

To: SOCIAL WORK (OPERATIONS AND SERVICES) SUB COMMITTEE		Subject: SEEN, HEARD AND SUPPORTED - SCRA ANNUAL REPORT 2002-03 SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S REPORTER'S ADMINISTRATION
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 4 MAY 2004	Ref: JD/MH/GN	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To inform Committee of the key findings of the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) Annual Report 2002-03 published on 29 January 2004.
- 1.2. This Report sets out the progress made over the year by SCRA and provides detailed information and trends in the Children's Hearing system.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. SCRA was created under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 and became fully operational in April 1996.
- 2.2. A fundamental aim of SCRA is to oversee the operation of the Children's Hearing System in delivering care and justice for Scotland's children.
- 2.3. SCRA operates under the direction of an eight person Board with a vast range of experience in working on behalf of children and young people. The Board plays a significant role in setting the strategic direction for SCRA and monitors the delivery of the service.
- 2.4. The report was published in advance of the planned review of the Children's Hearing System announced last year by the Scottish Executive.
- 2.5. The aim of this review is to develop a strengthened Children's Hearing System for the 21st century. SCRA aims to provide data, reflect experience and contribute information to that task.
- 2.6. The Convenor of Social Work is a member of the SCRA Board.

3. REPORT FINDINGS

- 3.1. The Annual Report 2002/03 illustrates the scale of cases dealt with by SCRA. Despite intense media attention on youth offending the majority of cases relate to non-offence referrals (care and protection issues). The number of cases of alleged lack of parental care has doubled in five years.

3.2. Key Findings include;

- 37,727 children were referred to the Children's Reporter in 2002-03 the highest number since the system was established in 1971.
- There has been a 102% increase in children referred on non-offence grounds in the past decade. In contrast referrals made on offence grounds have risen by 7.7%
- There has been a slight decrease from last year in the number of children offending from 15,132 to 14,404.
- The individual grounds children were referred on has reached a record high, with big increases over the last few years in misuse of alcohol or drugs (46%) and beyond the control of any person (39%) while lack of parental care cases have risen by 194% in the five years.
- The time taken to deal with both offence and non-offence grounds decreased although the latter remained higher due to the level of complexity involved in these types of cases.

3.3 SCRA has examined its own organisation and established a programme of recruitment and investment. They have undertaken a review of the strategic objectives and have set out a framework in the corporate plan for 2003-6.

3.4 Key targets and challenges include:

- Identifying best outcomes for every child referred to the Reporter.
- Meeting the government target of reducing re-referrals to Hearings on offence grounds by 10% by 2004 (National Youth Justice Standard).
- In conjunction with partners achieve the Scottish Executive target by reducing numbers of persistent offenders by 10% by 2006 (National Youth Justice Standard).
- Reduce timescales for dealing with children's cases. Despite the pressures created by record workloads the average timescale for offence cases (from caution and charge to Children's Hearing decision) is now no more than 4 months.

3.5 The increase in non-offending referrals and alleged lack of parental care undoubtedly reflect greater awareness of issues such as domestic violence and also raises concerns about the impact of drug abuse and family breakdown.

3.6 Figures and trends in North Lanarkshire reflect the National findings.

4. FINANCIAL / PERSONNEL / LEGAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The role of SCRA and the Children's Hearing System is a crucial element in informing and shaping North Lanarkshire's Children Services Plan to develop a network of services to protect children and contribute to the development of improved approaches to youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

4.2 Through recent recruitment initiatives North Lanarkshire has successfully appointed qualified Social Work staff in Children and Families and Youth Justice Teams which will have a positive impact on the services provided to young people in need of care and protection and to young people who offend.

4.3 The implementation of "Getting Our Priorities Right" (Scottish Executive inter-agency protocols for working with children and families affected by substance misuse) promotes the welfare and protection of such children and address the potentially concerning gaps in services highlighted in the National Child Protection Audit 2002 and For Scotland's Children 2001. Local protocols are scheduled to be implemented in June 2004.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Committee is asked to

- (i) request the Director of Social Work to provide a report following the completion of the Scottish Executive Review of the Children Hearings System
- (ii) note the contents of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Fegan RE.', is written over the printed name and title of the Director of Social Work.

Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
(11 February 2004)

For further information on this report please contact Maureen Hughes, Co-ordinator Young People at Risk Tel: (01698 332047)

A copy of the above report has been placed in the members library for information