About this report

This document reports on the achievements of Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS) as the Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) established under the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. This report covers the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

It summarises CHS’ key achievements during that period and presents some statistical information about the work of CHS, the CHS Community and the National Children’s Panel.

As part of our continued commitment to the environment, and to save on paper and postage costs, we do not print our Annual Report. You can view the report online, including a full set of our Annual Accounts and Summary Annual Report, at www.chscotland.gov.uk. Paper copies are available on request from CHS at the contact details on the back cover of this report.
In the Hearing Room

The Board of Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS) spends a lot of its time looking at issues from a strategic viewpoint. We identify the priorities for the organisation, make sure resources are appropriately targeted, monitor key performance indicators, scrutinise balance sheets and liaise with partners.

Undoubtedly these are important duties that have to be done. But it does not amount to much unless it is effectively supporting the work of the organisation at the sharp end.

And by the sharp end I mean what goes on in the hearing room. The Board, the staff from the CHS National Team, Area Conveners, Panel Practice Advisors, Lead Panel Reps, Learning and Development Coordinators and everyone else who are part of the CHS Community, whilst playing a major role in making the system work, are not the main act. That role is played by the volunteer panel members considering a case.

In the last year I have had the privilege of observing hearings from Ayrshire to Aberdeen and have been hugely reassured by what I have seen. In every single instance panel members have been entirely focussed on the interests of the child. Irrespective of the complexity of the case, the number of conflicting views that are presented and the inevitable tension that exists in any tribunal, our volunteers show themselves to remain true to Kilbrandon’s principle of putting the child first.

I appreciate this is not easy. I am regularly told that workload pressure on social work departments, the volume of paper work, increased legal representation and lack of time is making the role of panel members harder. But despite this no unbiased individual could be less than impressed by the management of hearings and the quality of decision making.

Not everything is perfect. As Scotland’s largest legal tribunal I would be surprised if it was, but I do think that the volunteer panel members are doing a fantastic job.

It is our aim to make sure CHS, working with its partners, maintains a focus on what goes on in the hearing room and on how we best support our panel members when they are making decisions. That is what we exist for and the quality of what takes place in the hearing room is ultimately what we will be judged by.

In the coming year my fellow board members and I are prioritising more hearings observations and visits to ASTs to ensure we are grounded in
the reality of how the system is working. I know everyone shares a common ambition to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people. Ensuring that our activity outwith the hearing room is genuinely focused on this will remain the board’s priority.

Gary Coutts
Chair of the CHS Board
Welcome to this year’s Annual Report for Children’s Hearings Scotland.

Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS) supports not only the national Children’s Panel and wider hearings system but also the specific functions vested in me as National Convener. My National Convener functions are highlighted throughout the report by this icon \( \text{NC} \). All these activities are closely intertwined.

This has been my first full year in post and the second for the organisation since go-live on 24 June 2013. It has been both a challenging and exciting year.

The challenges arise from embedding the new ways of working required of a national organisation. Much has been achieved building on the significant work by the CHS National Team in the run up to and since go-live. We have a robust set of values, principles and practice to drive CHS forward as we seek to achieve greater consistency across Scotland for the CHS Community. I am therefore very grateful to the volunteer panel and AST members and the Clerks to the ASTs, as well as to the CHS National Team for their time and effort in progressing this work. The debates and discussions can be robust but are welcome, and reflect the desire on everyone’s part to secure the best outcomes for the individual children and young people attending hearings. I am keen in moving forward that we do all we can to minimise the impact of the necessary bureaucracy on volunteers.

The exciting aspect of the year has been the emergence in the Children’s Hearings System of the digital agenda and the potential future of the system and the role that digital might play. These are long-term aims and could bring benefits to the volunteers, to the system and to children and young people themselves. On the ICT front, within CHS, we have made some advances on the use, content and accessibility of our digital portal — Children’s Hearings Information and Resource Portal (CHIRP). CHIRP contains a raft of information to which we have added a number of policy and practice notes to the core information to support panel members to develop their practice.

Participation of children and young people was also progressed on a variety of fronts – not least in training of panel members, consultation exercises and inclusion in the recruitment exercise leading to my formal appointment as National Convener in October. Many issues raised are not for CHS alone to address, but the relationships we have with Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration (SCRA) and Social Work Scotland as well as the wider umbrella group of the Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP), led by the Scottish Government – all provide opportunities for us to make progress.
During the year we also took the temperature of the CHS Community through a survey. The take up rate of 45% (1,163 people) was encouraging, as were many of the levels of satisfaction which we have peppered through this report. The survey will act as a benchmark to gauge CHS’ progress in supporting the national Children’s Panel and where we need to improve the experience for panel members in the future.

In terms of the core functions – the recruitment, training, appointment and management of panel members to sit on children’s hearing – all of these were achieved.

For me, 2014/15 has very much felt like a year in which the new CHS arrangements and ways of working have been established. I am pleased that with Garry Coutts our Chair and with the Chair and Principal Reporter of SCRA, we were able in October 2014 to discuss with MSPs how the system was developing.

Over the next three years we need to consolidate what has worked well, review and refine those areas which cause difficulty and concern and plan how the use of digital technology might enhance the experiences of children, young people and families and members of the CHS Community alike.

