

ANNUAL REPORT

CARE, CONNECT, PROTECT
2024/2025



ABOUT OUR REPORT

This report covers the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

It summarises SCRA’s achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan 2024/25.

You can also view this report’s supporting information online, including the full set of our annual audited accounts and

performance report, plus our Official Statistics and interactive statistical dashboard at www.scra.gov.uk.

You might also find our [Annual Report glossary](#) helpful.

If you want to find out more about our role and our work, please visit the [About Us](#) section of our website.



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OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU...

Our Vision

Children and young people in Scotland will be cared for, included, respected and safe, with opportunities for a positive future.

Our Mission

Together, we protect and uphold the rights of Scotland's children and young people, making decisions in a compassionate, inclusive and trauma informed way.



OUR VALUES

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

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.

FOREWORD

BY BOARD CHAIR, CATHIE COWAN

Where does a year go? I am delighted having taken up post in June 2024 to be looking back on my first year as Chair of SCRA. Firstly, in my observations I am immensely proud of the management and staff of SCRA and their commitment to support, care and respect children, young people and their families whilst being accountable for contributing to improving their lives and opportunities.

I want to firstly welcome two new Board members - Lynne Clow and Steve Renwick. Both Lynne and Steve bring a wealth of experience to the Board as well as their own personal undertaking to bring to life SCRA's values in their Board interactions and decision making. I also want to say goodbye and thank you to Suzie Vestri for her significant contribution as a SCRA Board Member over the last eight years - I wish Suzie well in her new ventures.

2024/2025 has been a year of delivery and change. In my interactions with staff, I recognise that for some change can be unsettling as we introduce new ways of working to keep children, young people and their families at the very heart

of what we do whilst ensuring we continue to enhance their experience of the Hearings System. It is therefore great to see and to hear staff's enthusiasm about their experiences in e.g., the roll-out of child friendly scheduling, Language that Cares Guide and developing Hearing Centre Design Standards. Thank you also to Our Hearings, Our Voice for their significant contribution in this work and for helping SCRA contribute to Keeping the Promise. To our partners, thank you for adding your weight and resources to our shared purpose of improving outcomes for children, young people and their families - a good example of this is our Learning Leads project and the work underway to improve and standardise referrals.

To Board Members - thank you for your welcome. In leading the Board I am keen to support the Board of SCRA in its commitment to having effective infrastructure in place to support delivery of change where required, and to this end with Board and the Executive Management Team members I have reviewed and enhanced our governance arrangements. Our new Planning and Performance Committee will further promote the development of a performance culture



in pursuit of our commitment to continuous quality improvement. In this regard, our ongoing commitment to deliver successful change was underpinned by investment in our properties to create a welcoming, caring and non-institutional environment to support the needs of everyone participating in the Hearings System. As a previous Children's Panel member, I am blown away by the attention to detail and the clear indication of the voice of the child, and young person playing out in the Hearing Centre design standards created.

Alongside this investment is SCRA's commitment to research, digital and change management resources and how these key areas of work can both enhance and support the experience of people accessing services and staff providing services. The research and digital programmes demonstrate the organisation's ambition and ongoing contribution to policy and practice both internally and externally. Using research to inform future policy and practice is a key future and personal objective. Sustainability is also a key feature in our investment decisions and our contribution to achieving net zero. Staff and their wellbeing remain a top priority for the Board and as expected is a prominent feature in all our discussions. At the heart have been the findings from the annual staff survey. This year, overseeing the implementation of the staff survey approved

action plan has seen us focus on the role of the Reporter in recognition of the changes notably in society and legislation and the unwavering consideration of a child's and young person's welfare in decisions made to protect and uphold their rights. Funding remains an issue for the Board and whilst I am grateful to our Scottish Government Sponsorship Team for their ongoing engagement and support to ensure we meet our statutory duties, greater certainty about funding is needed. In going forward I am keen that we address the widening funding gap in the future medium-term to create the stability required to meet the new and ambitious legislative changes to the Hearings System.

In concluding and commending this report to you I wish to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to staff, partners and Board Members for your contribution to the work of SCRA in protecting and upholding the rights of children and young people involved in the Hearings System. Finally, I look forward to working with you all to deliver our commitments as set out in our Corporate Plan 2024/2027 and to increasing Board visibility as we look to improve our performance and effectiveness in our endeavours to ensure all children grow up safe, loved and respected so they can realise their full potential.



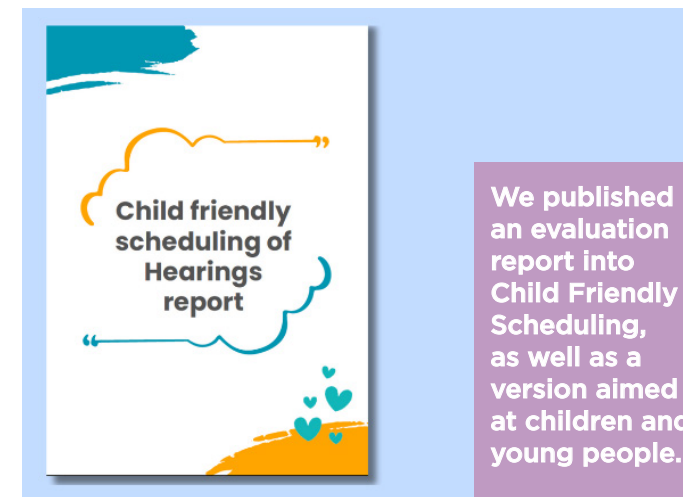
OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE



We celebrated Care Experienced Week by joining thousands of people at the Love Rally in Glasgow.



Our Transforming Connections Trauma Skilled Training programme started to be rolled out for all staff.



We published an evaluation report into Child Friendly Scheduling, as well as a version aimed at children and young people.



A detailed review into the role of the Reporter job description and person specification got underway.

SCRA's Corporate Plan 2024-27 was published highlighting our plans for the next three years.

SCRA Corporate Plan 2024-2027



On World Environment Day we unveiled our 8 Sustainability Priorities, which will help make SCRA as sustainable and environmentally-friendly as possible.

Our Neurodiversity Champions came together for invaluable training about FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).



Our LGBTQ+ staff group relaunched and held a series of Pride picnics.



We were delighted to join the Scottish Government's Sikh Network at a visit to Glasgow Central Gurdwara.



We launched a new information film in British Sign Language with sub titles which shows a walk-through of a Children's Hearings Centre.

