report covers the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

It summarises the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration's achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan 2022/23.

You can also view this report's supporting information online, including the full set of our annual audited accounts and performance report, plus our Official Statistics and interactive statistical dashboard at www.scra.gov.uk.

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Our commitments to you

Our Vision

Children and young people will be listened to, protected and supported to realise a positive future where they are safe, valued and respected.

Our Mission

We protect and support Scotland's children and young people, by making high quality decisions, upholding their rights and working collaboratively as compassionate, inclusive Corporate Parents to enable the most positive and personalised experience of the Children's Hearings System.

Our Values

Our values are the shared motivations, beliefs and behaviours that underpin all that we do.

Our Behaviours

Supportive: We work with kindness to support children, young people and families, our partners and each other

Child Centred: Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do

Respectful: Everyone is respected and treated fairly, inclusively and lawfully

Accountable: We are responsible for our decisions, our ethics and our learning



Foreword - Michelle Miller SCRA Board Chair

Following two years of extraordinary challenge brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be tempting to say that the past year saw a return to a form of normality. Far from it, 2022/2023 saw the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration transition from extreme crisis management, to a programme of work that reflects the critical importance of providing care and protection to Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people.

Re-energised by the easing of the Covid restrictions, we have continued at pace with our improvement programme; contributed significant resource and effort to the work of the Hearings System Working Group review; helped shape the policy and legislative programme for Scotland's children and young people; championed children's rights and ensured their views influence our work; focused increasingly on staff wellbeing; and

managed the complex landscape of demand against extremely difficult financial constraints.

This report provides a flavour of the wide-ranging activity undertaken by SCRA through the commitment and determination of our staff, not only to provide the best service we can, but both to imagine and to work towards a future that reflects our ambitions for our children and young people.

Although the Hearings For Children report was published in May 2023, the work of the Hearings System Working Group – and SCRA's significant contribution to it – were a key focus throughout the reporting period 2022/2023. SCRA was an enthusiastic partner, sharing the principles underpinning the work and fully supporting the report's recommendations.

We do not underestimate the effort still required to bring the vision in the report to life, the investment required across the whole system and the long-term commitment from all partner agencies. We

await the Scottish Government's full response to the report, but as you can see from the following pages, we have not interrupted our improvement programme and are confident that our work is fully consistent with the expectations in the report.

I would like to express my thanks and pay tribute to all SCRA staff, without whose professionalism and dedication we would not be able to operate. Their concern for the children and young people referred to the Hearings System and their commitment to continuous improvement are the solid foundation for all that we do and will keep us focused during what will inevitably be challenging times ahead.

My thanks also to my fellow Board members whose knowledge and insights are invaluable in helping to steer SCRA during what are, in equal measure, challenging, exciting and promising times.

Our year at a glance 2022/2023



JANUARY

MARCH

MAY

JULY

FEBRUARY

APRIL

JUNE

AUGUST

April

The latest in a series of Keeping The Promise webinars were held for staff
Our Business Plan for 2022/2023 was published
The final COVID-19 legal restrictions were lifted

May

A new Hearing About Me form was launched for children and young people
We held a series of events during Mental Health Awareness Week
Our latest Big Team Challenge for staff got underway

June

We unveiled our Official Statistics for 2021/2022
New research report '[Children aged 12 to 15 years involved in offending and referred to the Children's Reporter and Procurator Fiscal in Scotland](#)' was published.
We published an updated Whistleblowing Policy following a review

July

Our Principal Reporter signed the Menopause Workplace Pledge
We appointed our 14th Hearings-experienced Modern Apprentice
Our digital skills survey was issued for all staff to complete

August

SCRA marked Grief Awareness Day
We launched our first Menopause survey for staff
We recorded our first Keeping The Promise reform podcast

September

New information was produced to make it easier for people to complain
We raised awareness with staff during Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder month
We marked the sad passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II

October

We launched a new toolkit for staff during Menopause Awareness Month
Our Rights, Inclusion and Corporate Parenting report card was published
We welcomed the Hearings System Working Group's Issues List

November

We launched our annual Staff Survey encouraging all staff to respond
Our annual staff equalities monitoring campaign got underway
We produced a new suite of information materials about the role of the Reporter

December

Our Business Continuity Plan was updated post COVID-19 and re-launched
We marked International Migrant's Day with some staff case studies
We were awarded The Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion TIDE Silver Award Standard

January

Our latest Keeping The Promise podcast focused on language in the Hearings System
We launched a pilot autism alert card scheme in Glasgow and Glenrothes
Our Mental Wealth Group started planning Time to Talk Day

February

We published a Keeping The Promise progress report for children and young people
We recorded 'Sound Bites' with Our Hearings, Our Voice board members
We launched Programme Protect focusing on effectiveness and efficiency

March

We announced 20 new Neurodiversity Champions across the organisation
We celebrated Scottish Modern Apprenticeship Week
Our Victim Information Annual Report was published
We worked with the Promise, CHS and Sheriff Mackie to finalise the work of the Hearings System Working Group

Our Statistics 2022/23

10,981

children and young people
referred

2,637

children and young people
referred - offence

6,789

children and young people
with Compulsory
Supervision Orders
at 31 March

9,025

children and young people
referred - non offence

14_{and}

15_{years}

is the most common
age of referral

24.9%

with a Child Protection Order
were aged under 20 days old

22,341

Children's Hearings held

442

children and
young people on
Child Protection Orders



Reporting on our Business Plan Our Progress and Achievements in 2022/23

As we continued to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, our focus remained on delivering the strategic aims outlined in our Business Plan 2022/23:

Care - Delivering a service that feels right for each child, young person and family that experiences it.

Connect - Working together to receive the right referrals, for the right children, at the right time.

Protect - Making high quality and timely decisions for children and young people, using the right information that is relevant, clear and secure.

