

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS 2023/24



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION



Statistical Analysis 2023/24 - at a glance

Children referred 1972 to 2023/24

17,950
in 1972

10,197
in 2023/24

Compared to 1972 (first year of published data), the number of children referred has decreased by 43.2%

Compared to 2022/23, the number of children referred has decreased by 7.1%

Children within this report

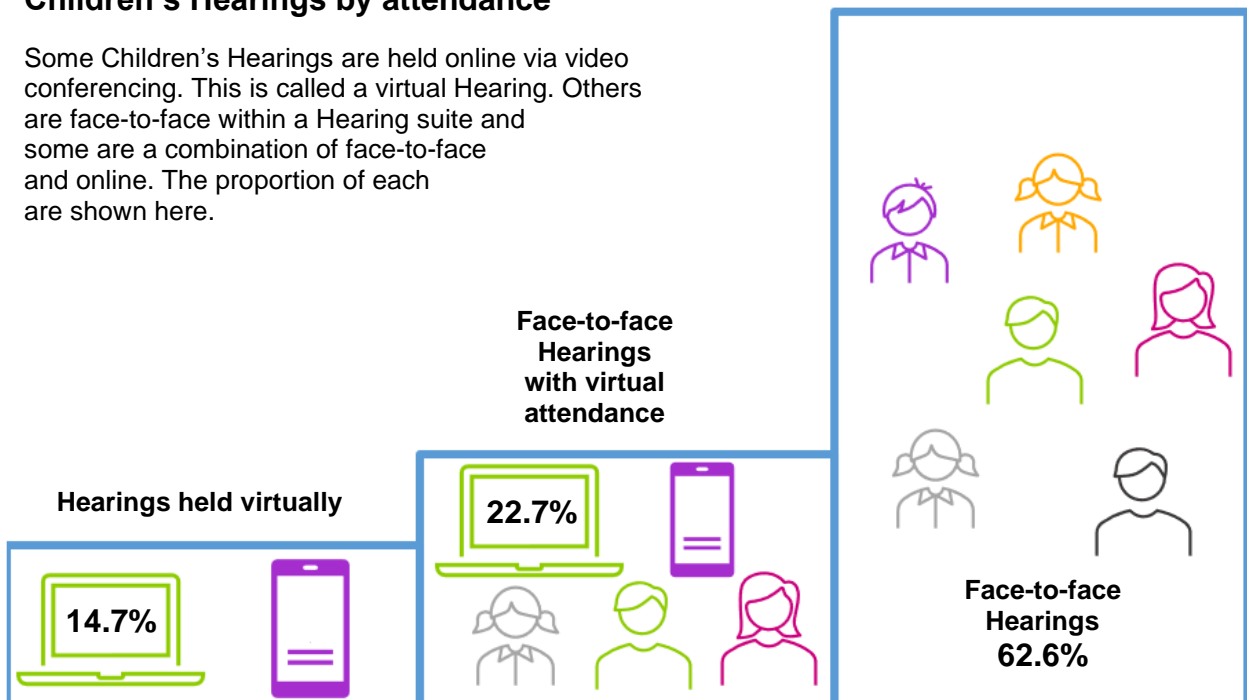
The statistics within this report cover **18,237** children within the Children's Hearings System in 2023/24. Of these children:

10,197 were referred to the Children's Reporter	2,378 had court callings
478 had Child Protection Orders	1,935 had Compulsory Supervision Orders made
10,390 had Reporter decisions	2,185 had Compulsory Supervision Orders terminated
1,653 had Pre-Hearing Panels	281 had appeals concluded or abandoned
9,632 had Children's Hearings	

Many children will be included in more than one of the splits above i.e. a child with a Compulsory Supervision Order made count will be included in that count and also the children with Children's Hearings count. The 18,237 total counts each child once.

Children's Hearings by attendance

Some Children's Hearings are held online via video conferencing. This is called a virtual Hearing. Others are face-to-face within a Hearing suite and some are a combination of face-to-face and online. The proportion of each are shown here.



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This statistical analysis is supported by our online statistical service which provides more in-depth information about individual local authority areas. All the information is available on our website www.scra.gov.uk.

Introduction

What do these statistics include?

This report presents the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration's (SCRA's) full statistical analysis on children involved in the Children's Hearings System between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. This is an Official Statistics publication, and the data has been produced using sound, proven and robust methodologies. In general, the children reported on within these statistics are aged between 0 and 15. There are however two exceptions to this:

- The age of criminal responsibility in Scotland has been raised to twelve years (from eight) under the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019. The Act was enacted on 17 December 2021. As a result, the police cannot charge a child with committing an offence after that date, if the child was under 12 at the time of the offence. Prior to 17 December 2021, the police could charge any child aged 8 or over with an offence. However, after 29 November 2019, the reporter could not then arrange a Children's Hearing for that child on offence grounds. Although the police cannot charge a child with committing an offence when under 12, the police may still refer the child to reporter because of concerns about the child's behaviour; and
- Children aged sixteen and seventeen years can be referred to the Reporter if they:
 - are still subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders;
 - are remitted by a court; or
 - had an open case which was received prior to their sixteenth birthday.

This only applies to a small number of children, therefore age graphs within this report will always show a significant decrease between profiles for children aged under sixteen and those sixteen or over. To make this distinction more apparent, children aged sixteen and seventeen years are combined to provide an age group of 16+ years in this report.

Information about the changes seen within the Children's Hearings System since 2003 is available through a research report released in 2018. The research aimed to answer the following question: Has child protection in Scotland become more complex over time, and if so, how? It can be found here: [Complexity in the lives of looked after children and their families](#).

How is this report structured?

This report is designed to follow the process by which a referral for a child is received by SCRA through to a final outcome being made either by the Reporter or by a Children's Hearing. This is based upon the following path:

- Referral for a child received by the Reporter because of concerns about them;
- Reporter investigation into the child's case including seeking relevant information from partner agencies;
- Reporter decision as to whether the child requires compulsory measures of supervision based on the information received; and
- Children's Hearing decision on whether compulsory measures of supervision are necessary (in respect of the child) to protect the child and/or address their behaviour. This may also involve:
 - the requirement to convene a Pre-Hearing Panel to consider any special arrangements needed for the Children's Hearing;
 - applications to the Sheriff to determine the grounds of referral; and
 - interim orders granted at Children's Hearings and at court to protect the child during the process.

The process is complex as a child can already be subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order at the point of referral and this will be considered within the decision-making process. Compulsory measures also only last for specific time periods and as such must be reviewed. This can be seen through the breakdown of Children's Hearings on page 20.

Finally, children and/or their relevant persons can appeal to the Sheriff against decisions made by Children's Hearings. Applications can also be made to the Sheriff to terminate or vary the conditions on a Child Protection Order.

Special data note for 2023/24

While the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic within 2023/24 is not significant on the data contained within this report any conclusions drawn from the data presented in terms of comparisons with prior years should be treated with caution.

The Children's Hearings System during Coronavirus

The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 introduced several measures aimed to alleviate pressures on the Children's Hearings System. The most significant areas in terms of this report were as follows:

- Removing the requirement for 2nd working day Children's Hearings for Child Protection Orders;
- Extending Compulsory Supervision Orders for an additional 6 months (over and above the standard 12-month limit); and
- Extending the length that interim orders could be made for from 22 to 44 days.

Further details on the legal changes can be found here: [Coronavirus legislation – changes to the law - SCRA](#).

Details around the use of these provisions can be found here: [Coronavirus – Children's Hearings data](#).

The ability to utilise the measures outlined above expired on the 30th September 2021. After that time, 2nd working day Hearings were required, Compulsory Supervision Orders needed to be reviewed at least every 12 months and interim orders could only last 22 days.

Update note:

Please note that this version of the report dated 02/09/24 replaces the earlier version. This updates the charge group mappings for offences in line with the most recently published recording standards.

Children referred

This section presents information about the numbers of children referred to SCRA over the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 with comparisons to prior years. It looks at the reason for referral and profiles by age and sex of those children referred.

Key facts:



Children referred decreased by 7.1% from 2022/23



20.9% of children with Child Protection Orders were aged under 20 days

15

was the most common age for referral to the Reporter

Children referred to the Reporter

In 2023/24, 10,197 children in Scotland were referred to the Reporter:

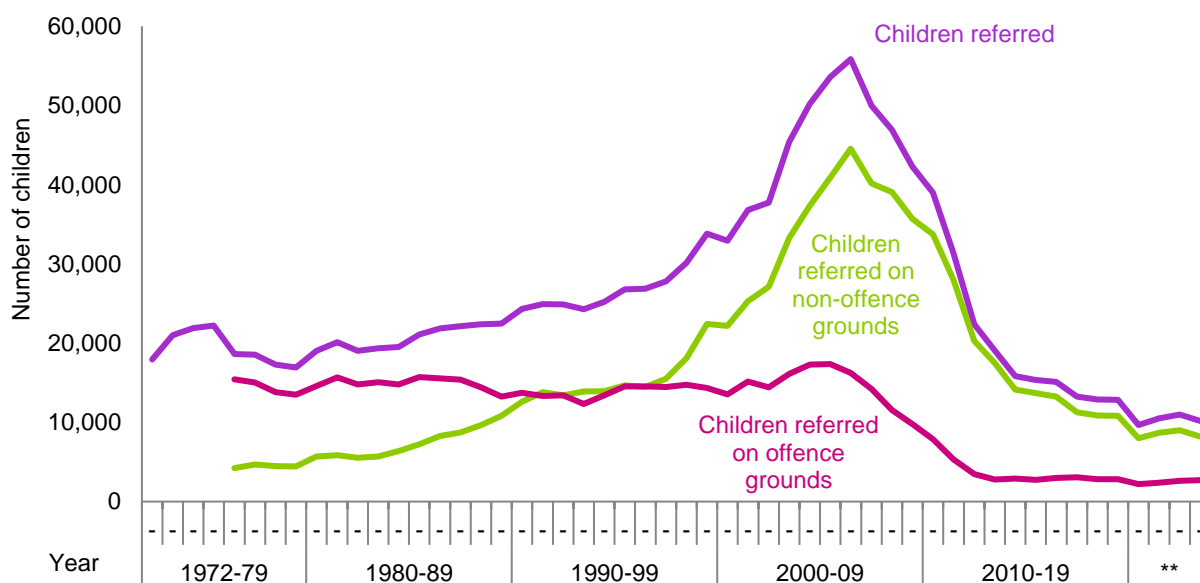
- 8,196 on non-offence grounds; and
- 2,701 on offence grounds¹.

The figure of 10,197 children referred to the Reporter in 2023/24 equates to 1.1% of all children in Scotland². Of this, 0.9% of all children were referred on non-offence grounds. 1.1% of all children aged between twelve and sixteen years were referred on offence grounds.

The number of children referred to the Reporter has decreased after two years of increases. This, as with the rest of this report, will have been influenced by the effects of Coronavirus and lockdowns and the subsequent return to a more normal way of life. Therefore, any conclusions drawn from trend data should be treated with caution.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the changing trends within the system over time. Operational processes and counting methodologies have changed over time but overall trends are broadly comparable. Year-on-year figures from 2003/04 onwards can be seen on the [Online Statistical Dashboard](#) including splits at a local authority level and rates per head of population.

Figure 1.1 Children referred, by year*



* Please note that offence and non-offence splits are unavailable prior to 1976.

** 2020-24

1 These figures include 700 children who were referred on non-offence and offence grounds.

2 % of population aged under 16 years, based on mid-year estimates for 2022 from the National Records of Scotland.

The 7.1% decrease in children referred from 2022/23 levels was due to 784 fewer children being referred. There were 829 fewer children referred on non-offence grounds (a decrease of 9.2%), this was offset slightly by 64 more children referred on offence grounds (an increase of 2.4%).

Increasing referral rates were seen in the years leading up to 2006/07. One of the most significant factors in this increase was police referrals for children from families where there had been an incident of domestic abuse. The volume of such referrals created massive demands within the system and led to concerted efforts by partner agencies to reduce referrals where there was no need for compulsory measures of supervision. It is important to note that there was no suggestion that these children did not require help or support, rather that there was no need for it to be provided on a compulsory basis.

There are certain types of referrals that indicate greater or immediate concern about the child’s safety or behaviour. These include Child Protection Orders and Joint Reports.