Hearings are held in Hearing rooms like this one



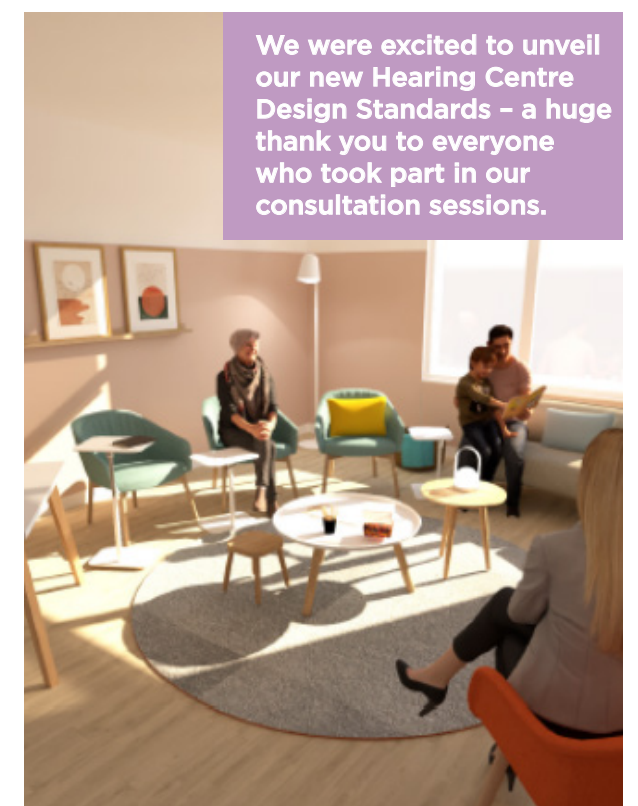
We produced our Language that Cares Guide and attended the launch of the fantastic Articulate Animation.



We were honoured to win the Care Conscious Employer award at Who Cares? Scotland's 10 year celebration of Corporate Parenting legislation.



SCRA's Mental Wealth Group produced a 31 day mental health calendar to support Mental Health Awareness Month.



We were excited to unveil our new Hearing Centre Design Standards – a huge thank you to everyone who took part in our consultation sessions.

REPORTING ON OUR BUSINESS PLAN

OUR PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024/25

During 2024/2025, our focus remained on delivering the strategic programmes outlined in our Business Plan:



CARE

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



CONNECT

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



PROTECT

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

During 2024/25, we successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan – some of which are highlighted in this next section of the report.

More detailed information is available in the Performance Review section of our [Annual Accounts 2024/25](#).

OUR PERFORMANCE AND TARGETS

Decision making by Reporters within 50 working days at 72% was up 2.0 percentage points (pp) compared to 2023/24. It was slightly below the 74% target and was rated as amber for the year. In terms of delays in case processing, on average, 3.4% of referrals were open beyond 100 working days in the year. This was below the 4.1% target and this measure is therefore rated as green. It was an improvement of 1.7pp on the prior year.

There was a focus on improving performance in 2024/25 which included reinforcing expectations with operational teams and individual Reporters and the use of Quality Improvement methodology. However, Reporters are reliant on partner agencies to provide reports and information to help them make the right decision for a child. The time taken to receive this information continues to be impacted by resourcing pressures experienced by some local authority social work teams.

The scheduling of grounds Hearings within 20 working days of a Reporter decision to arrange a Hearing was up 3.7pp in the year to 70%. The performance in 2024/25 continues the improvements seen since the pandemic and the prioritisation that was required at that time. Performance was though below the 74% target and is rated as amber.

Short term absence at 1.9% was within the 2% target and was rated as green but was 0.4pp higher than the prior year. Short term absence meeting the target will be in part around staff having more flexibility about where they work from even when they are feeling unwell, but not unwell enough to be absent from work. The target being met may also be a result of the various health and wellbeing supports that SCRA has in place, such as EAP, vicarious trauma support, menopause support etc.

Long term absence at 3.9% was up 0.5pp from the prior year and well above the 2% target and is therefore rated as red. We recognise that long term absence remains a challenge in terms of available resources. We work closely with managers pre, during and post long term absence to ensure that the most appropriate supports are in place to sustain the employee at work.

Of the finance targets, revenue savings (target of 2.5%) and the efficiency savings (target of 0.5%) were both met. The revenue spend target was rated as red at 6.4% below budget against a target of being within 1% of

budget. Savings mainly arose from staffing underspends arising from vacancies and the timing of recruitment to additional posts in advance of Children (Care and Justice) Act implementation. The capital spends target was narrowly missed at 6.1% below budget against a target of being within 5% of budget and was rated as amber. Capital savings arose primarily due to the decision to treat the Glasgow refurbishment project as a two-year project, resulting in a reduction of spend within 2024/25.

OUR STORIES

PROGRAMME 1 - CARE CORPORATE PARENTING

It has been another busy year of Corporate Parenting activity in SCRA. We continue to undertake a wide range of activities to deliver as well as promote our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Our Modern Apprenticeship and Work Experience programme exclusively for care and/or Hearings-

experienced people has been running for almost 15 years. In July 2024 we hosted a highly successful six month work experience placement for a young person in our Stornoway office and Hearings centre, who went on to permanent employment in the health and social care sector. We will be recruiting to our MA programme in 2025/2026.



In August 2024, to mark the 10 year anniversary of the Children and Young People (Scotland) 2014 Act, Who Cares? Scotland hosted their first Corporate Parenting Awards. SCRA were shortlisted for both the Care Conscious Employer award and the Lifelong Rights award, and won the Care Conscious Employer award.

In February 2025 we relaunched our highly successful and active Participation Group as the Corporate Parenting and Participation Group (CPPG). Working with partners such as Who Cares? Scotland, we are renewing our focus on fresh Corporate Parenting approaches, and work with partners such as Staf's Participation Group and the Who Cares? Scotland Corporate Parenting and Participation Network to achieve this.

Engaging with staff on our Corporate Parenting and Participation Group, as well as our Voice of Experience Reference Group, we have piloted a training programme on Corporate Parenting to be rolled out across SCRA. As a proud Corporate Parent, we were once again delighted to join thousands of people at the Love Rally in Glasgow in October 2024. It is always a highlight of our Corporate Parenting calendar.

SCRA's Voice of Experience Reference Group (VOERG) has had another busy and successful year. Working with the NHS we supported the development of their trauma training programme for alternative carers in September 2024, and in February 2025 we celebrated Care Day with a visit from partners at the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland and our Principal Reporter.