At the core of the system should lie trust, communication and quality with the aim of improving outcomes for Scotland’s most vulnerable children and young people.

90% of CHS Community Survey respondents who would recommend Children’s Hearings Scotland as a great way to volunteer.

Boyd McAdam
National Convener/Chief Executive Children’s Hearings Scotland
Our organisation

Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) was established as a non-departmental public body (NDPB) under the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (the 2011 Act), as part of the modernisation agenda for the Children’s Hearings System. We took on our full functions under the 2011 Act in June 2013.

The CHS Community

The CHS Community comprises close to three thousand people and includes a variety of different roles. Our aim is to work together in order to improve outcomes for children and young people who come to a children’s hearing.

Panel members – the national Children’s Panel is the largest tribunal in Scotland, comprising 2,500 panel members. Panel members are volunteers from local communities across Scotland who are recruited and trained to make decisions to help improve outcomes for lives of vulnerable children and young people attending children’s hearings. Panel members commit to make themselves available at least once a month to prepare for and sit on a three hour hearing session.

Area Support Teams (ASTs) – there are 22 ASTs across Scotland. AST members are also volunteers from local communities, recruited to support panel members in their area and carry out functions on behalf of the National Convener. Each AST is managed by a volunteer Area Convener who is in turn accountable to the National Convener. There are approximately 400 AST members across Scotland. In addition, each AST is supported by a Clerk who is employed by the local authority.

The CHS Training Unit – is run in partnership with West Lothian College. The CHS Training Unit is set up to deliver consistent, high quality training to new and existing panel and AST members from its four satellite centres based in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness.

CHS National Team – CHS is the dedicated national body which supports the delivery of National Convener functions related to the recruitment, selection, training, retention and support of Children’s Panel members. At 31 March 2015 we had a staff team of 20 with both permanent and temporary staff, which includes the National Convener/Chief Executive and a senior management team.

National Convener/Chief Executive – the National Convener/Chief Executive of CHS is Boyd McAdam. Boyd’s role as National Convener is set out in the 2011 Act. As the Chief Executive, Boyd has responsibility for leading and managing CHS.

CHS Board – we have a Board comprising of a Chair, Garry Coutts and five members, which sets strategic direction and provides governance.
and challenge to CHS. Through the Board, CHS is accountable to Scottish Ministers.

Our activity

This Annual Report reflects progress against the objectives set out in CHS’ Business Plan 2014/15.

The Board approved the Business Plan for 2014/15 in March 2014. This Business Plan covers the final year of our first Corporate Plan 2012-2015.

The Corporate Plan 2012-15 set out four high level outcomes for the three year period.

These outcomes provided a focus for our activity as an organisation. What we prioritised and what we did, sought to deliver on these outcomes, or secure progress towards achieving them.

The accompanying annual Business Plans laid out in more detail our objectives for each year and the key activities we undertook to achieve them. The business plans also demonstrated how CHS’ outcomes, objectives and activities contributed to the Scottish Government National Outcomes most relevant to CHS.

These figures were accurate as of 31 March 2015.
Our corporate outcomes 2012-15

**Outcome one**
Hearings are centred around the child or young person where their rights and those of their families are respected and upheld

**Outcome two**
Panel members feel valued, respected, supported and well trained to make and record consistent, sound decisions in the best interests of children and young people

**Outcome three**
Outcomes for children and young people in the Children’s Hearings System are improved by working together with partners in a whole systems approach

**Outcome four**
CHS is an effective, efficient and enabling organisation that meets the needs of its stakeholders
Our business objectives 2014/15

Business objective one
Meaningfully involve children and young people in shaping our service to ensure the Children’s Hearings System meets the needs of children, young people and their families

Business objective two
Strengthen support for panel members and AST members

Business objective three
Deliver high quality, consistent training for all panel and AST members

Business objective four
Consolidate relationships with our partners and build relationships with new partners

Business objective five
Embed effective governance and support arrangements across CHS, ASTs and the CHS community
Our vision, mission and values

Vision

Our vision is of a Children’s Hearings System where everyone works together, making sure that all children and young people are cared for and protected, and their views are heard, respected and valued.

Mission

Our mission is to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people in Scotland who may be at risk. We will do this by supporting the Children’s Panel, working with partners and using our influence to drive improvements across the Children’s Hearings System.

Values

Child centred
Making sure everything we do is in the best interests of children and young people.

Respectful
Treating children, young people, their families, partners and each other with care and consideration.

Fair
Making sure that everyone is treated with dignity and according to their individual needs; that our information and services are accessible to all; that we provide a consistent level of service to all.

Creative
Considering innovative and imaginative ways of approaching the issues we face in the work we do.

Challenging
Not being complacent, but questioning ourselves and others to help us improve.

Open
Listening, responding to and learning from feedback; acting honestly; ensuring processes are transparent; sharing information and being accountable for our actions and decisions.
Our achievements

Business objective one

Meaningfully involve children and young people in shaping our service to ensure the Children’s Hearings System meets the needs of children, young people and their families

Involving young people in the work of CHS

CHS is committed to making sure everything we do is in the best interests of children and young people. To do this we sought out and listened to the views of children and young people who have experience of the Children’s Hearings System, to help inform how we planned and delivered our work.