Child Protection Orders

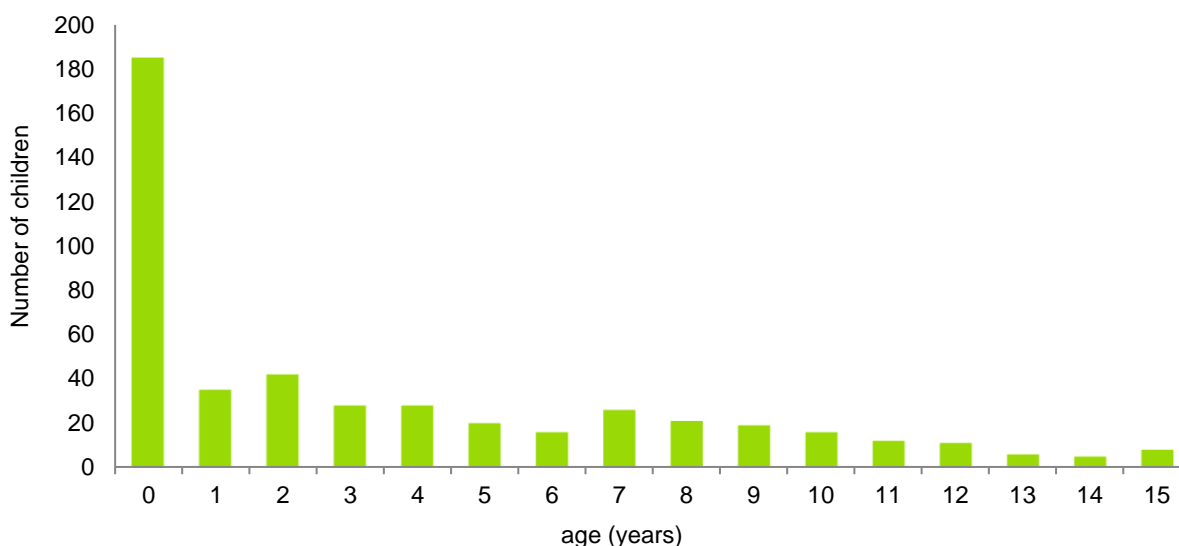
A Sheriff may grant a Child Protection Order to address emergency and/or high-risk situations where measures need to be put in place immediately to protect a child. The granting of this order requires the child to be removed to (or kept in) a place of safety away from home. For this to be considered, a child must be at risk of significant harm.

Table 1.1 Children with Child Protection Orders, by year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of children	570	479	442	478

The number of children with Child Protection Orders increased in the year (up 8.1%). Proportionately, more Child Protection Orders are granted for very young children (especially new-born babies), than any other age, reflecting their high risk and vulnerability and requirement for immediate protection.

Figure 1.2 Children with Child Protection Orders granted, by age, in 2023/24



Of the 478 children with Child Protection Order referrals received in 2023/24, 100 (20.9%) were aged under 20 days at the date of receipt, 185 (38.7%) were aged under one year and 220 (46.0%) were aged under two years.

Joint reports to the Reporter and Procurator Fiscal

Where a child is alleged to have committed an offence described in the Lord Advocate's Guidelines³, the police will make a joint report to the Procurator Fiscal (PF) and the Reporter. Following discussion with the Reporter, the PF will decide whether to deal with the case or refer it to the Reporter.

For children aged under 16, only the most serious alleged offences result in joint reports. As per the note on page 4, some children aged 16 and 17 can be referred to the Reporter under certain circumstances. When the police charge these children with an alleged offence, they will usually be the subject of a joint report to both the PF and the Reporter, followed by a discussion about who will deal with the offence. In certain limited circumstances, (in terms of the Government's Early and Effective Intervention Framework) offences committed by 16 and 17 year olds may only be referred to the Reporter, but also if the offence is particularly minor, the police can decide to take no formal action or use Police Direct Measures.

Joint reports can be categorised into two distinct groups; joint reports where a child has been taken into custody by the police; and joint reports with no custody element.

Table 1.2 Number of children with joint reports to the Reporter and PF, by year

Type of joint report	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Children - not in custody	1,078	1,224	1,299	1,322
Children - in custody	56	53	35	30
Total children with joint reports	1,090	1,233	1,309	1,329

In 2023/24, 1,329 children had 2,610 joint reports*. Of these, 47.0% (1,227) were for children aged 16 or over while 53.0% (1,383) were for children aged under 16. Most joint reports were made while the child was not in custody, 1,322 children with 2,569 reports, (several had joint reports on more than one occasion).

Of these joint reports where the PF had made a decision, 85.9% of cases were subsequently referred to the Reporter. For a small number of joint reports, the decision can be split in that some charges will be referred to the Reporter and some will stay with the PF. In addition, 41 joint reports were made for 30 children in custody. Of those joint reports where the PF had made a decision, 56.1% of cases were retained by the PF.

Table 1.3 Joint reports to the Reporter and PF in 2023/24, by decision and age at receipt

Type of joint report	12	13	14	15	16+	Total
Joint reports where child not in custody	98	230	376	660	1,205	2,569
Referred to Reporter	94	214	314	562	933	2,117
Retained by Procurator Fiscal	3	8	40	68	229	348
Decision pending	1	9	25	33	54	122
Joint reports where child in custody	0	1	2	16	22	41
Referred to Reporter	0	0	2	6	10	18
Retained by Procurator Fiscal	0	1	0	10	12	23
Decision pending	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total joint reports	98	231	378	676	1,227	2,610

Table 1.3 shows joint reports by age at receipt and decision. Joint report numbers generally increase by age.

* Please see the data quality note around joint reports on page 32 as there are significant counting issues with joint reports.

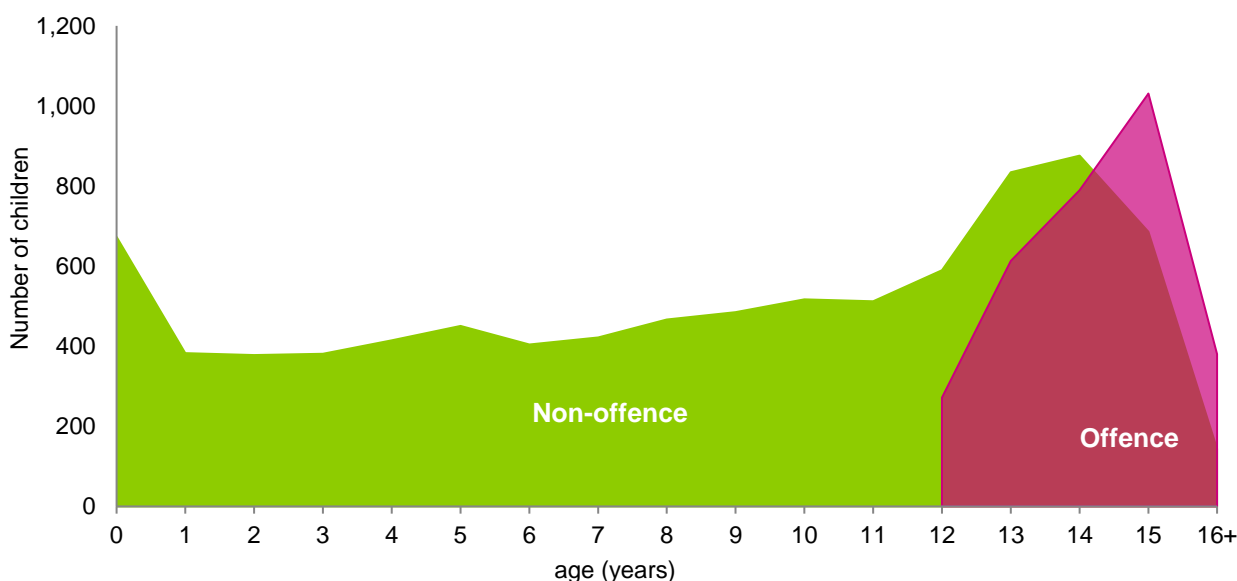
³ [To Chief Constables: Reporting to Procurator Fiscals of Offences Alleged to have been Committed by Children](#)

Age of children referred

The most common ages for children to be referred to the Reporter remain 14 and 15 years. The most common ages for children to be referred on non-offence grounds were 13 and 14 years, as shown in figure 1.3 below, with a particular increase seen between the ages of 12 and 13 years. This is in line with prior years, the exception being 2021/22, where under 1 was the most common age for referral on non-offence grounds. Children referred on offence grounds is highest for ages 14 and 15. The offence profile will look slightly different from years before 2022/23 due to the implementation of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019. More information on this can be found on page 4.

Overall, 15 is the most common age for referral, with 1,541 children referred at this age in 2023/24.

Figure 1.3 Children referred on offence and non-offence grounds, by age, in 2023/24



Sex of children referred

The number of females referred to the Reporter decreased by 7.6% (from 4,734 to 4,373) while the number of males decreased by 7.1% (from 6,247 to 5,805). These changes occurred due decreases for females and males referred on non-offence grounds (9.6% and 9.1% respectively) while females and males referred for offence grounds increased (by 7.3% and 0.5% respectively)⁴.

Table 1.4 Sex of children referred in 2023/24, by referral type

F = Female M = Male	Non-offence*		Offence*		All grounds	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Number of children	3,909	4,273	689	2,004	4,373	5,805
Proportion by sex	47.8%	52.2%	25.6%	74.4%	43.0%	57.0%
Change from 2022/23	-9.6%	-9.1%	7.3%	0.5%	-7.6%	-7.1%

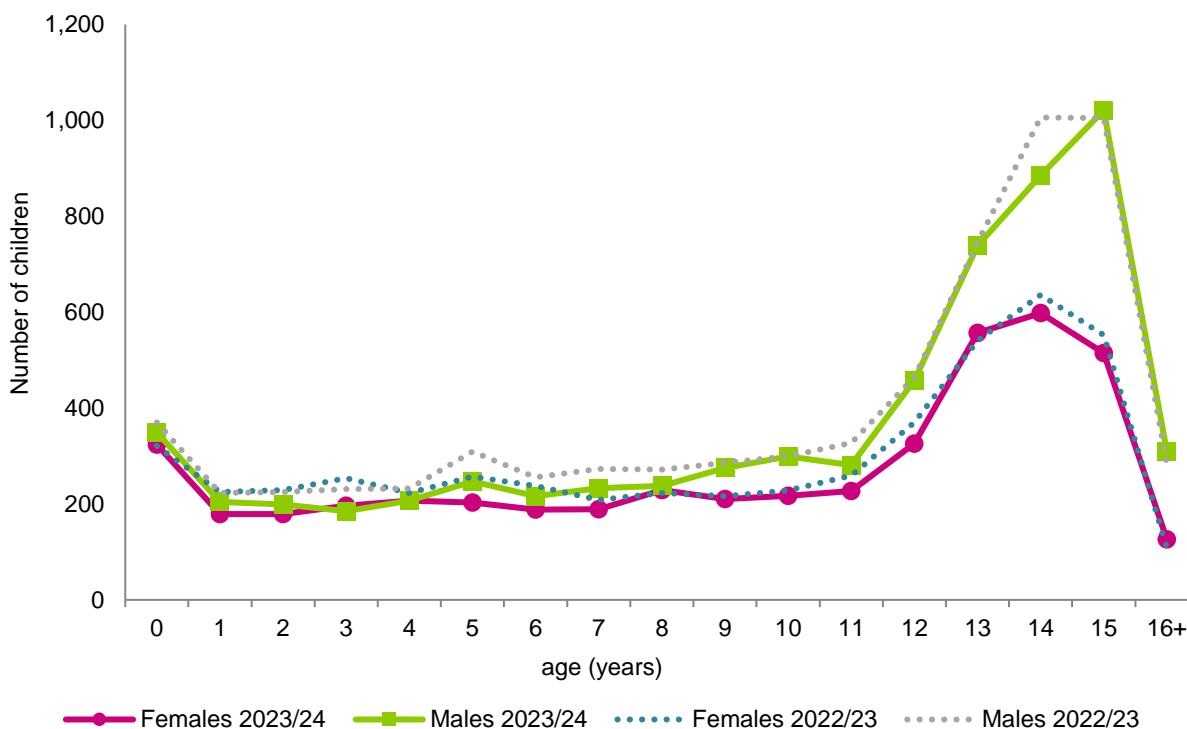
* Some children were referred on both offence and non-offence grounds. These totals count every child referred to the Reporter during the year once.

⁴ The sex of nineteen children referred was not recorded or was not known. These children are excluded from the table above.