The Neurodiversity Champions Network has worked hard to continue to refresh and roll out In-Hearing Room Sensory Kits and take away sensory items across Scotland for children, young people and families attending Children's Hearings. We have also worked with partner agencies such as Salvesen Mindroom and FASD Scotland to improve our understanding of neurodivergent conditions to tailor and improve our service delivery.

SCRA's unique book gifting programme has entered its second year and in 2024/25 we

distributed and gifted hundreds of books for older children aged six plus. Our fantastic partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library continues for children aged five and under, and in 2024/25, thousands of books were given to young children attending Hearings for them to keep.

SCRA has been proud to host and support Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) since 2018. In October 2024, to mark four years since publication of the 40 Calls to Action, we prepared our fourth update for OHOV. We continue to work with young people from OHOV on a number of projects, including the Taking Control of my Hearing scrapbook and magazine, information leaflets, cartoon animations and VOICE magazine.

We are an active and founding member of Stand Up For Siblings and the Community of Practice for Siblings. It was a busy year for the Community of Practice for Siblings as the community continued to grow. SCRA's Press and Communications Team continues to support the partnerships.

The Transforming Connections trauma training programme (in partnership with the NHS and their education team NES) was nationally rolled out throughout the second half of 2024 and in to 2025. NES's and SCRA's work to Keep The Promise led to Trauma Skilled level training for all staff in SCRA to support care experienced children and young people, enhancing the skills and service of SCRA staff as well as developing a network of trainers to assist in the role out.

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

At SCRA, we remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering an inclusive, accessible, and equitable workplace and service environment. In 2024/25, we made significant strides in embedding inclusive practices, enhancing accessibility, and strengthening our equality and diversity initiatives.

Meeting Our Equality Duties

We continued to meet our public sector equality duties by publishing key reports, including:

- Mainstreaming Equality
- Gender Pay Gap
- Gender Representation on the Board
- Workforce Statistics

We also launched our British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan and agreed on our Equality Outcomes for 2024–2027, setting a clear direction for future progress.

Enhancing Accessibility

To improve access to our services, we now offer Visual Information Guides for 33 Hearing Centres and continue to promote the ReciteMe accessibility software on our website. Our Disability Group, in collaboration with the British Deaf Association (Scotland), launched a BSL video dictionary and refreshed the BSL section of our website. We also reintroduced sunflower lanyards to support individuals with hidden disabilities. We were proud to retain the enei (Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion) silver award – a big thank you to our Inclusion Ambassadors for all their hard work!

Neurodiversity and Sensory Support
Our Neurodiversity Champions Network has grown to 44 members. This group has successfully reintroduced sensory takeaway kits and neurodiversity kits in all Hearing rooms, ensuring that children and young people have the tools they need to feel comfortable and supported.

In addition, our Neurodiversity Champions came together for their first away day in December 2024 with invaluable training about FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).

Anti-Racism and Cultural Inclusion

In February 2024, we held our first anti-racism development session, marking the beginning of a three-year programme. We also launched a successful Black and Asian Workers Group pilot, which has received positive feedback and is expected to continue beyond its initial six-month term. In October 2024, we were delighted to join the Scottish Government's Sikh Network at a visit to Glasgow Central Gurdwara.

LGBTQ+ Inclusion

In 2024, our LGBTQ+ staff group relaunched and held a series of Pride picnics across the country. We are actively working towards reaccreditation of the LGBT Youth Scotland Charter, reaffirming our commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and service users.

Workforce Representation and Engagement

Our Employee Information Statistics Report shows an increase in applications from men, candidates from an ethnic minority background, and individuals with disabilities – progress aligned with our second equality outcome.

We also established quarterly meetings for our Inclusion Ambassadors and Locality Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Leads, fostering stronger engagement and information sharing across the organisation.

Progress on Gender Equality

As of March 2024, our gender pay gap has reduced by 2% (mean) and 2.21% (median)—continuing a positive downward trend over the past seven years.

SUSTAINABILITY

We are early in our journey towards achieving Net Zero and are committed to embedding sustainability across all aspects of our organisation. Our goal is to work in ways that are environmentally responsible, financially sustainable, and aligned with national climate targets.

This commitment is reflected in our strategic planning, operational improvements, and the work of our Environmental Ambassadors.

Our Strategic Approach

In January 2024, our Strategic Sustainability Group (SSG) reaffirmed eight priority areas that are guiding our sustainability efforts.

These priorities are now embedded in our Corporate and Business Plans:

- Property Use – Creating energy-efficient offices and Hearing Centres.
- Energy Consumption – Using resources more intelligently and efficiently.
- Travel – Promoting active and sustainable commuting options.
- Waste Minimisation – Emphasising reduction, reuse, and recycling.
- Sustainable Procurement – Factoring in environmental, social, and economic impacts in purchasing decisions.
- Biodiversity – Enhancing and protecting our natural environment.
- Staff Awareness and Behaviour Change – Building knowledge and encouraging sustainable practices.
- Data Capture and Analysis – Tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement.
- Progress and Local Action.

Targets and Accountability

SCRA is committed to meeting the following sustainability targets:

- 10–20% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from 2022/23 levels within three years.
- Zero waste to landfill by 2030.
- Net Zero GHG emissions by 2045.
- To support these goals, leads have been appointed for each of the eight priority areas, with a clear directive to identify 3–4 actionable workstreams for 2024/25.

A monitoring and reporting framework is being developed to track progress and ensure accountability.

Making changes

We have already seen positive changes across our estate, driven in part by our Property Strategy, energy monitoring by our Business Development



Team and the efforts of our 25 Environmental Ambassadors across the organisation. Each Locality has developed tailored actions within their Locality Plans to support sustainability at a local level.

In January 2025, we launched a year-long environmental awareness campaign, with a different focus every month linking to our eight sustainability priorities.

The campaign has a dedicated section on our staff intranet which contains a host of resources and helpful information.

Estate and Environmental Assessments

Significant environmental improvements have been made to our buildings, including:

- Upgrading lighting systems to energy-efficient LEDs.
- Replacing outdated gas boilers with more efficient alternatives.

These upgrades contribute directly to our Net Zero objectives by reducing energy consumption and emissions. Environmental assessments have been completed for all owned properties—approximately half of our estate—providing detailed recommendations for further improvements.

Work is ongoing to assess the remainder of the estate, including leased properties, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of our environmental impact across all sites.



SPOTLIGHT ON ... KEEPING THE PROMISE

SCRA's is committed to working with our partners and transforming the Children's Hearings System in line with the Independent Care Review and The Promise.

