



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

SCRA ANNUAL REPORT 2025/2026

Care, Connect, Protect



www.scra.gov.uk

ABOUT OUR REPORT

This report covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

It summarises SCRA's achievements and performance during that period and includes an update on progress against our Business Plan 2025/26.

You can also view this report's supporting information online, including the full set of our annual audited accounts and performance report, plus our Official Statistics and interactive statistical dashboard at www.scra.gov.uk.

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

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

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OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU ...

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Our Values

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

Supportive

We work with kindness to support children, young people and families, our partners and each other.

Child Centred

The rights and voice of children and young people are at the heart of everything we do.

Respectful

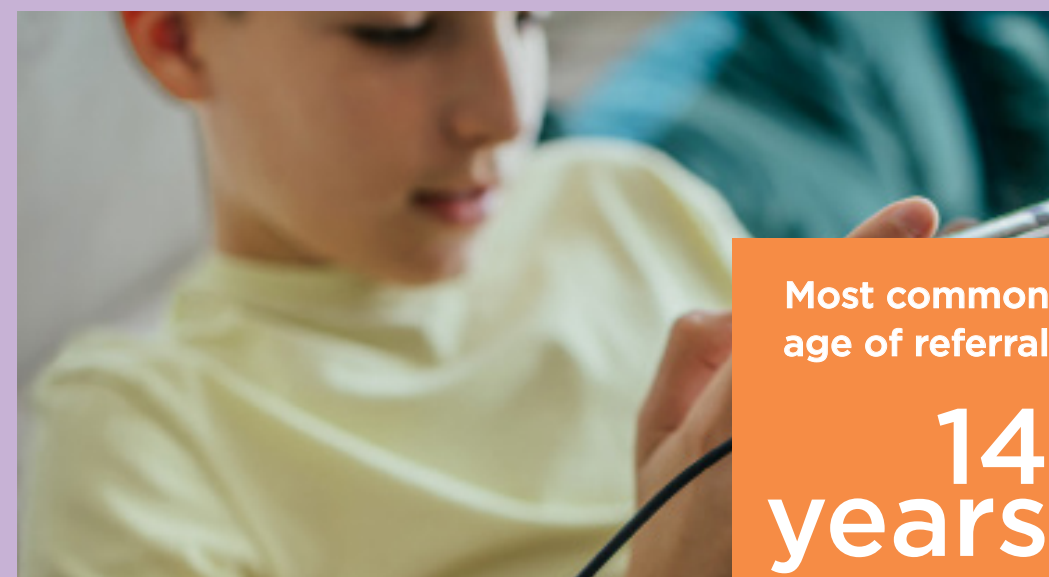
Everyone is respected and treated fairly, inclusively and lawfully.

Accountable

We are responsible for our decisions, our ethics and our learning.



OUR STATISTICS AT A GLANCE 2025/2026



FOREWORD ...

By Board Chair, Cathie Cowan

As I look back on the year past, I remain very proud of the management and staff of SCRA and their commitment to support, care and respect children, young people and their families, whilst being accountable for contributing to improving their lives and opportunities.

In 2025/2026 we said goodbye to two Board Members - Jim Edgar and Lynne Clow. Jim was first appointed in 2017 and extended his tenure to January 2026. Jim made a significant contribution over the last eight years including as the Chair of Audit and Assurance Committee. Jim will be remembered for his pragmatism and sense of humour. Lynne despite her very short tenure, brought previous children's panel experience and curiosity to Board discussions - I thank Jim and Lynne and wish them both all the very best in their new ventures.

2025/2026 has been another productive year and in actively championing a non-punitive, welfare-based Children's Hearings System, we welcomed the passing of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Service Planning) (Scotland) Act and its pledge to fulfil Scotland's commitment to 'The Promise'. Much work is already underway to support the implementation of this legislation and the

Children (Care and Justice) Scotland Act 2024 and in readiness we have continued to support and recruit to our workforce.

Workforce modernisation has been a Board priority and in recognition, we have overseen and supported the outcome of a review of the Children's Reporter job description. This work will be expanded to other roles and as part of our commitment to valuing and developing our staff, we approved SCRA's Wellbeing Strategy. This Strategy embeds wellbeing at the heart of our culture, and leadership in pursuit of supporting staff deliver better outcomes for children, young people and their families referred to the Children's Hearings System. Being an inclusive employer also means delivering inclusive services, and it was great to see this recognised in achieving the Gold Tide Award.

Our commitment to inclusive child-centred services continues through the implementation of child friendly scheduling and 'Communi-crate' a communication tool designed to enhance and support

participation and engagement whilst seeking the views and experiences of children and young people.

In addition, it was great to see firsthand the impact of Hearing Centre Design Standards when in November I visited the opening of the Hearing suite in Glasgow. Thank you to everyone including the children and young people from Glasgow children's homes, Our Hearings, Our Voice and Inverclyde Champions Board for your participation in developing these design standards. The new Hearing centre transformation demonstrates our ongoing commitment to improving the experience of people and to supporting our partners engaged in the Children's Hearings System. This commitment also extends to our research, digital, change management and sustainability programmes, all of which are designed to both enhance and support the experience of people accessing services and staff and partners providing services.

Partnership working remains a key priority for the Board and we are delighted that SCRA's online Learning Hub is of benefit in its support of professionals working within the children's hearing system. I also have high hopes for the collaborative approach between Police Scotland and SCRA. This joint ambition to refer children and young people at the right time will - I have no doubt - improve their outcomes. Our work with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to improve the joint referral process will also ensure a timelier and more coordinated response whilst also addressing any public safety concerns.

To Board Members - thank you for your ongoing contribution to board effectiveness. Our most recent independent internal audit findings

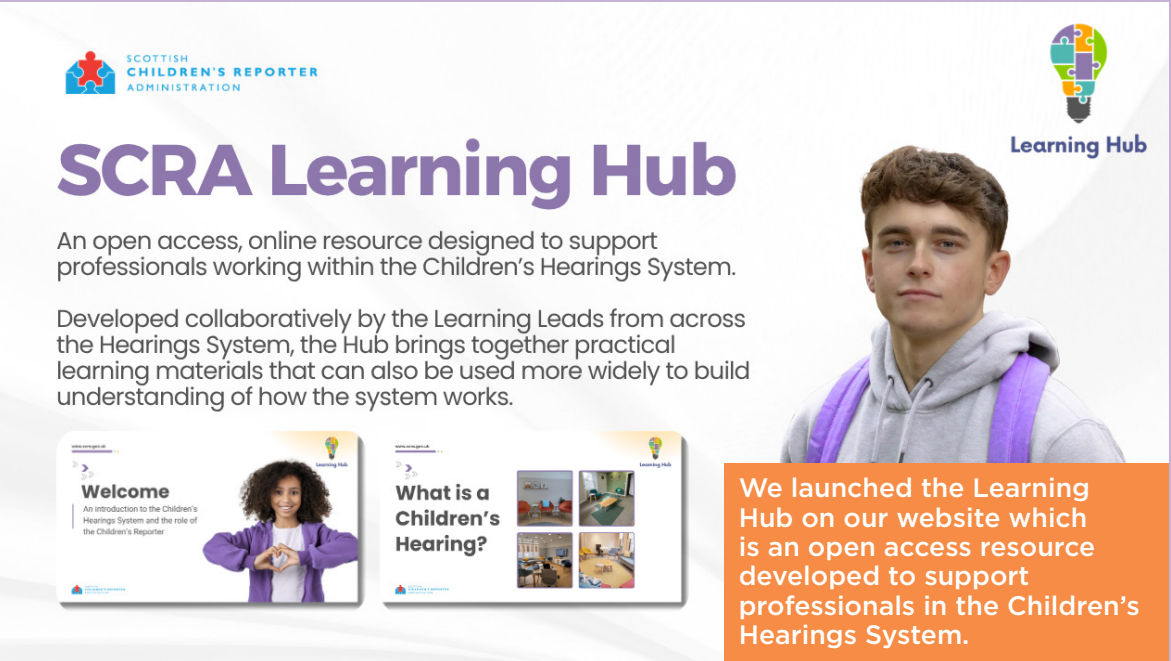
demonstrated our achievements in delivering good governance and sound decision making. It is good to see the contribution our new Committee structure is making when it comes to managing risk, influencing culture and holding each other and the Executive Management Team to account for SCRA's performance. Funding continues to be an issue for the Board, and whilst I am grateful to our Scottish Government Sponsorship Team for their ongoing engagement and support to ensure we meet our statutory duties, greater certainty about funding is needed. In going forward, I am keen that we address the widening cumulative funding gap to create the stability required to meet the new and ambitious legislative changes to the Hearings System.

