

Agenda of SCRA Board Meeting, held on  
Wednesday 16 December 2025, at Bell Street, Glasgow



# A G E N D A

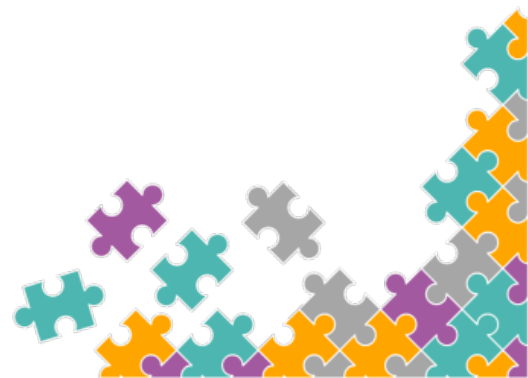
**SCRA BOARD CHAIR**  
**Cathie Cowan**

Item	Topic	Lead	Decision	Timings
1.	<b>Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum</b>			10:30
1.1	<b>AOB</b>			
2.	<b>Declaration (s) of Interest (s)</b>			
3.	<b>Chair/Non-Executive Updates</b>		For Information	10:35
4.	<b>Minute of the Board Development Day held on</b>		For information	10:45
5.	<b>Minute of SCRA Board Meeting held on 25 September 2025</b>	Chair	For Approval	10:55
6.	<b>Matters Arising from Minute Matters Arising from Action Log</b>	Chair	For Assurance	11:00
7.	<b>Workplan (Board)</b>	Chair	For Noting	11:05
8.	<b>Committee Minutes and Committee Chair Escalation</b>			
8.1	<b>Minute of Audit and Assurance Committee held on 25 November 2025</b>	Committee Chair	For Noting	11:10
8.2	<b>Minute of Remuneration and Nominations Committee held on 04 December 2025</b>	Committee Chair	For Noting	11:20
8.3	<b>Minute of Planning and Performance Committee held on 08 December 2025</b>	Committee Chair	For Noting	11:30
8.4	<b>Organisational Performance Escalation/Summary Report</b>	Committee Chair	For Noting	11:40
9.	<b>Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Report</b>			
9.1	<b>PR/CE Report</b> Including update on 2025 Staff Survey	PR/CE	For Assurance	11:50
	<b>Lunch - 12.15</b>			
10.	<b>Practice &amp; Policy</b>			
10.1	<b>Research Programme</b>	Research Manager	For Assurance	13.15
11.	<b>Finance &amp; Resources</b>			
11.1	<b>Budget Monitoring Report</b>	Head of Finance & Resources	For Assurance	13:40
11.2	<b>Draft Budget</b>	Head of Finance and Resources	For Noting	13.50
12.	<b>Governance</b>			
12.1	<b>Overview of Policies</b>	Governance Officer	For Approval	14:05

<i>Item</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Timings</i>
<b>13.</b>	<b><i>Risk Management</i></b>			
<b>13.1</b>	<b><i>Strategic Risk Register</i></b>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Assurance</i>	14:25
<b>13.2</b>	<b><i>Risk Policy Review</i></b>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Approval</i>	14.40
<b>13.3</b>	<b><i>New Risks</i></b>	Head of Finance & Resources	<i>For Assurance</i>	14:55 - 15:00
<b><i>Close</i></b>				

***Date of next meeting: Wednesday 26 January 2026, by TEAMS***

***Items marked \* will be considered in private session to protect commercially sensitive or children-related information, in line with our Public Access to Board Meetings policy.***



## Minute of SCRA Board Development Day, held on Tuesday 04 November 2025, at Ochil House, Stirling

### Attended:

Cathie Cowan (Board Chair), Steve Renwick (Vice Chair), Kay Barton, Lynne Clow, Lorraine Moore,

### Present:

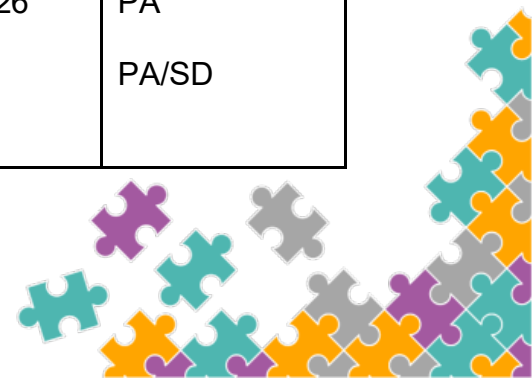
Neil Hunter, Pamela Armstrong, Lisa Bennett, Douglas Cameron, Susan Deery, Alistair Hogg, Ross Mackenzie, Paul Mulvanny

Melissa Hunt, and Sarah Wood (Impact Assessment Item)

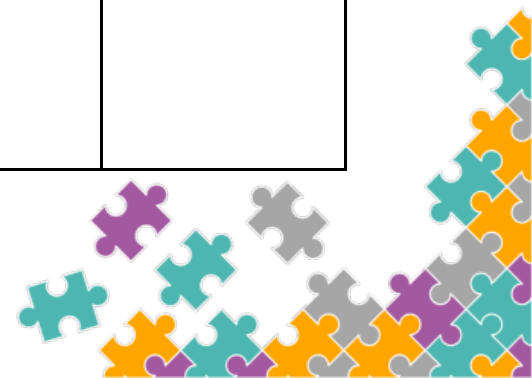
Andrew MacDonald (Business Plan Item)

Item	Topic	Timescale	Lead
1.	<p><b>Welcome</b> The Chair welcomed members and Officers to the session.</p> <p><b>Apologies</b> Jim Edgar, Ying Zhang, and Hazel Smith</p>		
2.	<p><b>Minute of SCRA Board Development Day held 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025</b> The Minute was agreed as an accurate record.</p> <p>Members reaffirmed that Development Days are intended for strategic exploration and improvement, strengthening and enhancing team (Board and EMT) dynamics whilst aligning with strong governance principles - e.g., reviewing Board effectiveness to maximise Board functions. It was agreed that such sessions are not decision-making forums and therefore the need for a formal minute was deemed as not required. In going forward a summary note capturing key actions would be produced and shared with the subsequent Board. This approach would enable the Board to oversee and agree any subsequent actions as part of governance arrangements. Any urgent actions requiring escalation would be documented separately and ratified through the appropriate governance routes.</p>		

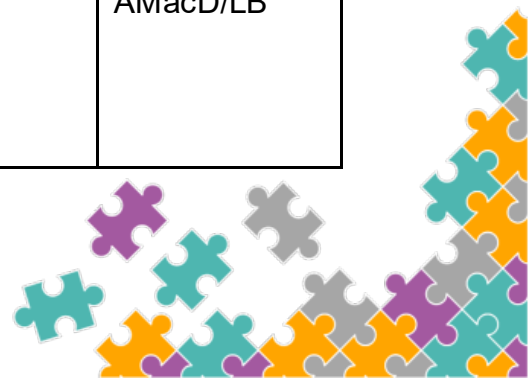
3.	<p><b>Board Effectiveness Review</b></p> <p>This session focused on the output from the recent Members including EMT assessment of Board functions, enablers, delivery, and evaluation. The assessment also assessed 'good employer' criteria. Board Members also noted the planned Internal Audit (advisory) assessment.</p> <p><b>Strengths Identified:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong collaboration between EMT and the Board.</li> <li>• High awareness of roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Constructive challenge and open dialogue.</li> </ul> <p><b>Areas for Improvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder Engagement: More structured engagement with staff, key partners, e.g., CHS, and children and young people through established forums.</li> <li>• Induction: Clearer onboarding for new members, including role and responsibility boundaries and practical support.</li> <li>• Framework Document: Enhancing visibility to increase statutory roles and relationships awareness.</li> <li>• Ethics and Values: Desire for a shared understanding to guide public messaging and strategic decisions.</li> <li>• Skills Matrix: Review and update ahead of Board Member recruitment; consider outreach options (e.g. webinars) to widen the applicant pool.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase visibility of the Framework Document and raise its profile with SG.</li> <li>• Refresh the skills matrix and explore outreach to diversify recruitment.</li> <li>• Schedule a Board session on ethics and values.</li> <li>• Strengthen the induction programme for new members.</li> </ul>	<p>Next review Q1 26</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>Apr 26</p>	<p>Board/EMT/PA</p> <p>RNC</p> <p>PA</p> <p>PA/SD</p>
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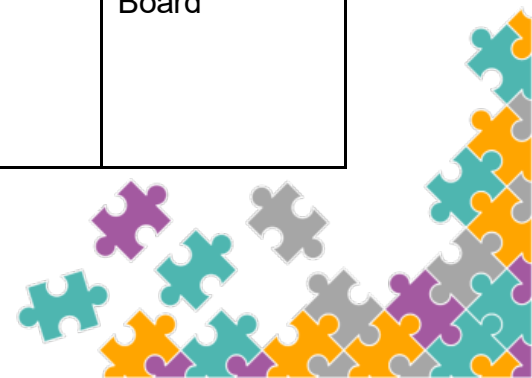
4.	<p><b><i>Developing Draft Board Governance Improvement Plan</i></b></p> <p>The plan will be structured around three key pillars:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continuous Improvement - including CPD for Board members.</li> <li>2. Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement function - both internal and external.</li> <li>3. Clear Role Delineation - between the Board and EMT, including expectations for offline engagement to support Board functions, enablers, delivery, and assurance.</li> </ol> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a Board Governance Improvement Plan incorporating review themes and audit findings.</li> </ul>	Apr 26	CC/NH/PA
5.	<p><b><i>Impact Assessments</i></b></p> <p>The Board reviewed the organisation's approach to Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (IAs). Historically, IAs were inconsistent and often completed late, reducing their value. The new model aims to embed IAs early in decision-making and using assessment process as part of a proactive planning tool rather than a compliance exercise.</p> <p><b>Key Discussion Points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ IAs can be perceived as tick-box exercises.</li> <li>◦ Inconsistent depth and timing; often left too late in the process.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• New approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Living Impact Assessments that evolve throughout a project.</li> <li>◦ Trial use of AI tools to prompt deeper thinking and suggest evidence sources.</li> <li>◦ Integrated consideration of equality, human rights, children's rights, socioeconomic impacts, and environmental factors.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Cultural shift: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Move from compliance to intentional planning.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		



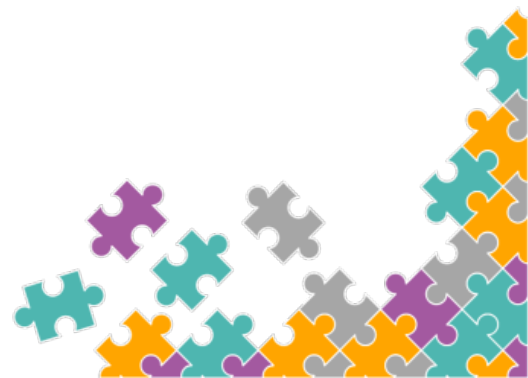
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Embed IA as part of governance and programme boards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt revised IA approach as part of governance improvement work.</li> <li>• Require IA sign-off before relevant policy publication or national rollout.</li> </ul>		<p>EMT</p> <p>EMT</p>
6.	<p><b>Business Plan</b></p> <p>This item focused on early thinking around organisational priorities for the next financial year and alignment with the forthcoming Corporate Plan (2027 - 30). The Board emphasised the importance of its structured involvement in shaping priorities and monitoring delivery.</p> <p><b>Key Discussion Points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 2026/27 Business Plan will serve as a bridge into the new Corporate Plan cycle.</li> <li>• Dependencies and readiness for transition were discussed, including resource constraints and programme assurance.</li> <li>• Early Board engagement is essential to avoid last-minute approvals and ensure strategic alignment with strategic objectives and risks.</li> <li>• The Planning &amp; Performance Committee will play a key role in shaping and monitoring strategy development.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning &amp; Performance Committee to map out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Timetable for Corporate Plan development</li> <li>○ Key Board and Committee touchpoints for input and assurance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure alignment with governance improvement and risk oversight.</li> <li>• Confirm that Business Plan discussions will inform the Corporate Plan timetable.</li> </ul>		<p>PPC</p> <p>AMacD/LB</p> <p>AMacD/LB</p>



7.	<p><b>Aligning Risks to Committees</b></p> <p>This session explored how strategic risks should be managed and reported across the Board and its Committees, with a focus on maintaining clear governance boundaries.</p> <p><b>Key Discussion Points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board retains responsible for setting risk appetite and strategic oversight of corporate/strategic risks not daily operations.</li> <li>• Committees should not assume responsibility for risk scoring or operational management and instead focus on risk are and monitoring culture.</li> <li>• Committees require sufficient information (e.g. red-rated actions, controls, and progress updates) to enable Members to assess controls and provide assurance.</li> <li>• Clear delineation is essential: Audit &amp; Assurance Committee provides assurance, vs role of EMT in owning and implementing the risk management policy.</li> <li>• Considered the draft alignment of specific strategic risks to relevant Committees to provide independent oversight, assurance, and escalation to the Board. Committees also able to seek cross Committee assurance.</li> <li>• Risk reporting should include narrative context notably around controls and avoid over-reliance on dashboards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EMT to prepare proposals for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Reporting format with narrative context including controls to support escalation and de-escalation of strategic risks for Board decision.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Seek approval by the Board for proposed strategic risk alignment to relevant Committees.</li> <li>• Maintain Board responsibility for setting risk appetite and oversight of strategic risks, with Committees focusing providing assurance on assigned Committee strategic risks. Noted role of</li> </ul>		<p>RMack</p> <p>RMack</p> <p>Board</p>
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	Audit & Assurance Committee in providing assurance on risk management arrangements.		
8.	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b></p> <p>The Chair concluded the Development Day by summarising key themes and reinforcing the importance of follow-through. While informal, Development Days generate actions critical to governance improvement and strategic readiness.</p> <p><b>Key Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous Improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Governance Improvement Plan to consolidate discussion outcomes and audit findings.</li> <li>○ CPD for Board members remains a priority.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stakeholder Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continued commitment to strengthening engagement internally and externally.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Induction &amp; Recruitment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Updates to the induction pack and skills matrix to support cognitive diversity of Board Members.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Visibility &amp; Assurance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Framework Document to inform roles and responsibilities - e.g., Board, CEO/PR and EMT and SG and Sponsorship Team.</li> <li>○ Risk alignment and IA embedding to enhance governance assurance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		





### Present:

Cathie Cowan, Chair  
Steve Renwick, Vice Chair  
Kay Barton  
Lynne Clow - By TEAMS  
Jim Edgar  
Lorraine Moore  
Ying Zhang

### In Attendance:

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

Donald Lamb, Data Manager - Item 7.3. By TEAMS  
Sarah Wood, Inclusion & Diversity Manager - Item 9.2  
Taiba Ali, Senior Policy Officer, Scottish Government. By TEAMS  
Grazyna Tega, Sponsorship & Policy Officer, Scottish Government. By TEAMS  
Nick Rougvie, Children's Hearings Team Leader, Scottish Government. By TEAMS

