Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
Agenda of Executive Management Team Meeting
Held on Wednesday 01 April 2026
Ochil Hpuse, Stirling

AGENDA

	Item	Purpose	Papers	Owner
1.	**Apologies**			
2.	**Any Other Business**			
3.	**Minute of the Last Meeting**	Approval	Attached	NH
4.	**Matters Arising**			
5.	**Senior Leadership Programme**	Noting	Attached	HE
6.	**Procurement Strategy and Policy Manual**	Approval	To follow	RMacK
7.	**Internal Audit** • Follow up action tracker	Review	To follow	RMack
8.	**Board/Committees** • SCRA Board Development Day – draft agenda	Review	Attached	NH
	Standing Items			
9.	**Finance and Resource** a) General Update	Update	Verbal	RMacK
10.	**Information Governance** a) General Update	Update	Verbal	AH
11.	**Practice and Policy** a) General Update	Update	Verbal	AH
12.	**Human Resource** a) General Update	Update	Verbal	SD
13.	**Digital Programme**	Update	Verbal	DC
14.	**Programme Board**	Update	Verbal	LB
15.	**New Risks**	Discussion		
16.	**Forward Plan** a) SCRA Board Development Day 22/04 b) D CAB 23/04 c) SCRA/SG Sponsor Team Meeting 28/04	Info		
	Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 06 May 2026, Fountainhall Road, Edinburgh			

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
Minute of Executive Management Team Meeting
Held on Wednesday 04 March 2026
Ayrshire Locality, Kilmarnock Office

Present

Neil Hunter (**NH**)	Principal Reporter/Chief Executive
Helen Etchells (**HE**)	Senior Operational Manager (North)
Ross Mackenzie (**RMacK**)	Head of Finance & Resources
Douglas Cameron (**DC**)	Head of Digital
Lisa Bennett (**LB**)	Head of Strategy & OD
Paul Mulvanny (**PM**)	Senior Operational Manager (East & Central)
Alistair Hogg (**AH**)	Head of Practice & Policy
Susan Deery (**SD**)	Head of HR
Pamela Armstrong (**PA**)	Governance Officer, Minute
Cairistiona Dougherty (**CD**)	Executive Admin Assistant

Ayrshire Locality Staff

Lyndsey Fraser	Locality Reporter Manager
Sarah Foran	Locality Reporter Manager
Janet Robertson	Locality Support Manager
Pamela Gracie	Locality Support Assistant
Mation Thom	Locality Support Assistant

Minute

	Item	Timescale	Owner
1.	**Apologies** None		
2.	**Any Other Business** **Greenock Window Replacement** RMack introduced the report outlining the need to replace 22 ageing metal framed single glazed windows at the Greenock office and hearing centre. Although the building has recently benefited from internal refurbishment, a condition survey and technical assessment confirmed that the existing windows no longer meet required standards and that upgrading to double glazed units would significantly improve environmental performance. EMT was asked to note the report and approve proceeding, subject to planning consent. **Issues arising during discussion:** • EMT discussed concerns raised by staff about the sequencing of refurbishment, specifically why the internal refurb was completed before window replacement. RMack confirmed this was due to early cost constraints and planning permission delays, not a strategic error. Earlier planning		

	approval would have allowed the windows to be replaced first. EMT agreed that the property team should be ready to explain the sequence to Greenock staff if asked, ensuring transparency and reassurance that the project had not been mismanaged. **Agreed:** • To approve revised Dumbarton upgrade budget. • Property team to begin procurement.		
3.	**Minute of the Last Meeting** Agreed	Approval	NH
4.	**Matters Arising** None		
5.	**Dumbarton Upgrading & Smart Working Project** RMack introduced the update on the Dumbarton office refurbishment, which aims to modernise the 1990 built office and hearing centre to support smart working principles and improve staff facilities. Initial design work by Space Solutions identified opportunities to reconfigure internal spaces, enhance the reception and hearing suite environment, provide agile working areas, and upgrade key building services including heating, BMS controls, lighting and windows. EMT was invited to approve the revised budget and confirm the appointment of Space Solutions to progress the detailed design, tender preparation and construction stages. **Issues arising during discussion:** • EMT reflected on the need to modernise older parts of SCRA's estate, many of which were built in the 1970s–1990s and now have major underlying infrastructure issues. They acknowledged that costs would continue to rise due to sustainability requirements and supply chain pressures across the UK public-sector property environment. • Staff engagement was highlighted as a key strength of the project. EMT noted that local staff had been actively involved in shaping the layout and providing feedback, increasing confidence that the final design would meet operational needs and support well-being. They emphasised the importance of maintaining this collaborative approach. • EMT agreed that the revised proposal was well balanced, affordable within the capital constraints, and protected the essential design	Approval	RMack