In summary, 2025/2026 was a busy and productive time, for staff, and our partners engaged in the redesign of our Children's Hearings System. 2026/2027 will require our ongoing combined efforts to support the successful implementation of new legislation and our ongoing commitments to 'The Promise'.

In commending this report to you, I wish to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to staff, partners and Board Members for your contribution to the work of SCRA. I very much look forward to working with you as we seek to improve our performance and effectiveness. I am in no doubt that our collective accountability and enthusiasm will contribute to more children growing up safe, loved and respected so they can realise their full potential.



OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE



SCRA Learning Hub

An open access, online resource designed to support professionals working within the Children's Hearings System.

Developed collaboratively by the Learning Leads from across the Hearings System, the Hub brings together practical learning materials that can also be used more widely to build understanding of how the system works.

We launched the Learning Hub on our website which is an open access resource developed to support professionals in the Children's Hearings System.



The official opening of our new Hearings Centre in Glasgow took place – what a transformation!



We were honoured to attend Rise Up - organised by Our Hearings, Our Voice, it was a celebration of the work of Hearings-experienced children and young people.



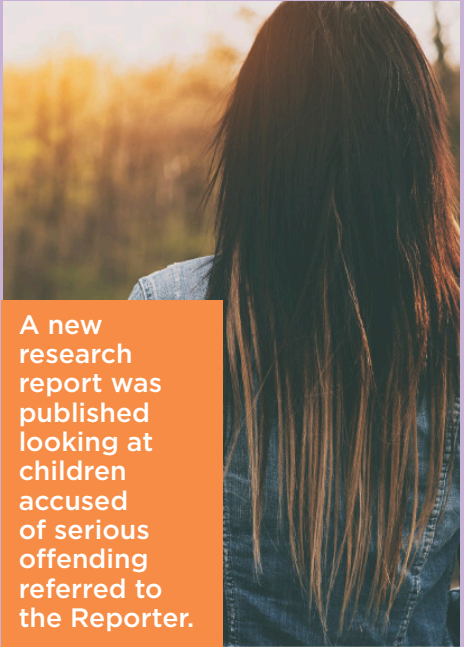
We welcomed the passing of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act.



On Care Day we announced the appointment of our 15th care experienced Modern Apprentice in SCRA.



We achieved the Gold TIDE Award for our work on equality, diversity and inclusion.



A new research report was published looking at children accused of serious offending referred to the Reporter.

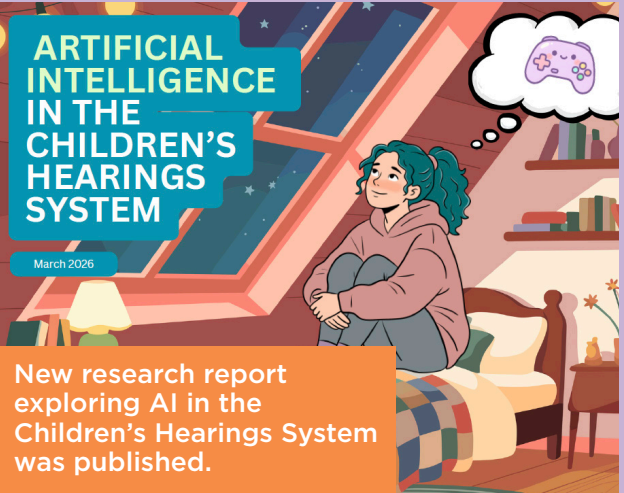


A joint project with Police Scotland got underway to ensure the right children and young people are referred to the Children's Reporter.



New British Sign Language materials were produced including a dictionary and a video on rights in Hearings.

Happy Sign Language Week from everyone at SCRA



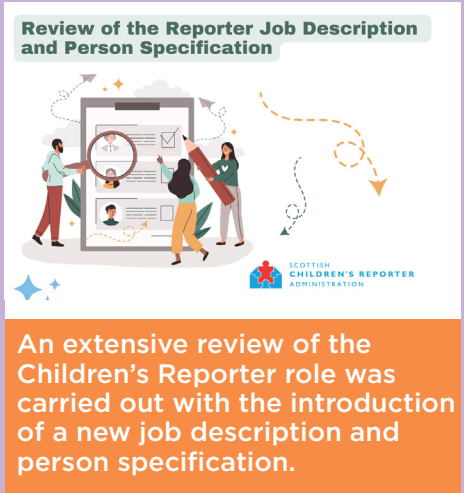
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE CHILDREN'S HEARINGS SYSTEM

March 2026

New research report exploring AI in the Children's Hearings System was published.

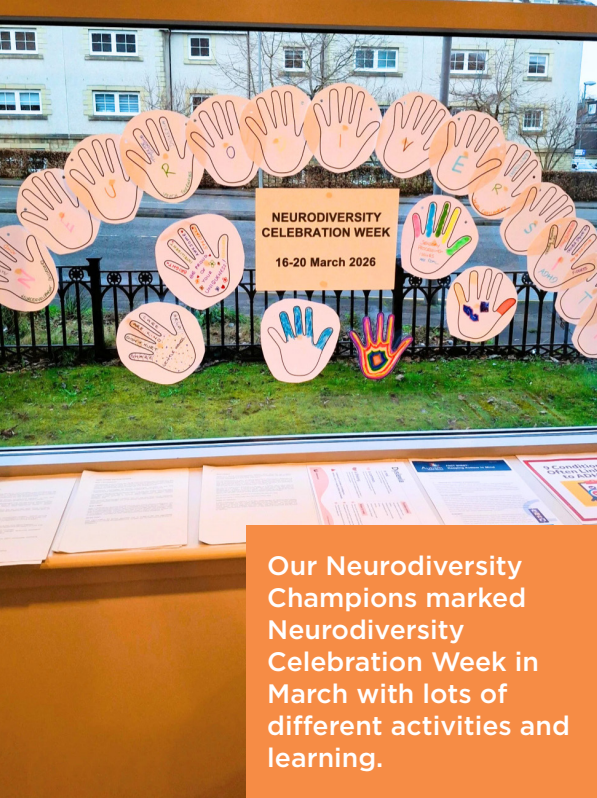


Our Women into Leadership Network was re-launched as Empowering Women in SCRA.



Review of the Reporter Job Description and Person Specification

An extensive review of the Children's Reporter role was carried out with the introduction of a new job description and person specification.



NEURODIVERSITY CELEBRATION WEEK
16-20 March 2026

Our Neurodiversity Champions marked Neurodiversity Celebration Week in March with lots of different activities and learning.

REPORTING ON OUR BUSINESS PLAN

Our Progress and Achievements in 2025/26

During 2025/2026, our focus remained on delivering the strategic aims outlined in our Business Plan:



CARE

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



CONNECT

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



PROTECT

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

We successfully completed a high proportion of the actions in our Business Plan – some of which are highlighted in this next section of the report.

More detailed information is available in the Performance Review section of our [Annual Accounts 2025/26](#).

OUR PERFORMANCE AND TARGETS

SCRA introduced a new target around making an initial decision on a referral within 5 working days in 2025/26. The aim of this target is to ensure decisions around the level of information required in order to make a final decision on a referral are taken as soon as possible. Performance at 85.6% was slightly below the 86% target (by 0.4 percentage points (pp)) and is rated as amber.

Decision making by Reporters within 50 working days at 72.9% was up 0.9 pp compared to 2024/25. It was slightly below the 74% target and was rated as amber for the year. In terms of delays in case processing, on average, 3.8% of referrals were open beyond 100 working days in the year. This was marginally above the 3.7% target and this measure is therefore also rated as amber.

Reporters are reliant on partner agencies to provide reports and information to help them make the right decision for a child. The time taken to receive this information continues to be impacted by resourcing pressures experienced by some local authority social work teams.

The scheduling of grounds Hearings within 20 working days of a Reporter decision to arrange a Hearing was up 5.9 pp in the year to 75.8%. The performance in 2025/26 continues the improvements seen since the pandemic and the prioritisation that was required at that time. Performance was marginally below the 76% target and is rated as amber.