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
1.	<p><b>Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed Board Members and Officers.</p> <p>Apologies: Hazel Smith (Board Member) and Helen Etchells (SOM).</p> <p>Quorum confirmed.</p>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
1.1	<b>AOB</b> The Chair reminded colleagues (Board Members and EMT) to participate in the completion of the Board Effectiveness Review. It was noted outcomes would be considered at the next Development Session (4 <sup>th</sup> of Nov) to inform the Board's ongoing commitment to 'good governance' and Governance Improvement Plan.	Nov 25	CC
2.	<b>Declaration (s) of Interest (s)</b> None		
3.	<b>Chair/Non-Executive Updates</b> The Chair reported on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>two meetings with the Sponsorship Team, focusing on the Promise Bill and related parliamentary activity, funding pressures, recruitment to the Board and agreeing personal objectives.</li> <li>a session with the Research Team providing a detailed update on current projects and their policy relevance to SCRA and the wider operating context.</li> <li>a meeting with the SSSC Chair to strengthen alignment and potential opportunities to deliver wider sector priorities and workforce standards.</li> </ul>		
4.	<b>Minute of SCRA Board Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025</b> Approved as accurate.		
5.	<b>Matters Arising from Minute</b> None  <b>Matters Arising from Action Log</b> The Board reviewed the Action Log and agreed to close those actions completed, notably: Financial Strategy, Sustainability, Energy Efficiency Review, Policy - Public Attending Board, Review of the Reporter Job Description Business Case and assigning strategic risks to Committees. The Board also agreed to close those actions relating to delegation to Committees, notably: SCRA absence reporting and monitoring to the Remuneration & Nominations (RNC) Committee, Corporate Plan development and monitoring and Case Sampling reporting and monitoring to the Policy & Planning		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	Committee (PPC) and the 'good governance' facilitated session scheduled as part of the Board Development November session. The Chair also highlighted the draft Board and Committee Workplans and changes to Terms of Reference to accommodate transfer of scrutiny and oversight responsibilities. It was noted these updates was on today's Board agenda.		
6.	<p><b>Workplan (Board/Committees)</b></p> <p>The Chair referred to the previous agenda discussion and introduced the draft workplans, recommending approval before being cascaded to relevant Committees for ongoing discussion.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timing adjustments to accommodate proposed transfer of responsibilities.</li> <li>• Risks to be allocated to relevant Committees (e.g. workforce - RNC; digital - PPC), with Audit &amp; Assurance Committee (ACC) retaining risk management system oversight and Board responsibility for management of strategy related risks.</li> <li>• EDI Strategy split - workforce to RNC, service-user aspects to PPC</li> <li>• Implementation of case sampling actions remaining with EMT, with PPC being responsible for scrutiny and oversight as part of annual assurance on progress</li> <li>• Change in RNC title to reflect its increasingly HR-focus.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To approve the updated SCRA Board Annual Workplan 2025/26 with draft workplans approved for cascade to Committees.</li> <li>• To note the transfer of specific oversight items to the PPC and RNC.</li> <li>• Endorse the alignment of the revised workplans with the Board's corporate objectives and governance functions.</li> </ul>		
7.	<b>SCRA Committees</b>		
7.1	<p><b>Minute of Audit and Assurance Committee (AAC) held on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025</b></p> <p>The AAC Chair reported on the Committee's meeting of 28th August. The principal item was the</p>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>Annual Report and Accounts, which received an unmodified external audit opinion from Audit Scotland, alongside positive feedback from Internal Auditors. The Committee therefore recommended approval of the Annual Accounts to the Board.</p> <p>Other matters considered included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Governance: Compliance remains strong, though further work is ongoing in relation to breach reduction, the lowest level possible supported by embedded case analysis.</li> <li>• Internal Audit: positive assurances were received on estate management controls.</li> <li>• Risk Management: The strategic risk register remains stable, with ongoing compliance work.</li> <li>• Pension Fund: confirmed as well funded, with assurance on long-term sustainability.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee also held a private session with internal and external auditors, which was positive in terms of engagement and quality of work.</p> <p>A self-assessment against Audit Scotland's standards confirmed strong overall performance, with induction for new members identified as an area for improvement.</p> <p>The Board expressed its thanks to the Committee Chair for leadership and oversight in this key area.</p> <p>The minute was noted.</p>		
7.2	<p><b>Minute of Remuneration and Nominations Committee (RNC) held on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2025</b></p> <p>The RNC Chair reported on its meeting on 21 August, with subsequent updates provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members noted that some decisions had been taken offline due to the pace of negotiations with Committee members agreeing these be captured in the next set of formal minutes to ensure a clear audit trail.</li> <li>• Members discussed declarations of interest, distinguishing between formal conflicts and the inherent tension of considering staff pay matters against budget limitations - it was noted this has been added to updated Terms of Reference subject to approval later in</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>today's agenda.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>at the time of the meeting, staff pay discussions were on hold pending progress of the Scottish Government's pay offer to its core staff group.</li> <li>review of the Reporter Job Description and Person Specification was also considered.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for December. The minute was noted, and the Board expressed its thanks to the Chair for leadership in managing these matters.</p>		
7.3	<p><b>Minute of Planning and Performance Committee held on 08<sup>th</sup> September 2025</b></p> <p>The PPC Chair, reported on its meeting of 08<sup>th</sup> September and highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External environment: the Committee noted ongoing uncertainty around the implementation date of the CCJA, and related budget implications and members were assured that the organisation remains agile and prepared to adapt to these uncertainties.</li> <li>Operational Performance Report: the Data Manager introduced the Operational Performance Report which was considered in detail. The Committee discussed the introduction of the new five-day decision target and the rationale for changes to performance measures. Performance issues in the Central and Glasgow localities were examined, with staffing and absence identified as key factors. Members noted early signs of improvement in Glasgow and ongoing actions to address challenges in Central. The Committee also considered improvements to police referrals and efforts to strengthen the quality of joint reporting data.</li> <li>Absence trends: a detailed absence report was presented, highlighting long-term absence patterns, particularly psychological-related absences. Members were assured that management continues to prioritise support for staff and managers, with new measures being introduced, including enhanced data categorisation, wellbeing initiatives, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>(CBT) provision, and phased occupational health surveillance. The importance of monitoring both absence rates and the speed of management response was emphasised. The report also addressed vicarious trauma, which is covered within current trauma-informed training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme Board update: the Committee received an update covering the target operating model and combined operational test roll-out. Members endorsed the gradual transition to a portfolio management approach, recognising it as proportionate and sustainable.</li> <li>• Impact assessment: the Committee agreed to schedule a development session on impact assessment, recognising its relevance across the Board's work.</li> </ul> <p>The minute was noted.</p>		
8.			
8.1	<p><b>PR/CE Report</b></p> <p>The PR/CE introduced the update report providing 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.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy provisions: the Board received an update on provisions within the current Bill, which promote lifelong advocacy, strengthen awareness-raising, and place duties on Police, Local Authorities and Health Boards to ensure children are informed about hearings and the availability of advocacy. Members discussed the ongoing debate on whether advocacy should be provided on an opt-out basis, particularly for younger children.</li> <li>• Political environment: Members reflected on the wider political context, and future potential impact on equality, diversity, and inclusion. The Board reaffirmed SCRA's commitment to EDI as a core organisational value, recognising the importance of</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>reassuring staff, upholding standards of conduct, and responding swiftly to behaviours inconsistent with organisational expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public sector reform: the Board acknowledged the government's 5% workforce reduction target but noted this would not be applied uniformly. Given the organisation's labour-intensive nature, efficiencies will continue to focus on technology, automation of routine processes, and redeployment of staff to frontline services. Members agreed it remains important to demonstrate SCRA's contribution to shared services, optimisation of estate utilisation, and wider reform objectives, but that workforce reductions were not achievable for SCRA, given the scale of legislative change and resultant new responsibilities in delivering SCRA's statutory duties.</li> <li>Children's Care and Justice Act: Members were assured that implementation planning is underway, with phased recruitment of Assistant Reporters and Senior Practitioners staff already in progress. Any delay to Act implementation is not expected to materially affect workforce planning.</li> <li>Staff and locality engagement: the Board discussed the value of members maintaining direct links with local teams to triangulate assurance. Members supported continued visits and considered the potential for a "buddy" approach with localities to strengthen engagement. Early engagement through the Governance Officer was encouraged to get the most out of visits.</li> <li>National staff event: early planning for a national staff event in spring 2026 was noted with Board members to be kept updated on programme development.</li> </ul>		
<b>9.</b>			
<b>9.1</b>	<p><b>Review of the Reporter Job Description – Update</b></p> <p>The Head of Human Resources introduced the outcome of the reporter job evaluation exercise.</p>		



Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board agreed that it would stand firmly behind the integrity of the evaluation process, noting that rejecting the outcome would undermine both credibility and fairness.</li> <li>• Members acknowledged the recognition of the two-year structured learning programme for new Reporters, providing a consistent pathway from entry to full qualification. While recognising that some individuals may require additional time or support due to workload, absence, or parttime working, the expectation remains successful completion. Assurance was given that no artificial barriers would be placed on progression, with protected time and tailored support available where needed.</li> <li>• The financial implications were discussed in detail, noting the additional cost of the evaluation outcome is separate from the annual pay award. Members agreed that affordability should be considered within the wider financial strategy and anticipated resources, rather than only current budgets and the cumulative effects of the proposal were noted. It was emphasised that communications with staff must make clear that this is a standalone evaluation outcome, distinct from the annual pay award.</li> <li>• Implementation was recognised as the next critical stage. While the business case is strong, discussions with the Scottish Government pay policy team would be progressed, particularly regarding the impact on adjacent grades within an already compressed pay structure. The distinction between job evaluation and regrading will be important in these conversations. Members agreed that the Executive should seek written confirmation from government where possible, to provide clarity and reassurance to staff. Communications will need to be carefully managed about the rigour of the process all the way from initial benchmarking to final evaluation outcome.</li> <li>• The Board reflected on the need for a review of job evaluation policy for the future. While singleton posts are normally reviewed when</li> </ul>		



Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>vacated or significantly changed, members agreed there is merit in committing to more regular, cyclical reviews, particularly as the target operating model evolves. The EMT undertook to consider how such a framework could be developed, balancing rigour with the resource demands of largescale evaluations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members praised the thoroughness of the process, noting that the time taken had strengthened the credibility of the outcome. They emphasised the importance of linking communications to the target operating model so that staff understand how the evaluation fits within wider organisational change. While recognising that some robust conversations with staff and UNISON are likely, the Board expressed strong support for the comprehensive process and the recommended option, with next steps involving discussions with the sponsor team and staff briefings.</li> </ul> <p><b>After further offline discussion the Board agreed the following recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noted the extensive staff and staff side engagement in developing and agreeing the Children's Reporter job description and person specification including regular updates to the Scottish Government Sponsorship Team on the process and intention to internally fund any proposed uplifts.</li> <li>Noted the benchmarking public sector pay exercise and independently led job evaluation process and outcome, which was reported to SCRA's job evaluation committee on 20 August 2025</li> <li>Noted the review had met all the key objectives approved by the Board in September 2023.</li> <li>Having sought assurance on affordability approved option three of the Business Case: i.e., to implement the Children's Reporter job evaluation outcome and resolve the subsequent impact on other grades within the structure.</li> <li>Endorsed backdating payment in line with reported (1<sup>st</sup> July 2025) job evaluation outcome.</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invited the EMT to update the RNC on the outcome of the planned implementation plan and skills gap analysis.</li> <li>In line with good practice proposed a review, by way of closure report incorporating any learning from this extensive engagement and evaluation process, reporting initially to the Programme Board.</li> </ul>	<p>TBC</p> <p>TBC</p>	<p>SD/NH</p> <p>SD</p>
9.2	<p><b>Mainstreaming and Equality Outcome Progress Report 2025</b></p> <p>The Inclusion &amp; Diversity Manager introduced the report, providing a mid-cycle update on SCRA's progress in embedding inclusive practice across the organisation between April 2024 and September 2025. The report outlined achievements in mainstreaming equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and progress against the Equality Outcomes 2024 - 2027, highlighting strategic alignment, workforce diversity, inclusive recruitment, anti-racism initiatives, and improvements in equality data collection.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Care experienced young people: the Board discussed the importance of recognising care experienced children and young people as a potential "tenth protected characteristic." While acknowledging the challenges of obtaining reliable data, members acknowledged the need to develop ways of monitoring and reporting on this group to ensure policies and practices reflect the realities of those most affected by decisions.</li> <li>Embedding EDI in service delivery: Board Members reflected on the balance between internal workforce initiatives and the organisation's approach to children and families. While recruitment, workforce diversity and workplace culture remain important, the Board emphasised that EDI must also be embedded in decision-making processes that directly affect service users.</li> <li>A robust impact assessment framework was seen as central to achieving this balance. Even where statistical data is limited, evidence can be drawn from practice, research, and engagement with children and families. The Board agreed to revisit this area</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>in a future development session to deepen its understanding of the revised impact assessment process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender pay gap: the gender pay gap is at its lowest level in eight years but remains over 20% and was raised as a continuing concern. Progress has been challenging due to low staff turnover and the concentration of female staff in professional roles such as social work and law. The Board welcomed the proposed engagement of external experts, <i>Close the Gap</i>, who will conduct an independent audit and develop an action plan. This will provide an external perspective, highlight structural issues, and generate practical recommendations. The consultant has also offered to present findings directly to the Board, which members agreed would provide valuable assurance.</li> <li>• Embedding EDI in organisational culture: the PR/CE emphasised that EDI is becoming increasingly embedded across the organisation. Staff networks and working groups are active and engaged, and there is growing evidence of intersectional approaches being applied in practice. Members praised the report as a genuine mainstreaming document, noting the increasing granularity of data, the breadth of staff involvement, and the clear link between EDI and the organisation's responsibilities to children and families. The report was seen as demonstrating that EDI is not an "add-on" but integral to both service delivery and organisational culture.</li> <li>• Communication and visibility: Board Members agreed that the workforce should be made aware of the Board's appreciation for the quality of the report and the progress being made. Sharing positive messages more widely will help reinforce the organisation's commitment to EDI and ensure visibility of the work being undertaken. It was suggested that this could be linked to the forthcoming inclusion and diversity newsletter, with a contribution from the Board.</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<b>Agreed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To note the report and endorse the proposed next steps.</li> </ul>		
<b>10.</b>			
<b>10.1</b>	<b>Annual Report</b> Head of Organisational Development and Strategy introduced the report on behalf of the Press and Communications Manager. The report covers the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The Annual Report will be published at 10am on Thursday 30 October 2025  <b>Issues arising during discussion:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board commended the report, describing it as an excellent piece of work that demonstrated considerable progress and strong diligence. Members agreed it struck the right balance between being comprehensive and accessible, offering both depth of content and clarity of presentation.</li> <li>The Board acknowledged the sustained effort over the past two years to refine the content, noting that contributions from performance colleagues had strengthened the final product. Members expressed appreciation for the assurance the report provides and agreed that the commendation should be formally recorded.</li> </ul> <b>Agreed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the Annual Report for publication.</li> </ul>		
<b>11.</b>			
<b>11.1</b>	<b>Budget Monitoring Report</b> The Head of Finance & Resources presented the Budget Monitoring Report for the forecast outturn of 2025-26.  The Board noted the revenue and capital positions for the year to date and latest forecasts.		
<b>11.2</b>	<b>Financial Strategy</b> The Head of Finance & Resources presented the financial strategy report - a five-year financial plan setting out funding requirements, the assumptions underpinning them, and how these plans support delivery of SCRA's strategic objectives in both the		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>current Corporate Plan (2024 - 2027) and the next (2027 - 2030).</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job evaluation exercise: Board Members sought clarification on how this had been treated within the strategy. It was confirmed that while provision has been included in the current year's budget, the longer-term impact has not yet been factored in and will be addressed in future iterations.</li> <li>• Presentation to Scottish Government: Board Members felt that while the current approach is balanced and measured, a stronger case could be made to highlight the operational challenges created by the absence of a three- to five-year funding horizon. It was suggested that the organisation should be explicit about why longer-term certainty is particularly important, especially given the need to recruit and train staff in advance of new or changing workloads.</li> <li>• Environmental ambitions: Board Members emphasised the opportunity to link financial planning more directly to environmental objectives, particularly net zero and energy efficiency. It was agreed that future versions of the strategy should make clearer reference to the developing environmental strategy and how capital plans will support its delivery.</li> <li>• Turnover deduction: questions were raised on the 2% turnover assumption. The Head of Finance explained that this figure is based on historical trends and has consistently been achieved, even without savings targets for managers. While the Board was assured this remains a modest and realistic assumption, concern was expressed about how it might appear externally when the organisation is already under-resourced. It was agreed that while valid for internal planning, its presentation in published documents may need to be reconsidered to avoid sending mixed signals in discussions with government.</li> <li>• Alignment with business plan: Board Members asked how the strategy aligns with the business plan. The Head of Finance</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>confirmed that it is constructed with reference to previous budgets and the corporate plan, with specific new projects (such as the Programme Team and Operational Development Team) factored in where required. A read-across at the annual, EMT led challenge and review process ensures resources remain aligned with business plan priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term planning and assumptions: the Head of Finance emphasised the importance of long-term planning and resource allocation. The strategy sets out the resources required over the next five years, based on assumptions such as employer pension contributions and potential property cost increases. These are assumptions rather than guaranteed outcomes. The strategy also reflects discussions with the Head of Property about potential cost pressures and underlines the importance of securing a longer-term budgeting horizon from Scottish Government.</li> <li>Financial stability: Board Members noted the importance of aligning the financial strategy with corporate objectives, operational imperatives, wide ranging statutory duties and at the same time ensuring financial stability. Future iterations are expected to integrate environmental and net zero ambitions more fully.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the financial strategy, noting the importance of clearer articulation of long-term funding requirements, stronger links to environmental commitments, and careful presentation of turnover assumptions in future versions.</li> </ul>		RMack
11.3	<p><b>Annual Accounts 2024-25 &amp; Management Representation Letter</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources presented the annual accounts for 2024-25 and the management representation letter.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The accounts received an unqualified audit opinion, providing assurance on their overall</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>accuracy. Recommendations were made in relation to capital works valuation, depreciation calculations, and ICT cost recoveries. The Head of Finance confirmed that these points have already been addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pension surplus was highlighted, though members noted that it cannot be recognised in the accounts under current accounting standards.</li> <li>• Board Members emphasised the importance of maintaining robust financial controls and ensuring continued compliance with all relevant financial regulations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To approve the annual accounts and management representation letter.</li> </ul>		
11.4	<p><b>Procurement Report</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources introduced the report.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board noted that one item - the deployment and support framework had been marked as “to be confirmed.” This was because the contract commenced at the very end of 2024/25 and was still under discussion when the report was drafted. The position has since been confirmed, and the relevant date will be included in the published version.</li> <li>• Two clarifications were raised: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Paragraph 8.6 on supplier payments should state that the ten-day target applied in both 2025 and 2024, not just 2024.</li> <li>○ Members asked about the organisation’s approach to modern slavery in the supply chain. It was confirmed that tendering processes include qualifying questions on fair work practices, specifically commitments against modern slavery. In addition, suppliers joining Scottish Government frameworks must provide such assurances before being admitted.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The timetable for the next internal audit</li> </ul>		



Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>procurement was discussed. This significant exercise is expected to be undertaken jointly with Children's Hearings Scotland. Board Members noted the scale of the work and the need for careful planning. It was confirmed that the current internal audit contract runs until 30 June 2026, with an option to extend.</p> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the Procurement report.</li> </ul>		
<b>12.</b>	<b>Governance</b>		
<b>12.1</b>	<p><b>Standing Orders</b></p> <p>The Governance Officer introduced the proposed amendments to the SCRA Standing Orders. Key changes included revisions to the remit of the Remuneration and Nominations Committee and updates to Committee memberships.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board Members considered where responsibility for the Annual Report should formally sit. While recognising that different Committees may wish to comment on specific sections, it was agreed that the Planning and Performance Committee should take the lead in undertaking the final review. This would ensure consistency, alignment with corporate objectives, and a clear line of accountability before submission to the Board for approval.</li> <li>Members agreed that this clarification should be reflected in the Committee's terms of reference as part of the wider update.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the updated Standing Orders and Terms of Reference, incorporating the above amendments.</li> </ul>	Oct 25	PA
<b>12.2</b>	<p><b>Proposed 2026 Board/Committee Dates</b></p> <p>The Governance Officer presented the proposed 2026 Board and Committee dates.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members noted that initial feedback had already been received from several Board colleagues, with further input to be gathered before the schedule is finalised.</li> </ul>		



Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was agreed that, subject to these adjustments, the finalised schedule would be circulated to members for offline approval to ensure timely confirmation of meeting dates.</li> <li>Board Members welcomed the early sight of the proposed timetable, recognising the importance of aligning Board and Committee cycles with the wider organisational year planner and ensuring sufficient spacing between meetings to allow for effective reporting and follow-up.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Governance Officer will incorporate member feedback and issue the revised 2026 schedule for offline approval.</li> </ul>	Oct 25	PA
<b>13.</b>	<b>Risk Management</b>		
<b>13.1</b>	<p><b>Strategic Risk Register</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources presented the Board's quarterly update on SCRA's Strategic Risk Register.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board considered the allocation of risks across subcommittees. It was agreed that while the Board will continue to hold overall ownership and responsibility of the Strategic Risk Register, individual Committees will be nominated to take a lead role in monitoring specific risks. This will ensure closer scrutiny at the appropriate level, with any new risks, closures, or material changes continuing to come to the Board for approval.</li> <li>The Head of Finance &amp; Resources confirmed that risks will be mapped against the relevant Committees, with the framework to be in place by the November/December cycle of meetings. Members welcomed this approach as consistent with the forthcoming update to the Risk Management Policy.</li> <li>Members also reflected on the recent Audit and Assurance Committee discussion on cyber security, particularly in relation to externally hosted websites. This was highlighted as a strong example of how committee-level oversight can provide additional assurance to the Board on complex and evolving risks.</li> </ul>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<b>Agreed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the Strategic Risk Register.</li> </ul>		
13.2	<b>New Risks</b> <p>While no formal proposals were made, Board Members noted that completion of the job description review, and associated reporting could present a short-term risk. This was regarded as well understood and manageable at present, but it was agreed that if the issue escalated it should be formally captured within the strategic risk register. Members also suggested that clear and consistent wording be developed to ensure expectations are transparent, particularly in relation to engagement with government.</p> <p>The Head of Finance &amp; Resources emphasised the importance of continuous improvement in risk management practices and of addressing new or emerging risks promptly. Board Members also reflected on the wider implications of government policy decisions for the organisation's work, particularly in relation to children's rights and welfare. It was agreed that such issues require assertive but carefully managed handling to ensure SCRA continues to deliver its statutory responsibilities and duties effectively.</p>		
14.	<b>Closing Remarks</b> <p>The meeting concluded with a heartfelt farewell to Jim Edgar, attending his final Board meeting after eight years of service. Members reflected on his significant contribution to the organisation, particularly his leadership as Chair of the Audit and Assurance Committee and his role in strengthening governance, risk management, and assurance processes.</p> <p>The Chair recalled her first impressions of Jim and the consistent support he had offered to colleagues throughout his tenure. She highlighted his clarity in distinguishing risks from issues, his constructive approach to holding the EMT to account, and his ability to do so in a supportive and good-humoured way.</p> <p>The PR/CE added his reflections, noting Jim's unwavering dedication to high standards of public service and integrity, and his practical guidance</p>		

Item	Topic	Timescale	Owner
	<p>during challenging periods, including the joint digital strategy oversight work with CHS.</p> <p>Board members agreed that Jim's commitment to good governance, his insistence on clarity in reporting, and his willingness to provide advice behind the scenes had been invaluable. His humour and collegiality had become hallmarks of his style and were appreciated by colleagues.</p> <p>In his response, Jim reflected positively on his time with the organisation, praising the openness and professionalism of both the Board and the EMT, and commending the culture of honesty and transparency.</p> <p>The Chair closed the meeting by thanking Jim, on behalf of the Board and EMT, for his dedication, wisdom, and humour, and wished him every success for the future.</p>		
15.	The next SCRA Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 16th December 2025 at Bell Street, Glasgow.		

### Board Action Log as at December 2025

Meeting/Item	Action	Timescale	Lead	Comments	Status
<b>Jan 25 Future Insight Session</b>	Facilitated session on creating a good governance system to be planned.	Apr 25	PA/CC	Provider and date still to be confirmed.	PA to discuss with CC and NH
<b>Sep 25 Review of the Reporter Job Description – Update</b>	EMT to update the RNC on the outcome of the planned implementation plan and skills gap analysis.  In line with good practice proposed a review, by way of closure report incorporating any learning from this extensive engagement and evaluation process, reporting initially to the Programme Board.	TBC  TBC	SD/NH  SD		
<b>Sep 25 Financial Strategy</b>	Clearer articulation of long-term funding requirements, stronger links to environmental commitments, and careful presentation of turnover assumptions in future versions.	Sep 26	RMack		Not yet due
<b>Sep 25 Proposed 2026 Board/Committee Dates</b>	The Governance Officer will incorporate member feedback and issue the revised 2026 schedule for offline approval.	Dec 25	PA	Updated schedule submitted to members.	Suggest closed

## SCRA Board Annual Workplan - 2025/2026

Business Item (supporting the delivery of our corporate objectives and functions)	Sept 25	Dec 25	Jan 26	March 26	June 26
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Planning for the future (Setting Strategic Direction)</b></li> </ul>					
Sustainability Annual Report				✓	
Digital Annual Report				✓	
Property Annual Report					✓
Procurement Annual Report	✓				
Policy Overview Annual Report		✓			
Health & Safety Annual Report				✓	
Policy & Influencing Report					✓
Research Programme		✓			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Investing in developing and maintaining effective governance systems (Managing Risk)</b></li> </ul>					
Audit & Assurance Committee Minutes	✓	✓		✓	✓
Planning & Performance Committee Minutes	✓	✓		✓	✓
Remuneration & Nominations Committee Minutes	✓	✓		✓	✓
Risk Register	✓	✓		✓	✓
SCRA Standing Orders Review	✓				
Committee Self-Assessment Annual Reports	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Delivering Best Value using our resources (Holding to Account)</b></li> </ul>					
Budget Monitoring Report	✓	✓		✓	✓
Draft Budget		✓	✓	✓	

Business Item (supporting the delivery of our corporate objectives and functions)	Sept 25	Dec 25	Jan 26	March 26	June 26
Annual Report & Accounts	✓				
Financial Strategy	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Committing to delivering service improvement and sustainability (Holding to Account)</b></li> </ul>					
Annual Business Plan (setting out improvements in line with the Board's Corporate Plan)					✓
Organisational Performance Escalation/Summary Report	✓	✓		✓	✓
Complaints Review					✓
Locality Performance Reviews			✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Valuing &amp; Developing our Staff (Influencing Culture)</b></li> </ul>					
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report	✓				
Annual Workforce Plan				✓	
Whistleblowing Policy and Annual Monitoring Report				✓	
Annual Staff Survey Results & Action Plan					✓
Business Case - Role of the Reporter (Job Review and Evaluation)	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Working in Partnership (Engaging with Stakeholders)</b></li> </ul>					
Chief Executive's Report	✓	✓		✓	✓
Communication Plan					✓

#### Present:

Steve Renwick (Chair)  
Lynne Clow (Vice Chair)  
Kay Barton

#### In Attendance:

Cathie Cowan (Board Chair)  
Neil Hunter (Principal Reporter/Chief Executive)  
Ross Mackenzie (Head of Finance and Resources)  
Helen Ettchels (Senior Operational Manager)  
Douglas Cameron (Head of Digital)  
Pamela Armstrong (Governance Officer)  
Caz Dougherty (Executive Admin Assistant)

#### Internal Audit (BDO):

Gemma MacLeod

Item	Topic	Timescale	Lead
1.	<p><b>Welcome, Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum</b> The Chair opened the meeting, confirmed quorum, and welcomed attendees, Including Caz Dougherty (Executive Office Admin Assistant), who has recently joined the organisation. Members and participants gave a brief introduction.</p> <p>Apologies received from Hazel Smith, Committee member.</p> <p><b>Chair's Opening Remarks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasised the importance of focusing on material issues rather than minor editorial detail.</li> <li>Highlighted the need to balance qualitative and quantitative considerations and maintain strong governance.</li> <li>Encouraged lateral thinking between committees and welcomed open discussion.</li> <li>Raised a reflective governance point on whether comments in minutes should be attributed to</li> </ul>		

	individuals or recorded collectively, inviting members to share views offline.		
2.	<b>Declaration (s) of Interest (s)</b> No conflicts declared.		
3.	<b>Minute of SCRA Audit and Assurance Committee Meeting held on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025</b> The minute of 28 August 2025 was approved without amendment.		
4.	<b>Matters Arising from Minute of Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025</b> None  <b>Matters Arising from Action Log</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Head of Finance and Resources proposed closing several actions, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal audit annual accounts and auditing policies</li> <li>Communications review</li> <li>Transition of quality assurance items to the Planning &amp; Performance Committee</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>Agreed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the Action Log</li> </ul>		
5.	<b>Workplan</b> The Chair reminded members to feed in areas of interest to ensure the agenda and work plan reflect collective priorities.  <b>Agreed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the Committee Workplan</li> </ul>		
6.			
6.1	<b>Environmental Sustainability</b> Gemma Macleod (BDO) presented the internal audit report on Environmental Sustainability.  <b>Assurance:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate assurance on the design of controls.</li> <li>Substantial assurance on the effectiveness of controls.</li> </ul> <b>Key Findings and Good Practice:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good practice included annual reporting to the Board and Scottish Government, oversight by</li> </ul>		



	<p>internal groups, integration of sustainability into locality plans, and staff awareness campaigns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas for improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Gaps in reporting for scope 3 emissions (travel and procurement).</li> <li>◦ Delays in reporting progress on carbon emissions targets; interim reporting recommended.</li> <li>◦ Low staff awareness of sustainability priorities (64% unaware); initiatives underway.</li> <li>◦ Suggestion to create a dedicated sustainability webpage.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Chair queried the difference between design and effectiveness ratings; Gemma clarified that controls operate effectively despite design gaps.</li> <li>• The Vice Chair raised the complexity of scope 3 emissions reporting compared to other public bodies. Gemma confirmed SCRA is aligned with sector norms but noted challenges in data collection.</li> <li>• The Head of Finance and Resources outlined a pragmatic approach: focus on major travel categories, aiming for 50–70% accuracy initially, with refinements over time.</li> <li>• KB questioned sustainability impact assessments for remote working and highlighted tensions between AI use and environmental goals. The Head of Finance and Resources responded that business needs drive decisions, with environmental considerations applied afterward.</li> <li>• The SOM for North and East, emphasised rights-based participation as the priority, noting AV investment supports virtual hearings.</li> <li>• The PR/CE highlighted organisational energy and progress, referencing the Environmental Ambassadors network and Strategic Sustainability Group.</li> </ul>		
6.2	<p><b>Procurement</b></p> <p>Gemma Macleod (BDO) presented the internal audit report on Procurement.</p> <p><b>Assurance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate assurance on the design of controls.</li> </ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substantial assurance on the effectiveness of controls.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Findings and Good Practice:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good practice included a high-quality procurement strategy reviewed by the Scottish Government, clear processes, and regular reporting.</li> <li>Areas for improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No formal annual review of spend by supplier; recommended.</li> <li>Lack of post-award risk assessment; recommended.</li> <li>Housekeeping issues: blanks in the contract register and updates required to delegated purchaser training logs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Chair asked for the proportionality of contracted versus non-contracted spend; the Head of Finance and Resources confirmed that 94% of spend is contracted.</li> <li>KB queried the qualitative aspects of delegated purchaser responsibilities and their interaction with the procurement team. Gemma reported positive engagement and clarity on roles, noting that delegated purchasers are comfortable seeking advice when needed.</li> <li>Mandatory training completion was noted as an area for monitoring.</li> </ul>		
6.3	<p><b>Payroll</b></p> <p>Gemma Macleod (BDO) presented the internal audit report on Payroll.</p> <p><b>Assurance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substantial assurance on both the design and effectiveness of controls.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Findings and Good Practice:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good practice included clear payroll policies, segregation of duties, and robust exception reporting.</li> <li>Areas for improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incomplete payroll checklist sign-offs.</li> <li>Discrepancy between the authorised signatory list and the delegated authority matrix.</li> <li>Missing fields in staff change forms.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

	<p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KB raised concerns regarding succession planning for payroll staff. The Head of finance and Resources confirmed active consideration of this issue and noted training for junior staff is underway.</li> <li>• It was noted that CHS and Board payroll were excluded from the audit scope; Gemma agreed to update the report to reflect this.</li> <li>• The Vice Chair queried controls for implementing across-the-board pay increases. The Head of finance and Resources explained the rigorous process in place, including detailed testing and finance checks to ensure accuracy.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee also discussed the organisation's general approach to internal audit recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Vice Chair raised a broader question on why SCRA appears to accept all recommendations, noting that other Boards often challenge low-significance findings due to resource constraints or differing priorities.</li> <li>• The Chair queried whether consensus represents genuine recognition of value or simple acquiescence.</li> <li>• Gemma explained that extensive fieldwork and dialogue with management occur before reports reach the Committee, providing opportunities for management to challenge findings. Disagreements are rare, but the Committee retains final authority to accept or reject risks.</li> <li>• The Head of Finance and Resources emphasised transparency and proportionality, noting that significant issues receive deeper discussion, while minor actions are addressed quickly. He cited the delegated authority matrix update as an example of a straight forward action expected to be approved without comment.</li> <li>• The Chair welcomed the iterative process and moderation between internal audit and management, noting its importance for effective governance.</li> </ul>		
<b>7.</b>			
<b>7.1</b>	<p><b>Internal Audit Recommendations Update</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources provided an update on progress against previous audit recommendations.</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of the 13 follow-up actions reported in August, one has been completed.</li> <li>• Several others are expected to be completed by the end of December, with evidence forwarded to BDO.</li> <li>• By the time the follow-up audit takes place in early March, most recommendations should be completed and evidenced.</li> </ul>		
<b>7.2</b>	<p><b>Governance Update</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources provided an update on external audit matters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External Audit attendance was not required at this meeting due to the timing of their activities.</li> <li>• The Head of Finance and Resources highlighted the quarterly technical bulletin issued by external audit, which provides updates to NDPBs and other audited bodies.</li> <li>• The bulletin included changes to the Scottish Public Finance Manual, which largely do not affect SCRA, the Head of Finance and Resources stressed the importance of maintaining a watching brief.</li> <li>• Fraud and irregularity cases from other audits were noted, including a foreign currency payment (rare for SCRA) and a payroll fraud common in the public sector.</li> <li>• The Head of Finance and Resources reassured members that the recent payroll audit provides confidence in SCRA's controls to mitigate such risks.</li> </ul>		
<b>7.3</b>	<p><b>Risk Management Policy</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources presented the annual Risk Management Policy, noting that it was approved in June and will go to the Board in December for formal approval. Key updates to the policy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addition of the Remuneration &amp; Nominations Committee to the governance structure.</li> <li>• Updated governance flowchart.</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Chair suggested noting that the Remuneration &amp; Nominations Committee is currently in transition and may be refocused.</li> <li>• He also proposed adding a clause in paragraph 9.10 requiring committees to flag pertinent risks to other committees to ensure lateral information sharing.</li> </ul>	Dec 25	RMack

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KB supported these changes and emphasised the importance of proofreading to ensure all committee references are accurate.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To recommend the Board approve the risk management policy subject to the incorporation of the suggested amendments.</li> </ul>		
<b>7.4</b>	<p><b>Strategic Risk Register</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources provided an update on the strategic risk register:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No new risks have been identified, but updates are needed for existing risks, particularly those relating to SCRA's financial landscape.</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PR/CE advised the AAC a senior team meeting is scheduled for 11 December to conduct a deeper review of risks and facilitate discussion across team members.</li> <li>The Chair suggested considering the political implications of the upcoming UK and Scottish elections and their potential impact on children's services and SCRA. The Head of Finance and Resources agreed to note this for the December meeting and determine the best approach to address it.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To approve the Strategic Risk Register</li> </ul>	Dec 25	EMT
<b>7.5</b>	<p><b>Annual Fraud Report</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources presented the annual fraud report, confirming that no frauds were reported in 2025, consistent with previous years. Key points of the report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies and controls in place to mitigate fraud risks, noting that SCRA's funding and operations make it less vulnerable than other bodies.</li> <li>The Head of Finance and Resources thanked Gemma Macleod and BDO for supporting the fraud response group discussion earlier this year and mentioned the upcoming National Fraud Initiative.</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Chair and the Head of Digital discussed phishing and QR code scams as part of</li> </ul>		

	<p>information governance. The Head of Digital noted staff awareness and ongoing sophisticated phishing exercises, stressing systematic approaches to handling such attempts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KB suggested that severe fraud cases under investigation should be reported promptly to the Committee. The Head of Finance and Resources agreed to track and report significant phishing attempts and fraud cases to the Chair and Committee.</li> <li>• The Vice Chair asked about the frequency of reviewing fraud policies and processes. The Head of Finance and Resources confirmed that the annual fraud response group meeting provides an opportunity for thorough review and noted the upcoming refresh of the whistleblower policy, which will be published on Connect.</li> <li>• The Chair suggested that the revised Remuneration &amp; Nominations Committee may wish to review the whistleblower policy before it goes to the Board.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To approve the Annual Fraud Report;</li> <li>• To approve the Fraud and Corruption Policy Statement; and</li> <li>• To approve the Fraud/Corruption Response Plan.</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 25</p>	<p>RMack</p> <p>SD</p>
7.6	<p><b>Pensions Update</b></p> <p>The Head of Finance and Resources provided an update on pensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reported on September and November meetings.</li> <li>• Highlighted a high estimated funding level, indicating that employer contribution rates are unlikely to rise on 1 April 2027, which is positive for SCRA's five-year financial planning.</li> <li>• Estimated cost impact: a 1% increase in employer contribution rates would equate to approximately £200,000 per year.</li> </ul>		
8.			
8.1	<p><b>Topical/Regulatory/Governance Issues</b></p> <p>None</p>		

