

**Agenda of SCRA Board Meeting, held on
Tuesday 17th June 2025, at Fountainhall Road, Edinburgh**

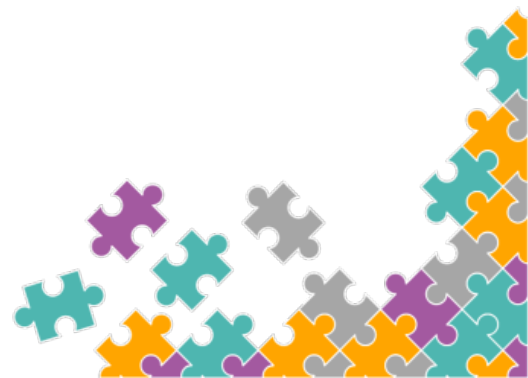
A G E N D A

**SCRA BOARD CHAIR
Cathie Cowan**

Item	Topic	Lead	Decision	Timings
1.	Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum			10:30
1.1	AOB			
2.	Declaration (s) of Interest (s)			
3.	Chair/Non-Executive Updates		For Information	10:30-10:35
4.	Minute of SCRA Board Meeting held on 20 March 2025	Chair	For Approval	10:35-10:40
5.	Matters Arising from Minute Matters Arising from Action Log	Chair	For Assurance	10:40-10:45
6.	Workplan (Board)	Chair	For Noting	
7.	Committee Minutes and Committee Chair Escalation			
7.1	Minute of Audit and Assurance Committee held on 27 May 2025	Committee Chair	For Noting	10:45-10:50
7.2	Audit & Assurance Committee Annual Report	Committee Chair	For Assurance	10:50-10:55
7.3	Remuneration and Nominations Committee Update (Verbal)	Committee Chair	For Information	10:55-11:00
7.4	Minute of Planning and Performance Committee held on 06 May 2025	Committee Chair	For Noting	10:00-11:05
8.	Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Report			
8.1	PR/CE Report	PR/CE	For Noting	11:05-11:20
9.	People Management			
9.1	Review of the Reporter Job Description - Update	Head of Human Resources	For Noting	11:20-11:30
10.	Strategy & Performance			
10.1	Organisational Performance Report & introduction to official statistics	Data Manager	For Assurance	11:30-11:40
10.2	Corporate Plan Update	Head of Strategy & OD	For Noting	11:40-11:50
10.3	Programme Board update	Head of Strategy & OD	For Assurance	11:50-12:00
10.4	Communications Strategy	Press & Communications Manager	For Noting	12:00-12:10
11.	Digital			
11.1	Digital Strategy Update	Head of Digital	For Assurance	12:10-12:20
Break 12.00-12:10				

<i>Item</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Timings</i>
12.	<i>Finance & Resources</i>			
12.1	<i>Budget Monitoring Report</i>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Assurance</i>	12:20-12:30
12.2	<i>Property Strategy – Update</i> • <i>Appendix 1</i>	Head of Finance and Resources	<i>For Noting</i>	12:30-12:40
<i>Lunch 12:40-13:15</i>				
13.	<i>Practice & Policy</i>			
13.1	<i>Annual Complaints Report</i>	Information Governance Manager	<i>For Approval</i>	13:15-13:25
13.2	<i>Influencing Report 01 June 2023 to 01 June 2025</i> • <i>Appendix 1</i> • <i>Appendix 2</i> • <i>Appendix 3</i>	Policy and Public Affairs Manager	<i>For Noting</i>	13:25-13:45
14.	<i>Governance</i>			
14.1	<i>Policy on Public Attendance at Board Meetings</i>	Governance Officer	<i>For Approval</i>	13:45-13:50
15.	<i>Risk Management</i>			
15.1	<i>Risk Management Policy</i>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Assurance</i>	13:50-14:00
15.2	<i>Strategic Risk Register</i>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Assurance</i>	14:00-14:10
15.3	<i>New Risks</i>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Assurance</i>	14:10-14:30
<i>Close</i>				

Date of next meeting: Thursday 25th September 2025, Ochil House, Stirling



Agenda Item 1.1 - Updated Workplan

For: Approval

Executive Sponsor: Cathie Cowan, Chair

Author: Cathie Cowan, Chair, Pamela Armstrong, Governance Officer

Executive Summary

In March 2025, the Board in considering the new Planning & Performance Committee business approved a Workplan for Board, Audit & Assurance, Remuneration & Nominations and Planning & Performance Committees.

At a recent Audit & Assurance Committee (June 2025) it was proposed to recommend all quality assurance and case sampling reports going forward transfer and be considered by the Planning & Performance Committee.

In addition, the Audit & Assurance Committee in recommending the Risk Management Policy for approval by the Board recommended that strategic risks be assigned to Committees for risk oversight to the extent that risks are inherent to the Committee's respective agreed Terms of Reference. The Assurance & Audit Committee will continue to be responsible for scrutinising the effectiveness of risk management processes and arrangements and providing assurance to the Board. All operational risks will continue to be managed by the Executive Management Team, the Team will also continue to recommend strategic risks to be added or deescalated to the Board for approval.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to:

- **approve** the updated workplan attached at Appendix 1
- **note** the changes incorporated in the Risk Management Policy being presented for approval under a separate Board agenda item recommendations

Key Issues to be discussed/considered

The Board is being invited to approve the updated Workplan following a recommendation by the Audit & Assurance Committee to transfer all quality assurance and case sampling reports to the Planning & Performance Committee for review and scrutiny. This recommendation takes account of the previously approved Planning & Performance Committee's Terms of Reference (attached at Appendix 2 for reference) and its role in providing assurance to the Board.

In addition, this recommendation aligns with the Board's Strategic Objectives set out below:

- Planning for the future
- Valuing and developing our staff
- Committing to delivering service improvement and sustainability through our care, connect and protect programmes
- Delivering best value using our resources
- Working in partnership
- Investing in developing and maintaining effective governance systems including risk management

Implications

Service

N/A

Financial

N/A

Workforce

N/A

Infrastructure including Digital

N/A

Information Governance

N/A

Risk Assessment/Management

The report refers to assignment of strategic risks to Committees for risk oversight to the extent that risks are inherent to the Committee's respective agreed Terms of Reference. This work will progress on the back of the Risk Management Policy being approved by the Board and thereafter be presented to the September Board for approval.

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

This report is relevant to the following Strategic Objectives:

- planning for the future, commitment to delivering service improvement and sustainability through our care, connect and protect programmes, delivering best value using our resources and investing in developing/maintaining effective governance systems including risk management

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process.

Further to evaluation it is noted:

The report is not relevant to Equality & Diversity

Involvement, Engagement, and/or Consultation

The Executive Management Team has considered this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Updated Workplan

Appendix 2 - Planning & Performance Committee Terms of Reference

SCRA Board Meeting Workplan March 2025 to March 2026

Business Item	Tues 25/03/25	Tues 17/06/25	Tues 23/09/25	Tues 16/12/25	Jan 2026	March 2026
Strategic/Corporate						
Policy & Influencing Report		✓				
Research Programme				✓		
Risk Register	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Governance						
Audit & Assurance Committee Minutes	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Planning & Performance Committee Minutes		✓	✓	✓		✓
Committee Annual Reports		✓				
Remuneration & Nominations Committee Minutes				✓*		
SCRA Standing Orders Review				✓		
Finance						
Budget Monitoring Report	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Draft Budget	✓			✓	✓	✓
Annual Report & Accounts			✓			
Financial Strategy			✓			
Planning						
Draft Corporate, Corporate Parenting & Business Plan reported via P&PC with final drafts to Board for approval	✓ (BP)					✓
Draft Annual Report reported via P&PC with final draft to Board for approval			✓			
Annual Workforce Planning Report	✓					✓
Communications Plan			✓			
Quality Assurance, Case Sampling & Performance						
Organisational Performance Report high level summary report to Board all monitoring via P&PC	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Business Item	Tues 25/03/25	Tues 17/06/25	Tues 23/09/25	Tues 16/12/25	Jan 2026	March 2026
Case Sampling - Annual Progress Report (June 2026)						
Case Sampling - Annual Plan						
Case Sampling Reviews - per Annual Plan						
Joint Inspections - those highlighted to P&PC						
Digital						
Digital Strategy all drafting via P&PC with final draft for approval to Board		✓				
Operational						
Locality Performance Reviews					✓	
Chief Executive's Report	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Complaints Review		✓				
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report			✓			
Environmental Annual Report	✓					
Overview of Policies Annual Report				✓		
Health & Safety Annual Report	✓					✓
Procurement Report			✓			
Property Strategy		✓				
Climate Change works				✓		
Programme Board update reported via P&PC	✓		✓			✓
Staff Survey	✓				✓	✓
Role of the Reporter		✓				
SCRA Framework Document			✓			
SCRA Whistleblowing Policy						✓
Staff Absence Update Report reported via P&PC TBC						



SCRA PLANNING & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Planning & Performance Committee is to scrutinise the quantitative and qualitative performance of the Board to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to deliver against organisational performance measures to secure efficient, economic and effective use of all resources, and provide reasonable assurance to the Board that the arrangements are working effectively.

1. COMPOSITION

Membership

The membership of this Committee shall consist of:

- Up to four Non-Executive Members of the Board, including the Board Chair

Kay Barton, Chair

Ying Zhang, Vice Chair

Cathie Cowan

Jim Edgar

Lorraine Moore

Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

The appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair shall be appointed at a full business meeting of the SCRA Board. The Chair of the Board will appoint a Vice Chair in addition to the Chair. The Chair will preside at every meeting of the Committee. The Vice Chair shall preside if the Chair is absent.

Attendance

The Principal Reporter/Chief Executive and (at his/her discretion) members of the Executive Management Team shall normally attend meetings. The Committee can request the attendance of any officer of SCRA. All Board Members shall have the right of attendance and have access to papers, except where the Committee resolves otherwise, e.g., papers containing confidential or person identifiable information.

The Committee shall have the right to invite, as required, external experts to attend meetings.

Quorum

No business shall be transacted unless a minimum of two Planning & Performance Committee Members are present.

2. MEETINGS

Frequency

Meetings will be held four times per annum with at least one meeting held in person. The timetable should also assist with scheduling key items of business to be discussed at each meeting.

The Planning & Performance Committee will be timetabled annually to coincide with the important events of the year e.g., annual delivery plan and before important decisions are made.

Agenda and Papers

The agenda and papers will be sent five days in advance of the meetings. All papers will clearly state the agenda reference, the author, the purpose of the paper together with the action the Committee is being asked to consider. The Chair of the Committee, Vice Chair and Committee Executive Management Team (EMT) Lead will be responsible for agreeing the agenda.

Minutes

Formal Minutes will be kept of proceedings and submitted for approval at the next meeting to the Committee. Recognising the issue of the relative timing of draft minutes may be presented to the SCRA Board Meeting to ensure Board Members are aware of issues considered and decisions taken by respective Committees.

The draft Minute will be cleared by the Chair of the Committee (Vice Chair) in absence of Chair) and the nominated Committee EMT Lead prior to distribution.

3. REMIT

The Planning & Performance Committee will oversee and scrutinise current qualitative and non-qualitative performance against approved aims, objectives and projected performance targets. The work of the Committee will include:

Corporate Planning

- contributing to the development of Board Strategies and Plans, specifically the Corporate and Business Plan, the Corporate Parenting Plan in advance of being presented to the Board for approval

- monitoring progress against the approved Annual Business Plan to ensure delivery against plan is achieved
- monitoring progress towards delivery on Hearings Redesign and Children's Care and Justice Act (phase 1) and UNCRC incorporation

Improvement and Performance

- promoting the ongoing development of a performance culture within SCRA to support a continuous quality improvement and change agenda in response to Ministerial priorities
- approving the Board's performance management framework informed by Corporate and Locality Plans
- reviewing the Board's overall approach to performance and planning objectives to ensure SCRA can demonstrate through its decision-making best value, improved efficiency and effectiveness
- maintaining an overview of the Strategic Risks aligned to the Planning & Performance Committee and agreeing appropriate escalation to the Board

Workforce and People Strategy

- monitoring the delivery of the People's Strategy and the culture where the highest standard of staff management is understood to be the responsibility of everyone working in SCRA
- monitoring the delivery of the staff survey action plan in collaboration with our unions and staff

Sustainability Strategy

- overseeing and reviewing overall development of major projects to ensure the Board can demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and meeting SCRA's net zero targets

Digital

- monitoring the delivery of the Board's Digital Strategy aims and targets to ensure delivery of investment in digital solutions in response to Hearings System redesign and wider Public Sector Reform

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- monitoring the delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy aims and targets and supporting programme of work, including activity to reduce the Gender Pay Gap

Property Strategy

- monitoring the delivery of the Board's Property Strategy aims and targets to ensure delivery of investment in the estate for Hearings System redesign and wider Public Sector Reform

4. OTHER

The Planning & Performance Committee has a duty to review its own performance and effectiveness including terms of reference on an annual basis and the Chair will submit an Annual Report on the work of the Committee to the Board.

A standing agenda item on each committee meeting shall be the agreement of matters to both report and escalate to the Board at its next meeting.

Present:

Cathie Cowan (Chair)
Kay Barton
Lynne Clow
Lorraine Moore
Hazel Smith
Ying Zhang (By TEAMS)

In Attendance:

Neil Hunter (Principal Reporter/Chief Executive)
Pamela Armstrong (Governance Officer)
Lisa Bennett (Head of Organisational Development and Strategy)
Douglas Cameron (Head of Digital)
Susan Deery (Head of Human Resources (HR))
Helen Etchells (Senior Operational Manager)
Alistair Hogg (Head of Practice and Policy)
Ross Mackenzie (Head of Finance and Resources)
Monica Sweeney (UNISON Branch Secretary/Reporter)

Andrew Watson (Director for Children & Families, Scottish Government) - Item 9
Steven Bell, (Directorate Finance Manager, Scottish Government) - Item 9
Nick Rougvie (Children's Hearings Team Leader, Scottish Government)
Taiba Ali (Senior Policy Officer, Scottish Government)

	Item	Timescale	Action
1.	Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum The Board Chair welcomed Board members and Officers to the March 2025 meeting of the SCRA Board. Apologies received from Jim Edgar and Steve Renwick, Board members, and Paul Mulvanny (Senior Operational Manager (SOM)). The Chair confirmed the meeting was quorate.		
2.	Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.		
3.	Chair/Non-Executive Updates The Board Chair recently visited the Glasgow and Kilmarnock offices. The visit provided an opportunity to		

	Item	Timescale	Action
	engage directly with staff members, gaining valuable insights into their daily operations and challenges. The Chair was impressed by the dedication and professionalism of the staff, noting their commitment to delivering high quality services.		
4.	SCRA Board Meeting		
4.1	Minute of SCRA Board Meeting held on 14 January 2025 The minute from the previous meeting was approved.		
4.2	<p>Matters Arising from Minute</p> <p>The Board Chair noted (staff survey results 2024) the need for further exploration of harassment and discrimination as highlighted in the recent staff survey results had been addressed as set out in the Principal Reporter/Chief Executive (PR/CE) report including 'bystander' training and revision of a number of policies to reinforce SCRA's culture, values and behaviours.</p> <p>Board Members highlighted the year on year financial deficit gap and the ongoing assurance provided by Scottish Government to meet the deficit - this assurance would contribute to the Board's discussion on the 2025/2026 budget being presented today. The PR/CE referred to the recent Government Public Spending Review summit held in February and the emphasis on efficiency, collaboration, empowerment, and prevention. Board Members noted the need for better public sector data to inform public sector reform decision making. Board Members noted the benchmarking data albeit limited in terms of comparability as part of the PR/CE report today.</p> <p>Matters Arising from Action Log</p> <p>The Board Chair highlighted the Board's role in setting SCRA's risk appetite action. The Head of Finance & Resources confirmed he would share the recommended risk appetite to today's Board meeting for review and approval when presenting the draft Audit & Assurance Committee minute.</p>		
4.3	Workplan (Board) The Board reviewed the workplan which included reference to the Planning & Policy Committee.		

	Item	Timescale	Action
5.	SCRA Committees		
5.1	<p>Minute of Audit and Assurance Committee (AAC) held on 25 February 2025</p> <p>The Board Chair in the absence of the Audit & Assurance Committee Chair and Vice Chair invited the Head of Finance & Resources to highlight key Committee discussion items including the recommendation on risk appetite.</p> <p>The AAC covered several key updates and decisions. The Head of Practice and Policy presented the six-monthly report, highlighting progress on data protection compliance, data breaches, training, and information requests. Advocacy standards for Reporters were evaluated, and areas of improvement supported using tailored training were highlighted. The Committee approved the 2025/26 case sampling programme and the Annual Audit Plans for 2024/25 and 2025/26. The Committee reviewed SCRA's risk appetite and agreed it met SCRA's willingness to accept and/or retain risks in pursuit of its strategic objectives. In addition, the Committee proposed the inclusion of a new category of risk – 'human resources development' carrying a risk appetite of 'hungry'. The Board approved the recommended risk appetite. The Head of Finance & Resources also highlighted a number of minor updates to the Risk Management Policy which would be presented to the Board for final approval in June.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note the Draft Minute of the Audit & Assurance Committee. 	June 25	RMack
5.2	<p>Remuneration and Nominations Committee Update</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee provided a verbal update on items discussed at the recent Committee meeting.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance process relating to pay negotiations to be further refined in agreement with the Committee. The gender pay gap remained a significant issue noting that this is well understood by both the Executive Management Team and Board Members. Board Members noted the plans underway to commission 'Close the Gap' to undertake a review and present findings and recommendations to support actions both new and underway to support improvement. 		SD/PA SD

	Item	Timescale	Action
5.3	<p>Minute of Planning and Performance Committee held on 27 February, 2025</p> <p>The Committee Chair provided an update on the inaugural meeting of the Committee.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee will continuously assess its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments to its working methods throughout the year. • The Committee agreed to prioritise understanding core strategic areas and to provide feedback on the effectiveness of its approach throughout the year. • Emphasis was placed on aligning efforts with the Audit & Assurance Committee and other SCRA Committees to avoid overlap and ensure effective collaboration. 		
	Reports		
6.	<p>PR/CE Report</p> <p>Staff Survey Action Plan</p> <p>The PR/CE highlighted significant ongoing work, including partnerships with various organisations and the use of new technologies. The update included a focus on the staff survey action plan highlighting areas including pay and reward, workload, morale, managing change, and equalities and inclusion.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Change Management and Staff Morale</i> - The Board discussed the importance of pacing changes appropriately to ensure they are well-received by staff members. It was noted that while changes are intended to improve job roles and reduce transactional tasks, there has been at times a tendency within the organisation to hold onto traditional ways of working. This can sometimes lead to degrees of resistance or discomfort amongst some staff. The organisation is working closely with UNISON to ensure that changes are implemented in a way that supports staff and addresses any concerns proactively. • There is a focus on improving the built environment and enhancing job satisfaction. The need for clear communication and engagement with staff to ensure they are informed and involved in the change process was highlighted. The importance of maintaining a balance between implementing necessary changes and ensuring staff well-being was emphasised. 		

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children's Care and Justice Act</i> - The Board acknowledged the complexity and labour-intensive nature of these changes, which are expected to increase the volume of cases managed by the overall system. The Scottish Government is aware of the pressures and is working in partnership with relevant bodies to address these challenges. • The importance of aligning with government priorities and ensuring that the implementation of new policies is done in a way that supports the rights and well-being of children and young people. The need for ongoing review and adjustment of financial and resource allocations to meet legislative demands was also discussed. • <i>Public Service Reform and Technology Use</i> - The Board discussed the ongoing efforts in public service reform, with a focus on the use of technology to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. It was noted that many public bodies are currently holding significant deficits, which has prompted discussions on benchmarking and comparability. The conversation highlighted the importance of shared services, process redesign and the use of new and emergent technologies to drive public service reform. • <i>New technologies</i> - such as voice recognition software and digital tools, to improve service delivery and operational efficiency are being planned, tested and deployed if proven. SCRA's work is described in the Scottish AI register. The meeting acknowledged the need for continued exploration of technology's role in public service reform, particularly in relation to children and families. • SCRA has recently developed trauma-informed design standards for Hearings Centres, designed with the firm who had been responsible for the first phase of Bairns Hoose developments. These would be delivered within our property improvement programmes over the next several financial years, commencing with Glasgow completing in September 2025. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note and take assurance from the update from the PR/CE including the action plan in response to the 2024 staff survey. 		

	Item	Timescale	Action
7.	<p>Annual Workforce Planning Report</p> <p>The Head of HR introduced the Workforce Report for the period April 24 to March 25, providing a high-level overview of key workforce data and the relevant trends to inform SCRA's workforce planning priorities for 2025/26 as well as progressing Year Two of the 2024/27 People Strategy.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was recognised that the gender pay gap is interwoven with other protected characteristics, including race, disability, and sexual orientation, which affect both staff and service users. A thorough understanding of these factors, alongside an analysis of staff cohort demographics, is essential for aligning workforce composition with Scotland's evolving profile, including growing ethnic, diversity and the involvement of young people. • SCRA is committed to working towards clear diversity and inclusion targets that ensure a responsive and equitable workforce. Key recruitment and retention strategies are being considered with an aim to boost representation among groups with underrepresented protected characteristics. In addition, initiatives such as mentorship and leadership development programs are being explored to support career advancement. • A proactive approach is underway, with plans to engage with Close the Gap, an expert organisation, to conduct a full gender pay gap audit. This audit will provide recommendations and contribute to updating SCRA's gender pay gap action plan. • Creating an environment that values and respects every employee remains a priority. The organisation will continue to monitor and evaluate its progress toward these goals, ensuring that diversity and equality strategies remain effective and adapt to the workforce's evolving needs. • The Board noted the planned activity for 2025/26 and how these will continue to support SCRA progress positively as a good employer. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note the workforce metrics for 24/25 and the workforce activity during 24/25 and plans for 2025/26 in line with Year 2 of the 2024/2027 People Strategy. 		

	Item	Timescale	Action
8.	<p>Organisational Policy update</p> <p>The Head of HR introduced the report covering the Staff Code of Conduct (review), Dignity at Work Policy (review), and Retirement Policy (new).</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff Code of Conduct should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in organisational values, external regulations, and societal expectations. • The Board discussed the importance of clear communication of the code to all staff members, ensuring that everyone understands their responsibilities and the expectations placed upon them. Good guidance was highlighted as essential for ensuring understanding and compliance, providing staff with the tools and knowledge needed to adhere to the code. • The discussion also covered the procedures for addressing breaches of the code, emphasising the need for a fair and transparent process that upholds the organisation's values. • The Dignity at Work policy outlines the organisation's commitment to preventing harassment, bullying, and discrimination, ensuring that all employees are treated with dignity and respect. • There are clear procedures for reporting and addressing any breaches of the policy, ensuring that issues are managed promptly and fairly. The Board recognised the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the policy's effectiveness, ensuring that it remains relevant and impactful in promoting a respectful and inclusive work environment. Training for staff will be considered as part of the relaunch of the policy. • The Retirement policy aims to provide a clear framework for retirement, ensuring that employees have a smooth transition from work to retirement. The discussion highlighted the need for flexibility within the policy to accommodate individual circumstances and preferences. The Board recognised the importance of supporting employees in planning for retirement, including providing access to financial advice and retirement planning resources. The policy also considers the potential impact of retirements on workforce capacity and the need for succession planning to ensure continuity of service. The policy aims to encourage open 		

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	<p>dialogue between employees and management about retirement plans, allowing for better workforce planning and the identification of potential skills gaps that may arise from retirements.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve changes to the Staff Code of Conduct. • To note the revised Dignity at Work Policy and the new Retirement Policy. 		
9.	<p>Budget Planning 2025/26</p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources introduced the proposed 2025/26 revenue and capital budgets for approval.</p> <p>Andrew Watson, Director for Children & Families, Scottish Government and Steven Bell, Directorate Finance Manager, Scottish Government, participated in the discussion.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal letter from Andrew Watson, which will outline the detailed budget, is in the process of internal clearance. The aim is to finalise and circulate this letter before the start of the new financial year. • The UK Government Spring Statement scheduled for this week has heightened awareness that external factors could quickly change the landscape, demanding continuous monitoring and adjustment of plans. Recent approaches by the treasury have been described as “sobering,” indicating that expectations and forecasts for the upcoming fiscal years (2025/26 and beyond) are uncertain. This requires flexible planning and real-time adaptation. • It was emphasised that progress on an individual budget must occur within the framework of the overall portfolio. Decisions regarding one area need to be in step with the broader Government's budget plans and coordinated closely with Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers. • The discussion stressed the importance of working together, across different departments and stakeholder groups, to ensure the budget reflects both immediate needs and longer-term strategic direction. • The new, legislation within children's services highlighted a significant challenge that is projected to lead to increases in workload as the system 		

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	<p>adapts to potentially higher volumes, especially with additional demands arising from increased referrals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With commitments aligned to UNCRC obligations and broader children's rights, ensuring that adequate support and resources are allocated has become a major focus. The challenge is not merely financial but also about managing capacity and safeguarding service quality. • There is a noted significant gap between the currently allocated budget and the forecast need. This discrepancy adds risk and requires careful forecast revision and strategic cost management. • Recent Cabinet discussions, including a meeting with the First Minister, underscore that Ministerial focus remains on these issues. • Beyond immediate budget management, there is an opportunity to incorporate medium-to-long term strategies (such as forthcoming spending reviews) that could help reset and better align budgets with ongoing and future needs. <p>The Board Chair thanked the Director for Children and Families and Directorate and Finance Manager for taking time out of their day to meet and provide updates and assurance regarding the budget gap to Board Members, and for their and their Team's support and inclusive engagement to date.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the proposed 2025/26 revenue and capital budgets. 		
10.	<p>Budget Monitoring Report</p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources introduced the report, providing a summary of SCRA's financial position for year to February 2025 and forecast (based on January results) for the full year 2024/25.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was agreed that accurate and timely financial reporting is essential for effective budget monitoring, enabling the organisation to make informed decisions and to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. • It was noted that the need for continued collaboration with the Scottish Government to ensure that budget monitoring processes are aligned with broader financial management strategies and priorities. 		

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11.	<p>OPR The Data Manager introduced the Third Quarter Organisational Performance Report (OPR) 2024/25: (1 October to 31 December 2024), with a spotlight on children attending hearings.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complexity of factors influencing attendance, including the child's age and the role of social work and advocacy, was discussed. The importance of maximising choice for children in terms of attendance format was emphasised, although offering virtual attendance did not necessarily increase participation. • The Board recognised the need for further investigation into the reasons for non-attendance and the development of strategies to enhance children's engagement in the hearing process. • The Board recognised the need for a strategic approach to manage staff absences, focusing on understanding the underlying causes and implementing measures to support staff and reduce absence rates. This includes exploring flexible working arrangements, enhancing support for staff wellbeing, and improving communication and engagement with teams to address any concerns that may contribute to absences. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the Q3 Organisational Performance Report 2024/25, covering the period 1 October to 31 December 2024. 		
12.	<p>Draft Business Plan The Head of Strategy and OD introduced the final draft for the 2025-26 SCRA Business Plan.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was noted that the business plan serves as a strategic document that guides the organisation's direction and priorities. It is crucial that this plan is effectively communicated and connected to the operational plans, which are more specific and actionable at the team level. • The SOMs are responsible for translating the business plan into an operational plan that engages teams locally. This operational plan then informs the locality plans, which are tailored to specific areas and ensure that individual objectives align with the 		

	Item	Timescale	Action
	<p>broader organisational goals. The challenge lies in making the business plan relatable and understandable to all staff members, given the diverse backgrounds and roles within the organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed that significant change at this stage in the Business Plan and how this related to the approved Corporate Objectives would be carried forward into next year's iteration however a review of language to enhance a child friendly read would be progressed supported by the Press & Communications Manager. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To approve the final draft (following review) of the 2025/26 Business Plan for submission to Minister for noting and publication. 		
13.	<p>Programme Board update</p> <p>The Head of Strategy and OD introduced the report, updating the Board on the Programme Management work, its governance arrangements, progress against plans and SCRA's approach to change and transition.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion highlighted the ongoing efforts in the programme change environment, focusing on the testing phase. Tests are designed to be the least restrictive and are part of a broader effort to implement a portfolio management approach. The team has been closely collaborating with the project team to address any issues that arise during testing. A detailed data capture session has been conducted, and the team is updating the benefits associated with the programme. The team have recently completed a second gateway review session, following the first one in May. The team is also working towards implementing recommendations, including for the introduction of portfolio management, which is seen as a crucial step in the programme's development. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note and take assurance from the Programme Board update. 		

	Item	Timescale	Action
14.	<p>Environmental Strategy/Climate Change -update</p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources introduced the report, providing Board Members with an update on the current position reached and setting out the key points contained within the 2023/24 Climate Change report submitted to Scottish Government.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental credentials are a key component of procurement criteria, with specific questions included to assess the sustainability practices of potential suppliers. • Environmental ambassadors have been appointed to promote sustainability initiatives and increase awareness among staff across SCRA. • The organisation has implemented a year-long programme of monthly environmental focuses, each dedicated to a specific topic such as food waste reduction or energy conservation. This programme aims to maintain staff engagement and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour. • The organisation is prioritising significant reductions in paper use, having already achieved substantial decreases over the past five to six years. However, larger projects are constrained by budget limitations. • Challenges of balancing statutory obligations with organisational goals and the importance of maintaining a focus on organisational priorities was discussed. • The discussion also included the potential role of electric vehicles (EVs) in the organisation's sustainability strategy. It was noted that while the use in EVs aligns with the organisation's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, it is a significant investment with evidence from other Board Member's experience of minimal return. The importance of a balanced approach was emphasised, ensuring that environmental initiatives do not compromise other organisational priorities. • Board Members inquired about project progress and the penalties for supplier non-compliance. The Head of Finance and Resources assured Members that mechanisms are in place to track and monitor both, ensuring adherence to sustainability commitments. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note and take assurance from the update. 		

	Item	Timescale	Action
15.	<p>Health & Safety Annual Report</p> <p>The Head of HR introduced the report, providing an update to the Board on corporate health, safety and wellbeing policies and initiatives across SCRA.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Health and Safety Officer has been actively leading on implementing defibrillators in each staffed office, with a phased approach planned over the next three years. Budget allocations have been identified to accelerate this programme. • A new policy of making available the administration of naloxone in the exceptional case of drug overdose on or around SCRA's premises. Volunteers to manage this locally will be sought from across the workforce. • The discussion emphasised the importance of having a feedback loop re action and/or learning to respond the different types of incidents that occur in SCRA's premises, particularly incidents of violence. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note and take assurance from the annual report findings and actions. 		
16.	<p>New Risks</p> <p>No new risks were identified.</p>		
	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>Tuesday 17 June 2025, Fountainhall Road, Edinburgh</p>		

Board Action Log as at March 2025

Meeting/Item	Action	Timescale	Lead	Comments	Status
Sept 24 Financial Strategy	It would be helpful to highlight in future reports risk and ambition. The risk around financial security and what cannot be achieved if flat cash continues, and what can be achieved if investment is forthcoming.	Sep 25	RMack		Not yet due
Sep 24 Sustainability, Energy Efficiency Review	A number of recommendations from the Mott MacDonald report will be incorporated moving forward.	Sep 25	RMack		Not yet due
Dec 24 SCRA Absence Update Report	It would be helpful to provide clarity on the breakdown of psychological-related absences and their correlation with work-related stress.	Sep 25	SD	A report will be presented at a future meeting on the findings related to absence data and its implications for workforce management.	Not yet due
Dec 24 SCRA Digital Strategy 2024- 27	To provide an update on the digital strategy's progress at the June 2025 meeting of the Board.	Jun 25	DC		Scheduled for noting at the June Board
Dec 24 Risk Policy Review	The Chair in highlighting the Board's responsibility in setting SCRA's risk appetite proposed having approved the Board's strategic objectives that a short piece of work be undertaken and presented to the Board. This work would also ensure that risks are handled at the appropriate level within SCRA.	Mar 25	RMack	Risk appetite will be reviewed by the February AAC and presented to the March Board for review and approval.	Scheduled to be confirmed at June Board
Jan 25 Future Session Insight	Facilitated session on creating a good governance system to be planned.	Apr 25	PA/CC	Provider and date still to be confirmed.	