Our work focuses on rights, participation, trauma-informed practice, and systemic redesign to better support children, young people and families and being the best Corporate Parent we can be.

So what has been happening?

We have been working with some amazing groups of Hearings-experienced children and young people, including local champions boards and Our Hearings, Our Voice. Working together and genuine co-production has been key to some really successful initiatives and projects.

- We have been testing ideas across different parts of Scotland (many came from children and young people).
- Then we have been reviewing the results to see if they have made a difference.
- Where they have led to improvements, we are introducing them on a larger scale.
- We have also had tremendous support and buy in from our staff across the country.

Here's some of the highlights:

Development, launch and implementation of our Keeping The Promise Language that Cares Guide. A huge thank you to the young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice in helping us roll this out to our staff across the country.

Introduction of child friendly scheduling to provide children and young people with more control over their Hearing – including where and when. Thank you to all the children and young people in Ayrshire, Fife, Paisley and the South East of Scotland who took part.

Creation of new easy read letters for children, young people and their parents to make sure they can be easily understood. We worked with so many people to get these letters right, including a speech and language expert to ensure the new letters are accessible and inclusive.

Taking Control of my Hearing scrapbook: this involved pro-actively inviting children and young people to a Pre-Hearing visit. To support their preparation, children and young people were also sent their own 'scrapbook' designed for and by young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice.

Referral Patterns and Planning: this project involves using data to drive improvements to ensure timely and proportionate referrals to the Reporter.

Learning Leads: this multi-agency project has been developing standardised training for partners on referrals and system roles. The first training packages will be launched in the autumn 2025.

Early Engagement on Grounds: this project has been exploring relational working practices, rights-based approaches to establishing grounds and its impact on children and families. Further work will continue into 2025/2026.

Has this made a difference?

We think so, yes. We are making sure that everything we test is fully evaluated, so we know it is definitely making a difference.

Our Research Team are undertaking an in-depth piece of research where children, young people and their families can tell us if and where they have seen changes and improvements.

We know there are still improvements to be made, but by working together with our partners across the Children's Hearings System we will Keep The Promise.

PROGRAMME 2 - CONNECT OUR PEOPLE

In 2024, SCRA launched its People Strategy 2024–2027, setting out four key aims: to recruit and retain talent, support and engage staff, and foster continuous development across the organisation. This strategy underpins our commitment to building a resilient, inclusive, and skilled workforce.

Learning and Development

We published our Learning Plan 2024–2027, which includes a wide range of training opportunities:

- Trauma-informed practice to enhance awareness of trauma in the workplace and service delivery.
- Inclusion and Equalities training, including Active Bystander, British Sign Language (BSL), Pronoun Awareness, Neurodiversity, and Imposter Syndrome training.
- Practice-focused modules such as Harmful Sexual Behaviour, UNCRC Incorporation, and training for Locality Support Administrators (LSAs).
- Operational training in breach prevention and complaints handling.

We exceeded our learning Key Performance Indicators, averaging two learning events per employee. A new digital skills strategy was also introduced to boost confidence in digital capabilities.

Supervision and Support

The Supervision Framework was revised to integrate annual development reviews, personal development, and wellbeing. Managers received guidance and support from HR Business Partners to embed the new approach.

Our e-learning platform was enhanced to improve accessibility and support internally produced content, including podcasts and policy briefings.

Inclusive Culture and Engagement

Following the rollout of the Inclusive Behaviours

Framework (ISBF), we embedded equalities learning throughout the year.

Staff Charter workshops were held to deepen understanding and application of inclusive behaviours. We also reviewed and updated key policies:

- The Dignity at Work Policy was simplified and now includes cyberbullying.
- A revised Staff Code of Conduct was adopted, reinforcing our commitment to high standards.
- A new Retirement Policy was introduced, covering various retirement options and support.

Health, Wellbeing and Mental Health

We trained our fourth cohort of Mental Health First Aiders, bringing the total to 31 across the organisation. We supported national campaigns such as Mental Health Week, Time to Talk, and Carer's Week, and ran a 31-day wellbeing calendar in October.

Our annual walking challenge in May saw over a third of staff participate, promoting physical and mental wellbeing. Based on staff feedback, we focused on topics such as menopause, baby loss, and sleep during October, and raised awareness of men's health during 'Movember'.

We also supported carers through dementia awareness webinars and updated policies to reflect new statutory carer's leave and neonatal leave and pay ahead of 2025 legislation.

In addition, we offered staff flu vaccination vouchers, with 85 taken up, as part of our ongoing commitment to staff health and wellbeing.

Recruitment

To support inclusive recruitment, we trialled a process allowing candidates to view interview questions in advance, with a launch to roll out fully in April 2025. We also developed new eRecruitment functionality, set to go live after testing.

We welcomed a new Board Chair and two new Board Members to SCRA.

Staff Engagement

A detailed review into the role of the Reporter job description and person specification got underway. This involved extensive consultation with staff across the organisation and was supported by an external consultant.

We carried out our annual staff survey and continued to work closely with UNISON through the National Partnership Forum, which hosted two development days and regular face-to-face meetings.

POLICY AND PARTNERSHIP

The policy landscape for children and public services in Scotland has evolved over many years and continues to grow. The Children's Hearings System, alongside SCRA and Children's Hearings Scotland, plays a central role in this landscape. In 2024/25, the focus has shifted towards collaborative improvement, legislative reform, and system-wide transformation.

Working in Partnership

SCRA staff across Scotland maintain strong working relationships with key partners, including social work services, Police Scotland, health and education professionals, Safeguarders, and advocacy providers. Joint corporate parenting and collaborative working at the local level are actively championed.

At the national level, SCRA's work reflects the broad remit of the Children's Hearings System. We responded to several key consultations, most notably the Scottish Government's extensive consultation on Hearings System redesign, which saw positive engagement from staff across the organisation. SCRA remains a committed member of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP), and we continue to play a central role in the development of local CHIP initiatives across Scotland.

We also work closely with a range of national groups addressing issues such as child protection, trafficking and exploitation, Bairns' Hoose, youth justice, safeguarding, and secure care. In preparation for the implementation of the Children



(Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, we are collaborating with partners to ensure a coordinated, whole-system response. While we await the implementation timetable, we are actively engaging in discussions about the resources required to support these changes - particularly for services supporting 16 and 17-year-olds.

Bairns' Hoose and Child Protection

SCRA is proud to contribute to the progress of the Bairns' Hoose initiative. Our staff are involved in both national and local discussions, including planning for Pathfinder Pilot sites and affiliated projects exploring new ways of working.