During 2022/23, we successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan – some of which are highlighted in this next section of the report.

More detailed information is available in the Performance Review section of our [Annual Accounts 2022/23](#).

Our Stories

Our performance and targets

2022/23 is the first full year since the pandemic where SCRA has not been operating under emergency legislation. As the legislation will impact comparisons with 2021/22, it is important to still recognise the key areas that the legislation supported, including:

- Removing the requirement for 2nd working day Hearings for Child Protection Orders;
- Extending Compulsory Supervision Orders for an additional 6 months (over and above the standard 12-month limit); and
- Extending interim orders from 22 to 44 days.

These specific provisions ended on 30th September 2021. More detail can be found here: [Coronavirus legislation – changes to the law - SCRA](#).

Decision making by Reporters within 50 working days was unchanged against the prior year at 69%. This measure ensures that children and young people are receiving a timely service from SCRA. Though performance was unchanged, this was against an increased number of decisions compared to 2021/22.

Challenges remain for Reporters around decision making in terms of capacity due to other demands on their time, including the additional tasks involved and increased labour intensity of arranging Hearings - which as well as the traditional face to face delivery, are still being held virtually or by a mixture of face to face and virtual means.

Reporters are also reliant on partner agencies to provide reports and information to help

them make the right decision for a child and the time taken to receive this information has also been impacted by pressures on other agencies in the same way that SCRA has experienced in the period since the pandemic.

The scheduling of grounds Hearings within 20 working days of a Reporter decision to arrange a Hearing was up 7 percentage points (pp) in the year to 57%. There had to be a strict prioritisation approach to allow the core business of Children's Hearings to continue through the pandemic with reduced availability of Hearing spaces due to social distancing and other constraints. This obviously had an impact on the ability to schedule grounds Hearings within the 20 working day target. The performance in 2022/23 starts to reflect the move away from the pandemic and the prioritisation required. It remained the case in 2022/23 that for the reasons outlined above there was no target set for either decision making or Hearing scheduling key performance indicators in the year.

Short term absence at 2.0% met the 2% target and was 0.4pp higher than the prior year. More staff have returned to office working in 2022/23 which may have increased the short term absence experienced on previous years when staff were more consistently working from home. Agile working is still giving staff more flexibility about where they work from even when they are feeling unwell, but not unwell enough to be absent from work. Long term absence at 3.7% was up 0.3pp from the prior year and well above the 2% target.

We have seen a rise in long term absences, particularly in relation to psychological absences. The post pandemic period has been challenging for staff and which is manifesting in complex personal, work or a mixture of both, stress related absences. We have

trained a number of mental health first aiders and our Mental Wealth Group is particularly active across the organisation in terms of signposting supports, health and wellbeing tools and initiatives and local health and wellbeing groups are responding to Locality needs. Appropriate management of our long term individual absences is in place, including occupational health advice and guidance, employee assistance counselling provision, and potential ill-health retirements.

Of the finance targets, the revenue spends (within 1% of budget), revenue savings (target of 1.3%) and the efficiency savings (target of 0.6%) were all met. The capital spends target was missed at 14.7% below budget against a target of being within 5% of budget. This was mainly due to delays on the Elgin refurbishment and property Minor Works projects and a pause in an IT development project.

Aim1 - Care Inclusion and Diversity

We have continued to develop and refine SCRA's Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment approach (EHRIA). We have listened to user feedback and now have a five-tier approach to EHRIAs to ensure proportionality is recognised and that the process is user-friendly. We continue to receive high quality completed EHRIA covering strategic and operational, Locality and national work, as well as Keeping The Promise project work. To promote awareness and understanding of importance of impact assessment, we have developed two information and training videos that are available on our intranet to support staff in the completion of these, alongside all of the EHRIA materials. We are further looking to develop mandatory EHRIA e-learning which will first focus on managers as well as specific teams (e.g. Digital, Practice, Property) whose work brings about the most change to



policy, process or practice. We will continue our work to raise awareness and proactively manage impact assessment and associated organisational risk throughout 2023/24.

In addition to general awareness raising, we have been focusing on embedding and mainstreaming equality, diversity and inclusion in Localities. This has been done through identifying an Equalities, Inclusion and Diversity (EDI) lead in every Locality, in addition to our cohort of Inclusion Ambassadors. To support this group of geographically diverse colleagues, we created a Locality EDI Lead Network. This Network is hosted on Microsoft Teams and enables all Locality EDI Leads to share questions, good practice, ideas and get peer support or advice and guidance from SCRA's Inclusion & Diversity Manager, as well as being a mechanism

to promoting inclusion and diversity opportunities and training. The Network ensures that strategic national inclusion and diversity priorities are communicated and discussed within Localities, identify areas of local inclusion and diversity work to ‘feed up’ into the national programme. This top down, bottom up approach to inclusion and diversity ensures that strategic priorities and local needs remain at the forefront of our inclusion and diversity work, in effect providing a feedback loop from Localities to ensure our inclusion and diversity work is needs-based.

A strong strategic approach to inclusion and diversity is required to fully embed and mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion. We have embedded EDI in SCRA’s corporate planning process to further mainstream EDI



through everything we do – whether it be national or local, strategic or operational – and all Locality plans have specific EDI actions. Further work will also be carried out within Localities as and when identified. The objectives in all Locality Plans are: we will continue to support SCRA’s inclusion and diversity aims by mainstreaming these in our culture, practice and services - ensuring that staff have a working knowledge and are implementing the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010; and we will use impact assessment to support our approach to Locality planning.

To ensure our EDI activity and programme of work is evidence and needs-based, we have been focussing on improving our collecting and recording of equality data. Equality data helps us to better understand the needs of the people we work with and for and provides us with an evidence-base for implementing and measuring change and improvement.