Meeting/Item	Action	Timescale	Lead	Comments	Status
Public Access to Board Meetings	A review of public access to meetings was discussed and the Governance Officer agreed to lead on this area of work and discuss further with the Communications Manager.	Mar 25 Jun 25	PA	Progress has been made on developing a Corporate Governance Framework document. This document incorporates details on public meeting access and the Public Access Policy, created in collaboration with the Communication and Information Governance Managers, as well as the EMT.	Scheduled for approval at the June Board Meeting
March 25 Remuneration and Nominations Committee Update	<p>Governance process relating to pay negotiations to be further refined in agreement with the Committee.</p> <p>The gender pay gap remained a significant issue noting that this is well understood by both the Executive Management Team and Board Members. Board Members noted the plans underway to commission 'Close the Gap' to undertake a review and present findings and recommendations to support actions both new and underway to support improvement.</p>	<p>Jul 25</p> <p>TBC</p>	<p>SD/PA</p> <p>SD</p>	<p>Action will be tracked via the Remuneration and Nominations Committee</p> <p>Action will be tracked via the Remuneration and Nominations Committee.</p>	

SCRA Board Meeting Workplan June 2025 to March 2026

Business Item	Tues 17/06/25	Tues 23/09/25	Tues 16/12/25	Jan 2026	March 2026
Strategic/Corporate					
Policy & Influencing Report	✓				
Research Programme			✓		
Risk Register	✓	✓	✓		✓
Governance					
Audit & Assurance Committee Minutes	✓	✓	✓		✓
Planning & Performance Committee Minutes	✓	✓	✓		✓
Committee Annual Reports	✓				
Remuneration & Nominations Committee Minutes			✓*		
SCRA Standing Orders Review			✓		
Finance					
Budget Monitoring Report	✓	✓	✓		✓
Draft Budget			✓	✓	✓
Annual Report & Accounts		✓			
Financial Strategy		✓			
Planning					
Draft Corporate, Corporate Parenting & Business Plan (reported via P&PC with final drafts to Board for approval)					✓
Draft Annual Report (reported via P&PC with final draft to Board for approval)		✓			
Annual Workforce Planning Report					✓
Communications Plan		✓			
Performance					
Organisational Performance Report (high level summary report to Board all monitoring via P&PC)	✓	✓	✓		✓
Digital					
Digital Strategy (all drafting via P&PC with final draft for approval to Board)	✓				

Business Item	Tues 17/06/25	Tues 23/09/25	Tues 16/12/25	Jan 2026	March 2026
Operational					
Locality Performance Reviews				✓	
Chief Executive's Report	✓	✓	✓		✓
Complaints Review	✓				
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report		✓			
Environmental Annual Report					
Overview of Policies Annual Report			✓		
Health & Safety Annual Report					✓
Procurement Report		✓			
Property Strategy	✓				
Climate Change works			✓		
Programme Board (update reported via P&PC)	✓	✓			✓
Staff Survey				✓	✓
Role of the Reporter	✓				
SCRA Framework Document		✓			
SCRA Whistleblowing Policy					✓
Staff Absence Update Report (reported via P&PC) TBC		✓			

Present:

Jim Edgar (Chair)
Steve Renwick (Vice Chair)
Hazel Smith
Lynne Clow

In Attendance:

Cathie Cowan (Board Chair)
Neil Hunter (Principal Reporter/Chief Executive)
Pamela Armstrong (Governance Officer)
Lindsay MacFadyen (Quality Assurance Manager) – Item 7
Douglas Cameron (Head of Digital) – Item 9.2
Ross Monteith (Digital Security and Governance Manager) – Item 9.2
Alistair Hogg (Head of Practice and Policy)
Ross Mackenzie (Acting Head of Finance and Resources and Finance Manager)
Maggie McBurney (Business Support Administrator) - Observer

Internal Audit (BDO):

Deepasri Selvam

External Audit (Audit Scotland):

Lisa Duthie
Sean Cowan

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
1.	<p>Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum</p> <p>The Committee Chair welcomed Board members and Officers to the May 2025 meeting of the SCRA Audit and Assurance Committee (AAC).</p> <p>Apologies received from the Head of Strategy and Organisational Development, Claire Robertson, BDO</p> <p>The Committee Chair confirmed the meeting was quorate.</p>		

2.	Declaration (s) of Interest (s) None		
3.	Minute of SCRA Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on Thursday 21st November 2024 Agreed subject to minor amendments.		
4.	Matters Arising from Minute of Tuesday 25th February 2025 None Matters Arising from Action Log Audit of financial systems: The Committee Chair raised concern about postponing the financial systems audit until after a new system is introduced, asking for assurance that existing systems are sound. The Head of Finance and Resources explained the last review was in 2019–2020; external auditors and internal reviews (e.g., credit card use, petty cash) have provided ongoing assurance. Controls and staffing have remained stable and is confident the current systems are robust. All other items on the action plan were either confirmed as done, scheduled for later in the agenda, or marked for carry-forward, with no objections raised.		
5.	Workplan Approved		
6.	Annual Report 2024-25 The Committee received and reviewed the Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report, which summarises the Committee's work over the past year and outlines priorities for the coming year. Issues arising during discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the need to continue clarifying the respective remits of the Audit and Assurance Committee and the Planning and Performance Committee, to avoid duplication while ensuring appropriate oversight and division of labour . • The Committee agreed on the value of providing further risk management training for all Board members, including new appointees. The vehicle for this would be 		

	<p>the Board Development sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgment of the organisation's financial challenges, particularly the ongoing funding gap. While primary governance of this issue sits with the Board, the Committee recognised its supporting role in providing assurance to the Board on these matters. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To approve the Annual Report for submission to the Board, subject to the agreed addition acknowledging the Committee's role in supporting the Board's work on financial oversight and assurance. 	Jun 25	RMAcK /PA
7.	Quality Assurance		
7.1	<p>Quality Assurance Report on the Reporter's Obligations Under UNCRC Article 12</p> <p>The QA Manager presented the findings of the recent exercise reviewing the organisation's implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), following the enactment of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members commended the thoroughness and breadth of the report. It was suggested that the current Committee's role should be limited to noting the report rather than approval. It was discussed that the remit and oversight of this work fall primarily within the responsibility of the Planning and Performance Committee (PPC). Members raised concerns regarding the authenticity of some children's views captured in response documents, and independence of the child's voice. Questions were raised on the reliability of responses received via email. The QA Manager responded that although the report did not explicitly investigate this issue, it is standard practice that reporters, through their professional training and experience, assess the maturity of the child and exercise judgement regarding the authenticity and influence behind the child's views. The explicit recording of how children's views are considered is part of a wider practice 		

	<p>improvement action plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members queried the notable variation across localities in the percentage of letters sent to children, as shown in the report's data. The QA Manager confirmed that locality-level breakdowns were provided and explained that these differences reflect local practice variations and demographic factors. Local action plans are in place to monitor and address these discrepancies to ensure equitable practice. • The language used in letters is currently under review, with a pilot programme underway in selected localities. The intention is to roll out updated, child-friendly correspondence across all areas by summer 2025. • The Head of Practice and Policy offered assurance that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The report demonstrates significant progress by SCRA in proactively capturing and incorporating children's views in line with Article 12. ◦ Variations across localities in sending letters to children are influenced by practical factors such as the timing of referrals and repeated contacts with the child. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair confirmed that the Committee would formally note the action plan. • Noted the ongoing evolution of governance linkage and coordination with the PPC. This will be considered at the June Board. • Executive Management Team to oversee implementation of the practice improvement action plan. 		
7.2	<p>Progress Report</p> <p>The Quality Assurance Manager provided a progress update on the 2025 case sampling programme. It was noted that the programme, approved by the Committee in February 2025, is proceeding as planned with no changes to the original schedule or scope.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was recognised that continuous improvement and action plan monitoring 		

	<p>require clearer alignment between the AAC and PPC. Members agreed that while reports such as the current one should continue to come to the AAC, there should also be a formal connection to the PPC regarding ongoing monitoring and performance improvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee Vice Chair highlighted three areas for future Board-level consideration: quality assurance, risk, and the distinction between strategic and operational responsibilities. He recommended a discussion to clarify Committee remits. • The Board Chair proposed presenting draft work plans to the Board in June that clearly define the roles of the Board and Committees, aligning with the approved terms of reference. These matters will be brought to the next Board meeting for consideration, subject to agenda capacity, to clarify Committee responsibilities and improve coordination. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop draft work plans for presentation at the June Board meeting, detailing Committee roles consistent with terms of reference. • To approve the status of the actions in the case sampling action plan tracker. 	Jun 25	CC/PA
8.	External Audit		
8.1	<p>General update on current issues</p> <p>Lisa Duthie, Audit Scotland, provided a verbal update on the progress of the audit work since the last Committee meeting.</p> <p>She reported having had a productive meeting with the PR/CE to discuss current challenges, particularly around budget allocation and financial sustainability. This will be addressed in the wider public sector audit reporting.</p> <p>The interim audit has been conducted, including a review of key financial controls over the main financial systems (general ledger, payables, banking, payroll).</p> <p>The audit team spent three days on site, observed controls in operation, and commenced early</p>		

	<p>substantive testing of income and expenditure transactions, with no issues identified to date.</p> <p>Minor issues were noted regarding the timely removal of leavers from payroll systems, including a potential overpayment involving one individual. Further testing will be conducted as part of the audit fieldwork starting 16 June to confirm if this is an isolated case.</p> <p>The audit timetable remains unchanged. Final accounts are expected by 16 June, with final audit work through June and July, and reporting to the Committee in August.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee Chair sought clarification on the leavers issue, confirming it related to payroll removal delays and a potential overpayment. Lisa Duthie, Audit Scotland, confirmed this and outlined plans for further testing. • The Committee Chair asked about the regular reporting of common audit themes across the public sector. It was confirmed that such reports would only be brought to the Committee if significant or specific issues arise. Technical Bulletins are shared with the Head of Finance and Resources and significant items would be escalated. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Head of Finance and Resources to circulate Technical Bulletin links to Committee members upon publication. 	Ongoing	RMacK
8.2	<p>Annual Accounts (including Accounting Policies and Governance Statement)</p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources provided an update on the annual accounts, seeking Committee approval on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCRA accounting policies for adoption in preparation of the 2024/25 financial statements; • The draft Governance Statement for inclusion in the accounts; • Noted key dates relevant to financial statement preparation. 		

	<p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee discussed the complexities of pension accounting. While the actuarial valuation indicates a significant asset, accounting standards (IFRIC 14) limit its recognition in the accounts. This discrepancy requires clear explanation to non-accountants. • The general fund deficit arises from differences between cash funding for employer contributions and actuarial liabilities. Assurance was provided that this does not impact SCRA's financial sustainability due to Scottish Government support. • The Head of Finance and Resources clarified that property revaluations are conducted every five years unless significant upgrades occur. Investments in properties like Glenrothes primarily enhance functionality rather than market value. • The Committee Chair emphasised the importance of the Board considering how to address the ongoing deficit transparently, despite reassurances and funding assurances from the Scottish Government, proposing that the Board consider inserting a statement in the governance statement or elsewhere in the annual report that explicitly acknowledges the ongoing deficit. He noted that while it is being managed and addressed in-year, it remains a sustainability concern and not a fully resolved issue. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the governance statement subject to further consideration of the deficit issue for inclusion in the annual report. • The distinction between depreciation of tangible assets and amortisation of intangible assets to be clarified in the audited accounts for improved transparency. • Propose that the Board consider including an explicit statement within the overall annual accounts., reflecting that while partly addressed, the deficit remains a concern for sustainability. 		<p>RMack</p> <p>RMack</p> <p>RMack</p>
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9.	Internal Audit		
9.1	<p>Communications Review</p> <p>Deepasri Selvam, BDO, presented the Communications Review, conducted to assess the design and operational effectiveness of the controls underpinning SCRA's communication strategy and activities. The review aimed to ensure that communication controls are robust, aligned with organisational objectives, and meet sector standards for public bodies.</p> <p>The review concluded with substantial assurance on both the design and operational effectiveness of communication controls. This outcome reflects positively on the systems in place to manage and deliver effective communications both internally and externally. No significant control weaknesses or findings were identified during the audit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues arising during discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about the narrow scope of interviewees in the communications review audit process. It was suggested that a broader cross-section of staff should be involved in future audits to ensure comprehensive insights. • Questions were raised about potential risks associated with SCRA hosting partner websites. It was clarified that while SCRA builds websites for partners, responsibility for maintenance is generally transferred to the respective organisations. Two exceptions were noted where SCRA continues to maintain websites for specific partnerships. • Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of SCRA's social media strategy in engaging audiences and achieving its objectives. A follow up discussion with the Comms team was suggested to help clarify the strategy. • The Committee recognises and applauds the Communications Team's effective management and delivery of their responsibilities, as reflected in the substantial assurance rating. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide further clarity on the hosting arrangements and any associated risk 		<p>PA</p> <p>NH</p>

	management measures.		
9.2	<p>Cyber Security Review</p> <p>Deepasri Selvam, BDO, presented the Cyber Security Review, providing moderate assurance. This is considered a positive outcome compared to other public sector organisations, where limited assurance is more common.</p> <p>Key Findings;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of formalised processes for monitoring third-party vendors' cybersecurity compliance with SLAs. • Absence of risk assessments for third-party vendors. • Low-risk issue: Lack of regular user access reviews. <p>Management Response & Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All recommendations accepted by management. • Immediate actions are being taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ A monitoring spreadsheet has been implemented. ◦ Monthly contract management meetings are in place with key vendors. ◦ Annual systematic checks are now part of the process. ◦ The issues were largely due to lack of documentation, not absence of practice. <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members raised a concern that the unauthorised access issue might be more significant than reflected and asked if systems warn users about the consequences of unauthorised access. The Head of Digital advised Computer Misuse Act warnings are shown at login and that Terms and conditions must be accepted annually for access to sensitive data. • The Head of Digital provided further assurance on training and awareness advising Members; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Annual cybersecurity training is mandatory for staff. ◦ Simulated phishing exercises are conducted 3–4 times a year. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plans to enhance phishing simulations using more targeted, AI-driven scenarios are underway. ○ Improved authentication protocols are in place for accessing personal data 		
9.3	<p>Follow Up Report</p> <p>Deepasri Selvam presented the status of audit recommendations as of March 2025.</p> <p>It was noted that although the completion rate is slightly below average, there are no outstanding high significance recommendations at this time.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board Chair raised concerns regarding the continuing relevance of some long-standing recommendations, given that legislative changes or improvements in practice might have rendered them obsolete or superseded, suggesting it would be valuable for the EMT, in conjunction with internal audit, to review these older recommendations from 2021 onward to determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Their current relevance. ○ Whether different or updated actions are necessary. • This review is not intended to dismiss or erase recommendations but to ensure that the Committee is not expending resources chasing issues that may no longer be pertinent. • The Committee sought assurance that any decision to close or modify recommendations would be taken with appropriate oversight. • The Committee acknowledged the progress made in following up audit recommendations and the challenges around evidencing completion. • The PR/CE committed to focusing efforts on improving documentation and evidence quality to facilitate closing recommendations. • The Committee agreed to maintain oversight through exception reporting at the next meeting. • No urgent risks were identified requiring 		

	<p>immediate escalation.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To approve the Internal Audit Follow Up report. To produce an exception-based "taking stock" report for the next Audit and Assurance Committee meeting, focusing on areas requiring attention or delay explanation. 	Aug 25	RMack/PA
9.4	<p>Annual Report 2024-25</p> <p>Deepasri Selvam, BDO, presented a summary of the internal audit work for the year 2024-25. The key points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The audit opinion is positive across all areas. Controls are suitably designed and operating effectively. A correction was noted on page 85: the total number of recommendations should be fourteen, not fifteen. <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Committee acknowledged the update to the total number of recommendations. The Committee noted that the audit results were predominantly green with no ratings below moderate, reflecting a particularly satisfactory level of performance. <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To approve the Internal Audit Annual Report 2024-25 		
10.	Risk		
10.1	<p>Strategic Risk Register and Risk Management Policy</p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources introduced the report, noting that the Risk Management Policy had been previously presented to earlier Committees and had undergone multiple rounds of amendments. He noted that at the March Board meeting, it was agreed that the policy would undergo one final review cycle through the Planning and Performance Committee and this Committee before being submitted to the full Board for formal approval at its June meeting.</p> <p>In addition to the policy review, The Head of Finance and Resources provided an update on the</p>		

	<p>strategic risk register for members to note. He drew attention to a specific issue raised by members at the March meeting concerning clarity around risk ownership.</p> <p>Issues arising during discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to distinguish between strategic risks (owned by the Board) and operational risks (managed by Executives). <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk Management Policy recommended to proceed to the Board for final approval in June 2025. To recommend the proposed updates to the Strategic Risk Register for board approval at its June meeting. Consensus that operational risks should remain visible for oversight purposes. 		
10.2	<p>New Risks None</p>		
11.	<p>Topical/Regulatory Issues/Governance Issues None</p>		
12.	<p>Items for escalations to the Board</p> <p>Risk Management Policy: The updates to the risk management policy have been noted and included in the Board report at the Board June meeting.</p> <p>Audit and Assurance: All audit-related matters must be routed through the Audit and Assurance Committee, even if they require input from other sources.</p> <p>Quality Assurance: There is an ongoing discussion about additional reporting, specifically regarding quality assurance. The Board will deliberate on potential actions at the June meeting.</p> <p>Offline Pension Discussions: Issues concerning pensions have been raised and will be handled separately.</p> <p>Internal Audit Follow-up Action: An exception report to be brought to the August AAC, to ensure that management actions are documented.</p>		

Date of the next meeting – Thursday 28th August

SCRA BOARD

17 June 2025



Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report 2024-2025

Report Classification: Open

For: Approval

Executive Sponsor: Ross Mackenzie, Head of Finance and Resources

Author: Pamela Armstrong, Governance Officer

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to evidence to the Board how the SCRA Audit & Assurance Committee (AAC) has fulfilled its remit, and how effectively it has discharged its responsibilities. It also supports preparation of the annual Governance Statement for inclusion in the published Annual Accounts.

Throughout the year, AAC has gained assurance from internal audit, external audit and the Quality Assurance programme on a wide range of operational, financial and governance systems within SCRA. AAC has also gained assurance from SCRA's approach to risk management and undertaken its annual self-assessment exercise.

Further detail on the context of AAC, its membership, the assurances it has received, its work in 2024-2025 and plans for 2025/26 are outlined in Appendix 1. The committee's Terms of Reference are attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to:

- Approve the annual report from SCRA's Audit and Assurance Committee covering the year to 31 March 2025

Key Issues to be discussed/considered

The Board is asked to consider in particular the proposed planned work in 2025-2026, identifying any potential omissions or risks.

Implications:

Service

N/A

Financial

N/A

Workforce

N/A

Infrastructure including Digital

N/A

Information Governance

N/A

Risk Assessment/Management

This report provides assurance in the operation of SCRA's risk management policy.

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

This report provides assurance regards SCRA developing/maintaining effective governance systems including risk management.

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process.

Further to evaluation it is noted:

Paper is not relevant to Equality & Diversity

Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation

Members of SCRA's Audit and Assurance Committee

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report

Appendix 2 – Audit and Assurance Committee Terms of Reference

Appendix 3 – Audit and Assurance Committee Agenda Items in 2024-2025

Appendix 4 – Delivery of 2024-2025 Audit Plans

Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report 2024-2025**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide evidence to the Board as to how the SCRA Audit & Assurance Committee has fulfilled its remit, and how effectively it has discharged its responsibilities. It also supports preparation of the annual Governance Statement.

2. Context of the Audit and Assurance Committee

- 2.1 The Audit & Assurance Committee's Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix 2. These were reviewed in December 2024.
- 2.2 The Board appoints non-executive Board members to the Audit & Assurance Committee. The Audit & Assurance Committee's membership for 2024/25 was as follows:
- James Edgar, Chair
 - Steve Renwick, Vice Chair (from November 2024)
 - Kay Barton (until November 2024)
 - Ying Zhang (until November 2024)
 - Hazel Smith (from February 2025)
 - Lynne Clow (from February 2025)

Where appropriate, the Committee augments the skills and experience of its members by seeking advice from Internal and External Auditors, and Executive Management Team.

- 2.3 The meetings of the Committee are attended by the Principal Reporter/ Chief Executive, the Head of Finance & Resources and the Internal and External Auditors. Additionally, other members of the Executive Management Team attend on a regular basis with input from other officers as appropriate. All meetings were minuted by the Governance Officer.
- 2.4 The Committee met four times in 2024/25: May 2024, August 2024, November 2024 and February 2025 and provided significant support to the Board and senior management in ensuring controls operated effectively.
- 2.5 The agenda for each Committee meeting is drafted by the Head of Finance & Resources and approved by the Audit & Assurance Committee Chair. In addition a pre-agenda briefing (if required) is made available to the Audit & Assurance Chair and involves the Principal Reporter/Chief Executive and Head of Finance & Resources. An overview of the 2024/25 meeting agendas is attached at Appendix 3. Appendix 4 shows delivery against planned outputs for the year.

3. Assurance

- 3.1 The Audit & Assurance Committee gains assurance from the reports submitted by the two audit leads and from the management response to audit recommendations and in person at Committee meetings. The audit plans, developed using SCRA's current strategic objectives and a risk based approach to identification of priority areas for audit review, between them cover a wide range of operational, financial and governance systems. Over and above this the Audit & Assurance Committee approves each year a programme of Quality Assurance Audits which are undertaken by SCRA's Quality Assurance Manager. The Quality Assurance programme focuses on issues related to SCRA's compliance with its statutory duties (usually described via Practice Direction from the Principal Reporter) and other practice or organisational guidance and direction. The themes of Quality Assurance are advised by SCRA's Practice and Quality Network. The findings from each audit are linked to corresponding management responses for approval by the Committee.
- 3.2 The focus of financial reporting in the year was the presentation of the 2023/24 Annual Accounts and the External Auditor's report in August 2024. The financial accounts reported that SCRA's net expenditure of £31.7m exceeded revenue Grant in Aid of £30.3m by £1.4m. This position reflects inclusion of non-cash items such as depreciation and amortisation (£2.7m), International Accounting Standards (IAS) adjustment to pension scheme contributions (<£0.1m) and pension scheme finance cost (<£0.1m). The Auditor expressed an unqualified opinion on the 2023/24 financial statements.
- 3.3 SCRA's General Fund remains in deficit, £18.9m at 31 March 2024. SCRA has received letters from Scottish Government to address any concerns around its continued operation as a going concern, the latest in April 2023.
- 3.4 In the year to 31 March 2024 the Management Accounts showed SCRA operated within its approved budget, incurring revenue expenditure (excluding depreciation, amortisation and unfunded pensions, but net of other income) of £29.5m. This was £1.4m less than the approved revenue budget, principally due to budgetary provision for new legislation implementation which was not required in-year. Capital spend of £2.47m slightly exceeded Grant in Aid of £2.40m.
- 3.5 The external and internal auditors have delivered to plans and timelines throughout 2024/25. There has been co-operation between both sets of auditors and between the auditors and SCRA staff, and this has been acknowledged by auditors in audit reports and at Audit & Assurance Committee itself. Having assessed the Internal Audit function the external auditors were able to place reliance on the work of the internal auditors in a number of areas. Management has agreed with all audit recommendations identified in 2024/25. Progress against delivery of these recommendations is reported annually to the Committee by Internal Audit progress reports.
- 3.6 Risk management is a key priority for the Board, alongside performance and financial management. The Audit & Assurance Committee oversees, on behalf of the Board, the risk management process through co-ordination and monitoring

of the implementation of the Risk Management Policy. This included reviewing Strategic and Operational Risk Registers every six months (now quarterly) and as necessary, reviewing the work undertaken on identified high risk areas and the action plans to mitigate the effects of such risks. Risk is a standing item at Board, Committee and Management Team (including Locality Management) meetings.

- 3.7 SCRA's Risk Management Policy was reviewed by the Audit & Assurance Committee at its meeting in November 2024 and subsequently reviewed by the Board. The Board has responsibility for the system of internal control and risk management within SCRA. The Risk Management Policy will next be reviewed by the Audit & Assurance Committee in May 2025 with any changes taken to the June 2025 Board for approval.
- 3.8 SCRA's risk management tool, Decision Time, is in widespread use across the organisation's national and local management teams, and its reporting outputs frequently form a central part of risk reporting to Board, Audit & Assurance Committee and Locality Management Teams.
- 3.9 The Planning and Performance Network (PPN) oversees Locality risk management. The network is chaired by the Senior Operational Manager and co-ordinates the operational and locality approach to risk, including the development and maintenance of risks (linked and aligned to locality plans).
- 3.10 The PPN's role also includes:
- identifying and sharing good practice;
 - assessing whether risks are being adequately managed within agreed appetites and tolerances across SCRA; and
 - ensuring that each business area and locality is regularly carrying out risk identification and assessment exercises to ensure that risk registers are accurate and up-to-date.

4. Impact

- 4.1 Throughout the year as well as the routine business for the Audit & Assurance Committee there was a continuing focus on information governance.
- 4.2 Feedback from the Executive Management Team is that it welcomes the rigour of the Audit & Assurance Committee's scrutiny and advice which has maintained an appropriate balance between scrutiny and support.
- 4.3 The Audit & Assurance Committee has achieved the following during 2024/25:
- Tracking and influencing progress on non-disclosure and case information breaches.
 - Scrutinising the organisation's risk profile, providing input and scrutiny on its application, review of SCRA's risk management approach to embed risk management arrangements at locality level and detailed scrutiny of the Risk Management Policy.

- Approving and overseeing Internal and External Audit programme plans.
- Supporting the wider Board in ongoing work to resolve SCRA's structural grant in aid shortfall
- Providing scrutiny to SCRA Senior Managers on implementation of Internal and External Audit recommendations across the year.
- Approving SCRA's Quality Assurance programme and subsequent monitoring of follow-up actions.
- Assessing the work of the Audit & Assurance Committee against relevant standards as developed by Audit Scotland and aligning practice as required.
- Receiving and responding to reports in relation to progress and risks in relation to the SCRA Pension Fund (Falkirk LGPS).
- Overseeing the finalisation and submission of the accounting policies, the accounts, including the process for review of the accounts and governance statement prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and the management's letter of representation to the external auditors" and also "recommending for approval the annual accounts to the Board.

5. Audit & Assurance Committee Self-Assessment

- 5.1 In August 2024, the Audit & Assurance Committee undertook its annual self-assessment exercise. Individual assessments informed the Committee's discussion, following which it was agreed that the Committee's approach was compliant.
- 5.2 Audit & Assurance Committee members will undertake its next annual self-assessment exercise in August 2025.

6. Plans for 2025/26

- 6.1 The Audit & Assurance Committee will meet in May 2025, August 2025, November 2025 and February 2026. It is noteworthy that during 2024-25, a new Planning and Performance Committee of the Board was established. During the next few months, a careful focus will be given to the remits of both committees to avoid either duplication or omission. Notwithstanding this focus, the Audit and Assurance Committee will continue to support the wider Board in ongoing work to resolve SCRA's structural grant in aid shortfall. Detailed planned coverage of the Audit and Assurance Committee meetings will be as follows:

May 2025

- Internal Audit – Annual Report 2024/25
- Internal Audit – Communications
- Internal Audit – Cyber Security
- Internal Audit – Follow Up
- External Audit – Annual Accounts 2024/25 (Accounting Policies and Governance Statement)
- Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report 2024/25
- Case Sampling Reviews – per Annual Plan
- Case Sampling Programme Update

- Review of recent Audit Scotland Technical Bulletins and section 22 reports
- Strategic Risk Register
- Risk Management Policy review
- Review of standing items including topical/regulatory/governance issues.

August 2025

- External Audit Annual Report and Opinion on the Annual Accounts
- Annual Accounts 2024/25
- External Audit – General Updates
- Internal Audit Reviews (per Annual Plan)
- Case Sampling Reviews – per Annual Plan
- Annual Report on Joint Inspections of Children's Services
- Pensions Update
- SCRA's Annual Report
- Information Governance
- Strategic Risk Register
- Review of standing items including topical/regulatory/governance issues.
- Audit & Assurance Committee Self-Assessment
- Private Meetings with Internal and External Auditors (Audit & Assurance Committee Members only)

November 2025

- External Audit – General Updates
- Internal Audit Reviews (per Annual Plan)
- Case Sampling Reviews – per Annual Plan
- Strategic Risk Register
- Annual Fraud Report
- Review of standing items including topical/regulatory/governance issues.

February 2026

- Information Governance
- Internal Audit – Annual Plan 2026/27
- Internal Audit Reviews (per Annual Plan)
- External Audit – General Updates
- External Audit – Annual Audit Plan 2025/26
- Case Sampling Programme 2026/27
- Case Sampling Reviews – per Annual Plan
- Risk Management Policy review
- Strategic Risk Register
- Pensions Update
- Review of standing items including topical/regulatory/governance issues.

6.2 Regular Progress Reports will be presented throughout the year by the Internal and External Auditors. Regular reports on Information Governance, Quality Assurance & Performance and Audit Recommendations will be presented to the Audit & Assurance Committee.

- 6.3 To ensure that the Audit & Assurance Committee has a mechanism to keep aware of topical, legal and regulatory issues, the External Auditors will continue to provide a regular update report detailing issues relevant to SCRA.
- 6.4 As part of Board member learning and development, further consideration will be given to risk management refresher training during 2025/26 for all Board members.



SCRA AUDIT & ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Audit & Assurance Committee is to ensure that SCRA Board activities operate within the law and regulations governing Scotland's executive non-departmental public bodies. Its primary concern is to ensure:

- an effective system of internal control is established and maintained to be able to give reasonable assurance to the Board that SCRA's financial reporting, internal controls including the workings of both internal and external auditors, governance and risk management are effective and can be relied upon

1. COMPOSITION

Membership

The membership of this Committee shall consist of:

- Up to four Non-Executive Members of the Board

Jim Edgar, Chair
Steve Renwick, Vice Chair
Lynne Clow
Hazel Smith

The Chair of the Board is not eligible for membership to the Audit & Assurance Committee.

Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

The appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair shall be appointed at a full business meeting of the SCRA Board. The Chair of the Board will appoint a Vice Chair in addition to the Chair. The Chair will preside at every meeting of the Committee. The Vice Chair shall preside if the Chair is absent.

