

CHS Board Meeting

Wed 17 June 2026, 10:00 - 12:00


Maldron Hotel, Glasgow

Agenda

10:00 - 10:00 **1. Welcome & Apologies**

0 min

verbal Katharina Kasper

 0. Board Meeting Agenda JUNE 26.pdf (1 pages)

10:00 - 10:05 **2. Declarations of Interests**

5 min

verbal Katharina Kasper

To update

10:05 - 10:10 **3. Approval of the Minute from the Meeting on 25 March 2026**

5 min

paper Katharina Kasper

To approve

 3. CHS-2627-01 CHS Board DRAFT Minute 25.03.26.pdf (9 pages)

10:10 - 10:15 **4. Action Log Update**

5 min

paper Katharina Kasper

To update

 4. CHS-2627-02 Board Action Log - MARCH 2026.pdf (1 pages)

10:15 - 10:25 **5. Chair Update**

10 min

verbal Katharina Kasper

To update

10:25 - 10:35 **6. Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Chair Update**

10 min

verbal Sean Austin

To update

10:35 - 10:45 **7. People and Culture Committee (PaCC) Chair Update**

10 min

verbal Katie Docherty

To update

7.1.

10:45 - 11:05 **8. National Convener/CEO Update**

20 min

paper Elliot Jackson

To update

ITEMS FOR NOTING

11:05 - 11:10 **9. 2025-26 Data Summary Report**

5 min

paper Lynne Harrison

To note

9a. CHS-2627-04 25-26 Annual Data Report.pdf (6 pages)

9b CHS-2627-04 Appendix 1 - 2025-26 Annual Data Summary.pdf (1 pages)

11:10 - 11:15 **10. CHS Data Strategy**

5 min

paper Lynne Harrison

To note

10a CHS-2627-05 - Data Strategy Cover Paper.pdf (3 pages)

10b. CHS-2627-05 Appendix 1 CHS Data Strategy DRAFT.pdf (22 pages)

11:15 - 11:20 **11. Volunteer Workforce Sustainability and Recruitment Update**

5 min

paper Joanne O'Leary

To note

11. CHS-2627-06 Volunteer Workforce Sustainability Recruitment Update.pdf (6 pages)

ITEMS FOR UPDATE

11:20 - 11:30 **12. Serious Case Learning Review**

10 min

paper Elliot Jackson

To update

12. CHS-2627-07 Serious Case Learning Review.pdf (7 pages)

11:30 - 11:40 **13. Children's Rights**

10 min

13.1. Children's Participation and Rights Strategy - Annual Update

paper Elliot Jackson

To update

13.1a CHS-2627-08 Children's Participation and Rights Strategy Annual Update.pdf (3 pages)

13.1b CHS-2627-08 Appendix 1 - Participation Review June 2026 Final.pdf (22 pages)

13.1c CHS-2627-08 Appendix 2 - Experts opportunities.pdf (2 pages)

13.1d CHS-2627-08 Appendix 3 - Implementation Plan Overview Status and Update 2025_26.pdf (2 pages)

13.1e CHS-2627-08 Appendix 4 - Three Pillars Implementation Plan June 2026.pdf (1 pages)

13.2. Progressing Children's Rights report

paper Elliot Jackson

To approve

13.2a. CHS-2627-09 Board Paper - Progressing Children's Rights 17062026.pdf (3 pages)

13.2b CHS-2627-09 Appendix 1 CHS Progressing Children's Rights Report 2023-2026.pdf (76 pages)


ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

11:40 - 11:45 14. Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Annual Report

5 min

paper Sean Austin

To approve


-  14a. CHS-2627-10 ARC Annual Report 2025-26_FINAL.pdf (7 pages)
-  14b. CHS-2627-10 Appendix 1 - ARC ToR 2026 APPROVED.pdf (5 pages)

11:45 - 11:50 15. People and Culture Committee (PaCC) Annual Report

5 min

paper Katie Docherty

To approve



-  15a. CHS-2627-11 PaCC Annual Report 2025-26 DRAFT.pdf (4 pages)
-  15b. CHS-2627-11 Appendix 1 PaCC ToR 2026-27 APPROVED.pdf (5 pages)

11:50 - 11:55 16. 2025-26 Annual Accounts Governance Statement

5 min

paper Lynne Harrison

To update

-  16a. CHS-2627-12 2025-26 CHS Annual Accounts Governance Statement Cover Paper.pdf (3 pages)
-  16b. CHS-2627-12 Appendix 1 - 2025-26 CHS Annual Accounts Governance Statement.pdf (6 pages)

11:55 - 12:00 17. AOB

5 min

verbal Katharina Kasper

To update

12:00 - 12:00 18. Date of Next Meeting

0 min

verbal Katharina Kasper

23 September 2026, 10am - 12pm, Thistle House, Edinburgh

BOARD MEETING
17 June 2026
10.00am – 12.00pm, Thistle House/Teams Virtual
AGENDA

	Timings	Item	Lead	Paper Number	Purpose
1.	10:00	Welcome & Apologies	Chair	Verbal	
2.	10:00	Declarations of Interest	Chair	verbal	To update
3.	10:05	Approval of the Minute from the Meeting on 25 March 2026	Chair	CHS-2627-01	To approve
4.	10:10	Action Log Update	Chair	CHS-2627-02	To update
5.	10:15	Chair Update	Chair	verbal	To update
6.	10:25	Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Chair Update	SA	verbal	To update
7.	10:35	People and Culture Committee (PaCC) Chair Update	KD	verbal	To update
8.	10:45	National Convener/CEO Update	EJ	CHS-2627-03	To update
ITEMS FOR NOTING					
9.	11:05	2025-26 Data Summary Report	LH	CHS-2627-04	To note
10.	11:10	CHS Data Strategy	LH	CHS-2627-05	To note
11.	11:15	Volunteer Workforce Sustainability and Recruitment Update	JO	CHS-2627-06	To note
ITEMS FOR UPDATE					
12.	11:20	Serious Case Learning Review	EJ	CHS-2627-07	To update
13.	11:30	Children's Rights			
13.1		• Children's Participation and Rights Strategy – Annual Update	EJ	CHS-2627-08	To update
13.2		• Progressing Children's Rights Report	EJ	CHS-2627-09	To approve
ITEMS FOR APPROVAL					
14.	11:40	Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Annual Report	SA	CHS-2627-10	To approve
15.	11:45	People and Culture Committee (PaCC) Annual Report	KD	CHS-2627-11	To approve
16.	11:50	2025-2026 Annual Accounts Governance Statement	LH	CHS-2627-12	To approve
17.	11:55	AOB	Chair	verbal	To update
18.	12:00	Date of Next Meeting			
		23 September 2026, 10am – 12pm, Conference Room 2, Thistle House, Edinburgh			

Board Meeting
25 March 2026, Thistle House, Edinburgh 10:00 – 12:00

DRAFT MINUTE

Present	Sean Austin (SA) (Chair)	Depute Board Chair/ARC Chair
	Katie Docherty (KD)	Board Member/PaCC Chair
	Claire Kettlewell (CK)	Board Member
	Ronnie Corse (RC)	Board Member
	Robert Dorrian (RD)	Board Member
In Attendance:	Elliot Jackson (EJ)	CEO/National Convener, CHS
	Lynne Harrison (LH)	Director of Business and Finance, CHS
	Carol Wassell (CW)	Director of Positive Outcomes, CHS, (via Microsoft Teams)
	Bethany Cunningham (BC)	Interim Director of Tribunal Delivery, CHS
	Joanne O’Leary (JO)	Director of People and Culture, CHS
	Nick Rougvie (NR)	Sponsor Team Lead, Scottish Government
	Taiba Ali (TA)	Legislation and Policy Leader, Children’s Hearings Sponsor Team, Scottish Government (via Microsoft Teams)
	Oliwia Jankowska (OJ)	CHS Expert by Experience (Observer)
	Laure Hann (LHan)	Administration and Office Coordinator, CHS (Note Taker)
Apologies:	Katharina Kasper (KK)	Board Chair
	Barbara Neil (BN)	Board Member

	Item	Decisions Taken
1.	Welcome & Apologies	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apologies received from KK and BN. The Chair welcomed OJ to the meeting and introductions were made around the table. OJ will be attending the Board meetings going forward as an observer and representative of the CHS Experts by Experience Group. 	
2.	Declaration of Interests	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were no declarations of interest. 	
3.	Approval of the Minute from the Meeting on 28 January 2026	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minute from the meeting on 28 January 2026 was approved as an accurate record, subject to the update on page 1 to remove BN as being in attendance and to change to apologies given. 	Minute Approved
4.	Action Log Update	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action log updated on a separate document with all actions noted as complete. 	
5.	Chair Update	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following a decision by the Board in January 2026, the Board Chair formally raised concerns with the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise. The letter emphasised that the flat cash Grant in Aid settlement for CHS is insufficient to support the organisation’s operational requirements, ongoing reforms, and system leadership. 	The Board formally acknowledges the letter from the minister

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<p>Risks were outlined relating to financial sustainability, workforce stability, delivery confidence, and the governance responsibilities of both the Board and Accountable Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minister responded in February, acknowledging the difficult financial circumstances and reiterating her commitment to CHS's statutory role within Scotland's child welfare sector. Despite recognising CHS's importance, she confirmed that—due to wider budget pressures—no increase in Grant in Aid funding was possible at this time. Continued engagement with government officials was encouraged to support CHS's efforts throughout the financial year. • During a subsequent meeting in late February, the Chair reinforced the need for sustainable funding. The Minister acknowledged the seriousness of the issues but indicated that more resources were unlikely in the current context. With a new Minister expected after the Scottish Parliament election in May 2026, CHS will continue to advocate for appropriate funding and keep the Board informed of any further developments. • The Board formally acknowledges the letter of thanks from the Minister to the Board, circulated as part of the meeting papers. 	
6.	Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Chair Update	
	<p>SA provided a verbal update to the Board from the last ARC meeting on 24 February by highlighting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KD as Chair of the People and Culture Committee (PaCC) attended the meeting due to prior agreement for each committee chair to attend the other committee meeting, once a year. • Audit reports were submitted, with Lisa Duthy (LD), Audit Director with Audit Scotland addressing the funding gap and outlining the work undertaken. • LD provided feedback based on experience with Historic Scotland, highlighting lessons learned and the importance of strong governance and effective leadership. • LD emphasised the necessity for robust spending decisions, comprehensive policies, and controls to ensure compliance, particularly regarding value for money and fraud mitigation. • It was agreed that, should the accountable officer be unavailable for an extended period, the CEO would assume responsibility to maintain operational continuity. • The ARC Terms of Reference and Committee effectiveness were approved; a review will take place in six months. • Audit plans were endorsed, including reports on cyber security. • Quality initiatives and a pilot project for accessing appeals data were discussed to analyse overturned decisions and inform improvements to volunteer training. • It was noted since the meeting that a new audit lead will be appointed, despite requests for continuity given CHS's unique reliance on volunteers. The audit team itself will remain unchanged. • SA will write a formal letter of thanks to LD and highlight the disappointment at lack of continuity. 	<p>Letter of thanks to be sent to LD Audit Scotland.</p>

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

7.	People and Culture Committee (PaCC) Chair Update	
	<p>KD provided a verbal update to the Board from the last PaCC meeting on 10 March and highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board approved a 0.5% pay increase for CHS colleagues, alongside enhanced maternity and paternity pay and continued provision of a wellbeing day. • A report on the People Strategy confirmed that it is progressing as planned. • The Committee reviewed the Employee Engagement Survey action plan, noting the positive impact of leadership development and learning initiatives addressing identified gaps. • A leadership development programme commenced in January 2026, with a follow-up session scheduled for April for senior leadership and management teams. • PaCC Terms of Reference were updated with minimal changes reflecting internal learning. • PaCC approved a proposal to review the committee effectiveness in six months, once new members have attended a few more meetings. • Family Friendly Policy was approved to incorporate statutory updates. • Team Forum update announcing CHAS named charity of the year by the staff group. Team Forum TOR will be submitted to PaCC for noting in a coming meeting. • The Chair thanked both committees for their contributions, and the board noted the update. 	<p>The Board noted the update.</p>
8.	National Convener/CEO Update	
	<p>EJ introduced the paper to the Board for update and highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CCCESP Bill was unanimously approved, marking the most significant legislative change in 55 years for the Hearing System. The Board recognised CHS's influential role in shaping the Bill. CHS is now moving into planning mode follow a discussion with the staff team and the sponsor team which will start in earnest in the summer. The Board formally thanked all contributors and NR thanked the CHS team for the hard work that was done early on to put the Bill in the best position to pass. • Wider stakeholder engagement through the Redesign Board event was held to address the implication of the upcoming changes to the system. Engagement events will be held discussing both legislative and non-legislative aspects of the CCCESP, strengthening sector collaboration and input. • Completion of the Learning Programme and TDM Programme has equipped CHS staff and volunteers with the necessary skills to deliver the reforms outlined in the Bill, ensuring organisational readiness and capacity. Upskilling the senior managers over the next 7 months will also help in creating support to the directors and the Board. • While most amendments to the Bill are manageable, a small number may require further attention. CHS will not need to fundamentally alter 	

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<p>its strategic direction, although some organisations may perceive differing impacts from the Bill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board welcomed provisions supporting CHS’s priorities, particularly regarding chairing and continuity. However, some elements, such as limitations on grounds hearings due to legal technicalities, were not included and may be revisited in future legislation. • The Board noted the update as well as the scale of change underway and the importance of prioritisation. 	The Board noted the update.
9.	2025/2026 Finance Report	
	<p>LH introduced the paper to the Board for noting with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2025/26 funding gap had been fully met through Autumn and Spring Budget Reviews. • Revenue and capital budgets were being managed within approved limits. • A modest underspend is anticipated, primarily due to conducting only one recruitment campaign. The returned portion has been reallocated by the Scottish Government. Final figures will be confirmed upon financial year closure. • No new financial risks had been identified. • The Board welcomed the clarity provided and acknowledged the ongoing need for financial vigilance. 	The Board noted the update.
10.	Q4 Performance Report	
	<p>LH introduced the paper to the Board for noting with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong progress against most milestones within the Business and Corporate Parenting Plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Key achievements in relation to quality, learning, recruitment, and digital transformation. ○ Invoice payment performance below target, driven by system and process constraints. • It was noted that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implementation of a new accounting system in 2026/27 is expected to improve performance in this area. • Some of the data is missing as the report comes before the end of the financial year. CHS is reviewing the reporting structure to ensure that reports come completed after the end of the reporting period. • No major risk identified with a positive picture across the work at CHS, thanks to all the team's contribution. 	The Board noted the update.
11.	Partnership Coordinator Network Paper	
	<p>BC introduced the paper to the Board for noting with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights from the report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The growing maturity and impact of the Partnership Coordinator Network. ○ Evidence of improved consistency in practice across regions. ○ Positive impact of initiatives such as “Chair Greeting the Child”. 	

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introducing panel member profiles for the children and young people attending hearings • The Board welcomed planned work to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce unnecessary hearing deferrals. ○ Strengthen outcomes and experiences for children and families through partnership working. • RC congratulated CHS on the change of culture around the chair greeting the child. The panel member profiles will be implemented in phases with the help of the Experts by Experience to underline their impact on children and young people. 	<p>The Board noted the update.</p>
12.	Panel Member Chairing Policy	
	<p>CW introduced the paper to the Board for noting with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CW outlined expectations for Panel Members (PM) regarding chairing, given reliance on volunteers. While not all PMs wish to chair, CHS policy is clear that chairing is expected; new PMs receive chairing training as part of pre-service training. Chairing training is now integrated throughout pre-service training, not limited to the final sessions. • Additional courses, such as 'Chairing with Confidence', have received positive feedback. Contrary to initial concerns, existing PMs have adapted well to the updated training approach. Untrained existing PMs are required to attend a one-day 'Chairing with Confidence' course. • The policy specifies exceptions for PMs unable to chair, but participation in chairing training remains mandatory, as it provides valuable insight into hearing procedures. • There is a significant culture shift, with experienced chairs supporting new PMs to build confidence and trial chairing parts of hearings. • CW confirmed that not chairing may impact reappointment discussions, even with exemptions. • EJ reported 2,300 PMs, with 1,800 active chairs. He also noted that paid chair roles are expected to influence future chairing policy discussions. Some side panel members excel but may not be comfortable chairing. • EJ noted regional differences in adapting to the policy, but overall implementation has been positive. 	<p>The Board noted the update.</p>
13.	Gender Pay Gap Report	
	<p>JO introduced the paper to the Board for noting with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gender Pay Gap Report was presented, having previously been submitted to the last PACC for approval. Reporting on the gender pay gap is a statutory requirement under the equality duty. • As of February, the organisation employed approximately 109 staff, with a gender breakdown of 74% female and 28% male. The mean gender pay gap has decreased by 0.67%, which is likely attributable to the increase in headcount. • Significant focus has been placed on the recruitment policy to ensure all protected characteristics are considered. Engagement continues with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (EDIWG). 	

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SA highlighted the importance of benchmarking against national data and expressed anticipation for ongoing collaboration with EDIWG, noting that current staff demographics do not fully reflect the Scottish population. EJ observed that the staff gender split closely mirrors that of Panel Members and the volunteer community. Actions: Compare the CHS data with the National data 	<p>Compare with national data</p>
14.	Budget Approval 2026/2027	
	<p>LH introduced the budget to the Board for approval with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board received the budget letter of comfort, which aligns with patterns observed in previous years. This year's correspondence is particularly reassuring and regarded as the most positive to date. Although the UK budget's delay means grant-in-aid figures will be confirmed later, the organisation has successfully communicated its requirements. The Board expressed confidence in ongoing collaboration with the sponsor team, anticipating a secure outcome for the budget. NR confirmed this view, noting that current pressures can be managed effectively. EJ highlighted that further opportunities will be available for the Board to engage with the Sponsor Team regarding budget matters. SA reiterated that all necessary steps have been taken to ensure a favourable funding outcome, with the organisation well positioned to receive grant-in-aid, which constitutes approximately 40% of the agreed budget. While the letter of comfort is expected later, confidence remains high. The Board extended its gratitude to all involved, recognising the efforts of both the Board and the Sponsor Team. The current budget does not account for reform initiatives; further discussions with the sponsor team will be undertaken to address this area. 	<p>The Board approved the budget</p>
15.	Business and Corporate Parenting Plan 26/27	
	<p>LH introduced the plan to the Board for approval with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This marks the final year of the current three-year strategic outlook. The updated plan has been streamlined and is designed to be more flexible and agile, reflecting feedback received from the Board. The three overarching strategic themes remain relevant and unchanged. Four key areas have been identified as priorities within the strategic outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning for Reform Strengthening Leadership Driving Digital Learning Transformation The plan will be continuously reviewed throughout the year to accommodate reform initiatives. Implementation will be monitored, and projects will be prioritised using the MoSCoW (Must, Should, Could, Would) method to ensure a manageable workload and realistic delivery. 	

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministerial approval has already been secured, in advance of the upcoming elections. SA commended the sharper focus of the plan, noting its increasing importance and emphasis on prioritising “the critical few” going forward. 	The Board approved the plan
16.	Equalities Mainstreaming Outcome Report 23/25	
	<p>JO introduced the report to the Board for approval with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For 2025–2029, the organisation’s approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) continues to mature, with EDI principles increasingly integrated throughout CHS as the organisation expands. The EDI Working Group (EDIWG) comprises a diverse cross-section of staff, ensuring robust progression of EDI initiatives. The EDI strategy has been refined to focus on three primary outcomes, providing greater clarity and direction. The report details current EDI activities and outlines the next phase: development of a comprehensive implementation plan, including a time-bound roadmap and project milestones. EDI remains a consistent theme (“golden thread”) across CHS, with visible progress. KD confirmed that PACC has thoroughly reviewed and endorsed the EDI work, noting that CHS is leading the sector in areas such as trauma-informed practice. SA emphasised the importance of establishing clear outcomes and key performance indicators (KPIs), with benchmarking against national data. SA also queried the organisation’s capacity to deliver on the ambitious plan. JO expressed confidence in the capabilities and commitment of the EDIWG, adding that while EDI is very much integrated into our wider People Strategy and the golden thread across our wider organisation, our activities and areas of focus should be proportionate to size, scale and organisational ‘make-up’. Currently, only 45% of Panel Members have responded to the EDI questionnaire; as the organisation grows, further engagement strategies will be developed to improve participation and advance the EDI agenda. Actions: Compare the CHS data with the National data. 	<p>Compare with national data</p> <p>The Board approved the report</p>
17	Update of Financial Regulations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved by ARC in February No more concerns or questions 	The Board approved the document
18	Update of Accounting Policies	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved by ARC in February No more concerns or questions 	The Board approved the document
19.	Update to ARC TOR	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved by ARC in February No more concerns or questions 	The Board approved the document
20.	Update to PACC TOR	

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved by ARC in February • No more concerns or questions 	The Board approved the document
21.	Communications and Engagement Strategy 2026-2029	
	<p>LH introduced the strategy to the Board for approval with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To write this strategy, feedback was gathered from volunteers, TDM, and the National Team, with a particular emphasis on engagement with the rota team. • Ongoing engagement is anticipated to develop over the coming years. • Effective communications will be essential in managing the upcoming reform. • The strategy will be reviewed and aligned with the new strategic outlook once established, ensuring continued relevance. • SA highlighted the importance of utilising multiple communication channels and their impact across CHS. The team encourages openness, making it clear that whistleblowing is welcomed and supported. 	The Board approved the Strategy
22.	CHS/Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) Project	
	<p>CW introduced the project to the Board for approval with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The next phase of the quality strategy is underway, with a self-assessment tool developed for PMs, leveraging stakeholder expertise from various organisations. <p>Regional teams are collaborating with PMs to identify areas for improvement, using 'Promise cards' as part of the process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback will be gathered by June, after which an implementation plan will be proposed with partners, focusing on achievable priorities to lay the groundwork for future initiatives. • The project aims for national consistency and regional enhancements, with TDM expressing enthusiasm for its potential to unify practice across Scotland. • KPIs and outcomes will be established to track progress and ensure measurable improvements. 	<p>The Board approved the plan</p> <p>KPIs to be added</p>
23.	Digital Priorities 26/27	
	<p>LH introduced the report to the Board for approval with the following points highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital priorities for the next 12 months are aligned to the strategic outlook, with a focus on rebalancing resources. • ISO certification has been deferred to December 2026 to accommodate capacity constraints. • AI remains a developing area as CHS explores board training via webinars is under consideration. • An internal Copilot champion group is in place, and the board is keen to leverage available Microsoft tools. Opportunities exist to build on national public service reform and AI tool development. • AI policy guidance from Scottish Government is being monitored and the SCRA AI research noted. • Digital initiatives aim to benefit staff and enhance outcomes for children. 	

Agenda Item 3. CHS-2627-01

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important not to let digital agenda overshadow other priorities; focus remains on improving ways of working and embracing cultural change. SA noted that non-public sector training and webinars would be beneficial to think outside the box. 	The Board approved the plan
24.	AOB	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EJ proposed arranging board development sessions before year-end, covering data, children's rights, AI, and secure care, with a guest speaker on secure care. NR highlighted forthcoming relationship stress tests from the Scottish Government, focusing on potential risks. RC observed that many PMs are unaware of the Board's existence and suggested increased networking to raise visibility. RC noted that onboarding training is effective in equipping board members with essential knowledge and experience. 	
25.	Date of Next Meeting	
	17 th June 2026, 10AM -12 PM, conference Room 2, Thistle House, Edinburgh	

CHS Board Meeting Action Log



Ongoing	0
Overdue	0
Delayed	0
Complete	0
Not Started	0
Closed	0
TOTAL	0

Action No	Paper Ref (not for SLT)	Action Title	Action Details	Date Added	Due Date	Owner	Lead	Update	Status	Completion Date	Additional Comments
19		Letter to Lisa Duthie, Audit Director from Audit Scotland to thank her for her support prior to moving post.	SA will send letter as ARC Chair	25/03/2026	ASAP	SA	SA	Complete			Letter sent 14/4. Auditor General wrote back re disappointment at lack of continuity in support.
20		Gender Pay Gap Report	Compare CHS data with national data	25/03/2026	ASAP		JO	Complete			The board highlighted the importance of considering wider national trends when reviewing CHS's gender pay gap data. We will explore opportunities to incorporate relevant external context, where appropriate to support interpretation of future results
21		Equalities Mainstreaming Outcome Report 2023-2025	Compare CHS data with national data	25/03/2026	ASAP		JO	Complete			The board highlighted the importance of considering wider national trends when reviewing CHS's Equalities Mainstreaming Outcomes data and establishing clear outcomes and key performance indicators (KPIs). We will explore opportunities to incorporate relevant external data/trends, where appropriate to support future reporting.
22		CHS/Public Service Improvement Framework Project	KPIs and outcomes to be established to track progress and ensure measurable improvements.	25/03/2026	ASAP	BC		Not Started			FC emailed Team to follow this action and awaiting reply (4/6)

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	National Convener/Chief Executive Board Update
Responsible Executive:	Elliot Jackson, NC/CEO
Report Author:	Elliot Jackson, NC/CEO

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to ask the Board to note the update from the CHS National Convener/CEO on a range of organisational activity between the last Board in March 2026 and now.</p> <p>The report provides bite sized updates that can be expanded upon during the Board meeting. Other, more detailed reports on Legislative reform, resourcing, digital and strengthening our Volunteer Leadership through the Panel Engagement Leads are covered separately on the agenda.</p>
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the National Convener/CEO in advance of the meeting.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	The Board are asked to note the paper and update provided by the CHS National Convener/CEO.
3.	Key Points for Discussion
3.1	Independent Review of Scotland's Legislative Framework for Children's Care
3.1.1	<p>I have been invited to participate in a Scottish Government sponsored Independent Review of Scotland's Legislative Framework for Children's Care. Scotland's legislative framework affecting children and the care system has developed incrementally over many decades. Whilst this has delivered important protections and duties, it has also resulted in a landscape that is frequently described as complex, fragmented, and difficult to navigate, particularly for children, families, and frontline professionals. The review will explicitly build on, and not duplicate, the substantial body of work already undertaken across Scotland, including work by The Promise Scotland, Social Work Scotland, the judiciary, academics, practitioners, and people with lived care experience.</p> <p>This existing work provides a strong foundation; the purpose of the review is to translate the evidence and insight gathered from that work into clear conclusions and specific recommendations about what changes to the legislative landscape might be required, why they matter, and who they are intended to benefit.</p> <p>The aim is to undertake a comprehensive, independent review of Scotland's legislative framework affecting children, young people, families within the children's care system. This is also to provide Scottish Ministers with clear,</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>evidence-based, and practical recommendations, focused on the structure, coherence, and accessibility of the existing legislative framework, which aim to improve outcomes and experiences for children and families, and support those who work with and alongside them.</p> <p>The review will provide specific recommendations on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether new primary legislation is required to give better effect to existing provisions, and/ or address identified overlaps tensions or contradictions in the • current law, clearly setting out the problem being addressed, who is affected, and why change is needed. • where existing legislation should be amended, consolidated, simplified, restated, modernised, or repealed to resolve identified problems and improve practical operation. • whether the language and structure of the law itself should be modernised so that it can be more readily understood and used by children, families, and non-legal professionals, while maintaining legal certainty; and • what non-legislative action is required alongside, or instead of, legislative change to address practical challenges and improve real-world outcomes. <p>This independent review is led by Professor Kenneth Norrie, working in partnership with the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS). The review will be analytical, evidence-based, and solution-focused. It will not assume that legislative change is always the correct response. It will explicitly identify where legislative change is necessary to resolve problems that cannot be adequately addressed through guidance, practice, or system reform alone. This is a 12-month review, with the final report and recommendations to be presented to Scottish Ministers in February 2027.</p>
3.2	<p>New Ministerial Appointment</p>
3.2.1	<p>Siobhian Brown MSP has been appointed as the new Minister for Children, Young People, & The Promise. She has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for Ayr since the 2021 election, having been re-elected at the 2026 election. Ms Brown was previously a councillor for the Ayr West ward of South Ayrshire Council and also served as Minister for Victims and Community Safety from 2023 until 2026.</p> <p>Together with the CHS Chair, I am scheduled to meet the Minister at the end of June 2026.</p>
3.3	<p>Public Sector Reform (PSR)</p>
3.3.1	<p>I attended an engagement session on 8 June 2026 on the Scottish Government's approach to Public Sector Reform with all other public sector CEOs in Scotland. The meeting was hosted by John Swinney, First Minister, Jenny Gilruth, deputy first minister and cabinet secretary for finance secretary, and Ivan McKee, cabinet secretary for public sector reform.</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

3.3.2	<p>Context</p> <p>The Scottish Government Public Sector Reform strategy [SG website] was published in June 2025. This strategy set out a new vision, mandate, and plan for the creation of a more efficient and effective public sector in Scotland. Ivan McKee, previously minister for public finance, led this work on behalf of the Scottish Government. Following the Scottish Parliamentary election in May 2026, the First Minister has created a new cabinet-level ministerial role to put public sector reform “at the heart of government”. This session, with three of the most senior politicians in Scotland, was a visible demonstration of changing gear in expectations and outcomes.</p>
3.3.3	<p>Key Messages on Public Sector Reform</p> <p>The session gave a clear, deliberate, and unified message from Ministers: Public Service Reform now needs to move at pace. This was not framed as incremental improvement, but as a more fundamental shift in how public services are designed, delivered, and sustained.</p> <p>The First Minister set out a strong challenge to the public sector. Reform is being driven by necessity, with public services needing to better meet people’s needs while also becoming fiscally sustainable. There was a clear recognition that the current system is not delivering effectively enough in some areas, particularly for people experiencing poverty and for economic opportunities such as inward investment.</p> <p>A central message was the need to design services around people, families, communities, and businesses, rather than around existing organisational or institutional boundaries. The First Minister’s challenge to “disrespect boundaries” was a powerful one and reflected the need to move beyond siloed delivery where that gets in the way of better outcomes. The FM emphasised this point, so in our redesign discussion we need to be laser focused on our thinking to ensure that the ‘how’ we do things must place our children and young people at the heart rather than rely on things that we’ve always done. Let’s promote and encourage creative thinking, the active use of data and evidence and finding leading edge technological solutions.</p> <p>There was also a very strong emphasis on pace and simplification. Ministers were clear that government and the wider public sector are still moving too slowly. There was a challenge to question whether every process, check or approval route is genuinely necessary, and to be more explicit about where we can rely on judgement, trust and proportionate risk-taking to deliver better outcomes more quickly.</p> <p>The Deputy First Minister reinforced the severity of the fiscal outlook and the need for cultural change in how people access services. We need to consider how better children, young people and their families can engage with ourselves and SCRA better. She also highlighted the scale of workforce costs and the importance of working with trade unions on the future size and shape of the workforce. Her message to leaders was both supportive and challenging: we</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

should collaborate across boundaries, but also challenge government where needed to help shape reform well.

The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform reinforced the need to move from discussion into delivery. The session created a strong sense that there is now a limited window to shape and demonstrate progress, with the Programme for Government in September an important milestone.

From a CHS, and a wider Public Body perspective, there were several important themes:

- First, we have a significant role to play in bringing forward practical proposals, risks, barriers, and opportunities. The discussion was clear that reform cannot be developed solely from the centre. It needs to draw on operational experience from across the system, including from organisations directly delivering services to the public.
- Second, there is an opportunity to use existing leadership networks and structures, to help gather practical examples of what is getting in the way of reform/redesign and what could be accelerated. This includes issues around governance, accountability, data sharing, digital, shared services, workforce, prevention, and collaboration across organisational boundaries. For me, we will need to discuss these messages with our key partners at SCRA, Social Work and broader CHIP partners to explore further opportunities in the context of a redesigned Hearings System.
- Third, reform will need to be handled with care. Ministers recognised that this agenda creates uncertainty for organisations, staff, and stakeholders. Engagement with staff, trade unions, and wider partners will be essential, but that engagement will need to support progress rather than become another source of delay. The PSR opportunity will be folded into our redesign work, but we may need to think bigger to satisfy the Ministerial appetite. Our staff team are in a good place and understand the opportunity that redesign gives us to make children's lives better. We are already on the PSR path with our thinking.
- Fourth, there was a clear focus on prevention, early intervention, and demand reduction. Reform was not presented simply as a cost-saving exercise. It was framed to improve outcomes, reduce long-term demand and target public resources where they can have the greatest impact, including in relation to child poverty and inequality. Our partners have done really good work on early and effective intervention (EEI) already. We may need to lean into this further. We also need to consider demand reduction and areas such as reducing deferrals and better scheduling of Hearings will allow us to put children and families first whilst reducing rework.
- Fifth, we were encouraged to consider bolder options around financial sustainability, including income generation, and different governance models, while being clear that this is about protecting public value. Financial sustainability is the main area for us. Like all other public bodies, we will need to play our part. We can pick this up as part of our strategic planning discussions for 2027-30.