Age and sex of children referred

In line with Child Protection Orders, significant numbers of children were referred in 2023/24 before their first birthday. For the majority of children who were aged under one year, the principal concern identified in the referral related to a lack of parental care or having close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse. Referral rates then remain reasonably consistent before increasing from ages 12 to 15 years.

Figure 1.4 Children referred, by sex and age, in 2023/24 with comparison to 2022/23



What we can see is a similar pattern between the years with slightly lower numbers of children referred across the age groups up to about age eight and then a drop in males referred aged 14 against the prior year. Overall, the patterns by age of males and females referred is consistent. For under 2s, there has been a decrease from 2022/23 for both males and females. There were 492 females referred aged under 2 years, down 8.2% from 536 in 2022/23. There were 535 males referred aged under 2 years, down 7.6% from 579 in 2022/23.

Offence ground profiles

In 2023/24, 2,701 children aged between twelve and seventeen years were referred to the Reporter on offence grounds. These children were referred for 13,198 alleged offences on 7,615 referrals. The offences have been mapped to the police crime groupings⁵ to provide consistency with other publications. Please note, these groupings have been updated in 2023 by the Scottish Crime Recording Board and the data below reflects these new groupings to ensure consistency between years.

Table 1.5 Number of alleged offences by police crime grouping and year

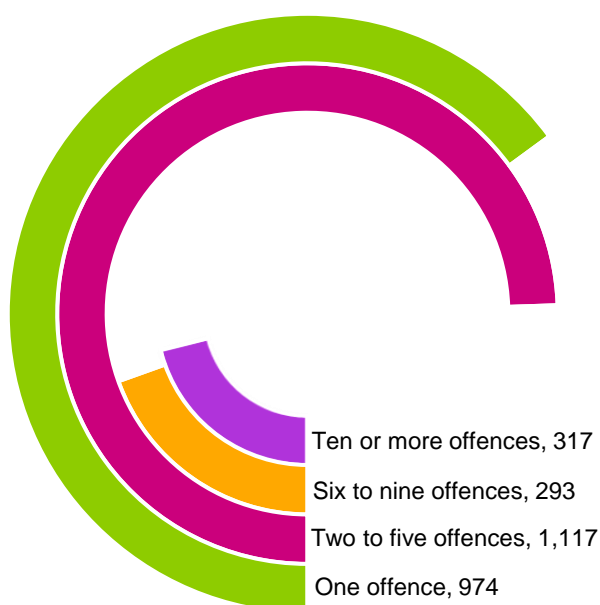
Police offence code group	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Non-sexual crimes of violence	2,452	2,899	3,285	3,862
Sexual crimes	394	435	542	422
Crimes of dishonesty	1,314	1,238	1,880	2,427
Damage and reckless behaviour	1,492	1,661	1,996	2,077
Crimes against society	1,091	1,181	1,381	1,529
Antisocial offences	1,841	1,882	1,881	2,062
Miscellaneous offences	230	196	257	259
Road traffic offences	280	325	480	560
Coronavirus restrictions	48	15	0	0
Total alleged offences	9,142*	9,832	11,702	13,198

* Please note, 294 referrals had no charges applied in 2020/21

Within these groupings, the most common types of alleged offences were assault, threatening or abusive behaviour and vandalism. The Reporter has the power to change the type of alleged offence based upon information received during the course of an investigation.

Figure 1.5 shows that children with two to five alleged offences (41.4%) is the most common profile in 2023/24 followed by children with a single alleged offence in the year (36.1%). Children with six to nine alleged offences (10.8%) and ten or more alleged offences (11.7%) make up the remainder of the profile.

Figure 1.5 Number of alleged offences per child referred on offence grounds in 2023/24



⁵ Further detail on crime groupings can be found here: [Scottish Crime Recording Standard: Crime Recording and Counting Rules](#).

Victim information service

SCRA provides an information service to people affected by harmful conduct, behaviour, or offences committed by children and young people across Scotland.

The Principal Reporter has powers to give victims the opportunity to receive information about the outcome of offences against them by a child, whilst also protecting the child's right to confidentiality. In addition, the Principal Reporter can give a similar opportunity to victims of seriously harmful behaviour by children aged under 12.

The principles of SCRA's Victim Information Service are:

- To provide victims of offences or harmful behaviour with access to routine information about the Children's Hearings System; and
- To provide specific information to victims (and others specified, such as insurance companies of victims) about what has happened to the referral to the Reporter; and
- To protect the right of the child to confidentiality.

The process involves the victim of an offence or seriously harmful behaviour being identified from the police report when the child is referred to the Reporter. Victim Information Co-ordinators then write to victims at the initial stage of our investigation. On receiving this initial letter, victims can then opt in to receive further information regarding key stages of the investigation and the final decision.

Victim Information Co-ordinators also provide the point of contact for requests for information from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and insurance companies.

Referrals to the Reporter

This section presents information about the numbers of referrals received by SCRA over the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 with comparisons to prior years. It looks at the types of referral, the source of referrals and whether the child was subject to compulsory measures of supervision when the referral was received.

Key facts:



Referrals received decreased by 2.2% from 2022/23



78.5% of referrals were from the police



72% of referrals received were for children not subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order

Referrals received

In 2023/24, 19,462 referrals were received by the Reporter, this was an 2.2% decrease from 2022/23 levels. Non-offence referrals decreased by 11.6% to 11,847 while offence referrals increased by 17.2% to 7,615. The changes seen in non-offence and offence referrals are due to changes in volumes from the police who as noted above are the main source of referrals to SCRA.

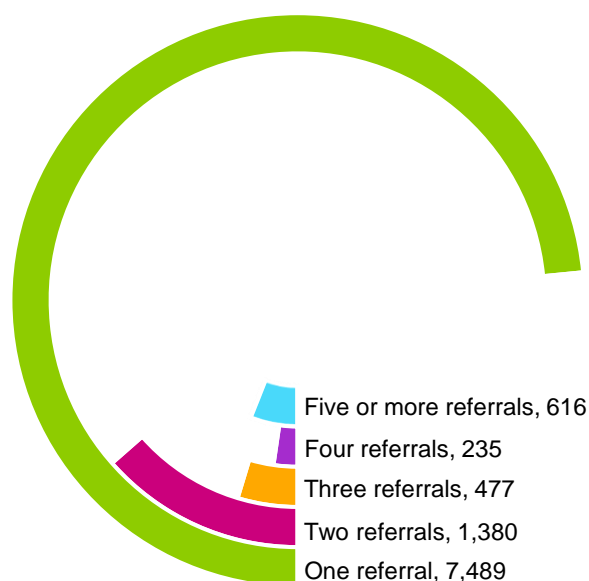
Prior to 2020/21, non-offence referrals had decreased annually since 2006/07, the exception to this being a slight increase in 2015/16. Full details of referral rates alongside other SCRA statistics over time can be accessed through SCRA's [Online Statistical Dashboard](#).

Table 2.1 Numbers of referrals received, by type and year

Type of referral	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Offence	5,282	5,474	6,498	7,615
Non-offence	11,800	12,795	13,406	11,847
Total referrals	17,082	18,269	19,904	19,462

Referrals per child varies depending on the type of referral. For non-offence referrals, 80.4% had a single referral in the year, this compares with 57.5% of children referred on offence grounds having a single offence referral in the year. Overall, most children (73.4%) were referred only once in the year, with 6.0% referred five or more times. The number of referrals received per child in 2023/24 is shown in Figure 2.1.

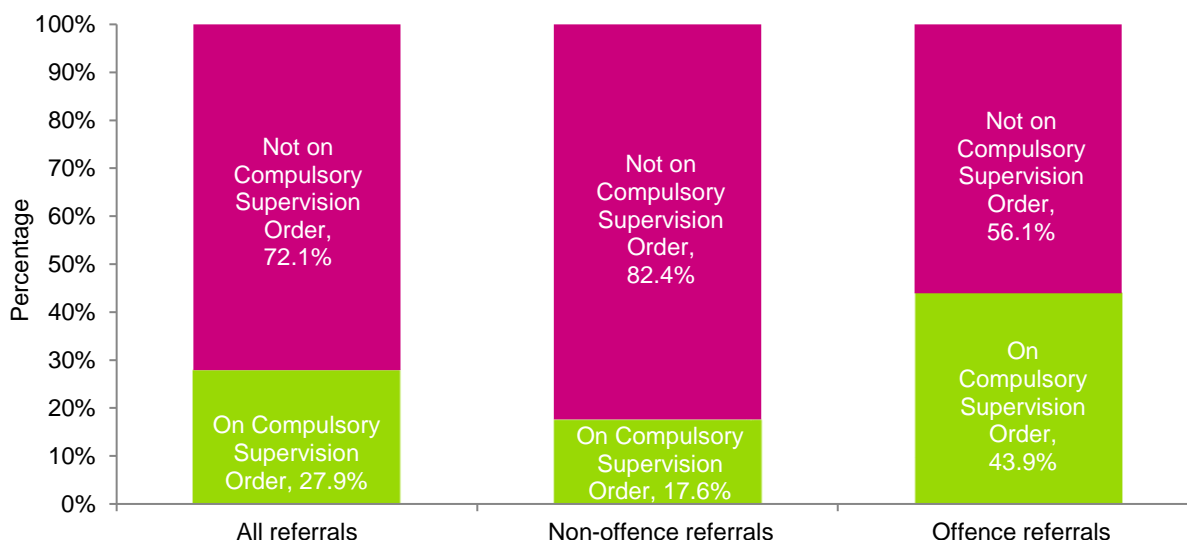
Figure 2.1 Number of referrals received per child in 2023/24



Referrals received by Compulsory Supervision Order status

In most cases, the child was not subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order at the point of referral, see Figure 2.2. Overall, 27.9% of referrals received (5,431) were for children subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order at the point of referral. This was the case for 17.6% of non-offence referrals (2,087) and 43.9% of offence referrals (3,344). This reflects Early and Effective Intervention guidance that says that there is a presumption that where the police charge a child on a Compulsory Supervision Order with an offence, they will refer the child to the Reporter. Page 24 contains more information about Compulsory Supervision Orders.

Figure 2.2 Referrals received by Compulsory Supervision Order status at receipt in 2023/24

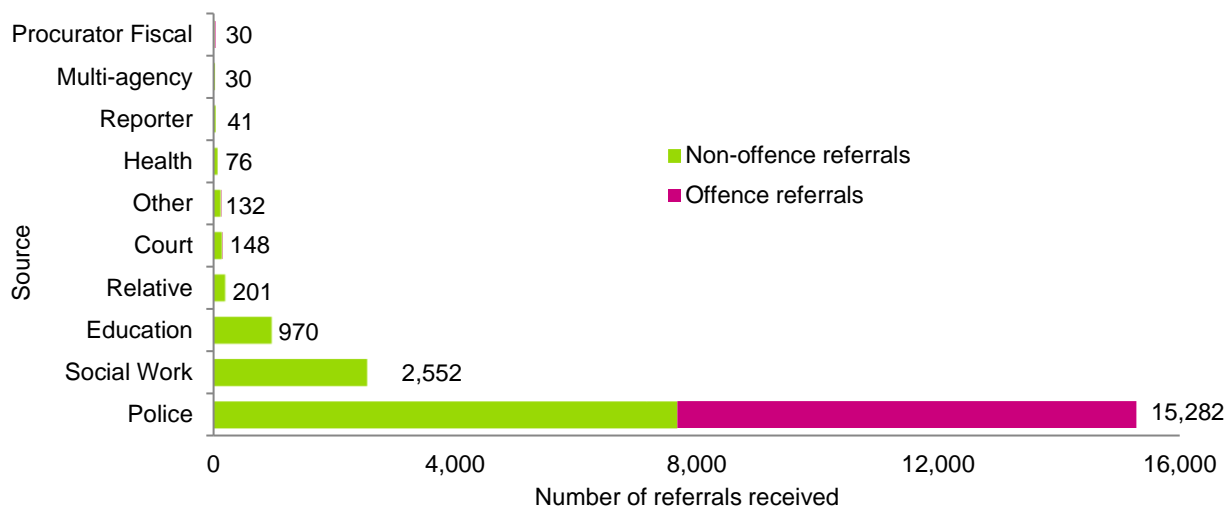


Males were more likely to be subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order at the point of receipt of a referral (29.2%) than females (25.6%). The difference is mainly because a greater proportion of referrals for males are on offence grounds than for females; and children referred on offence grounds are more likely to be subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order at the receipt of the referral than is the case for non-offence referrals.