Without it, we would not know how or where to target our action and resource in the most fair and impactful way. Previously we have focussed on improving our workforce equality data, and we now turn to improving the equality data we hold on children on our computer system, CSAS. Improving the equality data of children on CSAS has been and will continue to be a focus as this will help us identify operational and service delivery areas requiring improvement based on need and evidence. We will also continue our annual Equalities Employee Monitoring Campaign to encourage our workforce to complete their equalities data in iTrent, our online HR system.

SCRA’s Race & Ethnicity Group, led by SCRA’s Principal Reporter/Chief Executive, continues to proactively develop its aims and reach. We have been focussing on promoting awareness of issues pertaining to race and ethnicity and, in particular, racism and racial inequality and how we can become an anti-racist organisation. Our Race Equality

Action Plan includes an ambitious multi-year approach to improving our understanding of potential racial inequality in our service delivery and decision-making, taking a mixed method approach. Improving our data is the start of this work and we will, as the data improves, conduct case-sampling exercises and research projects to explore whether there is racial inequality in our decision-making, particularly in relation to the Reporter decision-making. The group – alongside HR – are using the Scottish Government’s Minority Ethnic Recruitment Toolkit to help us better understand the barriers to achieving a more ethnically diverse workforce. Further work will be done as e-recruitment is introduced. The group has also produced a Racism Guidance Note for staff, which sits alongside the Hate Crime Guidance Note, to act as guidance for staff in how to deal with, and report racism and/or a hate crime.

SCRA Disability Group continues to be motivated and enthusiastic with promoting disability inclusion. The group continue to implement the BSL Action Plan and raise awareness of deafness and the impact of being deaf. Since June 2022 the group has also had a significant focus on neurodiversity and neuroinclusion. As part of this work, we have partnered with Salveson Mindroom (a charity that champions all forms of neurodiversity and supports all kinds of minds) to launch a Neurodiversity Champions Network. The Champions will help raise awareness of neurodiversity within the organisation through providing training and awareness raising to staff. It will also provide advice and guidance to colleagues who are supporting people who have neuro-differences to attend Hearings, court and participate in the Hearings process more generally. The Champions will ensure that sensory tools, visual information guides and other aids to support people with neuro-differences are available and actively promoted within all our Hearing centres. We now have 20 trained Neurodiversity Champions across SCRA.

Whilst SCRA is not a named public body in respect of the Fairer Scotland Duty, we have, for some time now, committed to the Duty. The Fairer Scotland Duty is included in our impact assessment process, alongside consideration of island and remote communities impact. To further embed our commitment to the Duty, we have convened a Fairer Scotland Group, which is chaired by a Senior Operational Manager. The group will focus on the impact of socio-economic disadvantage (of resource, opportunity and aspiration) on the children and families we work with, and on our service delivery. This work will involve strategic and operational activity to better understand the impact of poverty on children and their families and in how we make poverty-aware decisions in discharging our statutory decision-making function.

Rights

SCRA’s has always worked to defend the rights of children and young people in the Children’s Hearings System.

SCRA is preparing for the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with a strategic focus on children’s rights – to consider what this means across the organisation – from the way that we develop policy, to the way that we write our letters. This should result in improved experiences for children, young people and families.

Children’s Hearings don’t just work with children and young people - they work with families and so in what we do, and in the improvements that we make, we need to work towards a positive impact on everyone’s experience. SCRA’s work can be complicated and, at times, be difficult for people to understand. This can make it hard for children and families to engage meaningfully and positively with us – and to exercise their rights. As a result, we continue to focus on information and awareness raising. We hope to provide a clear understanding of what

we do and why. We hope that this clearer understanding will help the children and families who come to the Children's Hearing be better informed, more confident, and that they will be more able to actively engage with their Hearings.

Wider human rights are central to our partnership work and are a key part of our collaborative approach. We are keen to develop our national and local connections with other Corporate Parents to ensure that we are able to provide a joined up approach to our wider work.

In 2022, SCRA became a member of Together Scotland's Professional Panel, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government to explore the skills and knowledge required for duty-bearers to fully implement children's rights in Scotland. The Professional Panel is a national group of partners who work with children, young people and families in a range of ways, with the aim being to develop a framework through collaboration with group members to fully support the implementation of children's rights.

Advocacy in the Children's Hearings System is a critical element of children's rights. Local SCRA staff across Scotland continue to enjoy strong working relationships with advocacy service providers. Collective working at a local level is championed and this will continue to be a focus for further improvement going forward.

During 2022/23, we continued to deliver comprehensive free training on the Children's Hearings System, Children's Hearings and participation and advocacy rights to multiple partner agencies supporting children and young people in care. We have worked closely with Barnardo's Scotland projects, both Children's Services as well as the Fostering Services, to roll this out.

Corporate Parenting

In 2022/23, we continued with lots of Corporate Parenting activity to improve our services to children and young people.

As part of our new Hearing Rooms Improvements programme, more upgrades took place to modernise our Hearing Rooms and make them feel more comfortable, flexible and family friendly. The look for these rooms came from a portfolio developed through co-design with Hearings-experienced young people and interior designers. We upgraded Hearing rooms in Hamilton, Stranraer, Fraserburgh, Tranent, and Elgin. We also revamped Alloa for a second time. We continue to receive positive feedback for all the new look rooms.

We had another successful year of working in partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Thousands of books were gifted to younger children aged 0-5 attending Children's Hearings throughout Scotland during 2022/23. The uptake for the programme has been consistently high and the success of the programme is mainly due to staff's unwavering commitment to promoting the Imagination Library and distributing the books.

SCRA's Modern Apprenticeship Programme exclusively for care and/or Hearings experienced young people has been successfully running since 2010. In 2022, we recruited our 14th Modern Apprentice to the Grampian Locality. The Modern Apprentice has been heavily involved in multiple Keeping The Promise activities and work streams, and is a member of our Keeping The Promise Team.

