



children's
hearings
scotland



Children's Hearings Scotland Business and Corporate Parenting Plan

2025-2026

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Foreword

**By Elliot Jackson,
National Convener and Chief Executive**



The Business and Corporate Parenting Plan 2025-2026 will guide our delivery of the second year of our Strategic Outlook 2024-2027, which focuses on driving improvement to the hearings system, and on keeping The Promise to Scotland's infants, children and young people. This Plan identifies the activities that Children's Hearings Scotland will achieve within the business year to progress the delivery of our vision, purpose and strategic goals.

Over the past year, CHS has continued to shape and inform what we expect to be some of the most transformational changes since the inception of the Children's Hearings System.

In June 2024, The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent. This landmark legislation further strengthens the rights of children in Scotland and will enable all people under 18 to access the protection and support of the hearings system. Within three months of it passing into law, we saw an end to any child being held in Young Offenders Institutions. This Act, along with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, reinforces that the work of Panel Members is one of the strongest ways in which children's rights are protected in Scotland.

Another key policy development was the Scottish Government's Children's Hearings Redesign consultation, which ran from July to October 2024, as the next step following the Hearings for Children Report. CHS worked with our Community and wider stakeholders to develop a considered and detailed response, laying out the changes we believe are required to future-proof and build on the strengths of the hearings system to safeguard and champion the rights of children.

In the coming year we will be ready for when the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 will come into full effect, and we are anticipating the detail of changes that the Scottish Government may introduce in response to the Hearings Redesign consultation. CHS will continue to work with the Scottish Government, our Community and our partner organisations to ensure that the best possible outcomes for infants, children and young people remain our highest priority throughout the changes to come.

During this middle year of our three-year Strategic Outlook period, I am pleased to set out the next steps to ensure CHS and our volunteers are ready for the future in every way.

This document details our plans for the year – what we will do and when – with activities grouped according to our three strategic themes: Delivering Positive Outcomes, Valuing Our People, and Driving Transformation. It also details the measures and structures that will support our effectiveness: our improvement programmes and the change architecture supporting them; the strengthening of our digital security; and the broadening of our communications channels to continue to meet the needs of all our audiences.

By definition, change is usually unsettling, and I know that among our 2,500-strong team of volunteers and employees across Scotland, there are differing views about the future of the Children's Hearings System. My highest priority is to support the Panel Community to deliver the best possible outcomes for the infants, children and young people we serve.





In 2024-25 CHS continued to face a challenging fiscal environment alongside the wider public sector. We remain indebted to our Panel Community, National Team, and partners across the sector who continued to be present and strive for better outcomes for infants, children, young people and their families.

- We delivered two successful Panel Member recruitment campaigns bringing new, fresh talent and dedication into the volunteer community with the **involvement and input of lived experience recruiters**.
- We continued to deliver high-quality training for Panel Members, adopting a refreshed approach to our pre-service programme. This included integrating knowledge of the Chairing role and increasing opportunities for practical skills development to strengthen both competence and confidence.
- We worked collaboratively with our Panel Community to inform, influence and respond to the Scottish Governments Children's Hearings Redesign consultation.
- We worked alongside our **Experts by Experience group** ensuring that young people with lived experience of the hearings system play a key role in CHS decision making.
- We worked with Scottish Government colleagues and partners in the sector to advise, influence and implement the **legislative changes** that support and uphold children's rights, such as the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024.

- We celebrated and thanked our community through local recognition events and nationally during **Volunteers' Week**.
- We **reappointed** over 373 Panel Members for a further three years.
- We refreshed our website and communications materials to make them more accessible.
- We fully **implemented a new Tribunal Support Model** to more effectively support our Panel Community. This has included local partnership roles who are developing relationships and working to create effective spaces at local level for collaborative improvement and reform where they aren't in place i.e. local Children's Hearings Improvement Partnerships. A Wellbeing offer for our community is in place, and wellbeing colleagues have been instrumental in liaising with our learning teams to support Panel Members through their journey to chairing. CHS adopted a new approach to change management to implement this important and significant programme of work which won the Public Sector Award for Project and Programme Management.