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>Overall, the message from Ministers was clear: Public Service Reform is now a current and urgent priority. There is permission to think and act more ambitiously, but also an expectation that leaders bring forward practical options, not just commentary.</p> <p>This feels like an important moment for CHS and other public bodies to contribute constructively and visibly to the reform agenda. The challenge now is to turn the clear ministerial steer into practical, deliverable proposals at pace.</p>
3.4	<p>Appointment of Director of Tribunal Delivery</p>
3.4.1	<p>Following a comprehensive recruitment and selection process, with an incredibly high-quality field of applicants and candidates, Stuart Lamberton has been appointed to the post of Director of Tribunal Delivery.</p> <p>Stuart has extensive experience in leadership and working within the children and adult protection sectors. He joins us from the Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership where he led on several Transformation programmes/projects designed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and adults. Stuart will join us from Tuesday 16 June 2026.</p>
3.5	<p>Legislative Update</p>
3.5.1	<p>Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026</p> <p>The <u>Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act</u> passed Stage 3 of the Parliamentary process on 18 March 2026 and received Royal Assent on 16 May. This is a landmark moment for children's services and the redesign of the children's hearings system.</p> <p>The Act will make significant changes to children's services in a range of areas including the introduction of lifelong advocacy, an extension of the right to aftercare support, steps to restrict the profit imperative from residential care providers as well as the redesign of the children's hearings system. For CHS, the introduction of a new enhanced role of chair is the most significant change. The new role will improve consistency and there will be continuity by default, as far as practicable, which is key to improving the outcomes and experiences for children attending hearings.</p> <p>The Practice and Policy Team are working closely with Scottish Government colleagues to plan for these changes. We have extended the placement of a member of the team with the Government and are working with them to assess the changes required in secondary legislation (notably the rewriting of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Rules of Procedure) 2013) to implement the Act effectively. In addition, the Act bestows additional responsibilities on the National Convener. The team are mapping out new guidance and policies that are required to operationalise these responsibilities. As this work evolves, we will work with our Experts by Experience to help co-produce key elements of these new provisions.</p> <p>As the Act has only just been passed, the Scottish Government will be working to produce an implementation plan and briefing Siobhian Brown, the new Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise to firm up a</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>commencement schedule. We anticipate that 2026/27 will be a preparatory year, with the practice and operational infrastructure being refined in 2027/28, in preparation for commencement in 2028/29. This will help us Keep The Promise by 2030. Further and regular updates will be provided to the CHS Board.</p>
3.5.2	<p>Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024</p> <p>The Scottish Government have now confirmed that Part 1 of the Act, raising the maximum age of referral to the Principal Reporter, will commence on the 1 March 2027. National work is now gathering momentum to ensure system readiness. The work is overseen by the national Implementation and Resourcing group and a number of sub-groups which CHS is actively engaged in. Key policy and practice areas such as guidance and criteria for the use of the new prohibitions, the definition of psychological harm, and guidance on non-compliance is now being refined in preparation for commencement.</p> <p>In late June, our Learning Team will release two new mandatory learning modules to the volunteer community. This will support volunteers to build their skills and understanding of the legislative changes as well as their understanding of the needs of older children. These resources were designed with the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) and include input from young people with lived experience of the children's hearings system. CHS is also planning a monthly CHS podcast series with inputs from a range of external partners.</p> <p>CHS has had to remain agile to respond to the shifting timescales for commencement, but we are well prepared for commencement. The work is overseen by an internal working group to ensure we are ready in relation to capacity, standards, and practice knowledge. The Practice and Procedure Manual will be updated by the end of December 2026 to reflect the changes. Having done much of the groundwork CHS is well prepared to implement the requirements of the Act and will provide further updates to the CHS Board.</p>
3.6	<p>Learning Programme Update</p>
3.6.1	<p>Facilitator Engagement</p> <p>We have hosted three sessions across the country and engaged with half of our facilitators so far. The session split into two categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservice, we asked <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What's working well, what could be better? ○ We heard that embedding chair training and increasing the amount of practice is going well. The facilitators felt that our recruitment process is bringing in the right people and we're building on existing skills and knowledge as well as being a good values fit. The facilitators appreciate working as part of team together with the Training Delivery Partner. ○ The facilitators told us that our Hearing Information Packs could be more realistic, they appreciate the improvements from last year but feel there is more work to be done to increase the level of challenge within them. They also told us they want there to be a better balance between practicing which they are part of through focused group work and

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>plenaries that are hosted by the Training Delivery Partner. Finally, our Facilitators are keen on receiving feedback on their skills, we see this as a desire from them to continue to develop in their role as facilitators and aligns to what we hear from Panel Members who also like the reassurance they receive from PPA observations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the Facilitator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It has been a couple of years since we refreshed our facilitator role profile and were keen to involve our Facilitators in redefining expectations. To do this they reviewed the role profile, adjusted and added it to it were necessary. This includes the expectation for them to prepare appropriately and not assume the materials are the same as their previous workshop, their feedback is valued by the Learning Team but is not a full picture of the trainee's capability and therefore they shouldn't be making judgements about people's ability. Finally, when they have concerns about a trainee's wellbeing or practice in training this needs to be reported to the Training Delivery Partner in a timing manner and kept confidential, allowing us to step in and offer support through existing escalation processes. <p>Overall, the sessions were warmly received with Facilitators appreciating the opportunity to come together and share their experiences with each other. Agreed next steps include forming working groups to support the redesign of Preservice, continuous improvement of Chairing with Confidence and skills practice for Facilitators. We also have a digital session arranged to engage with those unavailable for our in-person sessions.</p>
3.6.2	<p>Preservice – Pivoting to Digital</p> <p>All current Preservice activity has been mapped out and presents an opportunity to improve our digital offering, much of our workshop preparation involves reading the Practice and Procedure Manual but feedback through our self-evaluations and Facilitators makes it clear that we could be bringing this to life and helping trainees accelerate understanding in a better way. Our Panel Member role broadly splits into two key categories practice knowledge and trauma informed communication. Increasing our digital blend will allow us to use digital interventions to build practice knowledge, using scenario-based activities we can create ongoing robust assessment, allowing us to maximise our in person learning time to focus on building on trauma informed communication capability. Bringing in a skilled Digital Learning Designer supports us to fast-track our digital design while we continue to engage our volunteer Facilitators to support the redesign and capitalise on the expertise of our internal subject matter experts to create improved content for our community.</p>
3.6.3	<p>Care and Justice Learning Programme</p> <p>This month we will launch the next phase of our Care and Justice learning programme, building on the work started in 2024. We've continued our partnership with CYCJ who have provided expertise throughout the design process to create two more eLearning modules. The first module focuses on the technical changes of the legislation including changes to legal tests and the introduction of new measures Panel Members can implement as part of an</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>order. The second focuses on the welfare needs of 16- and 17-year-olds, including insecure housing, poverty and the risks of exploitation so that Panel Members can recognise the signs a young person is at risk and the measures that can be put in place to support them. This will be mandatory learning, and a follow up process has been agreed with the Tribunal Delivery and Resource Allocation Teams. The eLearning modules will be supported by additional multi-media resources bringing expert voices to our volunteer community.</p>
3.7	<p>The Future of Secure Care Consultation Response</p>
3.7.1	<p>CHS submitted a <u>response</u> to <u>the Scottish Government's consultation</u> on the future of secure care and the single point of contact for victims in the Children's Hearings System.</p> <p>The Scottish Government has made a commitment to improve the future provision of secure care in Scotland. This follows the publication of the 'Reimagining Secure Care' report by CYCJ in late 2024, and the Scottish Government's response to that report in June 2025.</p> <p>The decision whether or not to authorise a placement for a child or young person in secure accommodation is a significant decision and one which is often made by Panel Members at a children's hearing. In responding to the consultation, CHS has stressed the importance of a whole system approach which is needed for the small number of children that require secure care. Services must be multi-disciplinary, and be able to follow the child, from secure care services into the community. The provisions in the Children (Care and Justice) Act promote a therapeutic focus for children that need to have their liberty restricted to protect themselves, or others. Revised guidance will be issued to Panel Members in the Practice Procedural Manual update this year.</p>
3.8	<p>Digital and Data Update</p>
3.8.1	<p>We have worked with Data Orchard, a renowned social enterprise, to develop a CHS data strategy that will help us capture and utilise data to evidence, improving the work we do. This is included in Board papers today for noting.</p> <p>We have also embarked on a digital rebalancing project with SCRA that will allow CHS to autonomously access data within CSAS, transforming our ability to bring evidence, evaluation and quality assurance into our work and supporting more person-centred rota scheduling. This work has been progressing at pace, demonstrating a mature and collaborative delivery model between SCRA, CHS and Leidos, supported by the secondment of the CHS Data Analyst into SCRA. This has improved requirements shaping, governance confidence and operational trust across the programme.</p> <p>Across the first phase of the programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tranche 1 has successfully delivered a secure and separated CHS data the architectural foundations for greater data segregation, interoperability, and organisational autonomy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ separation of Azure SQL pools for CHS and SCRA datasets. ○ revised ETL and integration configurations. ○ replication and synchronisation of volunteer contact data. ○ secure administrative access arrangements; and

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supporting infrastructure and release governance. <p>This begins to establish a more mature interoperability model between the shared CSAS platform and CHS's developing and increasingly independent CRM capability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tranche 2 has focused on practical operational improvements across scheduling, rota management, hearing information exchange, and related service improvements and enables operational efficiency; increased rota quality; visibility of hearing information; and an enhanced user experience for operational staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ hearing information - type and times of hearings ○ rota and scheduling improvements. ○ improved warning and validation mechanisms. ○ enhancements around chair qualification and exemption management. ○ synchronisation improvements; and ○ operational user improvements for frontline administrative teams. ● Tranche 3 has demonstrated credible proof-of-concept capability in the application of AI-assisted quality insight within the Children's Hearings System. <p>Working with Brightwire we have delivered an improved Panel Member application and shortlisting process which will be live for the Autumn recruitment campaign. This is being re-cycled to apply to PPA and CHS National Team recruitment, driving the value from investment in this development. Discovery work in two further development areas has commenced: improvement of PPA Observation tools, processes and overall experience and development of a digital Practice and Procedure Manual.</p>
3.9	ISO 27001 Update
3.9.1	<p>We have continued to progress our journey towards ISO 27001 certification, with key refinements to our delivery approach and timeline. Certification is now targeted for December 2026, rather than May 2026. This revised timeline enables us to go beyond minimum requirements and focus on establishing a robust, sustainable Information Security Management System (ISMS), supporting continuous improvement without overextending internal resources.</p> <p>The core requirements are expected to be complete by late Autumn 2026, followed by a 2–3-month period of operating a business-as-usual (BAU) ISMS ahead of the final Stage 2 assessment. This approach supports a smoother transition into BAU operations post-certification, with processes embedded, tested, and evidenced in advance of audit.</p> <p>To support delivery, monthly progress reporting is now in place to maintain assurance and visibility at SLT level. Ongoing consultancy support and ad hoc internal auditing continue with Sapphire on at least a monthly basis. Remediation activity remains led across Information Governance, Digital, and Corporate Governance teams, focusing on policy, process, and procedure development, control embedding, and ensuring audit-ready evidence.</p> <p>The CHS Board is also within scope of the ISO 27001 certification. A further update will follow to ensure Board members are aware of relevant security requirements. This will not materially change day-to-day activity; however, the</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>standard requires all in-scope colleagues to be informed, be comfortable in relation to their role, and for this to be evidenced.</p> <p>Key milestones include internal audits and an initial external audit in October 2026, followed by the final Stage 2 external audit in December 2026, when certification will be assessed.</p>
3.10	Experts by Experience Update
3.10.1	<p>So far in 2026 our Experts have been involved in interview panels, worked on two animations, started consultation work on hearings redesign, and took part in a joint residential trip with Our Hearings Our Voice. The Participation Team have recently welcomed our new Participation Advisor, and we have events lined up over the summer to build relationships. Looking forward our Experts have identified three areas of focus for the following year; hearings redesign, influencing panel community knowledge and behaviour and further embedding within CHS.</p> <p>Next steps are for our Experts to work with the CHS Board and SLT as well as our regional teams to engage with other groups of children and young people to influence hearings redesign and decision making. We will also be recruiting a further 10 Experts to strengthen our commitment to including the voice of lived experience in everything we do at CHS.</p>
3.11	Communications Forward Look
3.11.1	<p>Planning for Reform</p> <p>The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill has now received Royal Assent, making it an Act of Parliament. When these changes come into place they will help deliver the Promise, introducing significant changes to the hearings system for Scotland's children. The Act is unlikely to come into effect before 2028/29 so there is time for CHS to consider our implementation approach and ensure that we get it right for children and for our Panel Members.</p> <p>We are working with our Experts by Experience to co-design a Participation Charter that will define how we ensure that the voice of lived experience is at the heart of any changes we make. Alongside this we will be seeking the views of the CHS community over the summer to help us design what "good community engagement" looks like in practice.</p> <p>CHS has begun developing our planning approach for the next three years. This will bring together the totality of changes we need to make over the next three years, including but not limited to the reform of the children's hearings system.</p>
3.11.2	<p>Digital Reform</p> <p>Investment in re-balancing as identified in 3.7 will help us improve how we collect and use data, enabling evidence-based decisions and driving improvement. The first stage has been successfully completed and CHS now has the infrastructure in place to allow us direct access to our own data within CSAS. Over the next few months, we will integrate our systems to allow this to happen.</p>

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<p>Alongside this change, we have also introduced some practical system improvements which will make scheduling more person centred, information sharing easier, and improve our recruitment tools. Together these will save time, improve quality, and make day-to-day tasks simpler for everyone.</p>
3.11.3	<p>Learning for the Future</p> <p>The new Learning Team is now in place, and we have completed a 'lessons learned' exercise to inform our approach to change in the future. A Learning Transformational Manager has been appointed to work with the new team to develop a learning programme that will meet our future needs.</p>
3.11.4	<p>Strengthening Leadership Capacity</p> <p>We continue to strengthen leadership capacity within the organisation. In April, SLT and senior managers participated in a coaching development session, designed to embed a stronger coaching culture, supporting more effective leadership and decision making. Building on this, senior managers held a leading role in a strategic planning session, exploring some of the big questions and choices we will need to answer as we begin planning for the future.</p>
3.11.5	<p>Post Election Relationship Building</p> <p>The election has led to changes in ministerial responsibilities including the appointment of Siobhian Brown as Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise. A letter has been sent from the National Convenor with a request for a meeting.</p>
4.	<p>Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook</p>
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS. • Objective 2 - Quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people. • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Objective 2 - We will become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. • Objective 3 - We will make effective use of technology, capitalising on its potential for enhancing performance and delivering efficiency. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Implement a three-year People Strategy that attracts and retains top talent and committed individuals and drives the success and sustainability of the organisation.

Agenda Item 8. CHS-2627-03

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective 2 - The organisational design remains agile, adaptable, and responsive to support ongoing organisational transformation. Objective 3 - To become a more inclusive and diverse organisation and create a culture where everyone feels valued, included, and engaged. Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	No risks identified in relation to the paper. Any risk in relation to any specific areas detailed in the paper have been considered and reflected in the CHS Strategic Risk Register.
6.	Risk Register
6.1	As above.
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
7.1	Not required for this specific paper, however any requirements for an impact assessment in relation to the individual areas outlined in the paper will have been considered separately.
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	Not required for this specific paper, however any requirements for engagement in relation to the individual areas outlined in the paper will have been considered separately.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	None in relation to this specific paper, however any resource implication in relation to the individual areas outlined in the paper will have been considered separately.
10.	Appendices
	None

Agenda Item 9a CHS-2627-04

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Annual Data Summary
Responsible Executive:	Lynne Harrison, Director of Business and Finance
Report Author:	Elaine Gray, Data & Performance Analyst

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1.	The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an overview of the annual data.
1.2.	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended the Board note the annual data report.
3.	Key Points for Discussion
3.1.	<p>Disclaimer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much of the data reported here are live operational data and subject to change. • Data are to 31/03/26 unless otherwise specified. • Annual changes are since 24/25 Q4-end. • “Active” is defined as being active on rota in the past 3 months or assigned a session/observation in future; for Chairs it does not mean they Chaired.
3.2.	<p>Panel Member numbers annually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,027 (+73) Panel Members; average 2,133 per month. This is an increase of an average 61 per month compared to 24/25. • 1,768 (+123) active Panel Members = 87.2% (+3.0%); average 1,860 (87.1%) per month. This is a decrease of 0.3% per month compared to 24/25. • The increase in Panel Members and active Panel Members at year-end is likely due to 553 Panel Members being appointed in 2025. • See trends in Figure 1 in the Data Summary (Appendix 1).
3.3.	<p>Panel Member target and forecast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current Panel Member target is 2,170 (in preparation for the Care and Justice Act) with an actual of 2,027 = 93.4% (-6.4% since Q3-end). • The Panel Member forecast can be seen in Figure 2 of the Data Summary (Appendix 1). • Compared to the forecast from Q3, the number of Panel Members is 38 lower than predicted; this is due to a higher end of service rate than anticipated, impacted by 25/26 being a large volume year for reappointment. • Figure 2 plots a target of 300 appointments for the next campaign (Autumn 2026, appointments in ~April 2027). • The forecast is based on the assumption that CHS will begin to see an increase in Hearings as a result of the Care and Justice Act in April 2027, but the numbers will steadily increase rather than a sharp uptake.

Agenda Item 9a CHS-2627-04

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Panel Member forecast indicates that we are currently on track to be able to support implementation of the Care and Justice Act. This is subject to recruitment intake through 26/27 e.g. 300 appointments from the next campaign, assumptions on implementation dates, and data assumptions made in the forecast, such as ends of service. • However, close monitoring of capacity will continue during 2027 while Care and Justice cases increases at a time when volunteer numbers will decrease (through typical ends of service).
3.4.	<p>Chair numbers annually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,468 Chairs (+216) = 72.4% (+8.3%) of Panel Members are Chair-qualified. • There was an average 1,431 Chairs per month, an increase of 214 since 24/25. • 1,341 active Chairs (+216) = 75.8% (+7.5%) of active Panel Members are Chair-qualified (the active % increases when non-Chair-Qualified active Panel Members end service). • The percentage has been positively impacted from the number of non-Chairs ending service. • There was an average 1,317 active Chairs active per month, an increase of 192 since 24/25. • See trends in Figure 1 in the Data Summary (Appendix 1). • Of the Panel Members who are not Chair-qualified (27.6%), half were appointed less than 12 months ago, and half have been in service more than a year. • Of the Panel Members who were appointed in 2025 and still in service, 217 are listed as Chair-qualified and 161 have chaired at least one slot (60 have chaired only once). • Of the 217 who were appointed in 2025 and listed as Chair-qualified, 146 qualified in the first month and 14 took between 1 and 6 months, and 57 took between 6 and 12 months. It will therefore take more than a year for the other 287 to become Chair-qualified, if they do (excluding those who have ended service). • From becoming Chair-qualified to chairing, it is taking an average (mean and median) 3-4 months to chair their first slot. • The impact of incorporating Chair-training into pre-service is yet to be fully realised. From the two new cohorts who completed Chair-training in pre-service, it is still taking at least a year for the majority of Panel Members to become Chair-qualified and several months after becoming Chair-qualified to chair their first slot.
3.5.	<p>Chair target and forecast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The target provided in the Performance Overview in the Data Summary (Appendix 1) is the KPI, which states 75% of all active and eligible Panel Members (i.e. not exempt or on a leave of absence) will be Chair-qualified. • The target, in terms of the actual number, changes as the number of active and eligible Panel Members changes. It should be noted that this is not a reliable KPI due to the fluctuation in percentage when Panel Members ends of service. • The number of active and eligible Panel Members is 1,716 and the number of active and eligible Chairs is 1,341 = 78.1% (+6.2% since Q3) against the target of 75%.

Agenda Item 9a CHS-2627-04

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the past quarter, an increase of 23 active and eligible Panel Members was recorded. Over the past 8 months (since recording started), an increase of 63 active and eligible Chairs was recorded. • The Chair forecast can be seen in Figure 3 of the Data Summary (Appendix 1). • The forecast is based on recent past trends but there is not yet enough data for this to be reliable. As new data is collected, these trends will be updated. • Compared to the forecast from Q3, the number of Chairs is 71 lower than predicted. The previous forecast overestimated how many new Chairs there would be, so it has been lowered to show the current trend, which is a plateau. The overestimation came from forecasting more of the 2025 appointees becoming Chair-qualified this year. • It is worth noting that the number of Chairs does not directly translate to the number of Panel Members chairing Hearing slots, therefore, a higher number of qualified Chairs may not necessarily ease Chairing capacity unless they actively Chair Hearings slots. • It is recommended a KPI be set to monitor the number of Panel Members who are chairing.
3.6.	<p>Panel Member recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were two appointment periods in 2025: late March and early May (cohort 1 from the autumn 2024 campaign) and early July and August (cohort 2 from the spring 2025 campaign). • The appointment rates from those recommended were 75.8% for cohort 1 and 72.8% for cohort 2. • The previous two campaigns saw 84.7% and 83.5% be appointed, so there has been a noticeable decrease in those successfully completing pre-service. The decrease aligns to the extension of pre-service to 7 days and the team are looking at reasons individuals did not complete pre-service. The team are considering digitisation of elements and the support on offer to trainees to support a reduction in this time commitment moving forward. • The KPI is for 90% to be appointed, so this has not been met for cohorts 1 or 2.
3.7.	<p>Panel Member retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81.9% of Panel Members were retained in the year, meaning 18.1% (448) left (for all possible reasons). • 24/25 saw 83.6% retained, so there has been a decrease of 1.7% in Panel Member retention. • The KPI is for 85% to be retained, so this has not been met by 3.1%. • The high number of people due reappointment in 25/26 has impacted how many people left. The number of resignations in 25/26 is lower than 24/25, but the number leaving at reappointment was higher than expected. • Analysis has been carried out on the end of service reasons, collected via CSAS and exit interviews, and is reported separately in another paper focused on ends of service. The primary reasons for Panel Members ending service are those CHS sees each year: personal, family, work, and time/other commitments.

Agenda Item 9a CHS-2627-04

3.8.	<p>Panel Member reappointment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the second year the new reappointment KPI has been in place; this KPI counts all Panel Members who were due reappointment in 25/26, including those who left during the three-year appointment period. • In 25/26, 54.7% (819) of Panel Members due reappointment were reappointed, meaning 45.3% were not reappointed. • 24/25 saw 43.5% reappointed, so there has been an increase of 11.3% in Panel Member reappointment. • It is believed that 24/25 saw a lower rate of reappointments as it included those who were appointed during Covid but never started service. The 25/26 data is likely more reflective of the percentage of reappointments CHS should expect to see each year. • The KPI is for 55% to be reappointed so this has nearly been met.
3.9.	<p>PPA numbers annually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 118 (-3) PPAs; there were an average 124 PPAs per month. This is a decrease of an average 3 PPAs per month since 24/25. • 82 (+1) active PPAs = 69.5% (+2.5%). There was a monthly average of 85 active PPAs in 25/26, this is a decrease of 5 per month since 24/25.
3.10.	<p>PPA recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 new PPAs were appointed in 2025 as a result of a targeted, local, campaign in June 2025. • This is fewer than those who left, resulting in a lower number at year-end. • A further PPA recruitment campaign was held in February-March 2026 and appointments are still to be confirmed. • The timing of the PPA recruitment campaign was to enable improvements to induction, training, and observation guidance, to help improve experience and potentially retention.
3.11.	<p>PPA retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 25/26, 78.3% of PPAs were retained in the year, meaning 21.7% (32) left (for all possible reasons). • In 24/25, 76.6% PPAs were retained, so there has been an increase of 1.7% in PPA retention. • Analysis has been carried out on the end of service reasons, collected via CSAS, and is reported separately in another paper focused on ends of service. The primary reasons for PPAs ending service include those CHS typically sees each year: personal, work, and time/other commitments.
3.12.	<p>PPA reappointment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the second year the reappointment data has been analysed for whole the three-year appointment period. • 44.4% (28) of PPAs due reappointment were reappointed. • 24/25 saw 33.7% reappointed, so there has been an increase of 10.7% in PPA reappointment.

Agenda Item 9a CHS-2627-04

<p>3.13.</p>	<p>Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the number of active and eligible (not LOA and appointed more than 3 months ago) Panel Members at the end of Q4, 76.8% had been observed in 25/26, an increase of 0.6% since 24/25. • There is no KPI for this measure but CHS's operational policy states the aim is for Panel Members to be observed twice during the year. • There were two recruitment campaigns in 2025, which means some of the PPAs' time would have been given to recruitment activities rather than observations, and PPAs can also be involved in reappointments, impacting how many observations could take place. Additionally, the trainees, as part of their training, would have been given preference to observe over the PPAs, resulting in fewer PPAs being able to observe. • Work is ongoing to develop the practice guidance to improve consistency, and the observation form and updated operational guidance are still to be progressed although have been planned and will be sequenced around dependencies. • The team are reviewing PPA figures following another PPA recruitment campaign in 2026.
<p>3.14.</p>	<p>Volunteer demographics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been only slight changes in the volunteer demographic information over the past year despite a high number of volunteers leaving and a high number being appointed. The demographics remaining unchanged suggests those who left and those who were appointed had similar demographics. • Length of service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Panel Members: mean of 6.3 (-0.3) years / median of 3.7 (0.0) years. ○ PPAs: mean of 3.7 (+0.2) years / median of 3.0 (+0.1) years. • Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Panel Members: 72.4% (0.0%) female / 27.4% (+0.4%) male / non-binary or blank <1% (-0.4%). ○ PPAs: 61.9% (+1.5%) female / 26.3% (-1.0%) male / non-binary or blank 11.9% (-0.5%). • Age: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Panel Members: mean of 54.9 (+0.1) years / median of 57.2 (+0.3) years. ○ PPAs: mean of 59.9 (+0.4) years / median of 63.0 (+0.7) years. • Previous experience of the children's hearing system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This data shows the number of volunteers who have declared previous experience of the hearing system; experience type (i.e. lived/as a previous volunteer/worked in the sector) is not defined in the question. ○ Panel Members: 5.4% (-0.1%). ○ PPAs: 13.6% (+0.9%).
<p>3.15.</p>	<p>Compulsory Supervision Order Implementation Breaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Compulsory Supervision Order implementation breaches were reported in 25/26. One was deemed to not meet criteria and the other was resolved at Stage 1.

Agenda Item 9a CHS-2627-04

4.	Next Steps
4.1	<p>The following KPIs will be set for 2026/27 to ensure reporting continues to be relevant/meaningful moving forward:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. % of total Panel Members are chair trained 2. monitor length of time to become Chair-qualified 3. monitor length of time from becoming Chair-qualified to chairing 4. monitor the number of Panel Members who are chairing 5. lowering the KPI on Panel Member recruitment to better reflect current trends 6. PPA retention 7. PPA reappointment 8. Panel Member observations
4.2	<p>Further analysis will be undertaken to better understand the data in relation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pathway and time taken to actively Chair • Retention during pre-service <p>To help inform improved offers for future trainees and new Panel Members.</p>
4.	Key Risks
4.1	None.
5.	Risk Register
5.1	There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.
6.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
6.1	Impact assessment not required.
7.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
7.1	There is no requirement for engagement and consultation in relation to this paper.
8.	Resource Implications
8.1	There is no specific resource implication associated with this paper.
9.	Appendices
9.1	Appendix A: Data Summary: 2025-26 annual data

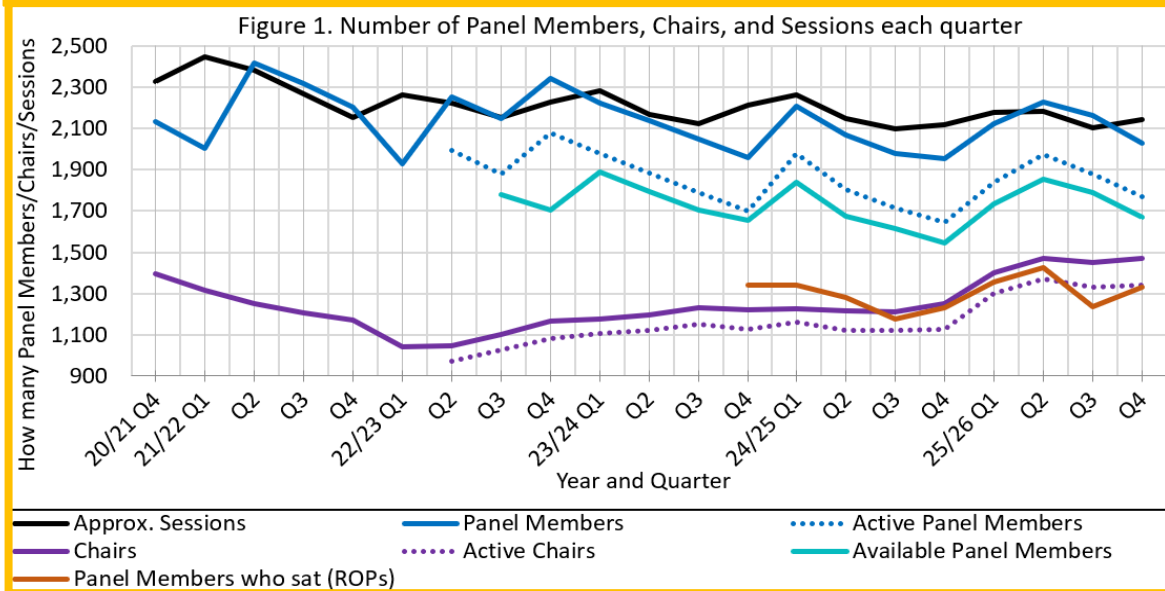
Volunteer data (changes vs. 24/25 Q4-end)

	PMs	Active PMs	Chairs	Active Chairs	PPAs	Active PPAs
Total	2,027	1,768	1,468	1,341	118	82
Change	+73	+123	+216	+216	-3	+1

Demographics	PMs	Change	PPAs/AST	Change
Mean length of service (yrs)	6.3	-0.3	3.7	+0.2
Median length of service (yrs)	3.7	+0.1	3.0	+0.1
% Female	72.4%	+0.0%	61.9%	+1.5%
% Male	27.4%	+0.4%	26.3%	-1.0%
% Other genders or no data	<1%	-0.4%	11.9%	-0.5%
Mean age (yrs)	54.9	+0.1	59.9	+0.4
Median age (yrs)	57.2	+0.3	63.0	+0.7
% has exp. of hearings system	5.4%	-0.1%	13.6%	+0.9%

Demographics have changed only slightly despite a high number of volunteers leaving and a high number of new volunteers being appointed. This suggests the demographics of those who left and those who were appointed are similar.

Trends over time



Sessions
Number of rota sessions remains similar to 24/25.

Definition of active = on rota in the last 3 months or scheduled for future.

CSO breaches 25/26: 2 breaches reported. 1 did not meet criteria and 1 resolved at Stage 1.

Performance overview

PMs against forecasted PM target

Active eligible chairs against active eligible PMs

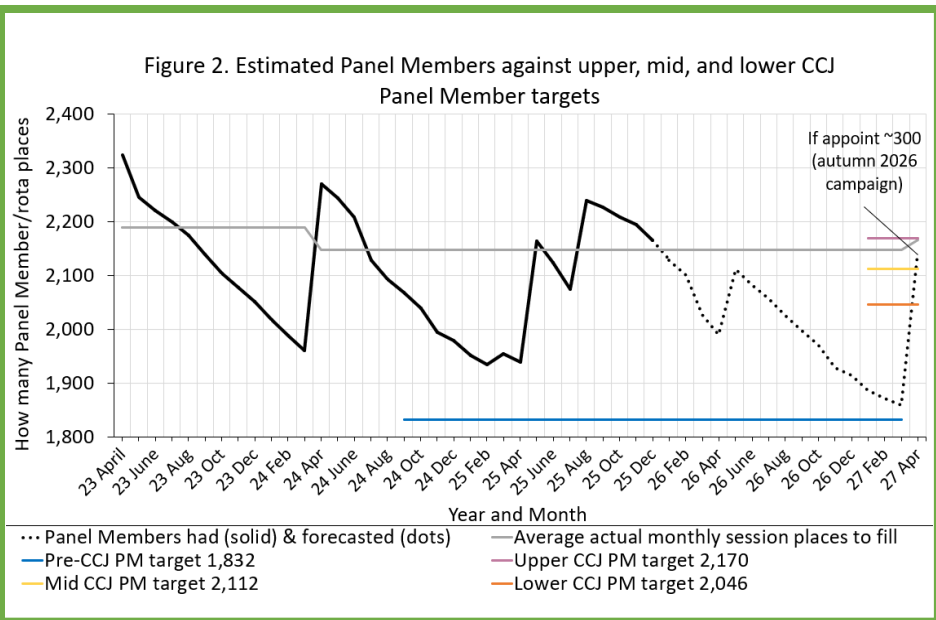
PM retention against KPI of 85% retained

PM reappt. against KPI of 55% reappt.

Panel Member forecast:

Calculations updated July 25; data updated May 26.

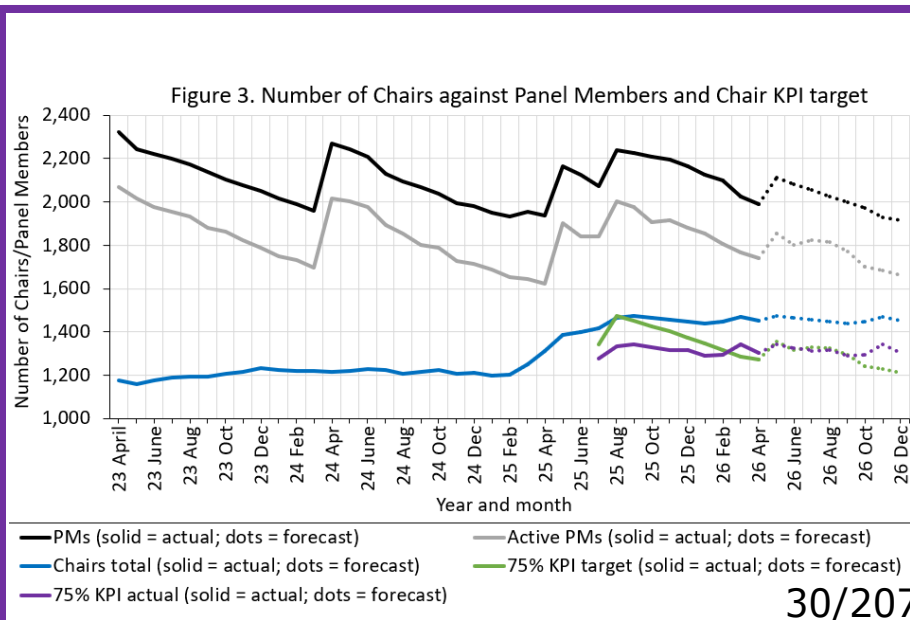
- Forecast based on live operational data and subject to change.
- Additional Care & Justice Act sessions anticipated from April 2027.
- Forecast predicts we are still on track to manage capacity.
- We continue to closely monitor timelines for C&J and recruitment along with capacity and risk.
- Risk is impacted by service ends, unavailable rate, number of sessions PMs can do, number of sessions PMs scheduled for, rota optimisation, scheduling project, and number of rota sessions created by SCRA.



Chair forecast:

Calculations updated July 25; data updated May 26.

- Forecast based on live operational data and subject to change.
- PM forecast based on past trends.
- Data shows rate of additional Chairs has plateaued over 25/26.
- Chair forecast is not predictable due to lack of data; no certainty is provided.
- KPI target is for 75% of active and eligible PMs to be Chair-qualified.
- Trends will continue to be monitored.



Agenda Item 10a. CHS-2627-05

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Data Strategy
Responsible Executive:	Lynne Harrison, Director of Business and Finance
Report Author:	Lynne Harrison, Director of Business and Finance

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to ask the Board to note the CHS Data Strategy. This was endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) at their meeting on 9 June 2026.</p> <p>The report has been produced in partnership with Data Orchard who are a renowned social enterprise who have worked extensively with the Scottish Public Sector.</p>
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	The Board is asked to note the report which is presented by way of an update for the Board on CHS' journey to become a more data-informed and data-driven organisation.
3.	Key Points for Discussion
3.1	<p>The development of CHS' first Data Strategy is aligned to the Board ambition to become a more data mature organisation, using data and evidence to drive quality improvement and hearings experiences.</p> <p>It is an identified objective within the 2025-26 Business and Corporate Parenting Plan with the aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish our future data needs and develop a pathway to meet those needs • identify the required structure to deliver the strategy • work with partners to develop effective data sharing practices. <p>This strategy has been developed through a comprehensive desk research and stakeholder engagement process carried out by Data Orchard CIC. This was informed by an organisational data maturity assessment in spring 2024 and extensive engagement with staff in January 2026 through key stakeholder interviews and purposeful workshops.</p>
3.2	<p>The data strategy will be delivered through a series of tangible steps described in terms of a strategic roadmap. The roadmap shows the likely order and broad timescale for the steps and has been articulated to enable organisational flexibility as we enter a period of hearings redesign.</p> <p>The pathways in our roadmap are organised into 4 sections according to the principles identified in our approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking good care of our data, • improving our data infrastructure, • using data to improve our work, and • developing our skills and confidence.

Agenda Item 10a. CHS-2627-05

3.3	<p>By the end of this strategic period in 2029, we hope to be in a position where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we have a good understanding of what data we have and who is responsible for it • our infrastructure supports us to make good use of our data • we are actively using trusted insights for decision-making • and we are more confident, cohesive, and advanced in our use of data as an organisation.
3.1	<p>The Data Strategy aligns to the broader digital investment and rebalancing project with SCRA that will allow CHS to autonomously access data within CSAS, transforming our ability to bring evidence, evaluation and quality assurance into our work and supporting more person-centred rota scheduling.</p> <p>This is outlined in more detail section 3.7 of agenda item 8, National Convener/CEO Report, report which is part of the papers for this Board meeting.</p>
4.	Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS • Objective 2 - Quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Objective 2 - We will become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. • Objective 3 - We will make effective use of technology, capitalising on its potential for enhancing performance and delivering efficiency. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Implement a three-year People Strategy that attracts and retains top talent and committed individuals and drives the success and sustainability of the organisation. • Objective 2 - The organisational design remains agile, adaptable and responsive to support ongoing organisational transformation. • Objective 3 - To become a more inclusive and diverse organisation and create a culture where everyone feels valued, included and engaged. • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	No risks identified.
6.	Risk Register
6.1	There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights

Agenda Item 10a. CHS-2627-05

7.1	N/A <i>See templates and guidance for this on the shared drive at G:\CHS\CHS Central Resources\Impact Assessments</i>
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	There is no requirement for engagement and consultation in relation to this paper.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	There is no specific resource implication associated with this paper.
10.	Appendices
	Appendix 1 – Data Strategy



May 2026

Authored by Hannah Khwaja, Lindsay Hodgson
and Madeleine Spinks

info@dataorchard.org.uk

Agenda Item 10b. Appendix 1

Data Strategy 2026-2029

for Children's Hearings Scotland



About Data Orchard and Children’s Hearings Scotland

Data Orchard combines specialist skills in research, statistics, and data with a passion for making the world a better place socially, economically, and environmentally. Our mission is to enable every nonprofit organisation to use data effectively to achieve their goals.

Our services include research and analysis, data maturity assessment, data strategy, impact measurement, training, and capacity building. Since 2013, we’ve worked on hundreds of projects supporting more than 150 organisations to get better with data, resulting in better planning and decision-making, increased impact, and improved service design and delivery.

Children’s Hearings Scotland recruits, trains and supports around 2,300 volunteers who are key to the children’s hearings system, including Panel Members and Panel Practice Advisers. CHS works to ensure that hearings make child-centred decisions which respect and protect children’s rights and support them to thrive.

In this document, we provide a data strategy for Children’s Hearings Scotland, based on a programme of engagement carried out between January and March 2026.

The remainder of this report is written from Children’s Hearings Scotland’s perspective so that the content can be used for your own strategic document.

Contents

Introduction and purpose	3
Our vision for data	4
Our approach	4
Implementation	5
Governance	5
Conclusion	5
Our strategic roadmap: Principle 1	7
Our strategic roadmap: Principle 2	11
Our strategic roadmap: Principle 3	14
Our strategic roadmap: Principle 4	17
Appendix A: Information and Data Governance	20

Introduction and purpose

The development of Children's Hearings Scotland's first data strategy was an objective in the 2025-26 Business and Corporate Parenting Plan. The objective included the following aims:

- 🕒 establish our future data needs and develop a pathway to meet those needs
- 🕒 identify the required structure to deliver the strategy
- 🕒 work with partners to develop effective data sharing practices.

In accordance with the 2024-27 Strategic Outlook, this strategy will establish the foundations for CHS to become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. Staff at CHS will be empowered to make data-driven decisions that use evidence to drive change and progress, create and communicate evidence-based insights, and demonstrate impact.

As with all our work at CHS, the data strategy is underpinned by our values (*challenging, creative, child centred, respectful, fair, and open*) and supports our ambitions across the three themes of Delivering Positive Outcomes, Valuing Our People and Driving Transformation. It sits alongside our Quality Strategy, Learning Strategy and Digital Strategy as well as the Vision for Public Sector Data in Scotland, supporting us to provide positive experiences for our volunteers and all infants, children and young people who experience the hearings system.

This strategy is informed by a comprehensive desk research and stakeholder engagement process carried out by Data Orchard CIC. This included an organisational data maturity assessment in spring 2024 and engagement with staff in January 2026 through key stakeholder interviews and purposeful workshops. Findings from the assessment and engagement showed that:

- 🕒 Data is an organisational priority and leadership are engaged in harnessing its value, but there is room for further investment in data-related resources and more coherence in roles and responsibilities.
- 🕒 Data held by CHS is secure, but fragmented, inconsistent, and often difficult to access for those who need it; as a whole, data assets are poorly understood across the organisation, and data quality needs monitored.
- 🕒 Staff share and discuss data together, but it is not necessarily seen as a team effort.
- 🕒 The organisation has room for improvement in terms of both specialist data skills and general data literacy.
- 🕒 CHS is making some use of data to support services and operations, but there is room for improvement, particularly in relation to volunteers' and children's experiences and organisational efficiency.
- 🕒 There is a general lack of understanding of and confidence in the digital tools at CHS.
- 🕒 Data is analysed in useful and meaningful ways at CHS, but there are opportunities to increase the use of more advanced analytical techniques and automation.

Our vision for data

Our vision is that all staff at Children's Hearings Scotland have access to high-quality data and are equipped with the skills to confidently use data to make informed decisions, evidence change and progress, and improve experiences for our volunteers and the children in the hearings system.

Our approach

Principle 1: We will take good care of our data

We will improve data governance and ensure that our policies, processes and tools effectively maintain the security and quality of our data. We will ensure we have clear records of what data we have, where it is held, how it should be used, who has access to it and who is responsible for it. We will agree what should be collected, define it clearly, input it consistently, and archive or dispose of it when no longer needed.

Principle 2: We will improve our data infrastructure

We will improve access to our data in our core hearings data management system and continue to work with partners to strengthen data sharing practices. We will improve the digital tools that hold core data and continue to review our tools where appropriate. We will develop methods for accessing, linking and

integrating different datasets and across different tools to enable extraction of deeper and more meaningful insights.

Principle 3: We will use data to improve our work

We will use our data to deliver more efficient and effective services with greater impact. We will ensure that staff have access to relevant insights so that they can make informed decisions in their roles and reduce siloes by identifying opportunities for shared insights across functions. We will agree and execute priority data use cases and explore opportunities to use automation and/or AI to drive improvement. We will communicate insights effectively to external audiences, enabling us to clarify our role and purpose and demonstrate impact and change.