Short term absence at 1.7% was within the 2% target and was 0.2pp lower than the prior year.

Short term absence meeting the target will be in part staff having more flexibility about where they work from even when they are feeling unwell, but not unwell enough to be absent from work. This reduction may also be a result of the various health and wellbeing activities that SCRA has in place, such as the Employee Assistance Programme, vicarious trauma support, and menopause support.

Long term absence at 4.1% was up 0.2pp from the prior year and still well above the 2% target. We recognise that long term absence remains a challenge in terms of available resources. We work closely with managers pre, during and post long term absence to ensure that the most appropriate supports are in place to sustain the employee at work.

Of the finance targets, the revenue spend target was rated as amber at 2.6% below budget against a target of being within 1% of budget. This was due to the updated Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act implementation timetable from the Scottish Government. The capital spends target was 3.1% below budget against a target of being within 5% of budget and was rated as green. Capital resource underspend was due to slippage in projects and additional resource being made available at Spring Budget Revision. The efficiency savings target was met.

OUR STORIES

AIM1 - CARE

Corporate Parenting and Participation

Working together in a meaningful way with Hearings-experienced children, young people and their parents and carers, as well as our care-experienced staff and partner agencies to improve our services continues to be the foundation of our approach. Here are some of our key milestones in the last 12 months.

Modern Apprenticeship scheme

In February 2026 we appointed our 15th care experienced Modern Apprentice. Our new colleague is working across the Tayside and Fife Locality in our Arbroath, Dundee and Perth offices, providing a wide range of services to children, young people and families as well as undertaking an SVQ in Business and Administration. In July 2025 we said goodbye to our sixth work experience candidate who moved on to permanent full time employment after a fantastic seven months of work experience and learning and development opportunities in our Stornoway office.

Voice of Experience

In September 2025, SCRA hosted the Community of Practice for Siblings in Glasgow and the VOERG presented at this event. In March 2026 the VOERG attended a two day learning and development event, as well as offering consultation opportunities to SCRA's new Corporate Parenting Manager on the development of our trauma programme. They have also consulted with the Digital Team on the portal for children and young people.

Engagement with partners

Our engagement work with partners remains one of SCRA's key strengths and ensures we collaboratively improve our services for children, young people and families. In the past year, SCRA has delivered and hosted talks and accessed improvement, learning and

development opportunities from the National Leadership Network, the Salvesen Mindroom, MCR Pathways, STAF (Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum) Participation Network and Who Cares? Scotland's Collaborative Corporate Parenting Network, Our Hearings, Our Voice and multiple Champions Boards.

Neurodiversity Champions

The Neurodiversity Champions Group, which is SCRA's largest group with over 40 staff members, continues to lead on national improvements and drive change. The group not only works to improve services for Neurodivergent children, young people and families involved in the Children's Hearings System, but also services for staff and partner agencies.

In the past year, the group have delivered training and awareness raising in Localities, and rolled out new sensory items for Hearings centres across Scotland in line with our Hearing Centre Design Standards. They have improved reception, gardens and public areas for families to include sensory areas and sensory items, written briefing sheets too sport and educate staff, and have worked with various internal teams such as Digital to influence and improve services for families.

Corporate Parenting and Participation Group

SCRA's Participation Group was relaunched as the Corporate Parenting and Participation Group (CPPG) in June 2025. Since that time the group hosted three quarterly meetings, working with staff on the group to promote awareness of Corporate Parenting duties throughout SCRA's teams, as well as driving service improvement and influencing new participative opportunities for families.

Part of the work of the CPPG is to influence ensuring improved services and provisions for families are made available in all of our Hearing centres, including communications, toys, books, snacks, and sensory items, as well as ensuring

that Localities are improving their amenities in line with our Corporate Parenting Duties. In turn the Participation Lead offers learning and development opportunities for staff focussed on participation and service improvement, including external training and opportunities with partner agencies such as Who Cares? Scotland, the National Leadership Network and MCR Pathways.

Participation and Hearing centres

In August 2025 the Hearing suites in Glasgow were launched in line with the new Hearing Room Design Standards. SCRA's Participation Lead and Lee Boyd (the appointed architects) worked closely with Hearings experienced children and young people from Glasgow children's homes, Our Hearings Our Voice, Inverclyde Champions Board and Voice of Experience Reference Group as well as partner agencies to participate in developing the design standards. The launch of the new Hearing centre was an enormous success and the young people involved attended to see the outcome of their work and dedication.

Imagination Library

SCRA's partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) is in its sixth enormously successful year. Since 2020, we have gifted thousands of books to young children in partnership with the DPIL. SCRA built on the success of the programme to run our own book gifting programme for children and young people aged 6 +, which we piloted, then rolled out nationally in 2024.

Working with Our Hearings, Our Voice

Working with Our Hearings, Our Voice, our Corporate Parenting Manager has been delivering Corporate Parenting sessions in each locality to promote awareness of our Corporate Parenting duties. At the sessions, our Corporate Parenting Manager has also been promoting the fantastic guide 'Seeing Beyond the Surface: What Children and Young People Wish all Adults Knew'.

The [interactive guide](#) explores six key themes, brought to life through the voices and creative expressions of children and young people with lived experience of the care system, and

the Children's Hearings System. Their insights, shared through written quotes, videos, artwork, poetry, voice recordings, and more offer powerful and honest accounts of the barriers to delivering effective, child-centred care and support, as identified by those whose voices matter most: children and young people. Emotions run deep throughout: from frustration and disappointment to hope, resilience, and love.

The success of the sessions has led to further sessions with Corporate Parenting Boards, spreading the messages to a far wider reaching audience.

Corporate Parenting training

All of our Locality Support Administrators (LSAs) have completed a full day of Corporate Parenting training delivered jointly by Elite and the Corporate Parenting Manager. The training was designed to ensure that key Corporate Parenting messages are communicated in a meaningful and practical way, recognising the vital role LSAs play in the experiences of children, young people and families engaging with SCRA.

The sessions highlighted the significant contribution LSAs make every day through their compassionate, trauma-informed approach and celebrated the many examples of excellent practice demonstrated across our localities. By recognising the impact of these interactions and strengthening understanding of Corporate Parenting responsibilities, the training has further reinforced our commitment to ensuring that every child and family experiences care, respect and understanding throughout their journey with SCRA.

Who Cares? Scotland assessment

Earlier this year, with input from Who Cares? Scotland, colleagues from across SCRA came together to undertake a Corporate Parenting self-assessment. The assessment provided an opportunity to evaluate our effectiveness as a Corporate Parent, reflect on our achievements, and identify areas where we can continue to strengthen our approach.

The findings were extremely positive. Across all key areas assessed, we were able to demonstrate clear evidence of both the impact and effectiveness of our Corporate Parenting activity. This reflects the commitment of colleagues throughout the organisation to improving outcomes for care-experienced children and young people. While the assessment highlighted many strengths, the team also identified opportunities to build on the excellent work already taking place across SCRA. Plans are now in place to further develop these areas, ensuring that we continue to enhance our Corporate Parenting practice and deliver the best possible support for care-experienced children and young people.

Inclusion and Diversity

At SCRA, we are committed to creating an inclusive, accessible and equitable organisation for our staff, children, young people and families. During 2025/26, we continued to build on this commitment through the delivery of our Equality Outcomes 2024-2027, strengthening our evidence base, improving workforce inclusion and investing in long-term culture change.

Meeting our equality duties

Throughout the year we published a suite of statutory equality reports, including our Mainstreaming Progress Report, Employee Information Statistics Report and Pay Gap Report. Together, these reports provide valuable insight into workforce diversity and help us target action where it is most needed.

Our reporting highlighted that many of the inequalities experienced within our workforce are driven by structural factors, including representation and occupational segregation. This evidence is helping to shape

future priorities and support a more inclusive organisation.

Enhancing equality data

A key focus during the year was improving how equality information on children and families referred to us is recorded and used. Significant progress was made towards a new, standardised equality data solution within our case management system, aligned to national standards and partner agencies.

This work will improve the quality and consistency of information available to SCRA, helping us better understand the children, young people and families we support and ensuring that future decisions are informed by stronger evidence. We will be working with partners to roll out these improvements in the coming year.

Building an inclusive culture

During 2025/26, we invested in a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusion across the organisation.