During 2022/23, SCRA continued to work closely with a number of groups of children and young people with experience of care and attending Children's Hearings, including a number of Champions Boards. These groups have been instrumental in helping SCRA to Keep The Promise and lead us in co-designing and implementing multiple new approaches and pieces of work to support children and young people's understanding of and engagement in the Hearings process. We are committed to continually reviewing and improving our information materials for children, young people and parents/carers.

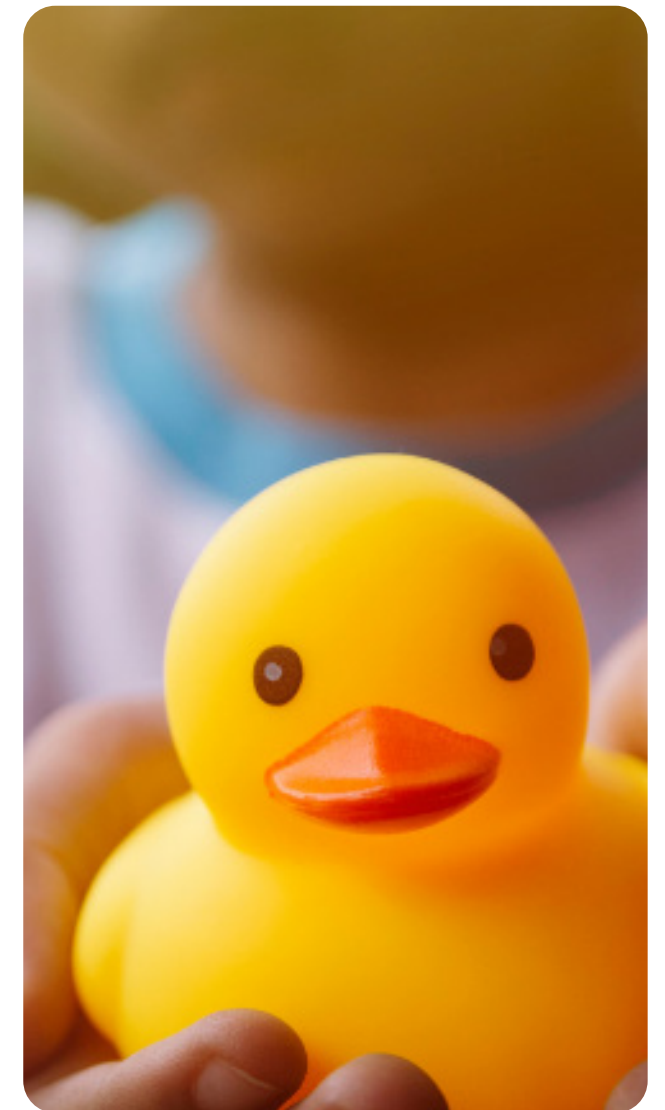
After consulting with Hearings-experienced young people, in November 2022, we launched a new suite of information materials about the role of the Children's Reporter. This included: new pages on our website for children and young people, two cartoon animations – one on the role of the Reporter and another about contacting the Reporter, an easy read guide for parents and carers and a British Sign Language video with subtitles and audio.

SCRA is proud to continue to host and support Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV). SCRA also provides communications support to OHOV, and regularly attends their Board Meetings to support the project team and the young people. SCRA also delivers specialised assistance around the OHOV website and social media. In October 2022, to mark two years since publication of the [40 Calls to Action](#), we prepared our second update for OHOV. In addition, at one of their board meetings, we provided every Board Member with a personal thank you letter. We continue to work with young people from OHOV on a number of projects, including podcasts, information leaflets, cartoon animations and VOICE magazine.

Keeping The Promise

More than half way through The Promise Scotland's Plan 2021/24, SCRA's journey towards improvement, transformational change and reform is well underway. The focus of the last 12 months has been in four key areas:

1. Significant contribution to both the work of the collaborative redesign project and the Hearings System Working Group;
2. Ongoing staff engagement activities to inform system redesign;
3. Developing existing and initiating new improvement activity; and
4. Enabling and ensuring engagement with our Voice of Experience Reference Group.



The Hearings System Working Group and Collaborative Re-Design Project

The Promise 2021/24 Plan set a clear direction for what needs to happen to fulfil our commitment, including an action for the Children's Hearings System to go through a collaborative redesign process. Working with Children's Hearings Scotland, The Promise Scotland, children, young people and families to ensure coherent, cohesive and collaborative proposals for an operating framework for the Children's Hearings System. The Hearings System Working Group and collaborative redesign project teams were set up to support delivery of the proposals.

The programme of work was split into three phases, addressing the issues set out in the Hearings System Working Group's Issues List which was published by the group in March 2022.

1. Discussion and Discovery was delivered through the work of the collaborative re-design project of which we were a key member.
2. Deliberation and Design allowed the group to begin to sequence, prioritise and consider the findings. In October 2022, the Hearings System Working Group published the Emerging Themes report which shared some of the group's early thinking and formed the basis of the final recommendations.
3. A series of sessions to discuss draft recommendations began in January 2023. The sessions followed the journey of a child, beginning with early help and support for families, including referral to the Children's



Reporter and concluded with the oversight and accountability of the panel and decisions made by the Hearings System.

Recommendations were tested with children and families with experience of the Children's Hearings System and key partners prior to finalisation and publication of the Hearings for Children report.

SCRA Staff Engagement

Crucial to SCRA's approach and planning for the redesign of the Children's Hearings System is the engagement of SCRA staff in all roles, the people with lived experience of experts on the system.

The approach taken to staff engagement has been open and transparent, with encouragement to think independently and creatively about reform. All staff have been encouraged to get involved in the sessions and to bring their own experience and knowledge into the process. This approach has supported and generated strong discussion and at times diversity of views and opinions, all of which has been welcomed as important in considering the key features of the system that ought to be redesigned.