Principle 4: We will develop our data skills, confidence and culture

We will ensure we can get the best value from the data we have by creating learning plans and investing in skills development for a wide range of roles across the organisation, including senior leadership. As part of Principles 1 and 2, we will provide central resources that give all staff a clear shared overview of the organisation's data, systems, and definitions. We will empower staff to use data themselves where appropriate with the support of a distributed community of data champions and a community of practice. We will also obtain additional specialist skills to help us govern and use data well. We will encourage the use of

evidence in all roles across the organisation, including in the development of processes, policies, guidance, training and strategic planning. We will create time and space for reflection and sharing around data within existing meetings and working groups as well as in new spaces.

Implementation

The data strategy will be delivered through a series of tangible steps described in terms of a strategic roadmap. This is summarised in the diagrams on the following pages and supported by further detail on each step.

A roadmap is not the same as a plan. The roadmap shows the likely order and broad timescale for the steps but is subject to change as the organisation develops. Some steps might have to be delayed, while others might be brought forward as opportunities present themselves.

We have not used fixed timescales in the roadmap. This is to emphasise its provisional nature and the fact that steps may move as a result of changes across the organisation. That said, as a planning assumption, we have suggested the timeframe in which each activity will be completed in relation to year 1, year 2, and year 3 of this strategy.

The pathways in our roadmap are organised into 4 sections according to the principles identified in our approach: taking

good care of our data, improving our data infrastructure, using data to improve our work, and developing our skills and confidence. These are visualised and broken down into more detailed steps over the following pages.

Governance

Delivering this strategy will require clear sequencing, alignment with corporate planning and investment decisions, and visible leadership. The monitoring of progress against our data strategy will be reviewed biannually by the leadership team, and the order and duration of steps may be redrawn when necessary.

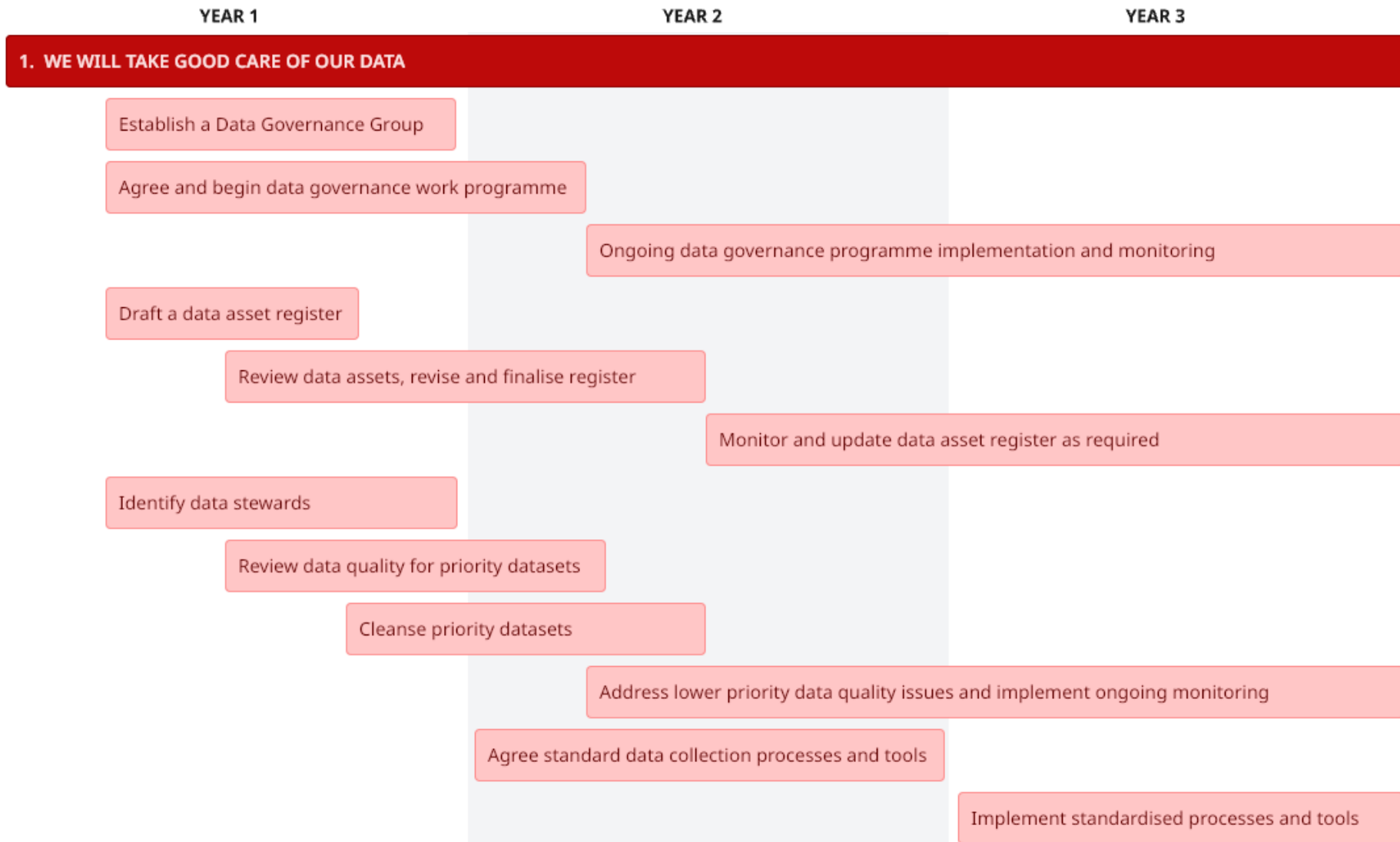
Conclusion

This first data strategy for Children's Hearings Scotland represents the start of a journey towards developing a data-informed and data-driven organisation. By the end of this strategic period in 2029, we hope to be in a position where:

- 🔗 we have a good understanding of what data we have and who is responsible for it
- 🔗 our infrastructure supports us to make good use of our data
- 🔗 we are actively using trusted insights for decision-making
- 🔗 and we are more confident, cohesive, and advanced in our use of data as an organisation.



Our strategic roadmap: Principle 1



1. Taking good care of our data

1.1 Establish a Data Governance Group (Y1)

We will establish a Data Governance Group that is empowered to guide an organisation-wide approach to data and related infrastructure. Data, information and digital tools governance are intertwined so one group should have oversight of all these functions and key decisions, led by a director. Appendix A provides further explanation and comparison of these focus areas.

1.2 Agree and begin to implement a data governance work programme (Y1-Y2)

Data governance is a constant process. A work programme will ensure that we allocate an appropriate level of effort to the most critical areas at CHS. The programme will aim to provide assurance and improvement in the areas of processes, data access and security, quality, usability, data linkage and AI use. This will include a review of appropriate data related policies such as data protection, information security, user access management, artificial intelligence and data sharing and usage. Where there are trade-offs in terms of these areas, the Data Governance Group will decide on priorities.

The work programme will incorporate some of the steps in this data strategy, such as identifying data stewards, but will also be informed by the data quality review and the organisation's risk register.

1.3 Ongoing data governance programme implementation and monitoring (Y2 onwards)

We will implement the governance programme and monitor progress on an ongoing basis.

1.4 Draft a data asset register (Y1)

A data asset register is a comprehensive register detailing dataset information, ownership, and usage guidelines. It will help identify and communicate what data exists across the organisation and what its purpose is. The initial process of drafting a data asset register will be used to inventory current datasets.

The register will answer the following questions:

- What is the dataset?
- What is its purpose?
- What can it be used for?
- Who is the data controller?
- Who is the data steward and who looks after it day-to-day?
- How big is it?
- Where is it stored?
- Who has access to it?
- Who can it be shared with?
- What types of data does it hold? (particularly personal or sensitive data)
- How/when should it be archived/deleted?
- What is the quality of the data?

1.5 Review data assets, revise and finalise the data asset register (Y1-Y2)

We will use the initial draft to make decisions about what data we might want to start, stop and continue collecting, where it is stored, and responsibilities and access permissions for each dataset. We will revise and finalise the register accordingly.

The data asset register will become embedded in data governance practices and routinely updated, maintained and reviewed by specified member(s) of staff. Importantly, it will help members of staff to locate datasets maintained outside their teams and request access to them when needed.

1.6 Monitor and update data asset register as required (Y2 onwards)

We will monitor and update the data asset register as and when required, ensuring that responsibilities for doing so are clear. We will also ensure that the design, hosting and content of the data asset register is iterated with opportunities for feedback to ensure it is clear and useful to staff across the organisation.

1.7 Identify data stewards (Y1)

Data stewards will be subject matter experts who are accountable for one or more data assets (or in some cases, a subset of a data asset). They define and control the data they are accountable for and monitor and improve its quality. Being a data steward is part of the responsibilities of a wider role in the delivery of services.

We already have staff across the organisation who are informally undertaking this role; this process will make the responsibilities explicit. Data stewards will be identified in the data asset register, and the Data Governance Group will ensure there is a process to replace them when people leave the role. Support will be provided to ensure that data stewards are able to confidently fulfil their responsibilities.

1.8 Review data quality for priority datasets (Y1 - Y2)

The new data asset register can be used as the basis for a data quality review, focusing initially on priority datasets that:

- have been judged to be of low overall quality, or
- are important in terms of impact, or
- are crucial to running the business, or
- another reason decided by the Data Governance Group.

Stewards of the data assets in the data quality review will work to assess the quality of the data asset in the following ways:

- **completeness** (all the critical data required for a particular use is present and available to be used)
- **uniqueness** (the data is free of duplicates)
- **consistency** (the degree to which values in the dataset do not contradict other values representing the same entity)
- **timeliness** (the degree to which the data is available when it is most useful)

- **validity** (the extent to which the data conforms to the expected format, type, and range)
- **accuracy** (the degree to which values match reality - bias may impact accuracy)

1.9 Cleanse priority datasets (Y1-Y2)

Following a data quality review, the staff accountable for the data asset will agree an action plan with the Data Governance Group to identify how data quality can be improved and prioritise which data assets should be addressed first. This will require obtaining dedicated data quality skills and contractors to work on the prioritised datasets.

1.10 Address lower priority data quality issues and implement ongoing monitoring (Y2 onwards)

Staff accountable for the data asset will agree an action plan with the Data Governance Group to identify how data quality can be improved. The Data Governance Group will implement a data quality monitoring programme. This may require obtaining dedicated data quality skills.

1.11 Agree standard data collection processes and tools (Y2)

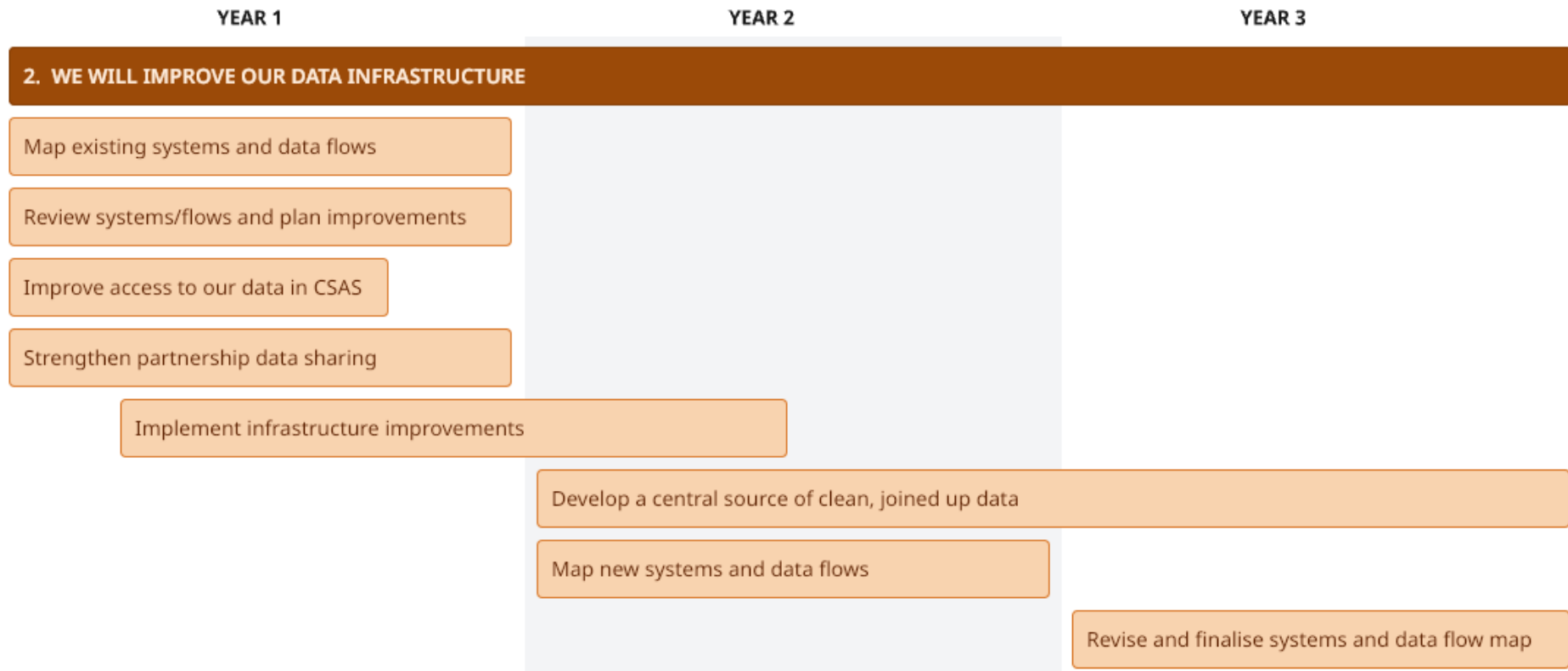
We will develop clear protocols for collecting and inputting data using consistent definitions and standards. This will be informed by the findings of the data quality review to ensure that quality issues are reduced going forward. As part of this process, we will review current digital tools and systems and assess whether they

are fit for purpose, aligned across the organisation and what improvements can be made.

1.12 Implement standardised data collection processes and tools (Y3)

We will implement the protocols developed in 1.11 across the organisation.

Our strategic roadmap: Principle 2



2. Improving our data infrastructure

2.1 Map existing digital systems and data flows (Y1)

We will develop an overview of the systems used across the organisation and how data flows between them. This will include where key datasets are stored, how data moves between systems and where manual processes or duplication currently occur.

2.2 Review systems and flows and plan improvements (Y1)

Data at CHS is currently held across several systems, including CSAS, CRM, our learning platform, G:Drive and a number of standalone operational systems. While these systems support key organisational processes, they operate largely independently and data is not consistently integrated across them. This can make it difficult to access data across systems and may require manual extraction or specialist knowledge to combine datasets for reporting and analysis.

We will develop a clearer plan for strengthening the organisation's data infrastructure. Building on the systems and data flow mapping exercise, we will identify opportunities to improve how data is accessed, integrated and prepared for analysis across key systems.

This will include exploring options for improving relational access across CSAS databases, identifying opportunities to link operational systems such as CSAS, CRM and the learning

platform, and linking with other relevant datasets. We will consider approaches to combining data across systems where this supports priority reporting and analytical needs.

This work will guide future improvements to data infrastructure and support the longer-term development of joined-up reporting and analysis.

2.3 Improve access to our data in CSAS (Y1)

We work closely with SCRA and rely on data within our shared system, CSAS, to support aspects of our operational and analytical work. We will improve our ability to access and analyse CHS data held within CSAS while ensuring that appropriate governance and security arrangements remain in place.

2.4 Strengthen partnership data sharing (Y1)

We will seek opportunities to strengthen partnership data sharing to enable us to better understand hearings operations and volunteers' and children's experiences and journeys where possible.

2.5 Implement infrastructure improvements (Y1-Y2)

We will take action to implement the infrastructure improvements identified in 2.2.

2.6 Develop a central source of clean, joined up data across different areas of the business (Y2-Y3)

We will create a unified, easy-to-access data environment with appropriate access rights, where data is cleaned and joined centrally ready for analysis. This environment will bring together data from key operational systems and provide a consistent source of trusted reporting data.

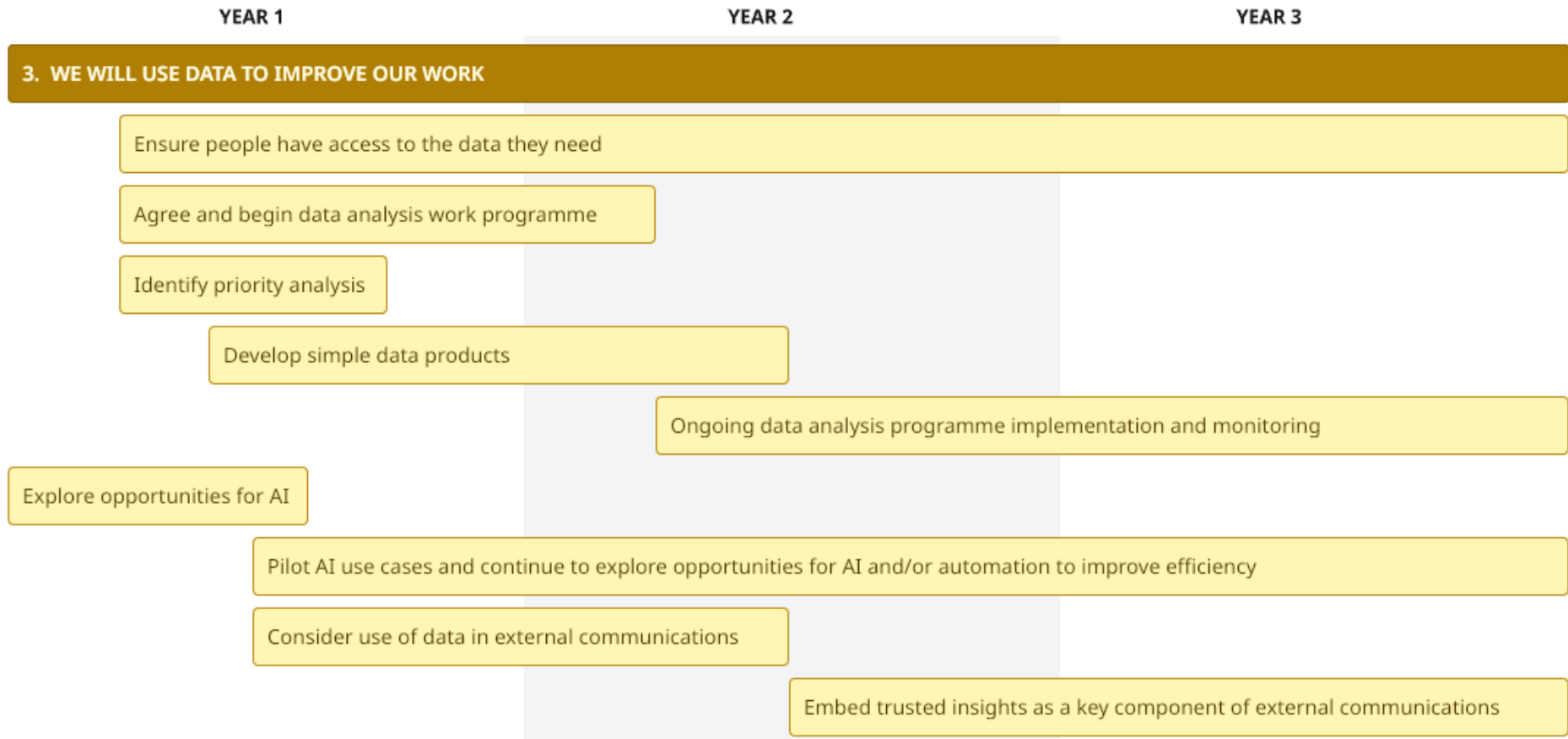
2.7 Map new digital systems and data flows (Y2)

We will update the map created in 2.1 following the implementation of infrastructure improvements.

2.8 Revise and finalise digital systems and data flow map (Y3)

We will finalise the map created in 2.1 following the implementation of infrastructure improvements. We will monitor and update the map as and when required going forward, ensuring that responsibilities for doing so are clear.

Our strategic roadmap: Principle 3



3. Using data to improve our work

3.1 Ensure people have access to the data they need (Y1 onwards)

Using the data asset register developed under Principle 1, we will review access to systems, datasets and reports for roles across the organisation. Our aim is to ensure that staff can access the information they need to perform their roles while maintaining appropriate governance and security controls. This will also reduce reliance on staff to pass on information.

3.2 Agree and begin implementation of a data analysis work programme (Y1-Y2)

The work programme will guide the work of the data team and other data specialist resource, enabling them to more easily prioritise their activities and helping CHS to understand demand and inform plans for improving data skills in the organisation.

It will also help the Data Governance Group to have visibility of what data requirements are likely to be surfaced and to ensure that such data is available at the appropriate quality.

3.3 Identify priority analysis (Y1)

We will grow the [Data Action Stories](#) drafted as part of the strategy development process to review and prioritise analysis needs. We will assess what data will be required to create each insight, any legal and ethical issues that might be involved in

collecting or accessing this data, and what other enablers will be required to achieve the desired outcome, as per the [LOTI Data Methodology framework](#). We will execute data use cases starting with the highest priorities and/or 'quick wins' (based on access to data and other barriers/enablers).

3.4 Develop simple data products (Y1-Y2)

In this context, a data product is a dashboard, report, chart or other object created by analysing some of the organisation's data. Data products will be developed based on the priority use cases identified in 3.3. The types of analysis and insight that the organisation can make use of will evolve as staff become more familiar with what can be done in terms of data insights.

3.5 Ongoing data analysis programme implementation and monitoring (Y2-Y3)

We will continue to monitor and implement the data analysis programme established in 3.2.

3.6 Explore opportunities for AI (Y1)

As data infrastructure improves and datasets become more consistent and accessible, we will explore opportunities to use automation and artificial intelligence to improve operational efficiency and reporting. This may include automating routine reporting processes, identifying patterns in operational data, analysis of qualitative data or developing tools that support better forecasting and planning.

3.7 Pilot AI use cases and continue to explore opportunities for AI and/or automation to improve efficiency (Y1 onwards)

Pilot projects will be used to test priority use cases and ensure that any future adoption of AI is aligned with organisational needs and governance standards. We will continue to explore opportunities for AI and automation going forward.

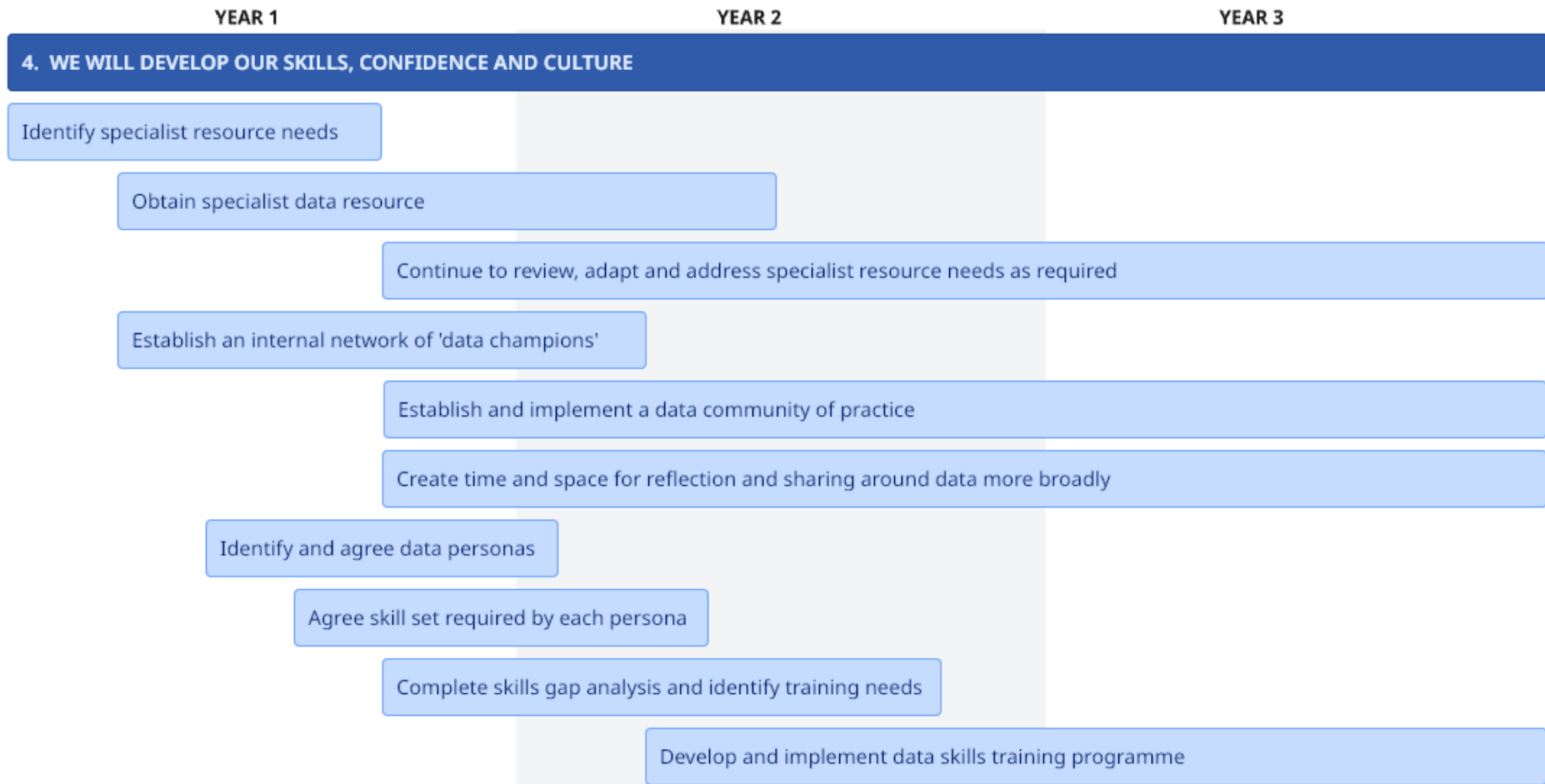
3.8 Consider use of data in external communications (Y1-Y2)

We will review the use of insight and evidence in our external communications and seek to improve the frequency with which we do so, while ensuring that this is based on quality data.

3.9 Embed trusted insights as a key component of external communications (Y2-Y3)

As we improve our data quality and analysis, we will communicate insights effectively, enabling us to clarify our role and purpose and demonstrate impact and change. This will improve our influence in the sector as a trusted, evidence-based, impact-focused organisation.

Our strategic roadmap: Principle 4



4. Developing our data skills, confidence and culture

4.1 Identify specialist resource needs (Y1)

It is likely we will require increased specialist capacity in data analysis, data governance, data engineering and data literacy training in order to meet our ambitions around data. We will consider how we can best meet these needs, including the potential for in-house roles, shared roles with partner organisations, contractors, and/or external consultants.

4.2 Obtain specialist data resource (Y1-Y2)

We will obtain the specialist resource identified in 4.1, prioritising data governance resource in the first instance.

4.3 Continue to review, adapt and address specialist resource needs as required (Y2 onwards)

We will review our specialist resource needs on an ongoing basis and address those needs as required.

4.4 Establish an internal network of 'data champions' (Y1-Y2)

We will identify and support an internal network of data champions in roles across the organisation to help support the use of data in different teams/functions and establish a community of practice. The champions are likely to include the data stewards identified as part of the data asset register

development, but also individuals from across teams who work closely with data.

4.5 Establish and implement a data community of practice (Y1 onwards)

The data champions will establish and implement a community of practice that will meet regularly to share use cases and knowledge and consider the usefulness of data surgeries.

4.6 Create time and space for reflection and sharing around data more broadly (Y1 onwards)

We will work to utilise organisational space, such as the Quality Reference Group, and to create new spaces to reflect and share around data. The Quality Reference Group will be important in building a culture around data and evidence related to the hearings.

To maximise the value of data and analytics, it will be important to increase the level of comfort and confidence people find in sharing data, analysis, what is working and what they have learned openly (and by extension when things have gone wrong), so that things can be done differently in the future. This is an area where managers and leaders will have a big impact on the organisational culture. The data champions network will also be developed as a space for discussion.

The senior leadership team will encourage and support self-questioning and embrace the practice of working in the open, building in ways to learn from each other and hold each other to account. It takes time and concerted effort to move cultural norms, and we anticipate the need to focus on culture change for some time.

4.7 Identify and agree data personas (Y1-Y2)

We will develop a data skills framework that shows what skills are required by people in different roles in the organisation by using data personas. Using the Scottish Government data personas as a basis, we will identify and agree on data personas relevant to our staff, Clerks, and volunteers at CHS.

4.7 Agree skill sets required by each persona (Y1-Y2)

Once the personas have been identified, we will agree the set of skills that are required for each persona.

4.8 Complete skills gap analysis and identify training needs (Y1-Y2)

Using the data skills framework we have developed, it will be possible to compare the skills of people in each persona to the skills the organisation has identified as necessary for that persona. Where there is a gap identified, this will inform training plans.

4.9 Develop and implement a data skills training programme (Y2-Y3)

The data skills training programme will need to address the skills gaps identified in the data skills gap analysis as well as ensure that as people join the organisation and change roles, they can access training that meets their needs. The programme will mix in-house content, mentoring and learning with training accessed from specific training suppliers. For example, informal data surgeries could be developed using data champions/data stewards to coach people in their service areas to make the best use of data.

Training should ideally be implemented for managers, leads and senior leaders as a first priority to ensure that they are then in the best position to demonstrate the importance of data and skills development, support their teams to develop, and harness their new skills.

We will develop an induction module/centralised resource that provides an overview of the organisation's data and systems, supporting both new and existing staff to understand the role of data in CHS's work.

Appendix A: Information and Data Governance

Information Governance (IG)

Primary focus: Compliance, legal obligations, security, and risk management.

Key question IG asks: “Are we protecting and managing information responsibly and legally?”

Typical concerns

- Privacy and GDPR compliance
- Information security
- Records management
- Freedom of Information requests
- Retention and disposal policies
- Information classification

Typical artefacts

- Information Asset Register
- Retention schedules
- Information classification policies
- Data protection impact assessments (DPIAs)

Typical roles

- Information Asset Owner (IAO)
- Data Protection Officer (DPO)
- Information Governance Manager

Data Governance (DG)

Primary focus: Managing data as an asset for operational and analytical use.

Key question DG asks: “Is our data reliable, well defined, and usable?”

Typical concerns

- Data quality
- Data definitions and standards
- Data ownership and stewardship
- Metadata and lineage
- Data catalogues
- Data sharing and access

Typical artefacts

- Data asset register
- Data catalogue
- Business glossary
- Data quality metrics
- Data lineage maps

Typical roles

- Data Owner
- Data Steward
- Data Governance Lead
- Data Architect

Roads and traffic analogy

<p>Information Governance = The Traffic Laws</p> <p>Sets the rules everyone must follow to stay safe and lawful.</p>	<p>Data Governance = The Road Signs and Maps</p> <p>Helps people understand where things are and how to get there.</p>	<p>Data Management = Building and Maintaining the Roads</p> <p>Helps keep data flowing and prevents accidents.</p>
<p>Purpose:</p> <p>Prevent harm, protect people, and ensure compliance.</p>	<p>Purpose:</p> <p>Help people navigate data confidently.</p>	<p>Purpose:</p> <p>Make sure the system physically works.</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed limits • Drink-driving laws • Seatbelt rules • Vehicle safety standards 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road signs • Street names • Maps and sat-nav • Lane markings 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building roads • Fixing potholes/blockages • Maintaining bridges • Installing traffic lights
<p>In organisations it covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDPR • Information security • Records retention rules • FOI obligations • Information classification 	<p>In organisations it covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data catalogues • Business glossaries • Data definitions • Data ownership • Data quality standards 	<p>In organisations it covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Databases • Data pipelines • Integration • Storage platforms • Data engineering



Data Orchard CIC, Lower House Business Park, Staunton-on-Wye, Herefordshire. HR4 7LR.

Company Number: 08674626 | Information Commissioner's Office Registration Reference: ZA045001 | VAT number: 239272885

Agenda Item 11. CHS-2627-06

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Volunteer Workforce Sustainability and Recruitment Update
Responsible Executive:	Joanne O'Leary, Director of People & Culture
Report Author:	Joanne O'Leary, Director of People & Culture

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>The purpose of this paper is to provide the Board with an update on preparations for the Autumn 2026 volunteer recruitment campaign, including proposed recruitment targets, campaign approach and the actions being taken to strengthen volunteer attraction, onboarding, and retention.</p> <p>The campaign forms a key component of CHS's broader approach to sustaining a skilled, diverse, and resilient volunteer community capable of meeting current service demand whilst supporting future developments within the Children's Hearings System.</p>
2.	Strategic Context
	<p>Volunteers remain at the heart of Scotland's Children's Hearings System. Maintaining sufficient volunteer capacity, capability and diversity is critical to ensuring the continued delivery of high-quality decision making for children and young people across Scotland.</p> <p>Whilst the primary purpose of the Autumn 2026 campaign is to meet identified volunteer requirements, it also presents an opportunity to build organisational capacity and resilience in anticipation of future reform of the Children's Hearings System.</p> <p>Workforce planning undertaken with Regional Tribunal Delivery Managers has informed projected recruitment requirements for 2026 and reflects both anticipated volunteer attrition and future service demand. This work has been supported by learning gathered from previous recruitment campaigns, trainee feedback, volunteer insight, and recent retention analysis.</p> <p>Alongside recruitment activity, CHS continues to strengthen its focus on volunteer retention, recognising that attraction, onboarding, development, and ongoing engagement are all critical components of long-term workforce sustainability.</p>
3.	Campaign Overview
	<p>The Autumn 2026 campaign will continue to adopt a nationally coordinated approach delivered through local engagement and recruitment activity across Scotland's local authority areas.</p>

Agenda Item 11. CHS-2627-06

	<p>Building on previous campaigns, recruitment assets, campaign messaging, and candidate information have been refreshed to provide greater clarity regarding the role, commitment and expectations associated with being a panel member at CHS.</p> <p>The campaign will be supported through a combination of national marketing activity, local engagement opportunities, and targeted community outreach. Developments to our digital recruitment applicant tracking system have also been introduced to improve application management, candidate communication, and overall recruitment efficiency.</p> <p>The campaign will continue to place lived experience and the voice of children and young people at its core, building on the positive enhancements introduced during previous recruitment activity and ensuring that applicants have a clear understanding of both the responsibilities, expectations of the role (training and development commitments, attendance at hearings) and impact of the role.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Recruitment Targets</p> <p>Based on workforce planning data and regional assessments, CHS is currently forecasting a requirement for approximately 350 new Panel Members nationally taking into account forecasting for the expected increase in Hearings associated with the implementation of the CCJA in March 2027.</p> <p>To achieve this outcome, it is anticipated that approximately 425 trainees will need to be recruited and progressed through the recruitment and learning pathway, requiring an estimated 700 applications nationally.</p> <p>Recruitment activity will be targeted towards those local authority areas where workforce planning data identifies a future requirement.</p> <p>This targeted approach allows resources to be focused where demand is greatest whilst maintaining a balanced and sustainable national volunteer workforce.</p> <p>Alongside we are currently reviewing our capacity to deliver redesign, therefore these recruitment numbers may go up in favour of not doing a campaign again in the autumn of 2027.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Continuous Improvement</p> <p>The 2026 campaign has been shaped by extensive learning from previous recruitment campaigns, trainee withdrawal data, volunteer feedback, user research activity, and annual retention analysis.</p>

Agenda Item 11. CHS-2627-06

	<p>This evidence has reinforced the importance of ensuring that prospective volunteers have a clear understanding of both the commitment and responsibilities associated with the role from the earliest stages of engagement.</p> <p>A number of improvements have already been implemented in recent campaigns, including enhanced information sessions, strengthened screening processes, improved candidate communications, revised induction arrangements, greater involvement of people with lived experience and the introduction of more consistent national recruitment processes.</p> <p>The 2026 campaign will build on these foundations through a continued focus on improving the end-to-end volunteer experience.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Key Areas of Focus</p> <p>Improving the Pre-Appointment Process</p> <p>A review of the current recruitment pathway has identified opportunities to streamline pre-appointment processes and reduce avoidable delays between recommendation, onboarding and commencement of training.</p> <p>The objective is to create a more efficient and transparent volunteer journey whilst maintaining robust safeguarding standards and assurance processes, this has included an update to the current PVG process to ensure safeguarding of standards.</p> <p>Reducing Time to 'Active' Panel Status</p> <p>Feedback from trainees and newly appointed Panel Members has highlighted the importance of maintaining momentum and engagement following appointment.</p> <p>CHS will therefore continue to review the period between appointment, induction, training, and participation in a first hearing, seeking opportunities to reduce delays and strengthen early volunteer engagement and retention.</p> <p>Workforce Capacity Planning</p> <p>Analysis of recruitment outcomes, trainee withdrawals, volunteer attrition, and projected service demand continues to inform future workforce planning assumptions.</p> <p>In parallel, CHS is currently reviewing future volunteer capacity requirements in the context of the Children's Care, Care Experience and Services Planning Bill, wider hearings system reform and the organisation's longer-term strategic planning assumptions.</p>

Agenda Item 11. CHS-2627-06

	<p>This work is focused on ensuring that recruitment activity remains proportionate to future demand and that CHS maintains sufficient volunteer capacity to respond to both current operational requirements and anticipated future changes within the hearings system.</p> <p>As part of this review, consideration is being given to a range of future recruitment scenarios, including whether capacity generated through the 2026 campaign may provide sufficient resilience to support anticipated reform activity and reduce the requirement for a further national recruitment campaign in 2027.</p> <p>These considerations remain under active review and will be informed by emerging policy developments, workforce data, volunteer attrition trends and the pace and scale of future reform implementation.</p> <p>Enhancing the Candidate Experience</p> <p>Recruitment and retention feedback continues to emphasise the importance of setting clear expectations regarding the role, training commitment, and ongoing participation requirements.</p> <p>Further improvements are being implemented to strengthen candidate communications, improve accessibility, and provide greater clarity throughout the recruitment process. These enhancements are intended to support informed applications, improve conversion rates, and strengthen long-term retention outcomes.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Future Focus</p> <p>The Autumn 2026 recruitment campaign forms part of a wider programme of work focused on volunteer sustainability, succession planning, and reform readiness.</p> <p>Alongside recruitment activity, CHS will continue to strengthen its workforce planning capability, using volunteer insight, retention data, and demand forecasting to inform future recruitment requirements and workforce investment decisions.</p> <p>A key priority over the coming year will be ensuring that volunteer recruitment and retention activity remains aligned to the evolving reform agenda and supports the organisation's ability to respond flexibly to future changes in the design and delivery of the hearings system.</p> <p>This includes ongoing consideration of the optimum size, composition, and capability of the volunteer community and whether future workforce requirements can be met through the capacity generated by the 2026 campaign, or whether additional recruitment activity will be required in subsequent years.</p>