<b>8.2</b>	<b>New Risks</b> The Chair highlighted the significance of the 11th December meeting with the EMT on the strategic risk register and potential risks from UK and Scottish elections.		
<b>8.4</b>	<b>Items for Escalation to the Board</b> 1. Mandatory training uptake 2. Risk policy updates reflecting the transition of the Remuneration & Nominations Committee 3. Trends in phishing and fraud attempts	Dec 25 Dec 25  Dec 25	PA/SD RMack  DC
<b>Close</b>			

**Date of next meeting: Wednesday 18 February 2026, Bell Street, Glasgow**

# SCRA Remuneration and Nominations Committee

## Summary minute of the meeting held on

04 December 2025, at 9:00am  
By Teams

### Present:

Lorraine Moore (Committee Chair)  
Lynne Clow (Committee Member)  
Steve Renwick (Committee Member)  
Cathie Cowan (Committee Member/Board Chair)  
Jim Edgar (Board Member)

### Attending:

Neil Hunter (PR/CE)  
Susan Deery (Head of HR)  
Pamela Armstrong (Governance Officer)  
Caz Dougherty (Executive Admin Assistant)

	Item	Timescale	Lead
1.	<b>AOB</b> None		
2.	<b>Apologies</b> Hazel Smith, Committee Vice Chair		
3.	<b>Declarations of Interest</b> The Principal Reporter/Chief Executive declared an interest in Item 8 (Review of Principal Reporter Job Description) and recused himself for that item.		
4.	<b>Minute of the last meeting</b> Approved without amendment. Members reaffirmed that all decisions will be taken in formal meetings and requested timely circulation of papers.		
5.	<b>Workplan review</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Chair's Report scheduled for Feb/March 2026.</li> <li>Staff Survey Action Plan reporting deferred to next meeting.</li> </ul>		
6.	<b>Remit of Committee including Name and discussion around future agenda/standing items</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Options for renaming discussed; Executive Management Team to bring proposal to Committee in February.</li> <li>Agreed to include Health &amp; Safety oversight within remit and review Whistleblowing Policy in February.</li> <li>Annual Workforce Report to be reviewed by Committee before Board consideration.</li> </ul>		





7.	<b>Update on the business case for the Children's Reporter</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update noted: Scottish Government Remuneration Group to consider case on 17 December.</li> <li>Committee stressed importance of separating pay negotiations from job evaluation outcomes.</li> </ul>		
8.	<b>Chief Executive's Framework expectations of a review of the Principal Reporters Job Description</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approved comprehensive review and independent benchmarking.</li> <li>Board Chair to oversee process for governance assurance.</li> </ul>		
9.	<b>Update on Board Member Recruitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reappointments confirmed for Lorraine Moore and Kay Barton (to Oct 2029).</li> <li>Next recruitment expected mid-2026; Committee to revisit skills matrix and outreach strategy.</li> </ul>		
10.	<b>HR Sub Group of the National Partnership Forum Update</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress on EDI policy refresh, enhanced family leave, EV salary sacrifice scheme (April 2026), and Wellbeing Strategy (Feb meeting).</li> <li>Committee requested annual summary of policy changes.</li> </ul>		
11.	<b>Risk</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's Reporter business case outcome noted as potential reputational/staffing risk.</li> <li>EMT to review strategic risk register and bring recommendations on de-escalation to the Board for approval.</li> </ul>		
	<b>Date of Next Meeting:</b> Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 10:30, by TEAMS		



**Minute of SCRA Planning and Performance Committee, held on Monday 08<sup>th</sup> December 2025, by TEAMS**

**Present**

Kay Barton, Chair  
 Ying Zhang, Vice Chair  
 Cathie Cowan, Committee Member/Board Chair  
 Jim Edgar, Committee Member

**In Attendance**

Lisa Bennett, Head of Strategy and OD  
 Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive  
 Paul Mulvanny, Senior Operational Manager  
 Donald Lamb, Data Manager  
 Andrew MacDonald, Planning and Performance Manager  
 Lindsay MacFadyen, Quality Assurance Manager  
 Douglas Cameron, Head of Digital Operations and Development  
 Kelly Mills, Digital Programme Delivery Manager  
 Pamela Armstrong, Governance Manager

	Item	Timescale	Lead
1.	<p><b>Welcome and apologies</b></p> <p>The Committee Chair welcomed members and Officers to the Planning and Performance Committee (PPC).</p> <p>Apologies were received from Lorraine Moore (Board and Committee member), Ross Mackenzie (Head of Finance and Resources) and Helen Etchells (Senior Operational Manager).</p> <p>The Committee Chair confirmed the meeting was quorate.</p>		
2.	<p><b>Previous Minutes and Action Log</b></p> <p>The September minute was approved, subject to minor changes and a factual check on page 5 regarding the term SPR in the joint reports context (to confirm it refers to Standard Prosecution Report) vs Single Page Report (SPR) as referred to performance report.</p> <p>Members considered a decision of the Audit and Assurance Committee to attribute comments to named individuals in minutes. Views recognised pros and cons, including value in minority positions being formally recorded when a vote</p>		

	Item	Timescale	Lead
	<p>occurs and the broader principle that minutes are not verbatim.</p> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attribution by exception : the Committee will not routinely attribute comments; however, where a minority view is expressed or a vote is taken, it can be formally recorded with attribution if desired.</li> </ul> <p><b>Action Log</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An update on a revised equalities impact assessment approach was presented at the Board Development Day and is therefore closed.</li> <li>• Inclusion of risks and positive milestones in future business plan reporting is ongoing.</li> <li>• Absence management scrutiny (targets and detailed oversight) to sit primarily with Remuneration and Nominations Committee while PPC will continue to note performance crossover to organisational outcomes.</li> </ul>		
3.	<p><b>Matters Arising</b></p> <p>Governance Officer to circulate 2026 Planning &amp; Performance Network dates.</p>		PA
4.	<p><b>PPC Workplan</b></p> <p>The updated workplan was noted.</p> <p>Governance Officer to confirm Committee dates for 2026.</p>		PA
5.	<p><b>Organisational Performance Report (OPR)</b></p> <p>The Data Manager introduced the OPR (Jul–Sep), including a focus on appeals following a recent spike.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members observed three areas account for most 100+ day cases; PPC noted management's targeted support and monitoring.</li> <li>• Cross-locality support, secondments, and targeted help have been provided to Localities affected by high absence and vacancy rates; it was noted that providing this support is not a straightforward process. In addition, structural resilience options (e.g., central surge capacity) are being explored.</li> <li>• Reporters embedded in three police hubs are at an early stage of improving referral quality and timing.</li> <li>• In some areas (e.g., Highland), high levels of social work vacancies are impacting on timely reports and</li> </ul>		

	Item	Timescale	Lead
	<p>assessments, causing delays beyond SCRA's control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PR/CE assured Committee that SCRA has advocated for improvements in children/families social work capacity over the last 18–24 months and raised issues about system readiness contributing to the phased delay of Children's Care &amp; Justice Act implementation; bilateral work between Government and COSLA continues.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The new Police/COPFS notification of mismarked "joint report" cases (children not flagged) has started; PPC to receive updates via OPR on its efficacy and any rollout.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair fed back from a visit to the Edinburgh locality, noting that staff work with 50-day and 5-day targets very regularly to manage caseloads and court work, and that a strong staffing mix (experience and skills) is key to meeting targets. The locality emphasised cross-locality support, moving work promptly when issues arise.</p> <p>The Committee asked for future assurance on how data supports forward planning/modelling, not just day-to-day management.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>DL</p> <p>DL</p>
6.	<p><b>Business Plan 2025/26</b></p> <p>The Planning and Performance Manager presented the mid-year assurance report on the Business Plan, noting that overall progress remains steady and broadly in line with expectations.</p> <p>External dependencies and timeline changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's Care &amp; Justice Act (CCJA) provisions directly affecting SCRA are now scheduled for January–March 2027, which reduces near-term pressure on some implementation activities but does introduce planning uncertainty.</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promise Bill risk: Members noted the content of committee proceedings at Parliament and risk of the Bill not being in a position to fully proceed before the election. PPC asked for this uncertainty to be considered in planning assumptions.</li> <li>Digital section readability: Members asked for plain-English summaries, reduced technical jargon, and a</li> </ul>		

	Item	Timescale	Lead
	<p>clearer focus on priority deliverables to align with the tone/length of other sections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Police collaboration: Where relevant, link objectives to the police hub work described under the OPR.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline the Digital section (plain English; fewer technical terms; focus on priority deliverables and critical path).</li> <li>Reference the police hub collaboration in Objective 7 where relevant.</li> <li>Surface dependencies/unknowns (legislative timing, elections, partner capacity, budget) within the Business Plan narrative.</li> </ul>	<p>March 26</p> <p>March 26</p>	<p>AMacD</p> <p>AMacD</p> <p>A MacD</p>
7.	<p><b>Business Plan 2026/27</b></p> <p>The Head of Strategy and OD and the Planning and Performance Manager introduced the first draft of the final year business plan under the current corporate plan (to 2027), noting it has been shaped by outputs from October's EMT workshop and subsequent EMT review on 3 December.</p> <p>The draft consolidates delivery across four strategic aims, nine objectives, and 21 delivery areas, with an emphasis on realistic sequencing and quarter-by-quarter road-mapping to avoid additive pressure and reveal pinch-points early.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarter-by-quarter deliverables, infographics, benefits management, partnership/equalities sections were welcomed.</li> <li>Members favour a short, sharp plan aligned across Horizons 1–3 (BAU, innovation/digital, longer-term TOM), with clear alignment to Board corporate objectives</li> <li>Internal work to align BP with Board strategic objectives and for this to be fully integrated into the 2027-30 Corporate Plan process</li> <li>Consider capturing key external dependencies (election, social work capacity) without over-complicating the business plan.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate format improvements, alignment cues (e.g., in the delivery framework), and map with dependencies/sequencing Programme/Digital/Change managers.</li> </ul>	<p>March 26</p>	<p>A MacD</p>

	Item	Timescale	Lead
8.	<b>Quality Assurance</b>		
8.1	<p><b>Joint Inspections</b></p> <p>The Quality Assurance Manager presented a high-level summary of Care Inspectorate Joint Inspections (“children at risk of harm”), report noting the shift to a new model focusing on children on Compulsory Supervision Orders living at home.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East Ayrshire inspection involvement provided helpful insight into partners’ work and Care Inspectorate triangulation methods; highlighted strong LRM engagement in CPCs.</li> <li>• The PR/CE welcomed the new inspection focus as there had been long standing concerns, in part informed by SCRA research on outcomes for children with a child protection order.</li> <li>• The Committee noted the report and inspection model transition.</li> </ul>		
8.2	<p><b>Action plan progress</b></p> <p>The Quality Assurance Manager introduced the update, advising the EMT agreed closure of six actions and revised date for one action.</p> <p>The PPC noted mid-year handover from the Audit and Assurance Committee.</p> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QA actions to be drafted with specific outcomes/next steps where practicable.</li> </ul>	Ongoing	LMacF
8.3	<p><b>Report on cases of children jointly reported to the Procurator Fiscal and the Reporter</b></p> <p>The Quality Assurance Manager presented the case sampling report on children jointly reported to the PF and Reporter.</p> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative communications (email/telephone) are sometimes necessary (e.g., undertakings/custody decisions same day); these do not imply poor communication even if formal processes aren’t fully followed in urgent scenarios.</li> <li>• Chair noted forthcoming changes when 16/17-year-olds enter the system will necessitate updates to Lord</li> </ul>		

	Item	Timescale	Lead
	<p>Advocate's Guidelines, the Agreement, and practice notes.</p> <p><b>Action Plan:</b> The action plan, as approved by EMT was noted including the amendment to the dates of two of the actions (as discussed and approved at EMT to account for the amount of change activity in the organisation at that time)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestion to expand actions to take in to account the activity of partners was discussed, however prior direction from the AAC reminded committee that QA plans should include actions for SCRA (not for external bodies), with external dependencies noted in narrative. This was supported by Internal Audit recommendation.</li> </ul>		
9.	<p><b>Digital Strategy</b> The Head of Digital Operations and Development and the Digital Programme Delivery Manager presented a "Then–Now–Next" roadmap to 2027 under five strands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Disclosure &amp; HIP redesign;</li> <li>• Children &amp; Families Portal (Mission 1);</li> <li>• System Integration &amp; Data Exchange (Mission 2);</li> <li>• Communications (professionals/families);</li> <li>• Business-as-Usual (AV, SWAN, Windows 11, etc.).</li> </ul> <p><b>Issues arising during discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members welcomed the scope, pace and innovation behind this work and the benefits to the organisation and partners.</li> <li>• Discussion took place on the need not to lose sight of end-user experience and the risk of more digital breaches (with corresponding increased reliance on digital). The Digital team outlined work ongoing in relation to security wraparounds (authentication, photo/doc checks), partnerships to help young people verify identity (e.g., Young Scot), and clear sequencing with change communications to manage staff impact and sustain enthusiasm.</li> <li>• On integrations, management emphasised bottom-up, actionable steps within remit, avoiding "big-bang" models and escalating scalable opportunities via the Redesign Board.</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b></p>	March 26	KM

	Item	Timescale	Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share PDF 'click-through portal wireframes' for PPC review; align non-disclosure and family-centred scheduling change communications with adequate lead time.</li> </ul>		
10.	<b>Programme Update</b> The Head of Strategy and OD reported that Family-Centred Scheduling has moved from two test sites to training in three further sites and is being sequenced alongside non-disclosure roll-out; CCJA delay removes an anticipated pause and allows fuller sequencing of FCS through end July.		
11.	<b>External Environment</b> The PR/CE and Head of Strategy and OD provided the following verbal update; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CCJA implementation now "no later than Q4 2026/27"; SCRA to continue recruitment/spend profile as planned;</li> <li>Hearing Redesign Board and Planning &amp; Implementation Group continue work on evaluation framework (outputs first; data gathered to evidence future impact); data workstream refined to support partner system integration and to unblock data gaps; local authority capacity constraints recognised and focus where engagement is most feasible (data/IT).</li> </ul>		
12.	<b>Risk</b>		
12.1	<b>Current Risks</b> The PR/CE provided an overview of strategic risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>movement trending downward for some workforcerelated risks;</li> <li>staff survey (initial) positive signals;</li> <li>budget risk remains static;</li> <li>CCJA preparation risk may increase when impact and likelihood factors reviewed;</li> <li>environment/sustainability programme expected to reduce impact/likelihood factors ;</li> <li>EMT deep-dive scheduled (Thursday11/12) with reporting through Jan–Mar cycles.</li> </ul>		
12.2	<b>New Risks</b> No New risks identified.		
13.	<b>Items for Escalation to the Board</b>		



	Item	Timescale	Lead
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. OPR: Provide covering note summarising assurances on police hub collaboration and targeted locality support.</li> <li>2. Digital Strategy: Report Board-level assurance on scope, governance, sequencing, and benefits; include note on authentication/Young Scot and portal wireframes engagement plan.</li> <li>3. Business Plan: Note PPC's discussion/assurance on formatting, alignment, and dependencies.</li> <li>4. Quality Assurance: Note revised training timelines and joint-marking data pilot.</li> </ol>		
	<b>Close</b>		
	<b>Date of the next meeting:</b> Monday 02 March 2026, 10:30-1pm at Bell Street, Glasgow		

**SCRA Board**

25 September 2025

**Agenda item 9 - Chief Executive's Report**

**Report Classification:** *Open*

**For:** Information

**Executive Sponsor:** Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

**Author:** Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive

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**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.
- Note the intention of the PR/CE to return to the Board in January with a more detailed action plan in response to the 2025 staff survey.
- 

**Key Issues to be Discussed/Considered**

SCRA's 2025 staff survey results

**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.
- Research and Learning
- Children's Participation, Rights and Voice

**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:

- Consultation and planning via the National Partnership Forum and UNISON representation.
- Annual Staff Survey for 2025
- Direct engagement with managers and staff
- Direct input to the OHOV Rise Up Conference
- Involvement in various national groups and activities

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Chief Executive Report

## **1. Staff Partnership**

1.1 The National Partnership met on 18<sup>th</sup> November and covered the following key issues:-

- Update on the Children's Reporter Job Description and Person Specification
- Discussion on proposals to strengthen UNISON's role and engagement on the Strategic Programmes Group which oversees programmes and projects across the organisation and makes recommendations to the Programme Board
- A discussion on the Scottish Governments evaluation of [4 day working week pilots](#), the Scottish Governments position and implications for SCRA.
- SCRA and UNISON's inclusion and diversity work and staff health and wellbeing
- Policy and Finance updates

## **2. Scottish Government Liaison**

2.1 Our regular accountability meeting took place on 20 November and included a deeper dive into SCRA's digital plans and priorities as well as routine updates on service performance, service resilience, finance and planning. A detailed discussion took place on the Children's (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act implementation arrangements following receipt of [correspondence on the Scottish Governments intention to delay aspects of part 1](#) which deals with raising the age of referral to the Principal Reporter.

2.2 Scottish Government, as part of its commitment to reviewing and strengthening the relationship between sponsoring teams and public bodies is offering access to facilitated 'stress tests' the purpose of which is to:-

- Enable the a public body and its Scottish Government Sponsor or Liaison Team to work through a scenario that would be challenging in real life and agree how they can work effectively together to deal with any challenges that arise
- The scenarios if they occurred in real life would raise concerns with Ministers and/or media interest. The main focus is how the public body and SG work together, support each other and respect each other's proper roles and responsibilities.
- the exercise is aimed at providing a safe space for learning, focussing on 3 scenarios.. The public body and the SG will have an opportunity to review and discuss the new information before coming together to have a wider discussion and agree actions and next steps. After the scenarios the facilitator will lead a washup discussion.
- On conclusion the Chief Executive and Senior Lead Officer or Senior Sponsor ensure that a record is made of the key learning points
- he learning points are captured should then be shared with Public Bodies Support Unit (PBSU) and the relevant DG Office. This will enable PBSU and DG offices to build up a picture of the issues that are coming up most often, and

reflect on this for training, guidance and further development across SG and public bodies

### 3. Our Hearings Our Voice – Rise Up conference



3.1 SCRA staff were delighted to be involved in the recent OHOV Rise Up event on 22 October. The event attracted just under 200 professionals, young people and agency staff from all over Scotland to critically examine the progress in relation to children and young people's voice and participation, rights and preferences in Children's Hearings and care system.