In October 2022, our Keeping The Promise Staff Engagement Report was published reflecting the key findings and common themes from staff engagement. It represents those areas where there was broad agreement and strong support for change as indicated by the responses of SCRA staff. The aim of the report and its key findings is to inform and contribute to the overall process of system redesign with the knowledge and expertise of SCRA employees.

SCRA's Keeping The Promise Route Plan

Since the launch of SCRA's Keeping The Promise Route Plan in February 2021, it is evident that work is beginning to take momentum and that the positive effects of change are being realised and experienced by children, young people and families in the

context of the small scale tests of change we have been working on as part of our approach to improvement work.

Three projects are testing alternative ways in which we can support children and young people before a Hearing. The Child Friendly Scheduling Project in Ayrshire is beginning to indicate signs of improvement. The Customise My Hearing in Grampian and Highland is in the early stages of testing and the Pre-Hearing Planning Meeting in Fife is coming to the end of the planning phase.

The Language Leaders project, which SCRA is heavily involved with, is progressing into phase two with a plan to launch in 2023/24. Most importantly, every activity or project charter is developed and tested with input and feedback from children and young people and where appropriate, other stakeholders within the Children's Hearings System. Additionally, it is positive that much of the planned improvement work outlined in our Route Plan aligns with recommendations from the Hearings for Children Report.

Voice of Experience Reference Group

The Voice of Experience Reference Group is made up of SCRA staff from across the country with a wide range of experiences of care, including fostering, adoption, being in care and as kinship carers. The group was formed in March 2022 and since that time have met regularly to identify areas for improvement for children, young people and families attending Hearings, as well as developing ideas to support SCRA staff to deliver on The Promise.

As part of Care Experience Week (23-30 October 2022) the group held their first away day meeting on Wednesday 26 October to continue to work towards improvements for children, young people and families involved in the Hearings System. Members are enthusiastic and committed, and

reviewed some of the Keeping the Promise Team Charters, as well as identifying their own thoughts on service improvement, both within SCRA and in relation to partner agencies.

Aim 2 - Connect People

In 2022/23, although we continued to recover from the pandemic, we carried out 46 internal recruitment exercises and 19 external recruitment exercises. This was during a six month period of vacancy management where we still recruited to critical vacancies and encouraged opportunities for existing staff and welcomed new talent to the organisation. In July 2022, we undertook a self-assessment exercise against the Scottish Government's Minority Ethnic Recruitment Toolkit to better understand and baseline our recruitment and selection process. This will inform our ongoing review of our recruitment process to ensure that we have no barriers to open and inclusive recruitment.

The Nominations Committee of the Board met regularly throughout 2022/23 to inform the recruitment round for two new Board members. This led to the successful appointment of new Board Members Ying Zhang and Hazel Smith.

In a difficult climate, we were pleased to be able to offer our staff group one of the highest consolidated pay offers across the Scottish Government framework.

We continued to provide advice in response to the challenging financial climate and make it available to all staff by creating a dedicated page on our staff intranet.

We offered staff two additional public holidays to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, but to also mark the sad passing of the Queen later that year.

We successfully secured the additional resource funding from the Scottish Government to retain fixed term contract Reporters and Assistant Reporters. The allocation of these resources was based on our workloading data to ensure that the resources were placed where they would have the most impact, and funding from vacant establishment posts was reallocated to Localities whose workloading figures evidenced the requirement for additional resources.

We commenced consultation on our Inclusive Standards and Behaviours Framework which describes how we can all contribute to upholding SCRA's values when carrying out our work. An implementation plan will be progressed in 2023/24.

In 2022/23, we once again saw a very active health and wellbeing agenda led out across the organisation including creative and considered approaches by local health and wellbeing groups which have become completely embedded in Locality culture and included in Locality plans.

Local health and wellbeing groups are led by staff, for staff and ensure that staff days or initiatives offer a mixture of fun activity, mindfulness, yoga, networking, sharing, listening, offering support and connecting with each other. The impact of these groups is remarkable.

In addition, our national Health and Wellbeing Group and Mental Wealth Group implemented a series of campaigns throughout the year. In partnership with UNISON, we increased our cohort of trained Mental Health First Aiders to 20.

As an organisation, we remain committed to achieving the Menopause at Work Standard. In October 2022, we launched a Menopause Toolkit and delivered a number of menopause sessions to all staff, as well as holding discussion cafés on menopause and an online strengthening your pelvic floor session.

Once again, we promoted Mental Health Week with a focus on loneliness and we held 'Time to Talk' days in February encouraging people to ask how others were and listen. In addition, we continued to hold online mindfulness sessions and we have worked in partnership with several external organisations including Strathcarron Hospice which ran an online session on grief awareness and Andy's Mans Club which ran a webinar which was offered to all staff.

As well as mental health, we continued to promote overall health and wellbeing. The flu vaccination voucher was again offered to all staff in 2022. Plus, we continued to encourage colleagues to get together and we offered staff a second national Big Team Challenge which saw over 100 participants walk the equivalent, and beyond, of reaching all SCRA offices across Scotland.

During 2022/23, we continued to strengthen our approach to learning and we delivered 160 learning and e-learning events with staff receiving a total of 5,139 hours of training across 1,455 separate attendances. On average, staff received 3.5 learning events in 2022/23. Our aim was to continue to increase engagement in learning events across all staff groups.

The analysis of attendance at events was 40% Reporter staff, 25% of Managers, 25% of Support Staff and 10% of Head Office staff. Learning opportunities included: Keeping the Promise Engagement events, General Data Protection Regulation refresher training, Professional Management Programme, Health and Safety Training and e-learning, Inclusion and Diversity e-learning, Quality Improvement Training, Managing Change and British Sign Language Training.

Looking ahead, we know digital skills are going to be critical, so in 2022/23, we commissioned research to undertake a digital skills audit to inform a programme of digital upskilling in 2023/24.