Agenda Item 11. CHS-2627-06

	<p>Recruitment planning is therefore being considered not only within the context of current vacancies and projected attrition, but also through the lens of longer-term reform, sustainability, and organisational readiness.</p>
8.	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>The Board is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the proposed approach to the Autumn 2026 recruitment campaign. • Note the indicative recruitment targets and workforce planning assumptions. • Note the programme of continuous improvement activity designed to strengthen volunteer attraction, onboarding, and retention. • Take assurance that recruitment and retention activity continues to support the long-term sustainability, resilience, and future readiness of the CHS volunteer community.
9.	<p>Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook</p>
9.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS. • Objective 2 - Quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people. • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Objective 2 - We will become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. • Objective 3 - We will make effective use of technology, capitalising on its potential for enhancing performance and delivering efficiency. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Implement a three-year People Strategy that attracts and retains top talent and committed individuals and drives the success and sustainability of the organisation. • Objective 2 - The organisational design remains agile, adaptable, and responsive to support ongoing organisational transformation. • Objective 3 - To become a more inclusive and diverse organisation and create a culture where everyone feels valued, included, and engaged. • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
10.	<p>Key Risks</p>

Agenda Item 11. CHS-2627-06

10.1	No risks identified in relation to the paper. Any risk in relation to any specific areas detailed in the paper have been considered and reflected in the CHS Strategic Risk Register.
11.	Risk Register
11.1	As above.
12.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
12.1	Not required for this specific paper, however any requirements for an impact assessment in relation to the individual areas outlined in the paper will have been considered separately.
13.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
13.1	Not required for this specific paper, however any requirements for engagement in relation to the individual areas outlined in the paper will have been considered separately.
14.	Resource Implications
14.1	None in relation to this specific paper, however any resource implication in relation to the individual areas outlined in the paper will have been considered separately.
15.	Appendices
	None

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Serious Case Learning Review
Responsible Executive:	Elliot Jackson, National Convener/CEO
Report Author:	Stephen Bermingham, Head of Practice and Policy

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to inform and engage the Board in the learning from the findings of the Family C Learning Review commissioned by Glasgow City Child Protection Committee published on 20 May 2026.
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	The Board is asked to note the summary of the Family C Learning Review, consider the learning points identified and approve the next steps detailed in this report.
3.	Key Points for Discussion
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>Family C Independent Learning Review involved a group of four siblings who experienced severe and sustained abuse and neglect from their parents and associates in Glasgow over a sixteen-year period. In 2023 seven abusers were convicted of multiple counts of neglect, rape, attempted murder, and assaults against children. The catalogue and scale of the abuse is deeply disturbing. The case was the subject of a high-profile multi-agency Learning Review commissioned by Glasgow City Child Protection Committee, supported by Professor Alexis Jay, which details a catalogue of systemic child protection failures.</p> <p>The review examined professional involvement of statutory agencies and found that numerous opportunities to recognise escalating risk, understand the lived experiences of the children, and intervene were missed. The review concluded that the inactions of a number of agencies, which fall within the legal framework of the child protection hearing system, prolonged the abuse the children experienced.</p> <p><i>*Please be beware that the following links to the Learning Review and press coverage contain extremely distressing content. *</i></p> <p>The full 75-page review report can be accessed here and was widely covered in the press. The Institutional severity of the abuse in what has been described in the press as the 'beastie house', has been accepted by the First Minister as an</p>

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

	<p><u>“institutional failing”</u> and is widely regarded as one of the most appalling child protection failings in Scotland’s history.</p> <p>This paper explores the key findings and proposes an initial set of learning points and next steps that CHS can take from this review, as part of our corporate responsibility for Each and Every Child.</p>
<p>3.2</p>	<p>System Wide Learning</p> <p>The thirteen core multi-agency recommendations from the review are.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children’s experience of day-to-day life must underpin how professionals assess their safety and wellbeing and make sense of the family’s functioning. 2. Children need trusting relationships and a protective space as part of child-focused interventions to improve their wellbeing. 3. Staff must recognise and respond to neglect as harm. 4. Assessments of risk and need must consider a whole-family view. 5. Staff should be equipped to evaluate and prioritise multiple risk factors and understand how these impact on each child. 6. Assessing parental capacity to change requires the meaningful acceptance of relevant concerns and sustained progress in addressing these. 7. Assessing the strength and safety of parent-child relationships must be based on evidence of parents’ capacity to meet their children’s needs and sustain this over time. 8. Professional support and oversight must deliver assurance about standards of practice and provide reflection and challenge where intervention is not improving outcomes for the child. 9. Partners need a shared understanding of the child and family history to inform an accurate assessment of each child’s current safety and risk of future harm. 10. Decisions made within multi-agency key processes should be based on information from all relevant partners, with professional opinion supported by evidence. 11. When recording and sharing information about risk, staff should communicate using factual language to accurately represent events and experiences. 12. Implementation of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and child protection procedure should enable staff to identify where children’s needs are not being met and direct them to respond effectively. 13. Children at risk and experiencing harm must be protected through the effective use of legal measures and frameworks. <p>These detailed practice and organisational learning points are far reaching and pose fundamental questions of the effectiveness of the current child protection system. The children and family had ongoing contact with health, education, and</p>

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

	<p>social work for more than a decade, yet the systematic abuse of the children appears to be hidden in plain sight.</p> <p>The children's severe signs of neglect were normalised, minimised, or explained through adult circumstances, rather than explored as indicators of intentional harm. The children's suffering was attributed to poverty and contextual factors when in fact it was being perpetrated and facilitated by the parents. Opportunities to recognise escalating risk and intervene earlier (including the convening of a children's hearing) were missed across a number of statutory agencies. The children's voices were ignored and left unheard.</p>
<p>3.2.1</p>	<p>Learning Points relating to the Hearing System and Proposed Next Steps</p> <p>CHS is part of the wider child protection system and therefore we need to be cognisant of our shared responsibility to keep children safe. The review does not single out Panel decision making as the source of the failures in this case. However, a delay in 2018 to progress a referral to a hearing resulted in the children suffering avoidable harm. When a children's hearing was eventually convened in 2019 the legal measures imposed by the hearing protected the children from further harm.</p> <p>These initial learning points relate to the wider systemic issues which this review has exposed. It is important to acknowledge further learning points will emerge as agencies consider their learning and wider changes are made within the child protection system.</p>
<p>3.2.2</p>	<p>Referrals to the Children's Hearing System</p> <p>Organisational Learning Point 13 (p.44-46) focuses on the crucial role of the hearing system as the legal framework for the protection of these children. The review concluded that, "the children's hearing system is an effective legal framework for the protection of children in need of compulsory measures of care." However, there was a failure in 2018 to progress a referral to a hearing. This referral should have been concluded within a 50-day time limit, but it took 111 days. This delay resulted in prolonged suffering for the children. Once the referral resulted in a hearing being convened in 2019 the hearing system effectively "established the evidence of cumulative harm experienced by the children, ensured they were secured in a safe placement away from the parents' care and provided appropriate controls around family contact arrangements."</p> <p>Next steps: SCRA are undertaking an internal learning review of the case. CHS have discussed this with the senior manager leading the review, and these discussions have helped inform the content of this report. Once concluded we will agree what learning points we can jointly take from this review through existing management partnership structures.</p>
<p>3.2.3</p>	<p>The Voice of the Child</p>

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

A theme throughout the review is the absence of the voice of the children. The most compelling statement in the review was from a child; “staff should be talking to the kids more, taking them out to talk to them without the adults.” This reinforces the need for Panels to always consider and give a child the option of speaking to the Panel on their own. CHS has practice guidance in the Practice and Procedural Manual on how Panel Members do this. In practice this involves asking Relevant Persons, their representatives, and other participants to leave voluntarily to allow this to happen. A Panel cannot exclude a Relevant Person or their representatives against their wishes unless there is evidence that their “presence is preventing the child from giving their views freely.” We do not have robust data on how frequently in practice Relevant Persons voluntarily leave the hearing room to allow a child to speak to the Panel alone.

The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act 2026 changes the criteria for children attending their hearings. The findings of this report reinforce the need for Panels to exercise the new provisions to “require a child to attend” a hearing on welfare grounds as well as offence grounds. Attending by electronic means only makes it harder to safeguard children from potential coercive influence of adults. Attendance at a hearing does not necessarily equate to participation and a child sharing their views, letting their voice be heard. Changes to the provision of advocacy within the new Act should also assist with ensuring there are other ways for a child to participate effectively and share their views with a Panel.

Next steps: a) review the practice guidance in the Practice and Procedural Manual making a more direct link between child protection safeguards and the importance of speaking to children on their own. b) undertake further exploratory work with SCRA on data gathering. c) in preparation for the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act produce new practice guidance on children’s voice and attendance including the safeguards needed for attendance by electronic means.

3.2.4 Relevant Person Status

Although not covered in the remit of this learning review, CHS received feedback that the two convicted birth parents at the centre of this case participated in their children’s hearing in March 2025 from prison: due to the rights bestowed on them as Relevant Persons. As the biological parents of the children and would have Parental Rights and Responsibilities by law. Given the circumstances it is hard to comprehend that these parents were allowed to participate in their children’s hearing. The process for un-deeming a Relevant Person is legally complex as it involves a court removing their Parental Rights and Responsibilities. We are looking into the detail of this with SCRA, but based on the information we have, we must assume that the birth parents have retained their Relevant Person status despite the abuse they committed against their children.

In April 2025, a landmark ruling by the Inner House of the Court of Session restored a decision of a Children’s Panel that a father who had repeatedly raped the child’s mother was not a Relevant Person. The ruling which found in favour of a children’s

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

	<p>hearing sets a key legal precedent for informing future practice. The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act further strengthens the powers of the chair to exclude a Relevant Person as a pre-emptive measure in advance of a hearing.</p> <p>Next steps: a) CHS will provide a further practice note to Panel Members to reflect the ruling of the Court of Session in relation to restricting Relevant Persons attendance. b) work with SCRA to investigate the legal framework for Relevant Person status in this case and make a case for the legal changes that are needed to prevent a situation like this occurring again. c) prepare new National Convener Guidance for hearings on managing attendance of relevant person in preparation for the enactment of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act.</p>
<p>3.2.5</p>	<p>Vicarious Trauma</p> <p>The scale of abuse, and neglect experienced by these children was only established and reported to the children's hearings system after their removal from their family home in 2019. Over the following 12-months, the children gradually disclosed the full extent of their abuse.</p> <p>Panel Members at this hearing and subsequent hearings (including the one in March 2025 referenced in the section above) would have received increasingly distressing reports detailing the extend of the abuse. This case reinforces the need for Panel Members to receive consistently high-quality wellbeing support via our regional Wellbeing Coordinators. It also highlights the need to establish a more robust system that consistently identifies hearings, with SCRA, that includes reports of child abuse. This will ensure that support can be proactively provided to mitigate some of the secondary trauma that Panel Members experience.</p> <p>There is also an opportunity as part of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act for the new enhanced role of the chair to play an active role in the joint planning of hearings with the reporter, in particular where significant abuse is being presented, and in the pre-hearing work to plan hearings in a trauma informed way with the appropriate supports offered to the Panel.</p> <p>Next steps: a) CHS to review and consider the system-wide approach with SCRA for identifying hearings that contain significant harm to children as part of the redesign work stream. b) ensure appropriate wellbeing support is provided in hearings where child abuse is a feature. c) keep under review the trauma informed mandatory training programme.</p>
<p>3.2.6</p>	<p>Inspection, Scrutiny and Learning</p> <p>The children were only protected from harm once they had formally entered the children's hearing system in 2019. A surprising feature of this review was that despite the concerns of professionals it took over a decade for a hearing to be</p>

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

convened. This is an important reminder of the vital role of the hearing system as the legal framework that has the decision-making powers to protect children. It also illustrates the important role that Panel Members play in scrutinising the assessments and interventions of social work and other statutory services. Their inquisitorial role in questioning assumptions, such as the extent to which families are a protective factor in children's lives, is critical in keeping children safe.

CHS does not have a formal role in learning reviews and in practice are peripheral to inspections and other child protection scrutiny systems. Neither CHS staff or Panel Members participated in this learning reviews evidence gathering or Practitioner Engagement sessions and we are not represented in the Glasgow Chief Officers Group that oversaw this review. As CHS evolves as an organisation, in particular with the development of professional staffing structure at a regional level, it is important that we establish communication channels in inspections, learning reviews and child protection scrutiny functions. This will allow CHS to learn from child protection learning reviews and inform Panel practice and standards. With the introduction of the enhanced role of the chair as one of the provisions within the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Act, it is anticipated that they will be more likely to be interviewed and involved in child protection learning reviews and scrutiny processes, given their enhanced decision making powers and their continuity by default status for every child in the hearing system.

Next steps. a) regional Tribunal Delivery Teams to continue to raise their profile in local child protection and scrutiny statutory functions. b) Practice and Policy Team to raise this issue through national forums and networks. c) to develop the role, remit, and training for the new cohort of enhanced chairs to engage in formal child protection scrutiny functions.

3.2.7 Cumulative Neglect

A theme throughout the report is for those supporting children to better identify the cumulative impact of neglect. Significant health deterioration, personal hygiene issues, and erratic behaviours which were out of step with the expected age and stage developmental milestones and were largely overlooked by professionals supporting the children. Furthermore, there was a tendency to be overly optimistic about the parents being a protective factor in the children's lives. Developmental concerns were attributed to addiction and poverty related factors, as opposed to the systematic and intentional abuse being inflicted on the children. In order to respond to this effectively Panel Members must be equipped with the skills to understand the cumulative impact of neglect.

Next steps. CHS will review the mandatory Panel Member and NSPCC child protection training, and the Learning Academy induction training to assess what improvements can be made to Panel Member trainings so they are equipped to recognise and respond to the cumulative impact of neglect.

Agenda Item 12. CHS-2627-07

4.	Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people. • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	<p>This paper details systemic risks within the child protection system and potential learning points for CHS. The key risk is that we do not learn from the review, however, the next steps detailed in the paper will go some way to mitigate this risk.</p>
6.	Risk Register
6.1	<p>A risk will be added to the strategic risk register, that CHS must review the lessons from Learning Reviews as an opportunity for organisational learning in order to help keep children safe.</p>
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
7.1	<p>The detail of the review highlights the fundamental right of children to be protected from harm, CHS has only taken a preliminary review of the report's findings, so no further impact assessment is required at this point.</p>
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	<p>There have been discussions with staff in SCRA about the findings of the report. We have discussed the review at the Child Protection Working group and with regional staff in Glasgow. Once approved, we will organise a briefing with Tribunal Delivery staff and senior managers as part of our wider engagement and to ensure the learning is shared across CHS.</p>
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	None.
10.	Appendices
	None.

Agenda Item 13.1a CHS-2627-08

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Children's Participation and Rights Strategy: Annual Review
Responsible Executive:	Carol Wassell, Director of Positive Outcomes
Report Author:	Stephen Bermingham Angela Phillips

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	This report is to provide an update and annual review of CHS's Children's Participation and Rights Strategy covering the period June 2025 – May 2026.
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	<p>This review of the Children's Participation and Rights Strategy illustrates the impact of the strategy and function over the last year. The review highlights our organisational learning and demonstrates our ambition to ensure the voice of lived experience is embedded in our organisation.</p> <p>The 'Our voice matters' video clip highlights the work undertaken this year. The Three Pillars Implementation Plan outlines our commitments for the next year.</p> <p>The recommendation is to note the progress made in delivering the Children's Participation and Rights Strategy.</p>
3.	Key Points for Discussion
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>"Our voice matters" video clip.</p> <p>Progress against the Three Pillars Implementation Plan 2025-2026, see section 2.</p>
3.2	Experts by Experience, section 3.
3.3	Status and Update of the 2024-2025 Three Pillar Plan commitments, sections 4 – 6.
3.4	Future plans, section 8.
3.4.1	Three Pillars Implementation Plan June 2026 – May 2027, section 9.
4.	Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook
4.1	This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:

Agenda Item 13.1a CHS-2627-08

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS • Objective 2 - Quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Objective 2 - We will become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. • Objective 3 - We will make effective use of technology, capitalising on its potential for enhancing performance and delivering efficiency.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	Budget constraints as we increase the number of Experts and resources required to support our shared ambition of elevating the voice of people with lived experience in CHS.
6.	Risk Register
6.1	There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
7.1	<p>An additional Data Protection impact assessment has been completed for The Voicebank project.</p> <p>A full suite of impact assessments were undertaken for the Children's Participation and Rights Strategy, this review is an update on progress.</p>
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	In the planning and preparation for this paper we reflected on feedback from young people and staff who have taken part in opportunities. This alongside engagement with all ten of our Experts structured the lessons learned featured in the review.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	As the work gains traction and is scaled up we will need to keep under review the staffing needs of the function and potentially increase our investment to reflect the legislative (UNCRC Incorporation Act) and organisational requirements of putting young people's voice at the centre of everything we do.

Agenda Item 13.1a CHS-2627-08

10.	Appendices
	Appendix 1 – Participation Annual Review June 2026 Appendix 2 – Experts opportunities overview Appendix 3 – Implementation Plan Overview Status and Update 2025-2026 Appendix 4 – Three Pillars Implementation Plan 2026-2027

Children’s Participation and Rights Strategy: Annual Review 2026

1. Purpose and Opportunity

The Children’s Participation and Rights Strategy is the delivery arm of achieving our corporate commitment to shape CHS through the voice of lived experience, by placing our Experts at the heart of organisational decision-making.

The Participation Coordinator leads and manages this strand of work in partnership and with oversight from the Senior Policy and Standards Manager.

This report provides an annual review of the work undertaken this year to deliver the aims and commitments made in the 2024 Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS) [Children’s Participation and Rights Strategy](#).

The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 and Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026 are key pieces of new legislation that will influence the direction of CHS. CHS will ensure the voice of lived experience are front and centre of the redesign. The new legislative landscape allows an opportunity for CHS to strategically involve the participation function, including our Experts to enhance CHS’s influence and credibility within the sector and the children and young people that we engage with.

2. Background

The Three Pillars were developed after thematic analysis of feedback from 100 young people who expressed an interest in the Expert by Experience (ExE) Group. The participation workstreams over the last year have been delivered via the Three Pillars Implementation Plan June 2025 – May 2026. A full status update for this plan can be found in *Appendix 1*. The work under each pillar along with lessons learned will be explored throughout this review.

The Three Pillars are:

Consistency

By improving the consistency of panels, all young people will have a fairer and equal experience. Making them feel respected and valued.

Support

Young people can thrive if provided with **clear and consistent information and support throughout their hearing journey and beyond**.

Trauma informed

When hearings are trauma informed, it puts the child at the centre. This makes them feel safe, supported and included.

To illustrate our work over the last year we have produced a short video clip 'Our voice matters' featuring the experiences of our Experts. It also features our Experts tagline, Real change, which has become a real strength when it comes to them considering accountability at CHS.

The clip can be accessed here:



3. Experts by Experience

ExE is CHS's national participation group and were established in March 2025 with their first Board meeting taking place in April 2025. The group currently has ten Experts, aged between 15 and 26. Since the group's inception, one Expert has stepped down, and we have appointed two additional Experts. ExE are the cornerstone of any participation and engagement work at CHS and ensures the voice of lived experience is at the heart of decision making.

Opportunities

In January 2025 the Participation Team launched an updated '[Ask the Experts](#)' process. This has allowed us to track and analyse requests to look for opportunities, trends and gaps. Opportunities must align with the four CHS Participation Principles: Respect, Inclusion, Empowerment and Accountability. The Participation Team are always available to support CHS staff to understand meaningful participation and co-design the opportunity if it doesn't quite meet participation standards the first time around.

Over the period 2025/26 we have received 36 Ask the Experts requests, 31 internal and five external. The Experts have participated in 30 opportunities ranging from one off events like Board meetings and regional learning events to larger ongoing projects like the updated recruitment materials with The Stand. Two internal Asks were declined and four are currently being reworked.

Lessons learned & capacity

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

Whilst we have ten Experts it can be challenging to engage them in opportunities. There are a variety of reasons for this including; work / education commitments, personal life and location as hybrid can be challenging for some opportunities. There have been occasions where a few of our Experts have dropped out at short notice. We are also aware that the upcoming redesign and involvement with the regions will create more opportunities. At present we are in danger of stretching our Experts and not fulfilling opportunities.

Next steps:

- Over the next year, we will recruit up to ten additional Experts, targeting the 14–18 year age group;
- The 'Ask the Experts' request will be continually promoted within CHS and we will consider the possibility of piloting requests from our Panel Community in one region. Staff are always encouraged to get in touch with the Participation Team to discuss any projects that could involve the Experts;
- We will continue to build strong and trusting relationships with our Experts, and wider voice groups to provide a range of safe and supported opportunities.

The table in *Appendix 2* details the opportunities and the individual/team who requested our Experts involvement. Descriptions of the opportunities and impact will be highlighted throughout this report under the relevant pillar.

4. Pillar One - Consistency

By improving the consistency of panels, all young people will have a fairer and equal experience. Making them feel respected and valued.

Under this pillar we said:

- Our Experts would work with Panel Members with the consideration of a small forum being created;
- Young people's experiences would influence recruitment and training;
- Experts would shape the Hearings Redesign preparation for Hearings workstream;
- Work would start with CHS Practice and Policy Team to develop new and existing policies;
- Partnership work would take place between the CHS Quality Team and Panel Practice Advisors;
- We would provide an evidence-based approach to ensuring rights are respected; and
- The plan is under continuous review.

Activities undertaken:

Recruitment of CHS staff and Board Members

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

In 2025/26 our Experts had several opportunities to influence and be part of the decision-making process for CHS staff and Board appointments. Experts were part of the interview panel for the following roles:

- CHS Board members
- Feedback & Complaints Officer
- Interim Director of Tribunal Delivery
- Participation Advisor
- Director of Tribunal Delivery

Feedback from our Experts is that they enjoy being part of the decision-making process for new staff and feel that their views are listened to and taken seriously. In terms of time commitment, interview panels require the most preparation work, compared with other opportunities. We have found that our older Experts are more able to commit to shortlisting, completing the necessary preparation work and engaging in long days for interviews.

Our experts had the opportunity to interview new CHS Board members as an ask from the Scottish Government Public Appointment Team. Two Experts formed and led a young person's interview panel, interviewing 12 prospective Board members. This ended up being a hybrid opportunity, our Experts were in person supported by the Participation Coordinator and the candidates were online. Our Experts met with the technical interview panel afterwards to inform the decision making.

The Participation Team and our Experts have worked closely with the CHS People Operations Manager to develop a Recruitment Guide for CHS to use when involving young people with lived experience in recruitment. This has been tested using a few of the recruitment campaigns with mixed success. For the most recent CHS staff recruitment we tested an in-person version of the young person's panel which worked much better than our Experts shortlisting and being part of the full interview process. The young person's panel questions were set by our Experts and focused on values, relationship building and questions on how the candidate will ensure young people will be included in their workstream if they are successful.

Lessons Learned

Feedback from our Experts is that they enjoy being part of the decision-making process for new staff and feel that their views are listened to and taken seriously. In terms of time commitment, interview panels require the most preparation work, compared with other opportunities. We have found that our older Experts are more able to commit to shortlisting, completing the necessary preparation work and engaging in long days for interviews.

We will continue to work with the People Operations Manager to rework the recruitment guide as young person's panel guidance. We have also been asked by the Scottish Government Public Appointments team to provide guidance on how people with lived experience can be meaningfully involved in Public Body board appointments. Two Experts are working with the Participation Coordinator and the People Operations Manager to create a good practice guidance guide to inform Public Body appointments.

Recruitment of volunteers

For the Autumn 2025 Panel Member recruitment campaign, our Experts and Our Hearings Our Voice (OHOV) effected real change by co-designing the questions and scenario section of the interview process. Homelessness and insecure housing are issues that disproportionately impact families and young people with care experience, and it is something that young people are very passionate about. As part of their interview, panel member candidates were asked to prepare a 5 min response to the scenario set by our Experts and OHOV: 'Homelessness impacts on the well-being of children and families.'

Candidates were asked to provide their feedback of the scenario question. It was clear that they valued young people's involvement in their interview:

"Nice to see young people at the centre. It was clear it was their own words and very authentic. Liked that they were involved at this stage."

"Candidate stated the video was brilliant!"

We will build on this and create a new scenario topic for the autumn 2026 recruitment campaign.

Designing recruitment campaign materials with The Stand

In June 2025, the CHS Communications Team submitted an 'Ask the Experts' request form for our Experts to be involved in the development of the new recruitment campaign materials. These materials included an advert for television as well as campaign posters for billboards and buses. This was a multi-stage opportunity which ran over several months. We also opened this opportunity to members of OHOV.

Our Experts and OHOV first met with The Stand in July 2025. Here The Stand introduced themselves, the project brief and conducted a stakeholder engagement session. The group worked through the following questions with staff from the Stand:

- What makes a good Panel Member?
- What do you think makes people want to be a Panel Member?
- What do people misunderstand about children's Hearings?
- What are the most important things for us to tell people about being a Panel Member?
- What do you worry about that we could get wrong?

Feedback on the campaign from Experts and OHOV included:

"It's children's lives. It's not a laugh and a game. The current campaign seems like you're helping out at an afterschool club."

“Children’s panels are an eye opener experience for some people! This campaign needs to open up eyes to reality.”

“Don’t make Panel Members out to be superheroes or gods. You don’t need to be extraordinary. They’re normal people. A five year old doesn’t care if you’ve got a law qualification.”

Lessons learned

Ongoing communication with the Communications Team and The Stand around this project was excellent. The Experts and OHOV had multiple opportunities to view drafts and provide feedback before the final materials were agreed. One Expert was also invited along to the production and filming day in Glasgow. Although it was a long day, the Expert felt well supported and listened to by the production team. They were able to make changes to the hearing ‘set’ and directly influenced how it looked on camera. We are confident the co-design of these campaign materials by those with lived experience will influence the application pool and strengthen our panel community.

Working with Practice and Policy

In November 2025, the Practice & Policy team submitted an Ask the Experts form to request our Experts to input into the CHS Progressing Children’s Rights Report. The report is an opportunity to celebrate the progress that has been made in terms of children's rights over the last three years within CHS. Although our Experts have not been in post for the full three-year reporting period, their input into the report has helped frame what we are doing well and areas for improvement.

We decided to focus on four areas of the UNCRC implementation framework:

- Participation of Children and Young People (linked to Article 12 - I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously)
- Publishing Child Friendly/Easy Read Information (linked to Article 6 - I have the right to live and grow as a person)
- Accountability and Reporting on Children’s Rights (linked to Article 3 - Adults must do what’s best for me)
- Non-Discrimination/Rights at Risk (linked to Article 2 - All children have these rights no matter what their differences are)

Our Experts had the opportunity to comment on different CHS workstreams and projects under each of these areas in the form of a school report card. They marked each piece of work as either achieved, working towards, or not on track and provided comments on what needed to happen next.

Lessons learned

The feedback and suggestions that our Experts shared during the session included developing clearer processes and justification for engaging with children and young people and making

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

sure this includes providing them with feedback about the impact of their involvement. There were some areas of work that our Experts did not know much about, for example Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments, however, they showed a level of interest and desire to be involved with in the future.

Our Experts shared enthusiasm for expanding their group, making sure to include 'quieter' voices and necessary adjustments to allow others to attend in person, and meet individual needs. They were particularly keen on ensuring that 'child-friendly' and 'easy read' versions of documents are created as standard at CHS, to ensure children have easy access to information about their rights.

Overall, our Experts voices have helped steer the focus of our Progressing Children's Rights Report. They have rightly highlighted the areas of work that need to be celebrated but also identified where learning can be taken from these examples and translated into future and ongoing improvement over the next reporting period. This report will be a tool that we can use to continue the conversation about how we are upholding children's rights at CHS, making sure we are accountable to our Experts and those with lived experience.

Working with Quality

The CHS quality team submitted and Ask the Experts as part of quality week 2025. The theme being "Quality: think differently," inviting us to challenge traditional approaches to quality management and embrace new ways of thinking. The quality team led a world café style workshop with our Experts to help develop some learning resources. During the workshop they explored two topics; children's voice and attendance. The work from this workshop has been further developed and is now a published appendix in the Panel Practice Adviser Guidance: The Observation Form.

Lesson learned

With any participation opportunity we must ensure that we are sure that the information doesn't already exist. The feedback from our Experts on this session was that they felt they had been asked these questions before. As part of the follow up the Quality Partner met with three of our Experts and developed the appendix. Knowing what teams do with the information young people provide is a key part of our strategy and when submitting an Ask the Experts feedback must be agreed to. In this case the feedback session provided the output, explanation and accountability which ensured our Experts felt their input had been developed respectfully. They did have opportunity during the feedback session to make changes which is important to ensure authenticity.

5. Pillar Two - Support

Young people can thrive if provided with **clear and consistent information and support throughout their hearing journey and beyond.**

Under this pillar we said:

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

- We would ensure rights are upheld during Hearings and beyond;
- CHS would provide support and opportunities for participation work;
- We would continue to work closely with OHOV and share opportunities;
- We would build on our participation network nationally and regionally with organisations that matter to young people;
- We would work with regional teams to identify opportunities for Experts and other groups of young people;
- We would deliver the Communications plan to share good news stories about participation work, including signposting and highlighting the work of other organisations;
- We would operationalise the mentoring scheme at CHS; and
- Continue to work in partnership with other Corporate Parents.

Activities undertaken;

Working with the Regions

In 2025/26 the Experts worked directly with five regional teams:

- Glasgow
- Central
- Lanarkshire & Dumfries and Galloway
- Highland, Moray and Eilean Siar
- Ayrshire

These opportunities included presenting at Panel Member learning events, one-off consultations and partnership working with local organisations. In Ayrshire the participation function supported an art project led by the Ayrshire Partnership Coordinator for hearings experienced young people to create artwork for a local hearing centre. The Participation team will continue to build on our relationships with the regional teams and work to develop and support projects in each of the nine regions.

The Partnership Coordinator from Highland and Moray invited our Experts to deliver a workshop at their local learning event in September 2025. The theme chosen by our Experts and one that we know resonates with our Panel Community was children’s participation in hearings. The event was a success, and you could actually see the moment where Panel Members receive the message of the workshop. This is described below in a vignette written by the Lived Experience Advisor.

“The city chambers were buzzing with discussion and lively debate. Paper shuffled, pens scribbled, post-its filled with ideas. Volunteers from across Highland and Moray paused over their notes, reflecting on what participation in hearings really meant. It was more than attendance—it was choice: to draw, to write, to record, or to ask someone to speak for you. Around the room, heads began to nod. Pens moved again, and more post-its flew. The shift was almost audible—the quiet moment of I get it now.”

Lessons learned

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

Feedback from regional teams and Panel Members has been very positive. Expert involvement at learning events is extremely valuable as it brings learning to life and ensures the sessions remain child centred. We have found that engagement with Panel Members works better when the Experts pose questions to them to open a discussion, rather than simply presenting as a key speaker. We noticed that this format risked the Expert being asked difficult/inappropriate questions about their individual story. On these occasions the Participation team were able to step in to redirect the questions. Taking this learning on board we now work with the regional teams to plan accordingly and ask Panel Members to submit their questions in advance or at the end so the Participation can field them.

Visit to Scottish Parliament and meeting with the Minister

As Experts by Experience, one of their core objectives is to influence key decision-makers. In October 2025 four of our Experts and three members of OHOV met with Natalie Don-Innes MSP, Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise. They were given a tour of the Parliament by staff of the office of Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and they watched First Minister's Questions.

The young people designed a game of 'questions Jenga' to play with Ms Don-Innes, where each wooden block removed from the tower had a talking point to spark discussion. These ranged from light-hearted ice-breakers to important issues about improving the hearings system.

"We gave the Minister some quite hard questions, including, in a year's time what do you see the Children's Panel being like, and what needs to change? We also discussed what better supports need to be in place for people leaving care and leaving the hearings system."

Gemma Expert

Lessons learned

For most of our Experts, this was their first time visiting Parliament, experiencing First Minister Questions in the Chamber and meeting with a Minister. This was an exciting opportunity to see how Parliament operates and directly share their views and experiences at the highest level of influence. For one of our Experts this was the first time they had ever encountered airport-like security, so this in itself was a huge experience for them.

Practice and Standards team days

In 2025/26 our Experts had two opportunities to participate in the Practice & Standards team days: the first in Sept 2025 and the second in March 2026. The purpose of the team days is to connect with colleagues, learn more about different workstreams/updates to policy and provide a space for collaboration.

Lessons learned

Feedback from colleagues is that they enjoyed the Experts' input into the day and appreciated the chance to meet them and gain a different perspective. Experts enjoy being part of these

sessions too, although the pace and structure of the days can be tiring. For future Practice and Standards team days, the Participation team plan to invite the Experts to certain sessions rather than the full day to ensure focus and meaningful engagement. There will also be an opportunity for our Experts to design a Practice and Standards development day, this will ensure the Experts feel like an integral part of the function.

Meeting the CHS Board

Our Experts were invited to join the CHS Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Board at a joint development session. This formed part of the third Board meeting for our Experts. This provided a real opportunity for our Experts to meet and influence senior decision makers.

The purpose of the session was to build relationships and consider ways in which our Experts could work more with SLT and the Board. The session started with a working lunch where everyone had prepared a Panel Member profile to share some information about themselves. This session began with question Jenga and the OHOV labels exercise, followed by a CHS version of Taskmaster facilitated by the Participation Coordinator. The groups took part in four tasks; describe CHS in three words, design a CHS mascot, objective setting for various roles at CHS and next steps for the Board/SLT to work with our Experts.

Lessons learned

The day went well and there was high energy amongst the group. A variety of short tasks worked well and all of our Experts said they enjoyed the session.

“The profiles were great, I liked the way all of the Board members came to find us and ask about the facts we had written. Sean in particular made it his mission to get round us all.”
Ryden Expert

“The thought, planning and engagement was on point for everyone. The board are super delighted. The experts were the worthy stars of the event and did a great job in confidently introducing themselves to all. Lots of actions to follow up on.”
Elliot Jackson, National Convenor

The write up from this meeting has informed the start of the joint charter and mandate for involving young people in project and redesign work. We are working closely with the Senior Policy and Standards Manager and the Strategic Planning and Delivery Manager to develop joint sessions for future Board meetings.

Working with OHOV

Throughout 2025/26, we have worked closely with Our Hearings Our Voice (OHOV) and collaborated on several projects. The basis of establishing our Experts was to provide additional lived experience voice within CHS, but it was critical that we remain a key partner and collaborate with OHOV on joint projects and wider children’s hearings redesign.

To achieve this the Participation team meet with OHOV staff every 6-8 weeks to share updates and opportunities for joint working. In 2025/26 Experts and OHOV have worked together on:

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

- Interview questions and scenario for Panel Member Autumn campaign
- Recruitment campaign materials with The Stand
- Visit to Scottish Parliament and meeting the Minister
- OHOV Rise Up event
- Joint Board meeting and pantomime trip
- Joint residential activity weekend in Lochgoilhead

In October 2025, two of our Experts presented at the OHOV Rise Up event which showcased their Seeing Beyond the Surface guide. Their presentation focussed on the guide's theme: children's participation and voice. They presented to over 100 people, including key decision makers, professionals working in the care-experienced sector, panel members and their peers. Our Experts used the learning from a workshop they had delivered on participation in hearings to Panel Members in Highland and Moray as the basis for the OHOV event.

This project included the creation of a reversible writing poem. They are now working with Braw Talent to animate this poem and when ready it will be used for training and will be shared wider as part of our communications plan. The original poem can be viewed by following this link [Am I as invisible to Panel Members as I think?](#)

In March 2026 we held a joint activity weekend at the Scouts Adventure centre in Lochgoilhead. This was the first time taking our Experts on an overnight residential. Five Experts attended the weekend. The purpose of the weekend was to build confidence and friendships through team building activities, as well as the opportunity to try new things. We also had a joint Board meeting during the residential to look at pre-service training.

Lessons learned

We have an established working relationship with OHOV and will continue to include them in opportunities at CHS. The success of this has been due to close partnership working between the staff leading the workstreams and allowing time of the young people to get to know each other during work and social activities. The professional peer-relationships between the two Participation teams has been invaluable in driving up standards by sharing good practice and collaborating on key areas of shared interest.

6. Pillar Three - Trauma informed

When hearings are trauma informed, it puts the child at the centre. This makes them feel safe, supported and included.

Under this pillar we said that:

- We would operationalise a joint Participation and Feedback Delivery Group for 2025/26;
- We would create CHS Voice Bank to encourage online engagement options;
- We would build relationships with partners to explore feedback mechanisms that work for young people;

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

- We would continue to embed the work of Language Leaders;
- We would carry out outreach work with organisations including secure and residential care settings;
- We would consider quieter voices in all strands of our work; and
- We would work closely with SCRA and Panel Members on ways to put children at the centre.

Activities undertaken;

Partnership working with Complaints and Feedback

Participation and Feedback Delivery Group

CHS have employed an additional member of staff to the Feedback and Complaints Team with a dedicated focus on creating child friendly mechanisms to gather feedback from children and young people. Alongside this has been the establishment of a CHS Participation and Feedback Delivery Group. This group is accountable for the upscaling of existing national and regional participation workstreams to develop a framework that works for children and young people to tell CHS what they think about hearings. The Delivery Group members are those within CHS who have a role working or communicating directly with children and young people. One of our Experts who works in a participation role for a local authority is also a group member.

The group meets every six weeks; Charing duties are shared between the Participation Coordinator and the Complaints Management Officer. Key members of this group are two Partnership Coordinators and the Tribunal Delivery Manager with responsibility for participation. The Partnership Coordinators carried out a mapping exercise across all nine regions as a baseline which we revisit quarterly to ensure we are maximizing opportunities for young people wider than our Experts.

The work of this group alongside the development of wider feedback mechanisms at CHS was included as a good practice case study (page 134) of the 2026 [State of Children's Rights Report](#) by Together Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights.

Lessons learned

The group has been running for one year and has transformed relationships with the regions and improved channels for participation and feedback. A working relationship between a Partnership Coordinator and Expert is fully established in Ayrshire. There are plans to launch a small forum group in Central between Panel Members and Experts, with a similar forum planned in Glasgow between Panel Practice Advisors and Experts. There has also been an increase in feedback from young people via advocacy providers as a result of this group. This group will also be instrumental for future plans to involve wider voice in redesign in the coming years.