In March 2015 we published our Participation Framework. The framework sets out our commitment to the meaningful involvement of children and young people in shaping our services. It reflects our statutory responsibilities and outlines the key areas where participation will take place.

Over the year we teamed up with Who Cares? Scotland to hold a number of workshops with young people, asking their views on issues ranging from what our priorities should be over the next three years to panel member training and recruitment. We wanted children and young people taking part in our workshops to learn new skills, develop self-confidence and have an opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Over 50 children and young people aged between 11 and 25, who all had experience of the Children’s Hearings System, attended these workshops. The views raised in the workshops informed our Participation Framework.

We also worked with young people to produce two films, Hear from Young People and The Perfect Panel Member. The films were about what makes a good panel member and panel member communication and behaviour in hearings. These films were used to support panel member recruitment and training.

To strengthen our commitment to listen and act on the views and experiences of children and young people, we signed Who Cares? Scotland’s Pledge to Listen, where we promised to put children and young people’s voices at the centre of everything we do.

When we recruited our new National Convener and Chief Executive Boyd McAdam, we convened a young person’s interview panel. Two
young people asked a series of questions designed to assess candidates’ understanding of the Children’s Hearings System from the perspective of a child or young person.

Research with children and young people

In July we published the results of our joint qualitative research project with SCRA. The research was carried out by ScotCen and was conducted shortly after the 2011 Act came into place. The research explored what children, young people, their parents and carers thought of the Children’s Hearings System. It consisted of in-depth interviews with 20 children and young people and 16 parents and carers. The research provided an opportunity to explore where things stood at an important milestone in the life of the Children’s Hearings System. It helped us to understand the extent to which findings of previous research have generated changes in policy and practice which have improved the experiences of those attending hearings.

The report also identified where there is still work to be done. In 2015/16 we will publish a follow up report explaining what we have done so far, and what we still plan to do as a result of what the children, young people, parents and carers have told us.

Young people focused information

We produced our first information leaflet specifically for young people to answer some of the questions they may have about panel members and their role in children’s hearings. This leaflet accompanies the existing suite of SCRA information leaflets available in Hearings Centres.

My CHS experience – Candice’s Story

Candice is a young person who has participated in consultation workshops set up by Who Cares? Scotland and CHS. Candice also helped make the film ‘A Perfect Panel Member’.


“We were asked to share our views and experiences of Children’s Panels. Young people of all ages and various care placements were able to help CHS understand our lives and encourage them to improve the Children’s Hearings System. For some young people being in care is difficult as is attending hearings. We’ve now met a few times and these evenings are fun as well as important and it is great to speak to CHS face to face.

“I was chosen with three other young people to record a short film about what makes a ‘Perfect Panel Member’. This film will be shared with all panel members. This has made me feel very proud and happy that CHS are listening to us care experienced young people. I hope this positive relationship continues!”
Business objective two

Strengthen support for panel members and AST members

Panel member appointment

In 2014 the National Convener appointed 496 new panel members to the national Children’s Panel. These panel members were recruited through the 2013 recruitment campaign and undertook 3 month pre-service training courses starting in January and September 2014.

Number of appointments to the national Children’s Panel in 2014

496

Panel member recruitment 2014

We carried out a national panel member recruitment campaign in the summer of 2014 which attracted almost 1400 applications, the vast majority of which were completed online using our new online recruitment website.

At local level, ASTs held information evenings across the country where prospective panel members had the opportunity to meet with serving panel members and AST members to find out more about being a panel member.

To help raise awareness of the campaign, the National Convener undertook several radio interviews including BBC Radio Scotland’s Morning Call programme and an interview on Moray Firth Radio.

National forums

Throughout the year we held four National Forums for AST members. The forums brought together members of ASTs from across Scotland to discuss and consult on national policy, practice, legislation and planning. They also provided a valuable opportunity for members to network and connect with each other.

Each National Forum had a different theme which shaped presentations and discussions at the event, for example participation with children and young people and panel member training.

Ahead of the National Forum in February 2015, the National Convener issued a consultation paper to Area Conveners which outlined his proposals to optimise the relationship between the CHS National Team and ASTs. The paper explored issues such as arrangements for managing liaison, ensuring high quality of support for Area Conveners.
and AST members and improving communications with the CHS Community as a whole.

In 2015/16 we will review the existing AST network structure to more accurately reflect the leadership role of the Area Conveners and the work of the networks and reference groups.

Feedback from the CHS community

In December 2014 we launched our first annual survey of the CHS Community. The survey was run in-house by CHS and aimed to better understand the volunteer experience so that improvements could be made to volunteer support. We also wanted to ensure that volunteers felt that being part of the CHS Community was a positive experience.

The survey explored topics such as support provided to panel members and AST members at local and national level, organisational culture, training and skills and communication. We received 1,163 responses, a 45% response rate, this was high.

CHS Community Survey Results 2014/15

- Panel members satisfied with local support: 71%
- AST members satisfied with CHS support: 69%
- Panel members satisfied with CHS support: 86%

Response rate to the CHS Community Survey: 45%
Long service awards

On 26 March 2015 Children’s Hearings Scotland hosted a Long Service Awards event to recognise the valued contribution of long serving panel members to the Children’s Hearings System.