In addition, we invested in a new Organisational Development Team which will focus on the upskilling of staff and digital champions through face to face, support and training, e-learning and guidance.

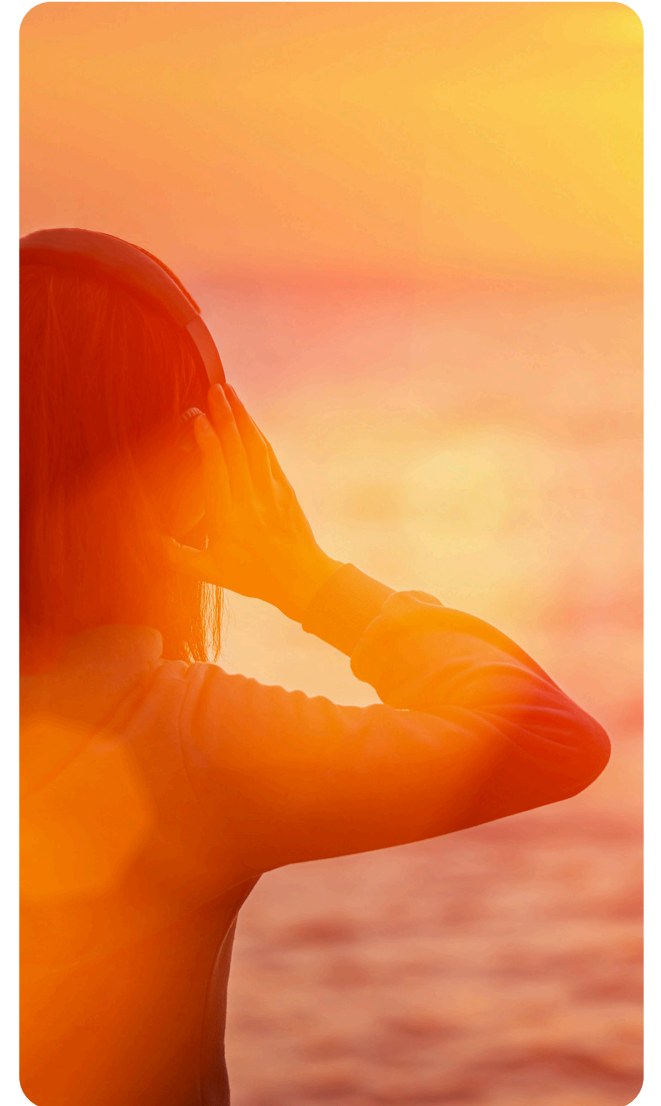
Ensuring our roles are future proofed, in October 2022 we concluded the lengthy consultation process with support staff and started the transition process from two distinct job descriptions (Support Administrator and Reception) to one unified job description.

Internal partnership working remains a key focus and our National Partnership Forum met quarterly, chaired jointly by the Principal Reporter and UNISON Branch Secretary. The HR Sub-Group, which reports to the National Partnership Forum, focuses on employment policies and practices within SCRA and during 2022/23 the group reviewed our Managing Fixed Term Workers, Career Break, Volunteering, Probation and Learning and Development Policies to ensure that they reflected best practice, fairness, transparency and inclusion in their developments.

Our most significant new policy development was the Right to Disconnect Policy which was launched as part of the 2022/23 pay offer. This policy recognises that every employee is entitled to switch off outside of their normal working hours and enjoy their time away from work and that disconnecting from work is vital to a healthy and sustainable work-life balance, and to support personal resilience.

Post pandemic, Managers events and the Locality Reporter Manager and Locality Support Manager networks were reinstated and these provide clear opportunity for two-way discussion, engagement and consultation with key groups across the organisation.

Executive Management Team led a specific lessons learned exercise with staff across all teams to understand and learn from how SCRA responded and supported its staff during



the COVID-19 pandemic years of 2020-2022. This work highlighted a number of required organisational and process improvements which are being progressed.

Working in Partnership

During 2022/23 we continued to strengthen our partner relations and local and national level. At a national level our partnership work is extremely varied.

We continued to be engaged in improvement work at a national level with partner agencies, including Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Children's Hearings Scotland and Social Work Scotland.

This work involved a wide range of subject matter, including the development of standards for Scotland's Bairn's Hoose, jointly reported cases, joint investigative interviewing, restorative justice and the age of criminal responsibility.

We continue to prepare for the changes proposed in the Children's Care and Justice (Scotland) Bill. We think these changes will be positive. It is time to uphold children and young people's rights to allow the referral of all 16 and 17-year-olds to the Principal Reporter. We continue to have rich and varied conversations with partners: about how best to resource this change, and about the types of resource that may be needed. Front line partners continue to need a significant investment in services designed for 16 and 17 year-old children and young people.



Child protection is a key focus for our partnership work. We continue to work with the national Child Protection Guidance Implementation Group, as well as Child Protection Committees across Scotland. We are also members of the Family Group Decision Making Steering Group, the Police Scotland Child Protection Strategic Group, the National Contextual Safeguarding Group and the Child Trafficking Strategy Group.

In addition, SCRA continues to be represented on the various justice groups, including the Youth Justice Strategic Leads, the Youth Justice Improvement Board and the Justice Board.

We continued to promote advocacy for children and young people and we are a members of the Expert Reference Group on Advocacy and the Advocacy Service Providers Network.

We regularly delivered national external training to the police and joint investigative interviewers. We have continued to develop and circulate briefing materials for partners. Our briefing materials allow local SCRA managers to share our approach with others.

Aim 3 - Protect

Our Practice

In 2022/2023, the Practice Team provided the full range of practice activities to support Reporters in their day to day work. This included giving support and advice to Localities throughout the year, developing practice materials, delivering practice training, managing cases in the higher courts, and working with partner agencies at a national level.