3.2 The event also marked the launch of OHOV's brand new resource – ['Seeing Beyond the Surface: What Children and Young People wish all adults knew'](#). SCRA believes that this is one of the most exciting and impactful pieces of work produced in this area of practice, change and improvement. It's powerful, it's authentic, it's innovative, it's unique and it's evidence based – because it's based on the wisdom and real life experience of the many young people who were involved in its production. The resource has so many layers and uses so many different mediums (written word, audio, video, animations) none of which is cut and paste from anything else - it's all the unique direct views and experience of young people with experience of the hearing system and is a catalyst for real change.



3.3 The guide explores 6 key areas:

- Children's relationships with key adults
- Support
- Language
- Seeing children's potential without judgement
- Children's stories and personal information
- Children's Participation and Voice

3.4 SCRA, alongside a range of other partner agencies is now helping to promote the Seeing Beyond the Surface material across our organisation as well as a broad array of areas where professional learning and practice is discussed and

developed. We are determined to do everything we can to promote and embed learning from this brilliant new resource.

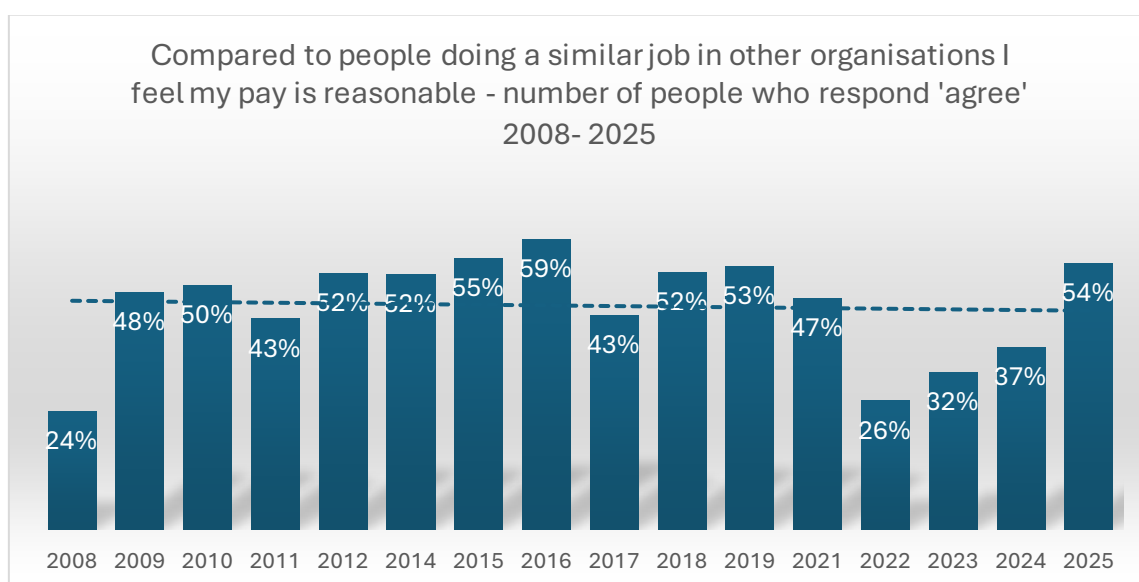
#### 4. SCRA staff survey 2025 – headline results

4.1 239 staff from across SCRA responded to the staff survey, consistent with 2024 (237) but lower than in 2023 (261). The staff survey represents an annual sense check of progress across our organisation on key areas of importance such as morale, satisfaction with pay and reward, concerns about workload, leadership of the senior team and diversity and equality. The 2025 staff survey closed on 5 December. A fuller analysis and action plan will be brought to the Board in January 2026. This update focusses on priority areas which have been identified in recent years

- Pay
- Morale
- Leadership
- Workload
- Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

#### 4.2 Pay and Reward

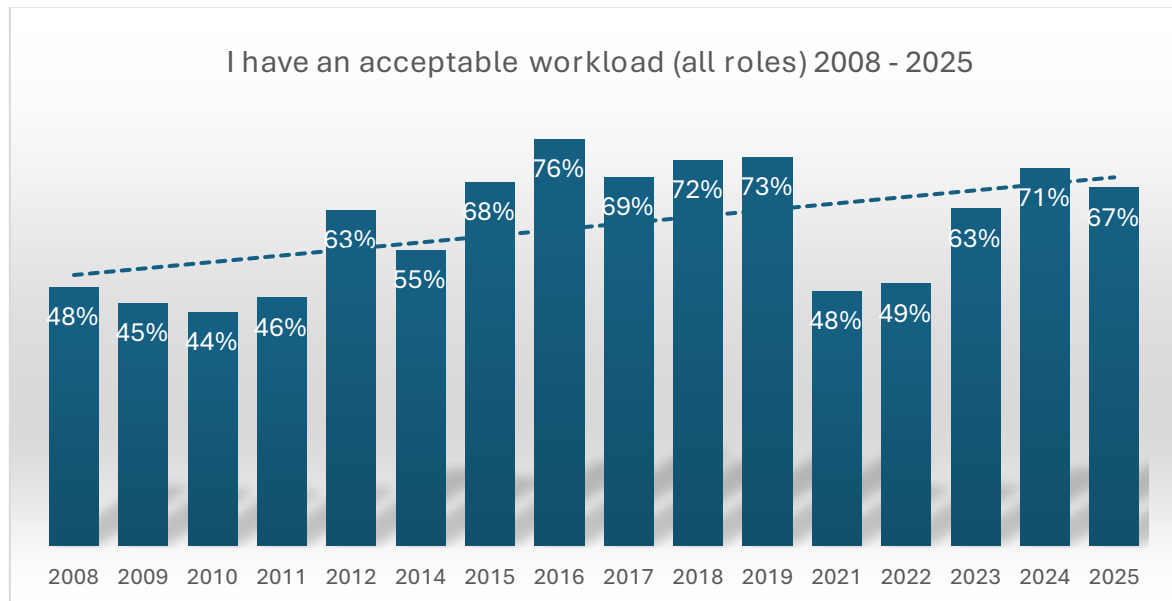
4.2.1 2022 marked the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest point in the SCRA staff survey relating to pay and reward. The organisation has taken a very proactive approach to negotiating with UNISON pay and has sought to deliver pay awards at the higher end of Ministerial pay policy to reflect the ongoing staff dissatisfaction with pay.



4.2.2 With the agreement of a 2 year pay deal in October of this year we have seen overall satisfaction with pay increase to over 50% for the first time in 6 years. However 46% of staff remain dissatisfied with pay compared to similar, comparable roles and organisations

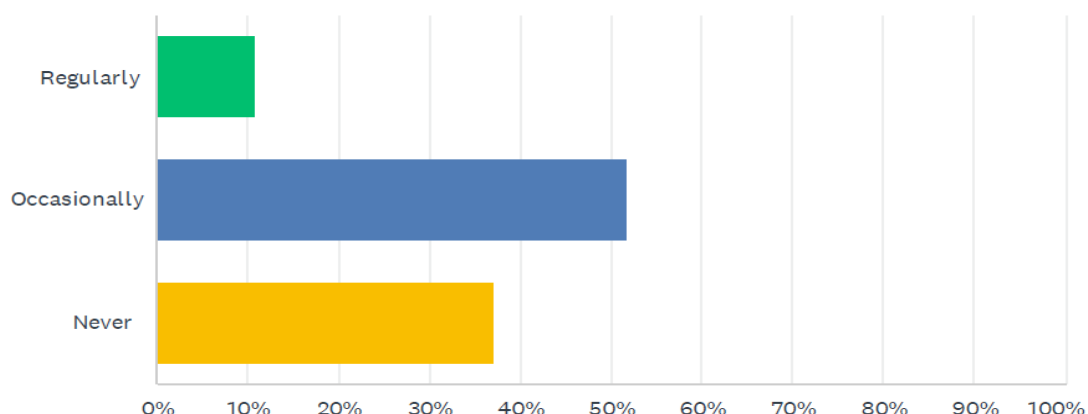
### 4.3 Workload

4.3.1 Results on staff workload have dipped since last year by 4pp after 2 years of steady improvement. The main comments in relation to workload relate to high levels of staff absence, the issue of sharp peaks in workload driven by external demands and a general sense of lack of staffing levels in the service.



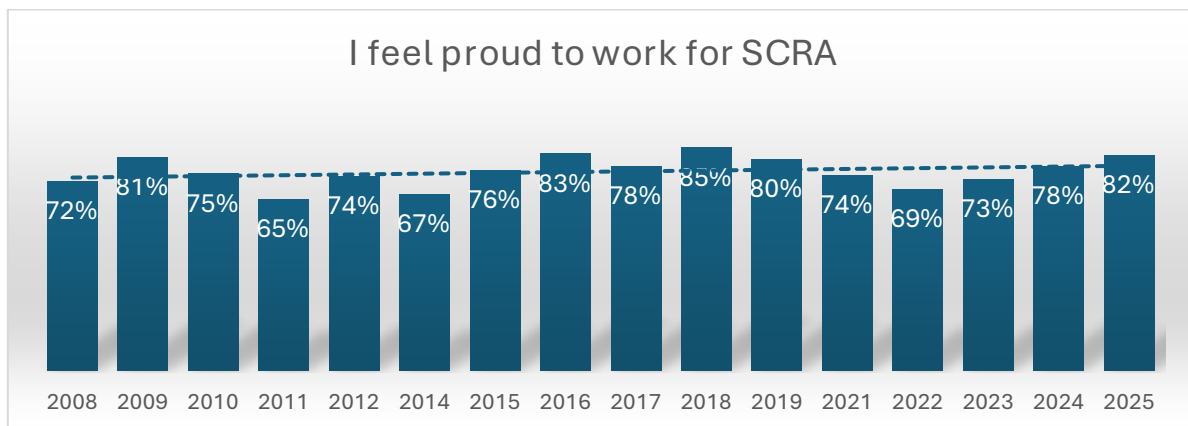
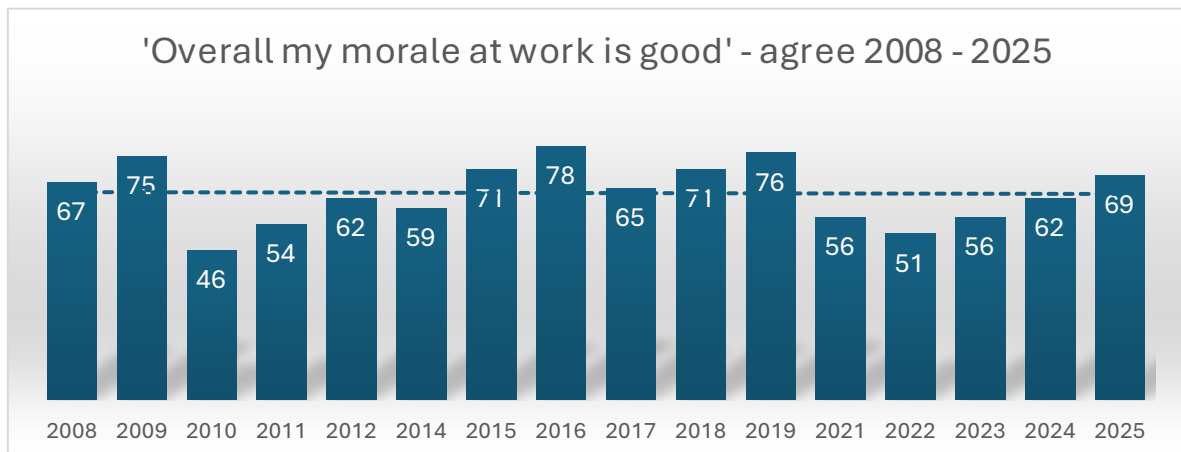
### Do you work at weekends/non working days (not planned overtime)?

Answered: 237 Skipped: 2

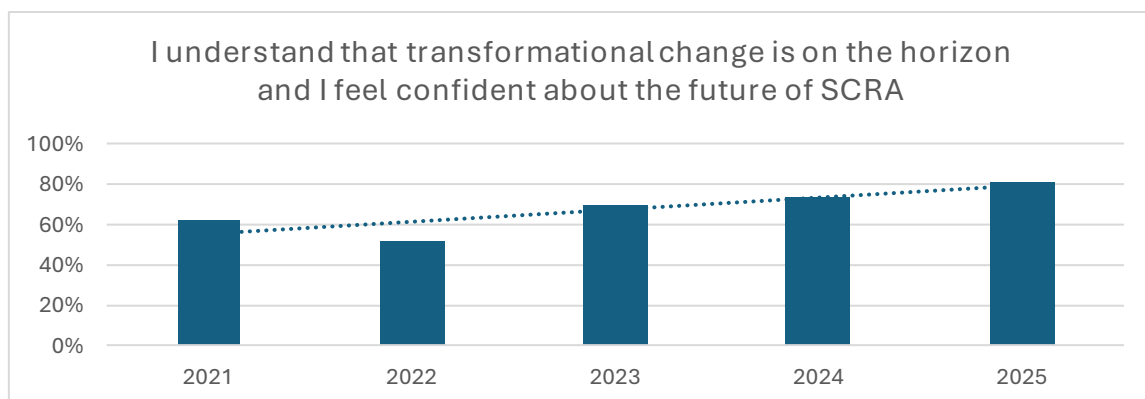


4.3.2 The number of staff reporting having to work regularly at weekends and non working days was 11% compared to 14% in 2024 and 17% in 2023. The number of people reporting working on weekends/non working days occasionally increased in 2025 to 52% and increase from 2024 (49%) and 2023 (43%).

## 4.4 Morale



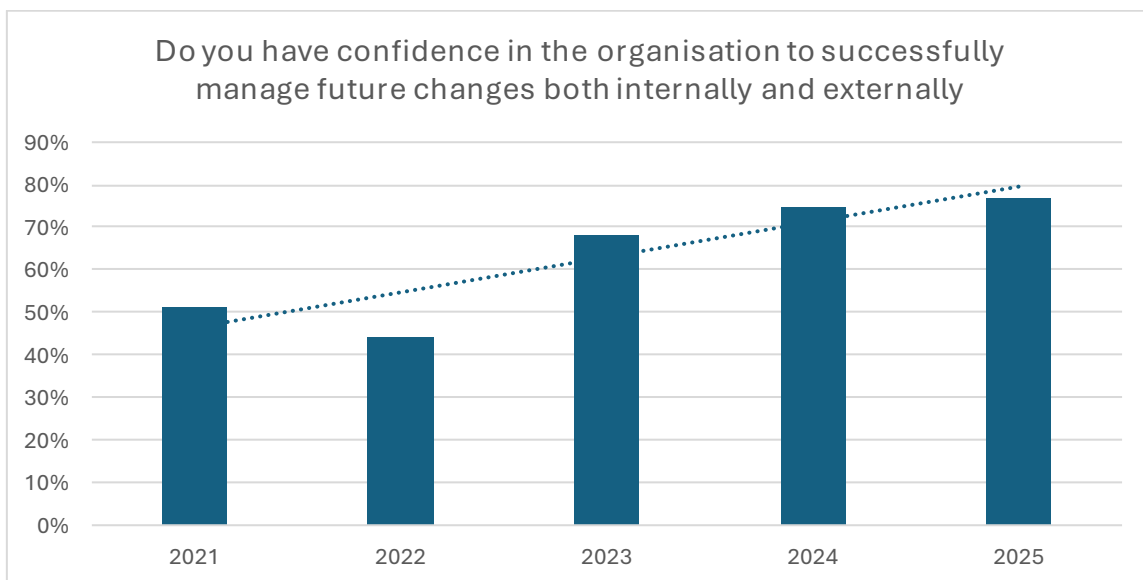
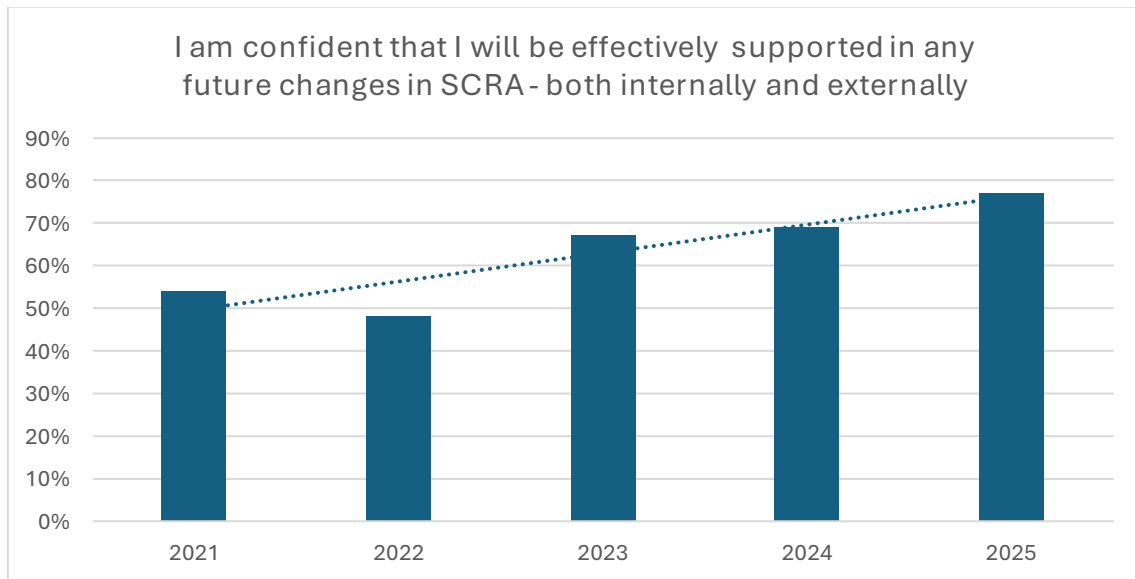
## 4.5 Change