61 Panel members with 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40 years' service were invited to receive their awards at an evening reception held in Edinburgh. The event was attended by over 180 people, including Acting Minister for Children and Young People Fiona McLeod MSP, CHS’ National Convener and Chief Executive and Chair of the CHS Board.

Developing the Children’s Hearings Information and Resource Portal (CHIRP)

CHIRP provides online resources and information for the CHS Community. CHS Community members can access practice information and resources, latest news stories and can connect with each other and the CHS National Team through workspaces.

In 2014/15 we developed the new recruitment website and CHIRP module, and delivered training on this for Clerks to the AST. Feedback from users of this new module said it helped the recruitment of new panel members run more smoothly.

Supporting ASTs

Our day to day work with Area Conveners and their Area Support Teams continued, with Panel and Area Support (PAS) Officers from CHS National Team providing support and guidance to Area Conveners and their teams across the country.

Out and about, PAS Officers attended regular AST meetings and panel member events, such as long service dinners or learning and development events.

In the office PAS Officers dealt with individual enquiries from ASTs on issues such as devolved funding, complaints, policy queries and training. They also prepared and supported volunteer reference groups (for more information see page 19).
My CHS experience – Lewis

This is a day in the life of Lewis, a Panel and Area Support Officer in the CHS National Team.

8:30 – Arrive at Ladywell House. Check emails received overnight over an almond croissant. Reply to some questions that have come in following an AST meeting last night in one of my areas.

9:30 – A question in my inbox raised by an Area Convener around an issue they would like discussed at the next Area Convener Liaison Meeting needs direct input from Boyd, the National Convener. Have a chat with him over one of his incredibly strong coffees.

10:00 – The weekly team meeting with all CHS staff, chaired by Boyd. Short and sweet, with updates on complaints handling, a new staff member starting next week and the rollout of the online Information Governance eLearning package. I updated on my meetings the previous week.

10:30 – Recruitment Project meeting. All three Panel and Area Support Officers along with our colleagues from other parts of CHS meet weekly in the run up to the recruitment campaign to discuss progress, allocate tasks and raise any issues that we have.

12:00 – Voicemail waiting when I get out of the meeting. It’s a question from a Clerk about a volunteer requesting a transfer from another area. I give her a call back to answer the question and have a little chat about how things are going more generally. Double check on AST meeting dates too, have it in my diary to attend next week.

12:15 – Lunchtime! Lunchbox salad, more emails at the desk, another strong coffee.

12:45 – Have booked the Boardroom so evict the colleagues that are in there so I can set up for a 1pm Video Conference with volunteer AST members in Shetland. We have these every 4 to 6 weeks just to catch up and hear how things are going.

14:00 – Spend an hour reading and commenting on a new policy that is being drafted before it goes out to the CHS Community for consultation.

15:00 – More emails and calls with AST members and Clerks to the AST.

16:00 – Leave early to head to North Lanarkshire for a panel member recognition event. The current Area Convener is leaving, and the new Area Convener is being introduced to the panel members.

21:00 – Finish up in North Lanarkshire. Nice evening drive home to Edinburgh. Great evening meeting panel and AST members and talking to the new Area Convener about plans to involve care experienced young people in their recruitment and selection this year.
Business objective three

Deliver high quality, consistent training for all panel and AST members

Delivering the pre-service training programme

84% (n: 496) of the 591 new recruits from the autumn 2013 campaign who started pre-service training in 2014 successfully completed the course and were appointed to the national Children’s Panel.

The trainees studied towards a Professional Development Award at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 7, with each volunteer completing six full days of skills-based, face-to-face training over four months. The programme was supported by online blended learning, continuous assessment, observing real hearings and attending local evening events. On successful completion of the pre-service training programme, the trainees were appointed for three years to the Children’s Panel by the National Convener.

In January 2015, 480 new Children’s Panel volunteers, recruited in autumn 2014 (see page 11) began their pre-service training programme. They were due to conclude in spring 2015.

Permanence and Contact training

It is important that panel members regularly update their knowledge and practice skills to meet changing legislation, policy and practice. To meet this need the CHS Training Unit develops and delivers training throughout the year to existing panel members.

In 2014/15 the CHS Training Unit delivered training on Permanence and Contact to 1,866 panel members over 76 sessions. The training involved two sessions which amounted to a day’s training. The aims of the course were to provide panel members with an understanding of the current legal framework and policy developments in relation to permanence and contact; for participants to demonstrate skills in articulating and recording decisions and reasons in relation to contact decisions, develop an awareness of the processes that local authorities will follow in considering applications for permanence orders and demonstrate appropriate skills in articulating and recording advice to the Sheriff.
My CHS experience – Jonathan’s Story

Jonathan is a new panel member who started pre-service training in January 2015.

“There was a buzz and camaraderie about the training days, and a growing sense of the responsibility we were taking on, coupled with admiration for the experienced panel members leading the training groups; we needed to draw on their experience repeatedly. It’s a fine point of judgement, how many days you can impose on volunteer panel members’ and trainees’ time, while requiring us to absorb a great deal of information. The balance was pretty much right.

“Certain sessions could have been better designed, for example on Communication, while other crucial skills – such as extracting information from complex panel papers – should be addressed. The training pack needs some rethinking and editing. Some training visits raised awkward questions which were not answered, but the presentation by care experienced young people was moving and telling in its authenticity.