In 2024/25, we published a new Practice Note on Child Criminal Exploitation, complementing existing guidance on Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children. We continued to focus on this area in 2024/25, including contributing to a national conference on child exploitation hosted by Action for Children.

Contextual Safeguarding and Risk Outside the Home

While the Children's Hearings System traditionally focuses on individual children, there is growing interest in contextual safeguarding - an approach that addresses risks outside the home, such as unsafe public spaces or community environments. This model brings partners together to improve safety in shared spaces, and interest in its application is growing across local authorities in Scotland.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

SCRA continues to support Family Group Decision Making at both national and local levels. We are active members of the national steering group and are working with Children 1st and other partners to explore how FGDM can be further embedded across Scotland.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Our ambition to become a trauma-informed organisation continues to progress. In partnership with NHS Education Scotland (NES), we have trained staff to deliver trauma-skilled training across SCRA. Following this rollout, we will assess next steps to further develop our workforce. In March 2024, we also launched a new psychological support process, offering staff access to additional support through self-assessment and professional screening.

Training and Knowledge Sharing

We have expanded our online training provision for partners, supported by our Learning Leads. In collaboration with CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection) and Social Work Scotland, we updated and relaunched A Guide to Referral to the Children's Reporter, along with a new training presentation. Our national online training programme for social work staff remains available, and we welcome opportunities to support local authorities with bespoke training.

COVID-19 Inquiry

SCRA contributed to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry, submitting a full written statement and providing oral evidence from three senior managers. This was an opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced during the pandemic and to recognise the exceptional dedication of our staff.

Looking Ahead

We are preparing for significant change. SCRA is working closely with the Scottish Government on the drafting of a Bill to redesign the Children's Hearings System. We expect the Bill to be introduced this year and are committed to shaping legislation that delivers on The Promise - ensuring a more compassionate, effective, and rights-based

experience for children, young people, and families who require statutory support.

OUR PROGRAMME WORK

In 2024/2025, SCRA's Programme Team delivered the first version of the future Target Operating Model for the organisation, setting out the vision for the future. This has been developed using staff engagement, project outputs, external drivers for change and feedback. The vision outlines how the organisation will improve the service, Keep The Promise and create capacity for this through efficient processes across referrals, hearings and court.

A Programme Delivery Plan has been developed to guide the work to take the organisation towards that target through projects, further discovery work, operational testing and implementing changes. Work is underway testing change in a number of key areas:

- Referrals – a report analysing referral patterns and practice across the country, developed with operational input, has been delivered. This report has informed the next stage of operational testing and enhanced models of working with partners who are our key referrers.
- Working with partners to develop a learning programme about the Children's Hearings System and role of the Reporter.
- Testing in a combined project approach that aims to deliver capacity that is then used to focus on improved service delivery, is due to complete in June 2025. A full evaluation will then take place for decisions are made about rolling this approach out further.

The combined approach includes:

- A consistent approach to scheduling and arranging Hearings.
- Child Friendly Scheduling – an approach to scheduling Hearings that involves liaising with children/trusted professionals in advance to ascertain preferences for day/date /

- An improved approach to court preparation by liaising with witnesses and undertaking witness statements proactively.
- The Keeping The Promise Commitment Standards project focuses on speaking directly to families ahead of the Hearing to ensure they are fully informed, supported and understand the process, as well as making sure practical are all elements taken care of. Planning is underway for phase 2 to begin in June 2025.
- Early engagement on grounds - a project to discover more about reporter practices for proactively engaging with children and families around grounds for referral. This project is also considering the benefits and risks and engaging the wider organisation on how an approach might be tested.

Other project activity for the Programme Team in 2024/2025 includes:

- Collaboration with Children's Hearings Scotland exploring improvement to scheduling of Hearings. An interim report was presented to the Hearings Delivery Group in March 2025 and a final report and updated Hearings Management Guidance taking account of this work will be presented to the the Hearings Delivery Group in June 2025 for approval. Thereafter work will commence on an implementation plan to deliver the changes and improvements.
- SCRA has initiated an internal project to prepare for and co-ordinate the implementation of the Children Care and Justice Act.
- SCRA is working in partnership on the Children's Hearings redesign. The work making up the redesign includes proposed legislative change and multiagency improvement work. SCRA is represented on the Redesign Board and Redesign Planning Group and has worked to shape the workstreams and commit staff into project team roles.

The Programme Team has been working hard to ensure that voice is at the heart of the work we do.



We are working with children and young people to co-design aspects of our child friendly scheduling offering that supports participation.

The Research Team are working with the Programme Team, supporting evaluation of the impact of projects. Research has been approved to take place during 2025. We will ask children and families about their experience of changes we are testing.

The Programme Team recently had a follow up independent assurance review in January 2025, which provided a good delivery confidence outcome, feedback about good practice in the programme and recommendations to further strengthen the approach.



SPOTLIGHT ON ... LOOKING AHEAD - PREPARING FOR CHANGE IN SCRA

We know change is on the horizon with a number of external drivers.

A key focus for 2024/2025 has been getting change ready.

One of the aims in our Business Plan is 'greater change capability and capacity across the organisation'. To take this forward, a Change Team has been created to support good, planned and managed, well communicated and supported change. Their role is to ensure smooth transitions as we adopt new ways of working.

The Change Team work with each of our Localities to understand their current state, their readiness, how 'close' they are to the areas of project work and test – and thus what it would take to implement – and what supports they would need to move from current to future state.