Attendance

The Principal Reporter/Chief Executive and Head of Finance & Resources, the Chief Internal Auditor and the statutory External Auditor shall normally attend meetings. The Committee can request the attendance of any officer of SCRA. All Board Members shall have the right of attendance and have access to papers, except where the Committee resolves otherwise, e.g., papers containing confidential or person identifiable information.

Quorum

No business shall be transacted unless a minimum of two Audit & Assurance Committee Members are present.

2. MEETINGS

Frequency

Meetings will be held four times per annum with at least one meeting held in person. The timetable should also assist with scheduling key items of business to be discussed at each meeting.

Meetings of the Committee will be timetabled annually to coincide with the important events of the year e.g., annual accounts and before important decisions are made.

Agenda and Papers

The agenda and papers will be sent five days in advance of the meetings. All papers will clearly state the agenda reference, the author, the purpose of the paper together with the action the Committee is being asked to consider. The Chair of the Committee, Vice Chair and Committee Executive Management Team (EMT) Lead will be responsible for agreeing the agenda.

Minutes

Formal Minutes will be kept of proceedings and submitted for approval at the next meeting to the Committee. Recognising the issue of the relative timing of draft minutes may be presented to the SCRA Board Meeting to ensure Board Members are aware of issues considered and decisions taken by respective Committees.

The draft Minute will be cleared by the Chair of the Committee (Vice Chair) in absence of Chair) and the nominated Committee EMT Lead prior to distribution.

Other

The Chief Internal Auditor and a representative from External Audit shall have free and confidential access to the Chair and Members of the Audit & Assurance Committee.

3. REMIT

The Audit & Assurance Committee shall oversee legal regulatory and code of conduct compliance and were appropriate challenges non-compliance. The Committee will also oversee the effectiveness of SCRA's system of internal control to be able to give reasonable assurance to the Board that SCRA's financial reporting, internal controls including the workings of both internal and external auditors, governance and risk management are effective and can be relied upon.

The duties of the Audit & Assurance Committee are in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the Scottish Government Audit Committee Handbook. The Audit & Risk Committee will periodically review its own effectiveness and report the results of the review to the Board and Accountable Officer.

Internal Control and Corporate Governance

The Audit & Assurance Committee will evaluate the system of internal control and corporate governance, notably to promote and demonstrate high standards of corporate governance, by:

- helping the Board address the key risks facing the SCRA in carrying out its statutory functions and working towards its strategic objectives
- providing assurances relating to:
 - corporate governance requirements for the organisation
 - strategic processes for risk, control and governance
 - the Governance statement
 - the effectiveness of the internal control environment
- based on a needs assessment, agreeing a regular and responsive programme of audit on the management and control of work within the Administration and receiving reports on that audit
- agreeing the most efficient and effective means of carrying out the agreed programme of audit
- reporting on the planned activity and results of both internal and external audit, and on the adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's management letter/report
- overseeing the finalisation and submission of the accounting policies, the accounts, including the process for review of the accounts and governance statement prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and the management's letter of representation to the external auditors and thereafter recommending approval to the Board of the Annual Accounts
- alerting the Board to factors which might affect the ability of the Administration to carry out its statutory functions and achieve its strategic objectives

- considering any proposals for tendering for internal services or for the purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services
- overseeing and alerting the Board, where appropriate, on anti-fraud policies, whistle-blowing processes, and arrangements for special investigations
- overseeing and reviewing SCRA's compliance with statutory obligations to comply with information governance, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Network Information Systems Regulations including cyber scrutiny
- overseeing and scrutinising improvements in information governance

Standing Orders and Financial Instructions

- reviewing changes to the Standing Orders and Financial Instructions
- reviewing and approving the Scheme of Delegation
- examining circumstances associated with any occasion when Standing Orders are waived or suspended

4. OTHER

The Audit & Assurance Committee has a duty to review its own performance, effectiveness and terms of reference on an annual basis and the Chair will submit an Annual Report of the work of the Committee to the Board.

The Committee is authorised to obtain legal or other professional advice it considers necessary.

A standing agenda item on each committee meeting shall be the agreement of matters to both report and escalate to the Board at its next meeting.

Lead	May 2024	August 2024	November 2024	February 2025
External Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General Update ➤ Section 22 reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 2023/24 Annual Audit Report, Covering Letter, proposed Independent Auditor's Report and ISA 580 Letter of Representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ General update on current issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Annual Audit Plan 24/25 ➤ General Update Briefing Paper
Internal Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Locality Quality Improvement ➤ Financial Planning ➤ Recommendations Follow Up Review ➤ Annual Report 23/24 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risk Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ New Legislation Readiness ➤ Business Performance Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Digital Development Audit Report ➤ Annual Audit Plan 25/26
Head of Finance & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Annual Accounts 23/24 update ➤ Strategic and Operational Risk Registers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pensions Update ➤ Draft 2023/24 Annual Accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review of Risk Management Policy ➤ Strategic and Operational Risk Registers ➤ Annual Fraud Report Revised Annual Audit Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risk Management Policy ➤ Annual review of risk appetite ➤ Strategic Risk Register ➤ Pensions Update
Head of Strategy & OD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Case sampling exercise on Appeals not opposed by Reporter ➤ Progress report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reporter's assessment on participation rights in Hearings ➤ Case Sampling Programme 24/25 Update ➤ Annual Report 202/24 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Case sampling: Reporter's drafting of the statement of grounds involving offences ➤ Case sampling progress report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Case sampling review: Report on Reporter advocacy ➤ 25/26 Case Sampling Programme

Lead	May 2024	August 2024	November 2024	February 2025
			➤ Annual Report on Joint Inspections of Children's Services	
Head of Practice & Policy		➤ Information Governance Six-monthly Report		➤ Information Governance Six-monthly Report
Audit & Assurance Committee Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report 23/24 ➤ Review of Topical, Regulatory & Governance Issues ➤ New risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review of Topical, Regulatory & Governance Issues ➤ New risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review of Topical, Regulatory, & Governance Issues ➤ New risks ➤ Private Meetings with Internal/External Auditors (committee members only) ➤ Committee Self Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review of Topical, Regulatory & Governance Issues ➤ Environmental Governance Arrangements ➤ New risks

Delivery of 2024/25 Audit plans

Report Type	Date Delivered
Quality Assurance Planned Outputs	
Annual Progress Report	May, Aug, Nov 24
Annual Report on Joint Inspections of Children's Services	Aug 24
25/26 Case Sampling Programme	Feb 25
Outcomes of Case Sampling	May, Aug, Nov 24 & Feb 25
Internal Audit Planned Outputs	
Locality Quality Improvement	May 24
Financial Planning	May 24
Recommendations Follow Up Review	May 24
Annual Report	May 24
Risk Management	Aug 24
New Legislation Readiness	Nov 24
Business Performance Management	Nov 24
Digital Development Audit Report	Feb 25
Annual Audit Plan 25/26	Feb 25
External Audit Planned Outputs	
Progress Reports/General Updates	May, Nov 24 & Feb 25
Report to those Charged with Governance on the 2023/24 Accounts and Management Representation Letter	Aug 24
Annual Plan 23/24	Feb 25

Minute of SCRA Planning and Performance Committee, held on Tuesday 06th May 2025, at Bell Street, Glasgow

Present

Kay Barton, Chair
 Ying Zhang, Vice Chair, by TEAMS
 Jim Edgar, by TEAMS
 Cathie Cowan, Board Chair

In Attendance

Lisa Bennett, Head of Strategy and OD
 Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive
 Paul Mulvanny, Senior Operational Manager
 Ross MacKenzie, Head of Finance and Resources
 Donald Lamb, Data Manager, by TEAMS
 Andrew MacDonald, Planning and Performance Manager
 Pamela Armstrong, Governance Manager

Item	Topic	Timescale	Lead
1.	<i>Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum</i> The Committee Chair welcomed members and Officers to the second meeting of the Planning and Performance Committee (PPC) Apologies were received from Lorraine Moore, Committee Member. The Chair confirmed the meeting was quorate.		
2.	<i>Declaration (s) of Interest (s)</i> None		
3.	<i>AOB</i> <i>Digital Strategy Update</i> A deep dive into the strategy will be scheduled later to ensure it aligns with broader organisational goals and programmes. There will be a planned update to the Board in June.		
4.	<i>Minute of the last meeting held on Thursday, 27th February 2025</i> Agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.		

5.	<p>How the Committee will Operate</p> <p>The Committee discussed the need to formally use its agreed Terms of Reference as a standing document and guide to add value and avoid duplication with other governance structures. The remit will focus on key areas of focus and responsibility, including operational performance, improvement, and forward planning.</p> <p>The importance of fostering behaviours such as curiosity, challenge, reflection, and shared learning was emphasised.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise the Committee's remit as a standing document, with agreed Terms of Reference attached, to ensure clarity and alignment with governance structures. • Develop a structured work plan for the Planning and Performance Committee that outlines key topics for discussion at future meetings. • Incorporate annual self-assessment as required in the Committee's Terms of Reference, to evaluate progress and effectiveness. 	<p>May 25</p> <p>Next meeting</p> <p>May 25</p>	<p>PA/Chair</p> <p>PA/LB</p> <p>PA</p>
6.	Standing Items		
a.	<p>Programme Update</p> <p>Progress on programme tests of change and candidates for rollouts was discussed, including scenario planning for localities based on evidence of efficacy and team readiness levels. The importance of aligning and sequencing rollouts with other initiatives like CCJA implementation was emphasised. Detailed progress updates included the completion of initial testing phases in selected localities, identification of key challenges, and adjustments to rollout schedules based on feedback from local teams.</p>		
b.	<p>Portfolio management Update</p> <p>AMacD introduced a paper on SCRA's potential adoption of a 'Portfolio Management' approach. Detailed discussions identified the need for a robust framework to manage interdependencies between projects, the importance of regular reviews to adapt to changing priorities, and the integration of capacity planning to ensure resource availability.</p>		

	<p>Portfolio management is seen as an established approach to integrate programmes, projects, and business-as-usual activities under a unified framework. This will enhance strategic alignment with the corporate plan and provide a holistic view of organisational priorities.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A phased, iterative approach to portfolio management was formally agreed upon as the most appropriate strategy for the organisation at this stage. • This approach will focus on prioritisation, dependency mapping, and capacity planning while minimising disruption. • Finalise updates to the programme framework to include dependency mapping and prioritisation mechanisms for integration into portfolio management. The role of the Planning and Performance Committee will be clarified. 	<i>Next meeting</i>	<i>AMacD</i>
c.	<p>Children's Hearings Redesign</p> <p>Updates were provided on multi-agency workstreams related to hearing system redesign. Key areas include culture, referrals, preparation for hearings, and data sharing. Legislative changes are also being prepared under tight timelines.</p> <p>Collaboration among agencies is crucial to streamline processes and improve outcomes for children involved in hearings. The redesign aims to address systemic issues, further embed rights and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the hearing system. Specific details included the need for improved communication channels among agencies, training programs for staff to handle new protocols, and the integration of technological solutions to facilitate data sharing.</p> <p>There was a discussion on the importance of ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately prepared for the changes, including the need for comprehensive training programmes and the establishment of clear guidelines to support the transition.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor legislative developments related to 	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>LB</i>

	hearing system redesign and consider any consequential programme and resource implications.		
d.	<p>CCJA</p> <p>There is no confirmed implementation date for the Care and Justice (Scotland) Bill (referred to as CCJA), but planning has begun in anticipation of a possible go-live early next year.</p> <p>A project has been initiated to prepare for implementation, including setting up a working group and appointing a project manager.</p> <p>Recruitment and training are being considered now to avoid delays later, especially if an April implementation is confirmed. The workforce plan includes provision for nearly £2 million investment in SCRA, (amid a broader £13–14 million deficit being met through in year support from SG.) The focus will be on strengthening frontline roles, particularly assistant reporters, and case-carrying staff, rather than administrative support.</p> <p>New responsibilities will emerge from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased age of referral to the Reporter, with consequential higher volumes • The power to share additional information with victims in very specific circumstances (an expansion of the Reporter's powers, enhancements to our victims information service and new demands through a new national single point of contact are being assessed). <p>The Crown is expected to retain the most serious cases (e.g., High Court level), but more will likely be referred to SCRA for mid- to lower-level offences. The Lord Advocate recently issued new guidance on alleged sexual offences conducted by children, with a higher level of decision making, internally within COPFS.</p> <p>There is a strong emphasis on ensuring SCRA is fully ready for implementation given the public and political sensitivity and interest around the Act.</p> <p>Discussion took place about the state of readiness of other parts of the system, but efforts are</p>		

	<p>underway to influence these areas where possible.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue scenario planning for CCJA implementation to ensure readiness across localities by April 2026. 	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>EMT</i>
e.	<p>Business Plan Update</p> <p>The 2025 business plan has been implemented, with locality plans aligned to its objectives. Updates against business plan objectives will be brought to future meetings for review. The business plan outlines key initiatives, including enhancing service delivery, improving stakeholder engagement, and achieving sustainability goals. Specific actions include the development of locality-specific strategies, monitoring progress through performance metrics, and ensuring alignment with the organisation's overall strategic objectives.</p>		
f.	<p>PPN – Feedback</p> <p>Observations from the Planning and Performance Network (PPN) meeting highlighted effective engagement of whole teams at the locality level. Discussions included sustainability in locality plans and communication around the target operating model. Additional details from the PPN meeting emphasised the importance of clear communication and collaboration among localities to achieve strategic goals.</p> <p>Specific topics included the need for regular updates on progress, sharing best practices, and addressing local challenges through coordinated efforts.</p> <p>Participants discussed the value of continuous feedback loops to ensure that locality plans remain responsive to emerging needs and challenges.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue invitations to future PPN meetings to Committee members to facilitate learning and understanding of planning and performance in SCRA. 	<i>May 25</i>	<i>PA</i>
7.	Risk		

	<p>The Committee reviewed updates to the risk management policy, including clarifications on roles and responsibilities. This Committee's role includes oversight of risks related to organisational performance and delivery of strategic objectives.</p> <p>Detailed discussions highlighted the need for a robust framework to identify, assess, and mitigate risks. The policy includes specific protocols for risk monitoring and escalation, ensuring that all identified risks are systematically addressed.</p> <p>The importance of regular training and awareness programs for staff to recognise and manage risks effectively was also emphasised.</p> <p>Additional details were discussed, such as the need for continuous monitoring of risk indicators, the integration of risk management into daily operations, and the establishment of clear communication channels for reporting and addressing risks promptly.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to focus its oversight role on risks related to organisational performance measures and strategic objectives, acknowledging that oversight process is the responsibility of the Audit & Assurance Committee.</p> <p>Cybersecurity was highlighted as an ongoing strategic risk due to increasing external threats. The organisation is actively monitoring this risk and ensuring alignment with government-level security protocols.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine the risk management policy to explicitly address this Committee's role in overseeing risks related to organisational performance and strategic objectives. 	Jun 25	RMack
8.	<p>OPR</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the OPR for January–March 2025.</p> <p>Key highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence Rates: Long-term absence rates have increased in Q4, while short-term absences remain below 2% for most of the year. • Child Protection Orders (CPOs): A significant spike in CPOs was noted, with no discernible pattern across localities. This spike has operational implications for workload prioritisation. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Offence Referrals: While overall annual rates remain low, certain areas (e.g., Argyll and Bute) experienced significant spikes. These spikes may indicate localised issues with partner agencies or workforce challenges. <p>The Committee discussed the importance of analysing the local factors underlying these trends to implement targeted interventions. Furthermore, the Committee emphasised the need for continuous monitoring and reporting to ensure timely responses to emerging issues.</p> <p>The Committee also discussed additional metrics such as service delivery times, stakeholder feedback, and resource allocation efficiency. These metrics provide deeper insights into operational performance and help identify areas for improvement. The importance of integrating these metrics into regular reporting was highlighted to ensure comprehensive monitoring and timely action.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the difficulty of redistributing workloads across localities due to security protocols and cultural barriers. While some short-term support has been provided to high-pressure areas like Central, long-term solutions remain a challenge.</p> <p>The organisation's national data provides valuable insights into trends like CPOs and non-offence referrals, which local authorities may lack. The Committee emphasised the importance of leveraging this data to improve multi-agency collaboration and operational efficiency.</p> <p>The Committee debated how best to present OPR data to the Board. A consensus emerged around providing a summary with access to full details for interested members. This approach aims to balance transparency with efficiency.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a summary report to the Board, highlighting key issues arising from the data that have been discussed with the Committee, and providing a link to the detailed data, should Board members wish to see it. 		
8.	Corporate Plan The corporate plan aims to achieve several		

	<p>strategic objectives, including enhancing service delivery, improving stakeholder engagement, achieving sustainability goals, embedding trauma-informed practice, and ensuring clarity and accessibility of language used in grounds for referral.</p> <p>Specific actions include the development of locality-specific strategies, monitoring progress through performance metrics, and ensuring alignment with the organisation's overall strategic objectives.</p> <p>The Committee emphasised the importance of continuous feedback loops to ensure that locality plans remain responsive to emerging needs and challenges.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the importance of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in all aspects of the organisation's operations. Emphasis was placed on integrating EDI principles into the Committee's remit and work plans, ensuring that all strategic initiatives and policies reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>Detailed discussions highlighted the need for comprehensive training programs to raise awareness and foster inclusive practices among staff. The Committee emphasised the importance of creating a culture where diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged. Additionally, the need for regular reviews of EDI policies to ensure they remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of the organisation was discussed. Specific actions include embedding EDI metrics into performance evaluations, establishing clear communication channels for reporting EDI-related concerns, and promoting initiatives that support underrepresented groups within the organisation.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the proposed approach to monitoring the objectives in the Corporate Plan. As well as topics noted here, PPC agreed to undertake a deeper dive into the sustainability objective later in 2025 and to add a cross reference to Staff Survey work.</p>		
9.	New Risks		

	<i>None</i>		
10.	Items for escalation to the Board Addressed in earlier sections of the minute.		
	<i>Date of next meeting TBC</i>		

SCRA Board

17th June 2025

Agenda item 8 - Chief Executive's Report

Report Classification: *Open*

For: Information

Executive Sponsor: Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

Author: Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the PR/CEO's activities as well as general areas of interest, not covered elsewhere in the Board agenda. It includes updates on national forums, Scottish Government liaison, ongoing work in multi-agency partnerships and internal workforce development initiatives.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to:

- Note the content of the report.

Key Issues to be Discussed/Considered

Implications

- Service: None
- Financial: None
- Workforce: None
- Infrastructure (including digital): None
- Information Governance: None

Risk Assessment/Management

N/A

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

The areas covered in this report contribute to delivery of SCRA's strategic priorities, including:

- Service transformation and redesign.
- Partnership working and system improvement.

- Digital innovation and infrastructure development.
- Workforce support and trauma-informed leadership.

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process.

Further to evaluation it is noted:

Paper is not relevant to Equality & Diversity

Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation

The following engagement activities are referenced within the report:

- Joint agency working through Redesign Board, Police Custody Group and Locality-based partnership teams.
- Consultation and planning via the National Partnership Forum and UNISON representation.
- Direct engagement with managers and staff through organisational development events and training initiatives.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Chief Executive Report

1. National Partnership Forum

- 1.1 The National Partnership Forum is due to meet in full face to face session on 18 June which act as a deep dive session to look at a wide range of internal organisational developments and our programme and project work.
- 1.2 UNISON continue to be actively involved in many internal SCRA fora and ensure partnership input to Locality Management Teams across Scotland. Pay negotiations are ongoing via the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC).

2. Scottish Government Liaison

- 2.1 No scheduled sponsor team meetings have taken place since the March Board. The next scheduled date is 9 June, where we will have a focus on the SCRA Digital Strategy to begin the discussion about future investment as well as technology's potential future contribution to the SCRA service reform planning – in the context of the wider pressures and issues facing the Children's Hearings system.

3. Strategic Partnerships

- 3.1 The national Children in Police Custody Group, jointly chaired by SCRA and the Children and Young Peoples Centre for Care and Justice (CYCJ) continues to meet regularly. The establishment of this group was first reported to the Board in December 2024. There is strong multi agency commitment from Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority, Social Work Scotland and the Promise, amongst others. looking at ways to minimise stress and trauma to children who have been arrested, whilst at the same time protecting the public from children who pose risk of harm and balancing the needs for investigative and forensic integrity following an arrest. Areas that the group are currently focussing on include:
 - Changes to the existing Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 – specifically section 4.1 in order to add an enabling addition that would allow the Police to take a child to a place of safety rather than a police station (which they are currently required to do).
 - Assessing the scope of some local pilots involving Police, Local Authorities and the third/voluntary sector in testing alternative approaches that either avoid or minimise the need for a child to remain custody.
 - Expansion in the future use of the voluntary interview pathway for children – whereby children (and their parents) agree to attend for a police interview at a pre-agreed time – potentially reducing the need to be taken to a Police Station to be charged or arrested. This would be appropriate for 'lower level' , less serious

alleged offences where no forensic (or other) evidence would be required at the point of arrest or no threat to investigative integrity exists.

- Incremental improvements to the existing custody environment which could benefit children where it is deemed necessary for them to be arrested and detained. Some of these improvements have commenced in some parts of the existing police estate.

3.2 The PR/CE and Director of CYCJ recently met with the Assistant Chief Constable (Criminal Justice) of Police Scotland who has responsibility for custody arrangements in order to establish a plan of action the remainder of 2025/26.

4. Children's Hearings Joint Redesign Board

4.1 The eight meeting of the Redesign Board (SG/COSLA/Social Work Scotland/CHS/SCRA) took place in April. Three major pieces of project work were approved for progress by the Board in relation to:

- [The culture of the Children's Hearings system](#) – focussing on roles, responsibilities, rights, respect and best possible experience – Lead Agency is Social Work Scotland
- [Planning and preparing with children for their Hearing](#) – better support to maximise participation, relieve stress and support rights for all children coming to hearings – Lead Agency is Our Hearings Our Voice
- [Ensuring the right referrals for the right children at the right time](#) – ensuring consistent, proportionate approaches across all partners to maximise focus on the right children, improving system effectiveness – Lead Agency is SCRA
- A fourth project on effective use of data is currently being finalised and will be brought to the June Redesign Board for approval. A pipeline of next phase projects are also being explored by the inter-agency planning group which supports the Redesign Board
- All projects have direct alignment to the work of the Hearings System Working Group and/or the Hearings System Redesign Consultation process

5. Programme for Government

5.1 The Programme for Government (PfG) was launched on 6 May and covers the period up to the Scottish elections in May 2026. Whilst the PfG covers a wide range of child and young peoples related policy commitments (child poverty, child mental health, speech language and communication, early years development health checks etc.) the most directly impacting on SCRA and the wider Hearing system are:-

- Introduction of the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill to Parliament before the summer recess . This Bill will carry legislative proposals to keep The

Promise including the Future of Foster Care, Developing a Universal Definition of Care Experience, Children's Hearings Redesign and 'Moving On' from care into adulthood

- Scottish Government response to CYCJ's report on ['Re-imagining Secure Care'](#)
- Responding to the report of the task force of the [Independent Working Group on Anti-Social Behaviour](#)
- Expanding access to 'Whole Family Approach' services beyond the current test areas

6. SCRA Managers Event

6.1 Managers from across SCRA and Head Office met in one of our 6 monthly sessions aimed at ensuring coherent leadership across the whole organisation. The focus of the day was deliberately positive and forward looking after many years of similar sessions focusing on internal challenges, financial constraints and burgeoning demands on the workforce. On this occasion the day looked at

- SCRA's progress to becoming a trauma informed organisation – facilitated and supported by NHS Education Scotland. We now have a cadre of trained staff who are delivering the 'informed' level training to all SCRA staff and great progress is being made – which was acknowledged by NES.
 - The PR/CE attended his training in the Paisley (North Strathclyde) office. Staff had undertaken 2 online modules prior to the whole day event. The trainers were knowledgeable and skilled and carried off the session with real credibility. The feedback on the day was very constructive, the group was a mixed group of Support Administrators, Reporters, Assistant Reporters and managers.
- SCRA's change strategy – discussion on SCRA's recently approved change strategy and a look forward to comprehensive briefing materials which have been prepared to support manager prepare to deliver team-based sessions
- An introduction to the SCRA Digital Strategy and a practical workshop introducing managers to the AI tools now available to SCRA – many of whom were using the capabilities of Microsoft Co-Pilot for the first time. Feedback on this session was strong – with many managers reflecting that the session demystified AI and encouraged them to use some of the capabilities in the weeks following
- An update on SCRA Hearing Centre Design standards – which were reported on through the March CEO report to the Board.

SCRA Board
17th June 2025



Programme Update June 25

For: *information*

Executive Sponsor: Lisa Bennett, Head of Strategy

Author: Lisa Bennett, Head of Strategy

Executive Summary

Work across programmes in SCRA is broad –

Programme Protect is focussed on testing of various projects to develop evidence for change in pursuit of the direction the Target Operating Model Sets

Programme Care focussed on the external work of the Hearings Re-Design Group, planning towards introduction of a new Bill and working to prepare for implementation of the CCJA.

The programme office coordinates across these to ensure robust processes remain in place and joined working is evident across both programmes and their relationship to the Digital Programme – a key enabler to successful delivery overall.

Recommendation

SCRA's Board is invited to:

- Note updates, progress made and activity taken place in the previous quarter

Key Issues to be discussed/considered

Protect

Complex planning is underway to consider a national rollout of a number of changes that have been being tested together in a combined operational test.

Our commitment to evidence based change is being tested fully as data has been collected and analysis taking place to inform the decisions that we are making.

Care

CCJA timelines are still not confirmed however internal planning is underway to ensure that we are prepared – and commitment from Scottish Government around advance notice/lead in times has brought comfort to this process.

Hearings Re-Design

Work is picking up with approved workstreams underway and another group being proposed – to consider change outwith legislative process

Implications:

Service

Service wide

Financial

Within agreed budget

Workforce

Within agreed resources

Infrastructure including Digital

Within plans

Information Governance

N/A

Risk Assessment/Management

As reflected in operational/strategic Risk Registers

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

In support of the Corporate Objectives

- *The Best Experience*
- *Clear Communications*
- *The Best Service*
- *People who Care, Connect*

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process.

Further to evaluation it is noted:

Paper is not relevant to Equality & Diversity – reporting on approved plans

Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation

Programme Manager, Head of Practice and Policy

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Actions to deliver findings from Assurance Review

Appendix 2 – Target Operating Model Visual

Appendix 3 – Q&A provided to staff re TOM

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update the Board on the Programme Management work – its governance arrangements, the progress against plans and on our approach to change and transition.
- 1.2. Throughout this report the following acronyms will be used:
 - SPG – Strategic Programmes Board
 - PB – Programme Board
 - TOM – Target Operating Model
 - PPPA – Portfolio, Programmes and Project Assurance
 - KTP – Keeping the Promise

2. Governance and Oversight

2.1. Approvals and Reporting

- 2.2. Reporting for Programme Board is focussed on exception and high level objectives and programme approvals with everything else managed within programme meetings and, if required, Strategic Programmes Group aligned to set tolerances.

2.3. Programme Board (PB) met in March and made the following decisions:

- Approval of the Benefits Management Framework subject to continual review and update (to be run through the SPG)
- That it was appropriate for benefits to be detailed in the TOM
- Approval of the Assurance action plan in response to the finding of the external assurance review conducted in February 25 (attached)

- 2.4. In relation to **project proposals**, the Programme Board made the following decisions:

Project: Early Engagement on grounds -

- To approve extending the period of discovery by two months from date of approval.
- To approve the development in conjunction with SCRA's Practice Team, of a high-level practice framework for the provision of an acceptable parameter of prehearing engagement on grounds.
- To approve a reduction in the scope of case sampling.
- To approve exploring means of early engagement that are alternative to the D&G practices

2.5 **Strategic Programmes Group** met on 1st April and again on 27th May and made the following approvals/recommendations:

- That subject to a few tweaks around Language, a communications pack could be issued to the wider organisation containing a visual representation of the TOM, a Q&A and slide deck for managers to use in team meetings.
- To carry out a scenario planning exercise outlining options for the combined operational test rollout around CCJA implementation
- KTP Commitment Standards to be rolled into the Combined Operational Test for consideration of rollout.
- Referral patterns & planning and learning leads is a crucial piece of work and requires resourced - put early engagement on referrals and intake handling discovery on hold.
- Prepare a transition plan for the rollout of the combined operational test across all localities, considering the readiness and gap analysis of each area.
- Work with localities to assess their readiness for change and provide necessary training and support.
- Factor in the use of additional assistant reporters in the rollout plan, ensuring they are deployed where needed.

3. Programme Updates

3.1. Programme Protect

- 3.2. Following the update in March around the Combined operational test (COT) going live in Ayrshire and in South East and the mid-point data collection, work has continued in these areas and data continues to be collected. The full evaluation is due to be undertaken in July.
- 3.3. The main focus over the last two SPG meetings has been around consideration of implementation plans for a national rollout. Critical to this has been the consideration of the evidence base for change, the readiness for it and the external factors that we require to work around save any clashes i.e. CCJA implementation (dates yet to be confirmed)
- 3.4. Following discussion at the April meeting, the team were tasked to develop a full scenario plan for rollout – considering different options e.g. evolutionary vs big bang as well as options dependent upon CCJA. This included consideration of resourcing options – full wraparound support as per the test sights, or more handover to managers to roll out with lighter support (and a number of options in between)
- 3.5. A full day SPG was held in May and the morning dedicated to discussion around the above. The discussion led the group to develop the following recommendations to take to Programme Board in June (Note to Board – these have yet to go to PB for approval) –

- Child Friendly Scheduling - Recommendation that Locality-by-locality approach would be the preferred for rollout to avoid local processes being adopted.
- Wider issues were identified from court aspects of the combined project, in relation to preparation for court. This requires a further piece of work, to be taken to programme board.
- KTP Commitment Standards – recommendation to combine with CFS and re name to Child and Family Friendly Scheduling for further rollout
- Use a DICE matrix approach to how we are applying the decision making when considering rollout.
- Recommendation to roll CFS, KTP and National Approach to Scheduling and Arranging hearings as part of the Combined Project.
- For the Court aspects of the Combined Project, create a framework around a direction of travel and best practice rather than part of rollout of the Combined Project.
- Rollout plan to be updated to reflect discussion this need to dovetail into digital plan.

3.6. The second key piece of work that has been a focus for the SPG is that of benefits. A benefits manager is now in place and is working across the team to develop a set of materials for Programme Board and then for the wider staff group to describe the high level benefits, how we will measure them and when we can expect to realise these.

3.7. Benefits have been described, measures identified and data collected for each of the projects being undertaken – we are now looking to measure the cumulative impact of these.

3.8. **Programme Care -**

3.9. **Hearings Re-Design Planning Group**

As previously updated, the following workstreams were approved at the re- design Board to move forward into more detailed planning:

- Culture and principles in the hearings system
- Data and information
- Referrals
- Robust preparation phase for hearings

At the meeting in May, a paper was circulated to propose the consideration of an additional set of workstreams – to pick up on areas of policy not intended to be part of the proposed Bill, more areas that could fall under the remit of the Hearings Re-Design Board through development by the Planning Group.

The topics being:

- Babies and Infants
- Children on a CSO
- Language, Communication, and Grounds

The newly formed group considering Referrals has now met and PID has been

reviewed. SCRA's internal work on Referrals Patterns & Planning is feeding into the multiagency project.