“All this simply reflects the challenges faced by both trainers and trainees. The last day – with its practice hearings, quiz and ‘presentation’ - was well judged, and it was good to have that final sense of bonding and fellowship.”

Digital skills training

The CHS National Team began a tour of the country delivering local digital skills workshops to panel and AST members. These workshops aimed to provide volunteers with the skills to log in to CHIRP, access and use their email and locate and use information stored within CHIRP.

Training for Panel Practice Advisors (PPAs)

CHS Training Unit initiated delivery of a rolling programme of training for Panel Practice Advisors, one of whose role is to observe panel member practice in hearings to ensure that they meet the necessary standards.

The training was delivered over four days and in 2014/15, 56 participants completed the programme. The course covered recruitment and selection of panel members, practice observation and feedback, reappointment and complaints.

27, 500+ Number of hours of individual learning delivered by the CHS Training Unit
Panel member practice

To help panel members build their knowledge and develop their practice within hearings, we published practice notes throughout the year. Reasons for selecting particular topics for practice notes ranged from changes to legislation or national policy, feedback from partner agencies or panel members frequently raising practice questions.

In 2014/15 we published four practice notes on the following topics: SCRA case sampling on appeals, the role of the panel member in securing permanence for a child away from home, parents and relevant persons and making decisions about contact directions.

We also developed our online practice section of CHIRP, our online information and resource portal, providing a library of practice and policy briefings, news updates and frequently asked questions, and we regularly published our ‘Panel Member Practice Newsletter’.

At the AST National Forum in April 2014, we held a seminar on Solicitors at Hearings which aimed to increase understanding of the role of solicitors attending children’s hearings and to improve panel member confidence in engaging with solicitors in children’s hearings.

We also responded to requests for continuity of panel members in a hearing, of which we received 368 in 2014/15. 317 requests were agreed.

On 1 September 2014 CHS assumed responsibility from the Scottish Government to facilitate the provision of independent reports to children’s hearings. We entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with SCRA and WithScotland (a national resource based at the University of Stirling to work with professionals involved in child and adult protection) to facilitate the provision of these reports. We received 11 requests for reports for 16 children in 2014/15 and commissioned reports for 11 children (eight requests).

A children’s hearing has the power to direct the National Convener to give notice for non-implementation of a duty placed on it by a hearing. In 2014/15 this power was invoked for five children.
Business objective four

Consolidate relationships with our partners and build relationships with new partners

Reference groups

Our three reference groups Training, Retention and Recruitment and Digital, provided an opportunity for the CHS National Team to discuss, consult and make decisions with the wider CHS Community and our partners. These reference groups met regularly to discuss policy and practice at a national level.

Chaired by one of our Area Conveners, the Training Reference Group was established to steer, support and monitor the quality, suitability and progress of the delivery of panel and AST member training. The group also makes recommendations to the National Convener about the development of the national training curriculum. The group consists of panel members and AST members, CHS National Team staff and staff from the CHS Training Unit, and it met throughout 2014/15.

The Retention and Recruitment Reference Group met in 2014/15 to help steer, support and monitor the quality and suitability of the procedures for recruitment and reappointment. The group was responsible for making recommendations to the National Convener about the development of the procedures for recruitment and the reappointment of panel and AST members. The group made significant progress improving and standardising the recruitment process across the country. It also added retention of panel members to its remit and will use data and evidence to inform a panel member retention strategy in 2015/16.

The Digital Reference Group was established in March 2015 to act as a consultation group to discuss the impact that digital technologies have on the Children’s Panel. Group membership was formed with representation of all roles within the CHS Community across the country. The Group began work with the CHS National Team to develop the CHS ICT Strategy, which will ensure that solutions are developed which meet the needs of users.

Partnership working

In 2014/15 we worked closely with our partners to deliver positive change for children and young people in the Children’s Hearings System.

CHS played a significant role in driving forward the work of the Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP). A representative from the CHS National Team chaired a sub-group of the CHIP, Generating Evidence and Promoting Improvement. This group convened to examine the evidence gathered by and about the
Children’s Hearings System and discussed how to make best use of evidence to promote improvement.

CHS and the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) worked in partnership to operate the **Hearings Management group**. The group aimed to make improvements to the operational management and scheduling of children’s hearings.

In 2014/15 the group published revised Hearings Management Practice Guidance and undertook a joint survey with ASTs and SCRA Locality Managers about the implementation of practice guidance. The results demonstrated a good level of awareness of the Hearings Management Practice Guidance along with increased awareness of scheduling of hearings practices among Reporters. They also showed that there was more contact at local level between SCRA and ASTs about issues such as frequency, timing and length of hearing sessions. The group also influenced the development of policies at national level on issues such as recording of hearings decisions, order of hearing papers, communication about hearing sessions by text, panel member continuity and the Digital Strategy for the Children’s Hearings System.

An **Information Governance Group** met for the first time in January 2015 and has representatives from CHS and SCRA. The group looked at common risks and issues related to information governance, for example information security incidents, and improve information governance across both organisations.

The National Convener met regularly with partners in the Children’s Hearings System including local authorities, CoSLA, Scottish Women’s Aid, the Scottish Tribunal Forum, MSPs and the Scottish Human Rights Forum.