Our Context: Upholding and progressing Children's rights

As Corporate Parents under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, CHS and the National Convener have responsibilities to make sure our attention and resources are focused on upholding the rights and safeguarding of Scotland's looked after children and care-leavers, and promoting their wellbeing. CHS and the National Convener plan, deliver, monitor and report on these duties together, collaborating with our partner organisations when necessary to deliver these goals. Our commitments in 2025-26 will centre on:

UNCRC

We welcome the incorporation of the UNCRC into law and will work closely with our partner organisations to ensure we are compliant with every aspect of new legislation. We will continue to conduct hearings and to champion children's rights with our Panel Members ensuring the rights of a child throughout their childhood are the paramount consideration when making decisions.

Participation

To ensure that our work is informed by and for the infants, children and young people we serve. We are committed to elevating the participation of those with lived experience as a key tenet of our organisation. We will champion the involvement of children, so it is core to our standards, practices and organisational culture through investment in participation.



The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024

At CHS, we welcome the changes proposed by the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 and have undertaken extensive work to prepare for the impact these will have in the hearing room. We are committed to ensuring that every child under the age of 18 who requires support and guidance benefits from the welfare-based approach of the Children's Hearings System to give them the best start in life.

Children's Participation and Rights Strategy

As a key priority, we have implemented a new strategy, co-designed with care experienced young people, which enshrines our obligations to put infants, children and young people with lived experience of care at the heart of what we do. We have invested in this work to ensure that the young people we work alongside are supported and have opportunities for influence.



Our Context: Delivering transformation and driving change

CHS remains committed to keeping The Promise to Scotland's children and delivering those reforms and improvements identified by the Hearings for Children report.

We acknowledge that change takes time, but we are committed to ensuring that what doesn't need to wait shouldn't wait. CHS recognises the opportunities we have to make a meaningful difference to the experience of children in the hearings system now, while further system transformation is planned as part of the redesign of the Children's Hearings System.

Change and innovation

We have a dedicated change function within CHS which will work with our partners on a number of innovative projects to improve children's experiences of hearings:

- Language in Hearing Room – picking up on the principles and work of the Language Leaders, we will be working with SCRA and our Panel Community to improve the use of language in hearings to remove trauma and stigma.
- Child-friendly complaints and feedback – having launched our child friendly feedback and complaints portal, we have implemented a 'front door' for feedback and complaints so children and their families do not need to navigate across organisations to share their feedback.
- Chair greeting the child – we are enabling children to feel more comfortable at their hearings by being greeted by the Chair in advance.



Working with Partners on the Children's hearings redesign

CHS will work with SCRA and key stakeholders on areas for improvement that do not require legislative change but do require a joint approach and are appropriate for early prioritisation in the delivery redesign of the Children's Hearings System.

Improvement

CHS will continue to engage in and influence the development of emerging legislation that can improve outcomes for children and young people through the hearings system. Through the Tribunal Support Model, we will incorporate improvements in a responsive and consistent way across Scotland.



Our Strategic Themes 2024-2027

Last year we launched our tri-annual Strategic Outlook 2024-2027. Within this Business and Corporate Parenting Plan we set out what our priorities for the next three years will be. We call these priorities our 'Strategic Themes' and together they guide and inform our ambitions to improve outcomes for children touched by the hearings system. Our Strategic Themes are:



Strategic Themes – an overview

Theme 1. Delivering Positive Outcomes:

Infants, children, young people and their families are at the heart of what we do, and we believe in a Scotland where they are all safe, loved and supported in order that they can fulfil their potential in all areas of their life. We are committed to delivering positive outcomes for all those who enter the hearings system by adopting a trauma-responsive and rights-driven approach in all we do and equipping our people with knowledge to uphold those rights and the means to support children and young people to participate in their hearing.

Theme 2. Valuing Our People:

We want to make CHS the best place to work and volunteer. We are committed to fostering a culture where colleagues and volunteers feel valued and supported. We will ensure that our people are empowered to perform at their best, understand the contribution they make and have those contributions recognised and celebrated. We want everyone at CHS to thrive and flourish.