Voicebank

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

The Voicebank is a collaborative project being developed between the CHS Participation and Feedback & Complaints teams. A key driving force in the management of this project has been the leadership of the Feedback and Complaints Office (child friendly focus).

The Voicebank is a proactive approach to gathering anonymous feedback from children and young people. Children and young people aged 12 and over can opt-in to receive regular emails with intentional questions about their hearings experience. Feedback will be gathered through short online surveys (hosted on MS Forms) where the child or young person can provide their views and experiences anonymously.

Analysis will collate concerns and positives from which learning will be extracted, to ultimately improve practice and standards in the hearing room. Regular 'You said, we did' style reports will be created and shared with the Voicebank members so they can see where their feedback has made an impact.

Lessons learned

It has been a slow process to set up the voicebank and involved working with Information Governance to produce a suite of Impact Assessments. The Data impact assessment has been crucial to the project, and we are now in a position where this has been signed off. We are working closely with the Communications team to host/promote the sign-up form on the CHS website and social media platforms. We plan for the Voicebank sign up to be live on the website in Summer 2026.

Website

Participation, Feedback & Complaints and Communications teams are working together to update the Children and Young People pages on the CHS website. Our aim for the website is to have a distinct and child-friendly section, where children and young people can find information relevant to them and their hearing journey.

Feedback from our Experts is that the webpages need to be attractive, accessible to children and easy to navigate. When discussing why children and young people might visit the CHS website we settled on four 'user journeys':

- I have a hearing coming up / I want to know what happens at a hearing
- I've had a hearing already / I want to give feedback about my hearing
- I want to use my voice to get more involved
- I've had my last hearing / sign-posting to further support

The webpages will also include child-friendly definitions and versions of CHS reports, and a section for adults who are supporting a child or young person in hearings. We are working with our Experts to agree the content under each of the user journeys.

The communications function are currently building the updated children and young people webpages with the aim of going live in Summer 2026.

Lessons learned

Only a few of our Experts signed up to this opportunity and attendance at online meetings has been challenging. We recently took the ideas to a workshop with higher Experts attendance which pushed the project forward. In future whilst it is good to have small focus groups, we would encourage our Experts to take this to larger group meetings to share what they have been working on and seek feedback from a wider group of young people with experience of the hearing system.

Feedback animation

In March 2026 the Participation team commissioned Braw Talent to co-produce an animation to encourage more children to give feedback about their hearings. Braw Talent are an award-winning not-for-profit creative studio amplifying underrepresented voices through film, animation, and visual arts.

Our Experts have had two sessions with Braw Talent. The first session was about introducing the Experts to Braw Talent and having conversations which would inform the script. During the first session we discussed:

- What is feedback
- Why feedback is important
- The barriers to children and young people providing feedback
- How to make the process more child friendly

These conversations were then translated into a script for the animation. Our second session with Braw Talent consisted of reading through the script and making comments/changes to the first draft. The animation will be launched in early Q2 once finalised.

Lessons learned

During these conversations with our Experts, it became clear that changes to the current process for child-friendly feedback were needed. Feedback from our Experts was that it was not clear on the CHS website where to navigate to find the feedback and complaints pages. They also did not find the current feedback form engaging or easy to understand. Taking their feedback on board, the Feedback & Complaints team created three draft versions of the form and asked our Experts to complete the forms as if they were a child currently in the hearings system. They have now agreed on a version they would like further developed.

The next stage is working with the Communications team to translate this draft form onto the website. We are aiming to launch this improved process alongside the website refresh.

Community Hub – Experts page

We have been working closely with the Communications team to look at different ways that our Experts can share their work with the volunteer and wider community. Recent changes

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

to the Community Hub have offered an opportunity for our Experts to have their own page – directly communicating with Panel Members and the rest of the volunteer community.

The page will include an introduction to our Experts, a group photo, their story so far, a section on ‘what we’re currently working on’, and links to news articles related to ExE.

The Communications team have drafted the page, and we now are working with our Experts to finalise content before launching.

Online engagement

While our Experts have told us that they prefer to meet in person, the Participation team always endeavours to have an online/hybrid option available for anyone who can’t make it in person. This has been especially important for our Experts based in the Highlands and Islands, but we have also had more centrally based Experts choosing to participate online too.

Lessons learned

The Participation team have regular 1:1s with our Experts and during our last review we asked if they would like more informal opportunities to meet and check in with us. It was agreed that we would trial a monthly online drop in. Although this was something the group had asked for, we only had the same 1-2 Experts attending. All of our Experts have a CHS account and access to MS package which includes Teams. Eight of the Experts also have CHS laptops, therefore, we are planning to move our communication to Teams to see if that helps and motivates the Experts to engage with us online.

Remuneration

With support from the CHS Board we have aligned the remuneration for our Experts ad participation work with Scottish Government guidance. The reason for this decision was to move away from ad hoc voucher payments and remunerate those with lived experience on an equal and consistent basis with a form of payment that works for them. With support from the Practice and Standards Business Support Assistant and the CHS Finance team our Experts can submit an invoice for payment for their time and input on projects at CHS. We have kept the voucher system as a few of our Experts prefer that method of remuneration. All travel is booked in advance to ensure no young person has any barrier to attending opportunities. When working with external groups of young people, for example OHOV or regional groups we can only remunerate in vouchers, however we always ensure they receive the same rates as our Experts for taking part in similar projects.

“I feel like the payments do encourage me to take part. Getting paid for our time feels good because we are getting listened to and able to take part in things.”

Grainne, Expert

“The payments do encourage me to a degree, but I still take pride and enjoyment in being part of the process.”

Ryden, Expert

"I absolutely love doing it and would do it for nothing, but it does have impact and I sometimes have to take time off work. If this needs to be as unpaid time off the payments mean I can still take part without any detriment."

Liam, Expert

"I would have done this anyway but it definitely helps that it's paid, because alongside wanting to do this, there's the extra fact that it helps with living, especially the cost of electricity in the winter. I have a job with minimum wage, so it's a little bit extra every so often that helps, and I can have some savings too because of that."

Gemma, Expert

Lessons learned

Many of our Experts tell us they don't need remunerated, but it provides equality and respects their time and input. We have an opportunity's structure in place which outlines expectations for input and remuneration for projects which we regularly refer to ensure accountability on both sides. Submitting invoices was completely new to many of our Experts and they have been supported by the Practice and Standards Business Support Assistant to ensure these are submitted correctly. There have been a few teething problems with the new finance system, but we are working with the CHS Finance team to iron these out.

7. Staffing

Effective participation work is resource intensive, and it is good practice for this be delivered by more than one staff member.

The Lived Experience Advisor had been recruited on a fixed term of two years; this term has now come to an end. In March 2026 CHS advertised and has recruited a Participation Advisor on a permanent basis to add structure and consistency to this workstream.

Currently there are two paid members of staff in the Participation Team, however our Experts are part of our team which takes the number to 12, soon to rise to as high as 22. This shows the commitment CHS have made to ensure the voice of lived experience is central to its work and any future redesign.

We will continue to ensure those with lived experience are provided with development opportunities at CHS via ExE and mentoring as well as expanding our Experts numbers. We will also continue to establish relationships between Partnership Coordinators and our Experts to promote regional opportunities for wider groups of children and young people with lived experience of hearings.

The Participation Team work closely with the Complaints and Feedback Officer (child friendly focus), as well as the regional Partnership Coordinators to add further capacity to the

function. We will continue to monitor staffing as Expert numbers increase, and redesign projects start to upscale.

8. Future Plans

CHS are Keeping the Promise and given our significant redesign agenda up to and beyond 2030 we have the ambition and drive to strengthen voice in all we do. We have the opportunity for our Experts to co-design what participation in redesign planning could look like. With that being the starting point for our organisation and our Experts to then involve wider voice to ensure lived experience is at the heart of organisational decision-making.

Our Experts have set the themes for our workstreams over the next year, building on the pillars developed last year. For 2026-2027 the focus areas are:

Pillar One - Consistency

Children's Hearings redesign

Pillar Two – Support

Strengthen connections and provide opportunities within CHS for those with lived experience of hearings

Pillar Three - Trauma informed

Influence Panel Community knowledge and behaviour

Given the scale of the work and interconnectivity of the Pillars alongside the redesign ambition we have scaled back and outlined the main workstream areas below:

Increasing ExE group numbers

One of the first things we will do is recruit more Experts. This will be targeted at the 14–18-year-old age group. Our Experts are appointed on a two-year term with option to extend if under the upper age limit of 26 years. For our older members we will continue to work on opportunities for them to still retain a role within CHS once their Experts journey has come to an end. Bringing in younger Experts will keep the group fresh and ensure we are reaching young people who may still be attending hearings or have recent experience.

Mentoring

Our Experts are keen to work with other teams across CHS and we are keen to offer wider opportunities for our Experts. A key part of this is to develop mutually beneficial mentoring relationships between staff and our Experts. This will be an opportunity for skills sharing and helping to embed the voice of lived experience in CHS' operational delivery of our key functions. Our mentoring scheme was due to launch early 2026 but after working with our

Experts we have paused this launch until later in 2026 to allow extra planning and to ensure we can offer meaningful opportunities.

Volunteer recognition

The Real Change Awards project celebrates the vital contribution of our volunteer Panel Community across Scotland. Volunteers regularly go above and beyond, undertaking additional responsibilities such as delivering training, stepping into hearings at short notice, and advocating for children's rights to essential services. Many also support children beyond their role, strengthening communities and contributing to the wider sector.

Designed and led by our Experts, the awards aim to recognise good practice while fostering stronger relationships between with our Panel Community, CHS, and children and young people. Our Experts will co-design every stage of the event, from planning and category creation to judging, and ensuring the awards reflect their priorities under their pledge "Real Change, Not Just Words."

Alongside the ceremony, the project includes a strategic communications plan to share authentic stories, challenge perceptions, and highlight child-centred practice. This will raise the profile of our Panel Community and CHS, while making their work more visible and relatable.

Initial research has already started, with the Lived Experience Advisor working closely with one of our Experts to agree the aims of the awards, potential categories, promotion and possible venues. With the announcement of the Hearing Redesign, it was agreed by CHS SLT and the Board that the awards is placed on hold until 2027.

External asks

In the previous year we have received five external asks from organisations to work with our Experts. These have been from Scottish Government, Edinburgh University, Strathclyde University, Community of Practice for Siblings and the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA). Any external asks will be considered if the project furthers strategic objectives at CHS. We will continue to work with OHOV on any external asks as they may be better placed to respond.

Recruitment

We will continue to build our CHS staff and Board recruitment guidance in partnership with our Experts and the People Operations Manager. This will also include working with Scottish Government to develop good practice guidance when engaging young people's panels for Board appointments.

We will also continue to work with the Recruitment and Retention Manger on Panel Member recruitment, including the development of new interview scenarios.

Children's Hearings Redesign

The significant redesign agenda including the planning, deciding and delivering what CHS need to do up to and beyond 2030 to keep The Promise in Children's Hearings is one of our Experts priorities for next year.

Our Experts met with CHS SLT and Board members in November 2025 where they started to unpick how they could work together. This has provided the foundations for planning, now our Experts have been invited to meet with CHS SLT and Board Members in June 2026 to discuss next steps for this. The Experts have indicated the below points they would like to discuss:

Co-designing a CHS participation charter

Based on what our Experts have told us already the charter will include ideas on how CHS include our Experts and wider groups of children and young people in project work.

This will include:

- Consideration of times/days when young people have availability.
- Meeting Experts where they feel safe. Not always inviting them into adult formats and spaces on pre-determined times and dates.
- Minimising the adults in the room.
- Ensuring equity of information shared with adults and young people in an accessible way.
- Ensuring they are invited to take part, and they always have the option to say no.
- Getting to know them on a social level and not just asking them about work.
- Ensuring any collaboration is clear with meaningful outcomes.
- Communication flows two ways. Young people need to have the opportunity to present their ideas on topics that are important to them.
- Their views are valued, respected and included in decision making.
- Feedback is provided at regular intervals. This will ensure they can influence as the project progresses rather than being presented a finished product.
- That they can see themselves and their ideas in the decision-making process and outcomes.

Co-designing a charter will set expectations from the very beginning and will ensure accountability from all parties. This charter will also be used for wider participation projects as well as redesign.

Mandate for action

Once the charter has been agreed, our Experts will work with Practice and Policy, Strategic Planning and the National Convenor to identify areas of redesign that they feel they can have most influence.

Over the last year our Experts have been involved in helping to shape the new provisions in the Children (Care, Care Experience and Service Planning) Bill. Our Experts are already working

with the Practice and Policy team to make sure that any new provisions that relate to the National Convener functions are co-produced with those with lived experience.

For example, we have already started this work in relation to the enhanced role of the chair:

As already agreed with the Minister and stated during committee evidence “CHS will involve young people with lived experience in the co-design of the role description, recruitment materials and recruitment processes for the new cohort of Chairs. This will ensure that the skills and values required for a Chairing Member reflect the views of people with lived experience.”

The Senior Policy and Standards Manager has facilitated a workshop with our Experts on the enhanced role of the chair to outline; what is staying the same and why, what is changing and why, and how this will affect the outcomes for children and young people.

Once the areas of redesign have been identified our Experts would like to work with the Participation Team and Regional Teams to take the redesign components in the Bill to wider groups of children and young people so that their views can inform redesign decisions taken by the National Convener.

Early thinking is that we do this in Roadshow format. Our Experts will work with CHS staff to develop engaging workshops on the identified areas; they will then be supported to deliver these workshops regionally to ensure all children and young people who want to be involved can be. We will also work with the Regional Teams to identify groups of young people including secure and residential settings to ensure harder to reach and quieter voice are included in the redesign planning process.

CHS staff will then help our Experts collate and analyse this information, which they can then present to CHS, the Scottish Government, partners and CHS Board.

9. Three Pillars Implementation Plan June 2026 – May 2027

The Three Pillars titles have remained the same, however, for the next year due to the large-scale projects anticipated due to the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill we have adjusted our workstreams accordingly. This will ensure we have the space and capacity to do this well and ensure young people are central to the decision-making process.

Consistency

Children’s Hearings redesign

Under this pillar it is proposed that we:

- Create and develop a Charter and Mandate for Action of how young people will be included in areas of redesign.
- Work with CHS Strategic Planning and Practice and Policy Team to identify areas of redesign work to involve young people.

Agenda Item 13.1b Appendix 1

- Create engaging sessions where young people can influence redesign and see themselves in the outcomes.
- Widen the reach of lived experience voice in redesign through regional partnership working.
- Ensure this plan is under continuous review.

Support

Strengthen connections and provide opportunities within CHS for those with lived experience of hearings.

Under this pillar it is proposed that we:

- Continue to work closely with OHOV and share opportunities.
- Amplify the quieter voices in all strands of our work.
- Match all Experts with a CHS mentor.
- Carry out a mapping exercise of CHS workstreams that young people could be part of. This will be closely linked to our mentoring work.
- Ensure our co-designed participation charter and mandate for working with children and young people is applied to all project work.
- Experts to co-design a regional roadshow for redesign planning in partnership with regional teams.
- Strengthen our Corporate Parent commitment and links with other Corporate Parents.

Trauma informed

Influence Panel Community knowledge and behaviour.

Under this pillar it is proposed that we:

- Launch and develop the CHS Voice Bank, website pages and SharePoint.
- Continue to share good news stories via our Communications team.
- Further strengthen and continue to work with both the Complaints and Feedback and Regional teams to ensure we maintain a trauma informed approach to seeking feedback from children and young people.
- Establish forums between our Experts and the Panel Community.
- Experts to work with the CHS Learning Team to influence Panel Community training.
- Continue to influence Panel Member recruitment.

The Three Pillars Implementation Plan for 2026/27 can be found in *Appendix 3*.

10. Key risks

Effective participation needs to be agile and therefore plans and activities need to flex and change depending on the feedback from young people and the requirements of CHS. We will continue to bring creativity and innovation to this work, and this will be reflected in how we report on its impact and progress.

Potential risks we have identified include:

- Experts' capacity. ExE has been in existence for one year and we have only had one member step down and this was due to them relocating to England. We are experiencing good retention rates but the majority of CHS opportunities are within working hours which does not suit a lot of our Experts. Whilst we can try where possible to be flexible, we have no control of the timing of some opportunities or external challenges which may mean Experts cannot commit. For this reason, we will be recruiting more Experts in the next year.
- CHS to provide meaningful opportunities. We need to ensure that young people can engage and influence appropriate operational and strategic work from the inception. We will continue to work with staff to ensure requests align with the strategy aims and are meaningful and that commitments to involve them are only made after once there has been a process of collaboration and agreement
- Looking through a child protection lens, it is imperative that we consider the support and safety requirements for the young people we are working with as well as the staff supporting them. As the group numbers increase, we will continue to monitor staffing and budget levels as the year progresses to ensure we can maintain remuneration and support levels to young people engaging with CHS.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Implementation Plan Overview Status and Update 2025-2026

Appendix 2 – Experts opportunities overview

Appendix 3 – Three Pillars Implementation Plan 2026-2027

Appendix 2 – Experts opportunities

Quarter	Opportunity	Request from	ExE sign ups	ExE attendance
Q1	ExE April Board meeting	Participation team	9	8
	CHS All Staff Day	People & Culture	3	1
	Glasgow learning event	Glasgow Partnership Coordinator	4	1
	Interview panel for Feedback & Complaints Officer	Feedback & Complaints Manager	6	2 (only 2 required)
	Volunteers’ Week video clip	Communications team	1	1
	Consultation on dental packs in hearing centres	Central Wellbeing Coordinator	4	4
	Interview panel for Director of Tribunal Delivery (acting up)	National Convener	1	1 (only 1 required)
	Participation Network Event	Participation team	1	1 (only 1 required)
Q2	PM recruitment campaign engagement session with The Stand	Communications team	4	4
	PM interview questions	Recruitment & Retention team	5	4
	Highland & Moray PM learning event	Highland, Moray and Eilean Siar Partnership Coordinator	2	2 (only 2 required)
	ExE August Board meeting	Participation team	8	7
	North Lanarkshire Marketplace	Lanarkshire & Dumfries and Galloway Partnership Coordinator	3	1
	Practice & Standards Team session	Senior Policy and Standards Manager	4	4
	CHS staff recruitment process	People & Culture	8	8
	ExE online comms & engagement delivery group	Participation and Feedback & Complaints teams	4	2
	Highlight Quality Week	Quality team	8	8

Agenda Item 13.1c

	Stand up for Siblings Community of Practice event	External	4	1 (only 1 required)
Q3	OHOV Rise Up event – co-present at event	External	3	3
	Visit to Scottish Parliament and meet the Minister	External	6	4
	Visit to redeveloped hearing centre Bell St	External	2	2 (only 2 required)
	PM recruitment campaign filming day with The Stand	Communications team	3	1 (only 1 required)
	Experts to meet the CHS Board at ExE Nov Board meeting	National Convener	9	7
	Joint meeting and Panto trip with OHOV	Participation team	5	3
Q4	Feedback on research proposal with Edinburgh Uni	External	2	2 (only 2 required)
	Development session with the Board to present PM recruitment campaign	Communications team	1	1 (only 1 required)
	Development of resource for Panel Member profiles	Highland, Moray and Eilean Siar Partnership Coordinator	2	2
	UNCRC report – progress report and child friendly version	Practice & Policy team	6	6
	Ayrshire Barnardos and Compass avatar project	Ayrshire Partnership Coordinator	1	1 (only 1 required)
	Practice & Standards Team session	Practice and Policy Team Manager	5	4
	Interview panel for Participation Advisor role	Participation team	2	1
Joint 2-night residential activity weekend with OHOV	Participation team	10	5	

**Agenda Item 13.1d Appendix 3
Three Pillars Status June 2025 – May 2026**



Commitments	Pillar	Tasks	Status
Every journey is different – and every voice matters.	Trauma Informed	Joint Participation and Feedback Delivery Group for 2025/26. Create CHS Voice Bank to encourage online engagement options. Build relationships with partners to explore feedback mechanisms that work for YP. Outreach work with organisations including secure and residential care settings. Consider quieter voices in all strands of our work.	Completed Due to launch Q2 2026 Established In progress Established
We will collaborate with Panel Members to rebuild together.	Consistency	YP to influence Panel Member recruitment and training. Consider developing a forum between Experts and Panel Members.	Established Due to launch Q2 2026
We are not ‘cases. We are people – with stories, strengths and futures.	Trauma Informed	Strengthen external partnerships for cross organisational working with the Experts by Experience and other YP. Work closely with Panel Members on ways to put children at the centre.	Established Established
Information that is clear, honest and accessible.	Support	Build a participation network with organisations that matter to YP. Provide support and opportunities for participation work.	In progress Established
Respectful and trauma informed guidance for every adult in the room.	Trauma Informed	Continue to embed the work of Language Leaders. Work with OHOV on producing guidance document. Work with CHS Policy and Practice Team to shape new and existing guidance.	Established Completed Established
Fair and equal access to support.	Support	Operationalise the mentoring scheme at CHS. CHS as a Corporate Parent and links with other Corporate Parents.	Due to launch Q2 2026 In progress (working with Strategic Planning and Delivery Manager)
Strong local connections that build trust and continuity over time.	Support	Work with regional teams to identify opportunities for Experts and other YP. Deliver the comms plan to share good news stories about participation work. Share good practice examples within CHS and wider. Continue to work closely with OHOV and share opportunities.	Established in one region Established Established Established
Policy shaped by lived experience, not assumptions.	Consistency	Hearings Redesign preparation for Hearings workstream. Work with CHS Policy and Practice Team to shape new and existing policies. Further embed ‘Ask the Experts’ at CHS and wider.	Paused Established 5 external requests 25/26
Transparent decision making, open communication, and real accountability.	Consistency	Work with the CHS Quality Team and Panel Practice Advisors. Ensure an evidence-based approach to ensuring rights are respected. Continuous review of this plan as well as an external evaluation in Q4.	Established Established External evaluation paused till 2027

**Agenda Item 13.1e Appendix 4
Three Pillars Implementation June 2026 – May 2027**



Commitment	Pillar	Strategy Aim	Tasks
Children's Hearings redesign	Consistency	Inclusion Respect Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and develop a Charter and Mandate for Action of how young people will be included in areas of redesign. • Work with CHS Strategic Planning and Practice and Policy Team to identify areas of redesign work to involve young people. • Create engaging sessions where young people can influence redesign and see themselves in the outcomes. • Widen the reach of lived experience voice in redesign through regional partnership working. • Ensure this plan is under continuous review.
Strengthen connections and provide opportunities within CHS for those with lived experience of hearings	Support	Inclusion Empowerment Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work closely with OHOV and share opportunities. • Amplify the quieter voices in all strands of our work. • Match all Experts with a CHS mentor. • Carry out a mapping exercise of CHS workstreams that young people could be part of. This will be closely linked to our mentoring work. • Ensure our co-designed participation charter and mandate for working with children and young people is applied to all project work. • Experts to co-design a regional roadshow for redesign planning in partnership with regional teams. • Strengthen our Corporate Parent commitment and links with other Corporate Parents.
Influence Panel Community knowledge and behaviour	Trauma Informed	Accountability Respect Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch and develop the CHS Voice Bank, website pages and SharePoint. • Continue to share good news stories via our Communications team. • Further strengthen and continue to work with both the Complaints and Feedback and Regional teams to ensure we maintain a trauma informed approach to seeking feedback from children and young people. • Establish forums between our Experts and the Panel Community. • Experts to work with the CHS Learning Team to influence Panel Community training. • Continue to influence Panel Member recruitment.

Agenda Item 13.2a CHS-2627-09

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Progressing Children's Rights Report
Responsible Executive:	Stephen Bermingham review and approval - Carol Wassell Responsible Executive
Report Author:	Sarah Weir, Policy Advisor David Mackay, Policy Team Manager

1.	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to ask the Board to discuss and approve the Progressing Children's Rights Report 2023-2026 which CHS requires to complete every three years, as part of the statutory reporting set out in the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.</p> <p>Alongside the report, an executive summary and child-friendly version will be produced with all of these being published in September 2026; following submission to Scottish Ministers.</p>
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.
2.	Recommendations
2.1	<p>This report provides evidence of how CHS has further embedded children's rights across the organisation over the last three years. It outlines the progress made on previous commitments, what action has been taken over this reporting period, and what we intend to do in the future.</p> <p>The recommendation is to note our UNCRC statutory compatibility, progress and future plans detailed in this report. The statutory guidance provides three key areas to self-evaluate to assess our progress:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do we provide or undertake in relation to this cluster and/or UNCRC article? How are we progressing in this area of activity? 2. What evidence do we have to help us give fuller and further effect to the rights of children? 3. What next steps or actions do we need to take arising from the initial questions?
3.	Key Points for Discussion
3.1	Our progress, pages 13-16
3.2	Cluster (ii) to (ix), pages 17-73

Agenda Item 13.2a CHS-2627-09

3.3	Ongoing and future improvements, pages 74-76
4.	Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	No risks identified.
6.	Risk Register
6.1	There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
7.1	A Children's Rights Impact Assessment is planned to be produced with young people as part of the production of a child friendly version of this report; prior to publication in September 2026.
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	<p>The section on 'Our approach to completing this report' highlights the extensive engagement and consultation that took place as part of developing this report, but to summarise this involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging directly with our Experts by Experience group on multiple occasions. • Session with Independent Report Writers. • CHSBites session with national team. • Survey sent to Practice & Policy Bank of volunteers. • Consultation with teams across CHS using the UNCRC Implementation Framework. <p>Once approved and ready to be published, a copy of this report is sent to the Scottish Ministers. The purpose of this is to increase transparency on UNCRC implementation and to provide the opportunity for analysis of good practice and to identify emerging policy and practice trends. Scrutiny of, observation and comment on the reports is also intended to come from children and young people</p>

Agenda Item 13.2a CHS-2627-09

	themselves as well as families, practitioners, the wider community, public bodies and civil society.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	Alongside this report, a child-friendly version needs to be produced. The plan is to work with our Experts and Comms team over Summer to create the child-friendly version as well as add design elements to the main report before publishing in September 2026.
10.	Appendices
	Appendix 1 - Progressing Children's Rights Report 2023-2026

Progressing Children's Rights

1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026

CONTENTS

Foreword	4
About Children’s Hearings Scotland (CHS)	6
Children’s Participation and Rights Strategy	8
Our approach to completing this report	10
Why this report is important	10
How we engaged with our people	10
The UNCRC cluster approach	11
Our progress	13
Cluster (ii): general measures of implementation	17
Strategic Outlook	17
Internal Policies, Procedures and Practices	18
Influencing policy and legislation	19
Collaborative working	21
Training and development	23
Involving our Experts in recruitment	25
Looking ahead	27
Cluster (iii): general principles of the UNCRC	29
Article 2 - All children have these rights no matter what their differences are	29
Article 3 - Adults must do what’s best for me	31
Article 6 - I have the right to live and grow as a person	33
Article 12 - I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously	34
Engagement with our Experts for the rights report	37
Looking ahead	38
Cluster (iv): civil rights and freedoms	40
Article 7 - I have a right to a name, to belong to a country and be cared for by my parents	40
Article 8 - I have a right to an identity	41
Article 13 - I have the right to freely express my opinions and access information	42
Article 16 - I have the right to keep some things private	43

Article 17 - I have the right to get information in lots of ways, as long as it's safe	44
Article 39 – I have the right to have help to recover if I have been hurt or treated badly ..	46
Looking ahead	48
Cluster (v): violence against children	49
Article 19 – I have the right to be protected from being hurt or treated badly	49
Looking ahead	52
Cluster (vi): family environment and alternative care	53
Article 9 - I have a right to live with my family if they can keep me safe.....	53
Article 20 - I have the right to be looked after if I can't live with my own family.....	54
Article 21 - I have the right to have the best care if I am adopted	54
Article 25 - If I am not living with my family, people should keep checking I am safe and happy.....	55
Looking ahead	56
Cluster (vii): basic health and welfare	57
Article 23 - If I am disabled, I have the right to special care and education.....	57
Article 24 - I have the right to be as healthy as possible	59
Article 27 - I have the right to have a proper home, food and clothing	62
Article 33 - I have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs.....	63
Looking ahead	64
Cluster (viii): education, leisure and culture	65
Article 28 – I have the right to an education	65
Looking ahead	67
Cluster (ix): special protection measures	68
Articles 22 and 30	68
Articles 32, 34 and 36.....	69
Article 37 - If I break the law, I have the right not to be punished in a cruel or unnecessary way	69
Article 40 - I have the right to be treated as a child if I break the law.....	71
Looking ahead	73
Ongoing and future improvements	74

Foreword

Scotland has an ambition to be the best place in the world to grow up. Following the reports from the Independent Care Review in February 2020¹, Scotland made a promise that our unique Children’s Hearings System would become best placed to truly listen to and uphold the legal rights of children and their families². To achieve this, children’s rights need to be at the heart of every decision made for every child in our country.

This is Children’s Hearings Scotland’s first Progressing Children’s Rights Report since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. This Act brought the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scottish domestic law and was a significant moment in the strengthening of children’s rights in Scotland. CHS has always been children’s rights respecting, and we have been reporting on our actions since 2017. This report specifically demonstrates the progress we’ve made from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026.

Our previous Progressing Rights at Children’s Hearings Scotland³ report committed to embedding the UNCRC through staff and Panel Member training, ambitious work on participation including involving lived experience in our recruitment, collaborating with partners through Hearings for Children, and continuing to champion children’s rights at a policy level. I am delighted to share the significant progress we have made in protecting the rights of children.

As well as the UNCRC Act, this reporting period has seen the passing of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 and the highly anticipated Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026. This landmark legislation will ensure that Scotland is closer than ever to fulfilling the Promise by 2030 and CHS is at the forefront of championing the rights of children in the hearings system.

¹ [‘Care Review Reports’](#) (2020), Independent Care Review

² [‘The Promise Scotland’s response to the Education, Children and Young People Committee’s call for views on the Children \(Care and Justice\) \(Scotland\) Bill’](#) (2023), The Promise Scotland

³ [‘Progressing Rights at Children’s Hearings Scotland 2020-23’](#) (2023), CHS

In May 2024, CHS completed a transition to a new Area Support Team structure. Nine regional Area Support Teams are now in place, with each region having a dedicated Tribunal Delivery Manager, Partnership Coordinator and Wellbeing Coordinator. They work alongside local teams of volunteer Panel Engagement Leads, Panel Practice Advisers and Learning Champions to support around 2,500 volunteers across Scotland, who champion children's rights at a regional level.

We have successfully implemented a restructured Pre-Service Training, with 30% of our newly recruited volunteers appointed as Chair qualified. And in looking to future needs of the hearings system, and our ambitions for our learning provision, we brought learning in-house at the end of Autumn 2025.

Our Experts by Experience group continue to play a crucial role of being the voice and gatekeeper of children's rights within CHS and their invaluable input is celebrated throughout this report.

We are proud of our volunteer community for their continued hard work to ensure children's rights are, and continue to be, at the heart of their practice. With this clear focus, and the legislative changes, we will collectively make sure that children's rights are respected, upheld and truly felt. Crucially when they are not we will make sure that children have a right to remedy and are supported to exercise this right.

Elliot Jackson

National Convener and Chief Executive Officer

About Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS)

Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) has statutory responsibility for recruiting, training and supporting Panel Members, who make legally binding decisions to protect the rights of children in the Children's Hearings System. CHS is made up of around 2,500 volunteers supported by a team of around 110 colleagues operating on a national level, all led by the National Convener.

The Children's Hearings System is Scotland's unique care and justice system that exists to protect the rights and safety of infants, children and young people in Scotland. We work to a set of National Standards, and we are focused on ensuring that children's rights are upheld and visible in everything we do.

The National Convener is responsible for the recruitment, training, retention and support of Panel Members. The whole CHS Community's primary focus is to provide high-quality hearings and deliver positive outcomes for all infants, children and young people who experience the hearings system.

CHS is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) supported by an independent Board, appointed by Ministers, whose membership is drawn from a broad range of experience, including lived experience of the hearings and care systems. Our Board sets the strategic direction for the organisation and is focused on ensuring that all children are protected and have the best possible start in life.

We are driven by our Strategic Themes:

- Delivering Positive Outcomes
- Valuing Our People
- Driving Transformation

Between April 2023 and March 2026, our Panel Members sat on hearings as follows⁴:

- In 2023-24, hearings were held for 9,632 children.
- In 2024-25, hearings were held for 9,385 children.
- The figures for 2025-26 were not yet available at the time of publication.

Although a large number of children are involved with the hearings system, this has been decreasing consistently over recent years as we seek to achieve our shared ambition of shrinking and specialising in order to meet the Promise by 2030.

⁴ 21,613 in 2023-24; 21,313 in 2024-25.

Children's Participation and Rights Strategy

In 2023, CHS conducted a strategic participation review. This provided an opportunity to take stock and explore how to refocus, invest in and improve the way in which we meaningfully involve those with lived experience in our work.

The result of this work was our Children's Participation and Rights Strategy⁵, which was co-designed with children with lived experience of the Children's Hearings System. This strategy reinforces our purpose, ensuring that Panel Members make child-centred decisions which respect and protect children's rights and support them to thrive. Four aims were developed as part of this strategy: Respect, Inclusion, Empowerment and Accountability and these combined support our strategic theme of Delivering Positive Outcomes in an evolving children's hearings system.

This strategy is underpinned by the UNCRC, Standard 1 of the National Standards for the Children's Panel and the principles of the internationally respected Lundy Model of Participation. A huge milestone of this strategy has been the creation of our Experts by Experience group who are a group of young people aged 14 to 25 with lived experience of hearings.

Building on previous work at CHS, the voices of lived experience have supported an ambitious programme of participatory work. Our Experts have been instrumental in driving improvements in practice and standards across the organisation and influencing wider discussions about children's rights and care with partners and decision makers. Examples of this work are included in the main body of this report.

Our Experts undertake work that aligns with their three pillars:

- **Consistency:** By improving the consistency of panels, all young people will have a fairer experience, making them feel respected and valued.

⁵ '[Children's Participation and Rights Strategy](#)' (2024), CHS

-
- **Support:** Young people can thrive if provided with clear and consistent information and support throughout their hearing journey and beyond.
 - **Trauma-informed:** When hearings are trauma-informed, it puts the child at the centre. This makes them feel safe, supported and included.

Continuing to build on our successes and support meaningful participation of children is an essential part of fulfilling our commitment to children's rights.

Our approach to completing this report

Why this report is important

“This report needs to be done right”

Expert by Experience

At CHS, we not only wanted this report to showcase the progress we have made in progressing children’s rights, but for the process of gathering the evidence itself to be a learning journey for us as an organisation. Writing this report is not a tick-box exercise; it is an opportunity to recognise and celebrate our strengths and to identify where we can improve and further embed a children’s rights approach.

The voices and experiences of children with lived experience of the Children’s Hearings System are a central focus of our work to ensure children’s rights are recognised, respected and upheld. That is why we decided to engage with our Experts as the first part of our journey in producing this report. We were keen to provide a meaningful opportunity for them to assess our progress and feed into what should happen next.

How we engaged with our people

We used a variety of methods to gather the information and supported people across the organisation to think critically about their children’s rights practice. This included:

- delivering creative engagement with our Experts by Experience, supporting them to learn about this report and complete report cards for the organisation based on the four general principles of the UNCRC
- using the Improvement Service’s UNCRC Implementation Framework⁶ to gather evidence from staff teams across the organisation

⁶ ‘[UNCRC Implementation Framework](#)’ (2025), Improvement Service

- awareness-raising activity with staff focusing on adopting a children’s rights approach and our reporting duties
- engaging with the CHS volunteer community (including Panel Members and Panel Practice Advisers) through our Practice and Policy Bank to gather their insights about how children’s rights guide their decision making
- delivering a session on progressing children’s rights with our bank of Independent Report Writers

Group engaged with	Method(s) of engagement	Number of people
Young People	Group activities at 3 events	9 Experts by Experience
CHS Staff	Group activities	13 staff
	UNCRC Framework	Offered to National Team
	Awareness-raising activity	34 staff
CHS volunteers	Survey	28 responses
Independent Report Writers	Group discussion and poll	11 IRWs

“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute – it has posed challenging questions to ‘how do we know we do this?’ in my own head.”

Panel Member

The UNCRC cluster approach

To help us show the actions we have taken to ensure compatibility with the UNCRC and embed children’s rights across the organisation, we have adopted the cluster approach⁷ to our reporting. This approach helps us to align our reporting with our duties under Section 18

⁷ [‘UNCRC Clusters’](#) (2019), UNICEF

of the UNCRC Act. We have also taken the concluding observations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child into account.

Cluster number	Area
(i)	Definition of the child
(ii)	General measures of implementation
(iii)	General principles of the UNCRC
(iv)	Civil rights and freedoms
(v)	Violence against children
(vi)	Family environment and alternative care
(vii)	Basic health and welfare
(viii)	Education, leisure and culture
(ix)	Special protection measures

Throughout the clusters, we have presented a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence that demonstrate how we have addressed the following four areas, as stipulated in the statutory guidance⁸:

1. action taken during the reporting period to ensure compatibility with the UNCRC requirements as defined by the Act
2. action taken to secure better or further effect of the rights of children’s
3. actions it intends to take in the next three-year reporting period to ensure compatibility with the UNCRC requirements as defined by the Act
4. actions it intends to take to secure better or further effect of children’s rights.

⁸ [‘Statutory guidance on Part 3 of the UNCRC \(Incorporation\)\(Scotland\) Act 2024’](#) (2024), Scottish Government

Our progress

In our 2020-2023 Progressing Children’s Rights Report, we made a series of commitments about how we would progress children’s rights. We’ve produced the following report card, so you can see our progress at a glance.

Key: Completed, In Progress, Not Completed

Area	Our commitment:	Our progress:	Our rating:
Staff training	UNCRC training for all staff.	Mandatory UNCRC training is required of all staff.	
	Bespoke workshops for staff to explore how children’s rights can be further embedded and progressed across CHS.		
Panel Member training	UNCRC training for all volunteers.	UNCRC training is available to volunteers.	
	We will develop a quality assurance framework to assess the extent which decisions are taken through a children’s rights lens.	Our Quality Team are progressing quality assurances frameworks and improvement plans.	

Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs)	We will continue to monitor CRWIAs to ensure children's rights are considered at every level in the organisation.	We need to strengthen the skills and knowledge of our staff team to be able to carry these out effectively.	
	We will review and publish the changes made to better protect children's rights and help improve their outcomes.	We produce annual reports to evidence how we will better protect children's rights and improve their outcomes.	
	We will continue to map out children's rights in the organisation to assess which areas we need to improve.	We have engaged creatively and meaningfully with our people.	
Feedback and complaints	Embed a new child-friendly feedback and complaints process.	We have started this important work but still in the process to ensuring this is embedded.	
	Look for interactive ways of engaging children through online platforms and apps.	We are still in the process of developing our digital platforms to support engagement with children.	
	Have the staffing capacity to speak directly to children.	We have recruited a Feedback and Complaints officer with this remit.	

Participation	Deliver the Children's Rights and Participation Strategy.	The Children's Participation and Rights Strategy has been updated and embedded.	
	Continue to involve children and young people over 18 with experience of the Children's Hearings System.	We have created and recruited members of our Experts by Experience Group.	
	Review current participation opportunities with a view to offering structured development opportunities.	There has been a busy programme of participation activities over 2025-26.	
Staffing resources	Continue to invest in staffing to work directly with children to gather feedback and better protect children's rights.	We have recruited a Feedback and Complaints officer with this remit.	
	We will invest in new roles and development opportunities.	Several new roles have been filled.	
Lived Experience Recruitment	We will continue to involve young people with lived experience in the recruitment of staff and Panel Members.	Our Experts have been actively involved in recruitment, in a multitude of ways.	

Legislative Influence	We will continue to support the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law.	We have supported this incorporation so far but there is still progress to be made as the right to recourse has yet to be defined and we will continue to push for this through our national influencing work.	
	We will continue to influence the design and implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill.	We have been an active voice in supporting this legislation, collaborating with partners and developing learning.	
Hearings for Children	We will continue to work with partners to implement the recommendations of the 2023 Hearings for Children Report.	We have successfully implemented a number of change projects aligned to this.	
Collaboration	We will improve how we collaborate with key partners in the hearings system.	We have strengthened our relationships with our key partners.	
	We will develop new partnerships, platforms and audiences to promote the rights of children.	We have increased the number of meaningful external relationships that we have.	

Cluster (ii): general measures of implementation

This section covers the following articles:



Cluster (ii) focuses on knowledge of children's rights and ensuring systems and structures are in place to respect and realise these rights. It includes activities such as the promotion of children's rights, raising awareness, training, capacity building, resourcing and service planning.

Strategic Outlook

Our Strategic Outlook⁹ was published in 2024 and covers our organisational priorities until April 2027. CHS has clear a purpose, vision and strategic themes that support us to embed a children's rights approach across our work.

Our purpose is to ensure our hearings make child-centred decisions which respect and protect children's rights and support them to thrive.

Our vision is for all infants, children, young people and their families to be safe, loved, and supported to realise their full potential.

Everything we do is underpinned by **our values**: Challenging, Creative, Child Centred, Respectful, Fair and Open. **Our strategic themes** cover three areas:

- Delivering Positive Outcomes

⁹ ['Strategic Outlook 2024-27'](#) (2024), CHS

-
- Valuing Our People
 - Driving Transformation

Internal Policies, Procedures and Practices

CHS has undergone considerable organisational change in the past three years focused on delivering an enhanced, quality-led and efficiency-driven Children’s Hearings System with children at the heart of our work. Over this reporting period, we have developed key organisational strategies that help to support and progress children’s rights. These include our Children’s Rights and Participation Strategy (highlighted in the previous chapter), our Learning Strategy¹⁰ and our Quality Strategy¹¹. Each of these strategies recognises the key principles of respect, inclusion, and empowerment of and accountability to people with lived experience of the hearings system.

Our Learning Strategy focuses on effective learning incorporating the voices and experiences of children, leading to improved outcomes. It will be reviewed at regular intervals to assess:

- how well our in-house learning provision has been integrated
- the positive engagement and increased uptake of learning
- successful implementation and engagement with new digital solutions
- the effectiveness of learning leading to evidenced impact on the delivery of improved hearings and positive outcomes for children.

As a whole, this strategy will ensure that children’s rights are integrated throughout each process of developing, implementing and assessing the learning available to volunteers.

Our Quality Strategy directly aligns to the objective that ‘quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system’. It sits alongside our Children’s Participation and Rights Strategy and

¹⁰ ['Transforming Learning to Transform Lives 2024-29'](#) (2024), CHS

¹¹ ['Stepping up, Stepping Forward 2024-27'](#) (2024), CHS

our Learning Strategy, adding another planning lens as we work together to our theme of Delivering Positive Outcomes for children.

Regardless of the where they take place in Scotland, children’s hearings must be consistent and reliable. Our people are active partners, delivering quality with a holistic, systems approach. Our new Quality Team and Quality Strategy will help bring clarity to our agreed operational standards, ensuring there are ways to test these with monitoring and feedback systems to ensure quality is sustained.

The Joint Impact Assessment Screening Tool used at CHS when a new project or work plan is implemented asks four key questions to determine whether there may be a potential impact, positive or negative, across four areas:

- Children’s wellbeing and their rights
- People from protected characteristics groups (equality)
- People within island communities
- The gathering, handling and processing of personal data (data protection)

All staff undertake training on the use of impact assessments, although ongoing work is required to build staff confidence in this process. Our Experts have also stated that they would like the opportunity to be involved in completing CRWIAs.

Influencing policy and legislation

We champion children’s rights at a policy level. We speak out when we feel children’s rights are not being protected and we are unapologetic in challenging legislation and policy that does not fully respect the rights of children.

In 2024, CHS helped shape the children's hearings redesign policy, which included a range of policy proposals that looked at strengthening the hearings system. As part of this process, we listened to the views of staff, volunteers and children on their priority areas in the hearings system.

Over the reporting period, we have also influenced and helped shape the Scottish Government policy areas:

- A Human Rights Bill for Scotland
- UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024: Statutory Guidance on Part 2 and 3 (section 18)
- ‘Moving on’ from care into adulthood
- Future of foster care
- Developing a universal definition of ‘care experience’
- Age of Criminal Responsibility Review
- UNCRC Compatibility Questions Rules
- Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill

Many of the policy proposals were included in the scope of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2025.

Since the introduction of this Bill, CHS has worked to ensure the views and experiences of children are central to the decision making process. A member of staff from our Practice and Policy Team has been on placement with the Scottish Government to inform the development of the legislation as it passes through Parliament. CHS has also responded to the Call for Views and presented formal evidence at the Scottish Parliament’s Education, Children and Young People Committee.

The Bill passed its final stage in the Parliament with unanimous support in March 2026. CHS welcomes the introduction of the legislation: it represents a significant step in meeting the aspirations of the Independent Care Review and improving the experiences and outcomes for children and families in the Children’s Hearings System. CHS has a pivotal role to play in the effective implementation of this Act and the redesign of the hearings system.

Collaborative working

CHS is one of a number of dedicated organisations that form part of the Children’s Hearings System, and it is crucial that we are able to build solid relationships and work closely with the other stakeholders to ensure that children’s rights are respected and embedded across a child’s hearings journey.

Children’s rights are not just upheld through our direct work with children, but also through the conversations, collaboration and partnership working that takes places daily. This often translates into CHS colleagues working with partners, professionals and organisations on collaborative projects, with the aim of protecting the rights of children involved in the hearings system. We do this by working with a range of multi-agency groups. During 2023-2026, these included:

- **Advancing the Whole System Approach Implementation Group (WSAIG):** the Whole System Approach (WSA) is the Scottish Government's programme for addressing the needs of young people involved in offending. Regular topics reviewed include: early and effective intervention, diversion from prosecution, legislation affecting young people in conflict with the law, and risk assessments.
- **Advocacy Expert Reference Group:** advising Scottish Ministers on how to establish and develop a sustainable model of advocacy support services being offered to children.
- **Age of Criminal Responsibility Ministerial Advisory Group:** this group and its four subgroups led on the review of the current legislation to assist Scottish Ministers to understand the implications of any change to the age.
- **Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 Implementation and Resourcing Group:** supporting and overseeing the implementation of this legislation.
- **Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP):** working with partner agencies to share ideas and co-ordinate efforts to improve experiences of the hearings system for children.

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- **Children’s Rights Implementation Group:** working to identify and address human rights issues affecting children in conflict with the law.
 - **Communities of practice – lived experience:** collaborate with partners who work with lived experience workstreams to share practice.
 - **Communities of practice – siblings:** network of connections with any organisation working with sibling and sibling-like relationships, promoting their rights.
 - **Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN) Bill Justice Working Group:** this was a small, focused, time-limited working group to assist in progressing further work on the justice proposals contained in the LDAN Bill consultation paper.
 - **Management and Scheduling of Hearings Group:** working together to create guidance around scheduling and management of hearings, supporting a child-friendly experience.
 - **Participation Practitioners' Forum:** exchange between practitioners involved in supporting young people with lived experience participate in their work.
 - **UNCRC Embedding in Public Services Reference Group:** providing advice and sharing practice exploring how public bodies with an obligation under the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 can measure compatibility and demonstrate that they are fulfilling their duties.
 - **Youth Justice Improvement Board:** collaboration to drive a rights-respecting approach to youth justice at a national level.

CHS is a key partner in the Hearings Redesign Group that meets regularly to focus on areas where improvements could be made to children’s and their families’ experiences of hearings. Current workstreams include:

- culture
- the referral process
- preparation and planning
- data

This collaborative work ensures children’s rights are represented throughout any change process.

Alongside national groups, there are regional partnerships which were established during this reporting period and remain ongoing. A series of 'knowledge exchanges' take place, bringing together Panel Members, regional CHS staff and partners such as Social Work, to build shared understanding of roles and strengthen a culture where children's rights guide all professional interactions throughout the hearings system.

In addition, we collaborate effectively with our partners to develop topic focused tools for Panel Members which all include a focus on children's rights. During this reporting period, these included resources on:

- language in the hearing room
- independent reports, breaches and National Convener advice
- responding to the needs of older children
- responding to the needs of infants, babies and very young children
- virtual hearings top tips

Besides these resources, volunteers have access to practice and policy advice which is relevant and current and embeds the relevant articles of the UNCRC. This often helps to inform monthly practice spotlights in each regional community newsletter based on local feedback or trends.

Training and development

The importance of children's rights is highlighted throughout all Panel Member training. However, there has been specific UNCRC training available for all staff and volunteers at CHS since 2023. This training covers our responsibilities within the UNCRC (Incorporation) Scotland Act 2024.

To help measure effectiveness and impact, we undertook a survey with a sample of the panel community in March 2026. They recognised the importance of training and development in this area and highlighted that Panel Members feel confident in their knowledge and understanding of children's rights. Most Panel Members who responded also

believed that their role as a CHS volunteer helps to support and progress children’s rights, although some did highlight the challenges and limitations of their role within a wider, complex system.

Our survey highlighted how existing training could be strengthened further to help Panel Members frame their reasons and decisions with reference to children’s rights. There was a recognition that training continually needs to be refreshed and updated, with a focus on practice examples and how this can be applied to children’s hearings. Training in relation to trauma-informed practice was also mentioned within this context, as something that helps Panel Members recognise and uphold children’s rights. The feedback gathered from Panel Members will be used to inform future training and learning opportunities.

“During my recent training as a relatively new Panel Member, the UNCRC formed a significant part of our learning, with a lot of coursework dedicated to understanding these rights and how they apply in a hearing scenario.”

Panel Member

We strive to support our staff in each of their roles, to acknowledge the part they can play in recognising, promoting and embedding children’s rights across our organisation and beyond. The process of gathering evidence for this report has supported valuable conversations that have helped shift culture, realising the importance of children’s rights in all areas of our work.

“Collecting evidence for our UNCRC report has prompted a meaningful review of how we create child-friendly content and where we can improve. This work has led to exciting plans to redesign our webpages so they speak directly to children in clear and engaging ways. Contributing to the report has opened up discussions within our team that have brought all colleagues to a shared understanding of the importance of child-friendly and easy-read content. We’re excited to better support children and young people to understand CHS’s role in their children’s hearings.”

CHS staff member

Involving our Experts in recruitment

CHS has worked hard to bring the voices of lived experience into our Panel Member recruitment. Young people with experience of hearings have been involved in the creative development of our marketing campaigns and are feeding into our interview processes, including reviewing questions and sitting on interview panels.

Recruitment of volunteers

Our Experts effected real change by co-designing the questions and scenario section of the interview process. As part of their interview, Panel Member candidates were asked to prepare a five-minute response to the scenario set by our Experts (homelessness and insecure housing).

Interviewees thought the video was brilliant, with our Experts engaging and confidently presenting in their own words, and they appreciated how our Experts were involved at the very start of the selection process. Candidates were asked to provide their feedback on the scenario question. It was clear that they valued young people's involvement in their interview:

“Nice to see young people at the centre. It was clear it was their own words and very authentic. Liked that they were involved at this stage.”

Candidate

Our Experts have enjoyed their work to support Panel Member recruitment, and their involvement has brought to life real issues that many care experienced young people face. Our Experts have always been keen to emphasise the importance of Panel Members' personal qualities and the gravitas of this decision-making role.

Recruitment of CHS Board members

Our Experts also had the opportunity to interview new CHS Board members as an ask from the Scottish Government Public Appointment Team. Two Experts formed and led a young person's interview panel, interviewing 12 prospective Board members. Our Experts met with the technical interview panel afterwards to inform the decision making.

Recruitment of CHS staff

Our Experts have also worked closely with CHS to develop a recruitment guide for CHS to use when involving young people with lived experience in recruitment. The young person's panel questions were set by our Experts and focused on values, relationship building and questions on how the candidate will ensure young people will be included in their workstream if they are successful.

"Being able to help on the update of the recruitment guide was a great privilege."

Expert by Experience

Our Experts have been involved in the hiring of a number of roles, including the Quality Manager and Feedback and Complaints Officer.

The recruitment for our Quality Manager role also included a video clip from young people to encourage applications. The majority of applicants watched the video and 92% of those said that it positively or very positively impacted their decision to apply for the post. Most significantly, the video helped CHS attract candidates who were passionate about ensuring that children's rights and needs are at the heart of all that we do.

"It was refreshing to hear from people with experience of the service and what they were looking for. A creative refreshing angle for recruitment!"

Candidate

Feedback from our Experts is that they enjoy being part of the decision-making process for new staff and feel that their views are listened to and taken seriously.

"When I was sitting on interview boards, deciding who got the job, my views were taken equally as everyone else's. When I was asking questions, some people, (candidates) instead of looking at me, were looking at older people in the room – this

wasn't a good sign and wasn't respectful, particularly where a big part of the job is to listen to children and young people."

Expert by Experience

Looking ahead

As we move ahead, our focus will be on leadership and planning.

In the financial year 2026-27, we will be developing our new Strategic Outlook which will have an even greater focus on the rights of children in the hearings system. This will cement our commitment to children's rights, underpinned by strong leadership and values.

We will continue to train and upskill our staff and volunteers to support with legislative developments, incorporation and implementation. Most notably further embedding our responsibilities within the UNCRC (Incorporation) Scotland Act 2024, ensuring our staff feel confident in undertaking CRWIAs.

The remaining provisions within the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 are due to be implemented in early 2027. This will have a significant impact on children's hearings and we will ensure that all Panel Members understand these changes and feel equipped to uphold the rights of 16- and 17-year-olds in the hearings system.

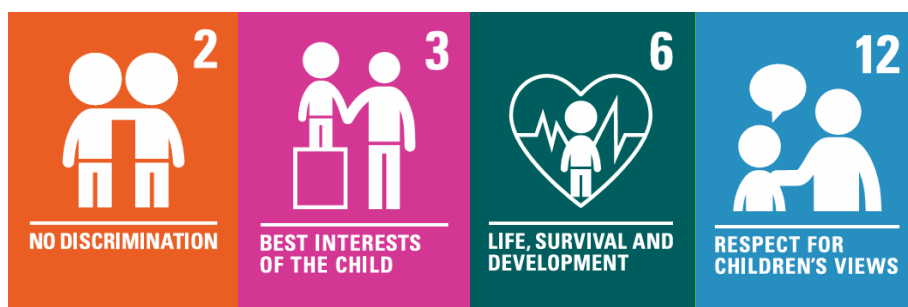
CHS will influence and inform the next steps of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026, including the development of secondary legislation and processes. We will ensure that the voices of children are at the forefront of the decision-making process.

When we spoke to our Experts about this report, the group told us that it was hard to see what has changed since the introduction of UNCRC legislation, and what impact this is having on the lives of children. Based on this feedback we need to get better at

communicating how children’s rights are positively impacting our work and improving experiences for children in the hearings system.

Cluster (iii): general principles of the UNCRC

This section covers the four general principles of the UNCRC, which are articles:



Article 2 - All children have these rights no matter what their differences are

At CHS, we are committed to fostering a culture where equality, diversity and inclusion are central to everything we do.

As a public body, CHS complies with the Equality Act 2010, including its protected characteristics and the general equality duty. Since 2020, CHS has recognised care experience as a protected characteristic, and we will continue to review our practice, policies and procedures to embed this across our work.

However, if our goal is to ensure that we fully reflect the community that we serve – children in the children’s hearings – we must build a culture that recognises and tackles the systemic barriers that impact children’s rights. This includes wider issues children and families experience such as poverty, homelessness and addiction as well as considering intersectional disadvantage.

“... treating all who come into a hearing with respect using language that is understandable, use of an interpreter, ensuring that children and young people are comfortable, so that a neurodiverse child can wear ear defenders, have low lighting or whatever is needed.”

Panel Member

In our work on equality, diversity and inclusion, it is important that we remain mindful that people are individuals with their own backgrounds, experiences and needs. People often have more than one protected characteristic meaning that their experiences of intersectionality will be very different to others with one of the same characteristics. While we strive for a diverse community, we must continue to treat everyone as individuals, providing the support that they need when they require it, as identified by them. This also applies to the children and families that Panel Members meet in the hearing room, who have unique circumstances, experiences, strengths and needs.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Work Group was relaunched in late 2024, and worked to refresh the previous strategy, developing the updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy¹². Key areas of this strategy that reflect our commitment to non-discrimination and the protection and promotion children's rights are as follows:

- We will implement appropriate training and development for our people in line with their responsibilities to ensure they are able to conduct their duties to a high standard in supporting children, families and our people.
- We will build an inclusive culture based on respect by increasing awareness of EDI across our community through engagement with youth-led advisory groups and the establishment of EDI networks.
- We will review our recruitment and selection processes for volunteers and National Team colleagues, aligning these processes with best practice in order to tackle barriers and promote inclusivity.

We know that the support and care children receive through the Children's Hearings System needs to be consistent. Our approach to supporting Panel Members through their Area Support Team and the CHS National Team is designed to ensure that children are receiving a consistently high quality of hearings, which will help to protect their rights.

¹² ['Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027'](#) (2024), CHS

Our Quality Strategy¹³, published in October 2024, is helping to steer a series of focused activities, ensuring that we know what good looks like and we share this practice, identify when things are not going well, and drive improvement where needed.

National Standards and Panel Member Core Competencies are reflected in our process of observing Panel Member practice to ensure that equal treatment and the protection of rights are embedded in our hearings system. The ‘Quality Conversations’ that took place throughout 2025 will be used to shape updated guidance and to promote a more cohesive and consistent approach to observation feedback. Continued development is needed in this area to evaluate effective practice in the hearing room and further strengthen the protection of children’s rights.

Article 3 - Adults must do what’s best for me

“It is the main purpose of the hearings system to ensure the best interests of the child are put at the heart of these discussions and decisions. When surrounded by parents, carers and various professionals, it is often the CHS volunteer who brings the discussion back to this instead of other priorities and agendas.”

Panel Member

We continue to apply our three overarching principles to every decision in every hearing. The first of these principles is the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout childhood. This is the paramount consideration that Panel Members must apply when making decisions about a child.

For a child, the first contact with the Panel Members will influence if children feel like they can trust the adults making decisions for them, and trust that they will seek their views about matters that affect them to determine what is in their best interest.

¹³ [‘Stepping up, Stepping Forward 2024-27’](#) (2024), CHS

The Chair Greeting the Child was introduced across Scotland between May and November 2025. This change in practice was driven by young people in Moray who wanted to meet their Chair before their hearing, to prevent them from walking into the hearing room to be met by three seated strangers.

A full project evaluation took place with the findings published in February 2026. The project has achieved its objective of rolling out the Chair Greeting the Child across all 32 Local Authorities. The evaluation confirmed that Chairs feel confident undertaking this new role consistently, helping hearings to be more relaxed and child centred.

The response from children, advocacy, social work and Panel Members has been largely positive which provides a high level of comfort that this project has improved children's experience attending hearings.

“It was good for the young person to see the panel Chair before the hearing started. They were very friendly and it helped put the young person at ease. After the hearing they shared that they liked the Chair.”

Children's Hearings Advocacy Worker

“A 17-year-old young person with additional needs was very upset and anxious when in the waiting room. I had chaired their previous hearing and when I went to greet them, they remembered me, smiled and settled. They were able to fully participate in the hearing and was relaxed throughout.”

Panel Chair

The best interests of the child and the paramountcy principle continue to be a key theme of pre-service training and Panel Member ongoing learning and development, including the practice resources. We asked Panel Members to reflect on the importance of Article 3 in their role. Panel Members made it clear this consideration was firmly embedded in their practice and they outlined the important role they play in focusing the hearing on the child's best interests.

“Panel Members have to take decisions that reflect the best interests and the wishes of the child. Implicitly this means we shouldn't go against the UNCRC rights.”

Panel Member

A project in Ayrshire will help children feel less worried and more prepared when attending their children’s hearing. CHS staff, volunteers, and one of our Experts along with Barnardo’s Advocacy Service, and SCRA have been working together since May 2025 to create avatars. Avatar videos will be created to help children understand who is in their hearing and what each person does. There will be a Panel Member avatar explaining their role and how they listen to children and a Children’s Reporter avatar explaining why hearings happen and what decisions are made.

This project supports Article 12 (right to be heard) by reducing fear and helping children feel prepared to share their views, Article 13 (right to information) and Article 42 (right to know your rights). Short, calm, child-friendly videos help remove communication and emotional barriers, ensuring children can participate meaningfully and feel safe, all in line with Article 3 (best interests).

Article 6 - I have the right to live and grow as a person

The role of a Panel Member is to listen to children and to make decisions with and for them to ensure their needs are met. Panel Members aim to ensure that children can achieve their full potential and have a happy and fulfilling childhood. Children’s hearings help children to access the help and support they need to thrive.

Back in 2020, the Promise report challenged us to listen to and understand the ‘quieter voices’ involved in the Children’s Hearings System, including infant, babies and very young children. The number of infants and babies involved in the Children’s Hearings System is

significant. According to SCRA statistical analysis for 2024-25, 32% of children referred to the hearings system due to lack of parental care were aged 0-3¹⁴.

Infants and babies have unique needs and vulnerabilities, which is why we decided to develop new guidance¹⁵ within this reporting period focusing on their needs. We know the importance of safe, nurturing and stable relationships for children’s crucial early years development, and the challenges of drift and delay that exist within the hearings system. The youngest children in our society are also a group whose rights are most at risk. Babies and infants are completely dependent on adults to realise their rights and meet their needs, so it’s essential that CHS supports Panel Members to uphold and progress babies’ rights and champion their ‘voices’ within the hearings system.

“It provided an in-depth understanding from a baby/very young person's perspective and reminded me that although they can't verbalise how they feel there are other ways of finding that out.”

Feedback from Panel Member about the ‘Responding to the needs of infants, babies and very young children’ guidance

Article 12 - I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously

Children are encouraged to actively participate in their hearing, with this being clearly laid out in the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011¹⁶. This informs our second overarching principle: ‘the child must be given the opportunity to express a view and this view must be taken into account in line with the child’s age and maturity’.

CHS is committed to providing opportunities for children and young people with lived experience of the hearings system to have their voice heard and make a difference, and to influence the work of CHS. Key steps that have been taken during this reporting period to

¹⁴ [‘Statistical Analysis 2024-25’](#) (2025), SCRA

¹⁵ [‘Responding to the Needs of Infants, Babies and Young Children’](#) (2025), CHS

¹⁶ [Children's Hearings \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#)

give further effect and compatibility with Article 12 have been the recruitment of these roles:

- Participation Coordinator
- Lived Experience Advisor
- Feedback and Complaints Officer (with a focus on feedback from children)

This has seen the development and implementation of our Children’s Participation and Rights Strategy and our approach to supporting child-friendly feedback mechanisms and access to independent complaints procedures.

In 2024-25, CHS developed and launched our Experts by Experience group. This is a structured, supported and remunerated CHS national participation group of young people, between the ages of 14 and 25, with lived experience of the hearings system. The group met for the first time in March 2025, and their voices are now fully embedded into the work of CHS.

“Being an Expert by Experience has given me a really valuable sense of involvement in the process – working directly with the system which I always wanted to see change in has been really beneficial to me.”

Expert by Experience

“I’m very happy and proud to be part of the Experts by Experience group. With the commitment given it will be an integral part of the organisation with the full backing of the Board and the staff team.”

Expert by Experience

“My experience with CHS has been absolutely amazing. CHS is like one big family.”

Expert by Experience

Over the course of a year, our Experts have:

- created a logo, pledge and group agreement

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- worked with our People and Culture Team to create a new recruitment guide to include those with lived experience
 - consulted on the new Volunteering Strategy
 - interviewed new members for the CHS Board
 - supported the University of Edinburgh’s Children’s Rights Unit review a research proposal
 - presented at the CHS All Staff Team Day
 - delivered a Q&A session with Panel Members in Glasgow
 - attended workshop sessions with members of the Practice and Standards function
 - helped influence and shape future Panel Member pre-service training
 - worked collaboratively with OHOV, including a visit to the Scottish Parliament to meet with the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise in October 2025. They also jointly enjoyed a residential weekend at Lochgoilhead Scout Centre in March 2026.

“What an unbelievable journey it has been so far. It has been inspiring to work alongside our Experts and start the process for them to influence the work of CHS. As a team we are looking forward to our next steps and want to thank everyone at CHS for welcoming our Experts and providing meaningful opportunities for them to get to know the organisation’s individuals, teams and workstreams. We cannot wait to see what opportunities 2026 brings.”

Participation Team at CHS

Our Experts have a strong relationship with and collaborate closely with Our Hearings Our Voice (OHOV) to jointly influence and improve children’s hearings. CHS also supports and encourages the development of regional participation networks and groups to ensure our reach is even greater. There are established links in all regions, and plans for this to continue.

A joint project has been underway since October 2025 in Ayrshire, giving children with lived experience an opportunity to share their experiences. Each child will create a piece of art inspired by UNCRC Articles 12 and 13 that reflects their voice and supports peers, which will

be displayed in the Kilmarnock Hearing Centre. This will help influence others, create something meaningful, and encourage other children who attend the hearing centre to feel listened to, valued and less anxious while waiting to go into their hearing.

Engagement with our Experts for the rights report

The opportunity

In December 2025, an engagement session took place with our Experts to allow them to input into the CHS Progressing Children’s Rights Report. Although our Experts have not been in post for the full three-year reporting period, their input into the report has helped frame what we are doing well and areas for improvement.

We decided to focus on four areas of the UNCRC implementation framework:

- Participation of Children and Young People (linked to Article 12 - I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously)
- Publishing Child Friendly/Easy Read Information (linked to Article 6 - I have the right to live and grow as a person)
- Accountability and Reporting on Children’s Rights (linked to Article 3 - Adults must do what’s best for me)
- Non-Discrimination/Rights at Risk (linked to Article 2 - All children have these rights no matter what their differences are)

Our Experts had the opportunity to comment on different CHS workstreams and projects under each of these areas in the form of a school report card. They marked each piece of work as either achieved, working towards, or not on track and provided comments on what needed to happen next.

Lessons learned

The feedback and suggestions that our Experts shared during the session included developing clearer processes and justification for engaging with children and young people and making sure this includes providing them with feedback about the impact of their involvement. There were some areas of work that our Experts did not know much

about, for example Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments. However, they showed a level of interest and desire to be involved with these in the future.

Our Experts shared enthusiasm for expanding their group, making sure to include ‘quieter’ voices and necessary adjustments to allow others to attend in person, and meet individual needs. They were particularly keen on ensuring that ‘child-friendly’ and ‘easy read’ versions of documents are created as standard at CHS, to ensure children have easy access to information about their rights.

Overall, our Experts’ voices have helped steer the focus of our Progressing Children’s Rights Report. They have rightly highlighted the areas of work that need to be celebrated but also identified where learning can be taken from these examples and translated into future and ongoing improvement over the next reporting period. This report will be a tool that we can use to continue the conversation about how we are upholding children’s rights at CHS, making sure we are accountable to our Experts and those with lived experience.

Looking ahead

The General Principles of the UNCRC will continue to remain key to our work, ensuring fairness and non-discrimination, and that children’s needs and best interests are central to everything we do. We will continue to listen to children’s voices, both inside and outside the hearing room, ensuring that their views influence individual decisions about their care but also wider changes to Scotland’s care and protection system.

Areas of development over the next three years will include:

- ensuring children’s voices are represented in discussions around hearings redesign and legislative change
- expanding our work with children through regional outreach work and growing the membership of our Experts by Experience

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- utilising a self-evaluation framework to review the support available through the regional support structure

“Drawing on the Promise, ‘What Matters Cards’, and National Standards, our new self-evaluation framework helps us review how we are working, gather evidence and improve how best we support child-centred, rights-based hearings.”

Quality Partner at CHS

Cluster (iv): civil rights and freedoms

This section covers the following Articles¹⁷:



Article 7 - I have a right to a name, to belong to a country and be cared for by my parents

Every child has the right to be registered at birth, have a name and nationality and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents. This is supported by CHS activity and one of the fundamental principles of the hearings system is that ‘parents are usually the best people to bring up their own children and should be encouraged and enabled to do so wherever possible’.

Where it is not possible for a child to stay with their parents, the hearing will make decisions that support them to have a fulfilling and positive childhood. Hearings must listen to and take account of the views of both children and their parents when making decisions about who should care for them.

¹⁷ How CHS contributes to Article 28 (right to education) is set out in Cluster (viii) - education, leisure and culture and Article 37 is presented in Cluster (ix). Articles 14 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and 15 (freedom of association) do not directly apply to our duties.

Article 8 - I have a right to an identity

Contact decisions that Panel Members make about brothers, sisters and sibling-like relationships can have a lifelong impact. They are guided by the legislation that promotes and enhances the rights of siblings when families live apart, the Children (Scotland) Act 2020. Since its introduction in 2021, CHS has continued to engage with the Communities of Practice for Siblings multi-agency group.

As well as the information and training given to Panel Members before they sit on hearings and in the Practice and Procedure Manual (PPM), CHS worked alongside CELCIS and professionals working in NHS Infant Mental Health Teams across Scotland to produce guidance specific for infants, babies and very young children. This guidance, published in October 2025¹⁸, has a dedicated section on ensuring that contact decisions support young children's rights and wellbeing.

CHS delivers a diverse calendar of learning to support Panel Members' understanding of their role in protecting the rights of children through a variety of ways: face-to-face, individual e-learning, Microsoft Teams, videos and Townhall webinars.

Relevant research within the children's sector and the Children's Hearings System is crucial to help inform our approaches, training and resources for Panel Members. In December 2025, we hosted Dr Helen Whincup to discuss the Permanently Progressing? Building Secure Futures for Children in Scotland research¹⁹ through a live webinar that was recorded and shared with the National Team and the whole Panel Community. Similar to other studies looking at data in Scotland²⁰, the Permanently Progressing study found that there was a gap between legislation and policy that prioritises sibling connections, and the experiences of many children. By highlighting some of the key findings of this research, this will help Panel Members to remember children's rights and the impact of their decisions on their identity.

¹⁸ ['Responding to the Needs of Infants, Babies and Very Young Children'](#) (2025), CHS

¹⁹ ['Permanently Progressing? Building secure futures for children in Scotland'](#) (no date), University of Stirling

²⁰ ['Born into care in Scotland: Circumstances, recurrence and pathways'](#) (2022), Cusworth et al.

Article 13 - I have the right to freely express my opinions and access information

Access to clear, child-friendly information has been a key focus of our work in the reporting period, with a new role created in our Feedback and Complaints Team focusing on creating child-friendly information and feedback mechanisms.

The feedback we received from children across 2025-26 highlighted variability in the quality of children's experiences in hearings. While many hearings demonstrate strong, trauma-informed, child centred practice, a few fall short in ways that can unintentionally undermine children's participation in their hearing. Consistency, curiosity and compassion were key themes emerging from the feedback. Any concerns raised can be addressed on an individual, regional or national basis through training and reinforcement of standards with Panel Members, to ensure that every child receives a respectful, fair and meaningful hearing experience.

CHS continues to work closely with SCRA to improve hearings delivery processes to better uphold children's rights. Following engagement with children, families and Panel Members, a new Decisions and Reasons Chronology was introduced in March 2026. This presents clearer information about decisions and reasons made at previous hearings, supporting children to access the information they need in advance of their hearing.

In 2025, we recruited an additional member of staff to the Feedback and Complaints Team with a dedicated focus on creating child-friendly mechanisms to gather feedback from children. Alongside this has been the establishment of a CHS Participation and Feedback Delivery Group, accountable for the upscaling of existing national and regional participation workstreams to develop a framework that works for children to tell us what they think about hearings.

This work is in early development and will take place in three phases, working with older children in year one, younger children in year two and adult advocacy workers in year three. Each phase has four distinct stages: research and consultation, collaborative design, implementation and review. The golden thread through each phase will be consideration of inclusion, transparency, accessibility and trauma-informed principles.

It is important to us that the feedback we receive is used by those with the influence to change practice. An active feedback tracker will be used to monitor how we are using feedback. We are committed to improving internal communication between teams as part of this project. We will direct feedback to relevant teams so that appropriate learning and development can be prepared or practice guidance updated. Close monitoring of the tracker will increase internal accountability and enable us to better tell children what impact their feedback has had on practice in the community through our website, annual reporting and social media.

Article 16 - I have the right to keep some things private

CHS takes children’s right to privacy seriously and has legal responsibility to comply with Information Governance legislation and regulations.

Children have shared their views about privacy in the Better Hearings report²¹ produced by the Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP), which was discussed within the context of the need for professional continuity. This was also a topic of the ‘Seeing Beyond the Surface’²² guide, published in 2025 by OHOV.

²¹ [‘The Next Steps Towards Better Hearings’](#) (2016), CHIP

²² [‘Seeing Beyond the Surface - Children’s Stories and Personal Information’](#) (2026), OHOV

In addition, a clear recommendation throughout the Hearings System Working Group (HSWG) Redesign Report²³, which has since been acknowledged within upcoming legislation, is the need for continuity within a panel for children.

Within every hearing the chairing Panel Member has a legal duty to ensure the number of persons present in a hearing at any one time is kept to a minimum. CHS continues to provide training, guidance and support to our volunteer community about how to manage hearing attendance effectively. Children and families also have the right to request Panel Member continuity which helps to ensure fewer people are involved in their family life. Over the past year, Panel Member continuity requests have continued to increase, with more of these being able to be fulfilled for children.

The introduction of the enhanced role of the Chair in the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026 will signal an important step forward and recognise the significant demands, responsibilities and expectations of the Chair's role. This will result in greater levels of consistency and continuity, and ultimately fewer people involved in a child's life and having access to their sensitive information. Building on evidence from children, this is something that CHS has advocated for as part of wider Children's Hearings System redesign.

Article 17 - I have the right to get information in lots of ways, as long as it's safe

During our engagement sessions with our Experts as part of this report, they told us that there was more that CHS should be doing to ensure we are producing child-friendly and plain language versions of information. They acknowledged that there was already positive work underway in this area – this included them being involved in shaping website content and navigation as well as the creation of animations to encourage children to provide feedback about their hearings.

²³ ['Hearings for Children'](#) (2023), The Promise Scotland

Our Communications and Engagement Team have engaged with partners, explored research and attended training to increase their knowledge and skills in producing child-friendly and plain language versions of the information we share publicly.

At the end of March 2026, we published a child-friendly version of our Impact Report 2024-25²⁴ which highlighted key improvements that were made across the year.

“It’s been a privilege to create this video for children and young people. We’ve designed it to be clear, engaging, and child-friendly so it’s easy for them to follow and feel included. It’s important that children and young people understand the changes we make that affect them and, more importantly, how their voices continue to shape improvements within the Children’s Hearings System. I hope every child who watches it feels heard and respected.”

CHS staff member

In addition, our Experts supported and encouraged the completion of Panel Member profiles which have been introduced to some hearing centres. When a child and their family attend a hearing, they will be able to see colourful posters displaying a photo and the name of the CHS volunteers who will be in the hearing room. This is another way for the child to know who the people making decisions about them will be before their hearing in an accessible way, appealing to children at various ages.

“You have all my information from my panel papers so it would be good to know if there’s any common interests. Panel Member profiles would make a child feel more at ease/more comfortable knowing who’s in the room they’re about to walk into”

Expert by Experience

“During hearings, my thought process has often been wondering about Panel Members as people (behind their role). I often observe to see if I can learn a bit about them. It would be

²⁴ ['Impact Report 2024-25'](#) (2025), CHS

good if they provided a bit of information to me”

Expert by Experience

“What kid wouldn't want to know who was going to be on their panel?”

Expert by Experience

Article 39 – I have the right to have help to recover if I have been hurt or treated badly

Our volunteer community and staff are trained to recognise signs of harm, abuse, or neglect, understand the impact on children, and how they can make the best decisions to meet their needs. In our previous report, we highlighted the roll-out of Trauma Training. Volunteers and staff now complete both trauma-informed and trauma-skilled training which helps to embed trauma-informed approaches. Our target was for 80% of the volunteer community to complete these training modules by July 2023. Our completion rates are below:

Training	Volunteers	Staff
Trauma-informed training	99.5%	96%
Trauma-skilled training	84%	94%

When consulting with our volunteers as part of the engagement for this report, there was clear recognition that the trauma training undertaken had helped to embed children’s rights-respecting practice within the hearings system. This was often referenced in relation to the skills that Panel Members demonstrated:

“I am also aware of the language I use to reduce any further trauma to the child”

Panel Member

“Treat them with respect, patience and empathy”

Panel Member

***“...addressing them from the outset in age appropriate ways (verbal and nonverbal),
keeping discussions future focused...”***

Panel Member

Panel Members need to ensure that when they are participating in hearings, they are not adding to the harm or trauma that a child may already have experienced. To address this, a group of young people with lived experience, and key professionals from across the hearings system called Language Leaders²⁵ published a guide for Panel Members in April 2024. This helps Panel Members consider the language they use in a hearing room, and is based on four principles. Language should:

- be personalised
- be balanced
- be non-stigmatising
- make children feel involved in their hearing²⁶.