CHS has also bolstered its arrangements with the Social Work profession with our tri-partite national liaison arrangement becoming more prominent and influential. This arrangement was built to ensure that the three key pillars of the Children’s Hearings system, namely SCRA, CHS and Local Authorities work across the system, in the best interests of children and young people.

**Influencing policy**

In 2014/15 CHS National Team responded to significant consultations on the Children and Young Peoples Act (2014) and the accompanying draft statutory guidance and Corporate Parenting guidance.

CHS also worked with partners to report to the Education and Culture Committee on progress made since the Committee’s published report on the Inquiry on Taking Children into Care.
My CHS experience – Davie’s story

Davie is the Area Convener for Dumfries and Galloway. He is also chair of the Training Reference Group and a member of the Hearings Management Group.

“I have found the meetings I have attended since becoming an Area Support Team member very rewarding. It has given me the opportunity through discussion and networking to gauge the core values of CHS. Our values as an organisation shape everything we do. CHS’ core values are based on placing our children at the heart of all our activities and services. Through our actions, we will:

- be responsive to the people and children in our communities we serve
- support our panel members to carry out their duties to the best of their ability
- show a strong commitment to equal opportunities and fair treatment for all
- foster good and productive relationships with our stakeholders to the benefit of our children
- value our panel members and support them to achieve their full potential
- use our resources efficiently and responsibly
- strive to achieve quality and continuous improvement in all that we do

“There have been many challenges during the past years but I do believe that by discussion of our concerns in an open and frank manner we have overcome the many hurdles that have been placed in front of us by becoming united through discussion on best practice and each of our experience.

“When I look back I don’t think we could have achieved what we have done without the dialogue and discussion at the various meetings.

“I would be fooling myself if I did not believe that we have still a lot of learning to do and a long way to travel but see no reason why we cannot achieve continual improvement in the Children’s Hearings System.

“I have greatly benefited from being on a number of groups in the CHS and as a result I can better advise and support my panel members.”
Business objective five

**Embed effective governance and support arrangements across CHS, ASTs and the CHS community**

**Information Governance**

CHS is committed to managing information effectively and ensuring that the information we create, hold and share is kept safe at all times. Managing information well, from hearings papers to panel member observation records, helps to facilitate the best outcomes for children, young people and families.

In 2014/15 CHS implemented an Information Governance Framework and accompanying suite of policies and procedures. These information resources covered various aspects of how information should be managed, tailored for each role within the CHS Community.

The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) conducted an Information Risk Review (IRR) in September 2014. The purpose of the IRR was to provide CHS with an independent assessment on whether appropriate Information Governance policies, procedures and controls were in place and being adhered to. It also provided an opportunity for CHS to demonstrate that it takes its data protection responsibilities seriously.

The ICO reported that they saw evidence of good practice and that it was clear to them that CHS had made major headway implementing the appropriate information governance procedures. The ICO highlighted six areas for improvement, including panel member training, that should be implemented as a priority by CHS. CHS accepted these recommendations and developed an action plan to implement them, which included the development of an e-learning training package for all volunteers and enhancing the data protection element pre-service training.

CHS also published our Records Management Plan, which detailed the arrangements in place for managing our records, in line with the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011.

We responded to 58 requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

89% Number of information requests responded to within legislative timescales
Staffing

CHS welcomed a new Chair of the Board, Garry Coutts, and National Convener/Chief Executive, Boyd McAdam, in 2014/15.

We also successfully filled a number of National Team positions, such as IT Officer, Assistant Panel and Area Support Officer, Communications Assistant and Training and Quality Development Officer.

Organisational review

The CHS Board commissioned an independent survey which was carried out with the CHS National Team, CHS Community and local authority Clerks in December 2013. The CHS Board published the results and an improvement action plan in April 2014. The key elements of the action plan were incorporated into the Business Plan 2014/15 and the National Convener reported on progress throughout the year.

The action plan aimed to build on the work that is already underway to communicate better and to deliver improved support to the CHS Community.

A commitment was made, and delivered, to provide regular updates from the CHS Team and the National Convener. The National Convener started an online blog in April 2014. Then in November 2014, the first CHS Team e-newsletter was issued and updated the volunteer CHS Community on the work of the CHS National Team (see Laura’s Story on page 27 for more details).

Setting our priorities for the next three years

CHS began developing our new Corporate Plan for 2015-18 in consultation with the CHS Community.

The CHS Board first confirmed CHS vision. They determined that the high level outcomes remained valid but required some wording changes to make them simpler.

CHS then tested the new wording out with ASTs and presented the whole package for consultation. The consultation ran for eight weeks and respondents were invited to give their views on CHS’ vision, the four proposed outcomes and what they thought CHS should prioritise in the next three years in order to achieve its aims. Partners were also invited to respond to the consultation through our Partner newsletter. CHS received over 400 responses to the consultation.

CHS also carried out two workshops with young people asking them to think about CHS’ Vision, Mission and Values, what the priorities should be for CHS and to tell us what going to a hearing would be like if the priorities were achieved.