The Hearings Re-Design Board meet again Jun 18th with the Minister in attendance to provide her an update on the work to date.

SCRA have provided updates to support this in relation to the multi-agency work taking place along with the work being carried out internally to support our own Change programme, that in turn will support the broader change programme ahead.

3.10. **CCJA**

With dates still not confirmed around implementation of the Act, and specifically around raising the age of referral it is difficult to fully prepare for implementation however internally we are looking to be in the best position possible for when we have more information.

Close working with Scottish Government ensures that SCRA are involved in the discussions taking place around this planning – the work being done with all of the partners to assess their readiness, the options planning around sequencing and implementation of the remaining sections of the Act.

SCRA have now established a project team and have a PID in place (approved by Alistair Hogg as SRO) with the some of the detail set out below:

3.11. **Aim / Vision for:**

Implementation of the Children (Care & Justice) Act 2024 ("CCJA") in SCRA.

The vision of the project is to ensure a coordinated and rigorous approach to CCJA delivery in SCRA.

Project Objectives

Coordinated approach

- Ensuring training and materials, including digital changes, are in place in sufficient time for implementation
- To manage dependencies to allow as smooth a transition as possible
- Effective use of additional resources
- Ensuring additional resources to the organisation are applied to best support the additional demand on the service
- Ensuring that lead times are managed so that

Change management

- Good staff experience of adopting changes
- To employ a change management approach to support a smooth transition of these changes to operational teams

Communications

- Clear information to staff

Partnership work

- SCRA's preparatory work is connected to the work of partners and there is good communication and mutual support around implementation

Desired Outcomes – Project Success Criteria (Outputs and measures)

- The relevant provisions of CCJA are implemented
- There was good collaboration across the organisation and a coordinated approach to implementation of CCJA
- Training, materials and digital changes were in place in sufficient time for implementation of CCJA
- The right resources were in place in sufficient time to support an increase in activity in operational work due to CCJA
- Staff experience a coordinated approach and a good experience of adopting the changes
- Staff were kept informed of the date of implementation, the specific changes impacting on SCRA and the approach being taken by the organisation to implementation
- There is good partnership work including communication and support around implementation

3.12. Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill (previously referred to as the 'Promise Bill')

As previously reported to the Board, ongoing discussions have been taking place with Scottish Government around the new Bill, likely to be introduced to Parliament this month (June 25).

SCRA have been involved in and providing data to support the Financial Memorandum that will accompany this.

4. Communication

4.1. A communications pack was developed and was published in May to all staff.

The Target Operating Model visual can be seen at Appendix 2 and Q&A provided to staff at Appendix 3 (for Board info.)

4.2. Ongoing face to face communication continues across the country with the change manager.

4.3. The next managers event is in September and we will be developing a session with the most up to date and relevant information that we have at that time around CCJA and the Re-Design for this.

5. Recommendation for the Board:

- To note updates, progress made and activity taken place in the previous quarter

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 (will need to zoom in!)

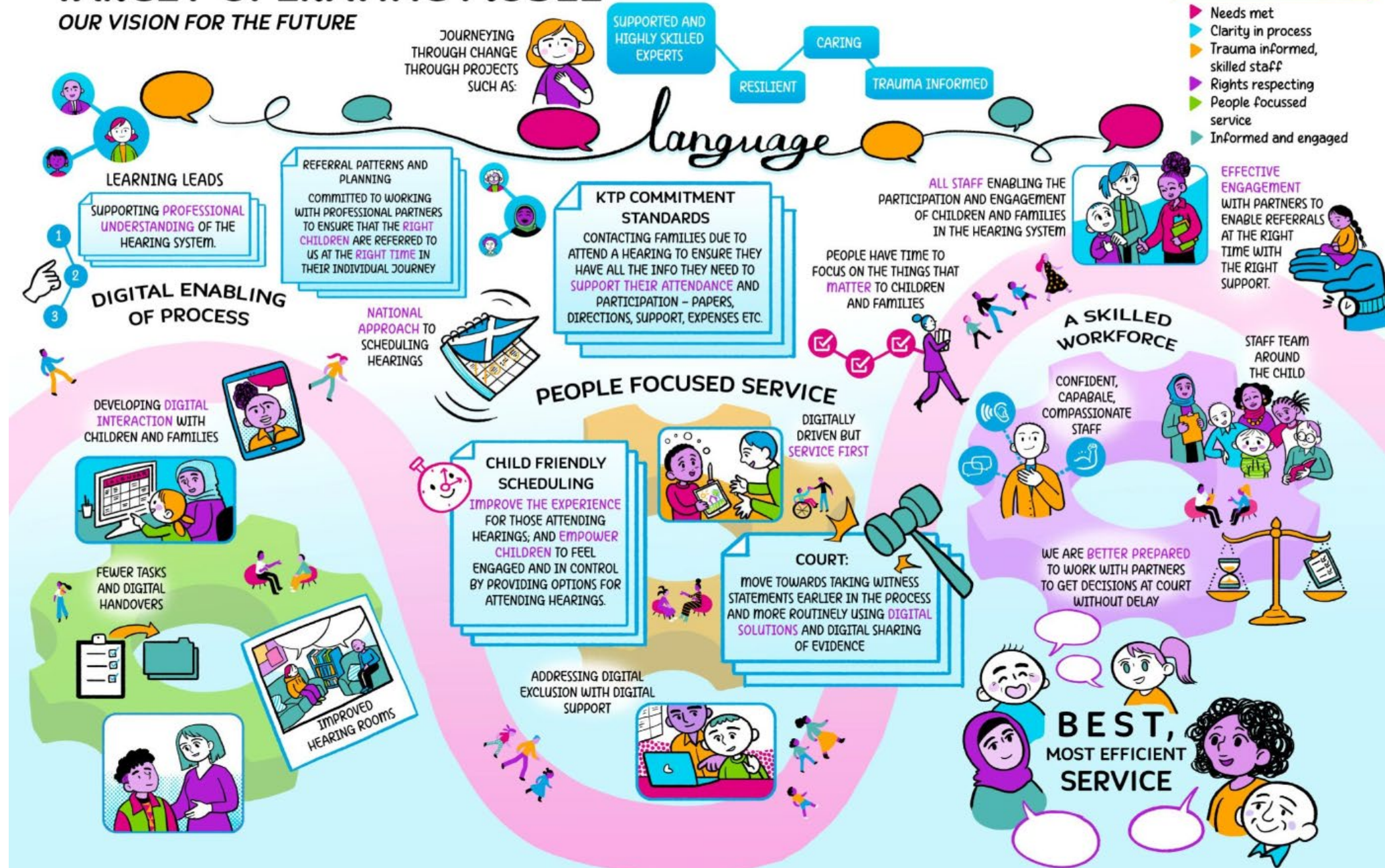
SCRA (Jun25) ITEM 10.3

Priori	Recommendation	Risk and Issue	Review Status	Classification	Rec. timescale	Rec. Owner	Rec. RAG status	Internal context notes / relevant action already underway	Action	Action	Responsible for action	Action Timescale	Action RAG status	Notes
1	The Benefits Manager and Business Change Manager role to be clarified and shared with the wider programme team	If this does not happen, the project teams and wider stakeholders will not be able to efficiently understand nor report on the benefits set out in the business case, ultimately ending up delivering the wrong solution	C	Roles & Responsibilities	Do now	Lisa	On track	People in the roles now. Have Operating Guidance that defines the roles that can be built upon with a focus on benefits.	1.1	Hold a Programme team workshop day to present material about the roles of Benefits Manager and BCM and how they connect to other programme roles, then work through some live examples that support learning and clarity as to roles as they are used in our context.	Roma	Mar-25	On track	Session scheduled for team on 4 March - Glasgow
									1.2	Develop a Benefits Roles & responsibilities document and RACI table to support understanding.	Roma	Mar-25	On track	
									1.3	Benefits Manager to access training on benefits management.	Joe	Jun-25	On track	Joe booked on Elite course for June 25
									1.4	Arrange a bespoke learning session on benefits management or cascade learning via Benefits Manager training to rest of team.	Roma	Jul-25	On track	See note of SPG on 03.02.25
									1.5	Use the combined operational test as a working example to develop a plan for how roles will be deployed to manage the different aspects of project management, change management and benefits management and then review.	Roma	Jul-25	On track	Considered by programme team at face to face team session on 4 March in Glasgow.
2	The PT to start devising communication and engagement plans to get all localities engaged and bring them on board to start testing of the TOM	Risk of significant delays into a) getting the users engaged early and obtaining their feedback and b) the preparation and onboarding of all localities into using the new ways of working as per TOM will not start on time.	C	Stakeholders	Do now	Helen	On track	Change communication plan is being built so there is an opportunity to develop a plan focused on engaging localities in the testing.	2.1	Map the baselines for localities as to the numbers they have in different roles and how those roles are deployed to inform a baseline across each locality prior to change.	Shona	Mar-25	On track	Shona developing this and is now almost complete.
									2.2	Create a visual showing the current project activity, timelines and localities involved in the testing that can be shared as a reference for localities and for the programme team as to who is involved in testing and where there are gaps.	Roma & Karen	Mar-25	Action Complete / Closed	This has been prepared and consulted on in programme team and is ready to be shared with localities through the best channels e.g. PPN / programme team newsletter being developed.
									2.3	Review benefits realisation plan with a view to generating the right pace for rollout of change including clarity about whether rollout must wait until the end of the planned testing period or could be started early. Link this to review period for combined operational test.	Shona	Mar-25	On track	
									2.4	Use locality planning process to set an objective for each locality to take on part of the testing towards the TOM.	Helen, Paul & Andrew	Apr-25	On track	Locality planning process started - PPN 19.02.25
									2.5	Develop a communication and engagement plan to engage localities in testing including how	Shona	Apr-25	On track	Change comms plan already underway. This could be developed as a feature of that.

Appendix 2

TARGET OPERATING MODEL

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE



Appendix 3

SCRA's Target Operating Model

Q&A

Version 1.2 (last updated 29.04.25)

Q. What is a Target Operating Model (TOM)?

A: A Target Operating Model (TOM) shows how our organisation will operate in the future. It outlines the structure and processes needed to achieve our strategic goals. Think of it as a roadmap guiding us towards a more efficient and effective way of working.

Q. Why is the TOM important for our organisation?

A: The TOM helps us focus our resources and efforts into the right things in line with our main goals and objectives. It supports everyone working towards the same goals and helps us improve. This supports our mission to deliver better services.

Q. How is the TOM developed?

A: We are developing the TOM by working with staff from all roles across the organisation. For example, we have used the feedback from Keeping the Promise staff engagement and webinars and the ideas generated from the Programme Protect workshops. We are gathering insights and feedback to make sure it reflects the realities of our day-to-day work and meets the needs of our organisation, staff, children, families and our partners. We are testing the ideas and will then review them to make sure things work well.

Q. Where have the ideas for the Target Operating Model come from?

A. The ideas for the Target Operating Model come from various sources:

- **Staff Engagement:** Workshops, webinars, and events where staff shared their insights.
- **Programme Protect Workshops:** Using service design methods to generate and refine ideas.
- **Exploration and Testing:** Some ideas have been explored further and tested in projects.
- **External Influences:** The Promise, corporate parenting duties, Hearings for Children report, Scottish Government response, policy, legislative environment, and digital developments.
- **Consultation:** Discussions with UNISON, Voice of Experience Reference Group (VOERG), managers, HR, Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV), Practice, Data & Quality, Property, and partners in the Children's Hearings System.

Q. How can we be sure that the Target Operating Model is being developed in an effective way?

A. The programme team has learnt a lot about developing Target Operating Models and that is shaping the way it is being approached. Learning has taken place in courses, as well as less formal learning during projects. We have also worked with project professionals and partners with experience of service design, who have given us an independent view of our approach. This has provided assurance and recommendations to further strengthen the way we are developing the TOM.

Q. Is the Target Operating Model just about efficiency?

A. No, the Target Operating Model is the future vision for the organisation. It is about both efficiency AND service improvement. Efficiency is part of the TOM to create some capacity so that we can work in improved ways, which includes corporate parenting, Keeping the Promise activity and relational working. In fact, the main reason for being efficient as an organisation is so that we can create capacity to do more of the quality and people focused work we have wanted to for some time.

Q. Why do we have to focus on efficiency? Should we not just focus on providing an improved service and Keeping the Promise?

A. Finance and resources for the public sector is currently challenging. Efficiency helps us use our resources better, reduce delays and creates capacity. This, in turn, supports an improved service and keeping our commitments, ensuring that children and families receive a timely and high-quality service. Efficiency and service improvement go hand-in-hand to achieve the best outcomes.

Q. Is the Target Operating Model an updated Standard Operating Model?

A. No. The Standard Operating Model sets out the detailed processes people follow in operational teams. The Target Operating Model is much wider than that. The SOM is primarily about CSAS case processing, whilst the TOM is a wider organisational vision. Process is one aspect of the Target Operating Model but it also covers things like property, digital, data and people. The standard operating model is designed as a set of instructions for people to follow. In contrast, the Target Operating Model is a programme management tool – a high level statement of the future vision for the organisation. It is not designed to be followed as instructions. It is designed to help us decide what changes we should make to get towards that vision.

Q. Now that the Target Operating Model has been drafted, will it be kept under review in case things change?

A. Yes, there are scheduled reviews for the Target Operating Model. This is so that it can be updated to take account of new information (such as future legislative change under the Children's Hearings redesign work). It will be very important to review it when key projects report their findings and evaluate the testing of new ways of working. The evidence gathered from these projects will support reviews of the TOM. That will help us to be clear about the future vision and changes.

Q. How will we know that the future vision will actually work for the organisation in practice?

A. We will not necessarily know this with absolute certainty. The aim of a Target Operating Model is to set a bold vision for the future so that we

can drive ourselves forward to improvement. The TOM will be subject to a continuous improvement approach with reviews so that we take account of new information. The approach is evidence-based and involves a staged approach to projects. This is so that we first of all generate ideas, then take the time to explore those further with people in the organisation feeding into and influencing that. For key changes, we test them and identify the expected benefits. We measure the impact using performance data, staff surveys, focus groups and qualitative assessments from the research team. This helps us understand if the changes are effective. Based on these evaluations, we may update the Target Operating Model to better meet our goals.

Q. How will the TOM affect my day-to-day work?

A: The TOM is designed to improve the way we work, so you will see changes in processes and systems over time. These changes are intended to make processes more efficient, to improve staff experience and enhance the service that we provide as an organisation. We will provide training and support to help you adapt to any new ways of working. An example of how the TOM is affecting day-to-day work already is in the localities testing the Keeping the Promise commitment standards. Staff testing this approach are reporting feeling upskilled by training, to support them to engage directly with families in advance of Hearings and report that this new approach is having a really positive impact on families.

Q. When will the TOM come into operation?

A. The nature of the TOM, as a document that guides our vision for the future, means that it is not a simple case of implementing at a certain point in time. Implementation of the TOM will look like gradual, incremental changes over a period of time.

Q. Is it true that the combined operational test project is about testing the Target Operating Model?

A. Yes, that is correct. The combined operational test (currently live in Ayrshire and South East localities) does not test the whole TOM, but it does test some of the key aspects. The Target Operating Model aims to deliver efficiency that creates capacity which can then be used to improve the way we provide our service so that we can Keep the Promise. The combined operational test includes testing of new processes that create efficiency (consistent approach to arranging of Hearings / witness liaison / Magic Notes tool to support transcription of witness statements) so that capacity can be used in improved ways of working (child friendly scheduling / witness statements). The combined operational testing is aimed at identifying if these different elements work together in the way we hope. This is absolutely about testing the ideas and aims of the TOM.

Q. I have found the concept of a Target Operating Model a bit difficult to engage with. Can you give me some examples of how it will work in practice in different roles in the organisation?

A. Yes, we acknowledge that the whole concept is a bit difficult to engage with at times. It has taken a lot of learning and reflection within the programme team to develop the knowledge and understanding of the Target Operating Model and how to develop it. Because it is a statement of the future vision for the organisation, that can make it feel a bit intangible for people. We can provide some examples of what it will mean in practice.

1. The combined operational test is testing how 4 projects operate together. The projects are child friendly scheduling, national approach to arranging Hearings, witness liaison and frontloading court preparation with routine preparation of witness statements. Some of the projects are focused on creating capacity and some require capacity. This project is testing the key aim of the Target Operating Model and the programme activity – that we can be efficient, create capacity and deploy that to providing quality of service. Within this project, the Magic Notes tool is also being tested to ascertain whether that can support efficient preparation of witness statements so that Reporters can focus on their court preparation.
2. The Keeping The Promise commitment standards project is testing approaches to offer greater support for relevant persons in advance of a Children's Hearing, such as signposting to representation and travel fares or directions to the Hearing centre. The project has been tested along with training for staff to support them in developing more front facing aspects of their role.
3. The concept in the Target Operating Model of digital being an enabler for our work can be illustrated by some examples too. Magic Notes referred to above is one example. Another is the development of digital sharing of information between our partners which will increase efficiency so that we can focus on the elements of the service that add value for children and families. Digital engagement for children and families is likely to be developed over time and could extend to child friendly scheduling, for example.

Q. Who is responsible for the TOM in the organisation?

A. Producing a Target Operating Model for the organisation was planned in [Programme Protect](#) – to set out how we can “spend less time on processing and more time on the decision making and things that benefit children and young people”. The [Programme Board](#) approves the Target Operating Model. The SRO (senior member of staff who is accountable for delivery of the TOM) is Paul Mulvanny. The Programme Manager is Roma Bruce Davies, who is responsible for drafting and reviewing the TOM. To really bring the Target Operating Model to life, so that it has the positive impact intended on staff, children, families and professionals, we are all responsible and we all have a part to play. This will happen gradually over time as we implement changes, learn and develop, engage with the process, influence the changes, and prepare to adapt to them.

Q. Can I still contribute to the development of the TOM?

A: Your input is invaluable! We encourage you to share your ideas and feedback during the development process. There will be opportunities for you to participate in workshops, surveys, and review sessions. Any participation in a project is an opportunity to influence the TOM. Your insights will help shape a TOM that works for everyone.

Q. What if I have concerns or queries about the TOM?

A: It's natural to have questions or concerns about changes. We are here to listen and address issues you may have. Please feel free to reach out to your manager or the [programme team](#) with your thoughts.

If you have any questions about the TOM please get in touch with the programme team and we will add your question along with the answer to this document so that other members of staff can benefit from the answer too.

In addition, there is a new [TOM section](#) on Connect which will be updated as the TOM develops.

SCRA Board Meeting

Tuesday 17 June 2025

Communications and Engagement Strategy

For: Approval

Report Classification: Open

Executive Sponsor: Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

Author: Maryanne McIntyre, Press and Communications Manager

Executive Summary

This is SCRA's new Communications and Engagement Strategy building on previous strategies and aligned with SCRA's Corporate Plan 2024-2027.

Our new Communications and Engagement Strategy aims to ensure SCRA continues to have an integrated and consistent approach to communications and engagement, and one that supports the organisations' vision and values.

Once approved and as per previous strategies, there will be an annual update to the Board on progress.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to approve the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Key issues to be discussed/considered

It is a time of change for SCRA and the wider Children's Hearings System, with policy, political and legal changes on the horizon. Externally we have the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill and The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. Internally we have development of the Target Operating Model, digital changes etc.

It is therefore critical that our Communications and Engagement Strategy supports the change agenda and ensures our communications are effective and efficient, both internally and externally.

Our communications need to be as proactive as possible, but we need to be prepared to react and respond if necessary.

Implications:

Service

Internally, effective communications will ensure our staff are well informed, engaged and prepared for change. Externally, effective communications will ensure children, young people and families are well informed and prepared for Hearings and with partners, will help enhance our reputation as an organisation.

Financial

This strategy is supported by the current Press and Communications Team budget. No additional funding is required.

Workforce

A successful communication strategy can have a positive impact on staff engagement, retention and performance. By ensuring clear, consistent, and timely communication, effective communications can foster a sense of belonging, and improve staff morale.

Infrastructure including Digital

This strategy can be implemented with no additional infrastructure.

Information Governance

N/A

Risk Assessment/Management

N/A

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

Our Communications and Engagement Strategy reaches across all of our Corporate Plan's three strategic aims Care, Connect and Protect. Sections 2 and 3 of the Communications and Engagement Strategy covers this in more detail.

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process.

Further to evaluation it is noted:

✓ Paper is not relevant to Equality & Diversity

Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation

Principal Reporter, Head of Strategy, UNISON Branch Secretary, Press and Communications Team, Staff Survey/communications-related surveys.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Communications and Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2 – Website and Social Media Analytics

Communications and Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Our new Communications and Engagement Strategy aims to ensure SCRA continues to have a dynamic, integrated and consistent approach to communications and engagement, and one that supports the organisations' vision and values.

The strategy is supported by a number of already agreed communication policies, including the Media Handling policy, Social Media policy, Website policy and Connect (staff intranet) policy.

The strategy is also supported by an action plan, as well as a detailed list of all our communication tools which will be used depending on the audience/message etc (please see Appendix 1 at the end of the strategy).

Once approved by the Board, there will be an annual update to the Board on progress.

Developing the strategy

The Communications and Engagement Strategy was drafted following a successful audit of Communications. Levels of design and reassurance were both substantial. The report by BDO noted "the controls surrounding communications are well designed and operating effectively" and "we are able to provide substantial assurance over both the design and operational effectiveness of communications controls in place."

Feedback from the 2024 Staff Survey around communications was also reviewed. We have experienced many years of steady growth in the ratings of internal communications. In the 2024 survey, there were small changes in peoples' ratings of their ability to stay connected in the organisation (+3pp), alongside time to read and digest communications (+1pp). However, we know there is still work to be done, particularly with the forthcoming changes mentioned earlier in this report.

In addition, feedback from other internal communication-related surveys was also considered. The survey which was issued to staff in advance of the Hearings for Children report being published, although carried out in 2023, was also helpful.

To help develop the new strategy, discussions were also held with a number of individuals in the organisation, including: the Principal Reporter/Chief Executive, Head of Strategy, UNISON Branch Steward, Planning and Performance Manager and the Press and Communications Team.

What's in the strategy?

The strategy has three key aims: Engagement, Communication and Accessibility. These three aims are supported by a number of objectives and actions. The strategy lists our

key audiences and includes a section on engagement with children and young people. It also contains information about internal and external communications. The strategy ends with information about all of our communication methods – from Connect, our new staff intranet site to our social media platforms and the different websites that we host and maintain.

Implementing the strategy

Although the strategy will be overseen by the Press and Communications Manager, supported by the Press and Communications Team, everyone in SCRA has a role to play.

To successfully implement the strategy, we will need to ensure: continued senior leadership support and visibility, ongoing effective two-way communication and clear ownership and accountability.

Evaluation and monitoring

Evaluating our Communications and Engagement Strategy is critical to understanding whether it met its objectives and how future efforts can be improved.

This strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually.

In addition, a variety of methods will be used to determine the level of success/effectiveness of our communications, including stakeholder feedback surveys, Connect analytics, hits to the website and social media analytics.



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Communications and Engagement Strategy



Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Alignment with the Corporate Plan	3
3.	Communication and Engagement Strategy aims	4
4.	Key audiences	4
5.	Engagement with children and young people	5
6.	Internal communications	5
7.	External communications	6
8.	Strategy Objectives	7
9.	Strategy Actions	8

Appendix 1 - Communication methods

1. Introduction

SCRA's Communications and Engagement Strategy demonstrates how we will deliver on **SCRA's Corporate Plan** and our values:

- Supportive - We work with kindness to support children, young people and families, our partners and each other.
- Child Centred - The rights and voice of 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

2. Alignment with the Corporate Plan

Our Communications and Engagement Strategy reaches across all of our Corporate Plan's three strategic aims:

The Best Experience - Care

We will influence and implement policy and practice that enables us to work in a way that is compassionate, rights based and inclusive.

Clear communications - Connect

Our systems, properties and communications will be designed to ensure safe interaction, clear understanding and be accessible to everyone who uses them.

The Best Service - Protect

Children and young people will have the most effective and efficient route through the Hearings System. Our services will be fair, inclusive and informed.

3. Communication and Engagement Strategy aims

We have three key aims:

- 1. Engagement:** Our communication platforms will be varied and informed by experience, and we will work with and engage with Hearings-experienced children and young people through effective and trauma-informed methods of participation, to ensure that our service is child-centred with the voice of children and young people being a visible influence and driver in terms of service provision.
- 2. Communication:** Through multiple and ever evolving communication platforms, we will ensure that we effectively connect with others – internally, and with external partners, children, young people and their families.

- 3. Accessibility:** We will ensure that the information that we provide is accessible, relevant and in a format that is appropriate to make sure that everyone in receipt of information is able to be as informed about the Children's Hearings process and our service as possible.

Our strategy aims are supported by a number of objectives and actions (**section 8 & 9**).

4. Key audiences

SCRA has a wide and varied audience. To ensure effective communication and engagement, we must use a flexible mix of communication methods, as children, young people and families have different information and communication needs to our partners and our staff.

SCRA's key audiences include;

- Children, young people and their parents/carers in the Hearings System
- All members of SCRA staff
- SCRA Board Members
- Children's Hearings Scotland staff and Panel Members
- Victims and vulnerable witnesses
- Scottish Government – Ministers, officials and elected members
- Partner organisations, such as Social Work Scotland, Police Scotland and Education Scotland
- Groups such as the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership and the Youth Justice Improvement Board
- The Promise Scotland
- Crown Office and Procurator Fiscals Service
- Health
- Our Hearings, Our Voice
- Local Champions Boards
- Voluntary organisations (Who Cares? Scotland, Barnardo's Scotland etc)
- Partnerships such as Stand Up For Siblings and the Community of Practice for Siblings
- Collaborative Corporate Parenting Network
- Participation Network
- UNISON
- Media – local and national
- Social media
- The general public
- Academics and researchers in children's services/child protection arena

5. Engagement with children and young people

Effective and meaningful engagement with the children and young people who are in contact with the Children's Hearings System is absolutely essential in ensuring that we

continue to improve, adapt and shape the way that we work to make the Children's Hearings System the best it can be for people that experience it. It is at the heart of this refreshed strategy and its supporting actions.

Working with our partners, SCRA hopes to deliver to children and young people a Children's Hearings System that feels designed for them – with options around how, where and when they attend their Hearings, how they choose to participate and what support they need to do that, what the centres look and feel like.

Children and young people will feel supported to take more control of how their Hearing is run and this will take partners and agencies to work effectively together through Keeping The Promise to make this happen.

We will continue to work with and strengthen partnerships with care experienced children and young people, from groups such as Our Hearings, Our Voice, local Champions Boards and organisations like Who Cares? Scotland, as well as SCRA's own care-experienced staff network, the Voice of Experience Reference Group.

6. Internal communications

SCRA has a large staff group based in offices and Hearing Centres across the country. Staff within SCRA cover a wide spectrum of roles, from those involved in the frontline delivery of the Reporter's service, to corporate functions such as human resources, finance and property.

SCRA continues to recognise the importance of internal communications in supporting the effective progress and development of the organisation.

In order to successfully implement an open, transparent and effective internal communications approach, it is important to understand the needs of staff and to appreciate there are differences in these needs, and plan communications to take account of them.

It is also important to recognise that internal communications are not always driven centrally and rightfully so - Localities and managers have a crucial role to play in achieving high quality internal communications. Two-way communication is vital to the success of this strategy and every member of staff has a role to play in making this happen.

Our internal communications must also be timely and appropriate to ensure maximum staff engagement and buy in. To achieve this, we will employ a number of internal methods (see Appendix 1 for a detailed list.)

7. External communications

As outlined in section 4 above, we have a large external audience, with a variety of different information and engagement needs. Therefore, we will continue to utilise a

number of communication methods to ensure maximum reach of our messages externally.

One of our most effective tools for reaching large numbers of people is our website. This routinely gets a lot of traffic. We continue to make improvements and refresh the content and review and respond to analytics on a routine basis.

Social media is also a key element of our communications and engagement approach. We actively use a number of popular platforms to reach a variety of different groups. We review our Social Media Handling Policy regularly to ensure it stays current and is meaningful for staff.

Traditional media – due to the continuing changing nature of the media landscape, we do not receive the same number of calls from the press. However, we do have an active media handling policy in place and this is supplemented by a joint media handling agreement with Children’s Hearings Scotland. Both of these are reviewed regularly.

More detail outlining all our external communication methods is available at Appendix 1.

8. Strategy Objectives

Our strategy will be delivered by a combination of our Press and Communications Team, EMT, Corporate Parenting & Participation Group, Inclusion Ambassadors, Neurodiversity Champions, as well as Localities at local level, but seeks to bring together a full picture of the communications, participation and engagement taking place across the organisation.

Our strategy objectives highlight how we will meet our aims:

Objectives	
1	We will work with the Senior Management team and Locality Management teams to promote an open and transparent engagement culture in SCRA aligned to organisational values.
2	We will work as a team to continually improve and strengthen internal communication.
3	We will provide Hearings and/or care experienced young people with salaried opportunities to work, learn and develop in safe, supported, trauma-informed environments within our service.
4	We will consult with and engage with Hearings-experienced young people employed within the service, as well as with external partners to develop new methods of communication.
5	We will work with children and young people, including Champions Boards, Our Hearings, Our Voice, Modern Apprentices, work experience placements, and other groups such as SCRA's Voice of Experience Reference Group, we will review and refine/improve the information that we provide.
6	We will continue to provide safe communication spaces and tools led by children and young people, including child-and-young-person-centred Hearing rooms, sensory spaces, toolkits/information for people with particular needs.
7	We will continue to ensure all our information materials are accessible and available in multiple formats.

9. Actions linked to our objectives in 2025/2026

We will...	Linked to objective
Organise an in person Staff Event in 2026.	1
Build and launch a new cloud-based staff intranet and continue to develop its new functionality.	2
Launch a new/interactive Team Brief making it more accessible and engaging for staff.	2
Identify a team/Locality to host and support a Modern Apprentice or work experience placement.	3
Launch phase 2 of child friendly scheduling which includes a scrapbook and magazine co-produced with Hearings-experienced young people.	4
Develop a brand for the Learning Hub and build a new, interactive learning section on our website for partners to access.	4
Work with young people and partners to review and improve our information materials around going to court and secure accommodation	5
Re-establish our Participation Group and rebrand it our Corporate Parenting & Participation Group	5
Review and refresh our Chloe and Billy storybooks for young children	5

Write and design witness information booklets for children and young people	5
Launch phase 2 of the Communi-crate communication toolkit for children and young people	6
Develop British Sign Language information around going to court	7
Explore the introduction of a chatbot on our website	7
Develop a cartoon jargon buster for children on our website	7

Appendix 1 - Communication methods

The following tools are used for internal and external communications. The list is reviewed and revised on a regular basis as new tools become available.

Internal communications:

Method	When	Comments
Connect	Daily	The home page of our staff intranet is updated on a daily basis (article of the day, news items, vacancies etc). Other sections are updated as and when required. A new cloud-based version of Connect was launched in the spring of 2025.
National Reporter	Twice a year	The staff e-zine is issued every six months to all staff and contains a round-up of staff news (fundraising etc) from around the country.
Team Brief	Every six weeks	This is issued every eight weeks (approx.) to all staff. It is followed by with usually three online sessions which are open to all staff.
Podcasts	Ad hoc	Used to key topics such as Change/Keeping The Promise etc.
In Touch	Fortnightly	This e-communication is issued every second Friday afternoon to staff on long term sick leave, maternity leave, secondment to other organisations etc. This is an opt in communication.
Consultations/ surveys	Ad hoc	As and when required.
Staff Survey	Annual	Usually every November (theme-based surveys are issued throughout the year such as training needs, health and wellbeing etc).

