

## Job Description

### **Role: Children's Reporter**

**Reports to:** Locality Reporter Manager

**Management responsibility:** n/a

**Place of work:** As a public facing organisation, regular presence in an SCRA office base is required, with travel to other offices and courts when necessary. SCRA operates an agile working policy which enables working from home subject to operational need.

### **Organisational Context**

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is an independent statutory body central to the Children's Hearings System. Alongside partners, SCRA is focussed on children most at risk. Together we protect and uphold the rights of Scotland's children making decisions that have a lasting impact on their lives in a compassionate, inclusive and trauma-informed way. Referring a child to a Children's Hearing is a significant interference in family life and therefore must be justified, lawful and proportionate. Children's Reporters operate with authority delegated from the Principal Reporter and work as part of a team to carry out their role.

### **Role Purpose**

The Children's Reporter's primary purpose is to decide whether a child should be referred to a Children's Hearing for consideration of compulsory measures of supervision. Having decided to do so, the Children's Reporter drafts statements of grounds that are the legal basis for state intervention; arranges and supports fair process in Children's Hearings; and conducts court proceedings to establish facts or to promote a Hearing's decision where that decision is supportable.

### **Role Summary**

The Children's Reporter is an expert in the Children's Hearings System and the role requires the Children's Reporter to work across the various components of the system. The Children's Reporter receives referrals from social workers, police, other professionals and from members of the public. These, often complex referrals, can relate to children in need of protection from others or who require compulsory intervention as a result of their own needs. Referrals also relate to children and young people who are in conflict with the law. The Children's Reporter investigates referrals to decide whether a child should be referred to a Children's Hearing. Having drafted the statement of grounds, if the reason the child has been referred to a Hearing is not accepted or not understood, the Children's Reporter prepares for, and conducts, proceedings in court.

The role of Children's Reporter is challenging and diverse, blending knowledge and skills across a number of disciplines: primarily law, social care and child development. The Children's Reporter operates with a significant degree of autonomy within a scheme of delegation. As part of a team, Children's Reporters recognise the need for continuous improvement and the need to develop their own knowledge and skills.

The welfare of the child is at the centre of all that Children's Reporters do. Children can be referred to the Children's Reporter for a variety of reasons, including serious neglect or because they have been the victims of abuse. From the outset, the role requires a high degree of personal resilience to manage potentially distressing information.

## **Key Responsibilities and core actions**

*The following areas of responsibility do not stand alone; each component part is inherently linked to that which goes before and/or after, and Children's Reporters carry out all functions.*

### **Investigator:**

Investigate and respond to referrals from partner agencies, including police, social work, other professionals and members of the public.

- Critically analyse available evidence identifying the need to request additional information to support robust decision making.
- Gather and assimilate further information (including expert reports, police statements and joint investigative interviews) to draw out material relevant to decision making.
- Identify potential witnesses and sources of evidence.
- Manage the competing demands of a challenging caseload to support the management of team workload.
- Adhere to the principles of the UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC) by obtaining and acting upon the views of children.
- Where necessary, adapt and tailor communications recognising individual needs.

### **Decision Maker:**

Based on investigations tailored to the needs of a child, make independent and informed decisions regarding the need to refer a child to a Children's Hearing.

- Critically analyse available evidence applying the law and ensuring adherence to SCRA's Decision Making Framework.
- Assess whether there is sufficient evidence applying either the civil or criminal standard of proof depending on the nature of the child or young person's circumstances.
- Ensure decisions are evidence based and specific to the needs of the individual child.
- Recognise the lasting impact of these decisions and apply the principles of proportionality and intervention only when necessary.
- Draft Statements of Grounds having identified the legal basis for referral to a Children's Hearing and the facts essential to proving that.
- Record decision making accurately within SCRA's case management system.
- Communicate decisions to children, and their families efficiently and sensitively.

### **Children's Hearings:**

Having referred a child to a Children's Hearing, the Reporter must carry out their functions in a way which maintains the independence of the Hearing and supports fair process.

- Arrange Children's Hearings in line with legislation and SCRA policy and guidance. Assimilate information from multiple sources to inform complex arrangements.
- Ensure all relevant papers are provided to a Children's Hearing with a focus on information governance. Apply non-disclosure provisions accurately and with care to ensure the safety of children, their families and carers.
- Support Children's Hearings to make legally competent decisions. Express views on procedural matters when asked, or act to mitigate against procedural irregularities demonstrating knowledge of the law, procedural rules, SCRA policy and guidance.
- Ensure fairness and uphold the rights of children and their families demonstrating sensitivity to individual needs.
- Record decisions of the Children's Hearing to maintain an accurate record of proceedings.
- Provide exceptional service to all parties with a focus on their participation, health and safety.
- Recognise the emotionally challenging nature of Children's Hearings. Respond and deploy appropriate strategies to defuse conflict.
- Embrace digital ways of working across multiple online platforms.

### **Court:**

When the Children's Reporter's decision to refer a child to a Children's Hearing is not accepted or not understood, present evidence in court to establish the facts.

- Comprehensively plan for, prepare and conduct court proceedings including those that are complex, sensitive or high profile adhering to legal timescales.
- Critically analyse available evidence, identifying key witnesses and productions.
- Prepare requisite legal documents including proof applications, interim compulsory supervision order applications, motions and legal submissions.
- Interview witnesses, including professional experts and victims, and prepare written witness statements.
- Support witnesses. Assess the need for, and progress, special measures.
- Present evidence in court demonstrating advocacy skills, knowledge of the law, procedural rules, SCRA policy and guidance.
- Assimilate information quickly and formulate responses in court based on legal knowledge whilst promoting the welfare of the child.
- Effectively cross examine relevant parties' witnesses to challenge and test their evidence.
- Communicate effectively with children, their families, legal agents including solicitors and advocates, witnesses, court staff and Sheriffs, tailoring style and content to take account of their diverse needs.

### **Appeals:**

- Prepare comprehensive appeal answers and legal submissions in line with the law, SCRA policy and guidance.
- Prepare and conduct appeal proceedings. Assisting the court to reach a well-informed decision in the child's interests and promoting a hearing's decision where that decision is supportable.

## **Further Role Information**

### **Working at pace:**

- The complexity of the key responsibilities and core actions described above are managed on a day-to-day basis by Children's Reporters working autonomously across all functions. Individualised support is provided for complex decision making and court proceedings recognising that collaboration and collegiate support is essential.
- Children's Reporters manage an ongoing caseload whilst responding urgently to child protection orders, transfers into secure accommodation or young people in police custody.

### **Partnership working and connections:**

- The role involves working collaboratively with police, social work, health and education. This may involve representing SCRA at external meetings, providing training and participating in working groups.
- The role also involves interacting with children and families at children's hearings and in court. The nature of this work is such that Children's Reporters must understand the complex relationships within families and often manage conflict related to Children's Hearing proceedings.

### **Managing change**

- With the evolution of policy, new legislation and the development of new processes and procedures, the role requires a commitment to continuous professional development and an ability to accept, adapt and support colleagues to quickly respond to change.

### **Digital competence and administration**

- Children's Reporters use SCRA's case management system to record investigations and decisions, administer children's hearings and prepare court proceedings. Children's Reporter's must be confident and effective at using digital systems for these administrative purposes.
- Various digital technologies and platforms are used for accessing information, communication and service delivery making digital competence fundamental to the role.