Feedback to the consultation and workshops helped shape the Corporate Plan.
Devolved funding

CHS made a commitment to empower ASTs. As part of this in September 2014, CHS allocated a budget to each AST, known as ‘devolved funding’ to enable ASTs to support local learning and development events and volunteer recognition.

In partnership with CHS, each AST agreed their annual local learning and development calendar of activities and events in line with their allocated budget.

Feedback loop

The feedback loop is a National Convener function under the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 requiring the National Convener to report annually to Scottish Ministers and panel members on the implementation of compulsory supervision orders by local authorities. The National Convener may also report on the ways in which the overall wellbeing of children who are subject to the orders has been affected by them.

In 2014/15 CHS reached agreement with SCRA to supply structured information to Local Authorities for the first time, which will begin to allow them to report under the first phase.

Recording and reporting of information is moving forward in a phased way with year on year improvements. Discussion has started with partners on how to improve the flow of information through the Children’s Hearings System to deliver better outcomes for children and young people.

Gathering information is a considerable challenge for local authorities, and the development of the feedback loop should also contribute to better information flowing through the system. Agreement has been reached with the Scottish Government’s data team on a collection method and Local Authorities are preparing their information returns.

Staff survey

In November 2014 we launched an internal CHS Staff People Survey.

The Staff Survey, which runs in over 100 other government organisations, aimed to help us understand what we needed to improve to make CHS a great place to work.

The survey examined what skills and development opportunities might be needed to best serve our panel members. It also explored areas such as inclusion, leadership and change management, resources and
workload and organisational culture. The CHS staff team took forward actions as a result of this survey such as developments to the staff intranet and building of collaborative online workspaces.

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My CHS experience – Laura’s story

Laura is CHS Communications Assistant and joined the National Team in July 2014.

“One of my first big projects soon after starting at CHS was to find a software platform through which to send attractive, personalised newsletters to the CHS Community which would allow us to monitor the success of these communications and improve future newsletters. This involved a lot of research on available programmes, as most are designed for sales and retail purposes, and not for our very specific need for communicating with volunteers.

“Once I found a suitable programme and received the appropriate approval from our finance team, we set up an account and began learning how to use the software. We have now developed a range of templates for different themed newsletters such as 'Panel member practice news' and 'CHS Team News', and have an average open rate of 35-40%. The newsletters are also helping to encourage people into CHIRP, including links to Boyd’s regular blog, CHIRP articles and resources. We can see which articles and links are most popular, and use this information to make future newsletters more interesting and relevant to the CHS Community.”
Our contribution to national priorities

Young Workforce

The Scottish Government has set out a clear commitment to reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021 through a programme of activity to support the development of the young workforce.

In 2014/15 CHS took on a law student for the summer in the role of Practice and Policy Student Placement who was involved in all areas relating to practice and policy within CHS. This post provided an opportunity for a student to gain valuable experience of the Children’s Hearings System, family law and policy within a public body, as well as gain work place skills for the future. See the opposite page for more information.

CHS also worked closely with Who Cares? Scotland and provided children and young people with meaningful opportunities to give their views on the work of CHS (see page 11 for more information). We believe the skills gained by the children and young people through these workshops contribute to them becoming work ready.

My CHS experience – Lauren’s story

Lauren worked as a graduate on a summer placement with CHS before resuming her law studies at Aberdeen University.

“I initially became interested in the Children’s Hearings System after spending my school work experience with SCRA. Child welfare has remained my main area of interest throughout my university career. This placement seemed the perfect way to spend my summer before recommencing my studies. I was excited to learn more about the Children’s Hearings System, particularly how it had changed since the commencement of the 2011 Act, and to gain insight into the world of policy development and implementation.

“My main project of the summer was work surrounding the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. This is an innovative piece of legislation and it has been fascinating to research all the different provisions and their background and examining how they will affect the Children’s Hearings System and CHS.

“Returning to university I have taken with me various skills, knowledge and experiences gained at CHS. In such a short space of time I have gained massive insight into the Children’s Hearings System and the world of policy, one which I could never have experienced through my studies alone. This was a fantastic placement and I am so glad to have had the opportunity to work with CHS.”
We will ask young people how CHS can help to develop their work ready skills at a workshop in early 2016.

**Digital Strategy**

CHS committed to working with our partners to support effective use of digital technology within the Children’s Hearings System.

In partnership with SCRA and the Scottish Government we started work to develop a joint digital strategy and to establish a blueprint for the use of digital technologies in the Children’s Hearings System over the next five years.

**Working together review**

In February 2014 the Scottish Government commissioned an independent review of progressive workplace policies and practices in the public and private sectors in Scotland. The review focused on measures that would optimise the relationships that link trade unions, employers and Government and to make recommendations.

Recommendation 23 requires all public sector bodies to include a section in their annual report on their approach to industrial relations and the impact that has had on workplace and workforce matters.

CHS has a staff group of 21 and is working in partnership with them to develop new policies and procedures. CHS has not recognised a specific trade union to date but is working closely with UNISON. Staff may be represented by Trade Unions at key meetings where appropriate. CHS is working closely with partners in terms of equality, environment and sustainability issues.

**Sustainability**

CHS is committed to meeting the Public Bodies duties set out in part 4 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

In 2015/16 we will implement a working group to produce an Environmental Policy. The working group aim to put in place mechanisms by which to capture a full complement of data and will report on sustainability in more detail in the CHS Annual Report 2015/16.