Practice materials produced during the year included practice notes on: relevant and collateral evidence and sections 173 – 175 of the 2011 Act; signed witness statements; “close connection”; independent reports

requested by children's hearings; and recording additional hearing decisions. Practice Notes provide support to reporters in relation to aspects of their work, for example in explaining the law on a topic or providing style wording to be used in a document. In addition, the team published revisions of 2 significant practice directions, one on court applications and the other on non-disclosure.

We delivered the full schedule of core practice training and more specialised training through the year. Although some of this training continued to be delivered remotely online, most was delivered in person. In total during the year, we delivered 53 full days of in-person training and 4 half days of online training to reporters and assistant reporters. The Practice Team also supported Locality-led training and practice sessions on request.

Fourteen cases in the higher courts concluded during the year. Significant issues raised in these cases included the interpretation of “close connection” in the section 67 grounds, whether there is a need to intimate an appeal to a sibling, and the transfer of jurisdiction by a children's Hearing to another state. Of those that concluded, only two were initiated by us – we did not proceed with the appeals in either of them.

Law Reports were published to support reporter awareness and knowledge of developments in the case law, including cases involving the Principal Reporter and relevant cases in external proceedings.

Research

We delivered another extensive research programme in 2022/23, with a number of reports published, several pieces of research concluding, and new, ambitious pieces of research underway.

Born into Care

On the 19 April 2022 the Scottish Government published “Born into care in Scotland: circumstances, recurrence and pathways”.

The report provided an overview of research undertaken by the Centre for Child and Family Justice Research (Lancaster University), the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and the Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Stirling); with SCRA's Research Team leading on SCRA's contribution.

Age of Criminal Responsibility

The research provided a detailed examination of the lives of 400 children aged 12-15 who had been referred to the Reporter on offence grounds; including 100 children who had committed more serious offences and had been jointly reported by the police to the Reporter and Procurator Fiscal (PF). This research was carried out to provide evidence on offending by children aged 12 to 15 years to inform the considerations of the Scottish Government's Age of Criminal Responsibility Advisory Group. The report is available on our [website](#).

Virtual Hearings

Young people have been central to a new piece of research which is looking at Virtual Hearings. In conjunction with Our Hearings, Our Voice, we are exploring how Virtual Hearings are viewed by children, young people and their caregivers. The research has involved a short survey with more than 200 foster and kinship carers; conducting interviews and focus groups with residential carers, secure care workers and foster carers; and conducting participatory workshops with 15 young people aged 14-22. The final report for the study will be published in September 2023.

Staying Connected

This is a groundbreaking piece of work

between SCRA and Families Outside (Scotland's only national charity that works solely on behalf of families affected by imprisonment). The study, funded by The Promise Partnership explores the gap in knowledge around 'looked after' children and young people's experiences of having a sibling in prison or secure care. It also explores the issues around the identification, restoration and maintenance of sibling relationships where at least one sibling is within prison or secure accommodation, and how these issues can then be addressed. Children and young people's voice have been at the heart of this work, with in-depth interviews taking place, as well as analysis of 200 case files held by SCRA and 1,000 entries on the Families Outside database. A final report will be published by the end of 2023.

If you want more information, all our published research reports are available in the [Resources section](#) of our website. There is also a more detailed round up available [here](#).

Property

We must provide a safe, suitable and appropriate environment for everyone who works in or uses our properties. During 2022/23 further investment was made in our estate to ensure that our properties continue to support our operational requirements.

Hearing facilities are central to the delivery of our services and property is one of our largest areas of expenditure.

This year, we have been able to move away from the provision of Coronavirus-safe work spaces and Hearing centres, and return to a programme of improving our hearing centres and office accommodation to reflect current practice of virtual Hearings and agile working arrangements. This was first implemented in our Kilmarnock office and coming out of the pandemic we are looking to provide accommodation that meets the needs of a

more flexible workforce and Hearings System.

We constantly review how we are using our property assets and look for ways to balance costs with the delivery of services from our estate.

For example, working with colleagues in Scottish Government, new leases were agreed for the whole of our Hamilton building, allowing us to reduce our occupancy to a single floor.

A major refurbishment project was undertaken, which included enlarging the second Hearing room and upgrading the space to a modern standard. On the staff side, an entirely new working environment was created that included bookable workstations along with a number of alternative, flexible workspaces. Private booths were provided to allow virtual Hearings to be held confidentially, along with several meeting rooms. We have also provided a wellbeing room for staff, a quiet space that reflects our move to being a trauma informed organisation.

A further major refurbishment was completed to our Head Office in Stirling. As in Hamilton, we have provided facilities for staff in both the Locality and Head Office teams that reflect our move to an agile workforce with bookable workstations, hearing booths and breakout spaces to accommodate the needs for individual and collaborative team working.

The long planned refurbishment of our Elgin office has been completed. We have been able to reduce the amount of space we lease by around a half, whilst providing improved hearing facilities for children and families and a new office for staff.

Following completion of a new lease, our Alloa Hearing Centre has been completely refurbished to provide a modern environment, with full IT connectivity to permit hybrid hearings, and for staff to work from this location. Also as part of the Hearing Centre improvement programme in support of Better

Hearings, a number of hearing rooms were upgraded this year. These refurbished Hearing rooms have been welcomed and include modern furniture and decorations to provide a more relaxed and welcoming space to encourage greater participation in Hearings.

Although no longer required for social distancing reasons, the provision of larger Hearing rooms is seen as being a benefit, and we have continued to investigate the provision of larger Hearing rooms where possible. In our Dumbarton office, for example, the impact of new IT systems has allowed us to remove the bulk filing system and utilise the space freed up to extend the Hearing room.