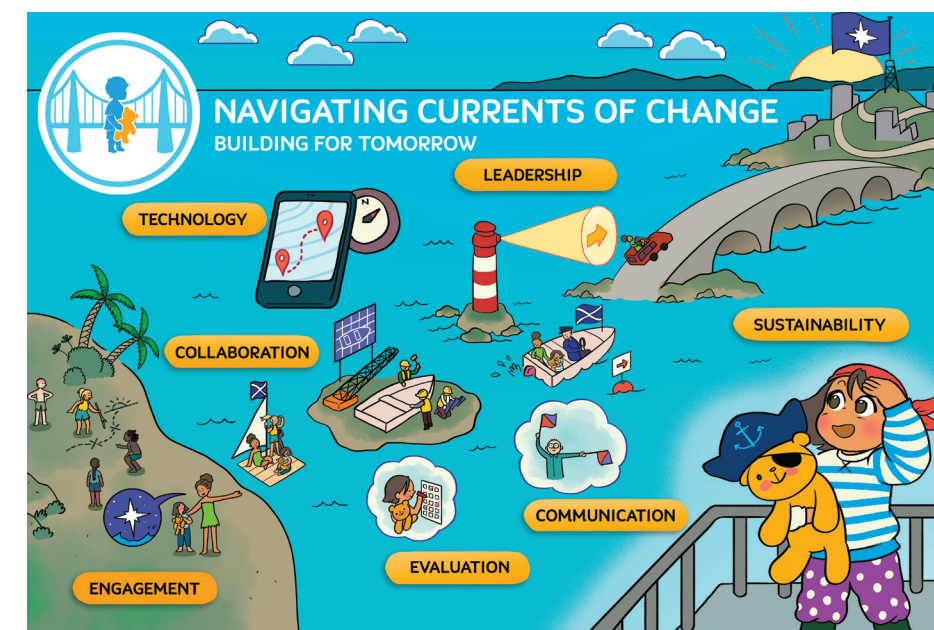
A Change Strategy has been approved which is supported by a Communication Strategy. A Business Change Manager is in place and is working closely with Project Managers and SCRA's Organisational Development Team ahead of implementation of any changes.

We know that an engaged staff group is essential to successful delivery of change. The Change Team are sharing updates and seeking feedback over multiple channels, and experimenting with new options such as podcasts to reach all of our people.

The Programme Team and Change Team have undertaken extensive learning and development to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to deliver change which is evaluated and can evidence benefits and to build confidence in our ability as an organisation to adapt, respond and create change, improving the way that we work and deliver our service.

Ensuring that our people are skilled and confident is critical to successful change – both in identifying, developing and implementing the change, and in working to it.

As we move forward with change and improvement to our service delivery, a key part of our Change Strategy is staff learning and development to support new ways of working which the Operational Development Team have a key role in supporting.



We recognise that change management is a key leadership skill and are supporting our managers to have the skills and knowledge to lead change confidently.

PROGRAMME 3 - PROTECT PRACTICE

In 2024/2025, the Practice Team provided the full range of practice activities to support Reporters in their day to day work. This included giving support and advice to localities throughout the year, developing practice materials, delivering practice training, managing cases in the higher courts, and working with partner agencies at a national level.

The two major areas of new activity in 2024/25 related to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (the UNCRC Act) and new practice training on harmful sexual behaviour.

A major part of the work on the UNCRC Act related to our approach to article 12 of the UNCRC - giving children who have been referred the opportunity to provide their views on the decision the Reporter will take, and for those views to be taken into account. This involved amendments to practice direction, a new practice note on the act, the development of practice training and working with other teams on related digital and operational changes.

The new practice training on harmful sexual behaviour was rolled out during the year. This was mandatory training for all Reporters with the required degree of experience. This 3 day course included sections on messages from research, Reporters' decision making, criminal evidence, drafting, and support for witnesses in proof proceedings, including protections against certain questioning.

Other practice materials produced during the year included revised practice notes on relevant and collateral evidence and sections 173 – 175 of the 2011 Act, and schedule 1 offences involving physical injury to a child. Both were revised to reflect recent decisions from appeal courts.

Practice Notes provide practical support to Reporters in relation to aspects of their work,

for example in explaining the law on a topic or providing style wording to be used in a document.

In addition, the team published revisions of 2 significant practice directions, one on relevant persons and the other on appeals.

As well as the harmful sexual behaviour training, we delivered the full schedule of core practice training and more specialised training through the year. Although some of this training was delivered remotely online, most was in-person. In total during the year, we delivered 53 full days of in-person training and 4 half days of online training to Reporters and assistant Reporters. The Practice Team also supported locality-led training and practice sessions on request.

Ten cases in the higher courts concluded during the year. Significant issues raised in these cases included questions relating to relevant persons and the hearsay evidence of an expert witness.

Of those that concluded, 3 were initiated by us – but we did not proceed with the appeals in any of them. Of the other 7, one appeal was refused after a full hearing, 2 were allowed after we did not oppose them, and the remainder were abandoned by the appellants. There was one judicial review.

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

We continued to be engaged in improvement work at a national level with partner agencies, including Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Children's Hearings Scotland and social work services. This work involved a wide range of subject matter, including the review of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019, the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, jointly reported cases, joint investigative interviewing, and restorative justice. We regularly delivered national external training to the police and joint investigative interviewers.

OUR RESEARCH

The Research Team has conducted three pieces of primary research in the last 12 months. These have focussed upon understanding: the ethics, rights and legalities of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the Children's Hearings System; the nature of serious offences that are committed by children aged 12-15 years old and how these are addressed by the Children's Hearings System; perceptions around how the rights of children who harm and those who have been harmed by children should be balanced within the provision of victim information and supports. Data for each of the studies are currently being analysed.

Findings from all of the studies will be in the public domain by the end of 2025. It is anticipated that findings from these studies will contribute to a number of legislative and policy areas, including: Scotland's use of ethical, transparent and inclusive AI; the parliamentary review of the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland; the formation of a single point of contact for victims of offences; and the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) act 2024.

The Research Team has also provided research and evaluation support for a number of service improvement activities being undertaken by Programme Protect and the Digital Team.

This programme of work has included: the gathering and analysis of SCRA staff opinions related to the testing of Child Friendly Scheduling, the Keeping the Promise Commitment Standards and the joint operational test; an evaluation and cost-benefit analysis of AI-based transcription tools for the transcription of research materials, including an assessment of equality and bias; gathering and analysis of information from SCRA staff on the Role of the Reporter to inform the process of modernising the Reporter job description; and understanding barriers to effective, timely and appropriate referrals as part of the Referral Patterns and Planning project.

In addition to these activities, the Research Team has also supported desk research for both



programme protect and the practice team to help promote evidence-based practice and decision-making. Evidence gathered from these reviews have been included within the recently introduced children in conflict with the law course for Reporters, as well as a workshop conducted by Programme Protect to explore barriers to children and families understanding statements of grounds.

DIGITAL ENABLEMENT

At SCRA, we are committed to designing digital services that enhance the experience of children, young people and families, while also improving the tools and systems our staff rely on. Our digital enablement efforts this year have focused on innovation, collaboration, and efficiency - ensuring that technology supports both service delivery and internal operations.

Enhancing the Hearings experience

We are developed and delivered and are also testing several digital tools aimed at improving how children and families engage with the Hearings System:

- Electronic Paper Sharing: A proof of concept for securely sharing Hearing papers electronically with children and families has been developed and is ready for testing.
- Texting (SMS): Also, being tested, we have developed the capability to send text messages to children, young people and families, to consider

how we offer more ways of communication around the arrangement and attendance at Hearings.