As a result, the ‘Articulate’ animation, commissioned by CHS and SCRA, was developed and won a gold award at the 2025 Scottish Design Awards²⁷.

“I could not believe the talent of the young people ... and cannot thank them enough for their dedication to improve language in the hearing room. From the initial workshop, to the first script read, right through to the film premiere, the whole process has been truly inspirational.”

Participation Coordinator at CHS

Across the South East region in January 2026, four training sessions were delivered on the use of Language and Trauma in hearings. Children should be able to understand all

²⁵ [‘Language Leaders’](#) (no date), CHIP

²⁶ [‘Language in the Hearing Room’](#) (2024), CHS

²⁷ [‘Articulate’](#) (2025), Scottish Design Awards

discussions in a children’s hearing to be able to participate effectively. Panel Members were encouraged to explain complex concepts, remove all system language and stop using acronyms.

Although we already place a lot of focus on trauma-informed approaches in hearings, Section 2²⁸ of the Children (Care and Justice) Act 2024 places a duty on children’s hearings to have due regard to the effects of trauma on children, meaning that Panel Members must treat children in a way that:

- takes account of the effects of trauma which the child may have experienced
- seeks to avoid, or minimise the risk of, exposing the child to
 - any recurrence of past trauma
 - further trauma

The recognition of trauma within the legislation is a positive step forward and will help to underpin our efforts to ensure CHS is a trauma-skilled organisation.

Looking ahead

Our Experts and teams across the organisation were consulted on what needs to happen in future in order to further embed children’s right within this cluster. Key feedback included:

- further work to embed trauma-informed practice and skills within hearing rooms
- produce more child-friendly and plain language versions of information
- continue to enhance child-friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms
- launch the voicebank, a proactive approach to gathering anonymous feedback from children aged 12 and over
- further work with SCRA to simplify hearing information and improve the Decisions and Reasons Chronology so that children have clear information about decisions and reasons and their related rights.

²⁸ [Children \(Care and Justice\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#)

Cluster (v): violence against children

This section covers Article 19²⁹.



Article 19 – I have the right to be protected from being hurt or treated badly

Panel Members are required to make decisions for children that directly protect them from harm. They will take into account the views of those experiencing violence, abuse and neglect and if it is in the best interests to do so, Panel Members may decide to:

- continue a Child Protection Order that is in place to protect a child from actual or potential harm and neglect
- limit or prohibit contact with individuals who place them at risk of abuse, violence or neglect
- move a child to a safer home environment
- prohibit the disclosure of an address if they think disclosing this is likely to cause significant harm to the child

Threats to safety should be considered in terms of physical safety and mental or emotional safety. Emphasis is placed on a hearing being for the child and therefore should be attended by the child to ensure their views are heard. If, however, attendance at a hearing may risk the mental, moral or physical welfare of that child, a panel can decide to excuse them of their duty to attend. A child can also be excused if they have been the victim of an assault or Schedule One offence at the hands of someone who has a right to, and is likely to, attend the hearing.

²⁹ Article 37 (no child subject to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment) is covered in Cluster (ix) – Special protection measures and Article 39 (recovery and rehabilitation) is covered in Cluster (iv) - Civil rights and freedoms. Article 28(2) (school approaches to managing behaviour and discipline) does not apply to CHS activity.

In the period of 2024-25, 82.7% of pre-hearing panels were convened to consider whether to excuse a child³⁰. This was an increase from the previous year (2023-24), when the proportion was 78.4%³¹. Figures for 2025-26 were not available at the time of publication but these figures demonstrate how frequently this is considered to ensure children’s needs are paramount.

CHS has supported Panel Members to increase their knowledge, confidence and understanding, in terms of the harm and risks that could be posed to children. Our guidance on ‘Responding to the Needs of Older Children’ has dedicated chapters on interpersonal violence, trafficking and criminal exploitation. Young people who may have caused harm to others also require individual support and the recognition that they have likely been harmed themselves. The guidance helps Panel Members to understand this.

CHS has developed training and resources in partnership with the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice (CYCJ) to prepare Panel Members for the full implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. Our eLearning module includes a focus on Child Sexual Exploitation told through the lens of a young person, Ethan.

Ethan is 16 and has been asked to attend a hearing because has been exposed to a person whose conduct is (or has been) such that is likely that:

- i. the child will be abused or harmed
- Or
- ii. the child’s health, safety or development will be seriously adversely affected

Ethan is a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation and the training supports Panel Members to consider the relevant background information, Ethan’s views, the protective and risk factors present and how a panel could help keep him safe.

³⁰ [‘Statistical Analysis 2024-25’](#) (2025), SCRA

³¹ [‘Statistical Analysis 2023-24’](#) (2024), SCRA

Over the past three years, we have strengthened our understanding of the impact of domestic abuse for children involved in the hearings system. This includes physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse and controlling and coercive behaviour. In 2023-24, the third most common reason for referral to the Children’s Reporter was a child having a close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse, so it is vital that CHS staff and our volunteers have a strong awareness of this topic, and Panel Members understand the tools at their disposal to manage hearings where domestic abuse is a factor.

Courses including the NSPCC’s Abuse and Neglect training is mandatory for staff and volunteers. In addition, a new training course, The Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool (DAART), which was developed by SafeLives for professionals working in the public sector in Scotland, was launched on our CHS Learning Academy Online for all staff and volunteers in November 2024.

The course became part of Panel Members’ pre-service training in 2025 and helps increase their awareness and understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse. This will support Panel Members in the hearing room making decisions, recognising the importance of trauma informed practice, making the hearing room feel like a safe place and supporting children’s rights to be protected from all forms of harm and violence.

Training	Panel Members	Panel Practice Advisers	CHS staff	Board Members
NSPCC Course	85% 1,355 completed; 237 still to complete.	88% 91 competed; 13 still to complete.	89% 109 completed; 13 still to complete.	57% 4 completed; 3 still to complete.

Looking ahead

It is crucial that we recognise the needs of children at different stages of development, the impact that decisions can have and the support needed to ensure their rights are upheld and respected.

Further work and development in this area will include:

- focusing on supporting Panel Members to understand more about infants and babies at risk of violence, and the impact of non-accidental injury
- work to update and strengthen our Managing Complex Hearings Guidance

Cluster (vi): family environment and alternative care

This section covers the following Articles³²:



Article 9 - I have a right to live with my family if they can keep me safe

If Panel Members decide that it is in the child's best interests to be separated from their parents, they have a legal duty to consider what arrangements should be put in place to help maintain relationships that are important to the child.

All Panel Members receive training about the importance of having legal arrangements in place to enable children separated from their parents to be able to communicate with them, either through meeting them face-to-face, speaking over the phone, maintaining contact online or through letters and photographs. This communication plays a critical role in maintaining relationships, promoting a sense of identity, and providing reassurance about others' wellbeing, health or safety.

Our new 'Responding to the needs of infants, babies and very young children' practice guidance explores the impact of contact decision making and supports Panel Members to ensure that decisions around contact are made in the best interests of the child.

³² Article 19 (protection from all forms of violence) is presented in Cluster (v) - Violence against children, Article 39 (recovery and rehabilitation) is presented in Cluster (iv) - Civil rights and freedoms and Article 27 (adequate standard of living) is presented in Cluster (vii) – Basic health and welfare. This section does not reference Articles 5 (parental guidance and a child's evolving capacity), 10 (family reunification), 11 (abduction and non-return of children) and 18 (parental responsibilities and state assistance) as they do not directly apply to CHS' duties.

Article 20 - I have the right to be looked after if I can't live with my own family

CHS responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on the 'Future of Foster Care', echoing the needs for the government to ensure there are enough foster carers to meet demand with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to provide high-quality care to children when they need it. We support the position that there must be safeguards in place to avoid the monetisation of the care of children and prevent the marketisation of care. Foster care provision must be designed and delivered with the primary focus being the best interests of the child.

Children's hearings respect, protect and uphold the rights of children to maintain relationships with those who are important to them and CHS fully supports any work to address the availability of stable, foster placements in a child's local community so they can maintain friendships and key relationships which lead to better outcomes, as well as enabling brothers and sisters to be cared for together. The rights of siblings is a key feature of any children's hearing where children are living away from their own family.

In October 2024, CHS was proud to become accredited as a Fostering Friendly employer in a programme run by the Fostering Network to help organisations actively support fostering and foster carer employees.

Article 21 - I have the right to have the best care if I am adopted

Any recommendation for adoption coming before a hearing will have been based on a comprehensive social work assessment that has already been presented to the local authority Adoption and Permanence Panel. The hearing's role is to provide advice to the Sheriff and Local Authority on whether it supports this course of action for a child. Support for adoption will only be given if it is considered best for the child not to live with one or both parents for the rest of their childhood.

In 2025, CHS responded to the Scottish Government's 'Universal Definition of Care Experience' consultation. In our response, we highlighted the importance of including adoption within any universal definition. We also highlighted the need for lifelong support for those with care experience recognising that they often face disproportionate levels of adversity and poverty when transitioning to adult life.

Article 25 - If I am not living with my family, people should keep checking I am safe and happy

Panel Members can impose a duty on Local Authorities to implement the terms of a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO). It may become clear at a review hearing that the implementation authority has failed to carry out a specific measure on a child's CSO. In these circumstances, section 146 of the 2011 Act allows a hearing to direct the National Convener to take action to enforce the authority's duty as a 'breach' proceeding.

During the period 2023-2026, 10 requests to serve notice were made. All of these breaches were resolved at Stage 1 and did not require an application to the Sheriff Principal for enforcement. These processes ensure that children on orders have access to the crucial supports that have been identified. CHS also issued further guidance to the panel community in relation to breach proceedings in 2025.

In August 2023, CHS staff visited Harmeny Residential School to spend time with the children and staff, getting to know them and listening to feedback they had about hearings.

This visit helped inform the way in which CHS gathers feedback from children about their hearings. CHS worked with SCRA to pilot the use of a QR-coded postcard at hearing centres in Stirling, Elgin, Alloa, Falkirk and Livingston. It was launched in October 2023 and ran until March 2024. At the end of each hearing, Panel Members offered children a feedback postcard and the QR code was linked to our child-friendly feedback page where children were able to directly give views about their hearings to CHS and SCRA. Although initially it

was hard to gather feedback CHS continue to work with SCRA and young people to improve this process.

During the pilot, the QR code was scanned more than 150 times with more than 10 pieces of feedback received. This included reports of really positive experiences and useful feedback on how hearings can be improved.

“This is all invaluable feedback that I believe we would not have received without the postcards in the hearing room. We always want to hear more about the hearings experience directly from the children and young people involved, and getting it can prove difficult. So this additional feedback is really significant.”

Complaints Management Officer at CHS

Looking ahead

In the next reporting period, CHS will strive to ensure that children, young people and their families have access to meaningful channels to provide feedback in relation to their experiences of children’s hearings. This is incredibly important for those who are unable to remain living with their family. Our Experts have already worked with a creative company, Braw Talent, to produce a feedback animation that will be rolled out in the next reporting period and will encourage children to provide their feedback in a child-friendly way, addressing some of the barriers to participation.

This will ensure that they can provide information about how their views were taken into account and the impact of the interactions throughout the process of being referred to, participating in and reflecting on a children’s hearing. Panel Members make decisions that significantly impact children’s lives and those involved need to have a way to share their views even further. This can help shape learning and development, especially concentrating on trauma informed practice.

Cluster (vii): basic health and welfare

This section covers³³:



Article 23 - If I am disabled, I have the right to special care and education

Many of the reasonable adjustments for children’s hearings fall under the remit of SCRA and the Children’s Reporter’s responsibilities, such as ease of access to the hearing centre and ensuring that hearing papers are sent in an accessible format. However, there are important considerations for Panel Members to make both before and during the hearing. Disability may affect children, parents, relevant persons or professionals involved in a hearing. Panel Members’ communication style, language and attitudes can positively impact on someone with a disability’s ability to participate effectively.

The CHS Communication Champions Programme builds a culture of communication inclusion across the Children’s Hearings System. It strengthens children’s participation, confidence and trust in the hearing process by ensuring Panel Members have the skills to recognise and respond to diverse communication needs from the very beginning of a hearing.

Sessions took place with Panel Members to help Communication Champions to:

- promote awareness of different communication needs
- use basic BSL, visual aids and inclusive approaches
- greet children in ways that reflect their communication needs

³³ Article 6 (life, survival and development) is covered in Cluster (iii) – General Principles. Articles 18 (parental responsibilities and state assistance) and 26 (social security) do not apply to CHS activity.

-
- support hearings to be child-centred, inclusive and accessible
 - model best practice and encourage a culture of communication inclusion

Evaluation of the programme will take place and a communication toolkit will be developed for each hearing centre in Ayrshire. This may highlight future development and further learning needs.

Promoting inclusive, accessible communication within hearings supports the right of children with disabilities to be an equal participant in their hearings. This supports them to feel safe, respected and heard. By supporting Panel Members' confidence in basic BSL, deaf awareness and inclusive greetings, this strengthens children's right to participation and the quality of decision making.

CHS continues to build on the resources highlighted in our last report that focus on minimising barriers for children and families that require additional support.

Our 'Responding to the needs of older children' practice guide for Panel Members highlights a range of issues relevant to children including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADHD) and mental health conditions including anxiety and depression, as well as the need to ensure advocacy services have been offered and are available to all children.

This has been complemented by local learning, with sessions taking place during this reporting period focusing on Neurodiversity Awareness for Panel Members. Those who have attended reflected on how engaging and worthwhile the session was, and learning that was taken from it included:

"... that where one aspect of a neurodiverse child's life is going well it may be to the detriment of other aspects of their life. Solutions need to look at across the whole."

Panel Member

In 2024, CHS staff, volunteers and hearings-experienced young people worked in

collaboration with SCRA to support them with an extensive refurbishment of the Glasgow Hearings Centre. The refurbished hearings centre was opened in November 2025, offering a calm and child-friendly space, supporting a range of sensory needs. It is hoped that these redesigned spaces will support all children, including those with disabilities, to have their rights met when attending their hearings.

“It’s such a change, it’s great. If I was a wean again, I would much rather not have any hearings but if I did, I would be more than happy to have them in here. It was very corporate beforehand and was like a maze, so I was always worried where my sister was when we were here. Now I wouldn’t worry as its much more open and feels safer.”

Expert by Experience

“If I had the choice between the hearing centre I went to and here, I know which one I would choose – this one. This one is a lot more comforting, especially for a younger kid. I would like the idea of the tents as I know some people feel safe in a small space.”

Expert by Experience

Article 24 - I have the right to be as healthy as possible

When a panel is deciding whether or not to defer making a decision, Panel Members must consider the need for any additional information from any other person which the panel consider relevant to any matter to be determined. One option for the panel is to consider asking for an independent report to be commissioned if they have questions in relation to a child’s needs or the support required that could be answered by an expert in a particular field, and without that information, the panel could not reach a substantive decision.

CHS administers the Independent Report Writers function and currently has a bank of 25 Independent Report Writers with expertise including:

- Social Workers (child and family, and criminal justice)
- clinical psychologists
- forensic psychologists

- educational psychologists
- psychiatrists

“I would definitely consider asking for a report of this kind in future. [Their] expertise enabled [them] to engage with the young person in a manner and for a length of time that surprised their family and other professionals. Having the time and ability to do this and do this in a home setting was extremely beneficial.”

Panel Member

To assist Panel Members when they are considering a request for an independent report, our Practice and Policy Team issued a detailed guidance note in August 2025. This resource built upon the details already included in the PPM.

In this reporting period, the number of independent reports requested by Panel Members has increased year by year.

Requests for Independent Reports

Year	Number requested	Health	Social Work
2023-24	27	20	7
2024-25	32	20	12
2025-26	37	30	7

Given that the majority of reports are health focused, it is appropriate to discuss independent reports within Article 24. Panel Members are often concerned about:

- children’s emotional wellbeing
- a lack of support
- a limited understanding of the child’s needs, or parenting capacity
- the children’s views being unknown
- a missing risk assessment

Panel Members will decide that an assessment is required to help them make a substantive decision. Requests for these reports are driven by children’s rights and when we engaged with our bank of report writers in February 2026, they undertook a self-assessment on how they apply children’s rights in their practice when completing these requests.

We asked them to rate each statement from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the time):

Statement	Average score
You can confidently speak about the importance of children’s human rights and can convey this message to others in a way that is meaningful.	4.2
You demonstrate a range of ways for all children to meaningfully participate and barriers to participation are identified and removed.	4.1
You build relationships with children in ways that allow them to feel comfortable sharing their views and ideas.	4.3
You support children who need additional support to overcome barriers or difficulties – these are proactively identified and support accessed, including inclusive communication practice.	4.2
You make recommendations based on protecting and advancing children’s rights.	4.7
You publish child-friendly information.	2.9

In the discussion that followed this exercise, our report writers reflected on their knowledge and confidence in discussing children’s rights but also reflected on the challenges of presenting detailed reports in a child-friendly way.

CHS is committed to ensuring that there is a robust quality assurance process for this function and a new process was introduced in 2024. Feedback is requested from Panel

Members following the presentation of an independent report at a hearing. Across 2025-26, out of the 37 requests, 19³⁴ supported a substantive decision to be made for a child.

“The family was very emotional at the end of the hearing. At last they felt understood. This was their life experience. The anxiety they felt around hearings was lifted. They could see a way forward.”

Panel Member feedback in relation to an independent report

Commissioning independent reports furthers children’s right to be as healthy as possible; they provide expert assessment and recommendations to assist Panel Members in making substantive decisions for children, who might otherwise be lacking this support.

Article 27 - I have the right to have a proper home, food and clothing

If a hearing considers including a measure naming a place of residence other than with a relevant person, the hearing must have a report from the implementation authority which provides information about the needs of the child, the suitability of the home to meet the needs of the child and the suitability of the person who is to have care for the child to meet the child’s needs. This is to ensure that within this home, children’s needs and rights are being met and fulfilled.

In our response to the Scottish Government’s ‘Moving on’ from Care in Adulthood consultation, we highlighted that all young people leaving care should be entitled to a secure tenancy, support to gain access to employment, training or education, access to therapeutic services and additional support to connect with their communities.³⁵

³⁴ At the time of writing, not all requests were completed so the number of reports which have supported a substantive decision could be greater.

³⁵ [‘Response to the ‘Moving On’ from Care into Adulthood consultation’](#) (2024), CHS

For the autumn 2025 Panel Member recruitment campaign, our Experts wanted to ask potential Panel Members to consider the impact of homelessness before their interview. This really brought to life what is faced by so many children attending children’s hearings – and makes sure that we keep children at the heart of everything we do.

At interview, candidates presented:

- their understanding of how this happens
- their empathy
- the impact it has on children
- feelings of anxiety, isolation and loss
- the impact on their peers and schooling

Many of our interviewees shared their views openly, either from their own personal experiences or having undertaken research. They understood the rights of children to have a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. Security and stability are so important for many of our children attending hearings.

“Including our children and young people with experience of the hearings system in our selection processes is such a relevant and powerful way to bring to life the rights of children.”

Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Manager at CHS

[Article 33 - I have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs](#)

Under Section 67 of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, children can be referred to a hearing for a number of reasons related to drug misuse. They can be referred because:

- they, or the adults responsible for caring for them, are involved in, or at risk of, substance misuse
- they are likely to suffer unnecessarily, or the health or development of the child is likely to be seriously impaired, due to lack of parental care which may result from their parents’ addiction to drugs, as well as other factors

-
- a Schedule One offence has been committed in respect of the child, including harmful behaviours, such as giving a child drugs

In 2023-24, 20 children were referred to SCRA due to misuse of drugs³⁶.

In 2024-25, 14 children were referred to SCRA due to misuse of drugs³⁷.

Figures for 25-26 were not available at the time of publication.

CHS has worked closely with the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) and jointly produced practice guidance and eLearning for Panel Members on the topic of Responding to the Needs of Older Children³⁸. Our practice guide has a dedicated chapter on 'Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Use' which helps Panel Members to consider these issues within the context of child development, peer pressure, children in care, poor mental health and the culture around this. It offers suggestions for how Panel Members can support children experiencing these issues and does this within a trauma-informed lens, recognising that children have the right to recovery (Article 39) and the right to rest, relax and play (Article 31).

Looking ahead

To ensure that we are upholding children's rights within this cluster, our activity over the next reporting period will focus on:

- increasing the number of report writers on our bank
- continuing to ensure that the voice of children and young people is impacting the recruitment and selection of Panel Members
- developing resources aimed at minimising barriers to effective participation in hearings

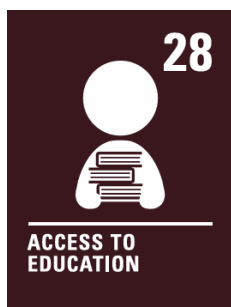
³⁶ ['Statistical Analysis 2023-24'](#) (2024), SCRA

³⁷ ['Statistical Analysis 2024-25'](#) (2025), SCRA

³⁸ ['Responding to the Needs of Older Children'](#) (2025), CYCJ/CHS

Cluster (viii): education, leisure and culture

This section covers Article 28³⁹.



Article 28 – I have the right to an education

Panel Members' decisions can help children to access their right to education, allowing them to develop to their fullest potential and achieve their aspirations. Hearing decisions can include measures to support school attendance or access alternative education provision.

In 2023-24, 783 children were referred to the Children's Reporter for failure to attend school without reasonable excuse. The average age of these children was 12.7 years.⁴⁰ In 2024-25, 753 children were referred for this reason, with an average age of 12.9 years.⁴¹ The figures for 2025-26 were not available at the time of publication.

Within some of the requests received for independent reports, Panel Members acknowledge children's right to education and strive for it to be upheld. This includes requesting specialised, expert knowledge to make an assessment and give Panel Members a recommendation which aligns with the child's best interests. Our feedback from Panel Members in relation to these requests reflect that this function supports them to make a substantive decision for children, which would otherwise not have been possible. There are

³⁹ Article 30 (children of minority or Indigenous groups) is discussed in Cluster (viii) – Special protection measures. Articles 29 (goals of education) and 31 (leisure, play and culture) do not directly apply to CHS activity.

⁴⁰ ['Statistical Analysis 2023-24'](#) (2024), SCRA

⁴¹ ['Statistical Analysis 2024-25'](#) (2025), SCRA

several education psychologists in our bank of report writers who often complete these assessments, ensuring their recommendations relate to children’s rights.

We recognise that hearings can have a negative impact on a child’s education. We continue to work with partners to support children to choose how they attend their hearing, with many children preferring to attend virtually, often from a private room in the school. This results in a reduction in lesson time missed and can help to reduce stigma for children.

Virtual hearings can sometimes be challenging for Panel Members to manage. In 2026, we issued a top tips for virtual hearings resource. This guide helps to emphasise the importance of choice and highlights the benefits a virtual hearing can bring for children, while offering simple, practical tips for Panel Members.

As a Corporate Parent, CHS strives to enhance the skills of our Experts. In June 2025, our Experts were involved in the development of new recruitment campaign materials. This was a multi-stage opportunity which ran over several months. Our young people worked with a creative agency and focused on the following questions:

- what makes a good Panel Member?
- what do you think makes people want to be a Panel Member?
- what do people misunderstand about children’s hearings?
- what are the most important things for us to tell people about being a Panel Member?
- what do you worry about that we could get wrong?

Our Experts had multiple opportunities to review the materials and provide feedback. One Expert was invited to the production and filming day, and was supported and listened to by the production team. They were able to make changes to the hearing ‘set’ ensuring it was realistic, and directly influenced how it looked on camera.

“Children’s panels are an eye opener experience for some people! This campaign needs to open up eyes to reality.”

Young person’s feedback on the campaign

Looking ahead

We will continue to work closely with SCRA and partner organisations to consider how we can reduce any negative impact on children caused by the way hearings operate. This includes supporting and contributing to pilot projects and improvement activity like the child-friendly scheduling pilot and the family-centred scheduling.

Cluster (ix): special protection measures

This section covers Articles⁴²:



Articles 22 and 30

Under Article 22, children with refugee status are entitled to special protection and Article 30 includes the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family.

Our organisational frameworks are designed to ensure that all children receive a consistent experience in their hearings and that everybody is treated according to their individual needs. This is embedded through CHS values, ensuring staff and volunteers are child-centred, respectful and fair.

Effective participation of children is an essential component of their hearing. Panel Members can support a child with refugee status by deciding to defer proceedings to arrange for an interpreter if it is apparent they do not have adequate language skills to participate or if they would prefer to speak in their own language.

⁴² CHS activity in relation to Article 33 (drug abuse) is presented in Cluster (vii) – Basic health and welfare. Article 39 (recovery and rehabilitation) are presented in Cluster (iii) - Civil rights and freedoms. Articles 35 (abduction, sale and trafficking) and 38 (war and armed conflicts) do not apply to CHS' work.

CHS works hard to ensure all children, including those with refugee status, do not experience discrimination within their hearings. Further information about this can be found in Cluster (i) - General Measures of Implementation, Article 2 (non-discrimination).

“As a chair, I work hard to ensure that everyone is heard - even when this is done through an interpreter.”

Panel Member

Articles 32, 34 and 36

Under Articles 32, 34 and 36, children have a right to be protected from child labour, and all forms of exploitation. As highlighted in previous chapters, the resources developed to support Panel Members understand the needs of older children, explore a range of topics including trafficking and exploitation. These resources are helping Panel Members to understand the complexity of the issues and how they may impact children who are referred to a children’s hearing.

Article 37 - If I break the law, I have the right not to be punished in a cruel or unnecessary way

The principle of minimum intervention – that ‘an order is only to be made if it is considered better for the child than if no order were made’ – is the third overarching principle in a children’s hearing and is at the core of Panel Member decision making. The hearings system is welfare orientated rather than punitive in its basis. Since its inception, the hearings system has shifted to referrals being around 80% welfare based and 20% offence-based grounds.

Ensuring that the rights of all children, including those who are 16 and 17 years old, are respected and protected has been a key focus throughout the previous reporting period and this one through our national work in relation to children in conflict with the law. In 2025, our National Convener presented at the CYCJ National Youth Justice Conference to reflect on the evolution of the Children’s Hearings System, including the positives changes that have been implemented and the importance of contextual safeguarding in children’s hearings.

CHS has been involved in significant collaborative work to prepare our organisation, and the wider sector, for the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. This landmark legislation will bring us in line with the UNCRC, ensuring any child can be referred to the Reporter to arrange a hearing for them before their 18th birthday.

Children’s hearings can make decisions that restrict the liberty of a child, but these are only made as a last resort and in a small proportion of cases. In order to implement such measures, strict legal tests must be applied and Panel Members are required to explain how these have been met. Any decision to restrict the liberty of a child must be in the child’s best interest and these options are not considered punishments, but ones that address a child’s need for intensive support or restrictions to keep themselves and others safe.

In total, between April 2023 and March 2024, 110 of all the interim and compulsory supervision orders made included secure care authorisation. Between April 2024 and March 2025, the total was 83.⁴³

CHS has been vocal in supporting the provision within the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 ensuring that a child cannot be held on remand or sentenced to detention in a Young Offenders Institution (YOI) or adult prison. The use of prison for children on remand is particularly unacceptable and fails to recognise the inherent vulnerabilities of children, regardless of their actions. There is a significant body of evidence that placing children in custody deprives children of their rights, is traumatising and does not lead to positive outcomes.

This legislation also amends the legal tests for secure care authorisation and Movement Restriction Conditions (MCRs). It allows for MCRs to protect the child from harm or to protect a potential victim from the child. These changes need to ensure that we are protecting children’s privacy, as enshrined in Article 16 of the UNCRC, especially as there has been an increase in their use within the hearings system.

⁴³ ['Statistical Analysis 2024-25'](#) (2025), SCRA

In 2023-24, 25 MCRs were placed on 17 children, and in 2024-25, 45 MCRs were placed on 28 children. This is an increase of 64.7%.⁴⁴

Article 40 - I have the right to be treated as a child if I break the law

The Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019 requires Scottish Ministers to carry out a review within 3 years of the commencement of section 1 of the Act (from 17 December 2021). CHS was an active member of an Advisory Group, which concluded in December 2024, that provided Scottish Ministers with a report⁴⁵ detailing the findings of the review and recommendations for any future age of criminal responsibility.

The overall assessment was that the increase in the minimum age of criminal responsibility had limited impact and the collective recommendation of the Advisory Group was to further increase the age of criminal responsibility to 14 or above, in line with most progressive European countries.

The main impact for CHS of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 is changing the definition of 'child' in a number of pieces of legislation, most notably the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. This will mean that any person under the age of 18 can be referred to a children's hearing on welfare or offence grounds.

We envisage that this change will bring an increase in the number of hearings overall, and that the majority of new referrals for 16- and 17-year-olds will relate to care and protection, rather than offence grounds. We have been and will continue to support Panel Members to fully understand the complex needs of older children, and what support services may be required to respond to their needs.

To prepare for the increase to the number of hearings, a strategic group was set up to explore capacity at CHS, and there have been successful recruitment campaigns over this

⁴⁴ ['Statistical Analysis 2024-25'](#) (2025), SCRA

⁴⁵ ['The Age of Criminal Responsibility \(Scotland\) Act 2019 Learning Event'](#) (2025), Scottish Government

reporting period with another one planned for Autumn 2026. In addition, our Area Support Teams have established a robust wellbeing support offer for Panel Members as they experience increasingly complex and challenging issues within hearings.

To support the panel community in anticipation of the changes that will be implemented as part of this legislation, nine focus group sessions were held in June and July 2023 to discuss the Bill, the changes it makes and the larger changes in the system that would accompany its implementation. Thirty-eight Panel Members joined the discussion groups to share their thoughts, knowledge and expertise. This helped to determine where further training and resources could be provided to support them.

As a result, we partnered with the CYCJ⁴⁶ to build a learning resource. This resulted in a detailed practice guide for supporting older children⁴⁷, which covers a number of topics including complex mental health needs, alcohol and substance use, exploitation and effective interventions. From this practice guide, we have developed wider awareness-raising activity and training for the panel community.

The first part of our training introduces some of these topics and encourages Panel Members to consider the unique needs of older children in hearings. The second part of the training, which will launch later in 2026, will develop Panel Members' understanding and confidence of supporting older children, and provide a detailed overview of the legislative changes to be introduced by the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. Together, parts one and two will create a comprehensive learning package for our volunteers.

Under the 2011 Act, a child is entitled to engage a solicitor at any point of the hearings process, and they can also apply to the Scottish Legal Aid Board for legal assistance.

"I'm not certain that all young people who attend hearings or are in conflict with the law understand their right to legal representation at a hearing. If the benefits of legal representation

⁴⁶ [Children and Young People's Centre for Justice](#)

⁴⁷ ['Responding to the Needs of Older Children'](#) (2025), CYCJ/CHS

were better explained to young people and their families before they attend a hearing I think this would be helpful.”

Panel Member

During this reporting period, CHS has been involved with a strategic group: Promoting Solicitor Best Practice in Hearings. The group engaged with young people and solicitors to produce a guide for solicitors who appear at hearings. This guide includes the views of young people and is a useful tool for those representing children in hearings.

Looking ahead

CHS is hopeful that once the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 is fully enacted, the changes will support us to uphold the rights of all children up to the age of 18. Significant work has been delivered during this reporting period and this work will continue across the next three years.

CHS continually strives to develop effective training, resources and tools for Panel Members, that respond to legislative, policy and practice changes. The PPM⁴⁸ is the main practice guide for Panel Members, ensuring that they are fully informed so that they can make decisions in the best interests of every child. We are in the process of completing an extensive update of this manual, incorporating key legislative changes as well as improving usability. This will be launched in December 2026 ahead of the full implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024.

⁴⁸ ['Practice and Procedure Manual'](#) (2022), CHS

Ongoing and future improvements

In addition to what has already been referenced throughout this report, CHS is committed to ensuring that our future activity embeds children's rights even further within our organisation and the Children's Hearings System. We lay out key areas below.

Strategic Outlook

Over the next year, we will develop our new Strategic Outlook for 2027-30 which will have an even greater focus on the rights and participation of children in the hearings system. This will cement our commitment to children's rights, underpinned by strong leadership and values.

Accountability

We know that we need to remain accountable to ourselves, but most importantly to children whose rights we impact. CHS will use this report as a tool to measure the effectiveness of our commitments to future improvements.

Participation

Our Experts by Experience group will remain influential in the direct delivery of our service as well as future planning for redesign. We will expand this group and support regional participation work.

Staff Training

We will continue our commitment to ensuring CHS staff undertake training on children's rights, child protection and trauma-informed practice and are able to demonstrate learning in practice.

Panel Member training

The training and development needs of our panel community will shape the learning offer available over the next reporting period. This will be driven by legislative change and themes emerging from observational analysis. Our training materials will ensure that rights are considered at every opportunity.

Panel Members indicated through engagement in relation to children’s rights that they would like to see rights being discussed more explicitly in the Children’s Hearings System. This means that Panel Members need to know about the right to recourse and the necessity to ensure that their decisions are compatible with the UNCRC. We will continue to work with the Scottish Government to refine and clarify how children can exercise these rights in children’s hearings.

Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs)

We will strengthen the processes of completing and monitoring CRWIAs, by expanding the knowledge and skills of our staff through development opportunities. Our Experts by Experience group have also indicated a desire to be involved in this work.

Legislative influence

CHS will be intensively planning for hearings redesign, creating a blueprint for our future and ensuring we play a pivotal role in shaping secondary legislation and implementation plans for the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026.

We will continue to play a lead role in the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, to support our panel community with these changes, and to uphold the rights of older children in the hearings system.

As we take stock from the reflections and learning realised through the process of completing this report, we will continue to embed the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.

Collaboration

We will continue to be key members of the Hearings Redesign Board and other national leadership forums, driving and delivering a programme of work focused on collaborative changes that complement the legislative changes.

Feedback and Complaints

Our ambitious plan to embed a more child-friendly mechanism to gather feedback and complaints will continue with learning from each phase informing future development. We are confident that the steps we have taken already will enable us to hear from more children about their experiences of children’s hearings.

A child-friendly version of this report is also available.

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Annual Report 2025-26
Responsible Executive:	Lynne Harrison, Director of Business and Finance
Report Author:	Karen Ferris, Governance Manager

1.	Purpose of Report																														
1.1	The purpose of this report is to ask the Board to approve the ARC Annual Report 2025-26. This was endorsed at the ARC meeting on 26 May 2026. The report covers the work of the ARC from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.																														
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.																														
2.	Recommendations																														
2.1	The Board is asked to approve the annual report for the period 2025-26. This report was previously endorsed by SLT and ARC. ARC meets quarterly and is responsible for providing the CHS Board and Accountable Officer with advice and assurance about the arrangements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial control and reporting • Risk management • Corporate and information governance • Legal and regulatory compliance. The Committee scrutinises all audit reports and actions taken by managers in response to audit recommendations.																														
3.	Key Points for Discussion																														
3.1	ARC Meeting Attendance																														
3.1.1	The ARC met on four occasions during the 2025-26 financial year: 15 May 2025, 3 September 2025, 18 November 2025 and 24 February 2026. The serving Committee members during this reporting period and attendance was as follows. It should be noted that in November 2025 Barbara Neil stepped down from her position a committee member and Ronnie Corse and Claire Kettlewell, as newly appointed CHS Board members joined: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>15 May 2025</th> <th>3 Sept 2025</th> <th>18 Nov 2025</th> <th>24 Feb 2026</th> <th>Attendance</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Sean Austin</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Barbara Neil</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ronnie Corse</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Claire Kettlewell</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>For the meeting to be quorate, a minimum of two members must be in attendance, which was met for 2025/26. Over the course of the meetings, the ARC met its Terms of Reference during 2025/26.</p>		15 May 2025	3 Sept 2025	18 Nov 2025	24 Feb 2026	Attendance	Sean Austin	✓	✓	✓	✓	100%	Barbara Neil	✓	✓			100%	Ronnie Corse			✓	✓	100%	Claire Kettlewell			✓	✓	100%
	15 May 2025	3 Sept 2025	18 Nov 2025	24 Feb 2026	Attendance																										
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Barbara Neil	✓	✓			100%																										
Ronnie Corse			✓	✓	100%																										
Claire Kettlewell			✓	✓	100%																										

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

3.1.2	In addition to the Committee members noted above, the meetings are attended by the National Convener/CEO (Accountable Officer) and/or the Depute CE and the Director of Business and Finance.
3.1.3	During 2025-26, also in attendance at the meetings were representative(s) from Audit Scotland who are appointed external auditors, representative(s) from BDO who are appointed internal auditors, Governance Manager and other officials where appropriate to assist with discussions and offer expertise.
3.2	ARC Meeting Workplan
3.2.1	A programme of work was agreed at the CHS Board meeting on 21 January 2025 and items allocated over the four meetings during 2025/26.
3.2.2	The standard agenda items on the agenda for each meeting are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declarations of Interest • Approval of the Minute of the previous meeting • Action Log Update • Chair Update • External Audit and Internal Audit planned activity and updates • Quarterly Compliance Report – including updates on Finance (Procurement and Fraud Reporting), Health and Safety, Information Governance, (FOI and SAR and Data Protection), Feedback and Complaints and the Strategic Risk Register.
3.3	Review of 2024/25 Annual Accounts
3.3.1	The 2024/25 Annual Accounts, including the Governance Statement were reviewed and approved and the Committee recommended the signing of the Accounts to the Board and Accountable Officer. The 2024/25 Annual Accounts received an unqualified opinion from the External Auditors.
3.4	Strategic Risk Register
3.4.1	Changes in the strategic risk register were reviewed at each meeting.
3.4.2	A framework for identifying, measuring, controlling and monitoring strategic risks was in place throughout the financial year. Operational responsibility for strategic risk management sits with SLT where risk management is a standard item on SLT meeting agendas.
3.4.3	Risk management is embedded in CHS' planning management processes. At the strategic level, corporate and business strategies are aligned to the risk management process; at the operational level, senior managers review the operational risk register and follows a similar process of risk review/interrogation.
3.4.4	The Committee routinely interrogates key strategic risks to test the robustness of CHS' risk management processes and assurances provided through the executive process. The CHS Board has an oversight role and receives a quarterly update from the ARC Chair at Board meetings.
3.4.5	The key strategic risks identified and monitored during 2025/26 included: <u>BUDGET</u>

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

	<p>CHS not obtaining sufficient budgetary support via Grant in Aid (GiA) , creating financial instability, the organisation will be unable to deliver its business and statutory functions</p> <p><u>LEARNING</u></p> <p>Delays to transition to effective inhouse learning, creating a gap in the learning provision, impacting the training of panel members & PPAs</p> <p><u>CYBER SECURITY</u></p> <p>CHS is subject to a substantial cyber-attack rendering its system inoperable</p> <p><u>CAPACITY</u></p> <p>Inability to recruit enough volunteer panel members to meet the National Convenor's statutory functions, it will fail to attract, recruit and retain panel member and we will be unable to fulfil its statutory duties</p> <p><u>ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</u></p> <p>The Financial Memorandum that accompanied the Hearing System Reform Bill (CCCESP) does not reflect the investment in CHS to fulfil its (likely) new duties, it will be unable to support reforms and be unable to provide the necessary support to the panel community</p> <p><u>CHILDREN'S HEARING REDESIGN</u></p> <p>The proposed (CCCESP) Bill does not proceed following the parliamentary process</p>
3.5	<p>Information Governance</p>
	<p>Under information governance, the ARC focussed its work on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of data breaches and subsequent actions and • Monitoring of compliance with statutory guidance on FOISA/SAR activity.
3.6	<p>Feedback and Complaints</p>
	<p>Under feedback and complaints, the ARC focussed its work on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of compliance and CHS and Scottish Public Services Ombudsman policy around complaint handling • Understanding trends and actions from feedback and complaints • Monitoring the development of child friendly mechanisms to capture feedback using different approaches and platforms.
3.7	<p>Internal Audit</p>
3.7.1	<p>The Annual Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 was presented to the ARC by BDO in February 2025 and approved.</p> <p>The following internal audits were carried out during 2025/26:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications Advisory Review carried out in April 2025 • Follow Up 2024-25 – carried out in May 2025 • Risk Management – carried out in November 2025 • Tribunal Support Model Review – Started in November 2026 (due for completion May 2026) • Cyber Security/Disaster Recovery – Started in March 2026 (due for completion May 2026)
3.7.2	<p>Follow-up 2025-26</p>

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

The Follow Up 2025/26 internal audit report will seek confirmation that the recommendations from previous audits had been implemented, and evidence sought. As set out in the Follow Up Tracker, the following recommendations were subject for review at that time of issue:

YEAR	AUDIT	RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWED UP			
		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	TOTAL
2018/19	Business Continuity	-	1	-	1
2024/25	Core Financial Controls	-	5	-	5
2025/26	Stage Gate Process	-	-	5	5
2025/26	Risk Management	-	5	1	6
TOTAL		-	8	2	10

3.7.3 Business Continuity
The recommendation to implement an annual BC testing schedule was completed in Q1 of 2025/26 with quarterly testing being carried out and test reports being submitted to ARC for review.