Source of referrals

The police are the main source of referrals, comprising 78.5% of all referrals to the Reporter in 2023/24 - 99.8% of all offence referrals and 64.8% of all non-offence referrals. This was a decrease of 5.1 percentage points in the proportion of non-offence referrals from the police from last year.

Figure 2.3 Referrals received by source in 2023/24



Reporter decisions on children referred

This section presents information about the investigations Reporters within SCRA undertake with partner agencies to make decisions on children's cases along with the grounds of referral and the decisions which have been made over the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Key facts:



22%

of children had a Reporter decision to arrange a Hearing

'Compulsory Supervision Order not necessary and refer to local authority'

was the most common Reporter decision with 33% of children with Reporter decisions having this decision in the year.

Reporter investigations

Reporters investigate where necessary, when a referral is received, to assist them in considering the likely need for compulsory measures. They do so by obtaining information on the child and their circumstances from relevant agencies. Some of this information may now be provided at the point of referral rather than requiring to be requested. There is a wide network of partner agencies that Reporters can ask for information, with the main agencies outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Number of communications requested by the Reporter, linked to investigations, by receiving agency

Agency	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Social Work	4,976	5,773	6,151	6,182
Education	734	1,589	1,812	1,602
Health	386	451	426	431
Other	32	37	31	25
Total requests	6,128	7,850	8,420	8,240

Reports are now linked to investigations, so the data above only includes those report requests within an investigation. Therefore, the numbers are not comparable with data published prior to 2020/21 where many report requests were linked to reviews of Compulsory Supervision Orders.

The level of information required in each report can vary significantly. For social work requests, depending on the report type, the Reporter can request anything from background information about the child referred, to a comprehensive assessment of the child's situation that would involve social work contacting the family as well as any other agencies involved in the child's upbringing.

In many areas the GIRFEC approach means that where the Reporter requests a comprehensive report, it is always a multi-agency assessment that is provided through social work, a practice which significantly impacts the number of single agency assessments received.

Education authorities can be asked by the Reporter to provide information about a child's attendance at school or about their behaviour.

Health (utilising information from health visitors, community psychiatric nurses and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) can provide relevant information on the impact on the child or family of particular health issues. The information that health visitors provide can indicate if the child is failing to thrive (through growth centiles and developmental measures).

The family is invited to provide any relevant information when they are notified that a referral has been received by the Reporter. This allows the family to inform the Reporter of any factors that may affect a Reporter decision on the referral i.e., any changes in circumstances or any measures the family have taken as a result of the referral.

Reporter decision making

Once any required information has been received, the Reporter will analyse the situation and make a decision about whether to arrange a Children's Hearing based on:

- whether a section 67 ground applies in relation to the child i.e., whether there is sufficient evidence such that there is a realistic prospect of the ground being proven in court; and
- whether, if sufficient evidence exists, it is necessary to have compulsory intervention in the child's life.

Where the Reporter has arranged a Children's Hearing, they will, if they have not previously done so, request a report for information about the child from the local authority.

Reporters have other options available to them to find the right help for children. The other decisions that a Reporter may make in relation to a referred child include asking the local authority to provide voluntary advice, guidance and assistance to the child, and not arranging a Children's Hearing as the child is already subject to a compulsory order that is sufficient to address the child's needs. In addition, the Reporter will decide not to arrange a Children's Hearing if there is insufficient evidence of any ground or if the children's hearing would not have jurisdiction over the child.

Table 3.2 Number of children with Reporter decisions in 2023/24*, by decision

Reporter decision	Non-offence	Offence	Total
Arrange a Children's Hearing (on new grounds)	2,252	59	2,299
No Hearing – Compulsory Supervision Order not necessary	2,052	1,051	3,032
No Hearing - Compulsory Supervision Order not necessary and refer to LA	2,766	845	3,451
No Hearing - Current order/measures sufficient	818	936	1,508
No Hearing - Insufficient evidence	976	179	1,149
No Hearing - Insufficient evidence and refer to LA	257	31	283
No jurisdiction	61	35	95
Total	8,408	2,733	10,390

* Data in this table relates to cases decided in 2023/24 as opposed to referrals received in 2023/24.

** The totals do not equal the sums as children can be referred more than once in the year and may have multiple Reporter decisions. The totals count each child once.

In 2023/24, 22.1% of children (2,299) with cases decided had a Reporter decision to arrange a Children's Hearing on at least one referral. The most common decision was that a Compulsory Supervision Order was not necessary and to refer the child to the local authority (3,451 children (33.2%)). In many cases, for children who are referred for offending where the Reporter decides compulsory intervention is necessary, the Reporter adds an additional non-offence referral, and it is this which is taken to the Children's Hearing.

Grounds assigned to referrals

As noted above, when making a final decision in relation to a referral, the Reporter will select the ground which reflects the principal concern(s) about the child. These grounds are set out in section 67(2) of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 and are summarised in Table 3.3. The table also includes splits to show whether children were subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order at the point of referral. This table counts children with referrals decided in 2023/24 whereas prior to 2021/22, grounds have been reported on against referrals received. Please note, on our new case management system, if no ground applies, a ground doesn't have to be added. Table 3.3 shows the numbers of children with no grounds added.

'Lack of parental care' was the most common ground assigned by Reporters to children referred followed by 'offence', 'close connection with person who has carried out domestic abuse' and 'child's conduct harmful to self or others'.

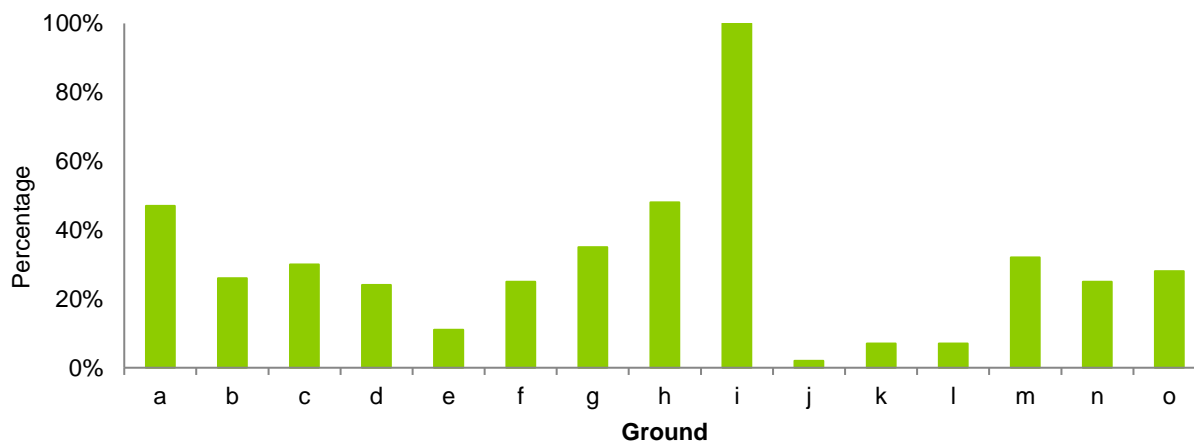
Table 3.3 Number of children with Reporter decisions in 2023/24, by section 67 ground and Compulsory Supervision Order status at the point of referral

Section 67 ground	On order	Not on order	Total
(a) Lack of parental care	186	2,870	3,015
(b) Victim of a Schedule 1 offence	69	557	624
(c) Close connection with a Schedule 1 offender	35	260	292
(d) Same household as a child victim of Schedule 1 offender	4	75	79
(e) Exposure to persons whose conduct likely to be harmful to child	65	441	504
(f) Close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse	118	1,220	1,321
(g) Close connection with Sexual Offences Act offender - Parts 1, 4 & 5	10	54	64
(h) Accommodated and special measures needed	0	33	33
(i) Permanence order and special measures needed	0	3	3
(j) Offence	782	2,075	2,733
(k) Misuse of alcohol	2	14	16
(l) Misuse of a drug	5	15	20
(m) Child's conduct harmful to self or others	277	929	1,165
(n) Beyond control of a relevant person	12	76	87
(o) Failure to attend school without reasonable excuse	12	772	783
(p) Pressure to enter into civil partnership (or same household as such a child)	0	0	0
(q) Forced to marry (or same household as such a child)	0	0	0
No grounds apply	219	1,402	1,615
Total children referred*	1,376	9,310	10,390

* A child may be referred to the Reporter more than once in the year on the same and/or different grounds and may be on a Compulsory Supervision Order at the point of referral at one time and not on a Compulsory Supervision Order at another. These totals count every child referred to the Reporter during the year once.

Different factors are considered by the Reporter when deciding whether to arrange a grounds Hearing for a child already subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order as opposed to those children not on an order. The percentage of children with arrange Hearing decisions by assigned ground where the child was not subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order is shown in Figure 3.1. Only very low numbers of children who are already on orders will have arrange Hearing decisions on new grounds, so these are excluded from the graph.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of children with a Reporter decision to arrange Hearing by ground in 2023/24 (where the child was not already on a Compulsory Supervision Order)



Non-offence ground profiles

The average ages of children referred on non-offence grounds are outlined below based on their age at referral receipt. The Reporter identifies the appropriate ground when making a final decision, to reflect the principal concern about the child’s welfare. Grounds codes (p) and (q) are excluded due to low or zero counts. The grounds codes are described in full in Table 3.3 on page 17.

Figure 3.2 Average age of children with Reporter decisions on non-offence grounds in 2023/24

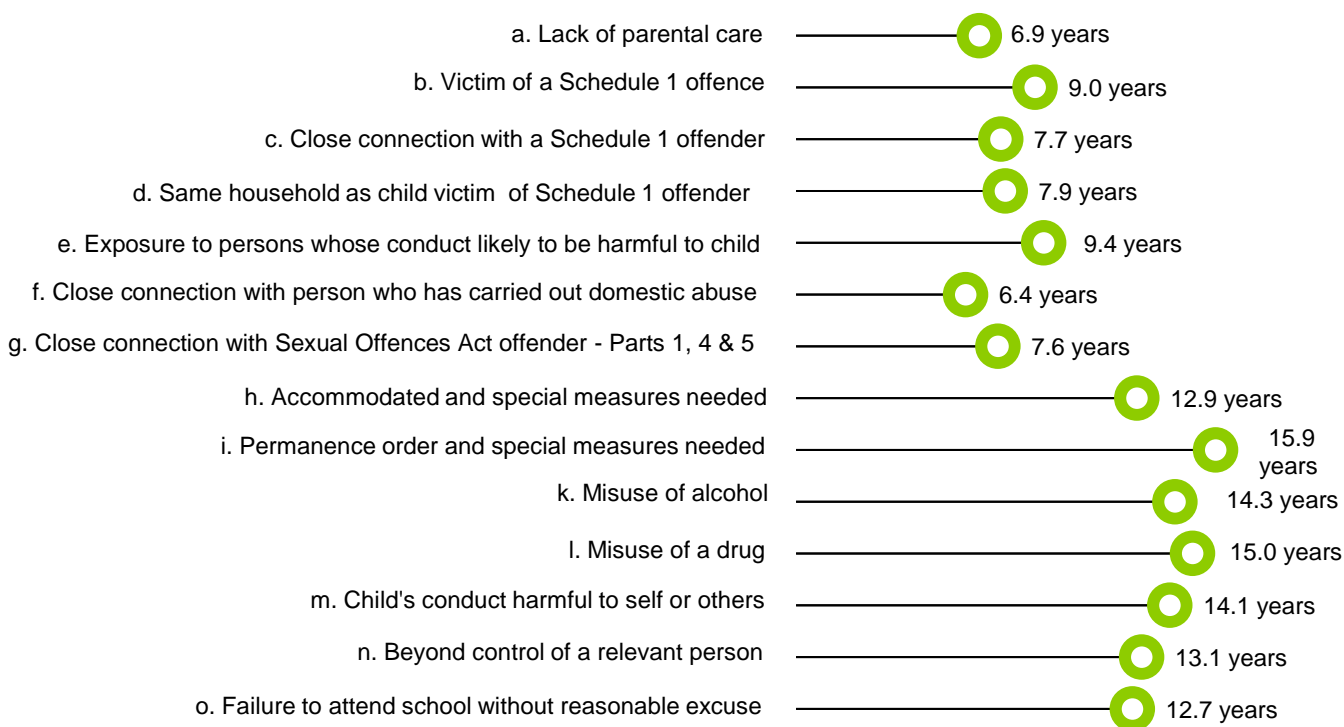


Figure 3.2 shows that there is a clear split in age profiles between children with a – g grounds, assigned by the Reporter, which have a younger average age and the other non-offence grounds where the average age is older.