Theme 3. Driving Transformation:

We believe in the power of transformation to effect meaningful change in ourselves, our partners, and the lives of the children and communities we serve. CHS is embracing a period of reform and transformation as it responds to the government-supported recommendations in the Hearings for Children report. We are committed to delivering the best possible hearings system for our children and young people and will work in partnership with them, our Panel Community and our strategic partners to drive forward our ambitious change agenda.

These Themes represent both our current programme of continuous improvement and our ambitions for the future for CHS, children's hearings and those who come in to contact with hearings. They will guide our work over the next three years and support us to deliver on national ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.



Critical Enablers - Improving capabilities

Our strategy is built on our three Strategic Themes and our identified critical enablers. These strategic enablers are the capabilities and resources required to support our operational effectiveness and organisational excellence.

We live our values

We keep children at the heart of everything we do, respecting their rights and listening to their voice. We are creative and innovative, serving others with great care and compassion.

We are committed to transformation

We are committed to delivering better outcomes for children and young people by transforming how we operate, setting high expectations to achieve results while delivering our mission and purpose.

We value our relationships

We are committed to working collaboratively and purposefully with all our partners recognising that we are not an island but are one part of a complex network dedicated to improving the hearings systems.

We manage change well

We continuously improve how we work and manage change and we respond to change in a flexible and agile way ensuring that we remain informed and communicate what we are doing and how we are doing it.

We are courageous, influential and impactful

We are not afraid to try new ways of working, to make the necessary changes to the system or to speak out when others can't but we are accountable and we take responsibility for our actions.

We measure the important things

We see the value of data to drive our decisions and to measure our impact, so we source, collect and analyse our data with care and precision and use it to navigate our path, to recognise our successes and to know when to pivot.



Our Plans - Theme 1: Delivering Positive Outcomes

	Objective, Lead Function; and (Main Support Function)	Milestones / Activities	Timescales / Targets
1	Implement year 1 of the Quality Strategy	Deliver year 1 of the implementation plan for the Quality Strategy, identifying and progressing key milestones and priority objectives.	Progress through Q4
		Develop tools and approach to evaluation and audit, reviewing the national guidance, developing cohesive approaches to evaluation, self-assessment and audit at national and regional levels.	Complete by end Q3
		Develop the resourcing and retention plan for PPAs increasing understand of the role and enhancing the efficacy of deployment.	Complete by end Q4
		Review and align the approach to quality-supporting data including establishment of baseline data.	Complete by Q2

2	Enhance practice and standards across all areas	Implement and operationalise the agreed plans for participation at CHS through a refresh of our participation activity aligned with the revised Children's Rights and Participation Strategy.	Complete by end Q4
		Enhance intelligence sharing, information and learning between regional and national teams and improving governance and reporting of complaints and feedback.	Complete by end of Q4
3	Fulfil our obligations and prepare our people for the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024.	Develop the P&P team as the subject-matter experts on all aspects of practice, standards and policy, increasing communications with volunteer community and enhancing levels of engagement with the practice bank.	Progress through to Q4
		Deliver the second module of Care & Justice Act Learning to ensure our Panel Community understand the specific needs and impact of trauma and legislation on older young people.	Progress through Q4

4	Build on existing mechanism to capture experience of children and families in the hearings system to drive quality at all levels.	Implementation and operationalisation of the Experts by Experience group.	Complete by Q2
		Appeals data used to create a feedback loop to Panel Members to inform practice.	Complete through end Q3
		Creation of Quality Measures and improvement plans aligned to key priorities.	Progress through end Q3
5	Continue to support and retain our Panel Community through the embedding of regional support structures that promote engagement and provide meaningful opportunities for our volunteers	Review recruitment application process to improve volunteer experience and attract diverse volunteers to join our Community.	Complete by Q2
		Review of CHS recruitment campaign to support attraction of diverse volunteer applicants.	Complete by Q4
		Develop an internal department plan to manage Capacity across the volunteer community.	Progress through Q4
		Continue to improve approaches to rota and resource allocation to improve the volunteer experience and enable more effective panel deployment processes.	Progress through Q4