3.7.4 Core Financial Processes
The recommendation to prepared Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is partially implemented with a number now complete. Due to a change in accountancy software "SAGE" certain SOPs require to be updated to reflect the new flow of information, tracking of invoices, and the approval process.
The implementation of a core financial system and an upgrade to SAGE was implemented in April 2026, this included a system driven approval flow for invoices to gain greater visibility and structure in the workflow. Further 'switch ons' of system driven processes are planned for later in the fiscal year, i.e. an on system PO process. Therefore, the for the recommendations for preparation of standard operating procedures, recording asset disposal approvals and clarity of purchase orders are currently partially implemented and will be completed during 2026/27.
The final recommendation for aligning the terminology, clarifying segregation of duties, roles and responsibilities in the MOU between CHS and SCRA is currently being under implemented and should be completed within Q1 2026/27.

3.7.5 Stage Gate Process
All 5 recommendations have now been superseded due to a change in organisational structure. The CHS Change and PMO functions operated from 2023 - 2025. In Q2 and Q3 of 2025 a review of the Change and PMO functions was initiated to understand what could be learned and developed ahead of legislative and non-legislative reform in the Children's Hearing system. At the conclusion of the review, the Change and PMO functions were retired and a new team, Strategic Planning and Delivery was created in January 2026. However, building on the learning from the BDO internal audit and own

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

	lessons learned programme reviews, the new team are reassessing the shape of the delivery and governance around this new function and this work is underway.
3.7.6	<p>Risk Management</p> <p>The two recommendations regarding aligning terminology across all risk documentation has now been implemented. The remaining recommendations on the expansion of risk registers across the organisation and a more uniformed approach to risk management link into the work being carried out by the new Strategic Planning and Delivery function and these outstanding recommendations will be mapped out and implemented during the coming months.</p>
3.8	External Audit
3.8.1	The Committee endorsed the accounting policies to be adopted by CHS for the preparation of its statement of accounts for 2025/26. The CHS Board approved the accounting policies at its meeting on 25 March 2026.
3.8.2	The Committee reviewed the outline annual audit plan and strategy in relation to the 2025/26 accounts at their meeting on 24 February 2026. The Director of Business and Finance, Finance Manager and Accountable Officer/CEO were comfortable with the high-level timetable for financial statements and reporting deadlines for the August CHS Audit and Risk Committee meeting.
3.9	Terms of Reference (ToR)
	The Committee reviewed its ToR (see Appendix 1) on 24 February 2026. The CHS Board approved the ToR in March 2026.
3.10	Strategic Issues to be Examined During 2026/27
3.10.1	The 2026/27 internal audit plan was reviewed and approved by the Committee at the meeting on 24 February 2026. The three internal audits will cover the Financial Process – Staff Payroll, Staff induction and Onboarding Risk Management and Procurement.
3.10.2	<p>The Committee anticipates focusing its energies on the key strategic risks facing the organisation over the next year. The following areas are highlighted as areas of challenge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed changes to the Hearing System due to the upcoming legislation • The ongoing challenges to our capacity and ability to recruit and retain Panel Members to fulfil our statutory duties. • Not maximising opportunities to improve outcomes and hearing experiences through a lack of appropriate training, practice and policy, engagement, quality control and quality assurance. • The ongoing risk to CHS' cyber security and resilience. • The ability to access and harness data for quality improvement.
3.10.3	The external auditors will complete their review of the 2025/26 annual accounts in June 2026 and the audited accounts will be presented to the ARC in August 2026 and to the Board in September 2026.
3.11	Support to the Committee

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

3.11.1	<p>On behalf of the Committee, the ARC Chair, Sean Austin, would like to record his thanks to the CHS Leadership Team and colleagues, the Internal Auditors, BDO, and the External Auditors, Audit Scotland, for their contribution and support throughout the year.</p> <p>The Chair would also like to express his appreciation thanks to his fellow Committee members Barbara Neill, Ronnie Corse and Claire Kettlewell. Barbara stepped down from the Committee part way through the year, having made a significant contribution to its work during her tenure. Ronnie & Claire joined the Committee in September last year. They have both made a valuable input, and brought fresh insights, to the Committee's work.</p> <p>Finally, special thanks to the Governance team, Karen Ferris and Frieda Cadogan, for ensuring the effective functioning of the Committee and keeping us all right!</p>
4.	<p>Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook</p>
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS • Objective 2 - Quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Objective 2 - We will become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. • Objective 3 - We will make effective use of technology, capitalising on its potential for enhancing performance and delivering efficiency. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Implement a three-year People Strategy that attracts and retains top talent and committed individuals and drives the success and sustainability of the organisation. • Objective 2 - The organisational design remains agile, adaptable and responsive to support ongoing organisational transformation. • Objective 3 - To become a more inclusive and diverse organisation and create a culture where everyone feels valued, included and engaged. • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	<p>Key Risks</p>
5.1	<p>No risks identified.</p>
6.	<p>Risk Register</p>
6.1	<p>There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.</p>
7.	<p>Impact on Inequality/Rights</p>
7.1	<p>N/A</p>

Agenda Item 14a. CHS-2627-10

	See templates and guidance for this on the shared drive at G:\CHS\CHS Central Resources\Impact Assessments
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	There is no requirement for engagement and consultation in relation to this paper.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	There is no specific resource implication associated with this paper.
10.	Appendices
	Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference

**Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)
Terms of Reference (ToR)
2026-2027**

1. Constitution

- 1.1 The Board hereby resolves to establish a committee of the Board to be known as the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC).

2. Membership

- 2.1 The ARC comprises a minimum of three non-executive members appointed by the Board, not including the Chair of the Board.
- 2.2 The Board appoints one of its members to serve as the chair of the committee. Details of the current members, including the committee Chair, are shown in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 All members are appointed for the length of their current Board appointment which may be extended in line with any Board re-appointments. The Board must approve all re-appointments.
- 2.4 The ARC may co-opt independent members who are not members of the Board for a period (not exceeding a year) to provide specialist skills, knowledge, and experience subject to budgets agreed by the Board.
- 2.5 The Committee may appoint a substitute drawn from the membership of the Board of CHS, except for the CHS Board Chair, in line with the requirements at 2.1.
- 2.6 A committee substitute may participate at a committee meeting in place of a member.
- 2.7 When a committee substitute attends a meeting (or other committee activity), he or she assumes the full rights of an ordinary member of the committee. In particular, the substitute can vote and is entitled to receive all committee papers.

3. Authority

- 3.1 The ARC is authorised by the Board to review and approve any activity within its terms of reference.

4. Meetings and Quorum

- 4.1 The ARC meets at least four times a year. The Chair of the committee may convene additional meetings as he/she deems necessary. Meetings may be held virtually if required.

Agenda Item 14b. Appendix 1

- 4.2 The Chair of the Board may also ask the ARC to convene further meetings to discuss issues on which he/she seeks the Audit and Risk Management committee's advice.
- 4.3 A minimum of two members of the ARC must be present for the meetings to be deemed quorate. In the absence of the Chairperson, one of the other non-executive members will assume that role for the duration of the meeting. To ensure that the meeting is quorate, committee substitute(s) may be required to attend.
- 4.4 The National Convener/Chief Executive Officer and the Director of Business and Finance are required to attend each meeting.
- 4.5 The Audit and Risk Management committee may ask any other officials to attend, to assist with discussions and offer expertise on a particular matter.
- 4.6 The CHS Governance team will provide the ARC with secretarial support services.
- 4.7 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee will attend one meeting of the CHS People and Culture Committee Meetings, per year and vice versa.
- 4.8 The agenda and meeting papers are issued to members at least seven calendar days prior to the meeting, unless agreed otherwise.
- 4.9 The CHS Governance team minutes the proceedings and resolutions of all committee meetings including the names of those present and in attendance.
- 4.10 Minutes of every committee meeting are circulated to the committee for approval and approved minutes referred to the Board for noting as soon as practical.
- 4.11 The internal and external auditors attend all meetings.
- 4.12 The ARC may ask any or all of those who normally attend, but who are not members, to withdraw to facilitate open and frank discussion of matters.
- 4.13 An Action Log is maintained to monitor progress on key issues raised at meetings.

5. Reporting

- 5.1 The Chair of the committee reports back to the Board, verbally or in writing, after each meeting. The committee takes directions from the Board on general or specific actions.
- 5.2 The ARC provides an Annual Report, timed to support preparation of the Governance Statement, summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year.

6. Responsibilities

The Audit Committee advises the Board and the Accountable Officer on:

Agenda Item 14b. Appendix 1

- 6.1 The strategic processes for risk control and governance.
 - 6.2 Corporate and information governance arrangements.
 - 6.3 The accounting policies, the approval of the Unsigned Annual Report and Accounts following completion of the audit and Management's Letter of Representation to the external auditors.
 - 6.4 The planned activity and results of both Internal and External Audit.
 - 6.5 The adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's report to those charged with governance.
 - 6.6 The annual and longer-term operating plans for internal audit and the resourcing of the internal audit to deliver these plans.
 - 6.7 Monitoring the implementation of approved recommendations.
 - 6.8 The external audit reports and, where appropriate, reports to the Board of any issues from the external audit of CHS, and any matter that the external auditors bring to the attention of the committee.
 - 6.9 The adequacy of the arrangements for the management of CHS' compliance with legislation and regulation focusing on data security, freedom of information, health and safety and equality.
 - 6.10 Fraud and Corruption prevention policy, Whistleblowing policy, and arrangements for special investigations.
 - 6.11 Quality Strategy Monitoring.
- 7. Information Requirements**
- 7.1 Agree a work programme at the start of each financial year for the year ahead.
 - 7.2 For each meeting, the ARC is normally provided with:
 - 7.3 a report on performance relating to risk management, including a summary of any key changes to the risk register.
 - 7.4 Information Governance reports.
 - 7.5 a report from Internal Audit detailing, as appropriate:
 - 7.6 audit performed.
 - 7.7 key issues emerging from internal audit work.
 - 7.8 management responses to audit recommendations.

Agenda Item 14b. Appendix 1

- 7.9 the current internal audit plan including proposed changes.
- 7.10 any issues affecting the delivery of internal audit objectives.
- 7.11 progress on the implementation of agreed recommendations.

8. As and when appropriate, the Committee:

- 8.1 Annually reviews its Terms of Reference. Proposals for amendment to the terms are submitted to the Board for formal approval.
- 8.2 Annually reviews its own effectiveness.
- 8.3 Considers the Draft Annual Report and Accounts prior to submission to the Board and reviews the compliance check list and draft Governance Statement.
- 8.4 Reviews any changes to accounting policies.
- 8.5 Reviews the Management's letter of Representation.
- 8.6 Reviews the effectiveness of CHS' financial and other control systems.
- 8.7 Monitors CHS' arrangements to secure Value for Money, whether these are made via internal or external audit or other means.
- 8.8 Monitors the effectiveness of Internal and External Audit, reviews the Internal Audit Annual Report and the ISA 260 from External Audit.
- 8.9 Alerts the Board and, where necessary, Scottish Ministers to factors which might affect the ability of CHS to conduct its statutory functions and achieve its strategic objectives.

Appendix 1 - Membership of the Audit and Risk Management Committee

Name	Term	Term	Term
	1 st Appointment	2 nd Appointment	3 rd Appointment
Sean Austin ARC Chair	06/21-06/24	07/25-06/29	
Claire Kettlewell	09/2025-09/2029		
Ronnie Corse	09/2025-09/2029		

Agenda Item 15a. CHS-2627-11

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	People and Culture Committee Annual Report 2025-26
Responsible Executive:	Jo O’Leary, Director of People and Culture
Report Author:	Frieda Cadogan, Governance Officer

1.	Purpose of Report																																				
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to ask the Board to approve the PaCC Annual Report 2025-26. This was endorsed by the People and Culture Committee (PaCC) at their meeting on 2 June 2026.</p> <p>The report covers the work of the PaCC from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.</p>																																				
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.																																				
2.	Recommendations																																				
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to approve the draft annual report for the period 2025-26.</p> <p>The PaCC meets quarterly and is responsible for assisting the CHS Board and Accountable Officer to deliver its responsibilities for effective staff performance management, recruitment, remuneration and appointment in accordance with its Terms of Reference.</p>																																				
3.	Key Points for Discussion																																				
3.1	PaCC Meeting Attendance																																				
3.1.1	<p>The PaCC met on four occasions during the 2025-26 financial year: 17 June 2025, 9 September 2025, 16 December 2025 and 10 March 2026.</p> <p>The serving Committee members during this reporting period and attendance was as follows:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>17 June 25</th> <th>9 Sept 25</th> <th>16 Dec 25</th> <th>10 Mar 26</th> <th>Attendance</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Beth-Anne McDowall</td> <td>✓</td> <td>Apologies</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>50%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Katie Docherty</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Barbara Neil</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Robert Dorrian</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td>✓</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sean Austin</td> <td></td> <td>✓</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>For the meeting to be quorate, a minimum of two members must be in attendance.</p> <p>The meeting on 28 August 2025 was inquorate due to apologies from Beth-Anne McDowall. Sean Austin, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee attended the meeting to make this quorate.</p>		17 June 25	9 Sept 25	16 Dec 25	10 Mar 26	Attendance	Beth-Anne McDowall	✓	Apologies			50%	Katie Docherty	✓	✓	✓	✓	100%	Barbara Neil			✓	✓	100%	Robert Dorrian			✓	✓	100%	Sean Austin		✓			100%
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Sean Austin		✓			100%																																

Agenda Item 15a. CHS-2627-11

	<p>Beth-Anne McDowall concluded her tenure as CHS Board member/committee member on 30 September 2025.</p> <p>Following appointment in September 2025 of Robert Dorrian as a new Board member, Robert and Barbara Neil became members of the committee.</p> <p>Over the course of the meetings, the PaCC met its Terms of Reference during 2025/26.</p>
3.1.2	<p>In addition to the Committee members noted above, the meetings are attended by the National Convener/CEO (Accountable Officer) and/or the Depute CE and the Director of People and Culture.</p>
3.1.3	<p>During 2025-26, also in attendance at the meetings were the Co-Chairs of the Team Forum and other officials where appropriate to assist with discussions and offer expertise.</p>
3.2	<p>PaCC Meeting Workplan</p>
3.2.1	<p>A programme of work was agreed at the PaCC meeting in December 2025 and items allocated over the four meetings during 2025/26.</p>
3.2.2	<p>The standard agenda items discussed at each meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declarations of Interest • Approval of the Minute of the previous meeting • Action Log Update • Chair Update • People Strategy and Planning Update • Policy reviews as required • Team Forum Update.
3.2.3	<p>Other items of business discussed throughout the 2025/26 year were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHS Policies approved, Lone Working Policy, Dignity at Work Policy, Disciplinary and Grievance Policy, Family Friendly Policy • Whistleblowing Policy Testing Update • Children's Participation and Rights Strategy Annual Review Update • Update on the Equality Mainstreaming Outcomes • Gender Pay Gap Report April 2024-March 2026 • The NC/CEO 6-month review, annual appraisal, and objectives were reviewed and approved • A 3-year Staff Pay Strategy, and CEO pay recommendations were considered and approved • Learning and Development Programme Update • Provided feedback and support for the Volunteer Commitments (formally known as the 'Volunteer Strategy') • Update on the newly formed CHS Health and Safety Committee • Updates, Discussion and Support for the Foundations for Learning Programme • Leadership Development Plan • Employee Engagement Survey and Action Plan

Agenda Item 15a. CHS-2627-11

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Annual Report on outcomes of staff appraisals was reviewed • The Committee reviewed its own effectiveness • The Committee welcomed the continued engagement with the Team Forum who attended every meeting.
3.3	Terms of Reference (ToR)
	The Committee reviewed its ToR (see Appendix 1) on 10 March 2026. The CHS Board approved the ToR on 25 March 2026.
3.4	Support to the Committee
3.4.1	On behalf of the Committee the PaCC Chair, Katie Docherty, would like to record thanks to Beth-Anne McDowall for her role as committee member prior to the end of tenure on 30 September 2025. KD would also like to record thanks to the CHS Leadership Team for their contribution and support throughout the year and to Frieda Cadogan for the governance support provided to the Chair and Committee. The Chair would also like to note thanks to her fellow Committee members for their insights and contributions past, present and future.
4.	Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Implement a three-year People Strategy that attracts and retains top talent and committed individuals and drives the success and sustainability of the organisation. • Objective 2 - The organisational design remains agile, adaptable and responsive to support ongoing organisational transformation. • Objective 3 - To become a more inclusive and diverse organisation and create a culture where everyone feels valued, included and engaged. • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	No risks identified.
6.	Risk Register
6.1	There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights

Agenda Item 15a. CHS-2627-11

7.1	N/A
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)
8.1	There is no requirement for engagement and consultation in relation to this paper.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	There is no specific resource implication associated with this paper.
10.	Appendices
	Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference

People and Culture Committee (PaCC)
Terms of Reference
2026/27

1. Constitution

- 1.1 The Board of CHS hereby resolves to establish a committee of the Board to be known as the **People and Culture Committee**.

2. Membership

- 2.1 The members of the committee are appointed by the Board from its membership. There is a minimum of three members of the committee, including the Chair of the committee and the deputy Chair. Details of the current members are shown in Appendix 1.

The Board appoints one of its members to serve as the Chair of the committee. The committee determines the procedure to appoint its Deputy Chair. If the Chair of the committee is absent from the meeting, his/her Deputy chairs the meeting and assumes all the functions and authority of the Chair.

- 2.2 All members are appointed for the length of their current Board appointment which may be extended in line with any Board re-appointments. All re-appointments must be approved by the Board.
- 2.3 The Committee may appoint a substitute drawn from the membership of the Board of CHS.
- 2.4 A committee substitute may participate at a committee meeting in place of a member where a committee member:
- (a) is unavailable for a committee meeting (or any committee activity taking place other than at a meeting) because of illness, family circumstances, adverse travel conditions beyond the member's control, a requirement to attend to other urgent business; or
 - (b) has ceased to hold that office and a replacement committee member has yet to be appointed.
- 2.5 When a committee substitute attends a meeting (or other committee activity), he or she assumes the full rights of an ordinary member of the committee. In particular, the substitute can vote and is entitled to receive all committee papers.
- 2.6 The Chair of the Board is not a committee substitute.

- 2.7 The PaCC may co-opt independent members who are not members of the Board for a period (not exceeding a year) to provide specialist skills, knowledge, and experience subject to budgets agreed by the Board.

3. Authority

- 3.1 The committee is authorised by the Board to review and approve any activity within its Terms of Reference (ToR). In so doing, the committee is authorised by the Board to obtain outside legal or other independent professional advice and to secure the attendance of outsiders with relevant experience and expertise if it considers this is necessary, subject to budgets agreed by the Board.

4. Meetings and Quorum

- 4.1 The PaCC meets at least three times a year subject to the possibility of cancelling a meeting should it not be required. The Chair of the committee may convene additional meetings as he/she deems necessary. Committee meetings are held in private and may be held virtually if required.
- 4.2 The Chair of the Board may also ask the Chair of the committee to convene further meetings to discuss issues on which he/ she wants the People and Culture Committee's advice.
- 4.3 A minimum of two members of the committee must be present for the meetings to be deemed quorate. To ensure that the meeting is quorate, committee substitute(s) may be required to attend.
- 4.4 If any matter falls within the remit of more than one committee, the committees concerned may, if they wish, seek the agreement of the Board to meet jointly.
- 4.5 The People and Culture Committee may ask any other officials to attend to assist with discussions and offer expertise on a particular matter.
- 4.6 The Chair of the People and Culture Committee will attend one meeting of the CHS Audit and Risk Committee Meeting, per year and vice versa.
- 4.7 The Governance Officer will provide the PaCC with secretarial support services.
- 4.8 The agenda and meeting papers are issued to members at least seven calendar days prior to the meeting, unless agreed otherwise.
- 4.9 The Governance Officer minutes the proceedings and resolutions of all committee meetings including the names of those present and in attendance.
- 4.10 Minutes of every committee meeting are circulated to the Chair for approval and approved minutes referred to the Board for noting as soon as practical.

4.11 An Action Log is maintained to monitor progress on key issues raised at meetings.

5. Decisions and voting

5.1 Where consensus on a decision is not arrived at and a vote is necessary, members should refer to, and apply, the procedure laid out in CHS Board Standing Orders.

6. Attendance

6.1 The National Convener/Chief Executive Officer and the Director of People and Culture are required to attend each meeting.

6.2 The People and Culture Committee may require any other officials to attend to assist it with its discussions on any matter.

6.3 The committee may ask any or all of those who normally attend and who are not members of the committee, to withdraw to facilitate open and frank discussion of matters. No attendee should be present for discussion of his/her own remuneration and conditions of service

7. Reporting

7.1 The Chair of the committee reports back to the Board, verbally or in writing, after each meeting. The committee takes directions from the Board on general or specific action it should take.

7.2 The committee reports on its activities, to the extent that it can, without breaching confidentiality, in the CHS Annual Report and Accounts.

8. Responsibilities

The committee has the following responsibilities:

8.1 Approves and reviews procedures/policies and any changes in procedure/policies for CHS colleagues for:

- the setting of performance objectives for the National Convener/ CEO.
- the appraisal of performance for CHS colleagues.
- the pay and reward structure within CHS.
- the employee life cycle process.
- and any other people strategies, policies and guidance as applicable.

8.2 Approves and reviews applicable people related procedures/policies and any changes in procedure/policies for CHS community.

Agenda Item 15b. CHS-2627-11

- 8.3 Notes and/or approves CHS' employment policies and their revision from time to time, including the Pensions Discretionary Policy.
- 8.4 Approves the annual pay remit for submission to the Scottish Government.
- 8.5 Approves the recruitment/reappointment process for the NC/Chief Executive when a vacancy arises.
- 8.6 Formulates proposals for the Chief Executive's salary progression and other aspects of their remuneration for recommendation to the Scottish Government.
- 8.7 Notes the Remuneration report in the CHS Annual Report and Accounts and seek assurance it fulfils disclosure requirements.
- 8.8 Considers the redundancy, early retirement or severance arrangements in respect of all CHS colleagues, excluding retirement on grounds of ill-health, and approve these or refer to CHS Board as it sees fit.
- 8.9 Considers/approves reports on progress against the People Strategy. This will include links across other organisational strategies such as the Learning and Development Strategy, EDI Strategy etc.
- 8.10 Approves any Employment Tribunal settlement.
- 8.11 Engages directly with representatives of the CHS Team Forum at PaCC meetings.
- 8.12 Where a question arises about whether a matter is within the committee's Terms of Reference, it is for the Board, after consultation with CHS Senior leadership Team as appropriate, to decide.
- 8.13 Learning, including the annual prospectus and any monitoring performance against the Learning Strategy and Implementation Plan.
- 8.14 Participation including any updates to the workstreams within the Children's Participation and Rights Strategy.
- 8.15 Wellbeing including updates on the delivery and implementation of the Wellbeing and retention approach for paid colleagues, as well as volunteers, in-line with the People and Culture Strategy.

9. Review

- 9.1 The committee reviews its Terms of Reference annually. Proposals for amendment to the terms are submitted to the Board for formal approval.

Chair

Date

*Reviewed by PaCC: March 2026
Approved by the Board: March 2026
Next review: March 2027*

1

Membership of the People and Culture Committee (PaCC) Committee

Name	Term	Term	Term
	1 st Appointment	2 nd Appointment	3 rd Appointment
Kathryn Docherty (Chair)	06/21- 06/25	07/25-06/29	
Barbara Neil	02/19 – 01/21	02/21 – 01/25	02/25 – 01/27
Robert Dorrian	09/25 – 08/29		

Other Attendees

Name	Designation
Jo O’Leary	Director of People and Culture
Elliot Jackson	National Convener/CEO
Katharina Kasper	CHS Chair
Frieda Cadogan	Governance Officer (note taker)

Agenda Item 16a. CHS-2627-12

Meeting:	CHS Board
Meeting Date:	17 June 2026
Title:	2025-26 Annual Accounts - Governance Statement
Responsible Executive:	Lynne Harrison, Director of Business and Finance
Report Author:	Karen Ferris, Corporate Governance Manager

1.	Purpose of Report															
1.1	The purpose of this report is to ask the Board to note on the key dates for the preparation of the CHS 2025/26 Financial Accounts (“Accounts”) and to review the accountable officer’s draft Governance Statement for inclusion in the 2025/26 Accounts .															
1.2	Any member wishing additional information should contact the Executive Lead in advance of the meeting.															
2.	Recommendations															
2.1	The Board are asked to note the key steps and dates in the preparation of the 2025/26 Accounts and to review the draft Governance Statement for inclusion in the 2025/26 Accounts. It should be noted that the Accounting Policies were approved at ARC in February 2026 and Board in March 2026.															
3.	Key Points for Discussion															
3.1	Audit Timetable															
3.1.1	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Audit Activity</th> <th>Target Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Submission of audited annual report and accounts and all working paper</td> <td>15 June 2026</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Latest Date for audit clearance meeting</td> <td>13 August 2026</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agreement of audited and unsigned annual report and accounts</td> <td>18 August 2026 (for ARC Meeting 25 August)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Issue of draft letter of representation, proposed independent auditor’s report and proposed annual audit report</td> <td>18 August 2026 (to ARC Meeting 25 August)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Approval by those charged with governance and signing of audited annual report and account</td> <td>23 September 2026 (Board Meeting)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signing of independent auditor’s report and issue of annual audit report</td> <td>23 September 2026 (or after Board)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Audit Activity	Target Date	Submission of audited annual report and accounts and all working paper	15 June 2026	Latest Date for audit clearance meeting	13 August 2026	Agreement of audited and unsigned annual report and accounts	18 August 2026 (for ARC Meeting 25 August)	Issue of draft letter of representation, proposed independent auditor’s report and proposed annual audit report	18 August 2026 (to ARC Meeting 25 August)	Approval by those charged with governance and signing of audited annual report and account	23 September 2026 (Board Meeting)	Signing of independent auditor’s report and issue of annual audit report	23 September 2026 (or after Board)
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Signing of independent auditor’s report and issue of annual audit report	23 September 2026 (or after Board)															

Agenda Item 16a. CHS-2627-12

3.2	Governance Statement
3.2.1	The draft 2025/26 Governance Statement is attached as Appendix I for inclusion in the Accounts.
4.	Alignment to CHS Strategic Outlook
4.1	<p>This work is aligned to the CHS Strategic Outcome 2024-2027:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 - Delivering Positive Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Develop a 5-year learning strategy to maximise learning impact across CHS • Objective 2 - Quality will be the cornerstone of our hearings system. • Objective 3 - Upholding and promoting children's rights is at the forefront of what we do, and those rights are well understood by our people • Theme 2 - Driving Transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Work with partners and stakeholders to lead and influence change. • Objective 2 - We will become a data-informed and data-driven organisation. • Objective 3 - We will make effective use of technology, capitalising on its potential for enhancing performance and delivering efficiency. • Theme 3 - Valuing Our People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 - Implement a three-year People Strategy that attracts and retains top talent and committed individuals and drives the success and sustainability of the organisation. • Objective 2 - The organisational design remains agile, adaptable and responsive to support ongoing organisational transformation. • Objective 3 - To become a more inclusive and diverse organisation and create a culture where everyone feels valued, included and engaged. • Objective 4 - to develop our people capabilities.
5.	Key Risks
5.1	No risks identified
6.	Risk Register
6.1	There is no requirement for anything to be added to the Risk Register at this stage.
7.	Impact on Inequality/Rights
7.1	N/A
8.	Duty to Inform, Engage and Consult People who use our Services (Internal and External)

Agenda Item 16a. CHS-2627-12

8.1	There is no requirement for engagement and consultation in relation to this paper.
9.	Resource Implications
9.1	There is no specific resource implication associated with this paper.
10.	Appendices
	Appendix 1 – Draft Governance Statement

Governance Statement

Scope of Responsibility

As Accountable Officer, I have responsibility for maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of CHS' policies, aims and objectives, as set by Scottish Ministers, whilst safeguarding the public funds and assets for which I am personally responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to me in the Memorandum to Accountable Officers for Other Public Bodies.

Governance framework

CHS' governance framework accords with generally accepted best practice principles and guidance from Scottish Ministers in the Scottish Public Finance Manual and has been in place for the financial year ended 31 March 2026 and up to the date of the approval of the annual report and accounts.

CHS has a Board which meets at least every three months to consider the overall strategic direction of CHS within the policy, planning and resources framework determined by the Scottish Ministers. The Board seeks assurance that corporate objectives are being progressed through the delivery of agreed targets in the business plans and corporate plan on performance, implementation of strategic projects, effective use of resources and management of strategic risks.

The Board Committee structure comprises a People and Culture Committee and an Audit and Risk Management Committee. Each Committee has developed its terms of reference which are documented, approved and reviewed on an annual basis.

The People and Culture Committee meet quarterly, and its responsibilities include:

- approving and reviewing procedures/policies for CHS staff and applicable procedures/ policies for CHS community members, including employment policies;
- reviewing the objectives of senior staff annually;
- approving the annual pay remit for submission to Scottish Government;

Agenda Item 16b. Appendix 1

- approving the recruitment process for the National Convener/Chief Executive;
- considering/approving reports on People and Recognition, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Learning and Development and Staff and Community Wellbeing;
- approving any Employment Tribunal settlements.

The Chair of the People and Culture Committee briefs the Board following each meeting and the latter receives an annual report on the performance of the Committee.

The Audit and Risk Management Committee meet quarterly and reviews the adequacy of the arrangements for ensuring sound internal control arrangements and provides the Board and Accountable Officer with advice and assurance with regard to the arrangements for:

- financial control and reporting;
- risk management;
- Information Governance;
- legal and regulatory compliance;
- Digital Programme.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee briefs the Board following each meeting and the Board receives an annual report on the performance of the Committee.

CHS has an internal audit service provided under contract by BDO, which operates to standards defined in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. During 2025/26 Internal Audit undertook three reviews; risk management, tribunal support implementation and cyber security. The Committee scrutinises all internal audit reports and the actions taken by managers in response to audit recommendations.

In the internal auditor's opinion, the risk management activities and controls in the areas which they examined were found to be suitably designed to achieve the specific risk management, control and governance arrangements. Based on their verification reviews and sample testing, risk management, control, value for money and governance arrangements were operating with sufficient effectiveness to provide reasonable, but not absolute assurance that the related risk management, control and governance objectives were achieved for the period under review.

Operation of the Board

The Board met five times during 2025/26, held four Board development sessions for training opportunities and discussion. In addition, the Board held a strategy t session on the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Scotland Bill.

Key issues for the Board in 25/26 included:

- Approval of the Communication and Engagement Strategy 2026-29
- Ongoing planning for changes proposed under the Children (Care, Care Experienced and Services Planning) Bill once approved
- Ongoing planning for the implementation of reforms in line with the accepted recommendations from the Hearings for Children Report
- Approval of the CHS/Public Services Improvement Framework Project
- Approving quarterly performance reports
- Reviewing and approving the Board Standing Orders and Self-Assessments
- Scrutiny of ongoing work to improve capacity
- Approval of the CHS Financial 5 Year Plan
- Approval of the Budget for 2025/26
- Approval of the Business and Corporate Parenting Plan for 2025/26
- Approval of CHS Digital Priorities 2026/27
- Approving the Annual Accounts and Impact Report
- Reviewing Learning Academy progress
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Equalities and Outcome reporting
- Approving the accounting policies to be used for the preparation of CHS' statement of accounts for 2025/26

Strategic and operational finance support is provided through a shared services arrangement with SCRA and CHS has a dedicated HR/OD Lead. SCRA's Head of Finance & Resources provides strategic finance advice to the CHS Board and Committee meetings and other meetings as appropriate.

Assessment of corporate governance arrangements

As Accountable Officer, I have reviewed the effectiveness of corporate governance arrangements. My review is informed by:

- the executive managers within CHS who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework, including the organisation's Senior Information Risk Officer
- the work of the internal auditors who submit to the Audit and Risk Management Committee
- regular reports which include the Head of Internal Audit's independent and objective opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of CHS' system of internal control together with any recommendations for improvement
- recommendations and comments made by the external auditors in their Annual Audit Report and other reports.

Internal control systems have been in place for the year under review and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts around risk management, business planning, major investment, project management, financial management, fraud, procurement, human resources, equality and diversity, information management, health & safety and compliance and are assessed annually as part of the Scottish Government Certificates of Assurance process. The National Convener completed this assessment for 2025/26, and no major control gaps were identified.

Assessment of procurement activities

As Accountable Officer, I have reviewed the effectiveness of procurement activities and arrangements. CHS is committed to fair process and best value resourcing and therefore in sourcing suppliers utilises SG procurement frameworks where possible and utilises shared service expertise from the SG procurement team through their Procurement Lite service. CHS has put in place a series of procurement KPI's to help demonstrate the contribution of procurement approaches to the efficient, effective and economical running of the organisation.

Agenda Item 16b. Appendix 1

CHS reports on effective contract management including the monitoring contract meetings held, the financial management of contracts, and the KPI's delivered. CHS records all procurement activity and reports to the Audit and Risk Committee against procurement activity for any contracts awarded above £20,000. These cover all contracts awarded using the Scottish or UK Government frameworks, the Quick Quotes route and full procurement exercises in compliance with procurement legislation.

In 2025/26 the following procurement activities took place which were awarded either via Quick Quotes, through the Government frameworks, and other procurement exercises.

- Procurement activities awarded with a value between £20,000 and £50,000 included the following goods and services: media support services, ISO27001 support services, IT learning pool platform, venue hire and office furniture.
- Procurement activities awarded with a value above £50,000 included the following goods and services: Microsoft licenses, software development, media buying and creative services.

Key issues and risks

The operation of the CHS Risk Management Policy that sets out a framework for identifying, measuring, controlling and monitoring strategic risks has been in place throughout the financial year. A regular review of the Operational and Strategic Risk Registers is undertaken by the Senior Management Team and the Strategic Risk Register is reported to the Audit and Risk Committee on a quarterly basis. Strategic and operational risk management is embedded in CHS' corporate and business planning processes and performance management arrangements.

Digital Programme

The primary focus during 2025/26 has been on delivering continued functional enhancements to the CSAS platform. Key areas of development include rota management, the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, observations, recruitment, and

Agenda Item 16b. Appendix 1

support for the new Tribunal Support Model. Governance arrangements remain in place through joint Change Control and Control Assurance Boards together with SCRA to oversee the implementation of platform improvements. Ongoing improvements have also been made to CHS Microsoft platforms, including enhancements to CRM functionality and the continued rollout of CHS-owned Windows devices to the volunteer community.

Support for Panel Members has continued through training and the provision of devices to enable participation in virtual children's hearings, including distribution of new devices to all new trainees during the year.

Personal data related incidents

During 2024/25, CHS recorded and investigated 53 information security incidents, including near misses. Of these, two were self-reported to the Information Commissioner's Office. The increase in reported incidents reflects improved reporting levels following organisational restructuring and the move to more centralised processes, which have strengthened oversight and awareness of data protection.

Mitigation measures are in place to reduce the risk of data breaches, including mandatory training for Panel Members, Area Support Teams, clerks, the CHS National Team, and Board members. Emerging trends are monitored, with controls updated or introduced as required.

Conclusion

As Accountable Officer, I am satisfied that CHS has effective corporate governance arrangements in place.

Elliot Jackson

National Convener/Chief Executive Officer