- **Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC):** Together with our partners we are investing in new ways to store and share different forms of media, to establish richer forms of expressing information and views through video or audio for example.

- **Hearings Room Technology:** Free WiFi and the use of laptops is available to anyone attending a Hearing. We have upgraded to the latest generation of WiFi devices and continue to roll out the latest Audio Visual (AV) equipment, offering a higher quality and more inclusive experience of Virtual Hearings.

- **Chronology of Decisions and Reasons:** We have developed a process to extract the key information from historic Records of Proceedings, that we intend to use to reduce the size of Hearing papers and present only the relevant historical decisions and reasons from amongst all the lengthy procedural and administrative information.

Improving internal systems

We continue to enhance our internal systems to support staff and streamline operations:

- **Artificial Intelligence:** As mentioned earlier in this Reporter, several of the new digital capabilities we are testing use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in an ethical and rights-respecting way, focusing on speeding up and reducing the complexity of processes. We are committed to our staff continuing to be the decision makers regarding all the information we receive, but aim to remove the unnecessary steps and labour, that currently extends the time to reach their conclusions.

- **Child Concern Reports Integration:** We are testing AI technology that can read information received in reports and save staff time from keying data and carrying out unnecessary processing steps, allowing them more quickly to get the relevant information and respond.

- **Lean Waste Assessment:** 'Lean' is a specific way to understand the way processes, people and systems

work together to achieve improved efficiency and effectiveness. We completed this analysis, identifying non-disclosure and court work as priority areas for improvement.

- **New Redaction Tool:** Non-disclosure is an important protection to children, where specific information is legally withheld from identified persons, and we use a 'redaction' tool that removes this information from other material we must legally share. We have been evaluating a new tool.

- **Calendar App:** Hearings are complex with lots to manage and consider in terms of arrangement and attendance. We have developed an application that pulls together all the relevant threads on information into a single view and rolled this out nationally in November 2024, enhancing scheduling and management of Hearings.

Looking ahead

We have made significant progress in delivering key digital developments during this business plan period. Projects such as electronic paper sharing, redaction, SMS (text) notifications, and DESC are advancing well, with further stages planned for the coming year. Our digital strategy remains focused on improving the experience for children and families, while also driving internal efficiency. Continued engagement with users and staff ensures that our digital solutions are practical, inclusive, and impactful.

OUR PROPERTY

Our buildings need to be safe, suitable and appropriate for everyone who uses them.

During 2024/25, we have continued with our programme of investment in our estate to ensure that both our Hearing centres and our offices continue to support our operational requirements. We have taken the experience of previous years, and built on this work to complete further internal reconfiguration work to support physical and hybrid Hearings, as well as improvements to workspaces to support staff flexibility.

We have also continued with our programme of large scale repair and maintenance projects following on from condition surveys completed in previous years.

Hearing facilities are central to the delivery of our services and property is one of our largest areas of expenditure. Over the last decade, we have rolled out a programme of improvements to our Hearing rooms, removing the large tables and introducing much more family-centred furniture and layouts. With the exception of Lerwick, which will be completed in 2025/26, every property on our estate now has at least one modern Hearing room.

This year, we took a decision to review what we have achieved, and how we would want to go forward in the future. In anticipation of undertaking a major project to the Glasgow Hearing centre, a firm of designers were appointed following a procurement exercise, to carry out a comprehensive consultation exercise with stakeholders in the Children's Hearings System, and to produce a new design blueprint for not only the Hearing room, but the whole of the Hearing suite including waiting rooms and receptions. Following the receipt of several hundred responses, and a number of focus group meetings, the outcome was the production of a new set of Hearing centre design standards which will be used as the basis for a new programme of improvements over the next few years.

Using the principles in the new design standards, the designers have completed a comprehensive redesign of the Hearing centre in Glasgow, and work commenced in March 2025 to completely remodel the ground and first floor Hearing centre. This will provide four new Hearing rooms along with new waiting, reception and toilet facilities. The Glasgow Hearings centre was created over 20 years ago and the majority of the mechanical and electrical installations that provide heating and ventilation are life expired. Replacement of this equipment with a modern energy efficient system increased the overall cost of the project but is entirely in line with the requirement to work towards net zero objectives.



We have also continued our focus of improving our working environments for staff, continuing the themes that we have developed, from previous schemes in locations such as Hamilton and Edinburgh. Building on our agile working policy, we have sought to reimagine space by providing different work settings for staff, and improved facilities for virtual Hearings and meetings.

In our Aberdeen office, a smart working project has created a modern flexible workspace by removing the bulk filing system, reducing the number of workstations and reconfiguring the available floor space. Improvements include the creation of new meeting spaces, virtual Hearing booths, wellbeing spaces and the provision of new furniture including a number of sit/stand desks.

In our Greenock and Inverness properties, we have initiated smart working projects involve works to create modern flexible workspaces that includes the creation of new meeting spaces, virtual Hearing booths, wellbeing spaces and the provision of new office furniture. The design proposal brings staff together within the workspace and through the adoption of smart working and agile principles it allows additional facilities to be created by reducing desk numbers and sharing use of resources. Design work completed in 2024/25 and physical work on both projects was completed in the first quarter of 2025/26.

Following on from the works in 2023/24 to the operational offices in Glenrothes, the second phase of the project continued on the first floor to upgrade the poor quality vacant space and create four new separately lettable offices. These units are now on the market to let through our appointed agent.

We continue to review the use of our estate, and wherever possible seek to find tenants for our surplus space. We have this year created additional good quality lettable space in Glenrothes, and we continue to look for opportunities share with other public sector bodies, or to generate income from our surplus property.

The next planned project is Dundee. The building was constructed by SCRA in 2005 and was configured to meet the workplace requirements of that time.

A number of building components have reached end of life and the space is significantly underutilised.

During 2024/25 a procurement exercise was completed to appoint architects and interior designers to develop a project to upgrade the workspaces and key building systems. The initial design work is now complete and detailed design and tendering will commence to progress comprehensive works to the building.

This includes reconfiguring how SCRA uses the office spaces to free up a floor of the building for leasing. Along with this the ground floor entrance and reception are being redesigned to accommodate shared use with a tenant of the lettable space. All staff will be accommodated on one floor following the smart working approach successfully adopted in SCRA's other offices.