A new mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion e-learning programme was launched, establishing a consistent foundation of knowledge and awareness for all staff.

During 2025/26, SCRA introduced its Active Bystander training programme, with staff and managers participating in six face-to-face sessions. The training supports our Inclusive Standards and Behaviours Framework and helps colleagues develop the confidence and skills to recognise, challenge and respond appropriately to behaviours that undermine an inclusive workplace culture.

We also progressed our anti-racism work through partnerships with external organisations and preparation for an enhanced learning programme that will support staff and managers to develop greater confidence, understanding and capability.

Our Black and Asian Workers Group continued to provide a valuable forum for peer support, discussion and organisational learning, while our Inclusion Ambassadors and staff networks remained central to driving inclusion across SCRA.

Inclusive recruitment and workforce representation

Improving workforce diversity remains a key priority. During the year, an independent review of recruitment practices was commissioned to identify opportunities to enhance consistency, improve candidate experience and support more inclusive recruitment outcomes.

Encouragingly, workforce data shows continued improvement in the diversity of applicants, including increases in applications from men, disabled people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This provides a stronger foundation for future progress as we work to ensure fair and equitable outcomes throughout the recruitment process.

Supporting LGBT+ inclusion

SCRA successfully achieved LGBT Youth Scotland's Charter Foundation Award for the second time, recognising our continued commitment to creating an inclusive environment for LGBT+ staff and service users. The assessment highlighted positive leadership commitment, staff engagement and strong policy development, providing a solid platform for further progress in the years ahead.

Accessibility and British Sign Language

We continued to deliver our British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2029 and support greater accessibility across the organisation.

In January 2026, we launched our latest BSL film on rights for children and young people in Hearings in January. We attended the excellent event organised by the British Deaf Association Scotland in February 2026 to highlight progress and best practice against Scotland's National BSL Plan

During BSL Week in March 2026, staff-led learning activities promoted awareness and practical communication skills, while colleagues also contributed to national work through participation in the British Sign Language Justice Advisory Group. These activities support our ongoing commitment to removing barriers and improving access for BSL users.

Looking ahead

While significant progress has been made, we recognise that achieving meaningful and lasting inclusion requires sustained effort. During the coming year, we will continue to build on the strong foundations established through our equality outcomes, focusing on embedding inclusive practices, improving workforce diversity, strengthening equality data and delivering lasting culture change across SCRA.

Sustainability

SCRA's Corporate and Business Plans set out our commitment to fulfil specific environmental duties as a part of our functions, namely:

- To contribute to the delivery of Scotland's national net zero target (mitigation – reducing greenhouse gas emissions);
- To help deliver Scotland's climate change adaptation programme (adaptation – resilience to the impacts of a changing climate); and
- To act sustainably (sustainable development as a core value).

Our goal is to work in ways that are environmentally responsible, financially sustainable, and aligned with national climate targets. This commitment is reflected in our strategic planning, operational improvements, and the work of our Environmental Ambassadors.

Our Strategic Approach

In January 2024, our Strategic Sustainability Group (SSG) reaffirmed eight priority areas that are guiding our sustainability efforts. These priorities are now embedded in our Corporate and Business Plans:

- Property Use – Creating energy-efficient offices and Hearing Centres.

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

Targets and Accountability

SCRA is committed to meeting the following sustainability targets:

- 10–20% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from 2022/23 levels within three years.
- Zero waste to landfill by 2030.
- Net Zero GHG emissions by 2045.

Bridge Plan

In order to support the prioritisation of environmental improvement efforts of the organisation in the period between 2025 and the creation of a new sustainability plan aligned to the next Corporate Plan in 2027, it was agreed by the SSG that we should establish a Bridge Plan.

The plan seeks to promote the priorities which emphasise developing the sustainability culture within SCRA, putting the attitudes, efforts and choices of staff at the centre, as well as options which require less direct financial input.

The plan is split into two phases, from October 2025 to March 2026 (Phase 1), and from April 2026 to March 2027 (Phase 2).

Phase 1 will focus on creating a more energised staff base, with individuals, teams and localities more actively involved in driving organisational awareness and improvements. This period will build upon the good work of the environmental awareness campaign that the Communications team have been leading. This period will primarily be about familiarisation and normalisation of what the priorities are, what we mean when we talk about them, what they are trying to achieve and what role all of us can and do play in achieving them. We want people to feel it is easy to incorporate the priorities into their everyday role without it feeling burdensome, additive or irrelevant.

Using these principles of culture and ease to guide our approach, the priorities which will be concentrating on in Phase 1 are:

- Travel
- Waste Minimisation
- Staff Awareness, Engagement and Behaviour Change
- Improving Data Capture & Analysis

Phase 2 will look to introduce more ambitious actions and activities. We will establish a solid data grounding for measuring our performance. We will consider the introduction of some policy interventions to drive behavioural change within the organisation and implement nudge techniques to promote positive and more sustainable actions and choices by all staff in all our operations. Phase 2 will also be the period in which we will develop, consult on and deliver a sustainability/net zero plan for the period 2027–2030.

In this phase we will continue to develop our efforts in Travel, Waste and Staff priorities but will expand the scope of our work to leverage some of our Phase 1 actions to drive improvements in:

- Energy Consumption
- Improving Data Capture & Analysis

Phase 1 Progress

Some key areas of progress during Phase 1 were:

- A year-long campaign was held to raise awareness and support the work SCRA is doing to contribute to the delivery of Scotland's national net zero target. Led by our

Environmental Ambassadors, we wanted to encourage our colleagues to act sustainably and provide helpful ideas and resources. Topics included food waste, recycling, sustainable travel, biodiversity and energy consumption.

- The first joint event between environmental ambassadors and the SSG was held to spend time together, learn more about the good work happening across the organisation and to build a shared sense of purpose.
- Localities continued to undertake environmental improvement actions as part of the locality plans for the year.
- We commenced a project to establish and understand energy use across all of our buildings. This is a significant piece of work that will give us excellent information on our consumption across the organisation.
- Environmental Ambassadors were invited to attend the SSG as standing members to further improve collaborative working.
- The creation of travel guides to each office, detailing public transport options to encourage people to use the car less.
- A glossary of terms was created and shared on Connect (our staff intranet) to create a common language and understanding of environmental and sustainability terms.

Looking to the future

SCRA's sustainability journey is one of continuous improvement, collaboration, and commitment. As we move forward, we will continue to refine our plans, engage our workforce, and invest in meaningful actions that support a greener, more sustainable future.

The plan for Phase 2 will evolve as we learn more from our data, as we work more closely with the environmental ambassadors and as, hopefully, staff and teams become more comfortable with some of the changes being made.



SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNI-CRATE

Helping children and young people have their voice heard

During 2026, we continued to strengthen our commitment to ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of every Hearing through the introduction of Communi-crate - an innovative communications toolkit designed to support participation and engagement.

Following a successful pilot in Glasgow, Communi-crate is being rolled out across Hearing centres throughout Scotland. The toolkit provides a range of communication aids and practical resources that help children and young people express their views, feelings and experiences in ways that feel comfortable and meaningful to them.

The initiative recognises that every child communicates differently and aims to provide additional opportunities for them to participate fully in decisions that affect their lives.

Communi-crate includes sensory noise-cancelling headphones and sunglasses, complementing the other sensory tools already available in Hearing centres. Rather than solely focusing on sensory support, it offers tools specifically designed to encourage communication, understanding and participation. These resources can be adapted to suit the individual needs of each child or young person, helping Hearing participants create an environment where they feel listened to, respected and empowered.

The development of Communi-crate reflects our ongoing dedication to improving the experiences of children and young people within the Children's Hearings System.

Feedback gathered during the pilot phase demonstrated the value of providing practical, accessible ways for young people to communicate their thoughts and feelings. By creating a toolkit that can be used flexibly and consistently across the country, we are helping to ensure a more inclusive and child-centred approach in Hearings.

To support implementation, a comprehensive package of guidance and learning materials has been developed for operational managers, staff and partners and partners are key to this - for this to be as effective as possible, it relies on all partners to support and promote use within Hearings. This includes webinars, training videos, briefing materials, practical guides and examples of how the tools can be used in Hearing settings. Managers have been encouraged to share this information with their teams and with professionals who attend Hearings, using approaches that best suit local circumstances. The aim is for Communi-crate to be fully introduced and embedded in all Hearings involving children and young people by the end of 2026.