	intent of a modernised, flexible, sustainable workspace. **Agreed:** • To EMT an increase to the budget for completing the Dumbarton works to £650K with the additional budget allocated from existing 2026/27 capital for property projects. • To approve the appointment of Space Solutions to progress Stage 2 of the Dumbarton project through detailed design work, tendering and construction.		
6	**Draft Business Plan 2026/27** LB presented the final Business Plan for the last year of the current corporate plan cycle. It consolidates organisational achievements, sets out planned work, and aligns with Scottish Government expectations ahead of elections. **Issues arising during discussion:** • NH and RMack emphasised that the plan reflects achievements across the organisation, including work on digital transformation, practice improvement, estates, job description revisions, and security enhancements. They stressed the importance of presenting achievements accurately, particularly in a year with multiple system wide pressures. • Key achievements, particularly the substantial work on Reporter job descriptions, are not fully captured. EMT agreed these should be strengthened in the final draft to avoid under representing major organisational progress. **Agreed:** • To approve the draft Business Plan for submission to the Board. • To finalise and refine key achievements and visual elements before design completion.	Mar 26	AMacD
7.	**World Cup Bank Holiday** SD introduced the item, recommending the EMT consider whether SCRA should align with other public bodies in recognising the proposed World Cup bank holiday. **Issues arising during discussion:** • NH emphasised the value of supporting morale by aligning SCRA with organisations that were granting the holiday. • EMT acknowledged the minimal cost implications associated with granting the day, especially compared with the potential staff engagement		

	benefits. They also recognised that UNISON was expected to support adoption of the holiday. **Agreed:** • To adopt the World Cup public holiday. • To adjust payroll by running salaries early (e.g., 12 June).		
8.	**Nominations for Associate Assessors** NH sought EMT's direction on SCRA's involvement in the Care Inspectorate's associate assessor programme, which plays a key role in national multi-agency inspection of children's services. **Issues arising during discussion:** • EMT strongly supported continued participation, noting that the role enhances cross agency insight and reinforces SCRA's contribution to national scrutiny and improvement work. They highlighted that current participants have gained significant learning from previous inspection roles. • EMT reflected on the intensity of the inspection commitment, which typically involves a concentrated 3–4-week period of work. They agreed that selection must consider operational pressures and each candidate's readiness. • EMT discussed the need for a fair, transparent nomination process, aligned with Personal Development Plans (PDPs), to ensure opportunities are well-matched to staff development needs while also maintaining locality capacity. • EMT noted that the Care Inspectorate's timetable may be slower this year due to pressures arising from the CSE Public Inquiry but agreed that SCRA should still prepare a pool of suitable nominees. **Agreed:** • To SCRA's participation in the Associate Assessor programme. • HR & Practice to issue internal expressions of interest, aligned with PDP processes. • NH to respond formally to the Care Inspectorate confirming SCRA's continued participation.	Apr 26 Apr 26	SD/AH NH
9.	**Referrals Project Business Case** SD Introduced the business case reflecting the project's evolution into work requiring Senior		

	Practitioner level experience, particularly as multi agency collaboration deepens. **Issues arising during discussion:** • EMT discussed the critical importance of maintaining continuity. Because the project relies heavily on strong, established relationships with Police Scotland and social-work colleagues, simply re-recruiting at Senior Practitioner level would risk losing momentum and disrupting joint-working gains. • The EMT considered fairness and organisational consistency, recognising that designating staff as "acting up" to Senior Practitioner roles was the clearest and most equitable way to formally acknowledge the level of responsibility they were delivering, without triggering structural upheaval or competition for roles mid project. • EMT agreed that the business case presented a sound rationale for adjusting the level of the role and noted that cost implications were modest compared with the value of maintaining stable, skilled representation within the multi-agency partnership. **Agreed:** • To approve revised business case.		
10.	**Board/Committees** EMT reviewed reports ahead of the March Board meeting. Final reports to be sent to be sent to PA by the end of the week.		
11.	**Finance and Resource** • RMack provided an update on SCRA's financial position, confirming that the revenue budget remains stable, but the capital budget continues to face significant pressure, with planned works exceeding the allocated capital envelope for 2026/27. EMT acknowledged that the capital plan may need to proceed to the Board despite being under funded. • The Scottish Government is seeking to claw back between £170k and £670k of SCRA's underspend. RMack explained that the final figure will depend on whether SG accepts SCRA's contribution toward national deficit reduction or chooses to apply a stricter interpretation. • EMT noted the benefit of SG's forward energy purchasing, which has already secured 93% of electricity and 75% of gas for the coming year.		