Campaigns	Ad hoc	Campaigns such as our Equalities Monitoring exercise (every November) and one off campaigns such as the 31 day mental health calendar or the year -long environmental awareness raising campaign are launched as and when required.
Team Meetings	Usually every 4-6 weeks	This is dependent on individual teams/Localities – best practice guidance is available for managers on Connect.
Staff Event	Biennial	In person and usually every 24 months
Locality/Head Office Development Days	Annual	Up to individual Localities, but usually annual and around the planning cycle.
Email communication	Regular basis	Emails are used to either communication and engage with a specific group, such as LRMs, Business Continuity Leads or all staff.
Networks and forums	Regular	Inputs to key groups such as the Corporate Parenting & Participation Group, Practice and Quality Network etc are utilised to communicate and engage on specific topics.
Corporate Style Guide	Updated as and when required	This guide ensures staff have access to all the communication templates, briefing sheets etc to ensure consistency in our communications. This was last refreshed with a new suite of templates in January 2025.
The Box	Staff can submit a suggestion at any time	SCRA's Staff Suggestion Scheme which allows staff to submit ideas on a variety of topics.

Branded communications	As and when required	We develop branded communications for specific subjects, such as the Digital Strategy, HR, Operational Development, Learning and Development etc.
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External communications:

SCRA's website	Updated regularly	This is one of our key tools to reach out to a wide external audience. The website is split into sections (children, young people etc). There is a dedicated Keeping The Promise section and BSL section. It also includes our online interactive statistical dashboard
ReciteMe	Ongoing	SCRA's website has Recite Me software which provides additional functionality to website visitors with different needs. The functionality includes: text to speech functionality, dyslexia software, an interactive dictionary, a translation tool with over 100 languages and it works across all devices. We regularly review the analytics to determine usage/popular functionality.
Facebook	Updated several times a week	This is used to communicate quickly with partners and promote job vacancies, new research etc. A number of staff also follow us on Facebook and is an additional way of reaching them.
Instagram	Updated several times a week	Launched in January 2018 to mark Year of Young People and to reach out to more young people
Linkedin	Updated when external jobs are advertised	Using it increasingly to promote general information, as well as vacancies.

Bluesky	Updated several times a week	We joined Bluesky in January 2025 and are slowly building up our followers.
Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership website	Updated as and when required	SCRA built and maintains this website on behalf of the CHIP. The site is aimed at partners in the Hearings System.
Corporate Parenting website	Updated as and when required	SCRA built and maintains this website which is joint with Children's Hearings Scotland and is aimed at Hearings-experienced children and young people.
Stand up for Siblings website	Updated as and when required	SCRA built and maintains this website on behalf of the SUFS partnership. It also contains a space for the Community of Practice for Siblings of which SCRA is a founding member.
Our Hearings, Our Voice website	Updated as and when required	SCRA built and maintains the website for Our Hearings, Our Voice aimed at children, young people and partners
Hearings advocacy website	Updated as and when required	SCRA designed and built the Hearings advocacy website for the Scottish Government and we continue to host and maintain it for them.
Youth Justice Improvement Board website	Updated as and when required	SCRA designed and built the Youth Justice Improvement Board website for the Scottish Government and we continue to host and maintain it for them.
Bairns' Hoose website	Updated as and when required	SCRA designed and built the Bairns' Hoose website for the Scottish Government and we continue to host and maintain it for them.
Glasgow Promise website	Updated as and when required	SCRA designed and built the Glasgow Promise website on behalf of the multi-agency partnership. We continue to host and maintain the website.

East and Midlothian Public Protection Committee website	Updated as and when required	SCRA designed and built the East and Midlothian Public Protection website on behalf of the public protection committee. We continue to host and maintain the website.
You Tube/Vimeo	As and when a new video becomes available	We use these platforms to promote our films and animations.
Podcasts	Ad hoc	Like their use internally, we use podcasts to get messages across on key topics and also to provide learning for our partners in a different format
Media	Ad hoc	<p>We do receive enquiries from the traditional press, but these tend to be focused on individual children. We have a media handling policy in place to deal with these (updated November 2024).</p> <p>We also have a media handling policy in place with Children's Hearings Scotland (updated February 2025).</p>
E-news	Quarterly	Our e-news is issued every three months to local and national partners and contains all our latest news and links to items with more detail on the working in partnership section of our website.
Emails	Regular	Emails are used to target specific groups to highlight information such as new research reports. Often branded emails with a visual are created to give an email more prominence.
Meetings	Regular	We utilise particular multi-agency groups to inform our partners of updates etc.

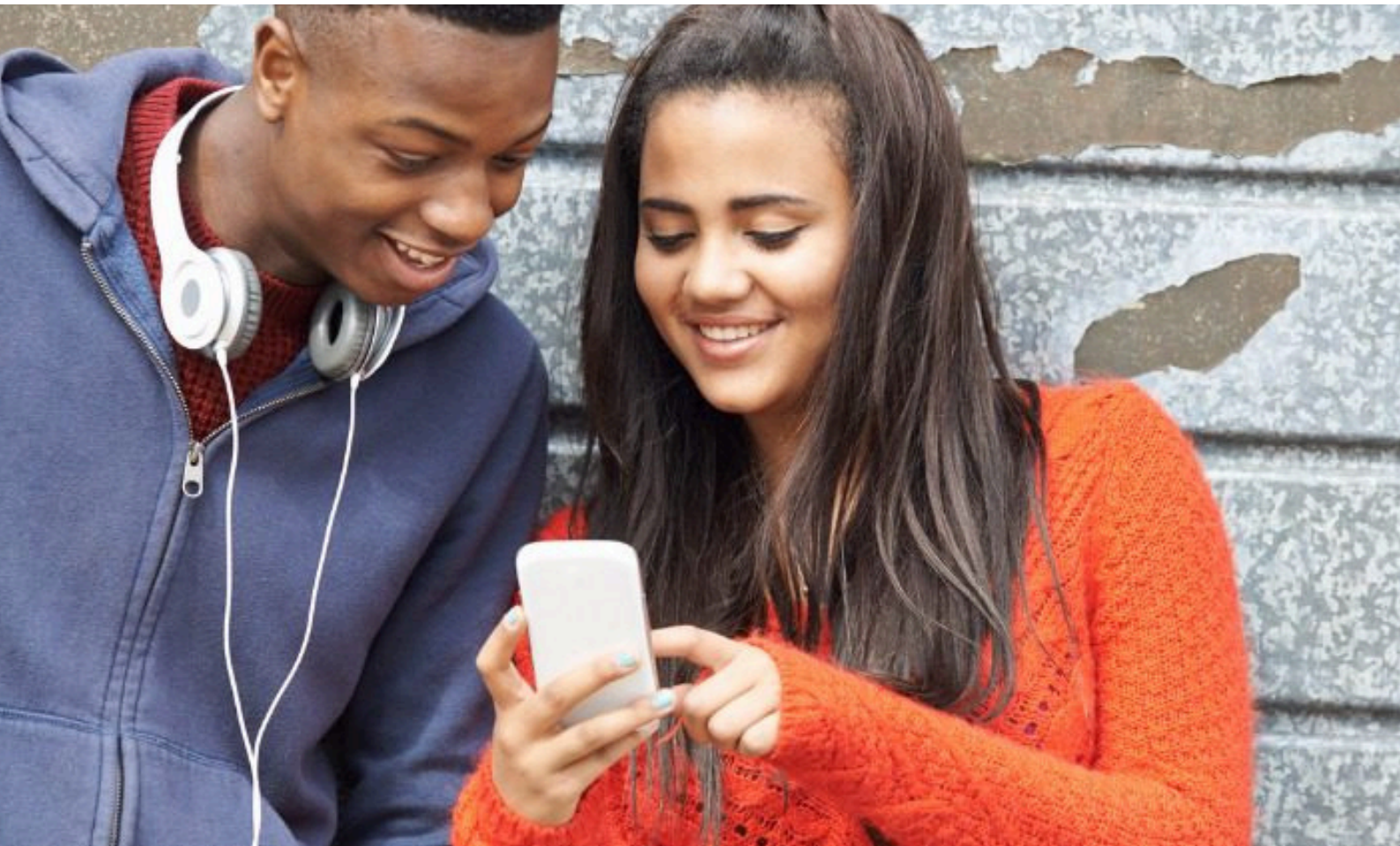
Information materials for children, young people and families	Updated/reviewed on a regular basis	<p>We have a suite of information materials, both online and in paper format (leaflets, posters, flyers, animations, videos and forms) to inform children, young people and families of going to a Hearing, their rights etc.</p> <p>We have several films for young people, podcasts and easy read material for parents/carers with learning difficulties (developed in conjunction with the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities and People First).</p>
British Sign Language	We continue to add to our BSL information	We have a dedicated British Sign Language (BSL) section on our website. This includes BSL videos with sub titles on key topics such as a walk-through of a Children's Hearings Centre. We also have a BSL video dictionary on our website. We work in partnership with organisations like the British Deaf Association (Scotland) on our BSL information.
Information stands at events	As and when required	We target specific events and conferences to promote the organisation and our information materials. We have a suite of marketing merchandise for these local and national events.
Briefing sheets	As and when required	These are used to communicate with key groups, to inform them of new developments such as Hearing room improvements, particular events etc.



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Social media and website analytics – overview

A key strand of our communications and engagement activity is a comprehensive social media strategy. We utilise all our platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and BlueSky) to reach target audiences. As well as helping raise awareness of SCRA and our work, our presence on social media also directs traffic to our website.

Here is an overview of social media activity and website analytics covering the period of the last 90 days.



social media content that performed well



New website
www.childprotection-resource-scotland.co.uk/

Facebook - 8,346 views



Galston Ladies Knitting Club
bears for children to take away
from our Hearings

Facebook - 1,783 views



Vacancies - We are Hiring 2 -
Children Reporters

Facebook - 3, 974 views



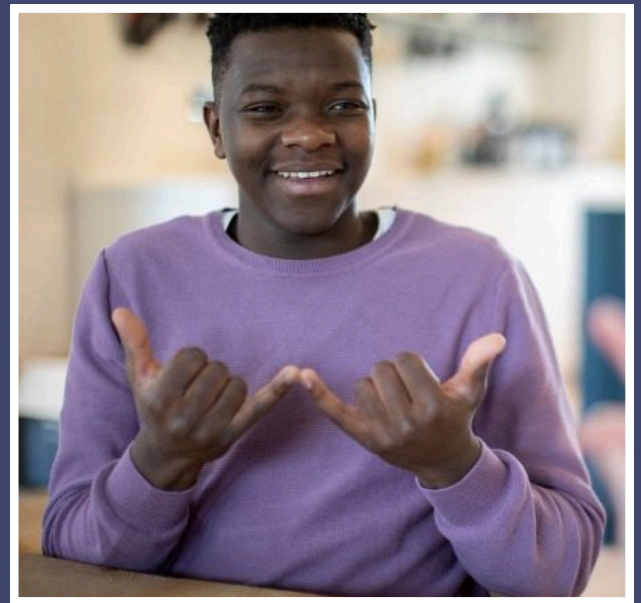
Neurodiversity Champions
have been sharing the most
popular sensory toys

Facebook - 989 views



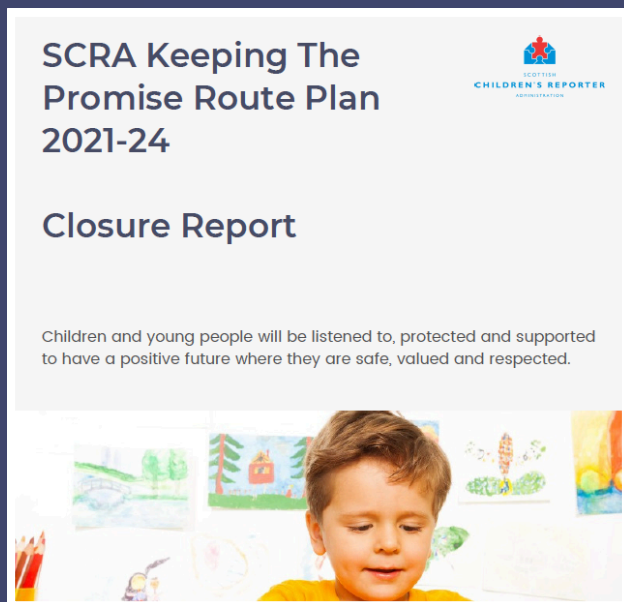
HR Assistant to support our HR team at our Head Office in Stirling

Linkedin - 1,020 impressions



New British Sign Language dictionary

Linkedin - 816 impressions



Keeping The Promise Route Plan 2021-2024.

Linkedin - 525 impressions



Hearing Centre design workshops

Linkedin - 480 views

Inspiring training session on Corporate Parenting with Who Cares Scotland



Dione from Who Cares? Scotland for an inspiring training session on Corporate Parenting in Glasgow.

Instagram - 180 views

On #NationalSiblingsDay we had another enlightening and informative session at the Community of Practice for Siblings this morning.

Bluesky - 75 views



Neurodiversity Champions have been sharing the most popular sensory toys

instagram - 140 views

PROUD TO SUPPORT  NATIONAL SIBLINGS DAY



#StandUpForSiblings

www.standupforsiblings.co.uk

On SCRA's website we had the following news articles that performed well:



Equalities reports published

150 views



Revised leaflet for parents/ carers

120 views



Marking World Autism Acceptance Month

80 views

On SCRA's website the following pages are popular

www.scra.gov.uk

13,450 views

Online statistical dashboard

4,756 views

Current Vacancies

10,560 views

Role of the Reporter

2,425 views

Office Locations

2,160 views

Compulsory Supervision Orders

1,889 views

Children

1,259 views

Young People

1,097 views

SCRA BOARD REPORT

17th June 2025

13.2 Influencing Report 1st June 2024 to 1st June 2025

Report Classification: Open

For: assurance and information

Executive Sponsor: Alistair Hogg, Head of Practice and Policy

Author: Melissa Hunt, Policy and Public Affairs Manager

Executive Summary

This is SCRA's annual report on the influencing work that takes place with Scottish and UK Governments in relation to statutory and other consultation exercises and the wider national influencing that occurs across the organisation.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to:

- Take reassurance from the breadth of the work
- Take reassurance that the content of the work, particularly the statutory work is in line with SCRA's mission, vision and strategic plans
- Acknowledge the breadth of the work and the focus of those involved

Key Issues to be discussed/considered

This report is for information. It is a narrative of the work that is done across the 12 preceding months in this area to make this visible and current for Board members.

Implications:

There may be implications beyond this report – if that is clear then they will be stated. However, implications may not be clear and are likely to be dependent on one or more areas of work which are not explicitly covered in this report.

Service

There may be impacts to our service delivery and where this is clear or anticipated then they will be included in this report. As above, such impacts may not be clear or anticipated and may evolve as part of ongoing work. When such impacts are recognised they should be captured and addressed as part of SCRA's ongoing approach to impact assessment across the organisation.

Financial

Any clear or anticipated financial impacts will be highlighted in this report. The nature of the work covered and the narrative approach of the report may mean that this is less likely to be relevant here, than in other reports.

Workforce

Any clear or anticipated workforce impacts will be highlighted in this report. The nature of the work covered and the narrative approach of the report may mean that this is less likely to be relevant here, than in other reports.

Infrastructure including Digital

Any clear or anticipated infrastructure impacts will be highlighted in this report. The nature of the work covered and the narrative approach of the report may mean that this is less likely to be relevant here, than in other reports.

Information Governance

There are no clear information governance issues or concerns with this report. The information narrated is information in the public domain – either through meeting or ongoing discussions or as a result of publication. It would be rare for sensitive information to be relevant to this report and if that did occur any sensitive information would be included in a separate appendix to the main body of the report.

Risk Assessment/Management

Any information in this report which should be addressed through the risk register will be highlighted. If this occurs then it will be raised with the Governance Officer and the Head of Practice and Policy and the Principal Reporter in advance of the Board considering this report.

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

This report is introduced through its links to the current Programme for Government; SCRA's strategic plans and through an evidence based approach, focused on relevant research.

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process. Human Rights legislation has also been considered.

Further to evaluation it is noted:

1. Paper is relevant to Equality & Diversity
2. Screening completed - no discrimination noted

3. Full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) completed This report does not require an EHRIA but one is completed in order to assess whether there are areas which require additional focus or mitigation. It is attached at Appendix 2. During 2024 / 2025 a new approach to impact assessment has been in development and there is now an approach which can be used in conjunction with statutory consultations, proposing reform which will have a direct, noticeable or fundamental impact on SCRA's work in the children's hearings system. In 2024 / 25 this Consultation Impact Assessment was used in relation to children's hearing redesign and is included at appendix 3.

Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation

This report is a collaborative endeavour. It requires Head Office and Senior Operational Managers and their staff to communicate their work, its influence and the influence they hope to have in the work going forward.

The Policy and Public Affairs Manager has written this report, supported by the Head of Practice and Policy and the Principal Reporter. Dr Catherine Nixon, SCRA's Research Manager has provided valuable help with the report introduction and staff across Head Office and relevant Operational Teams have provided input to the report section on wider engagement and influencing.

SCRA's responses to statutory consultation exercises are planned and delivered in a bespoke way – so that the people who require to be involved are proportionate to the ask of the consultation. Some consultations give the opportunity for everyone to be involved; others are more focused and specific. This should be evident from the content of the appended report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Influencing Report 2025	Link in agenda
Appendix 2 – Influencing Report EHRIA 2025	Link in agenda
Appendix 3 – EHRIA Consultation – Children's Hearings Redesign 2024	Link in agenda

SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER ADMINISTRATION

Influencing Report: 1st June 2024 to 1st June 2025

Table of Contents		
1	Introduction	2
2	Consultation Responses	6
3	Legislation	16
4	External and Wider Influencing Work	22

1	Introduction
1.1	<p>Report background - In March 2011, the Practice and Policy Team produced a report for the Board outlining the key areas where SCRA had been able to be influential and apply its professional expertise, data and research to particular issues at a national level. The report is now written annually. This is the twenty fifth Influencing Report and loosely covers the period 1st June 2024 to 1st June 2025.</p> <p>For the first time this year a version of this report is also being produced for Our Hearings, Our Voice – if they like the approach then it will be used going forward.</p> <p>Embedded documents are not included in the report – if there are documents or presentations or other items that you would like to see, please contact Melissa.Hunt@scra.gov.uk and I will be happy to provide them.</p>
1.2	<p>There are hyperlinks in this document - to external documents which may be of interest (including legislation and draft legislation) and to internal documents, published externally or internally. Some hyperlinks may be to web pages where there are multiple documents of potential interest.</p> <p>Where there are links to legislation these links are to a Bill or an Act, not to associated policy memoranda or regulations (unless these other documents are of specific interest).</p> <p>Where there is an area of policy that is likely to require SCRA consideration in the next 12 months that will be highlighted. If it is clear how SCRA will engage with the Policy area that will be included in the report, either as part of our assessment of legislation or as part of our wider engagement work. If thinking is still required or is ongoing that will be referenced in a footnote.</p>

[Programme for Government \(PfG\)](#) – The Scottish Government Programme for Government 2025 – 26 – **Building the Best Future for Scotland** was published on 6th May 2025. The 2025 PfG was published earlier than its usual September publication to allow a full year of delivery before the 2026 elections to the Scottish Parliament. There will be no PfG in September 2025.

The 4 main priorities for the Scottish Government continue to be:

- **Growing the Economy**
- **Eradicating Child Poverty**
(PfG page 20) – Keeping the Promise – care leavers payment will be introduced from 1st April 2026; the ‘Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill’ will be introduced; removing profit from the delivery of care; new vision for kinship care by the end of 2025 including allowance changes; responding to the [Reimagining Secure Care Report](#); Testing [Bairns’ Hoose](#); Establishing a National Social Work Agency. The action under ‘ensuring equality’ (page 21) is also relevant.
- **Tackling the Climate Emergency**
- **High Quality and Sustainable Public Services**
(PfG page 33) – [National Care Service Advisory Board](#) being established in May 2025; Implementing actions from [Module 1 of the UK Covid Inquiry](#) on resilience and preparedness; Publishing a service renewal framework for health and social care; focus on A-B-C’s (attainment, attendance, behaviour, curriculum) in education including a national campaign on attendance in Autumn 2025¹; Ministerial online safety taskforce². Ensuring a safer Scotland will occur through a focus on antisocial crimes and by suspending concessionary travel; ScotRail addressing antisocial behaviour on trains and at stations; responding to the Anti-Social behaviour Working Group Report³; implementing Year 3 of the [Violence Prevention framework](#); tackling retail crime⁴. There is also a focus on victims and witnesses – a pilot of specialist legal advice and a presumption that children under 16 should pre-record evidence; legislation will be passed (covered below); the [digital evidence sharing capability \(DESC\)](#) will continue to roll out; scoping of new specialised models of imprisonment for younger people; making roads safer⁵.

The planned Scottish Government strategy for Public Service Reform is set to be published in 2025 and will make clear the actions that will be taken to improve public services. This will involve consolidating public bodies and streamlining service delivery (PfG page 40)⁶.

¹ This may have an impact on referral practice and should be considered as part of ongoing work in relation to referrals by the Programme Team.

² This does not appear to have been established as of 21/05/2025 – but is likely to be something SCRA will want to take an active part in.

³ This renewed focus on antisocial behaviours and crimes may have an impact on referral practices and may require updated training / information / awareness raising for SCRA staff, if the [Antisocial Behaviour etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) is again to be a piece of legislation used by local authorities with children and their families.

⁴ As above – a national focus on combatting retail crime may have an impact on referral practice.

⁵ As above – a national focus on making roads safer may have an impact on referral practice.

⁶ SCRA and other bodies in the children’s hearings system has not been a focus of this work to date, but the spotlight of additional change legislation may also mean that we are looked at through the lens of public service reform as well. This is a risk and an opportunity and may need to be added to the risk register as such.

1.4	<p>SCRA's strategic plans – SCRA's policy work is embedded across our plans and imbued throughout the work. However, there are some areas of action / intention where policy is more front and centre.</p> <p>SCRA Corporate Plan 2024-2027</p> <p>The Best Experience – Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma based practice embedded in our service – our people, policy and practice. (page 12) • Recognition of the legal status that UNCRC now holds by ensuring we are trained and prepared to meet these requirements and be able to respond when required. (page 12) • 16 and 17 year olds coming to the Hearings System will be enabled to fully exercise their rights to attend, participate and access the support they require. (page 12) • Legislative proposals that have taken account of our views for the change that is needed to deliver a better system to children and young people. (page 12) <p>Clear communications – Connect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using evidence-based data and research to understand, inform and influence our operational delivery, our practice and the wider policy agenda.(Page 13) <p>The Best Service – Protect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mature partnerships and collective leadership in the Hearings System will continue to be nurtured to deliver meaningful improvements for the benefit of children, young people and families.(Page 14) <p>People who care, connect and protect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive 'one team' culture where people are encouraged to engage, innovate and lead together. (page 15) • Our people feeling valued, supported, skilled, and proud of the key role that they play. (page 15) <p>- Corporate Parenting Plan - 2024-2027</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More 16 and 17 year olds are referred to the Reporter providing them with the protection and support of the Children's Hearings System. (Page 5) <p>Rights, Inclusion and Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024–2027</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are empowered to be human rights defenders. (Page 2) • SCRA will use human rights/children's rights as a frame in our work. (Page 3) • SCRA staff across the organisation will be trauma informed and rights aware. SCRA staff will work in a compassionate, trauma informed and rights respecting way. (Page 3) • People who are affected by the work of SCRA will know what rights they have and what they can do if they feel like their rights have not been considered. (Page 4) • SCRA will have robust, evidence based and lived experience based approaches to difficult areas of work, where people's rights can be affected.(Page 5)
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1.5	<p>Research Evidence Base - The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration recognises the value, benefits and impact of research and evidence, and are committed to developing the evidence-based to inform child welfare and justice policies within Scotland.</p> <p>The approach to evidence-based policy adopted at SCRA is generated from a wide range of sources, including: the production of annual statistics; literature reviews; primary research undertaken with stakeholders within the children's hearings system, including children and families; practice experience; consultations undertaken with staff members on forthcoming changes to legislation; and participation work with hearings-experienced children.</p> <p>Through gathering evidence in all of these ways, we are able to better inform our policy and practice positions by triangulating the knowledge, experiences and skills of our Children's Reporters, with the experiences and preferences of children, families and partner agencies, and learning from the wider evidence base.</p>
1.6	<p>We have taken a decision to minimise publication of consultation responses across different online platforms. If an SCRA response will be published by Government or by a partner then we will not publish it as well.</p>
1.7	<p>Key messages from our consultation responses are disseminated internally within SCRA using an appropriate communication channel, determined by the Head of Practice and Policy and Public Affairs Manager, based on the content and engagement involved in any consultation exercise. Some consultation responses are more relevant to staff than others, and might become more relevant if they develop into new legislation or a new national policy approach.</p> <p>Every SCRA consultation response is produced following detailed planning about gathering necessary and relevant views in relation to the response, and following input from staff that is proportionate to the consultation.</p>

2	Consultation Responses
2.1	<u>Consultation on permanency of certain criminal justice measures from Coronavirus Recovery & Reform (Scotland) Act 2022 and modernising criminal justice procedures through digital processes</u>
2.1. a	<p><u>SCRA's Consultation Response</u></p> <p>SCRA's response was clear that our work is governed by the Children's (Hearings) Scotland Act 2011 and not the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 and that we would not comment on areas of the consultation which had no obvious consequential effect for us. We had some general comment in the widest sense around the participation of people in proceedings by electronic means:</p> <p>We provided a response around the proposal that digital evidence rather than an original item should be used in criminal cases; the criminal rules of evidence apply when SCRA are pursuing section 67 (2) (j) grounds for referral – that a child has committed an offence. We pointed out that the detailed rules of procedure in the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 do not apply to children's hearings court proceedings - therefore any amendments made to the 1995 Act will have no direct impact on the court proceedings we are involved in.</p> <p>If any proposed amendments are intended to apply to children's hearing court proceedings than additional legislative or regulation change will be required.</p> <p>SCRA also said that it is important to ensure that the modernisation in relation to digital productions envisaged, is also available in all children's hearings court proceedings. If further discussion is required to ensure that this is achieved without disproportionate regulation of those proceedings, then SCRA will be happy to be involved in those discussions.</p>

<p>2.1. b</p>	<p><u>Permanence of Coronavirus Recovery and Reform Act measures: consultation analysis</u></p> <p>In the feedback report for the consultation our response is explicitly recognised (page 7) <i>“There were also calls for proposals to be extended to the children’s hearing system, as the means by which many children who offend are dealt with”</i>.</p> <p>In relation to question 6 - Do you agree or disagree with the proposal that where an image is produced that it can be treated as if it was the item itself that was being produced? The report references the suggestion that the proposal should be applied to children’s hearing court proposals (page 25).</p> <p>On page 36 the report says: <i>“There was reference to digital exclusion being a more significant issue for specific groups such as children and families, and children in care.”</i></p> <p>And on page 39: <i>“It was noted that children who offend are more likely to be dealt with by the children’s hearing system, and wished to ensure that this system can also benefit from proposals intended to improve experience of justice processes.”</i></p> <p>On page 40: <i>“Digital exclusion was also seen as an important factor for the impact of proposals on socio-economic equality. Respondents noted that those affected by socioeconomic inequality, including in areas of deprivation, are more likely to lack access to the equipment, connectivity and skills/education necessary to properly engage with digital platforms. It was suggested that proposals could therefore limit access to justice for those experiencing socio-economic inequality.”</i></p>
<p>2.2</p>	<p><u>Children’s Hearing Redesign Consultation</u></p> <p>Following The Promise reports from the Independent Care review in 2020 and in response to the Hearing System Working Group Report, Hearings for Children and the Scottish Government detailed response, this consultation was developed.</p> <p>This Scottish Government consultation opened in July 2024 and closed on 28th October 2024.</p> <p>This consultation was an exercise where we tried to give every member of staff in SCRA an opportunity to feed into the response we developed as an organisation. SCRA’s Programme Protect and Operational Managers were able to facilitate in person events with staff across the country. SCRA managers were able to engage with the consultation at the Managers Event in September and SCRA Board Members also had a facilitated session on 25th October 2024.</p> <p>What staff said formed the basis for the response we submitted as an organisation.</p>
<p>2.2. a</p>	<p><u>Children’s hearings redesign – SCRA response</u></p> <p>This is a very lengthy and detailed consultation – and our response was also weighty. A summary version was prepared for staff and circulated. The response covers principles and referrals, grounds and legal members of the tribunal, relevant persons, panel members and decisions, the recording of hearings, child friendly summaries and miscellaneous questions as well.</p>

2.2. b	<p><u>Children's hearings redesign consultation analysis</u></p> <p>There were 105 responses to the consultation and 103 responses were analysed by academics at the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ). The analysis works through the 90 questions of the consultation and gives a largely balanced account of the different responses that were received. A discernible route forward from this consultation is not clear – and the Scottish Government response in terms of the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill outlined in the May 2025 Programme for Government will set out what has been taken and developed from the consultation.</p> <p>SCRA have been involved in conversations with Government during the development of the Bill, and whilst we have not seen the final provisions we are as satisfied as we can be that the Bill has been drafted in line with our organisational consultation response.</p> <p>Without question, the changes, if introduced, will be a significant reform of the children's hearings system and will require everyone to work in different ways. The experience of children and families should be an improved one. SCRA staff demonstrated throughout their engagement as part of the consultation process that they understand and support the changes, which puts us in a very good place to implement any new legislation that is developed.</p>
2.3	<p>Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Consultation – this was a Police Scotland Citizen Space survey – but the survey questions are no longer available online. The questions are clear from SCRA's response, below.</p>
2.3. a	<p>SCRA's response is available here:</p> <div data-bbox="248 1032 312 1099" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>SCRA Response to Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Consultation</p>
2.3. b	<p>Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-2027 is available in its different formats here - <u>Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27: Stakeholder Engagement Survey - Police Scotland - Citizen Space</u></p> <p>SCRA are very supportive of the approach which has been taken to the look / feel / tone of this corporate parenting plan. We supported a focus on communication in our response to Police Scotland and are pleased to see that Language and Training is a key focus.</p>

2.4	<p>'Moving on' from care into adulthood Consultation</p> <p>In addition to the children's hearings redesign consultation the Scottish Government issued a series of connected, issue focused consultations in the summer of 2024. 'Moving on from care' is one of these linked consultations.</p>
2.4. a	<p>'Moving on' from care into adulthood: SCRA's consultation response.</p> <p>SCRA took the view that 'moving on' isn't a one off, single event and that at different times any developing adult will need different supports to help them navigate the complexities of modern adult life. Replicating the supports of family through a state apparatus is very difficult and more might be gained from the types of information people may need at different stages of development. Barriers are present for children and these should be identified and addressed. Planning should evolve so that it is clear what a child needs, so that statutory and other services are no longer required. Such planning should focus on the goals, aspirations and skills of individual children.</p> <p>SCRA applied a wide definition to continuing care – which felt right, and we indicated that the changes of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 may need continuing care provisions / statute to be revisited, in order to work in the context of a raised age of referral to the Principal Reporter, on implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024.</p>