Our Plans - Theme 2: Valuing Our People

	Objective, Lead Function; and (Main Support Function)	Milestones / Activities	Timescales / Targets
6	Ensure an effective learning offer is in place to support Panel Member training for the year and support the implementation of the Children's Care and Justice Act	Deliver an effective learning offer to support Panel Members and the wider volunteer Community	Complete by end Q2
		Design and deliver high quality learning offer aligned to the Learning Strategy	Progress through Q4
7	Progress our ambition to become a Trauma Informed Organisation	Deliver the 2nd phase of Trauma training modules and resources to all volunteers and colleagues	Progress through Q4
		Continue to embed trauma informed language through the Language in the Hearing Room project	Progress through Q4
8	Build on our existing approach to how we support our Volunteers	Implement a nationally consistent approach to wellbeing, recognition and volunteer support.	Progress through Q4
		Implement processes to ensure expectations are communicated to volunteers in a transparent and timely manner	Progress through Q4

9	Implement Year 2 of the People Strategy	Deliver management and leadership training and development	Progress through Q4
		Continuous workforce planning to support organisational design activities	Progress through Q4
		Improve offering and promotion of CHS Total Reward package to support our approach to attract, retain and reward colleagues	Progress through Q4
		Review and publish CHS approach to EDI	Q1



Our Plans - Theme 3: Driving Transformation

	Objective, Lead Function; and (Main Support Function)	Milestones / Activities	Timescales / Targets
10	Deliver year 1 of the Hearings Redesign 2030 programme	As a member of the Children's Hearings Redesign Board, agree governance and delivery structures with partners for delivery of the agreed recommendations.	Progress through Q4
		Develop productive, equitable partnership relationships with our stakeholders nationally and regionally, focused on children and young people's outcomes that drive hearings improvement.	Progress through Q4
		Develop an implementation plan for the agreed reforms for CHS incorporating the key strategic, practice and operational changes to the hearings system.	Progress through Q4

11	Develop new Data Strategy 2025-30	Establish our future data needs and develop a pathway to meet those needs	Complete by end Q3
		Identify the required structure to deliver the data strategy	Complete by end Q3
		Work with partners to develop effective data-sharing practices	Progress through Q4
12	Develop new Digital Strategy 2025-30	Establish our future digital ecosystem and develop a pathway to deliver it	Complete by end Q3
		Identify the required structure in the digital team to deliver the digital strategy	Complete by end Q3
		Drive digital transformation through the Digital Lab taking a systematic approach to planning and delivering digital change initiatives	Progress through Q4

Our Plans - Organisational effectiveness and critical enablers

	Objective, Lead Function; and (Main Support Function)	Activities / Milestones	Timescales / Targets
13	Further develop and build on CHS's change architecture to support the delivery of critical programmes of improvement	Continue to evaluate how change is delivered to continually improve practice and process	Progress through Q4
		Adhere to good change governance practices, recognising and understanding risks at every stage	Progress through Q4
		Review and enhance the structures around change to ensure we have the skills and knowledge to deliver successful programmes	Progress through Q4
14	Fortify and strengthen our cyber and digital security measures	Gain ISO27001 accreditation and ensure that our security practices and governance are fit for purpose	Complete by end Q4
		Formalise and standardise the use of process maps and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS) across the organisation to enable clearer understanding of processes and fulfilment of services	Complete by end Q4

		Deliver the Business Contingency Plan and Digital Disaster Recovery Plan testing to ensure CHS is prepared to manage unforeseen critical business impacts.	Complete by end Q4
15	Build on our established communications channels and approaches to adequately reflect our growth and meet needs of our people and communities	Respond to the recommendations of the internal communications audit.	Complete by end Q4
		Improve and enhance the communications and engagement platforms and mechanisms.	Progress through Q4
		Deploy management information to enhance communications to improve and support the volunteer community.	Progress through Q4

Monitoring our business plan

To remain flexible and adaptable, we intend to review our Business and Corporate Parenting Plan mid-year to re-align our objectives and activities with the ongoing partnership working around the reform agenda.

Each of the activities, milestones and deliverables within this plan have been assigned timescales in which, to the best of our current knowledge, we anticipate they will be completed. As we monitor the delivery of our work through the year, the Business and Corporate Parenting Plan remain under regular review.