	This mitigates exposure to volatile energy markets, although long term pressures remain. • Travel budget fluctuations were discussed, with increases in some localities attributed to training, organisational development activity, and restructuring of working patterns. EMT acknowledged the need to monitor the impact of these changes. • RMack confirmed that the new finance system is ready for rollout, with training for invoice approvers already underway. This system is expected to strengthen financial controls and streamline processes ahead of year-end. • EMT noted that BDO will shortly begin internal audit follow-up work, and that most required evidence has already been prepared. Ross also highlighted the arrival of the Scottish Government's annual year-end internal-control checklist, which will be issued to leads for completion.		
12.	**Information Governance** AH provided a verbal update in the following areas, **General Update** • IG activity remains heavily influenced by increasing regulatory scrutiny, operational pressures linked to legislative reform, and the need to maintain high standards of confidentiality, data accuracy, and response quality across all localities. • EMT recognised that IG risks now intersect with major national developments, including the children's hearings redesign, the Promise, and the newly announced Public Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), creating heightened expectations for data governance and evidential reliability. **ICO Correspondence** • EMT discussed a significant escalation in tone from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in relation to a reported non-disclosure breach. The ICO issued a highly detailed and demanding set of questions seeking assurance on SCRA's handling, internal controls, staff training, decision-making and response processes. • Unlike previous contacts where the ICO typically accepted SCRA's explanations and took no further action the correspondence indicated greater scrutiny, with an explicit		

	warning that inadequate responses may trigger a formal investigation.
	• EMT acknowledged this shift as potentially signalling increased national concern about non-disclosure handling across the sector and therefore requiring exceptionally thorough and evidence based responses.
	• The IG Manager is preparing a comprehensive reply, incorporating the significant programme of ND improvements currently underway, as well as the role of training and compliance mechanisms. EMT recognised the importance of providing robust assurance to avoid regulatory escalation.
	
	SAR / Retention Queries
	• EMT reviewed a second contact from the ICO regarding a Subject Access Request (SAR) complaint involving an individual whose Local Authority had accidentally deleted all their records, while SCRA had informed the individual that their own case files were no longer held.
	• The ICO's initial query suggested that SCRA's retention policy may be "bad," prompting clarification from SCRA that its retention period of 19 years is lawful, published, and consistent with statutory requirements and UNCRC related adjustments (previously 18 years).
	• EMT discussed the sensitivity of retention decisions, acknowledging the importance of balancing:
	  o legal requirements,
	  o the risks of holding excessive sensitive information, and
	  o the need to maintain accurate records for individuals seeking access to their childhood history.
	• EMT noted that the ICO's final position is still pending and may impact how SCRA manages retention policies in the future.		

13.	**Practice and Policy** AH provided a verbal update in the following areas, **General Update** • AH provided a comprehensive policy and legislative update, framing the discussion within an exceptionally dynamic national context, with multiple reform agendas running in parallel. • EMT recognised that the current landscape including hearings system reform, the Promise, Children's Experience Bill		

	amendments, and the national workforce crisis has substantial implications for SCRA's statutory responsibilities, practice expectations, decision making timelines, and interagency working. • AH highlighted the intense pace of legislative scrutiny and amendment processes, noting the operational and workload complexities arising from poorly drafted, late, or incomplete proposals emerging from Parliament committees. • EMT acknowledged that Practice & Policy is carrying significant pressure due to the volume, pace, and sensitivity of national reform activity, and must remain engaged at every stage to influence outcomes and protect operational viability. **Children's Experience Bill (CE Bill)** • AH reported that the Bill's passage through Parliament, particularly Stage 2 has been "chaotic," with multiple amendments tabled, withdrawn, reconsidered, and re-drafted, often under severe time constraints and political pressure. He confirmed that several problematic amendments were either withdrawn or refused after the Minister committed to further review, though some will return in reworded form at Stage 3, requiring close attention. • One significant expected change is the introduction of a 3-month statutory timescale for establishing grounds at court. EMT discussed how this could positively impact delay reduction but may also create operational pressures depending on court capacity and Local Authority readiness. • AH noted major concerns relating to advocacy proposals, including pushed amendments for universal advocacy for every child at every hearing, as well as "non-instructed advocacy" for infants or children with communication needs. • EMT reviewed proposals around the continuity of the Chair at hearings. While continuity aligns with Promise principles, some proposed amendments placed inappropriate decision-making expectations on the National Convener. These are being redrafted. • AH also highlighted amendments concerning family group decision making. EMT noted that although standards may be introduced nationally, SCRA should not be given statutory		