<p>2.4.</p> <p>b</p>	<p>The consultation analysis is available here. 69 written responses were received; 47 from organisations. The analysis of the responses quotes from SCRA, in relation to person centred support: <i>"It feels important to recognise that there isn't a defined line or age at which a child 'in' care no longer requires care. Replicating the support structures that exist within family is very difficult for 'state apparatus' though. It is probably more realistic and useful to think about the type of information people may need at different stages of life and have that available and easily accessible – including signposting to statutory services or the third sector who can provide in-person supports."</i> - Scottish Children's Reporter Administration" Page 13.</p> <p>In relation to support beyond transition to adult care: <i>"Moving on from care' is not a one off, single event. Any child developing into adulthood in 2024 will require different supports at different times in order to navigate the complexity of adult life. It feels important to recognise that there isn't a defined line or age at which a child 'in' care no longer requires care. This implies that there might need to be some lifelong support available, or potentially available, should a care experienced adult ever need additional supports."</i> – Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Page 14.</p> <p>SCRA is referenced on page 15, where our comments on waiting for the outcome or review of a compulsory supervision order can be a barrier to moving on.</p> <p>On page 25 we are referenced again and quoted in relation to continuing care: <i>"It might be that we are applying a wider definition to continuing care – and that we are interpreting it as continuing support to provide care. But this feels right. It seems to be now almost self-evident that a child moving from secure care to no care order may need additional supports; that a child who no longer has the option of remaining with carers requires additional or alternative supports and that if continuing care (in its current form) would be detrimental then a new plan / approach to care needs to be developed – and the new plan would require support."</i> - Scottish Children's Reporter Administration</p> <p>At the bottom of page 25 our view about clarification needed around age as a result of UNCRC is referenced.</p> <p>SCRA's view on page 37 is referenced - that speaking with people with lived experience is the way to approach new service design, and on page 39 our recommendation in relation to the definition of secure care and mental health wards for children and young people is given.</p> <p>In relation to with working with a young person to plan: <i>"It may be that young people in custodial settings have more difficulty in developing any future vision of self. This should be the starting point. Developing this vision may take some time."</i> - Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) (page 42)</p> <p>And on page 44, in relation to improved collaboration: <i>"This needs to be developed alongside service provisions within local authority social work departments. It could be that there is need for an additional transitional role between children's services / criminal justice / mental health / community social work – which takes elements across all disciplines for young people (where relevant) and can work accordingly. Or each current social work discipline is enhanced by specific training in relation to transition and overlap between the different social work specialisations."</i> - Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)".</p> <p>SCRA's modern apprenticeship scheme is mentioned on page 79 as an example of a public sector programme of best practice.</p>
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2.5	<u>Media reporting on child homicide victims: Consultation</u>
2.5. a	<p data-bbox="177 309 411 347"><u>SCRA response</u></p> <p data-bbox="177 376 1511 517">SCRA responded to this consultation by letter, rather than by the questions that were asked. After speaking to Children’s Reporters who had dealt with these circumstances and who spoke eloquently through the issues they raise, a letter was felt to be the best way to communicate what we wanted to say.</p> <p data-bbox="177 546 1511 719">When there is a child death in a family, the focus of Children’s Reporters is on surviving children (in the family or linked to the child who has died). Homicide investigations can take time – child protection procedures need to operate at speed. Statutory intervention in the form of a CSO may also be required for children who have caused harm. When a CSO is in place then there are measures to protect the privacy of that child. The prohibitions in place can be lifted – but very rarely are.</p> <p data-bbox="177 748 1511 952">However, social media has made a difference and local knowledge of an incident spreads. Civil or criminal proceedings can be difficult and can take some time. Media coverage can be hard. Media coverage can also be hard for professionals. This is about trauma and responding to trauma – and we need to be extraordinarily careful with people. Reporting makes a complicated situation even more complicated – any decisions should probably be made by a family – with there being a court role if family members do not agree.</p>
2.5. b	<p data-bbox="177 996 501 1034"><u>Consultation analysis</u></p> <p data-bbox="177 1064 1369 1102">All responses are used in the analysis of the consultation. 41 responses were published.</p> <p data-bbox="177 1131 1511 1205">There was a general split in the analysis between the views of media organisations and people who have been bereaved / victims organisations.</p> <p data-bbox="177 1234 1511 1512">SCRA’s response is quoted in the analysis on page 54 in relation to social media: <i>“Social media has made a difference. It is very difficult to police and it is instant. Information about something that has happened locally can now be circulated whilst an incident is happening – or whilst emergency services provide a response. With or without actual reporting local knowledge of an incident, particularly a serious incident will spread. Sometimes without mainstream reporting the detail of an incident can be distorted and can become the ‘truth’ that is heard by a community. This can also be very damaging and mainstream reporting might need to be used to quash or quell the rumour mill.”</i> - Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration</p>

2.6	<u>Future of Foster Care: consultation</u>
2.6. a	<p>SCRA Response has yet to be published online.</p> <p>SCRA responded by letter to the consultation team, rather than by responding to the consultation questions. We wanted to highlight two key things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Foster care will continue to be a valuable resource when statutory decisions are made by the children's hearing; 2) Statutory decisions do not require the agreement of the child or family. <p>We are unclear about how the ethos of flexible foster care will work within statutory decision making frameworks – particularly in how the approach is perceived by children and families.</p> <p>We were not sure about how section 25 arrangements will work and we were not sure how the movement between 'no order' and the need for a statutory order would work.</p> <p>We felt detailed impact assessment work would help the development of these policy proposals.</p>
2.6. b	Consultation analysis is yet to be published online.

2.7	<u>Criminal Justice Modernisation and Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill 2024</u> <p>This Bill was first posted on 24th September 2024 and is currently at committee stage 2. It is being considered by the Criminal Justice Committee. Consideration of the Bill is due to be completed by 4th April 2025.</p> <p>The Committee had a call for views, which ended on 10th January 2025.</p>
2.7. a	<p>SCRA wrote to the Bill team, rather than to the Committee. We felt that the information we wanted to pass on could be resolved by the Bill Team, but would be difficult to explain to Committee.</p> <p>Sections of the Bill are not expressly related to section 67(2)(j) grounds (offence grounds) in the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 – and could cause some procedural issues in relation to the use of evidence stored in the digital evidence sharing capability (DESC). A children's reporter may need to produce the 'evidence' rather than an image of the evidence stored in DESC – which would not be the same as the improvements being made to criminal proceedings.</p> <p>The deadline for lodging proposed amendment to the Bill is 5th June, and Stage 2 amendments will be considered by the Committee on 11th June 2025.</p>

2.8	<u>Developing a universal definition of care experience: consultation</u>
2.8. a	<p>SCRA Response has yet to be published online.</p> <p>SCRA responded to the consultation team by letter. We had specific information to highlight, which would not have been possible in response to the consultation questions.</p> <p>We were not sure whether a universal definition of care experience was possible – or desirable. Any definition would be for Scotland and would need to work for both children experiencing the ‘care system’ now – but also for adults who experienced it in the past.</p> <p>Any definition may have a limited value.</p> <p>SCRA’s position was that it is the supports which are available to people which are key – and the eligibility routes to such supports need to be clear, accessible and proportionate.</p> <p>In saying this we fully recognise the importance of language and of identity and agree that a working definition, alongside other language improvement work, could be helpful.</p>
2.8. b	Consultation analysis is yet to be published online.

2.9	<p>Equality (Race & Disability) Bill Mandatory pay gap Reporting Consultation</p> <p>This is a Westminster consultation, and relates to development of the Equality Act 2010. This is not a devolved power area.</p>
2.9.a	<p>The consultation closes at the beginning of June. SCRA's response is not available online yet.</p> <p>SCRA agrees that changes will be an improvement to our reporting – but more than that – the changes will start a process of significant and necessary change. We agree with the changes proposed throughout the consultation – but have commented that employee data needs to be provided in the context of more localised population data – there is no single expectation in relation to diversity (ethnicity or disability) which can work as a baseline measurement. Ethnicity and disability are not binary, there are different census categories as well as self identification and are therefore more complicated to report on. Mandatory reporting does not result in staff volunteering their information more readily. SCRA are not a large organisation and we are aware that the counts indicated in relation to 10 employees may result in us not reporting very much. However, we would need to look at our data in detail first.</p> <p>There is a lot for SCRA to consider in relation to data reach, accuracy and interpretation and the work we need to do as an organisation to improve our work in this area. These proposals broadly support the ambition we already have.</p>
2.10	<p>SCRA responded to an online survey as part of CivTech Challenge 10.7 (CivTech Challenge 10.7 – public participation in decision making – CivTech).</p> <p>SCRA commented on the current approach to gathering and analysing consultation responses and gave the view that a platform which could have wider use across the public sector could really enhance engagement and conversations with stakeholders in a very positive way.</p>

3	Legislation
3.1	<p>This section of the report covers legislation that is currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament as part of a live parliamentary process or legislation that has been agreed and is in the process of being implemented. Some Acts of the Scottish Parliament can take many years for full implementation to occur.</p> <p>SCRA are involved in legislation at all stages of the legislative process. We respond to requests from Parliamentary Committees for written evidence when these occur and we will also provide evidence in person to Committee. We also maintain dialogue with different Bill teams across Scottish Government, to ensure that our views are heard / position is clear and known - on areas of legislative change which will affect our work or the work across the children's hearing system. We can contact Bill teams formally but we also have more frequent and less formal conversations around areas of challenge or difficulty – to ensure that wicked and complex issues are fully understood and dealt with accordingly. These conversations occur throughout the process of developing legislation and will also occur during the implementation of any new Act.</p> <p>Our wider work in section 4 of this report will often be linked to legislation covered in this section. We have tried to ensure that where this is the case we have pointed out the links.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019</u></p> <p>This Act is in force and the report from the Age of Criminal Responsibility Advisory Group, on a further change to the Age was presented to parliament on 16th December 2024, after its 3 year review period. The report can be read here - The-Report-from-the-Age-of-Criminal-Responsibility-Advisory-Group-on-the-review-of-the-Age-of-Criminal-Responsibility-Scotland-1.pdf.</p> <p>Scottish Government now has a year to determine next steps in relation to the age.</p>
3.3	<p><u>The Children (Scotland) Act 2020</u></p> <p>There are provisions of the Act still to be implemented, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sections 1, 2, 3 in relation to child's views which covers the presumption that a child aged 12 or over is considered mature enough to give their views and ensures that younger children who are capable of forming a view and wish to give that view are able to do so. All children are to be supported to give their views in a manner they prefer. • Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 in relation to new special measures to protect vulnerable witnesses including allowing the court to prohibit a party to proceedings conducting their own case. • Section 16, 18, 19 factors to be considered in making a section 11 order, under the 1995 Children (Scotland) Act. • Section 20 in relation to explaining court decisions to a child. • Section 21 duty to ensure the availability of child advocacy services. • Section 22 failure to obey the order. • Section 28 conferral of parental rights if birth registered outside UK and Section 29 extension to Sheriff of enforcement powers. • Section 30 – Delay in proceedings likely to affect child's welfare. • Section 31 - review of child's ability to participate.

3.4	<p><u>The Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020</u></p> <p>Part of the Act commenced in stages on 10/12/2021 30/09/2024 03/03/2025 and 01/04/2025. There are sections still prospective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 71 on duration of scheme membership. • Section 72 on failure to apply for renewal of scheme membership. • Section 76 conditions imposed on scheme members under consideration for listing. • Section 81 removal of references by court. <p>As of 1st April 2025 information has been available in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the law says (Behaviour under the age of 12 and disclosure - mygov.scot) • How the law treats pre 12 behaviour now (How the law treats pre-12 behaviour now - mygov.scot) • How the review process works (How the review process works - mygov.scot) • Providing information to the Independent Reviewer (How to provide information to the independent reviewer - mygov.scot) <p>SCRA also issued an update practice note to Children's Reporters.</p>
3.5	<p><u>United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024</u></p> <p>The Act commenced on 16th July 2024, following scrutiny by the Supreme Court and amendment to the provisions. There are no prospective provisions to this piece of legislation.</p> <p>SCRA altered our approach to communication with children following receipt of a referral to give children the opportunity to provide their views on the decision to be made by the Children's Reporter (Article 12).</p>
3.6	<p><u>Prevention of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill</u></p> <p>This is a members bill from Pam Gosal, MSP, which was introduced on 07/-5/2025 and is intended to reduce incidents of domestic abuse in Scotland. The Bill has 4 main parts:</p> <p>Part 1 – notification requirements for domestic abuse offenders</p> <p>Part 2 – consideration of whether a person convicted of a domestic abuse offence is suitable for rehabilitation</p> <p>Part 3 – Requirement to ask for information from victims of domestic abuse.</p> <p>Part 4 – Requires Scottish Government and education authorities to educate about domestic abuse.</p> <p>It is at stage 1, and is being considered by the Criminal Justice Committee.</p> <p>SCRA have not commented on this Bill or engaged in discussion around its provisions, to date. We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>

3.7	<p>Disability Commissioner (Scotland) Bill</p> <p>This is a members bill from Jeremy Balfour, MSP and was introduced on 08/02/2024. It intends to establish a Disability Commissioner to promote and safeguard the rights of disabled people.</p> <p>The Bill is at stage 1 and is being considered by the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.</p> <p>SCRA have not commented on this Bill or engaged in discussion around its provisions, to date. We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>
3.8	<p>Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill</p> <p>This is a Government Bill and was introduced on 20/04/2023. Stage 3 ended on 20/05/2025 when the Bill was passed by Parliament with a vote of 88 for, 26 against, 0 abstentions and 14 did not vote. A final version of the Bill as passed is available here (Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill as passed).</p> <p>SCRA contacted Scottish Government by email on 30/06/2023 to indicate that we were not anticipating the legislation to have a direct impact on our work. If it was to become clearer that there is / was an impact then we would need to have further discussion and more time to fully consider our position and any action we may need to take. To date, we have not heard anything back. We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>
3.9	<p>Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill</p> <p>This is a members bill from Douglas Ross, MSP, introduced on 14/05/2024. It intends to provide a treatment determination and an appropriate treatment to people diagnosed with an addiction to alcohol or drugs. Treatment is to be made available within 3 weeks of any treatment determination.</p> <p>The bill is at stage 1 and is being considered by the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.</p> <p>SCRA have not commented on this Bill or engaged in discussion around its provisions, to date. We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>

3.10	<p><u>Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill</u></p> <p>This is a Government Bill that was introduced on 25/04/2023. The Bill is being considered by the Criminal Justice Committee. The Bill is in 6 parts:</p> <p>Part 1 – creates a Victims and Witnesses Commissioner for Scotland</p> <p>Part 2 – embeds trauma informed practice in civil and criminal courts</p> <p>Part 3 – increases special measures availability</p> <p>Part 4 – changes criminal jury size, rules re: majority verdicts and removes not proven</p> <p>Part 5 – creates new sexual offences court</p> <p>Part 6 – provides automatic lifelong anonymity for victims of sexual offences, automatic right to independent legal representation for complainers in sexual offence cases when application made to introduce character evidence, powers to pilot rape trials in front of a single judge.</p> <p>The Bill is at stage 3, and MSPs can currently submit amendments to the Bill. There is no current deadline for amendments as the Stage 3 meeting date has not yet been agreed.</p> <p>SCRA submitted a response to the Committee call for views at Stage 1 which can be read here: Response 40014021 to Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space.</p> <p>We agreed with the role of Victims Commissioner – and that any such Commissioner should look to expand their role across the children’s hearings system in the future. SCRA works with a variety of people who are ‘victims’ in a number of different situations and further discussion is therefore required for the value of a Commissioner’s role across the children’s hearings system to be maximised.</p> <p>We agreed with the definition of trauma informed practice and the development of special measures.</p> <p>We asked for any innovative court practice in relation to the sexual offences court to be transferable and adaptable to children’s hearings court proceedings.</p> <p>We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become further involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>
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3.11	<p><u>Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill</u></p> <p>This is a Members bill, from Sarah Boyack MSP, which was introduced to parliament on 27th March 2025. It sets out that public bodies must take account of the need to promote wellbeing and sustainable development in their work. It would also establish a 'Future Generations Commissioner' who would promote the wellbeing of future generations and sustainable development in decision making by all public bodies, support public bodies to work together and publish guidance.</p> <p>SCRA responded to consultation in advance of this Bill being drafted, and our consultation response is available here: Response 642117775 to Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill - Scottish Government consultations - Citizen Space.</p> <p>The consultation received 180 responses. SCRA's response is directly reflected in the full analysis on a number of occasions.</p> <p>In relation to whether a statutory definition is required: "This illustrates the difficulties with a statutory definition. Can a definition be found which works equally well for different situations and which has universal applicability and understanding. Consequently, regulation may be the best vehicle to provide definitions of wellbeing which link to context – and which take full account of the broad range of available wellbeing measures and indicators." Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, page 23.</p> <p>In relation to further consultation with stakeholders: "It would seem that some work on whether the definition of sustainable development as proposed would encompass the different uses of the term across legislation since devolution. If the definition proposed could provide an umbrella under which previous iterations of the concept or approach can continue to be affected, then that would make sense. If it cannot provide such an umbrella, then specific areas of prior legislation may need to be amended." Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, page 41.</p> <p>In relation to duties applying to Scottish Government: "this should be done 'in a way which is accessible for all the people of Scotland' (Scottish Children's Reporter Administration), page 69.</p> <p>In relation to not applying a duty to any organisation: "An alternative viewpoint is expressed by, for example, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, who say: "No, that would be for Government to determine based on an assessment of what will be needed in order for them to report accurately against the National Outcomes." Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, page 75.</p> <p>In relation to whether it is too early to tell whether additional resource may be required: "There may be resource and associated cost implications. However, we would want to make such assessment when the full detail of any change was clear." Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, page 97.</p> <p>We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become further involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>
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3.12	<p>The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill</p> <p>Prior to the conclusion of stage 2 proceedings on 04/03/2025 the Bill was referred to as the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. It was intended to establish a National Care Service. It is a Government Bill and was introduced on 22/06/2022.</p> <p>The Bill is now called the Care Reform (Scotland) Bill and is at stage 3. (following Stage 2 amendment). It can be read here: Care Reform (Scotland) Bill as amended at Stage 2.</p> <p>The key change from this Bill is the establishment of the National Chief Social Work Advisor and National Social Work Agency. We will keep a watching brief, to see if we need to become further involved or we need to communicate relevant changes to staff.</p>
3.13	<p>Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024</p> <p>SCRA has an ongoing collaborative project to manage implementation of this Act, as and when the implementation timetable is known.</p> <p>At the point of writing this information was not available, as Scottish Government have not made these decisions. SCRA has been clear with Government that we need a 9 month lead in time to any implementation date – as a result of a 3 month recruitment period, following a 6 month training period for new Children’s Reporter staff.</p>

4	External and wider influencing work		
4.1	<p>This section of the report covers the national wider multi-agency or partnership work that staff across SCRA are involved in. It does not cover multi-agency or partnership work at local or locality level. It is retrospective – but also looks ahead to SCRA's anticipated involvement in the work in the next 12 months. A broad range of work is covered and SCRA's influencing reach is substantial. In addition, the approach that SCRA is taking to programmes and change is increasingly maturing and has been the subject of successful audit and independent assurance activity. The rigorous approach and the commitment of resources to deliver change has had a positive impact and influence in terms of working with our partners at Scottish Government and other partners in the children's hearings system. The approach enhances the organisation's credibility when it comes to taking on change and influencing change.</p> <p>The table below is loosely in alphabetical order.</p>		
	Group and attendance	Impact / influence we have had	Anticipated impact / influence in the next 12 months
4.2	<p>ACR Advisory Group – attended by Alistair Hogg and Neill Mitchell</p> <p>ACR Operational Implications sub-group chaired by Neill Mitchell and also attended by Nicola Glass</p> <p><i>Catherine Nixon also attended the Data and Research subgroup and Paul the Victim Support subgroup</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaired the subgroup on operational implications ensuring the subgroup's report properly reflected issues relevant to us and the hearings system • As a subgroup chair, contributed to the drafting of the final report of the Advisory Group <p>Influenced the final report of the Advisory Group</p>	None as the Advisory Group's work concluded with the publication of its report in December
4.3	ACR Data and Research Subgroup	Contribution to evidence gathering for the ACR review through report on Children- aged-12-to-15-years- offending.pdf .	Addendums to this report being prepared on: 1) serious offences referred to the Reporter by 12-15 year olds; 2) balancing rights of children who harm and those who are harmed that will be available to Ministers for ACR review by end of 2025.
4.4	Alcohol & Drug Early Intervention with young People Working Group - Melissa Hunt, Policy & Public Affairs Manager	<p>This piece of work has been under the National Mission Plan: 2022-2026.</p> <p>Professionals and young people worked on developing these recommendations and standards – and the work was very personal to the Independent Chair, whose son sadly passed away in 2023.</p> <p>"The standards are designed to ensure every young person</p>	<p>Report – Drug and Alcohol – Standards and Recommendations of Treatment and Support for Young People is due to be published in Summer 2025.</p> <p>The standards and recommendations will then need to be considered, SCRA staff may need to be made aware and additional work</p>

		<p>has access to consistent and high quality treatment services when problems start to emerge, instead of when they are in crisis. The National Mission is underpinned by an outcomes framework which articulates the drivers to reduce death and harm.”</p> <p>The ambition is that the support provided to a young person to address drug or alcohol use is person-centred, free from stigma and joined-up. Given the possibility of a child having a ground of section 67(2) (k) (the child has misused alcohol) or (l) (the child has misused a drug (whether or not a controlled drug)) SCRA needs to consider what we can do in relation to these standards in our work.</p>	<p>may need to be done in order to make them ‘real’ in the context of our work.</p>
4.5	Bairns' Hoose Indicators - Working Group	<p>Being a ‘data link’ person to help co-produce national baseline data based around core indicators.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that there will be a functional consistent set of baseline indicators of data already collated that can be used in the evaluation phase of the project and to be used thereafter for all partners to assess strengths and gaps. Deadline: June 2026</p>
4.6	<p>Children’s Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference Group and working groups -</p> <p>Melissa Hunt, Policy & Public Affairs Manager and Jennifer Orren, Participation Lead and Maryanne McIntyre, Press & Communications Manager</p>	<p>SCRA have been involved for many years in this wider work, which began by looking at the way in which section 122 of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 could be introduced in a meaningful and effective way. This sector of the children’s hearings system workforce is vibrant and innovative and offers children a support which can work. SCRA works to ensure that the focus of the work is always within the ethos and legislative framework of the children’s hearing and associated legislation and that the approaches being taken</p>	<p>SCRA have developed materials for consideration by the network of advocacy providers, including a question and answer paper. These materials are still being reviewed prior to publication on the Children’s Hearings Advocacy website. We will continue to provide our data to the Advocacy ERG and to provide SCRA’s voice in working groups set up to consider wider communications / training or the provision of non instructed advocacy.</p>

		<p>are recognised by everyone and are consistent.</p> <p>We provide a regular data update to the group, which is being developed constantly in order to maximise the data we have and to be as useful as possible to the providers. Our report is also circulated around Chief Social Work Officers by Social Work Scotland, and is sent to our Locality Reporter Managers. If Board members would like to see a copy of this report, please ask Melissa.Hunt@scra.gov.uk.</p>	
4.7	Child Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy Group – Melissa Hunt, Policy & Public Affairs Manager	SCRA sits on this Scottish Government strategy group, to ensure that the unique ethos and approach of the children's hearings system is recognised across discussions as and when necessary.	SCRA's influence in this group is likely to increase across the next 12 months, as a result of renewed focus on the children's hearings system as a result of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, children's hearings redesign and the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill as well as the review of the age of criminal responsibility. There may also be a focus as a result of increased media coverage of violent crime involving children.
4.8	Children and counter terrorism group (informal group led by SG, involving COPFS and Police Scotland), Practice Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenced SG input to the UK Govt on the sections on Youth Diversion Orders for terrorism offences in the Crime and Policing Bill (and Explanatory Notes) ensuring they properly reflect the role of the Principal Reporter • Ensured the potential role of the Children's Hearings system in responding to minor terrorism related offences is understood by partners 	Limited as bill is nearly through parliament but likely to be ongoing meetings to coordinate response to children involved in terrorism offences
4.9	Children and Families National Leadership Group	The sub-group exists to strengthen the understanding	Anticipated impact/influence in the next 12 months : Providing

	– GIRFEC sub-group, Helen Etchells.	<p>and implementation of ‘Getting it right for every child’ (GIRFEC) across children’s services. The sub-group will work in partnership with the Scottish Government to lead and coordinate a programme of improvement activity which is integral to the consistent, high quality implementation of GIRFEC across children’s services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce development • Refreshed GIRFEC narrative • Leadership and culture • Review and evaluation <p>First meeting took place in 28 April 2025 and is anticipated to run until December 2026. The sub-group reports to the National Leadership Group.</p> <p>Impact/influence to date : Involved in agreeing TOR.</p>	expertise and insights from the point of view of SCRA and the Children’s Hearing System in contributing to the work of the sub-group.
4.10	Children’s Rights Implementation Group (CRIG), Practice team	Ensuring the position of the reporter and hearings system is properly understood and reflected in the group’s work	Ongoing
4.11	Children and young people affected by parental imprisonment advisory group - Melissa Hunt, Policy & Public Affairs Manager	SCRA’s research team published “Staying Connected: Care-experienced children and young people with a sibling in prison or secure care” by then SCRA researcher, Dr Kirsty Deacon in 2023. Since then we remain connected with this wider engagement work – looking at how the experience of children with a family member in custody can be improved.	SCRA’s involvement will be to cascade relevant information to staff as and when it becomes available and to consider what is relevant and necessary to communicate - and to whom – at various points. Much of the work is happening at more local levels – and as such there may be learning that local SCRA staff groups and partners can share with the rest of the organisation.
4.12	Court – proposal for collaborative improvement work with SCTS and judiciary	Work is in the early stages but there is an agreement in principle with partners at	It is hoped that a collaborative project will be initiated and that partnership work will

	<p>SCRA reps: Neil Hunter, Alistair Hogg and Helen Etchells (senior leadership stakeholder engagement)</p> <p>Roma Bruce Davies (Programme Manager)</p> <p>Katie Pacholek (Project Manager)</p> <p>Neill Mitchell, Practice Team</p>	<p>SCTS for collaborative work focused on improving management of children's hearings proof applications at court and avoiding delay.</p>	<p>continue in this area that can lead to tangible differences in the management of children's hearings applications to court.</p>
4.13	<p>Early engagement on grounds project</p> <p>Alan Mulrooney (Project Manager)</p> <p>Roma Bruce Davies (Programme Manager)</p> <p>Paul Mulvanny, SRO and Alistair Head of Practice & Policy</p>	<p>Project Manager has presented to the SG Redesign unit on the reasons why we are doing discovery work around early engagement (grounds) as well as some of the early findings around data and anecdotal observations from reporters. Offered to link in with SG when it comes to them developing policy around any statutory reference to reporter's engagement with child in eliciting views. Any statutory provision is likely to give the reporter wide discretion and maybe even be a framework provision, which has been influenced by the SCRA project approach offering reassurance.</p>	<p>Ongoing links with SG as to the developing legislation in this area and the connections with internal project activity.</p>
4.14	<p>Government Funded, VSS/Journey Associates led design process for SPOC for victims of children referred to the Children's Reporter, Research team</p>	<p>Able to bring detailed knowledge of how we currently provide information for Mapping As Is process and share insights from current research to influence design work.</p>	<p>Influence the design of a SPOC service as part of the implementation of the Children(Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024</p>
4.15	<p>Group led by Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland producing guides on good practice in permanence, Practice team</p>	<p>ensuring the position of the reporter and hearings system is properly understood and reflected in the group's work</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
4.16	<p>Hearings Scheduling partnership work with Children's Hearings Scotland</p> <p>SCRA reps: Jenny West, Project Manager</p>	<p>Working with CHS to look at ways to improve scheduling of hearings to support service provision to children and families and panel member capacity. Updating Hearings Management Guidance to</p>	<p>Work will continue with the rollout plan for the updated Hearings Management Guidance.</p>

	Roma Bruce Davies, Programme Manager Paul Mulvanny, SRO, Alistair Hogg, Head of Practice & Policy and Helen Etchells, Senior Operational Manager	reflect practice and technology developments. Influencing activity has focused on clarity about the constraints around scheduling including legal obligations and practical constraints. Influence has also included a focus on quality of service provision and the need to remain focused on the service that is provided to children and families.	
4.17	Lady Dorrian's Review - Governance Group , Paul Harkness	The review was into the management of sexual offences in Scotland but also contained several recommendations relating to the Children's Hearing System	Soft influencing role focused on raising the profile of our work and the children's hearings system when that is required. Information may need to be shared internally with the Head of Practice and Policy or with wider staff from this group.
4.18	National Youth Justice Advisory Group , Practice team	Contributing to the group's work in relation to children in conflict with the law	Ongoing
4.19	Prevent... Multi agency Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Paul Harkness	Police Scotland led multi agency group	Soft influencing role focused on raising the profile of our work and the children's hearings system when that is required. Information may need to be shared internally with the Head of Practice and Policy or with wider staff from this group.
4.20	SG's Restorative Justice Strategic Group , Practice team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring the position of the reporter and hearings system is properly understood and reflected in the group's work 	
4.21	JII Governance Group , Practice team	Providing reports on reporters' evaluations of JIIs to contribute to the roll-out and embedding of the SCIM for JIIs	None – group now replaced by new National Oversight Group attended by Alistair
4.23	Redesign Planning Group SCRA reps: Lisa Bennett and Roma Bruce Davies	Working with partners in the Redesign Planning Group to agree the workstreams for the multiagency improvement work that sits as part of the	SCRA is a trusted partner within the Redesign Planning Group (and the Redesign Board that sits above it in the governance structure), and it

	<p>Partners: Scottish Government, Children's Hearings Scotland, Social Work Scotland, COSLA.</p>	<p>overall work on the children's hearings system redesign.</p> <p>The workstreams agreed to date are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & Preparation for hearings • Referral Process • Data & Information • Culture • Children on a CSO <p>SCRA has influenced which workstreams have been selected by contributing knowledge of the priority areas of focus, informed by internal SCRA programme work and the wider context around the redesign. SCRA has also influenced the shape of the work to be carried out within the workstreams by being actively involved in the scoping group work and by drafting and revising Project Initiation Documents. SCRA's influence has been focused on encouraging progress and momentum with the redesign work, whilst supporting partners to navigate challenges and barriers.</p> <p>SCRA has also contributed data and work from internal discovery project work. SCRA contributed to the planning and resources within the project teams by allocating SCRA members of staff as representatives within the project teams.</p>	<p>is anticipated that SCRA will continue to influence the shape of the workstreams and the quality and progress of the outputs from the workstreams.</p>
4.24	<p>Referrals Project activity – Learning Leads & Enhanced Partnership model and Secondments to Police Paul Mulvanny, SRO plus senior leadership stakeholder management from Neil Hunter and Alistair Hogg Katy Lang (Project Manager)</p>	<p>Learning Leads project has engaged partners across the multiagency to develop a consistent approach to learning materials about the role of the reporter and the children's hearings system. The uptake has been considerable and therefore</p>	<p>Testing activity to continue to September and then be considered for extension beyond that initial period. Work is underway to finalise Learning Leads materials and to roll out in a virtual model to allow continued access to the</p>

	Roma Bruce Davies (Programme Manager)	<p>there is a demonstrable impact on the multiagency in terms of supporting learning. The influence is around aiming to make the approach to learning more consistent and to remove the burden of delivering training regularly from localities.</p> <p>The Referrals project is in the early days of testing the Enhanced Partnership Model with the multiagency which aims to support consistency of referral practice. Two Senior Practitioners are in post to test this enhanced way of working. SCRA has engaged with Police Scotland and secured agreement to testing a further new way of working – with 2 members of SCRA staff seconded over to Police Scotland to work with them on developing their approach to referral to the Reporter in terms of consistency and quality of information. SCRA has also proposed working with Police Scotland and Social Work to develop Blueprints around referrals to the Reporter to further enhance the clarity and consistency of approach. SCRA has connected the internal discovery work within this project and this blueprint activity to the wider work that is happening in the Redesign. This has enhanced the impact of SCRA as a key partner in shaping the Redesign activity and supporting progress and momentum with the work when other partners were facing challenges and barriers to progress.</p>	learning for partners on a rolling basis.
4.25	Referrals Project Manager (Katy Lang) work with the Scottish Curriculum review for social sciences and PHAL – Public Health Approach to Learning.	Curriculum Review - Social Sciences. SCRA is a member of the Critical Friends group to support the curriculum content of The Children's Hearing	Ongoing engagement with both groups and influencing through contributions and data.