A key strength of Communi-crate is its focus on the lived experiences of children and young people. Resources have been shaped by participation and feedback, ensuring the toolkit remains practical, engaging and relevant. By giving children more ways to share their views, whether verbally or through alternative methods of communication, the toolkit helps create a Hearing experience that is more accessible and responsive to individual needs.

Communi-crate represents an important step forward in SCRA's journey to realise children's rights and promote meaningful participation. It reinforces our belief that every child should be able to engage in Hearings in a way that works for them and that their views should be heard, understood and taken seriously.

As implementation continues nationwide, Communi-crate is helping to build Hearing environments where children and young people can participate with confidence, ensuring their voices remain central to decision-making within the Children's Hearings System.



AIM 2 - CONNECT

OUR PEOPLE

In 2025, SCRA focused on Year 2 of our 2024-27 People Strategy, which sets out four key aims: to recruit and retain talent, support and engage staff, and foster continuous development across the organisation. This strategy underpins our commitment to building a resilient, inclusive, and skilled workforce.

Recruitment

Following the conclusion of the review of the Children's Reporter job description, we commenced work to develop a values-based recruitment approach to capture the skills, experiences and values that a postholder is required to have to undertake this core statutory role. This will be expanded to other roles as we embed our new approach.

We commissioned an independent audit and review of SCRA's current recruitment attraction strategies that will provide clear guidance and recommendations on actions we can take to increase applications from under-represented groups such as the global majority, male applicants and applicants with a disability so that we can more properly reflect the population of Scotland.

We worked with Close the Gap, Scotland's expert body on gender pay gaps, to fully understand the implications of SCRA's gender pay gap and the development of an appropriate action plan to take positive action that will seek to reduce the gap over time.

As we prepare for the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) Act, with a focus on service provision, and supporting our workforce, we recruited additional Children's Reporters, Assistant Reporters and Senior Practitioners.

Learning and Development

SCRA refreshed the 2024/27 Learning Plan for the final 18 months of the plan and this was launched to staff in November 2025. This plan was developed and is owned by SCRA's Learning Network. Some examples of the focus of the plan are as follows:-

- Trauma informed training for all staff
- Mandatory equalities and diversity training for all staff
- Practice Training
- Information Governance
- Operational Development and Digital Skills
- Management Development
- Wellbeing and health awareness training
- Train the Trainer course for those staff who deliver internal training within SCRA
- Additional e-learning packages to cover dignity at work and staff code of conduct

SCRA continues to invest in the learning and development of its workforce and exceeded the current learning events KPI of 4 by 1.3 to achieve a KPI of 5.3 for 25/26.

We developed a specific learning programme for our Locality Support Assistant cohort that covers a broad range of learning, and we launched our management development programme that offers three levels of training for prospective, new and experienced managers/leaders.

Inclusive Culture and Engagement

The Principal Reporter (PR) continues to have regular drop in sessions available to all staff so that they can hear directly from the PR about relevant updates but to also give staff a space with the PR and the Senior Team to raise any contemporary issues that are around.

SCRA ran its 17th all staff survey which has been fully analysed by the Principal Reporter and an action plan has been developed to address any gaps that have been highlighted.

We launched a guidance framework on communicating the benefits of meaningful and consistently applied appreciation to enhance the employee experience and genuinely appreciate the added value our staff bring to the Children's Hearings System.

We have agreed a three year timetable of job description review for all core roles in SCRA, fully engaging and consulting with postholders, line managers and other staff across the organisation.

We also reviewed and updated key policies in line with legislative changes such as maternity, paternity and adoption policies.

Health, Wellbeing and Mental Health

SCRA launched its Menstrual Health Toolkit which provides advice for staff and managers. To support the launch, we offered staff awareness sessions on Endometriosis and Adenomyosis, with others planned.

SCRA's Wellbeing Strategy was developed and approved by the Board. The Strategy aims to embed wellbeing at the heart of SCRA's culture, leadership and everyday practice, promoting an inclusive and psychologically safe 'one team' environment. This will be fully launched in 2026/27.

We have developed our adaptive resilience framework that will be delivered to all managers and staff throughout 2026/27 supporting their individual resilience, and support that of their teams.

National wellbeing activities have included our annual walking challenge launched in May which saw just under a third of staff participate, promoting physical and mental wellbeing including connection. We supported Time to Talk Day in February to encourage staff to come together to focus on the topic of "Making Spaces Stigma Free for Everyone", and Men's Health Week in June. A further cohort of Mental Health First Aiders will be trained to widen our network of supports across our workforce.

Supporting wellbeing, retention and attraction, we enhanced our benefits package for staff by launching a new salary sacrifice scheme for e-cars to support financial wellbeing and sustainability, as well as a discounted gym membership scheme, access to mortgage advice and dental insurance.

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

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Staff across SCRA work every day with a variety of partners in the public, private and third sector. Collaborative working for the benefit of

children and families in Scotland is something we will always prioritise and celebrate.

We always champion Scotland's Children's Hearings System and we continue to believe in its founding principles and the non-punitive, welfare approach we take to children who require additional support from the state. As we prepare for the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) Scotland Act 2024 and the Children (Care, Care Experience and Service Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026, we will actively continue to promote the enduring principles, philosophy and culture that makes the Children's Hearings System.

Across Scotland our staff are actively working with local Children's Hearing Improvement Partnerships (CHIPs) – and we are actively involved with the National CHIP as well. When we can, we will continue to make improvements in our work and across the system. We engage with our partners in a variety of forums across the full range of children in conflict with the law and child protection.

Children's Rights

Following the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots Law, SCRA continues to look curiously and critically at the ways we work – making improvements where there are gaps in our practice.

We are now thinking about other improvements we could make to ensure children's rights are fully realised across our work – and are seeking the support of partners and stakeholders with this. If you are interested in being part of this work, please contact us.

Bairns' Hoose and Child Protection

Bairns' Hooses across Scotland continue to develop, with incremental national roll out still planned from 2027.

The 'pathfinder' phase is now in its final year and 20 partnerships are at different stages – with 8 Bairns' Hooses now operational (Dumfries and Galloway started operating in June 2026). SCRA staff continue to be involved in the pathfinder work and in the successful start up and operation of each Hoose, and we work daily with information from children which has been gathered using the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM).

Contextual Safeguarding and Exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation Prevention Orders (CCEPOs) and interim orders are planned for commencement in Scotland in Autumn 2026 – following Scottish Government agreement that these provisions from the Crime and Policing Act 2026, (Westminster legislation), should also apply in Scotland. SCRA is actively considering this.

SCRA staff are engaging with the statutory Inquiry into group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation, chaired by Professor Alexis Jay; we continue to be part of the National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group and are members of the Data short life working group as well.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

SCRA continues to champion Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), nationally and locally. We are working with the FGDM Steering Group and with Children 1st and other partners to ensure that the provisions in the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act 2026 that relate to FGDM are implemented successfully, and for the benefit of children and families.

Becoming Trauma-Informed

Like many in the public sector, SCRA has made a long-term commitment to introducing a trauma-lens across the work we do. We have come a long way with this – having established a core group of trainers in 2024 who have delivered one day trauma-skilled training across our entire staff group. All new employees also attend the one-day trauma-skilled transforming connections training. In addition, we have created a new Corporate Parenting Manager role, with specific responsibility for our work

with trauma. We are starting to recognise the importance of the little things – and together, are carefully putting what we know into our practice.

Training and Knowledge Sharing

Our Learning Leads work is going from strength to strength and our Learning Hub now includes learning packages across four different key areas of work – with more to come.

SCRA staff regularly host partners interested in the work of the Children's Hearings System online, at our Learning Events and we also continue to provide training and learning inputs more locally. We are also happy to speak to researchers, politicians or other stakeholders who are interested in the work of the Children's Reporter and the Children's Hearings System. Please get in touch.

Looking Ahead

SCRA continues to develop new ways of working through discovery, piloting and local testing. At the moment we are testing an approach which starts to look at the early engagement of the Children's Reporter with a child and family about their grounds for referral and their first Children's Hearing. We will be doing more of this work moving forwards – as we have the Children (Care and Justice) Scotland Act 2024 and the Children (Care, Care Experience and Service Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026 to implement across Scotland. Both of these new Acts of the Scottish Parliament make some big changes across the work of Children's Reporters and the Children's Hearings System, and we are focused on working with our partners to implement these changes well.