	duties within this space, as it sits primarily with Local Authorities. • EMT discussed that the CE Bill remains entirely unfunded, raising significant concern given that the Care & Justice Act was also unfunded. The risk of legislation creating obligations without resource was clearly noted. **Social Work Workforce Crisis** • PM described a worsening national shortage of qualified social workers with some authorities facing severe staffing gaps, cuts to hours/grades, or operating in business continuity mode. • EMT recognised the direct impact on SCRA, such as delays in reports, incomplete case information, and reduced multi-agency involvement. • The viability of the children's hearings system was highlighted as a risk, with pressures undermining Promise commitments and legislative requirements. • SCRA will continue to work closely with the National Social Work Agency to escalate concerns to Ministers. **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Public Inquiry Announcement and Context** • AH updated EMT on the sudden announcement of a national Public Inquiry into CSE, led by Professor Alexis Jay, which came without prior notice and supersedes existing national workstreams. • The inquiry will require SCRA to produce extensive historical and qualitative evidence, including case files, thematic insights and Reporter experience. • EMT agreed that SCRA must pause destruction of case files due to the likelihood of inquiry disclosure requirements. The IG Manager has initiated contact with inquiry representatives to clarify the scope and expectations. • EMT acknowledged that suspending destruction will increase storage pressures, create potential for increased SAR workload, and raise risks associated with holding older sensitive case material. • The team stressed the importance of preparing early by mapping available data, identifying gaps, and coordinating evidence		

	gathering across practice, IG, legal, and locality teams. • The inquiry will also require multi-agency coordination with Local Authorities, CHS, Police Scotland and others to ensure accurate system-level evidence. **Agreed:** • IG & Practice to coordinate CSE Inquiry evidence and data collection. • Pause destruction of files pending CSE Inquiry guidance.		AH
14.	**Human Resource** Updates were given in the following areas: **Job Evaluation Reviews** • SD presented a proposed sequencing for reviewing job descriptions across locality and corporate roles following the recent job-evaluation outcomes. The recommended order is: 1. Assistant Reporter, 2. Locality Support Manager (LSM), 3. Locality Reporter Manager (LRM), 4. Senior Practice Administrator, 5. Reporter. • EMT discussed the logic of this ordering. Although the LRM role was last reviewed in 2011, they agreed that the sequence reflected both organisational need and the most effective use of limited HR capacity. • It was noted that these reviews require substantial time and specialist input; EMT recognised the possible need to dedicate resource specifically to job-description review work rather than dispersing it across multiple teams. • EMT also confirmed that line manager involvement is essential, as they provide critical operational context missing from purely HR led reviews. **Long Service Awards** • SD introduced a proposal to expand SCRA's long service recognition arrangements, following discussion at the Health & Wellbeing Group. SCRA currently recognises 20-year and 40-year service milestones with a £200 voucher. The proposal adds: o a new 30-year milestone, and o increased values of £200 (20 years), £300 (30 years) and £400 (40 years).		

	• The proposal includes retrospective recognition for staff who have already passed 30 years but have not yet reached 40 years. • EMT noted that additional work was required to verify tax implications, as long-service vouchers can become taxable depending on timing and value. SD to seek further advice before EMT approval. • EMT was broadly supportive of recognising long service more meaningfully but agreed that formal approval should be deferred pending confirmation of tax treatment. **Proposed Skills-Gap Analysis Process** • SD presented a new skills-gap analysis template designed to help managers assess staff confidence and capability against the revised Children's Reporter job description. • The analysis will take place within supervision sessions, allowing managers to explore development needs in a supportive, role specific context rather than through formal testing or one-off exercises. • The process will identify areas where staff may benefit from shadowing, coaching, practice based learning, or refresher training, ensuring all Reporters can meet the updated competency expectations of their role. • EMT discussed how this approach links to the job evaluation outcomes and the need for continuous development as casework complexity and external scrutiny increase. • The team acknowledged potential HR and managerial workload implications but agreed this supervision based model was proportionate and aligned with the organisation's performance development culture. • EMT also discussed mandatory CPD, noting UNISON's suggestion that some elements of Reporter practice (e.g., decision making, grounds preparation) may require cyclical refresher training. This issue will return once HR and the Practice Team explore options.	Apr 26	SD SD/AH
15.	**Digital Programme** DC provided the following verbal update: • Delays in infrastructure deployment caused by global semiconductor shortages affecting Microsoft's UK South datacentre, slowing SCRA's ability to build and deploy the new environment. Despite this, the team found workarounds to complete the required		