		<p>System in Scottish Modern Studies.</p> <p>PHAL - Public Health Approach to Learning.</p> <p>SCRA have had initial meetings and intend to engage in the next iteration of the pilot, to share data supporting the multi-agency outcomes and service provision. Here's summary of PHAL project <i>"PHAL is a groundbreaking collaborative project in Scotland spearheaded by Public Health Scotland (PHS), Education Scotland (ES), and the Scottish Prevention Hub (SPH). Driven by the needs of our Headteachers and schools, its core objective is to enhance the health, well-being, and educational outcomes of children and young people (CYP) across the nation and reduce entry into the criminal justice system. Through its data led multi-agency collaborative leadership approach, PHAL highlights the importance of children and young people, education staff and schools as anchor institutions within our communities and a key focus for intervention. "</i></p>	
4.26	SCRA/SG/SAIDOT joint working group on use of AI within the Children's Hearings System	<p>Ongoing gathering of research and consultation evidence on the ethics, rights and legalities of using AI within the Children's Hearings System are directly fed into policy and practice relating to the use of ethical, transparent and inclusive AI within children's services. SCRA have played an active role in testing of tools designed to promote transparency of AI usage within the public sector, including early adoption of the AI register.</p>	<p>Sharing of public views on acceptable usage of AI within the children's hearings system should provide policy insights into how AI should be used and regulated within children's services.</p>

4.27	Scottish Contextual Safeguarding Core Group - Melissa Hunt, Policy & Public Affairs Manager	Contextual safeguarding is a developing area of academic study which is having a real and practical impact across service delivery. SCRA continue to sit on the core group, which is supported by Child Protection Committees Scotland.	A member of SCRA staff (Children's Reporter Kirsty Miguda-Scott) is due to attend a conference at Durham University in September. The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding will be launched at the conference. Kirsty is keen to bring back her learning to cascade across SCRA.
4.28	SG group on implementation of the provisions on FGM prevention orders in the Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Act 2020 , Practice team	Very new group so little done so far	ensuring the position of the reporter and hearings system is properly understood and reflected in the group's work
4.29	SLWG revising pre-trial therapy guidance , Practice team	Ensuring the position of the reporter and hearings system is properly understood and reflected in the group's work	Ongoing
4.30	Speech, Language and Communication Needs sub group - Melissa Hunt, Policy & Public Affairs Manager	SCRA sits on this sub group of the Children's Rights Implementation Group (CRIG) and the group meets quarterly, prior to the CRIG so it can feed into the CRIG discussions.	SCLN sits across all of the work in SCRA and needs consideration at all stages. It has been a key feature of our 'letters project' where the work of a speech and language specialist has been invaluable. Moving forward, it will continue to be a key focus for us around wider communications, online and other information provision and in our work on child friendly scheduling and materials which are designed to suit a child's preferences. SCLN will also be a feature of the work in and around Courts as the provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 are introduced.
4.31	Subgroup of Child Protection Committees Scotland in relation to neglect , Practice team	ensuring the position of the reporter and hearings system is properly understood and reflected in the group's work	Ongoing
4.32	Victim's Taskforce , Paul Harkness		This group is largely populated by and designed to improve

			<p>services within the Criminal Justice System. Nevertheless, since the needs of victims can be broadly similar regardless of whether it's the CJS or CHS, there are opportunities for learning for us by attendance. SCRA sometimes pick up on current thinking within and across agencies with whom we work. And we get the opportunity to highlight things that we think we do well.</p>
4.33	<p>Victims Taskforce – Improving Communications Working Group, Paul Harkness</p>		<p>This group is largely populated by and designed to improve services within the Criminal Justice System. Nevertheless, since the needs of victims can be broadly similar regardless of whether it's the CJS or CHS, there are opportunities for learning for us by attendance. SCRA sometimes pick up on current thinking within and across agencies with whom we work. And we get the opportunity to highlight things that we think we do well.</p>

Assessment of Impacts from the SCRA Influencing Report 24-25

Direct and Indirect Impacts

1. Staff and Workplace Dynamics:

- **Direct Impacts:** Introduction of new legislation (e.g., Children (Care and Justice) Scotland Act 2024) will require staff training in trauma-informed and rights-based practices. This will demand time and resources for onboarding and continuing professional development.
- **Indirect Impacts:** Greater involvement in multi-agency work and advocacy may elevate staff morale and professional development, but increased responsibilities could lead to workload stress. Co-ordination of the work can also become more difficult when more people are involved. It can be tricky to see cross overs and interdependencies and it can be easier for silo working to operate.

2. Children and Families:

- **Direct Impacts:** The implementation of child-friendly approaches in the hearings process and a focus on trauma-informed care aim to improve the experiences of children and families interacting with SCRA.
- **Indirect Impacts:** Enhanced data-driven decision-making and legislative reforms could foster better long-term outcomes for children and families by ensuring decisions are more inclusive and responsive to individual needs.

3. Partners and Wider Stakeholders:

- **Direct Impacts:** Partners such as social workers and police will see procedural changes in referrals and hearings, necessitating their adaptation.
- **Indirect Impacts:** Improved inter-agency collaboration can enhance overall service delivery and outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)

- A DPIA is likely required, particularly given the references to using data for evidence-based decisions and consultations. This is critical where personal and sensitive data (e.g., child protection cases) is involved.
 - Special considerations include:
 - Transparency in AI and data-driven tools being tested.
 - Compliance with the GDPR and children-specific safeguards under the UNCRC.
 - **DPIA will be considered for each separate area of work referenced – as and when that it required.**
-

Equality and Human Rights

1. Eliminating Discrimination:

- The focus on accessibility and equity (e.g., advocacy services for children with disabilities) supports the Equality Act 2010 aims.
- Training staff on equalities ensures non-discriminatory practices are consistently implemented.

2. Promoting Equality of Opportunity:

- Encouraging diverse participation in consultations and policy implementation strengthens inclusivity.
- Efforts to support care leavers and children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds align with this objective.

3. Fostering Good Relations:

- Collaborative projects such as Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) promote empathy and understanding between individuals from different backgrounds.
-

Children's and Human Rights

• Children's Rights:

- The incorporation of the UNCRC into legislation ensures that children's voices are respected in hearings and policy-making.

• Human Rights:

- Trauma-informed practices aim to respect dignity and rights, especially for children in conflict with the law or care systems.
-

Socio-Economic Disadvantage and Remote Communities

- Enhanced access to advocacy services and digital tools (e.g., hearings scheduling) aims to reduce geographic disparities.
 - Investment in outreach to remote communities will mitigate socio-economic barriers and ensure equitable service access.
-

Harm Reduction and Consumer Duty

- Focused efforts to reduce trauma through streamlined processes (e.g., pre-recorded evidence) exemplify harm-reduction principles.
 - Consumer duty ensures that children and families understand their rights and have accessible complaint mechanisms.
-

Environmental Impacts and Sustainability

- Digitalization of evidence and hearings processes reduces paper usage and carbon footprint.
 - Sustainability in operations (e.g., reducing travel by fostering virtual collaboration) can further the organization's environmental goals.
-

Recommendations for Mitigation

- **Negative Impacts on Staff:**
 - Implement mental health support and ensure balanced workloads.
- **Data Privacy Risks:**
 - Develop robust protocols for AI tools and digital data handling.
- **Access Inequalities:**
 - Allocate resources for outreach programs to ensure equity for rural and marginalized communities.
- **Environmental Sustainability:**
 - Integrate sustainability metrics into organizational reporting and decision-making.

This impact assessment does not require SRO sign off, as it is attached to a Board Paper which has already been signed off by the SRO (Alistair Hogg).

This impact assessment does not require an Action-Impact Log as there will be no action taken specifically as a result of this paper. Action will be taken as a result of the work set out in the paper (and the appropriate impact assessment for that work will be done).

Melissa Hunt

Policy & Public Affairs

9th June 2025



SCRA EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT: CONSULTATION

SCRA's EHRIA Consultation is used when SCRA are developing a consultation response which requires the organisation to take a position or stance on a proposed change.

- 1) It will allow different options to be weighed up and prioritised across different impact dimensions.
- 2) It will enable comparison with views gathered from staff or other engagement.
- 3) it will encourage alternative changes to be explained, and the rationale for an alternative suggestion will be clearly articulated.

SCRA's EHRIA Consultation requires consideration of:

- What change is suggested and how this will impact SCRA staff (equalities, rights and wellbeing); children & families impacted by our work (consumer duty, equalities, rights and wellbeing); professional partners in the children's hearing (equalities, rights and wellbeing); islands and remote areas; socio-economic disadvantage (fairer Scotland duty).
- How SCRA would rank suggested changes.
- How impact assessment can add to engagement information to help SCRA land on an organisational position.
- What other alternatives are there for a change?

The outcomes of this EHRIA Consultation can be included in a consultation response from SCRA, to help inform any subsequent impact assessment work by Scottish Government or other body who has gone to public consultation.

Please email the completed EHRIA Consultation and a link to the relevant consultation to:

equalities@scra.gov.uk.

Name of work requiring EHRIA CONSULTATION:	
Completed by:	Children's Hearings Redesign Consultation 2024
Brief explanation of the work:	Scottish Government consultation on possible ways to redesign the children's hearings system in the context of the Hearings for children – Report of Sheriff Mackie from the Hearing System Working group and The Promise (report from the Independent Care Review). Specific areas of the proposed redesign are the focus of this impact assessment, to assist SCRA with developing a formal organisational position in relation to the consultation.

SWOT - Referrals

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

- Earlier discussion can lead to more understanding and more certainty about the plans for a child.
- Could be kinder?
- Earlier discussion can lead to earlier supports being in place for a family.
- Focus on referral criteria can get the right referrals at the right time.
- Reporter can have the right information and can have grounds / reasons drafted.
- Altering referral criteria could be easier for families. Would need to be carried through to criteria for intervention though as well.
- Not entirely clear what can change without legislation. More to be done on this – Hearing System Modernisation Strategy (like [Family Justice Modernisation Strategy - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)) could work well.
- Meeting w decision maker and family prior to decision can help explain process and expectations – family would need support.
- Quicker route to permanent care when needed?
- Changing the referral criteria could be clearer for children and families. Could also be clearer for professionals and could get LAs to focus on why and when to refer.
- Could speed up the process.
- Plan for a child is developed pre-birth – this would just put the plan into operation before the child is born.
- Could support an approach to adoption or permanent care where a Mum recognises wish to have child adopted early and is supported to make choices about how that should happen.
- It would allow clarity over concerns to be voiced from a very early stage.

WEAKNESSES & THREATS

- Could be seen by the family as a 'done deal'. Could increase risks during the last stage of pregnancy and could add to stress / trauma for Mum and family and be detrimental to unborn child as a result.
- Could be cruel and add to trauma. What do pregnant women with social work involvement think of this approach?
- Could mean that ideas about the capacity of a family to change become fixed in the minds of professionals.
- Once referral is made work could stop, waiting for decision in the children's hearing.
- Could inadvertently disadvantage some parents (those with addiction issues / mental health issues / learning difficulties / isolated parents or young parents with care experience).
- Difficult to explain to other children in the family.
- Could be difficult to maintain familial relationships if a child is not 'claimed' by birth family.
- In terms of fairness and proportionality this could become unfair and disproportionate very quickly. Its all a bit 'Minority Report' (Tom Cruise film) – none of us can predict the future and a state intervention that actually acts on the back of an educated guess is unlikely to be widely welcomed.
- UNCRC article 7 breach – but arguably a whole load of others as well.
- ECHR article 8 breach?
- Seems focussed on process rather than on experience – evidence for this being an improved experience for a family? A lot more work needs to be done with citizen panels to demonstrate this.
- Many improvements could be made without changing the law – reporter can already attend a pre birth planning meeting, if it is recognised that this would be helpful. LAs can speak with reporters in advance of referral to help develop their plans.
- Reporter involvement at an earlier stage could alter planning and affect decision making.

SWOT – Legal Member

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

- Streamlines decision making without stress of court.
- Avoids court. Easier for proceedings to be 'child friendly'.
- Encourages discussion.
- Could bring more consistency – same legal member seeing same family.
- Could have additional powers in advance of a hearing – around information rights, attendance rights (and mode of attendance) around additional people (Safeguarders / specialist report writers) and could get this in place ahead of any hearing.
- May be quicker – although statute may be needed to determine timescales as issues that currently affect court disposal in some cases may still be present – ie. complexity of evidence, parallel proceedings, time needed to negotiate, families not engaging.
- Would possibly be cheaper. But may not be – training and skill will need to be the same as or similar to a sheriff.
- Opportunities for more roles in CH - administration around the legal member will be required.
- SCTS involvement in the CH becomes much more limited.

WEAKNESSES & THREATS

- 'Poundland' sheriff could be seen as less important.
- Difficult to ensure that a legal member has the skills required.
- Difficult to ensure the gravitas of the decision making.
- Could be easily out manoeuvred by Counsel appearing in proof applications.
- Would still appeal decisions from the legal member to the sheriff – so actually adds in a layer of complexity.
- Adds a tier to the children's hearings tribunal – legal member wouldn't sit on a children's hearing BUT the children's hearing may require a legal / specialist / lay member to sit.
- Difficult for victims of offending by older children to experience a proof process which looks like it is minimising their experience / trauma.
- Different role doesn't necessarily encourage a different approach.
- Won't necessarily bring consistency & in any event, difficult to know what consistency means for this aspect of decision making.
- The legal member doesn't fit with the children's panel and the composition of that. It feels like an additional layer or even a separate tribunal. Difficult to see how the key Kilbrandon ethos of separating out the adjudication of fact from decision making can be maintained in this model. It can't. Role of National Convenor could be conflicted and challenged as a result.
- Additional people require additional training and support. This could be very costly and also duplicate training required for panel members – if a legal member is also required on the panel.
- This doesn't make the children's hearings system more serious, or give it gravitas. It reduced seriousness and the approach could make everything seem less important. If the legal member sits in a children's hearings centre the difference between different decision making could be totally lost on children and families.
- V poor optics for victims and people who have experienced harm caused by children.

SWOT – Grounds

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

- It's a smaller number of areas for intervention.
- It is quite generic.
- It fits well across other work in children's services and can be understood by professionals working with children and families.
- It is already used by reporters as part of decision making.
- Current s67 grounds could possibly be framed within the overarching context of SHANARRI.
- Real 'new' start – redesigning entry to a 'system' means the rest of the system needs to adapt as a result. Is this likely to bring about the biggest change in the experience of children and families?
- Review of grounds if not established within certain time – focus on timely decision making.
- SHANARRI gives opportunity for the ROGON Tool to be adopted and used more widely.
- S67 is clunky and complex – can be the sticking block for families understanding the reasons for the intervention of the children's hearing.
- 'Grounds' is not just about the s67 ground or statements of fact. Its also about the information families get and the support they get in the process.
- Grounds don't need primary legislation to change.
- May not be s67 that needs to change – but the process around it.
- Discussion in advance may help at the hearing – other alterations (like written responses) could also help.
- Check of grounds may / may not always be needed. However, repercussions of CH decision making may always be v serious. Check / ratification should be built in. CH could issue interim order which checking decision maker could convert to a full order OR issue again as an interim for further discussion @ CH w a note? Depends on grounds / reasons having evidence submitted w them though.

WEAKNESSES & THREATS

- Not every unwell child will need a CH, for example.
- Some of the areas of SHANARRI are much more difficult to capture and actually require a comparator to make any sense – achieving / respected / included (for example) all need a context and an expectation. The expectation makes decision making more subjective.
- Children and families may not really understand SHANARRI or apply it to their situation.
- Difficult to use a model developed for 1 purpose for another purpose – as it could undermine both. Focus of SHANARRI is on improvement for children – not on state intervention which could lead to permanent care away from birth family.
- Current s67 grounds could also be framed within the over arching context of other things – like UNCRC – SHANARRI doesn't present a unique solution.
- Lack of specificity. Too general and too low a test.
- Loss of case law.
- Misuse of ROGON Tool – which is perhaps best used over time to assess risk and changes in risk – as it should be filled in by children, adults and professionals and a final position about risk reached for a child, compared to a previous position.
- Loss of case law could result in more litigious approach, rather than less – as new tests need to be developed and new thresholds need to be understood.
- Focus on s67 grounds could mean that other areas are not prioritised for improvement – when it could be the other areas that make all the difference.
- Simple changes could be made to s67 (using available AI tools to re-write them, for example) which could provide the improvements needed without the other threats coming into play.
- Risk associated w focus on timely decision making – if decision not made then grounds could fall, leaving child at greater risk.

SWOT – Panel Composition

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

- 'Professionalising' the panel by introducing expertise and a payment for the work could improve quality of the work and could mean that training has to be done to a certain standard.
- Brings CH in line with other Scottish Tribunals (MH tribunal has a legal convening member, a medical member and a general member - for example – who have part time public appointments – it also has a list of sheriffs who have had additional training to convene hearings for a CORO Compulsion Order and Restriction Order. MH Tribunal Hearings scheduled for ½ a day. If decision can't be made on the day an interim order can be issued for up to 28 days? Applications to MH tribunal 22/23 5314 applications made and 6195 hearings held).
- Streamlines decision making if some decisions don't need 3 people – need to decide which decisions are for panel and which decisions are suitable for 1 person. Also the needs consideration of whether decision sits w single panel member or single professional (reporter).
- Clear training and learning expectations can be set. +
- If payment is to be considered then legal aid payments and costing across the CHS can also be considered? Opportunity for non means tested legal aid to be given to everyone? To every child with offence grounds (MH Tribunal is available for patients, named persons and initiators in some form)?
- If looking at roles and reformulating then consideration can also be given to other roles and to the current roles in the system (legal reps / advocacy / safeguarder).
- Is it necessary to include Curator ad Litem for some cases where this is required as a result of capacity / impairment?
- Chairing could be standardised – there could be a model to follow – intro and explanation / reason for CH / rights to be present / information rights / current situation / current recommendation and reasons for this / views - child - RP - supporters – professionals – safeguarder / anything else?

WEAKNESSES & THREATS

- Decision making model becomes less clear and admin support will vary – also become less clear. Risk to accuracy across information sharing and to confusion for admin / panel and others. Family not going to know what is going on – difficult to explain decision makers let alone the decisions they are going to make.
- Logistics are very complicated if not unworkable, particularly if there is also a duty to provide consistency across panel decision making.
- Focus is not on child or on decision making – but on the process and staffing the process.
- Trust will not be built w families – who won't understand what is happening or why.
- Credibility of the decision making in the hearing won't be improved.
- Training model will need to be more complicated, risk it won't work.
- Loss of panel members.
- Lack of clarity in recruitment – volunteers or paid professionals? Both? Big ask.
- Lack of expertise in working w professional panel members.
- V difficult to keep volunteers and professionals both happy in the same way.
- Focus will be on the panel composition – rather than on areas where improvements could be made now – like training. If people don't want to chair then why make them? Could do the training and then there could be a confidence building additional training module to follow on.
-

SWOT – Views & Supports

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

- Identifies age and stage appropriate differences and accounts for them.
- Recognises difficulty in gathering and explaining the views of very young (and other pre verbal or non verbal) children.
- Recognises importance of a child and family having the opportunity to give their views.
- Needs to consider views within the context of wider information – and how that is explained to a child, in order for a child to give their view effectively.
- Allows views to be gathered from a wider range of people potentially (those who know the child best....).
- Additional class of people w certain rights – to provide their views.....
- Strengthened approach to views allows possibility for alternative approach to attendance to become a reality. Does decision maker require a power to specify that view of child / view of person w a right to give a view is taken? To specify that view is taken in a certain way??
- Q about how the rights & views of children and better represented in decision making.....
- 'post referral discussion' - does this need to be statutory? Could be part of a suite of options for a family and may actually be stronger if it is something a family wants r than something they have to so.
- Could it be a virtual meeting or a telephone call?
- Could also be an opportunity to respond in writing rather than in person – which may suit some people (perhaps neurodivergent people, for example).
- Child becomes more of a partner in the process and less of a passive recipient of decision making.

WEAKNESSES & THREATS

- Doesn't fully explain change to safeguarder role – and also doesn't fully explain safeguarder role currently.
- Isn't clear about availability of funding or 'bodies' for legal reps and advocacy.
- Perhaps doesn't fully understand the dynamic of a family that requires statutory intervention in eh form of a CSO. Family unwilling or unable to accept that support is required and doesn't recognise their failings / difficulties, certainly at the start of the process.
- Unclear what additional information sharing would be required for additional class of people w right to provide a view – needs a corollary right to receive info about how that view was taken into account???
- Doesn't explain how rights / views will be used in decision making – or recorded – or evaluated as a positive thing.....
- How does it fit with other contacts an SCRA office may be having with a family?
- Layers of complexity around rights and information will lead to further difficulties with information sharing and breaches.
- Advocacy getting full set of papers – when a child hasn't had the same information. Advocacy for child clear that they should have the same information as the child (if they need additional context they can speak with professionals in the team around the child or with family).
- Provisions in Children (Scotland) Act 2020 in relation to child's views still need to come into force – v difficult layering new change on top of new change which hasn't started and hasn't yet been able to take effect or have an impact.....
- Statutory process undertaken by children's reporter in relation to views doesn't really fit with the objective impartiality needed for a reporter to fulfil decision making role prior to involvement of children's hearing.

Strengths and opportunities (summary):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Opportunity for change to focus on the experience of a child and family. 2) Opportunity to capture views of child and family at key stages of decision making. 3) Hearing needs to be modernised – but could be modernised through a Children’s Hearings Modernisation Strategy in the 1st instance – with an eye to legislation at a later stage if required. There is a lot of change in this area of work which needs to bed in and take effect before we can really see what additional changes are required to streamline what remains. 4) Change at key points could have a marked impact on the experience of a child and family. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language used in the legislation – so that children and families can understand it • at entry into the children’s hearing (‘grounds’) • with legal / advocacy support before and during children’s hearing • with some subtle change to way court proof proceedings, like written responses • opportunity to discuss in advance based on reasons and evidence and to be clear about areas in dispute before decision maker becomes involved
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Weaknesses and threats (summary):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Some areas are not considered, and if considered could make a big impact for children and families: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Emergency decisions • Decisions around secure care • Ending a CH intervention • Adoption and permanence 2) impact of children’s hearings on family life can be profound – should there always be a check and balance (no more ‘accepting grounds’ and moving to a decision) – not fully considered. 3) Difficult to see how some of the process changes suggested or mooted will have a positive impact on the experience of children and families. 4) Some quite radical suggestions really need to have evidence to demonstrate they will be an improvement – like pre birth referral. We think it might be ‘easier’ for a family – but would it really? Need families and those supporting families to consider and say.
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	<p>5) Piecemeal change of some aspects of the children’s hearings system may result in further change being required within a short space of time. The legislation is already quite difficult and split over different Acts. All the current legislation needs to be in force for us to really see how the system has already ‘changed’ and then we could consolidate and finalise change in a further Bill. Modernisation strategy approach could take us there.</p>
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SCRA 2024

SCRA BOARD

17 June 2025

Risk Management Policy

Report Classification: Open

For: Approval

Executive Sponsor: Ross Mackenzie, Head of Finance and Resources

Author: Ross Mackenzie, Head of Finance and Resources

Executive Summary

To support delivery of its core statutory functions and support good management of resources, SCRA has a Risk Management Policy. This details SCRA's approach to risk, who is responsible for actions etc. This policy is approved annually by the Board and includes SCRA's risk appetite, also reviewed annually by the Board. The draft policy was taken to the March 2025 Board meeting and subsequent meetings of the Planning & Performance Committee and Audit & Assurance Committee (AAC) for feedback and comment.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to:

- Approve the Risk Management Policy

Key Issues to be discussed/considered

The Risk Management Policy is attached to this report as Appendix A. Following feedback from AAC, additional text has been entered into paragraphs 1.2 and 8.2, and a new Training bullet point has been added at 5.1.

Implications:**Service**

The updated Risk Management Policy facilitates the appropriate stewardship and management of resources of SCRA by supporting those charged with governance and those charged with management in identifying and managing risks. It also provides assurance to stakeholders and auditors that SCRA operates within a sound governance and control environment.

Financial

N/A

Workforce

N/A

Infrastructure including Digital

N/A

Information Governance

N/A

Risk Assessment/Management

The updated policy will support the management of SCRA's risks via its risk registers, including the Strategic and Operational Risk Registers.

Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives

This paper furthers SCRA's commitment to transparent and robust risk management, supporting the development, maintenance and evidencing of effective governance systems.

Equality Declaration

The author can confirm that due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and compliance with the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision making process.

Further to evaluation it is noted: *(tick relevant assessment)*

Paper is not relevant to Equality & Diversity

Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation

Board members

Executive Management Team members

Appendices

Appendix A – Risk Management Policy

SCRA Risk Management Policy

1. Statement on Risk Management

- 1.1 The Risk Management Policy is founded upon the core principles that risk management is:
- central to SCRA's corporate governance and internal control arrangements
 - a key tool in the management of the organisation to assist staff to manage risk as part of their day to day workload
 - an important component in ensuring continuity of core activities and to assist SCRA to deliver its business objectives
 - dynamic, with frequent review and updating, and focused on the most significant risks at the time
 - is an inclusive process covering all strategic and operational risks.
- 1.2 The definition of a **risk** is the threat or possibility that an action or event will occur, or not occur, to adversely or beneficially affect an organisations' ability to achieve its objectives.
- 1.3 The policy applies to all areas of the organisation's activity. It is not only concerned with strategic objectives but encompasses operational and programme/project management activity.
- 1.4 It should be viewed as a top to bottom process, involving all levels of staff, that supports continuous improvement. As well as focusing on possible threats it is important to consider the risks of not taking opportunities that would support innovation (positive risk taking) and improve service delivery.
- 1.5 Locality Management Teams and Head Office Teams are responsible for developing their own risk registers and escalating risks to the Planning and Performance Network (PPN) or Executive Management Team (EMT) as appropriate.
- 1.6 The PPN co-ordinates the operational and locality approach to risk, including the development and maintenance of risks (aligned to locality plans).
- 1.7 The PPN role also includes:
- identifying and sharing good practice
 - assessing whether risks are being adequately managed within agreed appetites and tolerances across SCRA
 - ensuring that each business area and locality is regularly carrying out risk identification and assessment exercises to ensure that risk registers are accurate and up-to-date.

2. Approach to Risk Management

- 2.1 The risk management policy sets out the approach to risk management and documents the roles, responsibilities of the Board, senior management, the PPN and employees.
- 2.2 In addition, the policy describes the process the Board will use to evaluate the effectiveness of SCRA's internal control procedures.
- 2.3 The following key principles outline SCRA's approach to risk management and internal control:
 - the Board has responsibility for the system of internal control and for overseeing risk management within SCRA
 - the Principal Reporter/Chief Executive and senior managers will implement policies on risk management and internal control approved by the Board
 - a positive attitude to risk assessment and solving risk problems is adopted by the Board and senior managers
 - managers at all levels are responsible for encouraging good risk management practice within their areas and all managers consider the consequences of their decisions and actions from a risk management perspective
 - integration of risk management into the planning and performance framework
 - the process will be supported by a programme of audit and review

3. Risk Management Policy

- 3.1 The objectives of the risk management framework are founded on a number of key objectives to:
 - ensure the delivery of core strategic and operational objectives within available resources
 - support continuous improvement in service delivery
 - inform SCRA business continuity plans
 - support internal controls intended to reduce losses
 - facilitate the timely identification and resolution of risks
 - enable effective stakeholder communication on service delivery
 - enhance SCRA's reputation and image.
- 3.2 The effectiveness of the Risk Management Policy will be reviewed and monitored based on the following measures:
 - the extent to which SCRA is successful year on year in achieving its business objectives
 - the incidents of risks which have not been recognised and documented within the Risk Management structures; or which have been inappropriately rated within the structures.

- 3.3 The Risk Management Policy is underpinned by a commitment to training and development in risk management and the recognition of the importance of staff responsibilities in this area.

4. Risk Management Structure

- 4.1 The Risk Management Structure for SCRA is detailed at Appendix 1. Appendix 2 sets out in general the framework for managing risk (Diagram 1) and the Risk Management Process (Diagram 2).

- 4.2 These arrangements reflect the organisational structure and ensures that risk is embedded throughout the organisation and allows for a straightforward and timely process to response to risk.

- 4.3 Information Risk Register

A separate information risk register is maintained by SCRA's Digital Security and Governance Manager and owned by SCRA's Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) given the specific duties placed on the organisation in terms of information risks.

- 4.4 Joint Risks (SCRA/CHS)

SCRA and Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) hold regular liaison meetings and any joint risks would be highlighted at joint Board meetings.

5. Risk management as part of the system of internal control

- 5.1 The internal control system encompasses a number of elements including:

- Strategic planning and budgeting – the strategic planning and budgeting process is used to set objectives, agree priorities and allocate resources. Progress towards meeting objectives is monitored and scrutinised by the Board quarterly with longer term and strategic objectives reviewed at a frequency to be agreed between the Board and senior management.
- Risk Registers – the standard template (Appendix 3) has been set up in the risk register tool (Decision Time) and should be used at strategic, operational and locality level. The risk registers should be included in annual business plans at these levels and formally reviewed quarterly. Localities and Head Office (HO) Teams should develop a risk register for inclusion in their Locality/team plans and ensure any risks which require to be escalated are highlighted to the appropriate management group/network and Executive Management Team member.
- Programmes – SCRA's strategic Programmes and Projects have individual risk profiles based on risks identified by Project Managers some of which are escalated for review to the appropriate management group/network, Programme Board or Executive Management Team member.