Modern, flexible workspaces will be provided with sufficient meeting, breakout and shared spaces. The first floor of the building will provide additional flexible space for training, meetings and extra Hearing space capacity. The existing windows are approaching end of life and perform poorly

compared with modern replacements. Complete replacement of windows will improve the thermal and environmental performance of the building. Upgrading of heating and air handling systems are similarly planned to improve energy efficiency.

We have continued our programme of producing condition surveys to inform major repair and maintenance projects. We completed works to the fabric of our buildings in Fraserburgh, Selkirk and Bellshill, and our building surveyors have carried out surveys of Dumbarton, Greenock and Paisley with a view to completing projects in 2025/26.





SPOTLIGHT ON ... HEARING CENTRE DESIGN STANDARDS

In 2024 we invited Hearings-experienced young people, partners from across the Children's Hearings System and our staff to take part in a series of design workshops.

The aim of the workshops was to create a new set of design standards for our Hearing centres across Scotland.

We worked with Hearings-experienced young people including:

- Children and young people from Glasgow children's houses
- Proud2Care
- Our Hearings, Our Voice
- Multiple internal and external stakeholders (including SCRA's Voice of Experience Reference Group, Panel Members, SCRA staff from across the organisation, Neurodiversity specialists, and Speech and Language Therapists).

The workshops were facilitated by architects, who were appointed following a procurement exercise.

They were supported by members of our Hearing room improvement project team which consists of colleagues from a range of areas, including property, operations, digital and participation. The consultation sessions found that the need for safe

and inclusive environments extended beyond the Hearing room to the whole Hearing centre.

Our new Hearing Centre Design Standards were launched in March 2025 and are built around eight key principles:

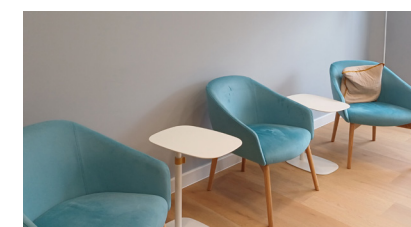
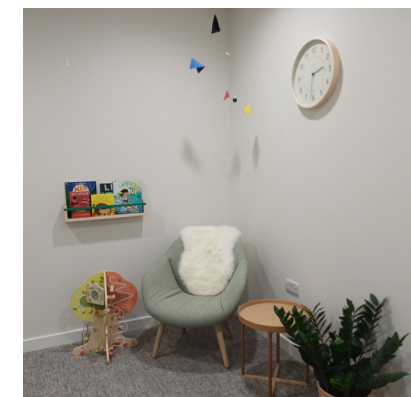
1. Welcoming
2. Caring
3. Safe
4. Trauma-informed
5. Calming
6. Non-institutional
7. Green
8. Sustainable

The new standards reflect the need for trauma-informed designs and draw on the feedback from multiple participants taking part in the consultation, as well as elements of the designs used in the Bairns' Hoose houses.

The designs also suit or can be easily adapted for neurodivergent people or those with physical disabilities. The standards also ensure our Hearing Centres are flexible and future-proofed, designed to help children and young people of all ages to participate effectively.

The process to develop the new standards was a significant undertaking, but we are confident they will support and enhance the work of our staff to create a welcoming, supportive and accessible environment for everyone coming to Hearings.

A huge thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation sessions. We hope you see that your views are reflected in the final standards.



OUR STATISTICS IN 2024/25



Children referred
9,789



Children referred
(non-offence referrals)
7,839



Children aged
between 12-17 years
were referred on
offence grounds
2,447



Most common
age of referral
**14
years**



Children's
Hearings held
21,313



Children
with CPOs
503



Children with CSOs
at 31st March
6,355



You can view our [Official Statistics 2024/25](https://www.scra.gov.uk) -
including our interactive dashboard - on our
website www.scra.gov.uk

OUR BOARD IN 2024/25

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

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

More information about our Board, including a full Register of Board Members' Interests, can be found on our website at www.scra.gov.uk

Here are details about our Board Members at 31 March 2025:

Chair:

Cathie Cowan (appointed 2024)

Board Members:

Kay Barton (appointed 2021)

Lynne Clow (appointed 2024)

James Edgar (re-appointed 2021)

Lorraine Moore (appointed 2021)

Steve Renwick (appointed 2024)

Hazel Smith (appointed 2022)

Ying Zhang (appointed 2022)



LOOKING AHEAD

NEIL HUNTER, PRINCIPAL REPORTER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE

2024/25 has been another exciting and challenging year for SCRA. Our commitment to Keeping the Promise and making progress with the Hearings System Working Group recommendations has led to a series of important and stimulating projects emerging, as well as a real commitment from SCRA staff to testing new ways of working and delivering our important statutory service to children and young people. We remain absolutely committed to keeping the detail and the spirit of The Promise and Hearings for Children and we are very aware of the work being done in the background on what has become known as the Promise Bill.

But we also understand that much change does not require legislation, rather commitment and energy for change and improvement for children and young people involved in the Hearings System – and that’s where we will be putting so much of our work in 2025/26. We have welcomed and comprehensively responded to the range of consultations which have a feature of the last few years. This ensures everyone with an interest in Scotland’s Hearings System to have their say. I’m very conscious that we have been over 5 years in a state of review and examination.

Whilst it is important we get the next few stages right, it’s equally important that we end this prolonged and uncertain period of inward looking and move forward with certainty and confidence. In 2025/26 we expect to finally implement the Children’s (Care and Justice) Act. Amongst all the review and examination this remains SCRA’s primary focus for next year. The Act is a fundamental piece of the jigsaw to ensure Scotland is compliant with UNCRC and that children under 18 can access the

protections and support of the Hearings System when they need it.

This is a massive operational challenge for SCRA and we will embark on the biggest recruitment in our organisation for over a decade. Whilst this is welcome, we remain in a year on year extremely difficult financial position that must be stabilised. Nonetheless the safety and continuity of our service remains paramount and that will guide me and the senior team of SCRA over the next year.

Our SCRA staff remain our most valuable and precious asset, every day working hard on behalf of children and young people. We have been working hard in the background on a review of the Children’s Reporter Job Description and we hope to complete and implement this in 2025/26. The last time we reviewed this was over 15 years ago and we are keen to ensure that the range of critical roles the Children’s Reporter plays in the Hearings System are reflected in a contemporary way which narrates the range of skills and qualities this job entails.

To our Hearings System partners, I very much look forward to working with you again in 2025/26 – we have significant plans to refresh and strengthen some of our key partnerships over this next year to ensure the Hearings System works in a truly collaborative way for children and young people in Scotland.





SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2025

www.scra.gov.uk