For the most common ground assigned, lack of parental care, children of all ages were referred but numbers generally decreased with age. More children were referred in the first year of their life than any other age (392). This was 13.0% of the children with this ground assigned.

The number of children with ‘f’ (‘close connection with person who has carried out domestic abuse’) grounds assigned, again generally decreased with age. Very young children were more likely to have this ground assigned, with more referred in the first year of their life than any other age (188). This was 14.2% of children with this ground assigned.

Other grounds assigned, such as ‘victim of Schedule 1 offence’, were common throughout the childhood years but were highest for 13-15 year olds while ‘exposure to persons whose conduct is likely to be harmful to child’ grounds were commonly assigned throughout the childhood years.

There were notable differences in the ages of children referred to the Reporter with several other non-offence grounds assigned. Older children were more likely to have grounds of, ‘beyond control of a relevant person’, ‘child’s conduct harmful to self or others’, ‘misuse of alcohol’ and ‘misuse of a drug’ assigned. The most common age for children with ‘not attending school’ grounds assigned was 14.

Whilst the patterns for these are similar to prior years, the low numbers, especially around drug and alcohol referrals makes it difficult to draw conclusions from the data.

Children’s Hearings and court work

This section presents information about the work undertaken by Children’s Hearings and courts (in relation to Children’s Hearings) over the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 with comparisons to prior years. It also covers the reasons for Pre-Hearing Panels and Children’s Hearings and the outcomes of court work.

Key facts:



Pre-Hearing Panels increased by 83% as a result of the repeal of the legislation



Children’s Hearings decreased by 3.3% from 2022/23



89 % of applications for proof had the grounds established

Pre-Hearing Panels held

Pre-Hearing Panels are convened before some Children’s Hearings to consider any special arrangements needed for the Children’s Hearing. These are:

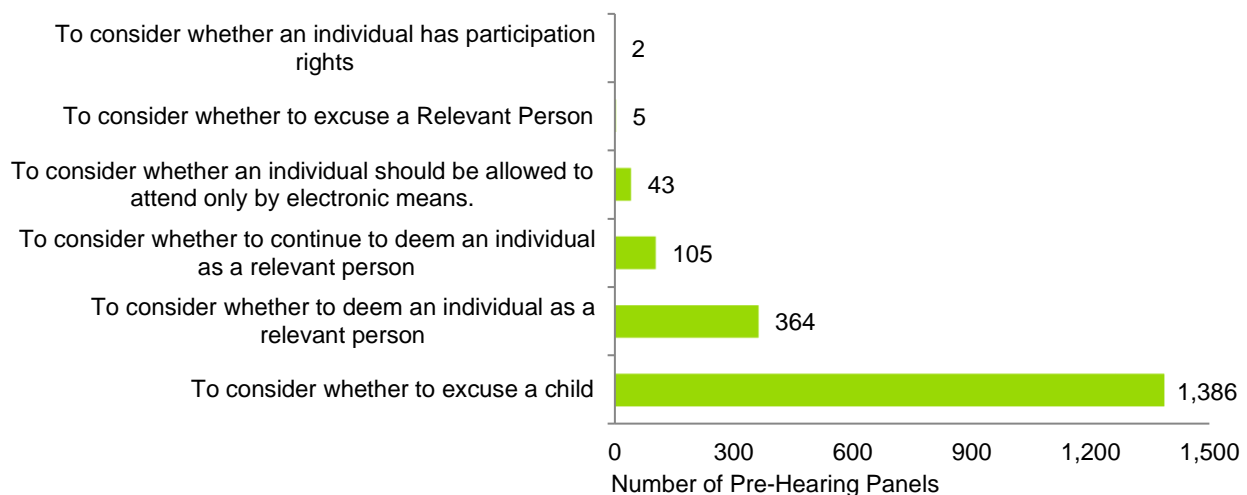
- whether to deem/und deem an individual as a relevant person;
- whether to excuse a child or relevant person from the obligation to attend the Children’s Hearing;
- whether an individual has participation rights; and
- whether an individual should be allowed to attend only by electronic means.

The vast majority of Pre-Hearing Panels (78.4%) were convened to consider excusing a child. Pre-pandemic, this figure was around 87%. Under the Coronavirus Act provisions, Hearings could proceed without individuals being present, this part of the legislation was only repealed on 30th September 2022 so the partial year is reflected in figure 4.1 and also the overall totals.

Table 4.1 Pre-Hearing Panels held, by year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Pre-Hearing Panels	293	328	963	1,767

Figure 4.1 Pre-Hearing Panels held, by reason* in 2023/24



* Children can have more than one reason considered at a single Pre-Hearing Panel. The totals in Table 4.1 count each Pre-Hearing Panel once.

In 2023/24, 1,767 Pre-Hearing Panels were held for 1,653 children, this is an 83.5% increase from the previous year. As noted above, much of this is as a result of the repeal of Coronavirus Act provisions. Prior to the pandemic, Pre-Hearing Panel numbers were between 3,800 to 3,900 so current volumes are still significantly lower. Figure 4.1 will not fully reflect the total number of decisions made in each category as Pre-Hearing Panel matters can also be considered at the start of a child’s Hearing. This option of considering Pre-Hearing Panel matters at the start of a Children’s Hearing has been much more common during and after the pandemic and associated restrictions.

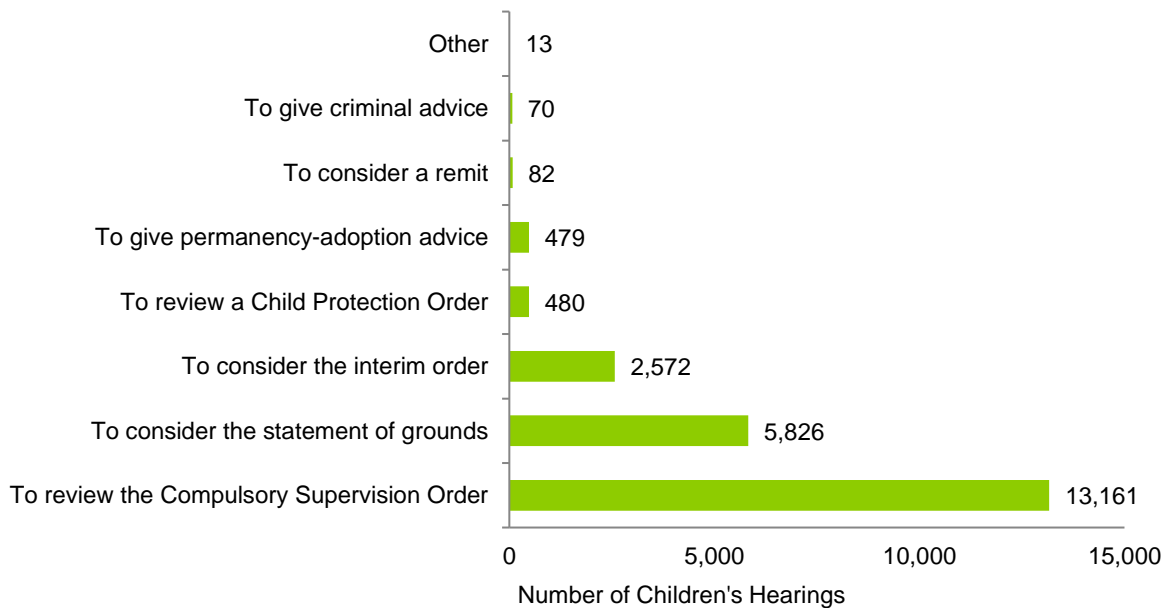
Children's Hearings held

Children's Hearings decide whether compulsory measures of supervision are necessary (in respect of the child) to provide protection, support or guidance. The reasons for Children’s Hearings being arranged are shown in Figure 4.2 below. The two most common reasons are: to review an existing Compulsory Supervision Order; or where the Reporter has decided, after investigating a referral to arrange a Hearing for the child to consider whether compulsory measures of supervision are required.

Table 4.2 Children’s Hearings held, by year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Children’s Hearings held	16,248	21,909	22,341	21,613

Figure 4.2 Considerations by Children’s Hearings* in 2023/24



* Children can have more than one reason considered at a single Children’s Hearing. The totals in Table 4.2 count each Hearing once. Some Children’s Hearings may also consider Pre-Hearing Panel matters such as the deeming of relevant persons.

In 2023/24, 21,613 Children’s Hearings were held for 9,632 children. This was a 3.3% decrease from 2022/23. The main reasons for the decreasing number of Children’s Hearings are due to fewer review Hearings being required as the number of Compulsory Supervision Orders continues to decrease (see page 24). Despite this, review Hearings are the most common type of Hearing, with 60.9% of Hearings having this as a purpose in the year. The next most common purpose was to consider the statement of grounds, 27.0%, followed by considering the interim order, 11.9%.

Of the grounds Hearings, 2,193 had substantive (final) decisions, this means that either a Compulsory Supervision Order was made, the grounds were considered alongside a review of an existing Compulsory Supervision Order or the grounds were discharged by the Hearing. More information about these can be found on page 25.

The 21,613 Children’s Hearings were part of 16,376 Hearing slots in 8,753 Hearing sessions. A session is a block of time, usually the morning or afternoon, which panel members are allocated to for the purposes of making legal decisions for children. A slot is a specific time period within that, allocated to one or more children within a family and a Hearing is a count of each individual child within that slot.

Of the children with Children’s Hearings in the year, 46.3% had a single Hearing, with 10.0% having five or more Hearings. SCRA are now able to record child attendance. While a small proportion of Hearings don’t have attendance data, we have recorded that 4,774 children (50.1%) attended at least one Hearing in the year (excluding those Hearings with no attendance data) this was up 1.7pp from 2022/23. Children’s Hearings can be held physically, with all attendees in the room, virtually, with everyone joining online or a combination of the two. The proportions of these are shown in the at a glance section on page 2.

Children’s Hearings deferred

In most Children’s Hearings, Panel Members can defer (postpone) the Children’s Hearing until a later date if required. Overall, 23.7% of Children’s Hearings (5,117) were deferred for 2,964 children this was down 1.2pp on 2022/23. Please note, reasons for deferment started to be recorded within SCRA’s case management system as data in October 2023. As this is not a complete period, no further breakdown is available this year.

Children’s Hearings unable to proceed

At a grounds hearing, the Children’s Hearing may decide not to proceed and instead will require the Reporter to arrange another grounds Hearing. This will normally happen if the child has not attended and has not been excused in advance at a Pre-Hearing Panel, or if a relevant person has not attended. In 2023/24, there were 462 such decisions.

Child Protection Orders and interim orders

Many short-term decisions made by Children’s Hearings will be to address emergency and/or high-risk situations where measures must be put in place immediately to protect children or address their behaviour. These may include Children’s Hearings arranged as a result of the Sheriff granting a Child Protection Order.

In 2023/24, Children’s Hearings considered the cases of 480 children with Child Protection Orders under sections 45 or 46 of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. Of these, 267 Child Protection Orders were continued, 206 were continued and varied and seven were terminated.

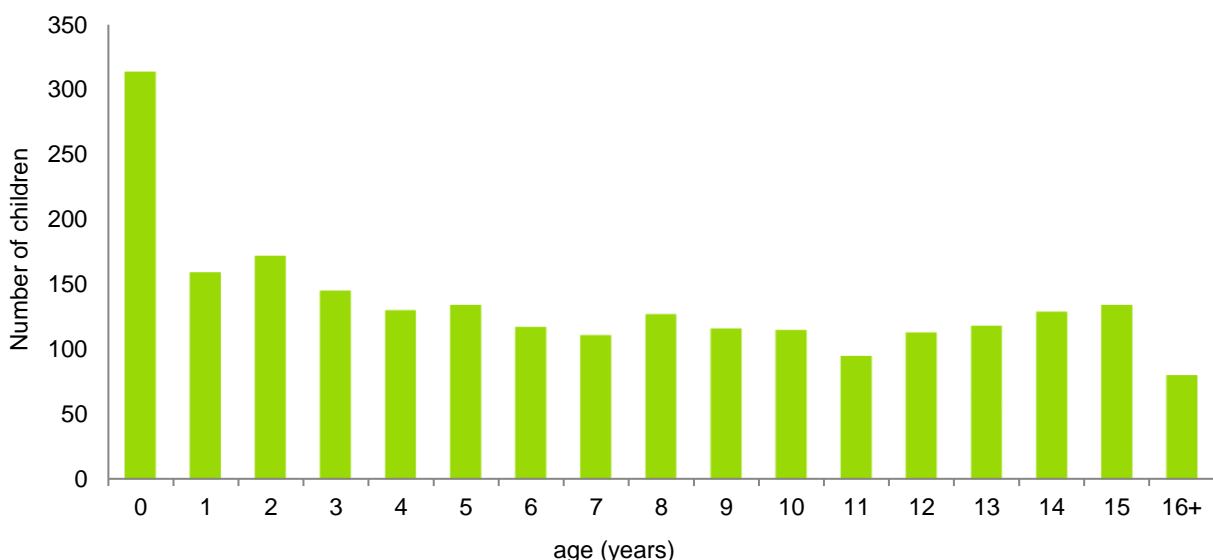
Interim orders in the form of Interim Compulsory Supervision Orders can be used to protect the child whilst grounds for referral are in the process of being determined at proof. Interim Variations of Compulsory Supervision Orders can also be made which can change the measures attached to a current Compulsory Supervision Order. Children’s Hearings made, varied, or continued 5,662 interim orders as defined under sections 86 and 140 of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 for 2,076 children in 2023/24.