OUR PROGRAMMES

2025/2026 was another busy year for our Programme Team as they progressed the next stages in the delivery of SCRA's Target Operating Model ...

Target Operating Model

Over the past two years, SCRA has developed a Target Operating Model (TOM) for the organisation - setting out our vision for the future. This has been developed using staff

engagement, project outputs, external drivers for change and feedback. The vision outlines how the organisation will improve the service to children and families, develop internal skills and confidence and, Keep The Promise - through creating internal capacity. We are creating this capacity by looking at how we can do things differently - more efficiently - to allow for less transactional work and more relational work in future.

The TOM is being delivered in three phases or 'Horizons'. The first horizon which was at the end of 2024 was to stabilise the current process and working, a second horizon by 2027 to embed identified improvement within the current legislative context and then finally, a third horizon by 2030.

Child-friendly scheduling and Keeping the Promise Commitment Standards

This is an approach to scheduling and preparing for Hearings that involves liaising with children and trusted professionals in advance to ascertain preferences for day, date and mode of Hearing; and speaking directly to families ahead of their Hearing to ensure they are fully informed, supported and understand the process.

Some of the benefits of this approach are:

- Promotion of better participation of parents and family members within Hearings by offering support to attend in a trauma-informed way by recognising the central importance of relationships.
- To support their preparation, children and young people were also sent their own scrapbook or magazine (depending on age) designed for and by young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice.
- To support their preparation, children and young people were also sent their own scrapbook or magazine (depending on age) designed for and by young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice to allow them to take notes ahead, or during their hearing, put forward preferences for seating arrangements etc.
- Providing practical support to overcome participation barriers such as technology, travel, communications.

These projects have now been fully evaluated and approved for national roll-out as part of a suite of improvements now known as 'Family Centred Scheduling'.

Learning Leads

There is significant demand for learning and development across the sector - about the Children's Hearings System - the elements within it, how professionals interact with it, and how professionals support others to interact with it.

A multi-agency project was set up to develop an online training resource to provide national consistency, prevent duplication of effort, produce instant access materials and support the current high demands for training input on core topics. Turn to page 26 to find out more detail about this work.

Referral Project - Police Champions

A new collaboration got underway between Police Scotland and SCRA in September 2025. The project focuses on a shared ambition to ensure that the right children and young people are referred to the Children's Reporter, and at the right time in their own unique journey.

The pilot saw three Children's Reporters being co-located in the Police Division Hubs of L, Q and U Division. The Reporters worked with Police Scotland to better understand the referral test and appropriateness of referrals.

The aim was to establish a Children's Hearing champion model – training, enabling and supporting Champions made up of Police Scotland staff in each of the three Divisions.

By the end of March 2026 and after initial training of all shift police officers in the 3 Divisions, a cohort of over 100 (self-nominated) police champions are now fully trained.

SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING LEADS AND THE LEARNING HUB

Supporting learning across the Children's Hearings System

During 2025/26, SCRA and partners across the Children's Hearings System achieved a significant milestone with the launch and continued development of the Learning Hub.

The Learning Hub is an open-access online resource on our website designed to support professional learning and improve understanding of the Children's Hearings System.

The Learning Hub provides accessible, high-quality learning materials for professionals working across the sector and for anyone seeking to learn more about Scotland's unique system of care, protection and justice for children and young people.

At the heart of this work are the Learning Leads, a collaborative group of professionals drawn from organisations across the Children's Hearings System and representatives of SCRA's Locality Teams and a Practice Team member. Bringing together a wide range of expertise and experience, the Learning Leads have worked in partnership to identify learning needs, develop content and create resources that reflect the realities of practice. Their commitment and enthusiasm have been instrumental in turning the vision of a shared learning platform into a reality.

The Learning Hub was developed in response to growing demand for accessible, consistent learning resources that could be accessed at any time and from any location. By making materials freely available online, the Hub supports learning for both experienced practitioners and those who are new to the Children's Hearings System.

The resources can also be used more widely by students, partner organisations and others with an interest in understanding how the system operates and the roles of different agencies within it.

The first learning packages available through the Hub covered key areas of practice, including an introduction to the Children's Hearings System, referral to the Children's Reporter and child-friendly scheduling. These modules

provide learners with practical information, guidance and insight into the principles and processes that underpin the system.

During the year, the range of resources continued to expand, including the development of learning materials specifically for Police Scotland colleagues to support decision-making about referrals to the Children's Reporter. Additional learning packages are also in development, ensuring that the Hub continues to grow in response to the needs of professionals and partners.

A key feature of the Learning Hub is its emphasis on continuous improvement. Learners are encouraged to provide feedback at the end of each module, helping to shape future content and ensure that resources remain relevant, effective and responsive to changing practice needs. This collaborative approach reflects the wider partnership ethos of the Children's Hearings System, where learning and improvement are achieved through shared knowledge and collective effort.

The Learning Hub has already attracted interest from partners across the Children's Hearings System, with organisations promoting the resources through their own internal channels and networks. Its success demonstrates the value of partnership working and highlights what can be achieved when expertise is brought together around a common goal.

During the initiation period of the Learning Hub work, the wider project work included the introduction of live webinar sessions, offering an introduction to the Children's Hearing System and process of referral of a child to SCRA.

These monthly webinars have attracted over 1,700 connections since August 2024 and have become a recognised core component of the wider Learning Leads project intentions.

As the Learning Hub continues to develop, it will play an increasingly important role in supporting learning, strengthening professional understanding and promoting consistency across the Children's Hearings System. It is also a ready platform for supporting legislative changes which will come into effect over coming years.

We are grateful to all the Learning Leads and partner organisations who have contributed their time, knowledge and expertise to this important initiative. Together, they are helping to build a culture of learning that ultimately benefits the children and young people at the centre of the system.



Learning Hub



AIM 3 - PROTECT

OUR PRACTICE

In 2025/26, the Practice Team provided the full range of practice activities to support reporters in their day to day work. This included giving support and advice to localities throughout the year, developing practice materials, delivering practice training, managing cases in the higher courts, and working with partner agencies at a national level.

Practice Materials

Practice materials produced during the year included 3 new practice notes on:

- The child's view on what decision the reporter should make – discussions, meetings and communications
- Name and pronoun use in proceedings and documentation (produced with our Inclusion and Diversity Manager)
- A summary of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024.

In addition, 4 revised practice notes were published on:

- Offence grounds, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and disclosures
- The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
- Signed witness statements
- The criminal exploitation of children.

Practice Notes provide practical support to reporters in relation to aspects of their work, for example in explaining the law on a topic or providing style wording to be used in a document.

In addition, the team published revisions of 12 practice directions, with significant revisions having been to the directions on attendance at hearings and non-disclosure.

The revision of the practice direction on non-disclosure was part of a wider piece of work

providing practice input to the non-disclosure project. This included working closely with the Operational Development team to ensure that changes to processes remained compliant with our practice direction and the legislation.

Training and Inputs

The team also produced refresher training materials on practice aspects of non-disclosure and supported the delivery of that training in localities.

Providing practice input to a range of projects has been an increasing feature of the Practice Team's work. Major pieces of work in 2025/26 included input to the Learning Leads, Early Engagement on Grounds Hearings and Family Centred Scheduling project.

We delivered the full schedule of core practice training and more specialised training through the year. This involved the delivery of 68 full days of training, all of it delivered - in person. The Practice Team also supported locality-led training and practice sessions on request.

Court Work

Nine cases in the higher courts concluded during the year. One significant issue raised in a case related to the impact of the UNCRC rights of a child in a children's hearing being held for their brother or sister.

Of those that concluded, one was initiated by us with the Sheriff Appeal Court allowing our appeal. Of the other 8, 4 appeals were refused after a full hearing, one was allowed after we did not oppose it, and 2 were not proceeded with by the appellants. There was one judicial review - the case relating to the UNCRC rights.

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

Working in Partnership

We continued to be engaged in improvement work at a national level with partner agencies,

including Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Children's Hearings Scotland and social work services. This work involved a wide range of subject matter: the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, jointly reported cases, joint investigative interviewing, and restorative justice. We regularly delivered national external training to the police and joint investigative interviewers.