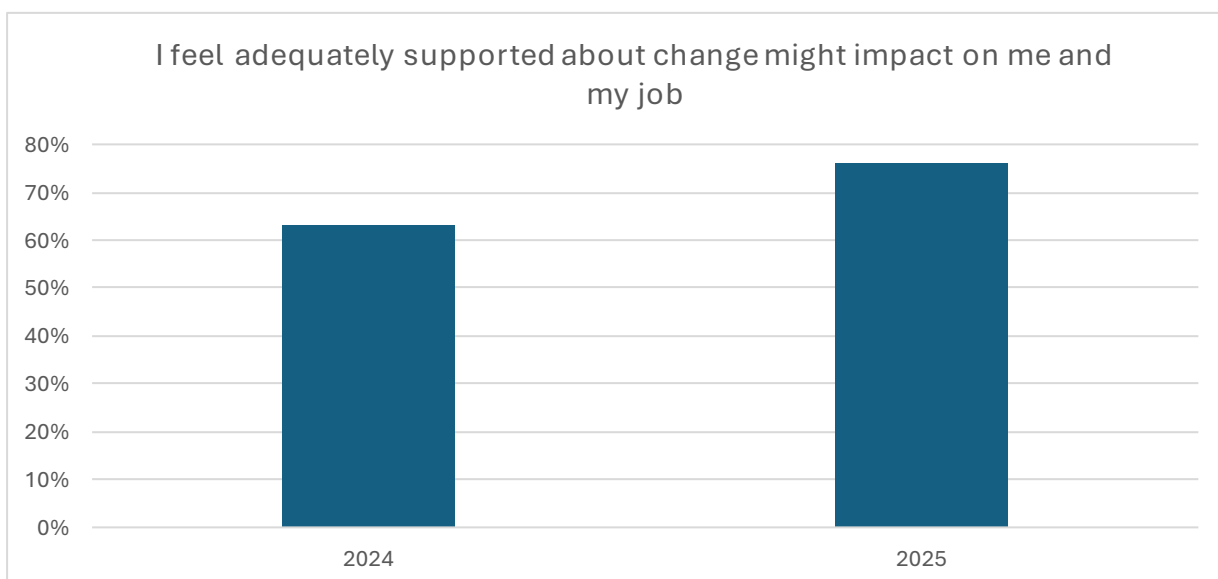
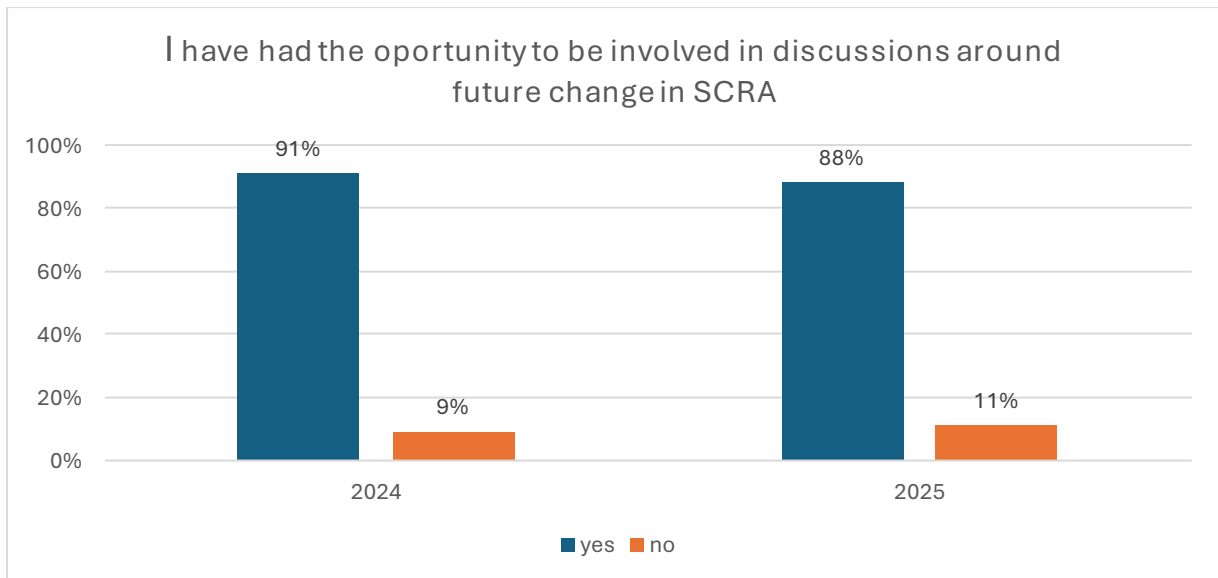


4.5.1 Whilst these results are very positive and reflect the considerable efforts by programme and project management staff, the Strategic Programmes Group, the National Partnership Forum and UNISON, this continues to be one of the most contentious and debated issues in the organisation at the moment. The change section of the staff survey attracted 45 comments – some brief and some more detailed. Whilst these represent a minority of voices – it is important that they are heard and understood – there is scepticism and a degree of fatigue in the service about change – even the most modest of changes. This is driven



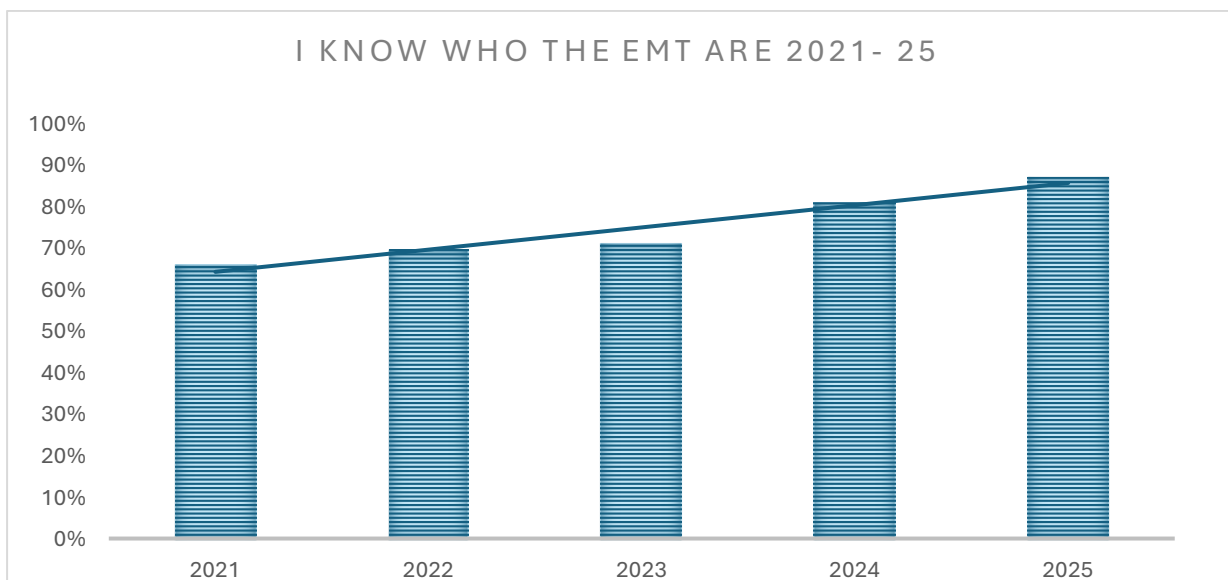
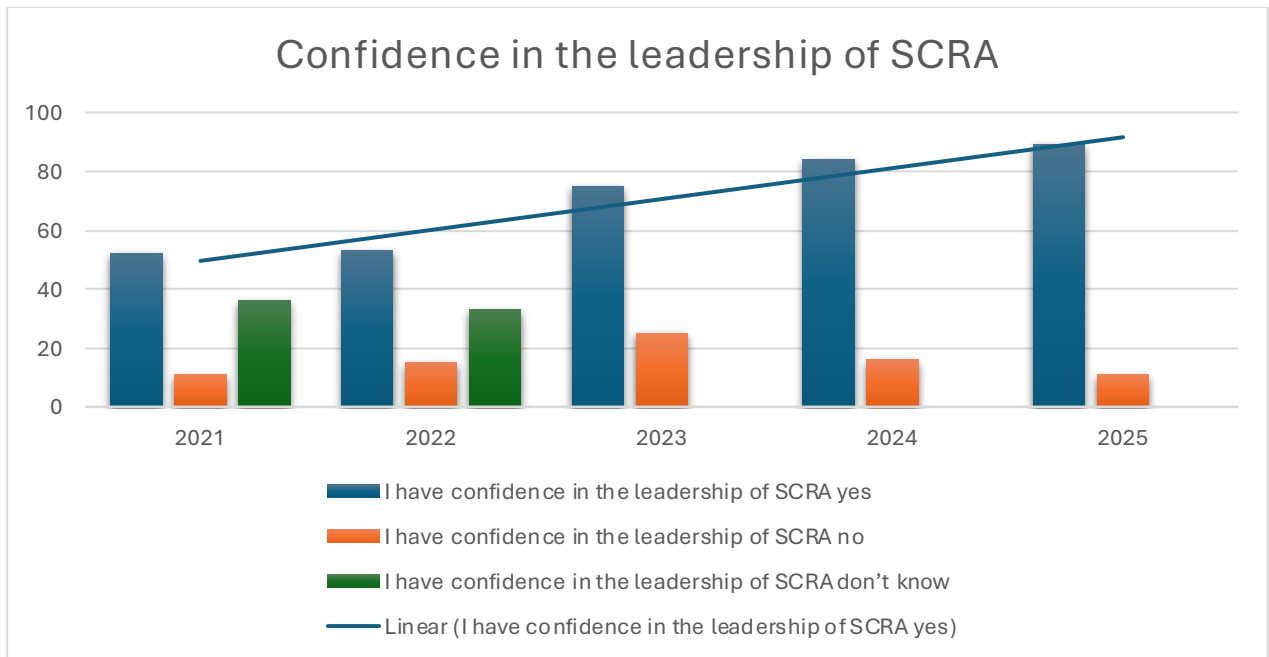
in part by history but also a strong sense of lack of agency for a group of staff – despite all of the extraneous efforts which have and are being made across the organisation. All comments are absolutely anonymous within the survey – however a flavour of comments is shown at appendix A. These represent ongoing resistance to and cynicism about change that the organisation needs to continue to constructively engage with.

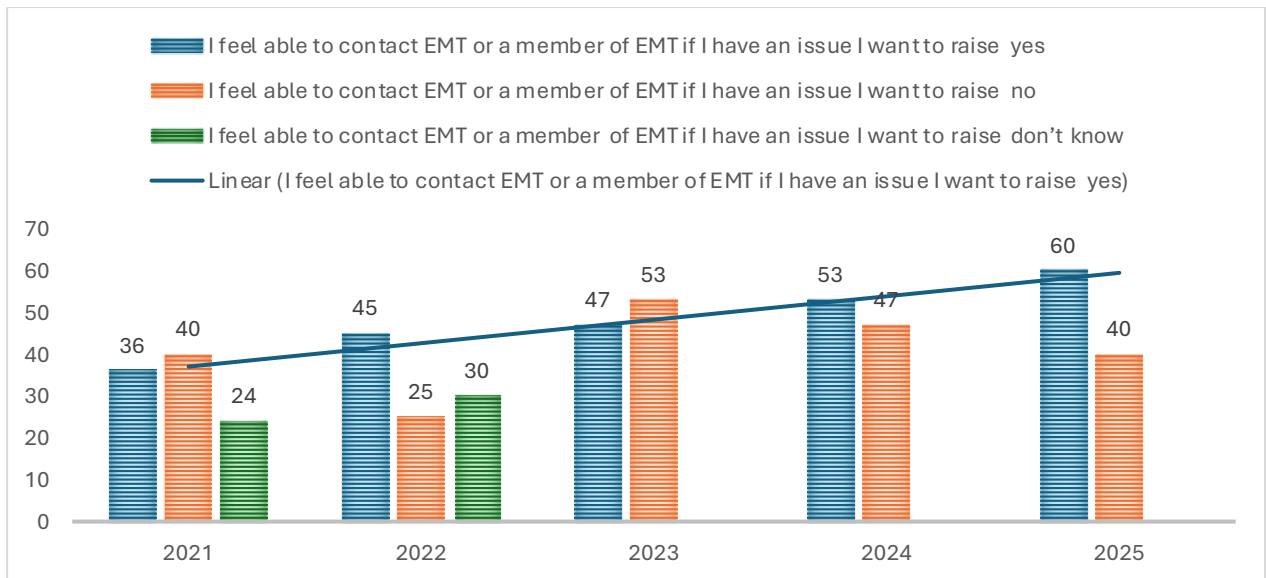




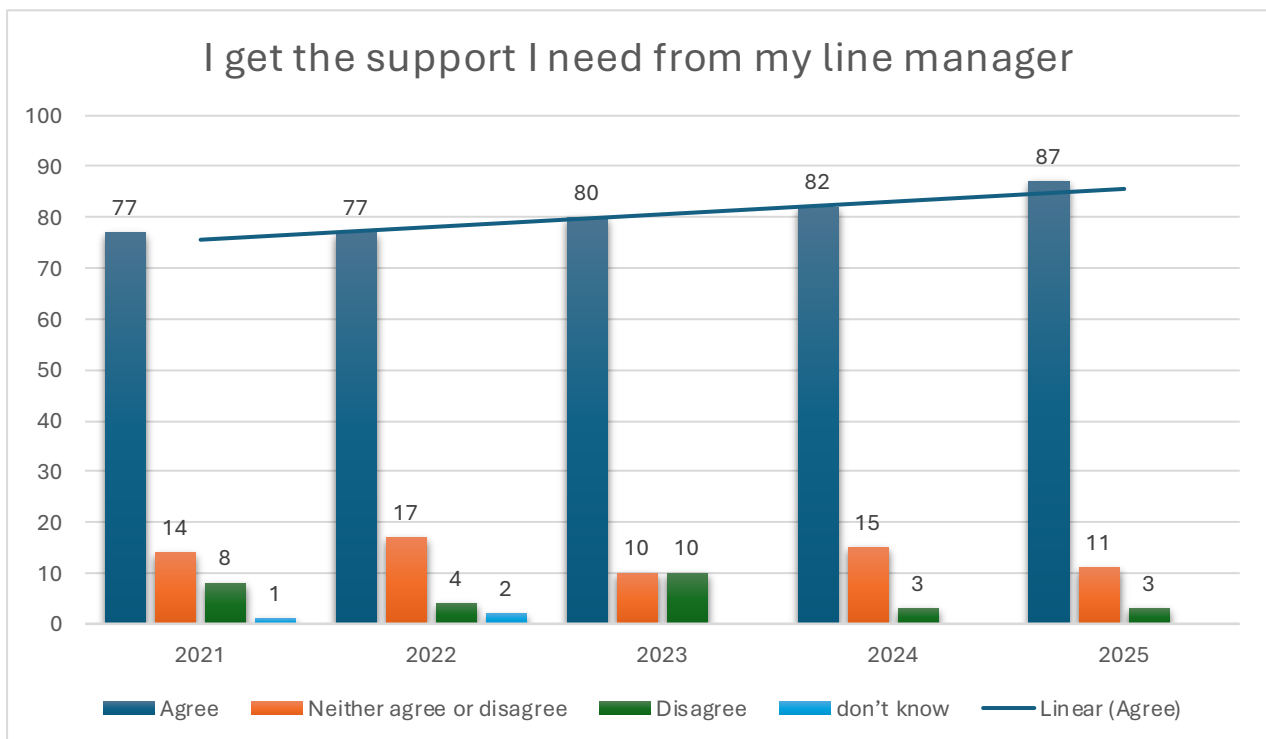
#### 4.6 Leadership

The senior team have been working to ensure that their regular monthly meetings have been much more visible since last years survey which suggested there was scope to further improve visibility and understanding of their work. So far the EMT have visited Grampian (Aberdeen), Highland (Inverness), North Strathclyde (Greenock and Paisley), Glasgow, Central (Stirling), Ayrshire (Kilmarnock), LD&G (Hamilton and Dumfries) and Tayside and Fife (Glenrothes and Dundee). We will prioritise South East Locality and various Head Office Teams in 2026 and then recommence another full cycle of visits.