Table 4.3 Children with interim orders, by year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of children	2,037	2,200	2,064	2,076

Interim orders numbers are highest for children aged under one but are also common for all age groups. Slightly more children had interim orders made by Children’s Hearings than was the case in 2022/23 (up 0.6%).

Figure 4.3 Children with interim orders made by Children’s Hearings, by age, in 2023/24



Safeguarder appointments

A Children's Hearing must consider whether to appoint a Safeguarder to provide them with a report that will help with making a decision in respect of the child. In 2023/24, there were 799 decisions to appoint a Safeguarder at Children's Hearings and Pre-Hearing Panels.

Non-disclosure requests

A non-disclosure request may be made by any person. The request must specify what information within the Children's Hearing (or Pre-Hearing Panel) papers is to be withheld from whom, and why. The Reporter must withhold the specified information from the specified individual and refer the request to the Children's Hearing (or Pre-Hearing Panel). The Children's Hearing (or Pre-Hearing Panel) will decide whether to agree to the request. In 2023/24, there were 144 Children's Hearings or Pre-Hearing Panels which considered non-disclosure requests.

Measures and directions

Compulsory Supervision Orders and Interim Compulsory Supervision Orders must specify which local authority is the implementation authority and must include at least one of the measures listed in section 83(2) of the Act.

In 2023/24, a total of 11,041 Children's Hearings made a decision which included in the order a contact direction regulating contact between the child and a specified person or class of persons. These directions may include frequency and duration of contact, and whether it is to be supervised by another person. 9,584 of the 11,041 Children's Hearings included such a direction. In addition, 3,301 included a direction that the child should have no contact with a specified person or persons (1,844 Children's Hearings had both types of decision).

Other measures made by Children's Hearings are as follows:

10,726 made a decision which included a measure requiring the child to reside at a specified place;
1,757 made a decision which included a measure requiring the child to reside at a place of safety away from the place they predominantly reside (for interim orders only);
3,146 made a decision which included the measure that the implementation authority must provide appropriate support and supervision to the child;
1,008 included a measure that the child must comply with another specified condition; and
387 included a measure that the implementation authority carry out specified duties.

Statement of grounds

Where the Reporter arranges a grounds hearing for a child, the Children's Hearing can only consider whether compulsory measures are required for the that child if the statement of grounds is accepted and understood by the child and any relevant persons.

If the child and/or their relevant persons do not accept some or all of the statement of grounds for referral which form the basis of the Children's Hearing, or the child is unable to understand the grounds, the Children's Hearing may direct the Reporter to apply to the Sheriff to determine whether the statement of grounds for referral is established (sections 93 and 94 of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011).

In 2023/24, 2,331 children had statements of grounds considered by a Children's Hearing. For 1,946 of these children, the Children's Hearing directed the Reporter to apply to the Sheriff to determine whether the ground for referral is established on at least one occasion in the year (a small number of children can have more than one grounds statement in a year).

Applications to the Sheriff for proof

Overall, 2,001 applications were determined for 1,972 children in 2023/24 and 89.5% were held to be established by the Sheriff.

When an application to the Sheriff for proof has been established, the grounds are referred back to a Children’s Hearing to decide what/if compulsory measures are necessary.

Table 4.4 Applications to the Sheriff for proof determined, by year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of applications determined	1,699	2,072	1,976	2,001

The number of concluded applications for proof increased by 1.3% from the previous year. Applications for proof may require several callings (court dates) before the application is determined.

Table 4.5 Average working days for proofs to be determined in 2023/24

	0-19	20-39	40-59	60-79	80-99	100+
Average working days first to final calling	443	403	316	257	169	413

The average length of time for proof applications to be determined from the first to the final court calling dates are shown in the table above. Court information is still a developing area in our new case management system and reporting around it will expand in future years.

Table 4.6 Number of callings for proofs to be determined in 2023/24

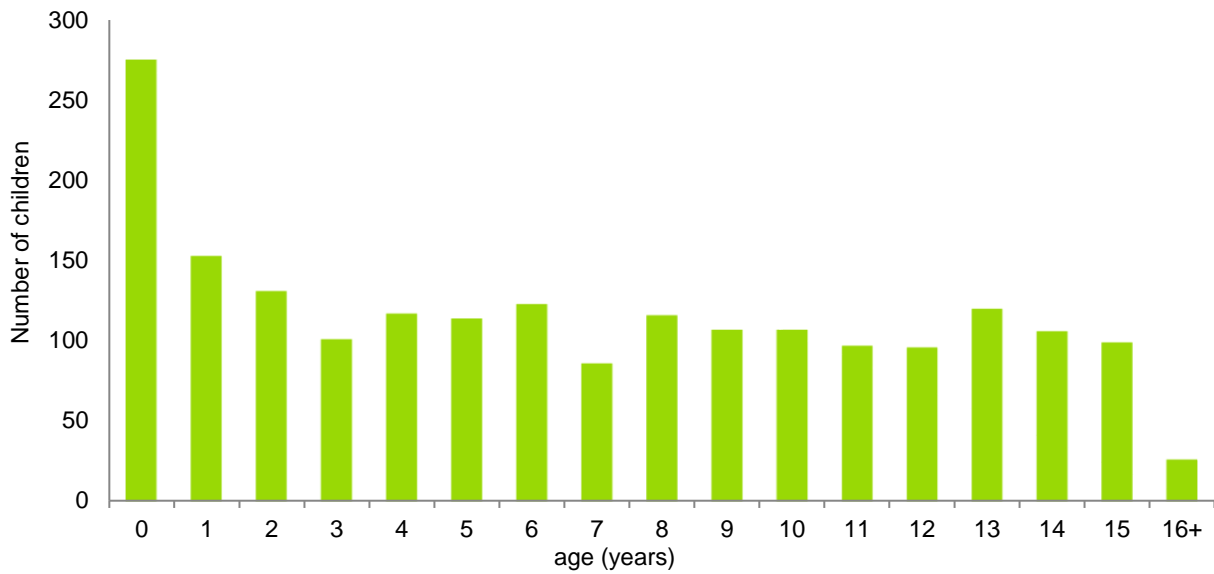
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
Number of callings	278	338	335	293	282	152	134	54	35	100

The number of court callings for proofs to be determined are profiled in table 4.6 above. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 show that in many cases, proofs can be determined within one or two callings and within 40 working days, but a significant number can take a longer time and take multiple callings.

Including applications not yet determined, there were 8,269 callings recorded for 2,378 children in 2023/24. 211 children attended at least one court calling in the year.

As with interim orders and Child Protection Orders, numbers are highest for children aged under one. The age at determination of the application for children is shown in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4 Children with applications determined, by age, in 2023/24



Applications to the Sheriff to consider interim orders

Interim orders in the form of Interim Compulsory Supervision Orders can be used to protect the child whilst grounds for referral are in the process of being determined at proof.

At the conclusion of a proof at which the Sheriff has found the statement of grounds for referral to be established, the Sheriff can also make an Interim Compulsory Supervision Order, or, if the child is already the subject of a Compulsory Supervision Order, can make an Interim Variation of the Compulsory Supervision Order to change the measures attached to the current order. Sheriffs made, varied, or continued 5,119 interim orders in 2023/24 for 1,244 children.

Table 4.7 Children with court interim orders, by year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of children	1,081	1,273	1,232	1,244

Compulsory Measures of Supervision

This section presents information about Children's Hearings decisions and Compulsory Supervision Orders in force in 2023/24. It also covers the number of secure authorisations, movement restriction conditions and non-disclosure measures put in place by Children's Hearings in 2023/24 with comparisons to previous years.

Key facts:



Compulsory Supervision Orders have decreased for the fourteenth consecutive year

14 and 15 years are the most common ages for children to have Compulsory Supervision Orders

Children's Hearings decisions on grounds

Compulsory Supervision Orders are the most common form of compulsory intervention made by Children's Hearings. They are also the only longer-term option available to Children's Hearings. It is the statutory responsibility of local authorities to implement Compulsory Supervision Orders.

At Children's Hearings in 2023/24, 1,935 children had a new Compulsory Supervision Order made. This includes orders made as a result of new grounds of referral and remits from the criminal court under Section 49 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995, see Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Number of children with Children's Hearings decisions in 2023/24

Children's Hearing decision	Non-offence	Offence	S49 Remit	Total
Grounds accepted/established and new Compulsory Supervision Order made	1,890	39	13	1,935
Grounds accepted/established and considered in review of existing Compulsory Supervision Order	45	14	18	74
Grounds discharged	206	12	29	247
Total*	2,135	57	56	2,238

* The totals do not equal the sums as children can have more than one Hearing decision on different grounds contained within a referral or may have more than one referral on new grounds sent to a Hearing during the year or may have a Section 49 remit. The totals count each child once.

Children subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders

At 31 March 2024, 6,490 children were subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders. This is 0.7%⁶ of all children in Scotland. The number of children subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders has decreased for a fourteenth consecutive year. The 6,490 children are 299 fewer than the prior year-end, a decrease of 4.4%.

For most children subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders, the reasons which they came into the Children's Hearings' System was as a result of non-offence referrals. Of the 6,490 children subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order as at the 31st March 2024, 85.4% have only ever been referred on non-offence grounds.

Table 5.2 Number of children with Compulsory Supervision Orders in place at 31 March, by type and year

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Compulsory Supervision Orders in force	7,959	7,265	6,789	6,490

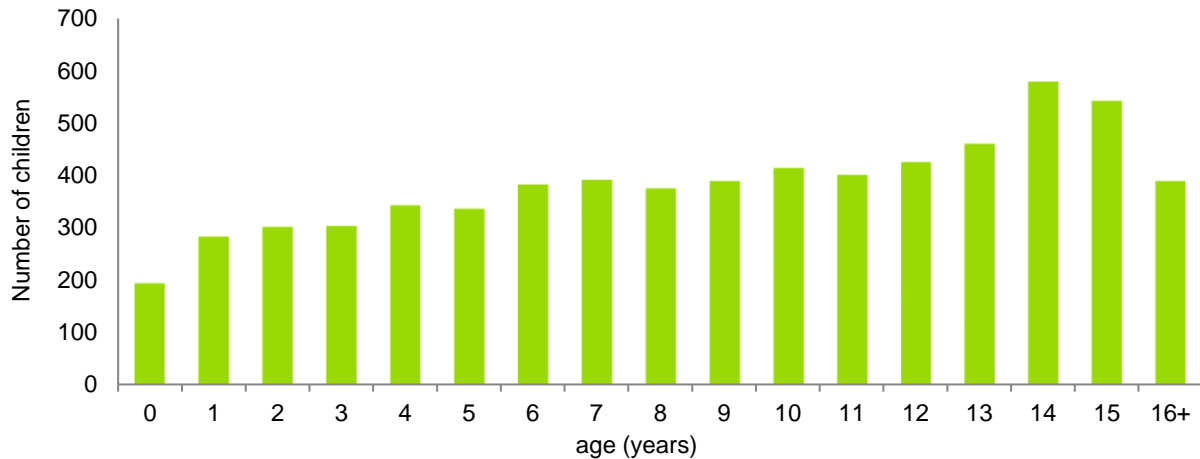
Of the 6,490 children subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders at the year-end, 25.9% (1,682) were recorded as having home supervision with 74.1% (4,808) having supervision away from home.