To manage this review process, CHS operates a well-established process of monitoring and reporting:



Our quarterly performance reviews to the CHS Board take into account work delivered in the past quarter and also reflect on upcoming work and whether alterations will be required (e.g. change of timescales or change of scope) in order to adapt to the environment at the time. In addition to performance monitoring and measurements against business plan objectives, CHS has a set of data driven targets which are monitored by the Board and the Senior Leadership Team which drive decision making and in year business planning.

Monitoring our work: Key Performance Indicators

To monitor the performance of the organisation through the year, we have set the following Key Performance Indicators. In addition to these KPIs, CHS monitors its volunteer capacity and statistics via a data summary which accompanies the quarterly performance report.

Strategic Theme	Objective	Performance Measure	Baseline	2025/26 Target
Positive Outcomes – <i>Participation</i>	Objective 2, 4	# Number of feedback items received from children and young people	2023/24: 12 2024/25: 49	100 % increase on last year
Positive Outcomes – <i>Learning</i>	Objective 3, 6, 7	% of required volunteers and colleagues who have completed trauma-informed training	2024/25: 91%	100%
Positive Outcomes – <i>Learning</i>	Objective 3, 6, 7	% of required volunteers and colleagues completed trauma skilled training	New Measure	100%

Valuing our people – <i>Learning</i>	Objective 5, 6	% of pre-service trainees who felt that the learning objectives were met	2020/21: 98% 2021/22: 99% 2022/23: 98% 2023/24: 99% 2024/25: 98%	99%
Valuing our people – <i>Learning</i>	Objective 5, 6, 8	% of recommended applicants appointed as Panel Members	2020/21: 83% 2021/22: 75% 2022/23: 84% 2023/24: 83% 2024/25: 79%	90%
Valuing our people – <i>Learning</i>	Objective 6	% of active and eligible Panel Members who are Chair-qualified	2024/25: 70%	75%

Positive Outcomes – <i>Participation</i>	Objectives 4, 5	Number of young people in the design and delivery of the recruitment of Panel Members	2024/25: 2	1
Valuing our people	Objectives 5, 6, 8, 19	% of all Panel Members due for reappointment within the year who were successfully reappointed	New Measure	55%
Valuing our people	Objective 5,6,8, 19	% of Panel Members retained during the year	2021/22: 86% 2022/23: 78.5% 2023/24: 83% 2024/25: 84%	85%

Critical Enablers		% CHS employee attendance keep	2020/21: 99% 2021/22: 85% 2022/23: 97% 2023/24: 97% 2024/25: 98%	97%
Critical Enablers		% invoices not in dispute paid within 10 working days, during normal operations keep	2020/21: 85% 2021/22: 85% 2022/23: 89.3% 2023/24: 87% 2024/25: 84.3%	95%

Our Resources for 2025-26

We are funded through an annual grant in aid under a framework agreement with Scottish Government. CHS has an identifiable resource need supported by Government in development of the reform ambitions outlined within our Business Plan.

For 2025-26, our published Grant in Aid is £5,086m, with a further £803k allocated to capital costs including IFRS16.

These resources are allocated across CHS's functions to ensure that we can recruit, train and support our Volunteer Community whilst delivering the best quality hearings.

300

volunteer Area
Support Team
members

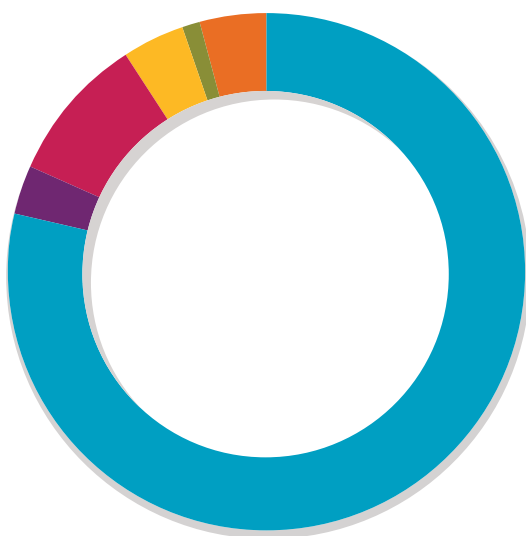
2500

volunteer Panel
Members

97

colleagues in the
CHS 'National
Team'