The fabric of our buildings also requires constant attention. Condition surveys are undertaken periodically, and this can result in significant external works being identified. Our contribution towards reducing the impact of Climate Change and achieving the government's Net Zero objectives are big challenges for the organisation. Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from our properties remains the highest reported contributor to our carbon footprint. One of the ways we can reduce our GHG emissions is by continuously reviewing the amount of space that we require for our operations and only occupying the space needed. Energy savings can also be achieved by using low energy equipment (LED lighting systems were installed in Dumfries and Hamilton) and ensuring that heating and other systems in our buildings are operating correctly.

Digital

SCRA's Digital Team has been at the forefront of supporting service delivery for the last three years and, with the introduction of new ways of working during the pandemic, has provided new digital services at pace in response to needs. The restructured Digital Team focused on consolidation and improvements to



systems that were introduced in the previous three years during the pandemic where digital was a key capability for the ongoing delivery of the Children's Hearings System.

Key activity was to mainstream the Virtual Hearings Service from a specialist team managed centrally by the national Digital Team, to Localities. This improved the opportunities for local staff to identify options for children and families to participate in Hearings. From a technical point of view, this involved significant investment to ensure secure data transfer between two internal systems – to improve the service offered and to create enhanced capability for the future.

During 2022/23, the Digital Engagement Group was formed, consisting of operational staff

and key head office roles, to prioritise digital projects and system improvements that were asked for by staff using the systems to improve performance, useability and interface.

A Digital Modern Apprentice was recruited late in 2022, to supplement the restructured Digital Team, and they supported the technology refresh that focused on monitor replacement across the estate.

Three new SCRA locations were added to the wide area network – Alloa, Bellshill and Fraserburgh – in recognition of the need for improved digital connection for Hearings. This will allow connection to Hearings and to internal systems in those areas.

A project was initiated in January 2023 to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our communications through the Documents Core Pack – the system that produces the letters that we send out to children, families and our partners. This project allowed us to understand our current position and what could be improved to help us to move towards redesign in the coming year – to improve the look, the language and the flexibility of what we produce.

Digital activity in 2022/23 was mainly around internal improvement. When CSAS (our internal case management system) was delivered, it was to the minimum requirements – we are now working to enhance this to take on board feedback, improvements and changes in line with the way that we work and changes to policy.

Throughout the year, the Digital Team has maintained an internal focus on supporting the three core corporate programmes - Protect, Care and Connect which were all in the early stages of developing structures and exploring requirements.

External drivers such as the Hearings For Children Report, the Care and Justice Bill and

the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child are yet to be fully fleshed out in terms of requirements and these will feature heavily in the revised digital strategy. In the meantime we continue to engage with our stakeholders, as well as look at every aspect of the digital financial model to ensure ongoing value for money and focused investments.



Our Board in 2022/23

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

Chair:

Michelle Miller (re-appointed 2022)

Board Members:

Anela Anwar (retired 2022)

Tam Baillie (retired 2022)

Kay Barton (appointed 2021)

James Edgar (re-appointed 2021)

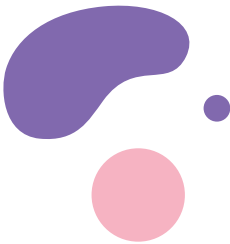
Lorraine Moore (appointed 2021)

Martin Toye (re-appointed 2020)

Hazel Smith (appointed 2022)

Suzanne Vestri (re-appointed 2020)

Ying Zhang (appointed 2022)





Looking Ahead

Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

In the course of 2022/23 we have been fully engaged in the work of Keeping the Promise and in the context of the Children's Hearings System, the Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) and recommendations.

These recommendations are likely to see some of the most significant change to the Hearings System in a decade or more.

The coming year will focus on digesting and understanding what is and will be asked of us in the future, shaping with our partner agencies how we will collectively deliver those asks and absolutely critically ensuring the

spirit of collaboration, mutual co-operation and respect developed within the HSWG redesign process continues to be a guiding principle in this next phase.

Within SCRA, we are ramping up our internal capacity and capability to undertake this significant series of changes linked to The Promise, whilst facing unprecedented financial challenges. We are working hard with the Scottish Government in order to scope the scale and size of the investments that will be required to support the delivery of the HSWG report.

The Scottish Parliament has been hearing evidence on the Children's (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. This amongst many other draft provisions, seeks to extend the age of referral to the Children's Reporter from 16 to 18.

SCRA fully supports this development as a major step towards making Scotland a fully children's rights respecting nation. The number of new referrals which we anticipate being received by the Reporter goes to several thousand and will relate to children and young people with high degrees of complexity and risk in their lives.

We firmly believe that the welfare based protections and support offered by the Hearings System will deliver substantively better outcomes than our current approach to some young people of processing them through the criminal justice system with all the resultant impact on them and their long term life chances. But the system needs strengthened and investment needs to flow across all areas – particularly Local Authority Social Work and through that Third and Voluntary Sector organisations to deliver these outcomes.

The second stage of scrutiny will commence towards the end of 2023 and we very much look forward to seeing what amendments may be laid on developing the Bill further. SCRA will continue to support the Scottish Parliament and its Committees in helping the Bill through to completion.

In March 2023 our Board approved a budget for 2023/24 which is aligned to SCRA's own assessment of the resources we will need to keep the organisation stable enough to meet the challenges in this year and beyond. In the course of 2022/23 we instigated a six month vacancy freeze which was a very unwelcome development for us and destabilised our

teams and their capacity. Whilst previous years budgets show year on year growing deficits the situation is, as it stands unsustainable for an organisation performing such important statutory functions such as ours.

We are and will continue to work positively with the Scottish Government to resolve this position in the coming years. The children and young people who need the support and protection, with the full force of law that the Hearings System gives, need the very best of understanding, the very fullest forms of help, interventions and services to help address the very significant challenges in their lives. They also need objective, proportionate and timely decisions from agencies like SCRA to make all of this happen.

The need for investment in a stable well resourced Children's Hearings System in Scotland has never been more urgent if we are to meet the ambitions we hold for Scotland children.



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