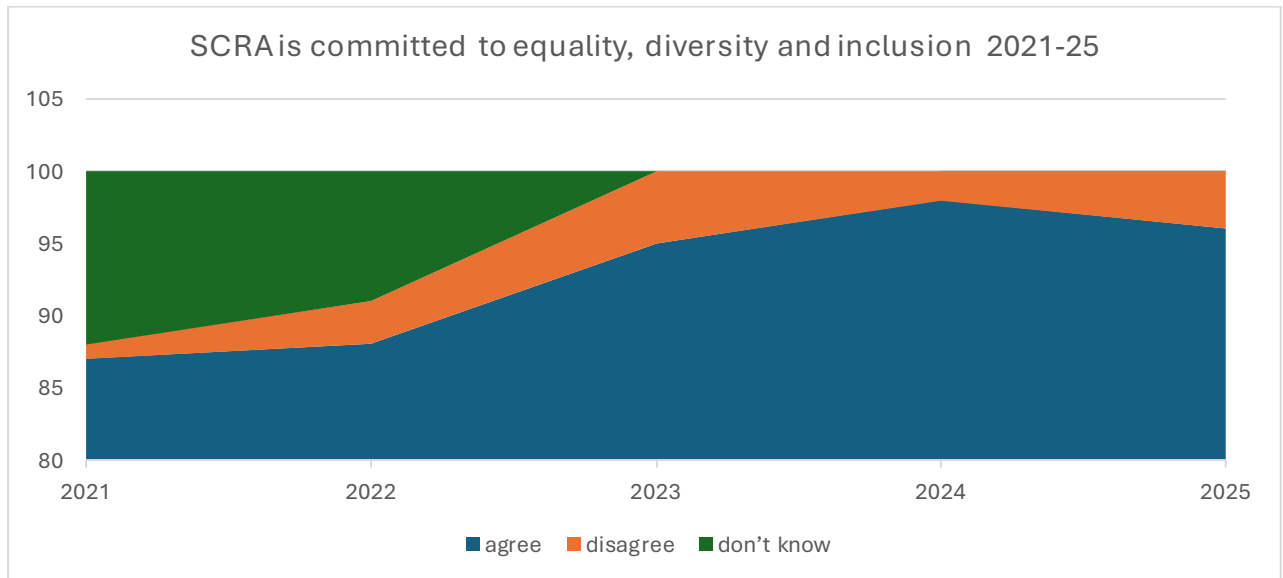




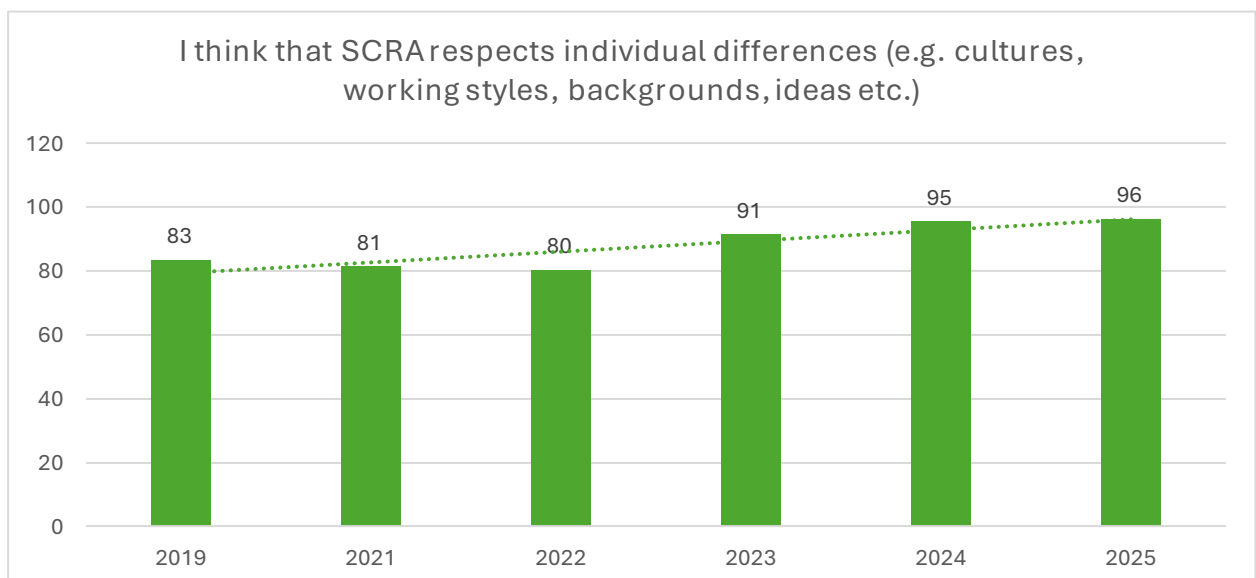
Line management support continues to be one of the strongest elements in the staff survey each year in SCRA, demonstrating that good support at team and Locality level continues to be a bedrock of the SCRA approach.



## 4.7 Inclusion and Diversity



4.7.1 The strong results in this area since 2019/20 have continued with 96% of staff believing that SCRA values individual difference and 96% believing the organisation is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion.



## **5. National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group (CSAE)**

- 5.1 The Head of Practice and Policy represents SCRA on this national group. The work of this group has received a great deal of media and political coverage in recent weeks with consistent calls for an independent inquiry into group based sexual exploitation of children in Scotland, historic and present. This criminal activity is often referred to as 'grooming gangs'. Police Scotland are known to be reviewing a large number of historic and current investigations which may meet this criteria and definition. The Cabinet Secretary for Education recently announced a review involving 4 key inspectorates for Education, Care, Constabulary and Health Improvement with oversight provided by Professor Alexis Jay. The outcome of this review will in part determine advice to Ministers on the need for a public inquiry.
- 5.2 The CSAE group will continue to meet and will be independently chaired by Professor Jay who has consistently said that Scotland lacks clear data and understanding of the nature and extent of group based sexual exploitation of children. SCRA will continue to support and contribute to the CSAE group and we will be working internally on the groups two established priorities on workforce development and data – making sure our workforce have all the required knowledge and competencies to understand the nature, identify and respond to group based sexual exploitation of children and that we have comprehensive systems of data collection which can contribute to understanding of this issue across Scotland.
- 5.3 Members will recall that SCRA has previously [published research](#) in the area of child sexual exploitation (not specifically group exploitation) jointly with Barnardo's in 2020 – but many of the findings (identification, assessment, interventions, training, particularly vulnerable groups) remain highly relevant. I have agreed to resend this research to Professor Jay.

## **6. Scottish Government Equality Strategy for Women and Girls**

- 6.1 SCRA attended a recent roundtable organised by the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG) which focussed on:
- The development of first national Gender Equality Strategy for women and girls, addressing persistent inequality, rising misogyny, and intersecting discrimination. The strategy aims for a coherent, cross-government approach, informed by lived experience and aligned with frameworks such as Equally Safe and the Women's Health Plan
  - Recognition of continued structural inequality across safety, health, work, education, and representation for women and girls.
  - The need to ensure that Scotland is a place where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation — and the behaviours and attitudes that perpetuate it, ensuring early and effective interventions, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people. Helping men and boys reject all forms of violence

against women and girls, and perpetrators are held accountable. These are central issues for SCRA and the Children's Hearings system.

- Rising misogyny (especially online) and increased racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism were highlighted as urgent concerns.
- 6.2 Of particular concern for SCRA is women's financial precarity, worsened by the cost-of-living crisis, disproportionately impacting on disabled women, carers (including children), and those in low-paid roles.
- 6.3 Women are recognised to have high reliance on public services and make up much of the public sector workforce. The Public Sector Equality Duty has not delivered transformational change in the last 15 years. Gaps persist in data quality (especially intersectional data), impact assessment, and cross-organisational data exchange. Accountability for delivery—not additional reporting—is essential.
- 6.4 The Equality Strategy for Women and Girls will be underpinned by a dynamic delivery plan developed after the election, supported by a measurement and accountability framework. Annual gender equality statements will ensure transparency and progress tracking. Organisations will be expected to contribute sector-specific actions and align with national priorities.
- 6.5 SCRA have agreed our commitment to support this work and further updates will be provided to the Board over the next period.

**Appendix A – staff survey  
comments on change**

I am not particularly confident  
that there will be  
transformational change.

I don't have very much  
confidence  
in the way the organisation is  
going. I do not feel convinced  
that the interests of children are  
what guides us now. What  
constitutes or is likely to  
constitute "transformational  
change" is completely unclear.

I'm not sure about the future  
of SCRA . There seems to be  
much focus on projects and  
CHS is ever-expanding'

i have ticked no-  
not because of a  
lack of confidence  
that SCRA will  
persist but rather  
that it may change  
beyond recognition

just don't think  
we are equipped  
as an  
organisation to  
cope and manage  
any changes that  
are coming to us  
in the future

I think the organisation is experiencing  
change fatigue, and while a large  
number of the workforce are willing to  
move forward and accept change it  
breeds frustration and discontentment.

'..think change is necessary, but I  
also think the thinly veiled attempts at  
'pro-change' propaganda that is  
produced by the organisation, the  
heavy use of analogies instead of  
clear answers and the attitude  
surrounding feedback leave a lot to  
be desired...'



**SCRA BOARD**

16 December 2025

**Agenda number 10.1 Research Report: SCRA Research Plans for 2026–27**

**Report Classification:** *Open*

**For:** *Approval*

**Executive Sponsor:** *Alistair Hogg, Head of Practice and Policy*

**Author:** *Catherine Nixon, Research Manager*

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**Executive Summary**

This paper provides an overview of current research outputs and internal evaluation activity, and sets out the proposed research programme for 2026/27. Key highlights include recent publications (residential care; serious offence referrals), stakeholder engagement and ethics/AI work with externally funded workshops, ongoing support to organisational tests of change (referrals; transcription/'Magic Notes'; participation barriers), and planned projects on permanence, education referrals, family-friendly scheduling and decision-making biases. Staffing changes and resourcing are summarised, with budget requirements within approved envelopes.

**Recommendation**

The Board is invited to:

- To note SCRA's current research activities, and approve the proposed plan for 2026/27.

**Key Issues to be discussed/considered**

- Ensuring the research programme continues to support service improvement and wider system reform (The Promise/UNCRC).
- Managing risks and ethical considerations related to AI use and digital tools, including equality impacts (e.g., transcription accuracy across accents).
- Maintaining momentum on internal evaluations that feed decision-making pathways (e.g., SPG) and programme governance.
- Balancing resources and fixed-term staffing elements while sustaining delivery across planned projects and stakeholder engagement.

**Implications:****Service**

Research outputs inform practice and programme tests (referrals; participation; scheduling), and support victim information service design (single point of contact).

**Financial**

Within approved budgets.

## **Workforce**

Team composition includes recent appointments and fixed-term elements; administrative support post now permanent; potential movement of AI coordinator from digital team (subject to funding/contract timing).

## **Infrastructure including Digital**

Evaluation of AI-assisted tools (e.g., Magic Notes) and digital service channels; workshops linking AI research to policy/legislative recommendations.

## **Information Governance**

No formal EIA undertaken; equalities considered via research ethics approvals for each project. Classification: Not protectively marked.

## **Risk Assessment/Management**

Risks relate to ethical use of AI, equalities impacts in digital tooling, and delivery dependencies on fixed-term staffing/funding; mitigations include ethics approvals, external partnerships and programme governance oversight.

## **Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives**

- **Renewal – Strategy, Transformation and Continuous Improvement:** Research supports system-wide change (The Promise, UNCRC) and embeds new ways of working, including digital innovation and evidence-based practice.
- **Delivery – Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Regular updates/evaluations feed Board oversight of performance and inform decision-making, scrutiny and risk management across programmes.
- **Resources – Budget Management, People and Culture:** Programme delivered within approved budgets; workforce changes promote inclusiveness/equality and sustain capacity to serve diverse communities.

## **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**

EMT consulted. Findings presented to stakeholders including Social Work Scotland, Scottish Government Children's Rights Implementation Group, and sector conferences; external partnership with SAIDOT on AI policy/legislative recommendations.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Research Report

## **1. Introduction**

This report describes the research projects planned for 2026-27, our current research activities, and research published this year. It also outlines any staffing changes that have occurred within the team.

## **2. Composition of the Research Team**

- 2.1.** Miss Nicola Baird was seconded to the research team in January 2024 to provide administrative support on a temporary basis. This post has now been made permanent.
- 2.2.** Mrs Judy Warburton and Ms Kristina Moodie were appointed as research officers in January 2024 and May 2024 respectively. Both members of staff have fixed term elements (totalling 1.1 FTE) to their contracts which end in March 2027. Dr. Annie Taylor was appointed as a research officer in April 2024. She is a fully permanent member of staff.
- 2.3.** Funding is currently being sought via challenging review to move Jennie Laurenson (Research Coordinator for the AI project) into the research team from the digital team when her fixed term contract expires at the end of March 2026.
- 2.4.** Dr Catherine Nixon is the research manager. This role consists of a 0.5 FTE permanent post and a 0.4 FTE post that expires at the end of March 2027.

## **3. Research update**

### **3.1. Children aged 5-11 in residential care**

“The Care Trajectories and Nature of Care Received by Children Aged 5–11 Who Are in Need of Therapeutic Residential Care” article that was published in July 2024 was republished in the anthology “Residential Care of Children and Young People” in September 2025. The purpose of this anthology is to increase visibility of research focussed upon residential care to practitioners.

In response to the publication of this article, Dr Nixon was invited to deliver a workshop alongside Dr Andrew Burns Association of Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland (AFKAS) and Dan Johnstone (Kibble) on therapeutic residential care at the “transforming the commissioning of therapeutic support for children in care” conference in October 2025. This conference, which was aimed at children’s care commissioners in England and Wales, focussed on providing insight into the potential benefits of therapeutic residential care.

### **3.2. Ethics, rights and legalities of using Artificial Intelligence in the Children’s Hearings System**

This research project focuses on understanding how individuals perceive the use of artificial intelligence, along with their views on what benefits and risks it poses to society. It also aims to explore views around how AI could be used within the Children's Hearings System, what benefits/risks this might present and how any risks should be mitigated. Views will be collected from a wide range of stakeholders, including children and families, via a series of interactive workshops. The research findings are currently being written up for publication, with an anticipated publication date of February 2025. Early findings from the research were presented at the Social Work Scotland Annual Conference in October 2025.

Following additional funding being granted by the Scottish Government AI team, the research team have been working with SAIDOT, a company specialising in the ethical management of AI systems, to link the research findings to policy and legislative recommendations that could be used to address concerns around the use of AI. This work will form the basis of a series of interactive workshops in January, with the intention being to draft and publish a second report documenting the learning from this.

### **3.3. Children aged 12-15 referred to the Reporter for serious offences**

This research, which was published in November 2025, built on existing research undertaken by SCRA to characterise the experiences of 12 to 15 year olds referred to the Reporter on offence ground by focussing specifically on children referred for serious offences. The report provided an understanding of 1) the backgrounds and characteristics of children aged 12 to 15 who have been referred to the Reporter for serious offences; 2) gender differences in serious offending behaviour; and 3) the factors that Reporters taken into account when making decisions around serious offence referrals, including how these cases are managed between the Reporter and the Procurator Fiscal.

The findings reinforce calls for the ACR to be raised beyond aged 12. However, they also highlight the importance of: better supporting those harmed by children referred to the Reporter; engaging with the general public to explain the welfare-based approach to youth offending, and what role the children's hearings system plays in this; understanding whether increasing the ACR could result in more children being criminally exploited; supporting children's understanding of sexual consent in the digital age. A copy of the report was submitted to the office of the Minister for Children, Young People's and Keeping The Promise via the ACR data and research subgroup of the ACR Review Group. A copy of the publication is attached for reference.

### **3.4. Victim information and support research**

This research project aims to gather evidence that can be used to support the implementation of a single point of contact service for victims of children who have been referred to the Reporter. In particular it aims to understand: 1) how SCRA's victim information service is currently being used; 2) what the experiences and needs are of individuals who have been harmed by a child who has been referred to the Reporter; 3) how the rights of children who have harmed and those they have harmed can be addressed.

The findings from this research are currently being drafted for publication, with an anticipated publication date of January 2026 to coincide with discussions around how SCRA and partner agencies will implement the provisions aimed at victims within the CCJA. Findings from the research have been fed into the Single Point of Contact Service Delivery Model Design Collaboration Stakeholder Workshops as they have become available. They have also been presented to practitioners and policy makers at the Scottish Government's Children's Rights Implementation Group (CRIG) (August) and the "Restorative Justice in Scotland: A Day of Reflection, Learning and Action conference" organised by the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (November).

#### **4. Internal service monitoring and evaluation work**

In 2024 the Board approved a request to expand the size of the research team. This funding was granted on the basis that the research team would support the programme teams to gather and evaluate evidence for the wider change activities being undertaken across the organisation. Throughout 2025 the research team have contributed to these activities in the following ways:

##### **4.1. Referrals project**

The research team have supported the testing of the enhanced partnership model and the champions charter by: 1) providing an introduction to research and evaluation methods for senior practitioners and reporters involved in the tests; 2) supporting the gathering and analysis of baseline data. They will continue to support the tests through completion.

##### **4.2. Joint Operational Test and Evaluation of Magic Notes**

The research team were asked to support the evaluation of the joint operational test, including the use of Magic Notes for taking witness statements, by conducting focus groups with LSA, Assistant Reporters, Reporters and LSM/LRMs in the two areas chosen for these tests. In addition, we conducted an evaluation of human vs. AI-assisted transcription tools, including Magic Notes, to assess the accuracy of transcription across a range of different Scottish accents. The purposes of this evaluation were to identify if AI-assisted transcription could be used to transcribe research interviews, as well as to identify if there were any potential equalities issues arising from the use of these tools. Findings from both of these pieces of work were fed into decision making pathways via the SPG.

##### **4.3. Rapid desk reviews**

To support staff members to understand the rationale for different tests of change being conducted within the organisation the research team have conducted rapid literature reviews focussed upon barriers to participation in legal proceedings and the impact of court delays on the physical and emotional wellbeing of children and families. The findings of these reviews have fed into planning workshops, briefing materials and training events led by the programme team. The team are currently conducting a review of existing research on digital service channels to support the digital team. This

includes an update on existing digital service channels within the public sector, as well as findings on the potential benefits, concerns and risks, barriers to access and engagement, accessibility requirements and potential solutions.

The research team have also conducted a rapid evidence review on the predictors of offending behaviour in children and how this maps to the Reporters' Decision Making Framework to support the development of training materials for the Children in Conflict with the Law training course launched by the Practice Team earlier this year.

## **5. Other professional activities**

### **5.1. Membership of working and advisory groups**

Members of the research team have sat on the Scottish Government's Age of Criminal Responsibility data and research sub-group, the cross justice working group on race and data evidence, the Scottish Government's AI Task Force, the SPOC Service Delivery Model Design Collaboration Stakeholder Workshops and the Bairnshoose Indicators Working Group. We also participate in the Association of Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland's (AFKAS) research network.

## **6. Planned research and evaluation activities**

The research team are currently in the process of working with internal and external partners to identify what our research focus for 2026/2027 will be. A list of the projects being discussed is provided below for consideration.