⁶ % of population aged under 16 years, based on mid-year estimates for 2022 from the National Records of Scotland.

Compulsory Supervision Orders by age

The most common ages of children subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders continue to be 14 and 15 years. Figure 5.1 shows the number of Compulsory Supervision Orders by age at the start of the current order.

Figure 5.1 Children with Compulsory Supervision Orders in force, by age at 31st March 2024



Length of time subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders

The link between decisions made at Children's Hearings and the number of Compulsory Supervision Orders is displayed in Table 5.3. This shows that the most common length of time to be subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order is under 1 year. The impact of the pandemic and the low number of orders made in 2021/22 can be seen in the low proportion of orders in place for 1-2 years at 31st March 2022, 2-3 years at 31st March 2023 and 3-4 years at 31st March 2024.

Table 5.3 Number of children with Compulsory Supervision Orders in place at 31 March each year, by length of order

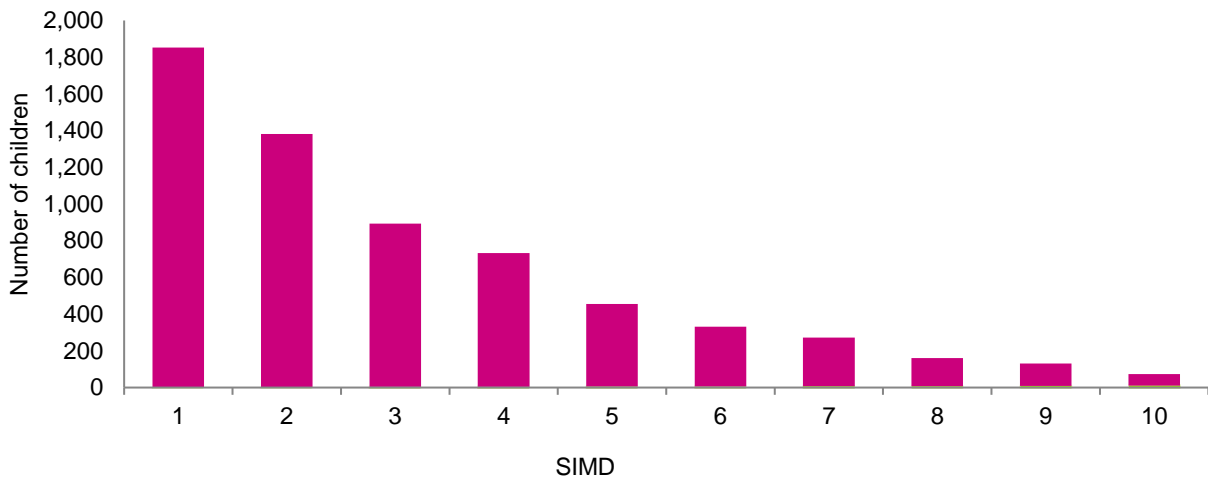
Length of Compulsory Supervision Order	2021	2022	2023	2024
Under 1 year	16.7%	26.9%	26.8%	28.6%
1 – 2 years	26.0%	13.8%	21.4%	20.8%
2 – 3 years	17.6%	18.3%	9.4%	15.2%
3 – 4 years	11.4%	12.4%	12.4%	6.2%
4 – 5 years	7.9%	8.0%	9.1%	8.5%
5+ years	20.2%	20.7%	20.9%	20.8%
Total	7,959	7,265	6,789	6,490

Compulsory Supervision Orders and deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). If an area is identified as 'deprived', this can relate to people having a low income, but it can also mean fewer resources or opportunities. SIMD looks at the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing.

SIMD is the Scottish Government's standard approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. SIMD data here is used to categorise the home postcodes of children subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders at 31st March 2024 in groups of 10 percentage points from the most deprived (1) to the least deprived (10).

Figure 5.2 Children with Compulsory Supervision Orders in force, by SIMD, at 31 March 2024

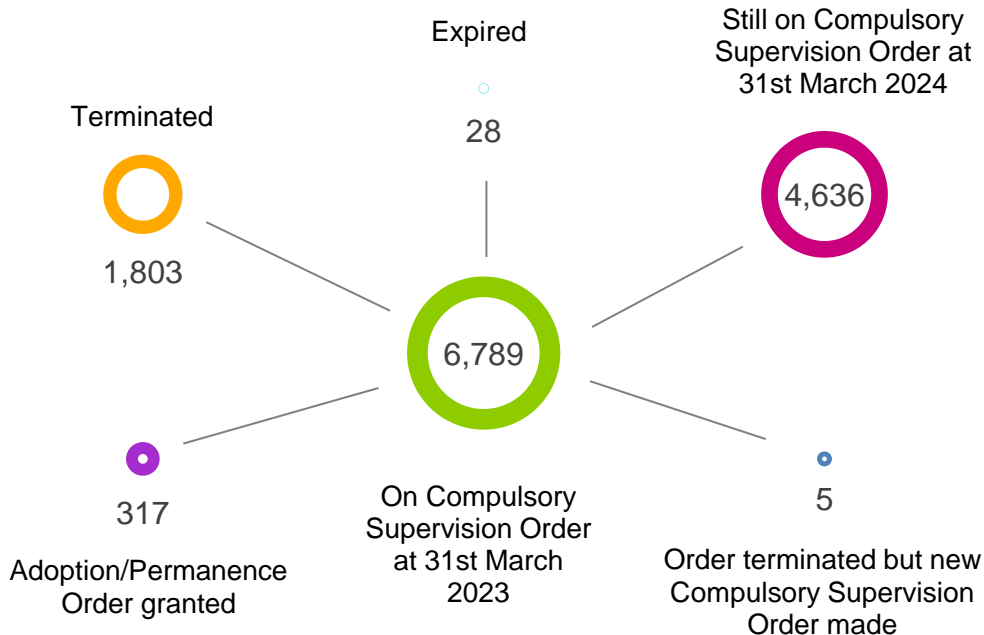


This graph is based on the home postcodes of the child as at the year-end so may differ from the postcode at the time the order was made. Additionally, 261 orders (4.0%) had no recorded postcode, incomplete postcodes, had postcodes outside of Scotland or the postcodes are not yet on the SIMD dataset. These are excluded from the counts above. The graph shows a clear relationship between deprivation and supervision with over half of children with Compulsory Supervision Orders having home postcodes within the two most deprived data zones.

Tracking Compulsory Supervision Orders

To provide more context around Compulsory Supervision Orders we have tracked forward the 6,789 orders which were reported as in force at the 31st March 2023.

Figure 5.3 Children with Compulsory Supervision Orders in force, by age, at 31 March 2023 tracked forward to 31 March 2024



Of the 6,789 children with Compulsory Supervision Orders at 31st March 2023, the majority were still on an order a year later, 68.3% (4,636). 317 (4.7%) ended due to an Adoption or Permanence Order being granted and the Sheriff terminating the order. The 317 is a higher figure than table 5.4 below as often it takes a long time for us to receive the orders from the court so many of them pre-dated the 31st March 2023.

Compulsory Supervision Orders terminated

When a Children’s Hearing decides that a child no longer needs to be on supervision, they will terminate the Compulsory Supervision Order. If not before, a Compulsory Supervision Order must end on a child’s 18th birthday. Alternatively, the Sheriff can end Compulsory Supervision Orders if a court grants a Permanence or Adoption Order following a request from a local authority.

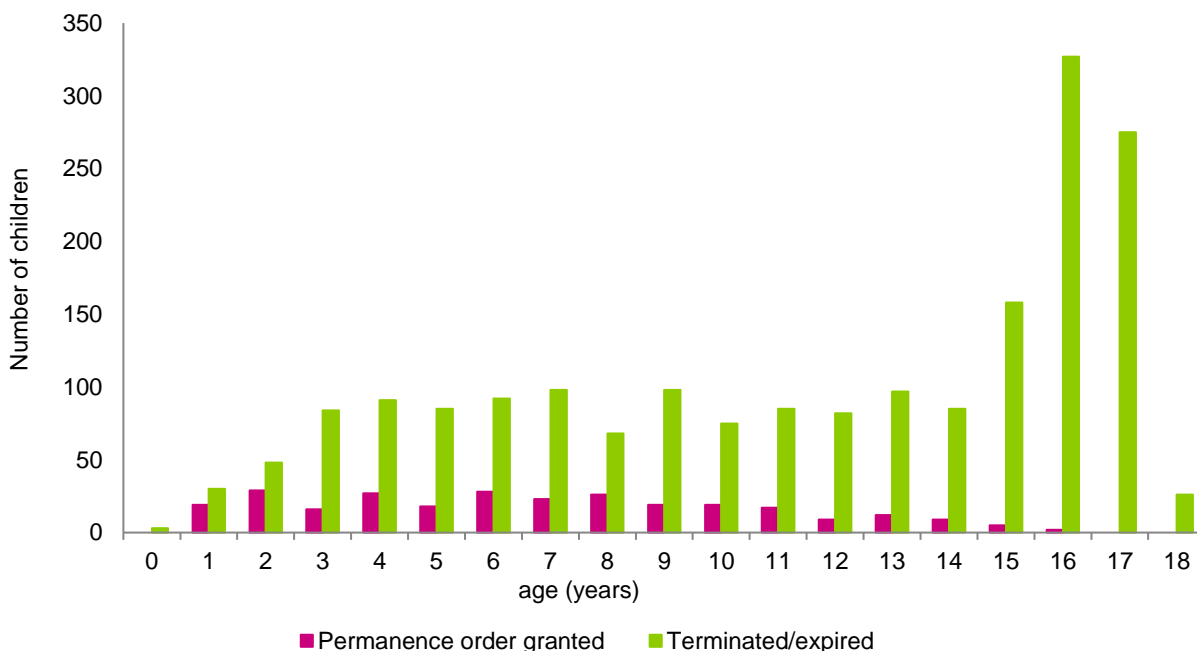
Table 5.4 Number of children with Compulsory Supervision Orders terminated, by year

Compulsory Supervision Order terminations	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Compulsory Supervision Order terminated	1,883	2,303	2,013	1,907
Permanence or Adoption Orders granted and Compulsory Supervision Order terminated by the Sheriff	196	386	368	278
Compulsory Supervision Orders terminated	2,079	2,689	2,381	2,185

Please note that it can often take some time for the Permanence or Adoption Order to be received and therefore we have adjusted the 2022/23 figures to reflect the updated position based on this year’s analysis. Of the orders terminated this year, 193 were identified as Permanence Orders and 85 were identified as Adoption Orders.

Some orders were allowed to expire rather than a hearing being arranged just before the child’s 18th birthday. These will be included in the terminated figure above. Because many orders are terminated at 17, the graph below deviates from the rest of the report (where ages 16 and 17 are combined to be 16+).

Figure 5.4 Children with Compulsory Supervision Orders terminated, by age, in 2023/24



Secure Authorisations made by Children's Hearings

Secure Authorisations can be included in interim orders or Compulsory Supervision Orders. The criteria by which they can be made are set out in sections 83(5) and 83(6) of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011.

Table 5.5 Number of children with Secure Authorisations made by Hearings, by year

Secure Authorisation measure	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Within interim orders	73	68	84	98
Within Compulsory Supervision Orders	69	65	71	80
Total children with Secure Authorisations	110	83	102	110

Children with Secure Authorisations included in interim orders increased by 16.7% while those included in Compulsory Supervision Orders increased by 12.7%. In total in 2023/24, 110 children had secure authorisations either within interim orders or within Compulsory Supervision Orders, this was 8 more than in 2022/23.

Movement Restriction Conditions made by Children's Hearings

A movement restriction condition (MRC) is a measure that can be included in interim orders or Compulsory Supervision Orders restricting the child's movements and requiring the restrictions to be monitored by way of an electronic monitoring device attached to the child. The criteria by which they can be made are set out in sections 83(5) and 83(6) of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011.

Table 5.6 Number of children with Movement Restriction Conditions made by Hearings, by year

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Children with Movement Restriction Conditions	17	24	17

Children with Movement Restriction Conditions decreased by 29.2% in the year. The 17 children had 35 Movement Restriction Conditions made, this compares to 44 for 24 children in 2022/23. Figures prior to 2021/22 are not available as they weren't recorded as data on our previous case management system.

Non-disclosure Measures

A non-disclosure measure is a special provision attached to a child's order in instances when it is considered necessary to protect the address at which a child is required to reside by virtue of the order, due to significant concerns about their safety.