Our Expenditure



78% Volunteer Support

3% Governance

9% ICT

4% Corporate

1% Property

4% Development & Reform Activity

CHS and the National Performance Framework

In our 2025-26 Business and Corporate Parenting Plan, we set out how our Strategic Themes are aligned to Scotland's National Performance Framework, displaying our commitment to delivering a better Scotland for all of us.

Strategic Theme

Theme 1 **Positive** **Outcomes**

Protecting, upholding and promoting children's rights, and delivering positive hearing experiences and outcomes

National Outcomes

Children & Young People;
Communities;
Human Right; Health

Theme 2 **Valuing** **People**

Providing employment and volunteer opportunities that benefit our communities and are carried out with fairness, compassion and respect

Children & Young People;
Communities;
Education; Poverty;
Culture; Fair Work lth;
Poverty;
Human Rights

Theme 3 **Driving** **Transformation**

Driving change and innovation that enables the best possible outcomes based on data and evidence

Children & Young People;
Communities;
Education; Human Rights

Glossary

Area Support Teams (ASTs)

Teams who provide support and guidance to Panel Members at the local level. There are 22 of these across Scotland, with 300 volunteer members.

Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership

Group that brings together partners in the hearings system to identify and drive improvements.

Corporate Parent

An organisation or person that has specific responsibilities and duties to people with care experience and their wellbeing. These responsibilities are defined in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland Act) 2014.

GIRFEC

'Getting it Right for Every Child' is the way for families to work together with people who can support them such as teachers or nurses.

Grant In Aid

A payment made by a government department to finance all or part of the costs of a public body.

Hearings System Working Group (HSWG)

Group made up of partners from the hearings system established to facilitate the redesign of the hearings system. It is chaired by an independent chair.

The Hearings for Children Report (HfC)

"Hearings for Children: The report of the Hearings System Working Group" was published on 25 May 2023. It sets out an ambitious package of recommendations for improvements to the Children's Hearing System.

Children's Hearings Redesign Board

A group of leaders from organisations that have a statutory responsibility for the operation and management of the Children's Hearings System responsible for providing oversight for delivering change.

Language Leaders

Language Leaders is a collaborative group made up of young adults with lived experience of hearings, and professionals from across the hearing system (including CHS, SCRA, Social

Work, Advocacy and Children's Rights)

Independent Reports

A specialist report, requested by Panel Members, answering specific questions about a child and young person's circumstances, that is produced by someone not involved in the child's case.

Learning Academy

Provides a range of training to ensure our volunteer community's learning is current and relevant for the role.

National Convener

This role leads and oversees Children's Hearings Scotland. They are responsible for recruiting people to serve as Panel Members across Scotland, and making sure they have the right training and support to make sound decisions in the best interests of infants, children and young people. The current National Convener is Elliot Jackson.

National Performance Framework

The strategic framework that sets out the vision, values and outcomes for Scotland as a whole.

Our Hearings Our Voice (OHOV)

An independent board for children and young people from across Scotland who have experience of the Children's Hearings System. OHOV works to ensure that these children and young people have a decision-making role in the design and improvement of the hearings system.

Panel Members

People who take part in children's hearings and make legal decisions about the care and protection of infants, children and young people. There are around 2,400 Panel Members in Scotland. Three Panel Members sit on each hearing.

Panel Practice Advisers (PPAs)

Specially trained volunteers responsible for observing Panel Members hearings to ensure they are following correct practice and are providing a high-quality experience to children and families.

Participation Standards

The principles that define our approach to, and best practice for, the participation of people with lived experience across CHS's work.

Promise Programme

CHS's structured programme of work that delivers on the findings of the Independent Care Review.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)

The Children's Reporter works for SCRA; they decide if a child might need a children's hearing, arrange children's hearings and send all the necessary papers out.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

An international convention that sets out articles defining rights that are specifically held by children.



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