**6.1.** Dr Kristina Moodie has begun developing a research outline for a piece of work that will consider how partnership working and contextual safeguarding practices are being used to identify children who are being criminally and/or sexually exploited. This work will be supported by Nicola Baird.

**6.2.** The application for funding that was submitted to the Nuffield Foundation to undertake research on permanence in conjunction with AFKAS and the University of Stirling was unsuccessful. We are currently in the process of rewriting the funding bid for consideration by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The planned project would: extend existing SCRA research on permanence by examining what changes there have been over time in the pathways to and beyond permanence orders in Scotland; explore how permanence orders have been experienced by children, families and carers since their introduction in 2007; and identify what changes, if any, are needed to improve the legislative and practice related processes related to permanence orders. Drs Annie Taylor and Catherine Nixon will be involved in this project.

**6.3.** The research team will, in conjunction with the wider referrals project, undertake an exploratory piece of research to understand the nature of

referrals from education and how these have changed over time. The planned project will use administrative and case file data to: consider grounds/reasons for referral; interrogate changes over time in the number and type of referrals, including any geographical differences; consider whether decision-making pathways vary for education referrals; and explore the role of education partners in referrals from social work. If this desk-based component highlights areas that warrant further exploration, a subsequent qualitative research element would help us understand how, why and in what contexts education partners interact with the children's hearings system, and what the perceived benefits and drawbacks are.

**6.4.** The research team will undertake an evaluation of family friendly scheduling as it is rolled out. The research will include conducting qualitative interviews and focus groups with children, families and social care professionals, and will explore how changes that have been made to facilitate participation in hearings are viewed by these groups. This work will be led by Dr Catherine Nixon.

**6.5.** Judy Warburton (with support from Jennie Laurenson; subject to contract extension) will conduct a piece of research exploring whether and how decision-making by Reporters and Panel Members is influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity and race, neurodiversity and socio-economic disadvantage.

**6.6.** The research will include the analysis of SCRA administrative data, interviews with decision makers and the use of vignettes to integrate decision making biases. The research team will continue to support requests from other departments to support internal service evaluation and monitoring projects. This is likely to include the evaluation of new non-disclosure processes.

## **7. Conclusion and recommendation**

To recommend that the Board notes SCRA's current research activities, and provides approval for the proposed plan for 2026/27.

**SCRA BOARD**

16 December 2025

**Item 11.1 Financial Forecast Outturn 2025/26**

**Report Classification:** Open

**For:** Information

**Executive Sponsor:** Ross Mackenzie, Head of Finance and Resources

**Author:** Ross Mackenzie, Head of Finance and Resources

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**Executive Summary**

This report provides a summary of SCRA's financial position for financial year to 30 November 2025 and a forecast (based on October results) for the year ending 31 March 2026. A revenue underspend is currently forecast, with two major uncertainties (CCJA timing and pay award) now reduced. The underspend has been reported to Scottish Government and factored into Spring Budget Revision (SBR). A modest capital overspend is forecast but this is being actively managed and monitored by Executive Management Team members.

**Recommendation**

The Board is invited to:

- Note the revenue and capital position for the year to November 2025 and forecasts based on October actuals.

**Key Issues to be discussed/considered**

Further detail on the year to date (YTD) position and forecast is contained in Appendix 1 but there are no concerns regarding funding availability, underspend/overspend, or achievability of SCRA's planning objectives.

**Implications:****Service**

N/A

**Financial**

The forecast indicates that all current activity is within financial plans.

**Workforce**

N/A

**Infrastructure including Digital**

N/A

**Information Governance**

N/A



**Risk Assessment/Management**

Regular budget monitoring and reporting, and dialogue with SG, are key mitigations against the financial sustainability risk on SCRA's Strategic Risk Register.

**Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives**

Spend and forecasts are broadly in line with the Board-approved budget which supported SCRA's corporate and strategic objectives.

**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**

Budget holders

Executive Management Team members

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Background and further detail

**1 Background**

- 1.1 The Scottish Government (SG) allocated SCRA revenue funding of £24.318m for 2025/26 in its budget published on 4 December 2024. However, Deputy Directors of Children's Rights, Protection and Justice Brian Taylor and Ian Donaldson acknowledged in their budget allocation and monitoring (BAM) letter of 28 March 2025 to the Principal Reporter that "expenditure this financial year could be up to £34.92m". This effectively acknowledges an unfunded resource pressure of up to £10.6m and, given repeated assurances from the Director of Children and Families Andrew Watson to the Board, the Board approved a revenue budget of £34.92m on this basis in March 2025.
- 1.2 While SCRA continues to seek in-year savings to mitigate some of the pressure, the remaining budget pressure will be resolved, as in previous years, in two tranches: Autumn Budget Revision (ABR) in August 2025 and Spring Budget Revision (SBR) in early 2026.
- 1.3 At ABR, SCRA received £5.287m additional budget, £0.287m of which was specifically to cover 60% of the projected increase in employer's National Insurance Contributions (NICs) that SCRA faces.

**2 Funding update**

- 2.1 SCRA was asked in late October 2025 to confirm its SBR requirements. Based on the latest forecast at the time, and after additional direction from SG on being cautious around ability to spend out on its budget plans, SCRA confirmed its SBR needs were £4.3m, bringing the total resource to £33.905m. This is £1.0m less than the £34.92m available, with this saving largely arising from a delay to CCJA implementation and establishment vacancy savings.
- 2.2 SG allocated £4.2m of capital funding to SCRA for 2025/26 and the Board subsequently approved a £4.2m capital budget in March 2025. SG indicated in October 2025 that additional capital cash of £0.487m may be available. Discussions between SG and the Head of Finance and Resources are ongoing around the usability of this resource.

### 3 Revenue

- 3.1 The table below summarises the position to November 2025 by expense head. Depreciation is a non-cash charge and is excluded from the expenditure tables throughout. Payments in respect of unfunded pensions are also excluded.

Previous Full Year Actual £000	Expense Head	Budget Year to Nov £000	Actual Year to Nov £000	Variance Year to Nov £000	Full Year Budget £000	Full Year Forecast £000	Forecast Variance £000	Forecast Variance %
24,655	Staff Costs	18,865	17,246	-1,619	28,298	27,170	-1,128	-4.0%
2,457	Property Costs	1,678	1,182	-496	2,517	2,424	-93	-3.7%
203	Travel Costs	124	117	-7	186	212	+26	14.0%
3,148	Other Operating Charges	2,097	1,948	-149	3,145	3,513	+368	11.7%
159	Capital Financing	109	97	-12	163	163	+0	0.0%
-244	Other Income	-172	-108	+64	-259	-156	+103	-39.8%
<b>30,378</b>	<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>22,701</b>	<b>20,482</b>	<b>-2,219</b>	<b>34,050</b>	<b>33,326</b>	<b>-724</b>	<b>-2.1%</b>
334	Lease payments	112	131	+19	675	675	+0	0.0%
-30,130	Grant In Aid	-23,280	-21,500	+1,780	-34,920	-33,905	+1,015	-2.9%
<b>582</b>	<b>Net Total for SCRA</b>	<b>-467</b>	<b>-887</b>	<b>-420</b>	<b>-870</b>	<b>-579</b>	<b>+291</b>	

- 3.2 Year to date revenue expenditure is £2.219m under budget. On staff, this is due to costs associated with Children (Care and Justice) Act (CCJA) implementation not being incurred, a partly-outstanding pay award, and vacancies. Property costs show a YTD underspend due to the timing of bills for repairs and maintenance, shared costs from landlords and a large electricity credit in respect of prior years. Other Operating Charges show a YTD underspend due to the timing of ICT bills for software licences and network charges.

- 3.3 The table below summarises the position to September 2025 by budget centre, excluding depreciation, lease payments and unfunded pensions. The forecast underspend within Practice and Policy relates to the £1.0m CCJA provision that will now mostly be spent in future years. The Support Services overspend is primarily network charges and ICT licences.

Previous Full Year Actual £000	Cost centre	Budget Year to Nov £000	Actual Year to Nov £000	Variance Year to Nov £000	Full Year Budget £000	Full Year Forecast £000	Forecast Variance £000	Forecast Variance %
250	Communications	201	162	-39	302	277	-25	-8.3%
11,577	East and Central Scotland Area	8,288	7,869	-419	12,431	12,390	-41	-0.3%
264	Executive	183	172	-11	274	264	-10	-3.6%
8,431	North West Scotland Area	6,221	5,777	-444	9,332	9,366	+34	0.4%
1,777	Practice and Policy	1,839	1,106	-733	2,758	1,786	-972	-35.2%
8,079	Support Services	5,969	5,396	-573	8,953	9,244	+291	3.3%
<b>30,378</b>	<b>Net Total for SCRA</b>	<b>22,701</b>	<b>20,482</b>	<b>-2,219</b>	<b>34,050</b>	<b>33,327</b>	<b>-723</b>	<b>-2.1%</b>

- 3.4 The forecast spend by locality is detailed below. The gap between YTD variance and forecast year-end variance will substantially reduce in December when the back pay relating to the 2025/26 pay award is paid.

Locality	Variance Year to Sept £000	Forecast Variance to March £000	Variance %
East & Central Scotland Office	-4	+24	-0.7%
Tayside And Fife Locality	-68	+17	-2.5%
South East Locality	-92	-72	-4.1%
Central Locality	-53	+32	-2.8%
Lanarkshire Dumfries & Galloway Locality	-117	-56	-4.0%
Ayrshire Locality	-83	+15	-4.2%
North West Area Office	+4	+60	+0.7%
Highlands And Islands Locality	-104	-46	-6.9%
Grampian Locality	-63	+36	-4.0%
North Strathclyde Locality	-119	+75	-4.1%
Glasgow Locality	-161	-89	-5.8%
	<b>-860</b>	<b>-4</b>	<b>-4.0%</b>

- 3.5 Plans are progressing to recruit some operational posts in advance of CCJA, but the timing of future recruitment will be kept under review given the update from SG that the key provisions impacting SCRA workload volume may not come into force until early 2027. Work continues to stabilise teams, bringing in additional or transfers of resource where operationally justified, and give certainty where possible to staff on fixed term contracts.
- 3.6 The final in-year costs of the pay award and the outcome of the review of the Reporter job description will be fully reflected in future updates, but the element of these spends not currently reflected in the above forecasts are expected to be met from underspends arising, and will not require any additional resource from SG.
- 3.7 The forecast underspend of £724k above is expected to increase towards the end of the year, in line with previous years' experience, notwithstanding the change in approach to budget management this year where budget holders are discouraged from making vacancy savings. This, coupled with use of reserves and potential for a high year-end bank balance covering short-term liabilities, has led to the decision in paragraph 2.1 above to restrict the revenue ABR request to £4.3m.
- 3.8 Dialogue between SG Finance, Sponsor Team and SCRA remains frequent and transparent to ensure SCRA can meet this request without risking SCRA's fulfilment of its core duties. SCRA continues to report forecasts to SG as part of the monthly budget monitoring process, in addition to monthly staffing data.

## **4 Capital**

- 4.1 Capital spend to November 2025 is £2.48m, being £0.70m within the Digital programme and £1.78m within the Property programme (principally Glasgow). The total forecast spend is £4.42m, a modest £0.22m over-budget; however, this does not account for potential slippage, and this total spend would still be manageable within cash management should the potential £0.487m additional cash mentioned in paragraph 2.2 be unavailable. As such, this forecast overspend is not seen as a likely concern for EMT members to require deferral of projects.

## **SCRA BOARD**

16 December 2025



### **Agenda number 12.1 Annual Overview of Policies Report**

**Report Classification:** *Open*

**For:** *Approval*

**Executive Sponsor:** *Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/Chief Executive*

**Author:** *Pamela Armstrong, Governance Officer*

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#### **Executive Summary**

Provide the Board with an annual overview of policy activity in 2025 and set out the programme for 2026, highlighting equality, risk/assurance and timing dependencies.

##### **2025 Highlights:**

- Risk Management Policy – retention schedules updated.
- Family Expenses Policy – updated (May EMT).
- Procurement Policy – review completed with EHRIA outstanding; Procurement Retention Policy (Aug 2024) reviewed Aug 2025.
- HR suite – Dignity at Work, Salary & Allowances, Discipline, Grievance, Investigation Guidelines, Learning & Development, Shadowing & Mentoring (all with EHRIA complete).
- Whistleblowing Policy – revised; EHRIA under review.
- Trans Inclusion Policy (revised from Transitioning at Work) – guidance updated; final checks and Impact Assessment to complete by end Dec 2025.
- Health & Safety – reviews largely minor; items scheduled for Nov 2025 H&S Committee deferred to end-Jan 2026 for sign-off.

#### **Recommendation**

The Board is invited to:

1. Note the programme of policy reviews undertaken in 2025 (Section 3).
2. Approve the programme and schedule planned for 2026 (Section 5).
3. Endorse completion of outstanding EHRIA/Impact Assessment actions (Whistleblowing; Trans Inclusion; Procurement) and note the routing of Risk Management and Fraud policies to the AAC for assurance oversight.
4. Note the deferral of routine H&S reviews from November 2025 to end-January 2026 for formal committee sign-off
5. Note that, at the request of the Remuneration & Nominations Committee (RNC), an assurance report covering all existing HR and Health & Safety (H&S) policies will be presented to the Committee at its February 2026 meeting

**Key Issues to be discussed/considered**

- Equality compliance: Several HR policies completed EHRIA; Whistleblowing EHRIA under review; Trans Inclusion Policy Impact Assessment due before year-end.
- Risk & assurance: Routing of Risk Management and Fraud Policies to AAC; Procurement Policy EHRIA to be completed and embedded in 2026 programme.
- Operational timing: H&S reviews deferred from Nov 2025 to end-Jan 2026 for formal committee sign-off.
- Records & governance: RMP retention schedules updated; Delegated Authority minor payroll-audit amendment.

**Implications:****Service**

Policies reflect legislation and best practice; minimal service disruption anticipated.

**Financial**

No direct financial implications from policy updates; Procurement Retention Policy continues annual reporting; any EHRIA-driven changes will be managed within existing budgets.

**Workforce**

Positive impact through clear HR policies and updated Trans Inclusion guidance; continued Partnership Forum engagement.

**Infrastructure including Digital**

No material infrastructure impact anticipated.

**Information Governance**

Retention schedules updated; policies available on Connect; no additional IG risks identified.

**Risk Assessment/Management**

Links to Strategic Risk Register via AAC oversight of Risk Management and Fraud; H&S committee governance maintained.

**Relevance to Corporate/Strategic Objectives**

**Renewal – Strategy, Transformation and Continuous Improvement:** Policy updates support compliance with The Promise/UNCRC expectations and embed consistent practice across SCRA.

**Delivery – Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Programme of reviews strengthens assurance, maintains standards and supports risk management and governance.

**Resources – Budget Management, People and Culture:** HR policy revisions and the Trans Inclusion update reinforce inclusiveness and equality; activity delivered within available resources.

**Equality Declaration**

Due regard has been given to the Equality Act 2010 and the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty as part of SCRA's decision-making process. Following evaluation, this paper is not itself relevant to Equality & Diversity, although individual policies within the programme are subject to EHRIA as appropriate.

**Involvement, Engagement and/or Consultation**

Partnership Forum (HR Sub-Group), Equalities Review Group, Health & Safety Committee, Procurement and Head of Property

**Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Review of Policies (2025)
- Appendix 2 – Programme for 2026



# Appendix 1 — Review of Policies (2025)

Function	Policy/Document	EHRIA Status
HR	Dignity at Work Policy	Complete
	Salary & Allowances Policy	Complete
	Discipline Policy	Complete
	Grievance Policy	Complete
	Investigation Guidelines	Complete
	Learning & Development Policy	Complete
	Shadowing & Mentoring Scheme Policy	Complete
	Whistleblowing Policy (this will come to the Rem Com in February 2026 then onto the Board)	Under review*
	Trans Inclusion Policy (revised) + guidance	To be completed Dec 2025
	Draft Appreciation Framework (new)	Not finalised
Health & Safety	Naloxone Policy	Complete
	Lone Working Policy	Not required
	Asbestos Policy	Not required
	COSHH	Not required
	First Aid Policy	Not required
	Sharps & Bodily Fluids Policy	Not required
	Display Screen Equipment Policy	Not required
	Monthly Checklist for LSMs	Not required
Finance	Risk Management Policy (retention schedules updated)	Not required*
	Family Expenses Policy (May EMT)	Not required
	Procurement Policy (review)	Outstanding
	Retention Policy – retention payment in contracted works (Aug 2024; reviewed Aug 2025)	Not required
	Schedule of Delegated Authority (minor amendment from Payroll audit)	Not required
	Fraud Policy (to AAC)	Not required*
Corporate Governance	Public Access to SCRA Board Meetings	Complete*

## Appendix 2 — Programme for 2026

Function	Policy/Document	EHRIA Status
HR	Flexi Time Scheme	TBC
	Flexible Working Scheme	TBC
	Wellbeing Strategy	TBC
	Equal Opportunities Policy (review and revise)	TBC*
	Trans Inclusion Policy — post-publication embedding & guidance refresh (if required)	Not required
Health & Safety	Violence in the Workplace Policy	Not required (minor changes likely)
	First Aid Policy	Not required (minor changes likely)
	Eye Test Policy	Not required (minor changes likely)
	No Smoking Policy	Not required (minor changes likely)
	Manual Handling Policy	Not required (minor changes likely)
	Gender-Based Violence / Domestic Abuse Policy (new)	TBC
Finance	Procurement Policy (including EHRIA completion)	TBC
	Fraud Policy	Not required*
	Risk Management Policy	Not required*
Digital Security & Governance	Vulnerability Management Policy (new)	TBC
	CSAS Accreditation Policy (update)	TBC
	Information Security Handbook (incl. Password & Multi-Factor Authentication policy)	TBC
	AI Policy (under consideration)	TBC

- All policies marked with an asterisk are reserved to the Board for approval