	infrastructure build, though it extended timelines. • The Glasgow soft-launch of the Non-Disclosure (ND) redesign will go ahead but initially using the proof-of-concept environment until the full environment becomes available the following week. This ensures momentum while managing technical constraints. • DC raised capacity challenges with vendors ARM and Folding Space, explaining that SCRA is increasingly reliant on Leidos engineers due to the other vendors' limited ability to respond quickly. EMT recognised this as a managed risk to maintain delivery timelines. • DC confirmed that although the programme remains extremely busy and stretched, no risks currently threaten national go-live, and remaining delays can be absorbed with careful planning. EMT acknowledged the effort across digital, OD, locality teams, and national partners. **Issues arising during discussion:** • EMT discussed the impact of SharePoint deprecation, which requires staff to change how they create local apps and workflows. This will require substantial retraining and change-management support to avoid operational disruption. • EMT noted significant progress in delivering the new ND functionality, HIP improvements, and integration components, with several deployments taking place over recent weeks. All functionality is now present in the live environment but hidden behind permissions until rollout begins.		
16.	**Programme Board** LB provided the following verbal update: • The data workstream with CHS has been reframed to focus on improving information exchange between agencies, rather than analysing trends. This shift reflects where the greatest operational benefits and system-wide improvements can be achieved. • Preparations for the Redesign Board are underway, with updated papers and clearer narrative being developed to show how digital, data and practice elements connect. • SCRA is strengthening its portfolio management approach, following a recent		

	SPGE workshop. This work aims to give EMT and Programme Board unified visibility of all ongoing projects and ensure better prioritisation across digital, practice, estates and OD workstreams. • Family Centre scheduling continues to progress, although at a slower pace due to the organisation's focus on the ND/HIP rollout. Work is proceeding incrementally to keep alignment with digital developments. **Issues arising during discussion:** • EMT reconfirmed the importance of alignment across all programme strands, recognising that changes in one area (e.g., digital, data, scheduling) often have impacts elsewhere and require coordinated oversight.		

17.	**New Risks**
	• EMT confirmed that no new formal risks were being added to the Strategic Risk Register at this meeting. However, the team held a substantive discussion about cyber security, noting that the likelihood of a cyber incident should be treated as inevitable rather than hypothetical. Several members referenced learning from previous outages and emphasised that organisations across the public sector are experiencing similar pressures.
	• EMT highlighted the need to ensure that all teams understand what to do in the event of a complete systems outage, including scenarios where CSAS becomes inaccessible or the entire network becomes unavailable. They noted that staff may need to rely on informal communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp) if official systems are down, as evidenced during a recent outage.
	• The discussion linked cyber risks directly to business-continuity planning, with EMT recognising that scenario based rehearsals are required to determine:
	    o the first actions EMT members would take if systems "went dark",
	    o how operational continuity (e.g., issuing orders for children) would be maintained,
	    o how communication would be managed between offices and home workers,
	    o and how panel members would receive essential information during a network loss.		

	• EMT agreed that SCRA should refresh and test its business continuity approach using structured scenario exercises, including joint exercises with CHS already scheduled. These exercises will help identify gaps, strengthen readiness, and ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities across teams. **Agreed:** • EMT to schedule cyber security and business continuity scenario exercises over the summer, aligning them with the planned joint CHS session.		
18	**Forward Plan** • EMT reviewed upcoming commitments including work with the Tribunal Service and contributions to the secure care consultation. • Members discussed SCRA's role in Professor Norrie's forthcoming legislative review. • EMT noted the need for strong coordination across teams to prepare for these system level engagements.		
	Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 01 April 2026, Ochil House, Stirling		