OUR RESEARCH

Our Research Team published a number of reports during 2025/2026, including:

Children who cause serious harm

In November 2025, the research team published a study focussed upon understanding how the needs of [children aged 12-15 who cause serious harms](#) are met through the Children's Hearings System. This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government as part of a statutory review of the Age of Criminal Responsibility Act, with the findings presented to the Age of Criminal Responsibility Review group to support decision-making around further increase to the age of criminal responsibility. Learning from the research was also disseminated via an online webinar hosted by CYCJ and through presentations to child protection committees.

Exploring Artificial Intelligence

In February 2026, the Research Team published '[A Double-edged Sword' Potential Uses of AI in the Children's Hearing System](#). An [illustrated version](#) of the research findings was also published to allow easy dissemination of key messages to children, practitioners and policy makers. The research, based upon the views of 123 professionals, 19 parents and 21 young people, explores the acceptability of using AI within the children's hearings system, the risks that this might pose, and the protections that participants would like to see adopted when AI is being used. Following publication of the research, the team have worked with SAIDOT, an ethical AI company, to map the concerns raised by participants against existing legislative frameworks and the UNCRC. This work will underpin the development of ethical principles for the use of AI within the Children's Hearings

System. Findings from the research have also been shared with practitioners at the Social Work Scotland conference, and the team will continue to work with colleagues across SCRA and the Scottish Government to ensure that learning from the report is disseminated across the care, justice and education sectors.

Sharing Learning

Throughout the last year, we have actively sought out opportunities to share learning from other research conducted at SCRA with practitioners and policy makers. Research published in 2024 on the [care trajectories of younger children in residential care](#) was republished in an edited book aimed at helping practitioners to understand current trends in the use of residential care. Findings from the study were also shared with social work commissioning officers at the Transforming the Commissioning of Therapeutic Support for Children in Care conference held in England. Findings from forthcoming research on victims' experiences and support needs were shared via an online webinar hosted by CYCJ and through presentations to the Scottish Government's Child Rights Implementation Group and the Restorative Justice Conference hosted by CYCJ. Learning from the research was also incorporated into design workshops for a Single Point of Contact service for individuals harmed by children.

Beyond these activities, the research team has continued to provide research and evaluation support for service improvement activities being undertaken by Programme Protect and the Digital Team. This has included gathering evidence to support decisions around the longer-term use of the Children's Hearing Champion Model, the Enhanced Partnership Model and the use of new digital tools to support the redaction of information in non-disclosure cases.

OUR PROPERTY

SCRA's focus is the provision of high-quality services from our premises that meet the needs of children, young people and families. Our properties, and the services we deliver from them, need to be flexible, resilient, sustainable and able to demonstrate value for money as our operational requirements evolve and change over time.

During 2025/26 a number of lease events were progressed and new 10 year agreements have been concluded for the properties in Inverness and Stornoway. Legal work to finalise the new lease agreement for SCRA's building in Lerwick is also now substantially complete.

We have continued to invest in our estate to ensure our Hearing centres and office environments remain aligned with operational needs. Building on the lessons learned from previous years, we have undertaken further internal reconfiguration projects to enhance the delivery of both physical and hybrid Hearings, while also improving workspace arrangements to support greater staff flexibility. In parallel, we have progressed our programme of major repair and maintenance works, informed by condition surveys carried out in earlier years.

Revamp of Glasgow Hearings centre

Our main focus through the year was the major reconstruction of our Hearing centre in Glasgow. Following an extensive period of consultation including the receipt of several hundred responses, and a number of focus group meetings, a brand new design and look for the whole Hearing suite was developed by our designers, together with the production of a new set of Hearing centre design standards to be used as the basis for a new programme of improvements across our estate over the next few years.

The project has provided us with:

- A completely new colour palette, and furniture, that is designed to provide a calming and trauma-informed atmosphere in the Hearing suite
- Fewer, but better designed Hearing rooms with full AV connectivity

- An increase in the number of waiting rooms, with a variety of sizes to better meet the needs of users
- A redesigned, open reception area that is more welcoming to visitors
- Improved facilities for staff to take part in virtual Hearings
- Replacement of the heating and ventilation system with modern energy efficient equipment

The new Hearing centre was officially opened in November by the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, Natalie Don-Innes.

Refurb in Lerwick

Following on from the well-received work in Glasgow, the next Hearing suite to be refitted was in Lerwick, Shetland. This was the last Hearing centre in the country that still featured the old style formal table. The Lerwick project has used the design principles established in Glasgow to create a modern, fit for purpose Hearing centre on the island. Together with the renewal of the lease and repairs to the fabric of the building, this provides a great facility that will serve the Shetland Isles for many years.

Improvement projects have also been completed in our Greenock and Inverness properties, focusing on the staff areas, to create modern flexible workspaces. Each project included the creation of new meeting spaces, virtual Hearing booths, wellbeing spaces and the provision of new office furniture.

Improvements in Greenock

In Greenock, the first floor office accommodation was reconfigured to bring the full staff group together in a flexible workspace and allowed for the provision of new kitchen, touchdown and break out spaces. Following the preparation of a schedule of condition during the year, works will be carried to the external fabric of the building in 2026/27 ensuring the long term health of the building.

Changes to Inverness office

In Inverness, works were undertaken to the staff side of the building following the successful extension of our lease for a further 10 year term. By reducing the overall number of workstations in line with the organisation's smart working and agile working principles, it was possible to create additional meeting rooms, breakout space and improved administration space within the existing office area. In addition, by redesigning an area of underused space in the Hearing suite, 3 quiet booths were created for virtual Hearings or court attendance along with a small area for staff well-being space.

External repairs in Paisley

A survey of our Paisley building identified that a number of external repairs had become necessary. Following this, works were undertaken to the building's exterior and grounds to complete repairs and ensure that the property remains wind and water tight. Further work is planned to improve the internal layout of the building in line with our smart working and agile principles. Around the estate, our programme of condition surveys continues and the information gathered will help inform major repair and maintenance projects.

Major project underway in Dundee

During 2025/26 work commenced on SCRA's next major project in Dundee. This comprehensive project will reconfigure the internal layout of the building and how SCRA uses the Hearing and office spaces. A full floor of the building will be freed up and made available to lease. Along with this the ground floor entrance and reception areas will be altered to provide shared access arrangements with a future tenant of the lettable space.

All of SCRA's staff will be accommodated on one office floor following the smart working approach successfully adopted in our other offices. Modern, flexible workspaces will be provided with sufficient meeting, breakout and shared spaces. The first floor of the building will provide additional flexible space for training, meetings and extra Hearing space capacity.

The existing windows are approaching end of life and perform poorly compared with

modern replacements. Upgrading windows and replacing glazing will improve the thermal and environmental performance of the building. Upgrading of heating and air handling systems are similarly planned to improve energy efficiency. This project will be completed in 2026/27.

Future projects

Planning has also commenced for work to both our Edinburgh and Dumbarton buildings. In each location it is intended to improve the Hearing suite environment, better utilise the available space and undertake building fabric and environmental upgrading where possible. In Dumbarton significant improvements will also be carried out to the staff offices, workspaces and facilities.

We continue to review the use of our estate, and wherever possible seek to find tenants for our surplus space. This year vacant space in Kilmarnock is now occupied by the Scottish Court and Tribunal Service, and in Dalkeith we have leased the first floor office space to the Dalkeith Citizens Advice Bureau.

DIGITAL SERVICES

2025/26 has been a year of significant delivery, implementation and foundation-building for SCRA's Digital Services. Alongside maintaining reliable digital services, major operational transformation was delivered through the Non-Disclosure and Hearing Information Pack (HIP) programme. At the same time, joint investment activity with Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) helped establish foundations for future interoperability, service improvement and innovation across the Children's Hearings System.

Digital Services continued to support delivery of SCRA's Business Plan, Digital Strategy and Target Operating Model through structured planning,

governance and prioritisation. Technology investment was increasingly aligned to organisational outcomes, service improvement, legislative change and future transformation.

Non-Disclosure and Hearing Information Pack transformation

A key focus during 2025 and the first half of 2026 was the successful national implementation of the Non-Disclosure (ND) and Hearing Information Pack (HIP) programme. Delivered collaboratively across Digital Services and operational teams, the programme introduced a redesigned approach to managing and sharing sensitive information. A key component was the Automated Redaction Manager (ARM), supporting the secure handling of information. Following implementation, work continued on optimisation, enhancement and benefits realisation.