CHS is based within Ladywell House which has is 4,208 square metres. CHS office space, which is let from National Records Scotland (NRS), is 189 square metres, or 4.49% of the total building space. Overall figures for waste, gas, electricity and water usage were supplied by NRS and CHS has calculated the figures below taking into consideration our square footage.
These figures have been generated using the resource Efficient Scotland Carbon Footprint (CF) Forecast & Projects Tool.

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</table>

*This includes gas and electricity usage.

**Car emissions are generated by using the mileage claimed through CHS National Team online expenses system. The expenses system doesn't currently capture either the fuel type or the engine size of the vehicle used and as such the average petrol car consumption has been used for this measure.

**Action on Biodiversity**

As a public body CHS is required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities.
Our future

In April 2015, CHS produced and published a new Corporate Plan for the three year period covering 2015-18. We set out five outcomes to deliver in this three year period:

**Outcome one:** Hearings are centred around the child or young person and their needs.

**Outcome two:** Our activities are informed by the views and experiences of children and young people.

**Outcome three:** High quality decisions for children and young people referred to a children’s hearing are made consistently across Scotland.

**Outcome four:** Members of the CHS Community feel valued, and are supported and well trained to carry out their role.

**Outcome five:** Children’s Hearings Scotland is an effective and supportive organisation locally and nationally.

The theme for year one of this three year plan is to consolidate our business processes and systems, and enhance and strengthen our relationship with panel and AST members.

We will develop measures of success and strengthen our use of evidence in decision making. Together with our partners we will prepare for the introduction of digital technology in the Children’s Hearings System.

Our Business Plan 2015/16 sets out our objectives for the year ahead:

- **Business objective one:** Voice of the child
  We will take action to improve our services by involving children and young people in how we run Children’s Hearings Scotland.

- **Business objective two:** Strengthening the panel
  We will strengthen and maintain our capacity to service children’s hearings and support panel members.

- **Business objective three:** Supporting decision making
  We will ensure that the same high quality of decisions is made consistently across Scotland by developing and supporting panel member practice.

- **Business objective four:** Sustainable infrastructure
  We will make sure our systems and processes and support mechanisms are robust and understood. We will strengthen the relationships between the CHS National Team, AST and panel members.

- **Business objective five:** Governance
  We will make sure that Children’s Hearings Scotland meets its obligations as a public body and functions well. We will report on our progress to the CHS Community, public and government.
Our key figures

The figures in this section are taken from CHS’ reporting system, Panel Pal, and represent the data held on the system on 31 March 2015. If a panel member resigned on, for example, 28 March 2015 and CHS did not receive notice of the resignation until April 2015, this will not be represented in these figures.

CHS National Team

On 31 March 2015 there were 20 members of staff at CHS National Team including the National Convener/Chief Executive.

The CHS Board consisted of the Chair and five Board members. CHS took Scottish Government’s voluntary pledge to achieve a 50/50 gender split on public, private and third sector boards by 2020. On 31 March 2015 the composition was 4 male: 2 female.

Panel and Area Support Team members

On 31 March 2015 there were 2,373 panel members on the Children’s Panel.

In 2014/15 CHS received 360 resignations from the Children’s Panel. This is an annual turnover of 15%*.

The number of AST members in post on 31 March 2015

As of 31 March 2015 there were 404 AST members across Scotland supporting the Children’s Panel at a local level.

There were 44 AST resignations between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015.

*Turnover is defined as number of leavers divided by number of panel members in place on 31 March 2015.
Corporate information

Information requests

We received 58 requests for information in 2014/15. Ten of these were subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998 and 48 were requests under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

We responded to 89% of these requests within the legislative timescales.

Payment performance

Scottish Government set a target of 95% of invoices to be paid within 10 working days.

In 2014/15 CHS paid 98% of invoices within 10 working days, exceeding the target of 95%.
Hearings information*

- There were 36,904 children's hearings held in Scotland in 2014/15.
- There were 7,864 deferred hearings held in Scotland in 2014/15.
- There were 4,305 pre hearing panels in Scotland in 2014/15.
- There were 860 children with appeal outcomes in 2014/15.

For more information, and figures broken down by local authority area, please see the Scottish Children’s Reporters Administrations Official Statistics: http://www.scra.gov.uk/publications/online_statistical_service.cfm.

*The source of this data is the Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration.
Jargon Buster

**CHS**: in the context of this Business Plan this refers to the CHS National Team.

**CHS Community**: encompasses panel members, AST members, local authority Clerks to the AST, CHS National Team staff and CHS Training Unit staff.

**Children’ Hearings System**: The Children’s Hearing System is the care and justice system for Scotland’s children and young people.

**Area Support Teams (ASTs)**: ASTs are teams of volunteers who support and manage panel members in their local area supported by a clerk who is a local authority employee. There are 22 ASTs across Scotland.

**Area Convener (AC)**: The Area Conveners are members of the AST. They provide leadership and direction to the AST, ensuring that the AST fulfils its responsibilities to support panel members and carries out the key responsibilities outlined previously in this paper.

**CHS Training Unit**: the CHS Training Unit is run in partnership with West Lothian College, with satellite offices based across the country.