- **Audit & Assurance Committee** – the Audit & Assurance Committee will oversee, on behalf of the Board, the risk management process through co-ordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Risk Management Policy. This includes reviewing the Strategic Risk Register, and being given the opportunity to note the Operational Risk Register, every three months, or more frequently as necessary for key risks (e.g. finance and pay), reviewing the work undertaken on identified high risk areas and the action plans to mitigate the effects of such risks.
- **Audit** – The Audit programme is informed by an annual needs assessment and encompasses traditional fieldwork and self-assessment. The internal audit programme will be focused on the significant strategic and operational risks, as identified by management, and auditing risk management processes across SCRA. External audit provides feedback to the Audit & Assurance Committee on the operation of internal controls as part of the annual audit.
- **Training** – Board members and staff with a risk management remit receive training in order to fulfil their functions

6. Annual Governance Statement

6.1 The Board is responsible for the effectiveness of governance arrangements within SCRA. The Principal Reporter/Chief Executive, in preparing an annual Governance Statement for inclusion in the Annual Accounts will consider the elements in section 5.1 above and the following:

- SCRA's performance against financial and non-financial targets
- organisational structure and performance of senior managers
- organisation culture with respect to management of risk
- operation of delegated authority
- timeliness in identification of control issues and new significant risks
- prioritisation of risks and action to address areas of high exposure.
- effectiveness with which corrective actions are implemented

7. Risk Management Process

7.1 The key elements of the risk management process are set out below and more information is provided in Appendix 8. Effective risk management is a vehicle for continuous improvement in service delivery.

7.2 **Risk Types** – it is helpful to categorise risks to ensure consistency in the process of identification, monitoring and reporting of key risks. SCRA has adopted a simple approach based on definitions for seven types of risk that should be sufficiently flexible to cover strategic, operational, group, team and programme risks.

7.3 **Risk Identification** (guidance at Appendix 4) is the process of finding, recognising and describing risks – it is the responsibility of the members of groups/teams at each level to identify risks. A workshop approach is likely to be most effective allowing individuals within the group/team to work together and look beyond their areas of responsibility.

- 7.4 Description of Risk (guidance at Appendix 4) – each risk should be defined by a risk statement which describes the risk (the event) and outlines the consequence for and the impact on the organisation if the risk is crystallised.
- 7.5 Risk Measurement (guidance at Appendix 5) – a numerical value between 1 and 5 is given to two measures of risk – Impact and Likelihood.
- 7.6 Inherent Risk is the exposure arising from a specific risk before any action has been taken to manage it.
- 7.7 Controls – the controls in place to mitigate the risk should be recorded and any new controls to be put in place should be proportional to the risk. Some form of cost benefit analysis might be required to ensure the control action represents value for money in relation to the risk being controlled.
- 7.8 Residual risk is the risk remaining after the application of key mitigating controls and reflects how effective these controls are.
- 7.9 Target Risk is the risk exposure deemed to be acceptable as informed by the organisation's risk appetite.
- 7.10 Monitoring and Reporting - monitoring is continually checking, supervising critically observing or determining the status in order to identify change from the performance level required or expected.
- 7.11 A key element of managing risk is obtaining assurance that key controls are in place and operating effectively. SCRA has a range of internal and external assurance providers who review and provide opinions and statements which enable EMT and the Board to form a view as to whether risks are being managed in line with its expectations. Risk assurance is built into the risk management tool with the ability to report on sources of assurance, gaps in assurance and improvement actions. The risk assurance report template is attached at Appendix 6.
- 7.12 It is important to monitor that action plans are effective and to identify further action that might be necessary. Groups/teams should self- assess their key risks quarterly and use Decision Time to report thereon to the appropriate level for the purposes of challenge and scrutiny.
- 7.13 Outputs – the Risk Register is the main output of the process. As well as providing crucial data internally, this document provides evidence for audit that the risk management process is operating. The overall risk management process should help ensure that significant issues are quickly highlighted to the right level of management.
- 7.14 When a risk has crystallized, before closing the risk, the risk owner should review the risk in terms of effectiveness of controls and impact of actions, and capture any lessons learned in notes in Decision Time.

8. Risk Appetite

- 8.1 SCRA recognises that the organisation may be involved in activities that expose the organisation to a measure of risk.
- 8.2 The 'risk appetite' (Appendix 7) is defined as the amount of risk that SCRA is prepared to accept, tolerate or be exposed to at any point in time. Risk appetite is about taking well-thought through risks where the long-term rewards are expected to be greater than any short term losses. Risk appetite needs to be considered at all levels. SCRA's Board sets and owns SCRA's risk appetite.
- 8.3 SCRA has considered its risk appetite using the classifications shown below:

Classification	Description
Averse	Avoidance of risk and uncertainty is a key organisational objective.
Minimalist	Preference for ultra-safe options that have a low degree of inherent risk and a potential for limited reward
Cautious	Preference for safe options that have a low degree of residual risk and limited potential for reward
Open	Willing to consider all options and chose the one that is most likely to result in success, whilst also providing an acceptable level of reward
Hungry	Eager to be innovative and to choose options offering potentially higher rewards despite greater inherent risk

- 8.4 The SCRA Board has to determine its risk appetite against the different categories of risk that it is exposed to as follows:-

Type of Risk	Risk Appetite Agreed (as at March 2025)
Strategic/Policy Risks	Open to Cautious
Operational/Service Delivery Risks	Open to Cautious
Finance Risk	Open to Cautious – in reality, move to Open as required *
Reputational/Credibility Risks	Open to Cautious
Accountability/Governance Risks	Open to Cautious – in reality, move to Open as required *
Human Resources Development	Hungry

- 8.5 * In reality means when SCRA has no or very limited controls over decisions made by other agencies on which it relies for its functioning. The clearest example is decisions made by Scottish Government on matters of full year budget allocation where, for SCRA to retain its stated risk appetite could be catastrophic for the body insofar as the Board would be unable to set a

budget. In reality SCRA is able to set a budget to meet its needs with sufficient and formal reassurance from senior officials about the availability of in year resource to allow it to govern effectively, within clear boundaries of accountability and with an proportionate approach to risk.

- 8.6 Whilst the organisation's approach is to minimise its exposure to reputational, compliance and financial risks it may accept and encourage an increased and proportionate degree of risk in pursuit of opportunities to better achieve its strategic and operational objectives.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

- 9.1 Through allocating specific risk management responsibilities SCRA have created an environment where:

- risk management is integrated into decision-making arrangements, helping to create an environment for continuous improvement and learning
- the adequacy of risk assessment, control measures and action plans are regularly reviewed, taking into account the Board's risk appetite.
- The effectiveness of the risk management framework is reviewed at regular intervals and modified as necessary.

9.2 Role of the Board

The Board is responsible for the system of internal control. This includes

- Setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management
- Setting appropriate policies on internal control
- Seeking regular assurance (at least once every quarter) that the system is functioning effectively
- Approving major decisions affecting SCRA's risk profile or exposure
- Annually reviewing risk management policy and risk appetite.

- 9.3 In setting the tone and influencing the culture of risk management the Board must determine the level of risk which SCRA is prepared to tolerate i.e. for any particular risk whether SCRA is prepared to accept the risk at its current level or whether any further action is needed to reduce likelihood or impact. It is expected that for all top rated strategic, operational and programme risks the risk owner will develop an action plan to reduce the risk assessment to moderate or escalate the risk to the next level.

9.4 Role of the Audit & Assurance Committee

The Audit & Assurance Committee is charged by the Board with overseeing the operation of the system of internal control and with ensuring robust risk management arrangements within SCRA.

9.5 Role of the Planning and Performance Committee

The Planning and Performance Committee is charged by the Board with maintaining an overview of the strategic risks that align to its remit. The

committee's remit is ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place to deliver against organisational goals and objectives, including through portfolio and programme management and organisational strategies, that secure efficient, economic and effective use of all resources, and provide reasonable assurance to the Board that the arrangements are working effectively. The Committee can fulfil this remit through reviewing the Strategic and Operational Risk Registers every three months, or more frequently as necessary for key risks, reviewing the work undertaken on identified high risk areas and the action plans to mitigate the effects of such risks.

9.6 The Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

As Accountable Officer the Principal Reporter/Chief Executive has overall executive responsibility for risk management arrangements within SCRA, leading the risk management systems and ensuring that responsibilities delegated to other senior managers and staff at all levels within SCRA are discharged in an effective manner. The Principal Reporter/Chief Executive is also responsible for signing the Governance Statement which is included in the annual accounts.

In addition to overall executive responsibility for risk management the Principal Reporter/Chief Executive oversees the maintenance of the Operational Risk Register which is owned by EMT.

9.7 Senior Managers

All senior managers are responsible for:

- implementing policies on risk management and internal control
- identifying, assessing and developing actions plans for the most significant risks faced by SCRA

9.8 The Head of Finance and Resources

The Head of Finance and Resources has specific responsibility for:

- day-to-day operation of SCRA's risk management arrangements
- quarterly reporting to the Executive Management Team, Audit & Assurance Committee and Board on strategic risks and controls
- facilitating an annual review of the effectiveness of governance arrangements and reporting thereon to the Audit & Assurance Committee

9.9 Planning and Performance Network (PPN)

The role of the PPN is to act as an internal focus for the development of SCRA's approach to risk issues, providing leadership on the delivery of SCRA's Risk Management Policy at Locality level.

Risk leads within the PPN will act as risk champions which will include:

- having a specific role of raising awareness of both the risk management process and specific risks.
- providing local staff with advice and support on risk management issues
- working with other risk champions to bring consistency of approach to risk management, share knowledge and experience
- assisting with making the necessary changes happen – both process and cultural changes.

9.10 **All Employees**

All employees should have the necessary knowledge, skills, information and authority to establish, operate and monitor the system of internal control and be responsible for managing risks as an integral element of their job.

9.11 **The Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)**

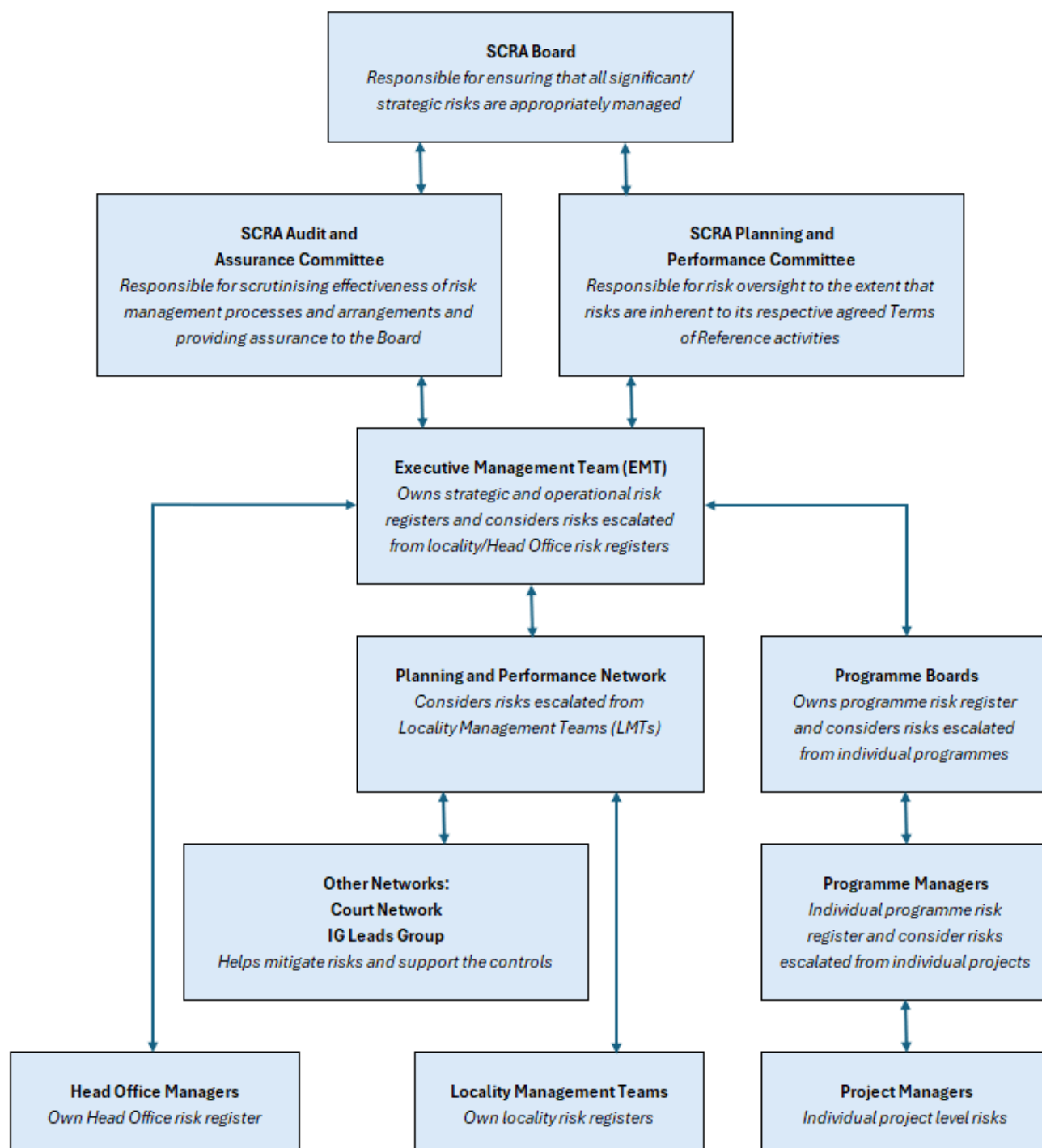
The Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) owns the information risk policy and provides advice to the Accountable Officer on the content of the Governance Statement relating to information risk.

10. **Effectiveness**

10.1 The effectiveness of the Risk Management Policy will be reviewed and monitored based on the following measures:

- the extent to which SCRA is successful year on year in achieving its business objectives.
- the incidents of risks which have not been recognised and documented within the Risk Management structures; or which have been inappropriately rated within the structures.

Risk Management Structure



Appendix 2

Diagram 1: Relationship between the components of the framework for managing risks:

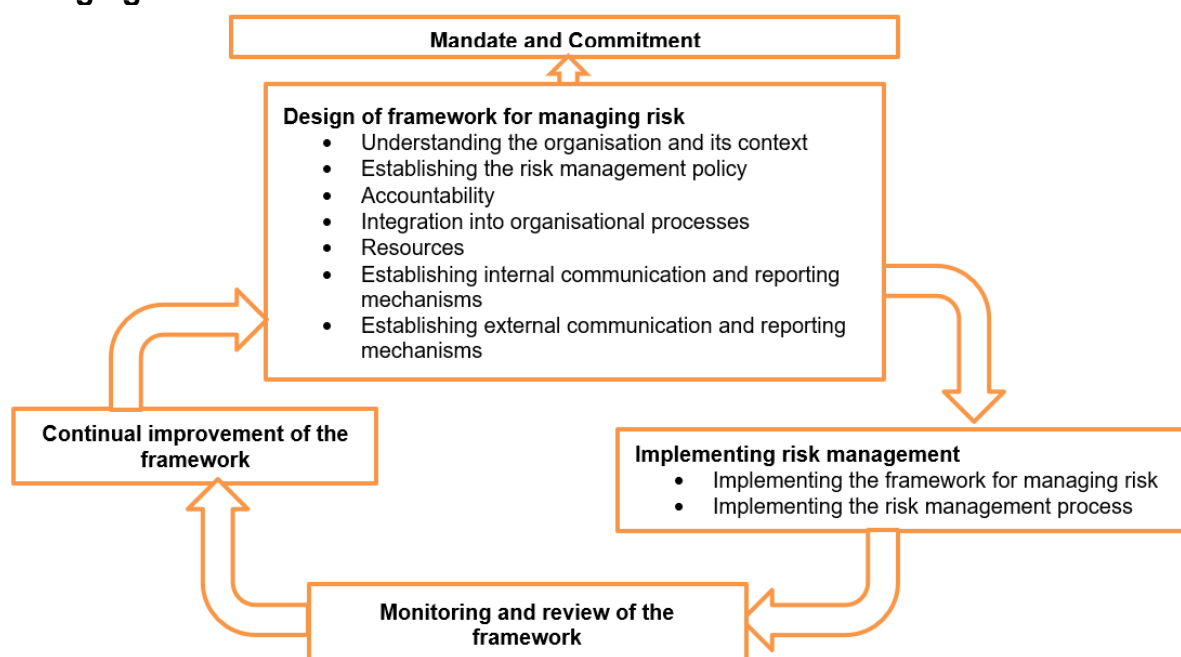
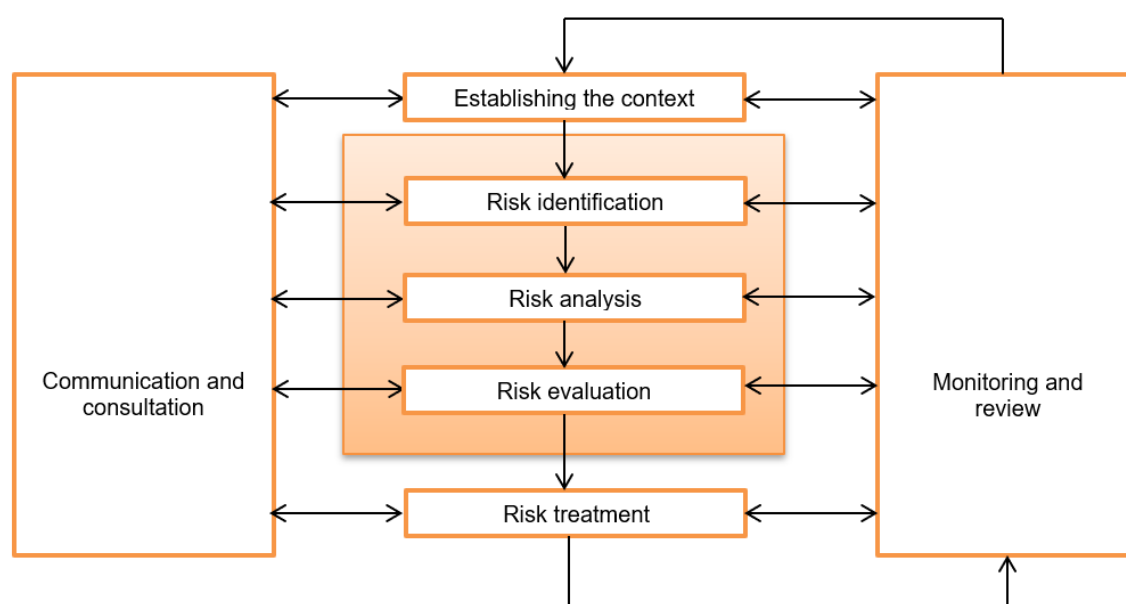


Diagram 2: Risk management process:



Risk Register Template

Risk No	Reference to Locality Objectives	Risk Type	Risk Description	Risk Owner	Inherent Risk Score L*	Key mitigating controls	Control effectiveness	Residual Risk Score L*	Risk Appetite	Target Risk Score L*	Actions and Time-scales	Action Owner/ Dead-line
1.						•					1.	
2.						•					2.	
3.						•					3.	

Risk Identification Guidelines

The following guidelines have been developed to assist risk leads across SCRA to adopt a consistent approach to identifying new risks (the same approach can be used to identify changes in existing risks or risks which are no longer relevant):

- The existing meeting structures for Locality/Team planning and performance reviews, facilitated by Planning Business Partners, should be used for identifying new risks.
- A facilitated workshop, at least once per year, as part of the Locality/Team meeting is usually the best method of generating new risks.
- Good documentation of discussions is important.
- Consideration should be given as to how to gather input from those staff not involved in the Locality/Team meeting.
- Some pre-work is encouraged e.g. ask those attending the meeting to identify top 5 new risks which can then be discussed and developed further.
- A major refresh of the Locality/Team risk register should take place every two years.
- Consider different types of risks (external, governance, information management, compliance, financial management, human resources, operational).
- As well as facilitated workshops other tools and techniques and sources of information can be used to support identification of new risks (SWOT analysis, PESTLE, questionnaires, checklists, inspection reports, audit findings).
- Risks should be related to objectives in Locality/Team Plans although care should be taken to identify any generic risks which will impact on objectives but might not always be apparent when thinking about particular objectives.
- Risk identification is not an exact science and should be a continuous process which keeps up with changes in the Locality/Team.

The role of risk leads in Head Office (Head of Finance & Resources and Governance Officer) includes supporting and challenging individual Localities/Teams on their risk descriptions and risk scores and comparing risk registers to identify common themes, feeding back findings to the Planning and Performance Network and EMT.

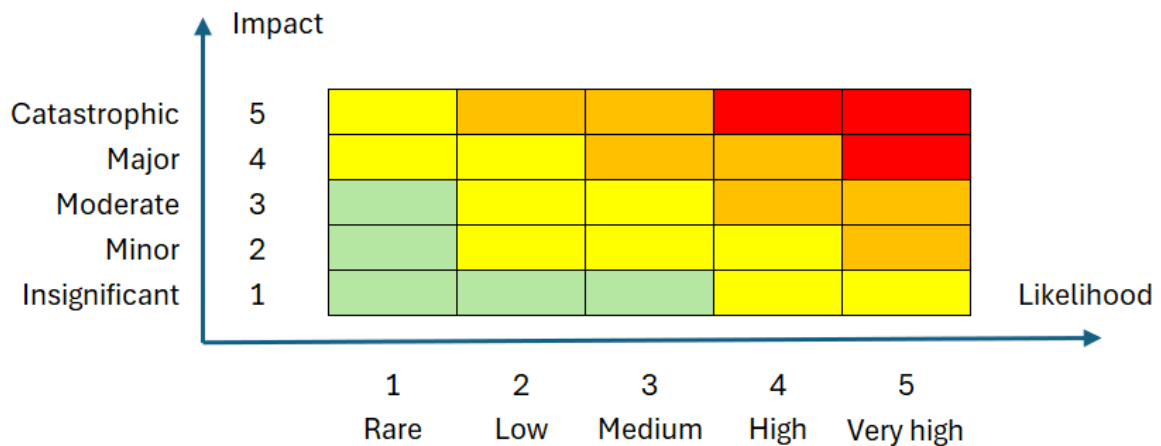
Risk descriptions

Once a new risk has been identified it is important to develop a good description or statement of the risk. There are some basic rules which should be followed:

- Avoid stating impacts which may arise as being the risks themselves, and to avoid stating risks which do not impact on objectives.
- Avoid defining risks which are simply the converse of the objectives.
- Identify the root causes and don't mistake these for the symptoms.
- A statement of risk should encompass the risk event, causes of the impact and the impact to the objective (or consequences) which might arise.
- This should mean you identify a risk which you can't control. For a risk which you can't control it may be advisable to draw up a contingency plan.

Risk scoring

Risk Matrix



Risk level	Score	Risk level description
Very high	20-25	Rating: Unacceptable level of risk exposure that requires immediate mitigating action Reporting: To Accountable Officer/Audit & Assurance Committee for upward reporting to Board
High	10-19	Rating: Unacceptable level of risk which requires controls to be put in place to reduce exposure Reporting: consideration should be given as to whether High risks should be escalated (score between 10-14: No, score between 15-19, Yes)
Medium	4-9	Rating: Acceptable level of risk exposure subject to regular active monitoring Reporting: Director level
Low	1-3	Rating: Acceptable level of risk exposure subject to regular passive monitoring Reporting: Director level. Do risks that low still exist?

Likelihood of a risk materialising

Score	Likelihood	Definition
5	Almost certain	81-100% - almost certain will occur. Highly likely, could occur on a regular basis (i.e. several times a year).
4	Likely	51-80% - more likely to occur than not. Likely, could occur, but on sporadic basis (i.e. at least once a year). Potential of it occurring several times within the time period or has occurred recently
3	Possible	21-50% - fairly likely to occur. Possibly, could occur, but infrequently (i.e. not more than once every 12 months). Could occur more than once within the time period and may be difficult to control due to some external influences.
2	Unlikely	6-20% - low but not impossible. Unlikely, (i.e. an event that is unlikely to occur more than once every few years) or has not occurred historically.
1	Exceptional	0-5% - extremely unlikely or virtually impossible (i.e. one-off event)

Impact of the risk

Score	Impact	Definition	Regulatory	Business Objectives	Reputational	Financial
5	Catastrophic	Likely to threaten the survival or continued effective functioning of SCRA, either financially or reputationally. Likely to have major impact on the whole organisation. Immediate action required. Must be managed with an effective control.	As below causing catastrophic loss.	> 20% variance	Ongoing media campaign, Parliamentary attention.	> £1m
4	Major	Likely substantial financial impact on SCRA. Significant impact on SCRA's strategy or operational activities. Significant stakeholder concern seriously damaging SCRA's ability to deliver its service. Likely to have major impact in many areas of the organisation. Likely to cause some damage, disruption or breach of legislation. Prompt attention required. Risk controls and actions to be developed.	As below causing major loss.	10-20% variance	Short term media campaign, meet partners and Minister to provide reassurance.	> £250k

Score	Impact	Definition	Regulatory	Business Objectives	Reputational	Financial
3	Moderate	Financial impact on SCRA is likely to be moderate. Moderate impact on the SCRA's strategy or operational activities. Moderate stakeholder concern having some impact on the SCRA's ability to deliver its service. Likely to have major impact in one or a few areas of SCRA. Unlikely to cause much damage and/or threaten SCRA. Monitor and review.	As below causing moderate loss.	5-10% variance	Headline media interest causing public embarrassment, proactive contact with partners and Minister.	£50-£250k
2	Minor	Financial impact on SCRA is likely to be small. Low impact on SCRA's strategy or operational activities. Low stakeholder concern. Likely to have minor impact in many areas of SCRA. Primary impact is on the internal business. Unlikely to require specific application of additional resources. Manage through	As below causing minor loss.	2.5-5% variance	Headline media interest, reactive approach to limited interest from partners and Minister.	£25-£50k

Score	Impact	Definition	Regulatory	Business Objectives	Reputational	Financial
		existing controls. Monitor and review.				
1	Insignificant	Likely to have minor impact in one or a few areas of SCRA. No significant impact on SCRA as a whole.	Act or omission causing legal or regulatory breach causing insignificant loss.	< 2.5% variance	Minor media, partner, Ministerial interest	< £25k

Appendix 6

Risk Assurance Map template

Risk	Risk Impact	Risk Controls	Assurance Sources	Gaps in Assurance	Improvement Actions	Due Date	Assurance Control RAG rating

Assurance Sources – Decision Time:

- Operational Control (1st line)
- Corporate Oversight (2nd line)
- Internal Audit (3rd line)
- External Assurance (3rd line)

Appendix 7

Risk appetite

SCRA has considered its risk appetite using the classifications shown in the table below:

Classification	Description
Averse	Avoidance of risk and uncertainty is a key organisational objective.
Minimalist	Preference for ultra-safe options that have a low degree of inherent risk and a potential for limited reward
Cautious	Preference for safe options that have a low degree of residual risk and limited potential for reward
Open	Willing to consider all options and chose the one that is most likely to result in success, whilst also providing an acceptable level of reward
Hungry	Eager to be innovative and to choose options offering potentially higher rewards despite greater inherent risk

Current risk appetite

Type of risk	Risk Appetite Agreed (June 2025)
Strategic/Policy Risks	Open to Cautious
Operational/Service Delivery Risks	Open to Cautious
Finance Risk	Open to Cautious – in reality, move to Open as required
Reputational/Credibility Risks	Open to Cautious
Accountability/Governance Risks	Open to Cautious – in reality, move to Open as required
Human Resources Development Risks	Hungry

Risk Management Process

1. Risk Identification (Reference & Link to Business/Group/Programme/Project objective)

It is best practice to integrate risk management into the annual business planning and quarterly performance monitoring process. Risks should be identified, assessed and prioritised in relation to SCRA's objectives. Each risk should have a unique reference number (for audit trail purposes) and be cross-referenced to one or more Business Plan/Locality Plan/Programme/Project objectives. The management of risk at strategic, operational and Programme levels needs to be integrated to ensure actions at different levels are co-ordinated.

Initial risk identification should be carried out as a facilitated group exercise involving the owners of plans and objectives at each level of the organisation. All participants should have the opportunity to identify and assess risks however the exercise should conclude with an overall group view on the risk profile to be captured in the Risk Register. Continuous risk identification and assessment is achieved as part of the quarterly reviews of the Risk Register, although new risks can be identified and assessed outwith the cycle.

The participants in initial and ongoing risk identification exercises will want to consider the following internal factors:

- Annual plans and Quarterly Operational Performance Reports (OPR's)
- Weekly, monthly/quarterly performance reports
- Quality Assurance, External Audit and Internal Audit findings
- Research and Evaluation findings
- Significant Case Reviews
- Casework issues/appeals activity

Identification of risks should involve looking externally as well as internally. Areas for consideration include:

- Stakeholder feedback
- Economic changes
- Issues from other jurisdictions
- Partnership Working issues
- Inspectorate reports and action plans

2. Risk Type

Once identified, individual risks typically fall into natural groupings. Capturing these groupings or categories of risk can act as a check that the range of potential risks that may arise have been considered. The following risk categories should be used at all levels of the organisation:

- **Strategic Risks** – risks that relate to doing the wrong things
- **Operational Risks** – risks that relate to doing the right things but doing them in the wrong way
- **Information Risks** – risks that relate to loss or inaccuracy of data, systems or reported information
- **Reputational Risks** – risks that relate to SCRA's image
- **Financial Risks** – risks that relate to losing monetary resources or incurring unacceptable liabilities
- **Human Resources Risks** – risks associated with employees or management
- **Regulatory Risks** – risks related to the regulatory environment

3. Responsibility for identification, assessment, recording, reporting, management and escalation of risks

Activity	Executive Management Team (strategic and operational risks)	Localities/ Head Office	Programme/ projects
Risk identification	All Members	All Members	All Members
Risk assessment	All Members	All Members	All Members
Updating Risk Register	Head of Finance & Resources	Risk Lead	Programme Manager
Reporting risks	Head of Finance & Resources	Risk Lead	Programme Manager
Identification/ assessment of controls	Risk owner	Risk owner	Risk owner
Action plan and progress	Risk owner	Risk owner	Risk owner
Escalation of risks	PR/CE	SOM/Risk Lead	Programme Manager

4. Key Mitigating Controls and Control Effectiveness

The controls in place should be recorded by the Risk Owner. In addition there should be an assessment of how effectively the controls are operating.

5. Action Plan & Timescales

The key actions required to mitigate the risks should be recorded along with a clear timescale for implementation.

6. Owner

The individual responsible for ensuring that the risk is managed and monitored over time. They should have sufficient authority to ensure the risk is effectively managed but may not be the person who implements the agreed actions.

7. Progress against Action Plan

Progress should be recorded on an ongoing basis on the register, with outstanding actions clearly marked.

8. Escalation

Risks may be escalated for a number of reasons: they can no longer be managed at local level; they are not confined to one area of the business; they cannot be managed effectively in isolation; there are correlations where one risk has an impact on another. The register should record where the risk is to be escalated:

Risks at Locality or Head Office level should be escalated to the Senior Operational Manager (Operational Risk Register) or Executive Management Team (Strategic Risk Register). Project risks should be captured on Programme Risk Registers and where necessary to the Senior Operational Manager (Operational Risk Register) or Executive Management Team (Strategic Risk Register). Risks that may require to be escalated to Executive Management Team (and Board) include risks that pose a significant threat to corporate objectives, targets or resource plans, risks that are deemed intolerable or have potential for significant adverse publicity.

9. Closed risks

Risks that are no longer applicable should be recorded as 'closed' and moved to a closed risk register. If the risk has been closed as it has crystalized risk leads should review the risk and ensure lessons learned are captured in the notes in Decision Time.