Partnership working and Secure Data exchange

Progress continued through Mission 2, SCRA's programme to strengthen partnership working and support secure information exchange across the Children's Hearings System and wider justice sector. Digital Services worked with partner organisations to explore opportunities for improved data sharing, interoperability and service integration, including discovery work on the Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) tool to support future secure information exchange.

Co-designing future Digital Services

Work also began on Mission 1, SCRA's programme to develop a future digital portal for children, young people and families involved in the Children's Hearings System.

Through user engagement, co-design and technical discovery, the programme developed user journeys, service designs and accessibility requirements informed by hearing-experienced young people and colleagues across the organisation. This work established the foundations for a future digital engagement platform designed to improve communication, participation and understanding of rights.

Modernising core systems

Alongside major transformation programmes, Digital Services continued to modernise SCRA's core case management system (CSAS) and supporting platforms through strategic improvements and continuous engagement with operational users.

Delivering reliable Digital Services

The Digital Service Desk and CSAS Administration Team continued to provide critical support across SCRA's technology estate and core business systems, helping ensure reliable, secure and effective digital services for colleagues and operational delivery across the organisation.



SPOTLIGHT ON TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Strengthening our trauma-informed approach across the organisation

Trauma-informed practice continues to be at the heart of how SCRA supports children, young people and families. We recognise that many of those who engage with the Children's Hearings System have experienced adversity, trauma or significant life challenges, and we are committed to ensuring that every interaction is informed by an understanding of these experiences.

What has been happening?

Throughout the year, we have continued to strengthen our trauma-informed approach across the organisation. Colleagues have participated in learning and development opportunities designed to increase awareness of trauma and its impact, helping to ensure children and families experience a service that is compassionate, respectful and responsive to their needs. We recognise that to reach our ambition to be a trauma-informed organisation across people, policy and practice training our trauma programme must extend much further than training alone.

We continue to strengthen our trauma-informed approach through close collaboration with Public Health Scotland's National Trauma Transformation Programme delivery partners, including Public Services Delivery Scotland (formerly NHS Education for Scotland), the Improvement Service and the Resilience Learning Partnership.

Through our engagement with this work, SCRA has continued to build knowledge, skills and confidence across the organisation, helping to embed trauma-informed principles into everyday practice. This supports our commitment to creating environments where children, young people and families feel safe, valued and understood, while ensuring that trauma-informed practice becomes a sustainable and enduring part of how we deliver our services.

Here are some of the highlights:

Transforming Connections Trauma Training in line with the NES Transforming Psychological Trauma,

knowledge and skills framework, 84% of our staff have been trained by our team of internal Trauma Trainers to trauma skilled practice level.

Reflective Sessions

Planning is taking place to deliver regular reflective sessions supporting the transition from learning theory to implementation and embedding of trauma informed practice, increased confidence and consistency of staff in responding in a trauma informed way, support for staff wellbeing, stronger professional relationships, improved outcomes for children and young people as well as an organisational culture change.

Reflective Lens Session with Resilience Learning Partnership

Resilience Learning Partnership is a lived experience led organisation that work alongside organisations to explore and understand the role of lived experience in implementing Trauma Informed Practice. During February and March RLP ran a number of Trauma Lens session with staff providing a guided organisational assessment of current practice, highlighting what we already do well, barriers, gaps and challenges. These were followed up with Trauma Lens Reflective Sessions to inform the development of an action plan and gauge our readiness to start the journey on the National Trauma Transformation Programme roadmap for creating trauma-informed and responsive change.

Trauma Informed Justice Training

We are developing bespoke enhanced practice level Trauma-informed justice training for staff who have a role presenting, examining, interpreting or making decisions based on evidence relating to traumatic events or obtained from witnesses who may be affected by trauma.

Our trauma-informed journey is one of continuous learning, reflection and improvement. By investing in workforce development, creating opportunities for reflective practice

and working collaboratively with national partners, we are building the foundations for a truly trauma-informed organisation. This work will help ensure that children, young people and families experience SCRA as a service that understands the impact of trauma, responds with compassion and respect, and supports participation and positive outcomes.

As we move forward, we remain committed to embedding trauma-informed principles across our people, policies and practice, ensuring they become an enduring part of how we deliver our services and fulfil our commitment to Keeping The Promise.





OUR BOARD IN 2025/26

SCRA operates under the direction of an eight person Board.

As a Non-Departmental Public Body, SCRA's Board - although acting independently - is ultimately accountable to Scottish Ministers, and Board Members are appointed by Ministers.

Our Board Members reflect a wide range of experiences and backgrounds in relation to children and young people.

The Board plays a significant role in setting the strategic direction of SCRA, and in challenging the organisation to ensure we deliver our plans.

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

Here's details about our Board Members in 2025/2026:

Chair:

Cathie Cowan (appointed 2024)

Board Members:

Kay Barton (appointed 2021)

Lynne Clow (appointed 2024)

Lorraine Moore (appointed 2021)

Steve Renwick (appointed 2024)

Hazel Smith (appointed 2022)

Ying Zhang (appointed 2022)

Jim Edgar (retired January 2026)



LOOKING AHEAD ...

by Neil Hunter, Principal Reporter/ Chief Executive

At the end of 2025/26 I have a real sense of progress and forward momentum in SCRA on a number of really important fronts. We are in a well prepared state of readiness for the implementation of part 1 of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 which increases the age of referral to the Children's Reporter. These provisions are scheduled to take effect in due course in 2027. The extension of the Children's Hearings System to include referrals for 16 and 17 year olds, represents a significant milestone in Scotland's commitment to treating children as children and ensuring they receive support, care and protection in response to their needs.

SCRA has been recruiting extensively to meet these new demands in relation to increased volume of referrals for older children. It has been great to see new staff come into the organisation, undergo induction, training and getting the benefit of the wisdom, knowledge and experience of our existing teams across the organisation. It's an exciting time for the Hearings System, for children's rights in our country and for the further development of meaningful, resonant and sustainable help, support and effective interventions for children and young people.

We also look forward to extending our ability to communicate with those who may have been harmed by a child's behaviour and working alongside national and local victims' organisations in taking this work forward, balanced against our key duties to preserve privacy and confidentiality. I remain concerned about the need for continued investment and capacity building in Children and Families Social Work services across Scotland. This new legislation needs confident, well trained and well equipped Social Workers to provide the support and interventions that can help children and young people address some of the underlying issues that can impact in their lives and at times affect others.

We don't know as much as we would wish about how the needs of older children who may be referred to the Reporter on the basis of concerns about care and protection. But it is clear that Scotland has seen a significant rise in worries

about children who are being criminally and/or sexually exploited by others, sometimes involving organised criminals. There is a clear sense of intersection across these forms of abuse, harm and risk which the Hearings System has of course considerable experience in responding to and managing – but there is no question that this next phase of our expanded duties will pose new challenges. The Children's Hearings System must continue to evolve in response to these changing patterns of harm.

In 2026/27 I am committed to building on the progress we have been making in recent years – a rights respecting, rights upholding organisation with a deep respect and concern for children's safety and wellbeing in our country. Paying more and more attention to the individual needs and issues affecting each and every child who is referred to us for support, care and protection.

We have seen inspiring work conducted by SCRA staff in the last 12 months – whether it be in relation to child friendly scheduling, our work to become a trauma skilled organisation or our commitment to dramatically transform Hearing environments. The work our staff do every day involves making difficult and finely balanced decisions, preparing and leading complex evidence in order to ensure children can be protected or that their Hearing is genuinely focussed on their individual needs and preferences, views and opinions.

SCRA of course does not do this alone. The Children's Hearings System is by definition based around - and can only function - with deep respectful partnerships with shared purpose and mutual respect.

Dedicated Children's Panel Members, committed Social Workers, Solicitors, Safeguarders and others.

We recommit ourselves this coming year to continue this approach to working in partnership with others to deliver the best experience and outcomes possible. Special mention to our work with Our Hearings, Our Voice who continue to inspire us with all that they do.

Over and above everything though is my commitment to our dedicated, skilled and professional SCRA staff – 2026/27 will be another tough year of learning, development, change and delivery – but I have huge respect for and confidence in the work that we do together to contribute to a better experience and outcomes for children and young people and look forward to next year working alongside you all.