Table 5.7 Number of children with non-disclosure measures in place at 31 March, by type and year

Order type measure attached to	2021	2022	2023	2024
Interim order	84	70	58	70
Compulsory Supervision Order	723	746	682	645
Total non-disclosure measures	807	816	740	715

As at the 31st March 2024, 645 children had non-disclosure measures attached to Compulsory Supervision Orders and 70 children had non-disclosure measures attached to interim orders. Overall, 25 fewer children (3.4%) had non-disclosure measures in place at the year-end as a result of interim orders or Compulsory Supervision Orders than was the case at the 31st March 2023. SCRA continues to work with partner agencies to ensure that non-disclosure is only used where necessary and in line with statutory criteria as well as internal work to review all current non-disclosure cases.

Appeals to the Sheriff

This section presents information about appeals to the Sheriff against decisions made by Children's Hearings in 2023/24 with comparisons to previous years. Outcomes have been expanded to provide an enhanced picture of appeals rather than simplified upheld/not upheld mappings.

Key facts:



Appeals concluded decreased by 26.4%



82% of appeals were against Compulsory Supervision Order decisions

Appeals

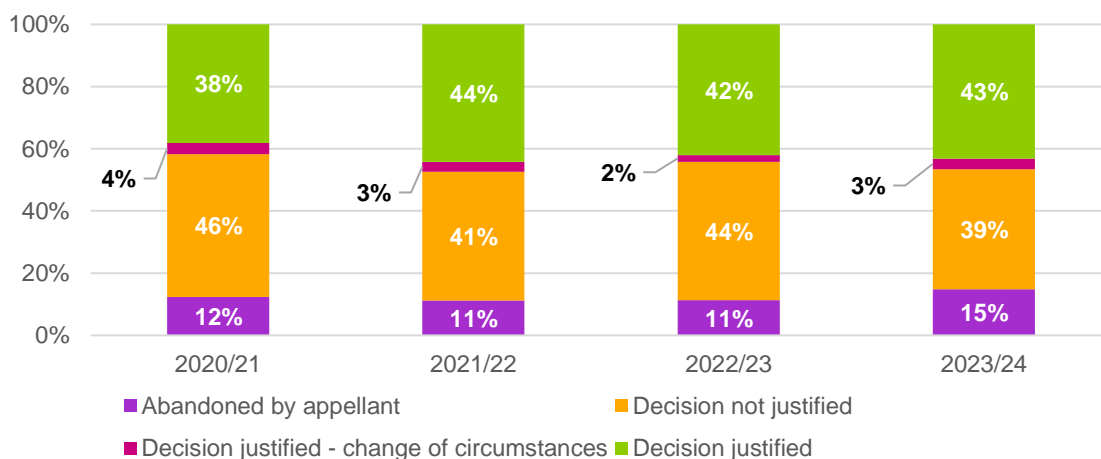
Children and/or their relevant persons can appeal to the Sheriff against decisions made by Children's Hearings and Pre-Hearing Panels. In 2023/24, 281 children had 331 appeals concluded, a 26.4% decrease in appeals against the prior year. A child may have multiple appeals within the year.

Table 6.1 Number of appeals to the Sheriff

Appeal outcomes	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Hearing's decision justified	197	251	189	143
Hearing's decision justified but change of circumstances	19	18	10	11
Hearing's decision not justified	237	235	200	128
Appeal abandoned	64	64	51	49
Number of appeals concluded/abandoned	517	568	450	331
Number of children with appeals concluded/abandoned	397	435	346	281

The most common appeal outcome in 2023/24 was that the Children's Hearings decision was justified (43.2%) followed by the decision not being justified (38.7%). Where a decision wasn't justified, the most common outcome was for the Sheriff to require the reporter to arrange a Hearing (for any purpose for which a Hearing can be arranged). The proportions of each category of appeal outcomes can be seen in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1 Appeals against Children's Hearings decisions, by outcome, and year



The most common type of appeal is in respect of Compulsory Supervision Orders (270), either in terms of the review of the order or the decision to make the first order. This is expected in the context of Compulsory Supervision Orders being the most common outcome of Children's Hearings. In addition, there were 46 appeals against interim orders, 14 against relevant person/not relevant person decisions and one against the discharge of a referral.

Performance

This section presents information about operational performance within SCRA during 2023/24, with comparisons to previous years. Detailed performance against targets contained within our Corporate and Business Plans will be reported through SCRA's Annual Report 2023/24. It will also include commentary around performance as well as wider progress against SCRA's plans and will be published on the 31st October 2024⁷.

Key facts:



Performance improved in all three measurable time interval standards

160 days
non-offence

average working days from referral receipt to Hearing decision

98 days
offence

Time taken to progress referrals through the Children's Hearings System

The Time Interval (TI) Standards for the Children's Hearings System were published in 2001⁸. There are 14 standards covering various aspects of the process within the Hearings System and the different agencies involved. Those of most relevance to SCRA are shown below. The Time Interval Standards within the Blueprint are currently being reviewed by a multi-agency group as part of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership. Currently the only time interval standards which we are reporting against are TI4, TI6 and TI14.

Table 7.1 Performance against Time Interval Standards in 2023/24

Time Interval (TI) Standard	Total number	Number on time	% on time
Standard TI4 – The Reporter will make a decision about a referral within 50 working days of receipt	20,270 referrals	14,187 referrals	70%
Standard TI6 – Hearings will be scheduled to take place within a maximum of 20 working days of the Reporter's decision	2,343 decisions	1,551 decisions	66%
Standard TI14 – The child and family will be sent written notification of the outcome of a Hearing within 5 working days of the Hearing	56,588 notifications	54,003 notifications	95%

Performance against the Time Interval Standards has continued to improve since the impact of the pandemic on the Hearing's system. Standard TI8 (ensuring Hearings continuations are kept to a minimum) is not reportable due to system changes.

Table 7.2 Performance against Time Interval Standards, by year

Time Interval (TI) Standard	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
TI4	71%	69%	69%	70%
TI6	54%	50%	57%	66%
TI14	83%	81%	94%	95%

⁷ SCRA's publications can be accessed here: <https://www.scra.gov.uk/resources/>.

⁸ Scottish Executive (2001) Blueprint for the Processing of Children's Hearings Cases. Inter-agency Code of Practice and National Standards.

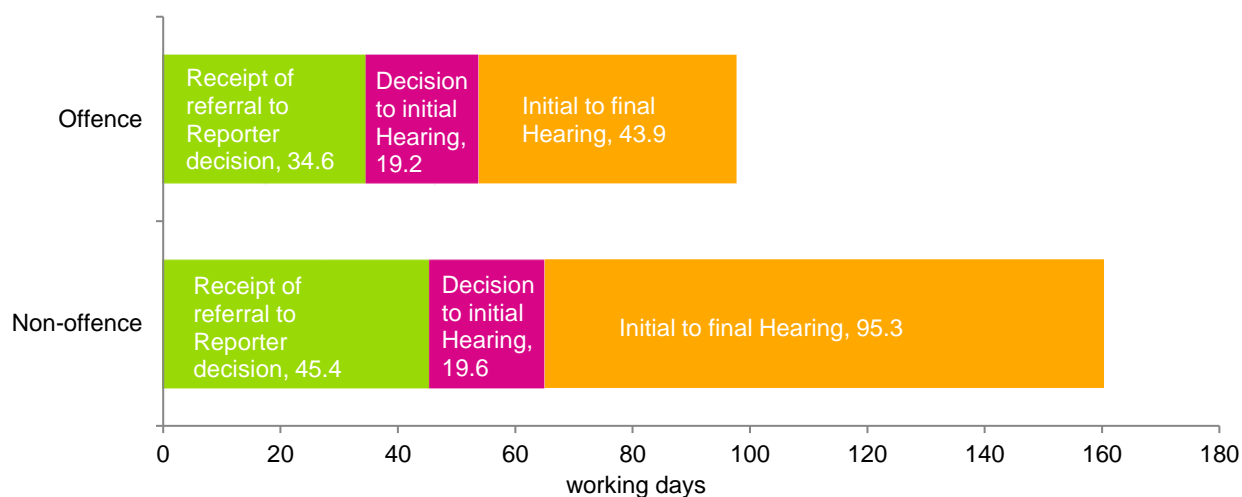
Working days from referral receipt to Hearing decision

Of the 2,135 children with non-offence based Hearing decisions and the 57 children with offence based Hearing decisions (Table 5.1), the average working days from referral receipt to Hearing decision were 160 and 98 days respectively, see Figure 7.1.

Working days are split by the main stages in the process. The differences in profiles between non-offence and offence referrals reflect the higher proportion of non-offence referrals which require the establishment of grounds at court.

Please note that the methodology for counting working days for non-offence referrals has changed from 2020/21 onwards as non-offence referrals now form part of an overall investigation with the decision applied to the investigation rather than the referral. To count working days for non-offence referrals, we have used the receipt date of the earliest referral within the investigation as the starting point. Therefore, average working days will be longer than before 2020/21. Offence referrals remain unchanged as each charge is treated separately.

Figure 7.1 Average working days from referral receipt to Children's Hearing decision in 2023/24



The major factor in the length of time to a Children's Hearing decision is whether the grounds required to be established at court by a Sheriff. Where they were, the average days for non-offence referrals was 177 days against 83 where a proof application was not required. While for offence referrals, the averages were 154 days and 65 days respectively.

The median for offence referrals was 83 days against an average of 97.7 days, while the median for non-offence referrals was 141 days against an average of 160.3 days. The difference between the average and the median (14.7 days for offence referrals and 19.3 days for non-offence referrals) illustrates the effect that prolonged cases have on the overall performance on this measure.

To provide context, the average working days were 173 for non-offence referrals and 95 for offence referrals respectively in 2022/23.

For enquiries or feedback about this publication please contact:

Donald Lamb,
 SCRA Quality and Performance Team,
 Telephone: 0131 244 8578,
 e-mail: donald.lamb@scra.gov.uk

We are also continually seeking to improve our Official Statistics and would be grateful if you could fill in the following short survey [here](#).

Appendix 1 - error margins

In line with Official Statistical guidance, error margins around the key areas within this report are included below. If data falls below the quality that we expect from an Official Statistics publication, then it will be removed from the report. Where data quality issues have been identified, manual checks and amendments to the figures have been undertaken.

Referral data

Police referrals and charges are now automatically processed into our system for most offence referrals. In addition, there are no longer additional or duplicate categories which caused issues previously, therefore our error margin is expected to be very low, <1%.

Joint reports

A police report can concern several individuals and if any one of these are jointly reported then then all children within the report will be considered as having been jointly reported. Where possible (if this has not already been done by locality staff) we have attempted to adjust the data to only include those children where the intention was to jointly report. There can also be issues around receiving joint reports for children who are over 16 and have no open referrals or current orders. In effect, these shouldn't have been received. In addition, we have discovered marking issues with custody reports which we have manually corrected. Therefore, we estimate that we are overcounting joint reports by up to 10%.

Child Protection Orders

Child Protection Orders can be cross referenced against the order and the referrals therefore the error margin will be low, <1%.

Children's Hearings

Only Children's Hearings with outcomes have been included and any cases where there is more than one Children's Hearing for a child on the same day have been checked. Therefore, our error margin is expected to be very low, <1%. There are issues around ground disposals at Children's Hearings with inconsistencies between the Children's Hearing decision and the ground outcome in terms of either outcome or dates. We have manually fixed those we can but there may be an error margin of up to 5%.

Compulsory Supervision Orders

Compulsory Supervision Orders are well recorded and checked. Our error margin is expected to be very low, <1%. Issues do occur in identifying those which are terminated due to permanency or adoption as there is no flag or date field for these, so they are checked manually. For this subset there may be an error margin of up to 10%.

Court

All court disposals have been checked. Therefore, our error margin is expected to be very low, <1%. Issues occur is around court interim orders which have errors in recording. Whilst we have tried to cross reference available data to minimise this, there may be an error margin of up to 10% in court orders.

Appeals

Many appeals in the year had no outcome recorded. These have been manually corrected but there are limited cross reference points for appeals, so it is difficult to know whether all appeals have been captured. Therefore, there may be an error margin of up to 10% in appeals.

Time intervals

For standard T114 – The child and family will be sent written notification of the outcome of a Hearing within 5 working days of the Hearing, there is no sent date currently, so we use the creation date. Not all family relationships can be identified also for picking up communications, therefore there may be an error margin of up to 5%.



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