

Children's hearings scotland

Children's Hearings Scotland

Business and Corporate Parenting Plan 2026-27

Contents

Foreword 3

2025-26 In Review 4

Our Context 6

Context for 2026-27 7

Our Plans 8

Our Resources 16

Foreword



By Elliot Jackson, National Convener and Chief Executive

The Business and Corporate Parenting Plan 2026-27 sets out how we will deliver the final year of our **Strategic Outlook 2024-27**.

We enter the new business year just as the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) Scotland Bill passes its final hurdles before becoming law, and we are full of hope and expectation for what it will mean for the Children's Hearings System. Children's Hearings Scotland, our volunteers and children and families with experience of hearings have played an important role in shaping the legislation, and we will continue to work with the Scottish Government and our partners across the sector to ensure that the expected Act and subsequent secondary legislation deliver the reforms that have long been sought.

This legislation heralds the biggest changes to the hearings system since it was established more than 50 years ago, and although it holds few surprises for CHS, it is only its passage into law that enables us to start preparing in earnest for its implementation. These changes will ultimately improve the experience and the outcomes for infants, children, young people and their families who need us most.

Our plan for 2026-27 is partly a 'plan to plan', as we digest the detail of the reforms that we need to prepare for, and the work that lies ahead to enable them.

This has driven us to put forward a tightly focused set of objectives for the year that fit into four priority areas: **Planning for Reform, Strengthening Leadership, Driving Digital and Learning Transformation**. And as always, they will all help us to optimise the recruitment, training and support of our volunteers whose job it is to make decisions in the best interests of Scotland's infants, children and young people.

2025-26 In Review



In the second year of our three-year **Strategic Outlook**, we made changes at CHS and helped to shape reform of the wider system that will enable the fulfilment of the Promise.

- 269 new recruits were recommended from our September 2025 campaign into pre-service training, and as of early 2026, we have reappointed 658 Panel Members during 2025-26 at the end of their term. In late 2025 we learnt that the **Children (Care and Justice) Scotland Act 2024** would not be implemented in full until 2027, changing our capacity requirement, so we decided not to run a spring 2026 recruitment campaign.

- We appointed our first nine **Experts by Experience** – care experienced people aged 14 to 25 from all over Scotland who will shape the work of CHS. They met the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise at the Parliament, and presented at the Rise Up conference hosted by Our Hearings Our Voice. They met the Senior Leadership Team and the Board, and inputted into our latest volunteer recruitment campaign.

- CHS continued to shape the 'Promise Bill', both before and after it was introduced to Parliament. We provided written and in-person evidence to the the Education, Children and Young People Committee responsible for scrutinising the Bill. We have kept volunteers and staff informed about the proposed changes and the progress of the legislation.

- We continued to design and deliver non-legislative changes to the hearings system, to improve the experience of children and families. For example, the 'chair greeting the child' project was implemented across Scotland between March and November 2025, and we worked with SCRA to change the Hearings Information Pack.

- A strengthened Practice and Policy team provided new guidelines to support Panel Member practice, '**Responding to the Needs of Older Children**', drafted in partnership with CYCJ, and '**Responding the Needs of Infants, Babies and Very Young Children**', developed in partnership with CELCIS and NHS Infant Mental Health Teams.

- We successfully implemented re-structured Pre-Service Training, with 30% of our newly recruited volunteers appointed as Chair qualified.

- We improved support for new Panel Members, through self-evaluation surveys after three and six months of service, and

wellbeing check-in conversations.

- We enhanced the online Community Hub, bringing many more resources and tools into a single place for a better volunteer experience.
- We celebrated our volunteers throughout the year, including with regular recognition events, through Volunteers' Week, and at the Royal Garden Party, at which 38 members of our volunteer community were guests.
- We conducted a series of 'Quality Conversations' with volunteers, revealing how highly valued observations of hearings are, and gaining insights into how we can improve our quality assurance.
- As part of Year 2 of the **People and Culture Strategy**, we published our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**.
- In looking to the future needs of the hearings system, and our ambitions for our learning provision, we brought learning in-house when the contract with our external provider came to an end in autumn 2025. A restructure of the new in-house Learning Team was also completed in 2025-26, following full consultation with the team.
- After our planned review of the Change and Innovation team and our Programme Management Office, and in full consultation with the teams, we restructured them into a single Strategic Planning and Delivery team, within the Business and Finance Directorate.



Our Context

This Business and Corporate Parenting Plan for 2026-27 spans the final year of our current **Strategic Outlook**.

Our Strategic Themes for 2024-2027 are:

1. **Delivering Positive Outcomes**
2. **Driving Transformation**
3. **Valuing our People**



Within our Strategic Themes, we've identified Priority Areas for 2026-27 that will focus our work this coming year. These are:

1. **Planning for Reform**
2. **Strengthening Leadership**
3. **Driving Digital**
4. **Learning Transformation**



2026-27 will be a critical year as we think ahead to our next strategic planning cycle for 2027-30 and beyond.

Strategic planning and planning for reform will be balanced alongside the delivery of our key statutory functions to recruit, train and support volunteers, delivered across our regions in Scotland.

Context for 2026-27

The **Children (Care and Justice) Scotland Act 2024** is expected to come fully into effect in early 2027, extending the Children's Hearings System to embrace all 16- and 17-year-olds for the first time.

We have been enhancing our learning and support for our volunteers to ensure they are all equipped and confident to deliver hearings for older children.

The **Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill** is expected to become law in 2026-27, which will bring change to the care and justice sector, including hearings.

The changes we need to design will depend on the final provisions of this legislation.

We will also continue to play a key role in the sector-wide Redesign Board, shaping non-legislative reforms to the hearings system.

We will begin delivering our new **Learning Strategy**, with our in-house Learning Team and Learning Transformation Manager in place.

We will develop and begin delivery of a new **Digital Strategy**, which will bring efficiencies for CHS and improvements to the volunteer journey.



Our Plans

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
1	Driving Transformation	**Planning for Reform**	Lead and collaborate on the transformation of hearings	We will improve the hearings experience for children, young people and their families by implementing a programme of non-legislative reform.	**1. Working in collaboration** Reporting progress quarterly, we will continue to be key members of the Redesign Board, driving and delivering a multi-year programme of work focused on collaborative changes that are not dependent on legislative change
					2. Shaping our future By the end of Q3, we will be intensively planning reform, creating a blueprint for our future, while developing our next Strategic Outlook for 2027-30.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
2	**Driving Transformation**	**Strengthening Leadership**	Strengthen voice in all that we do	We will shape our organisation through the voice of lived experience, by placing our Experts by Experience at the heart of organisational decision-making.	**1. Strengthening voice** By the end of Q2, we will have further strengthened our Experts by Experience involvement with governance and decision making, creating a direct relationship between 1. Voice and reform planning and 2. Voice and CHS Board governance.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
3	Driving Transformation	**Planning for Reform**	Implement new legislation	We will implement the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 across CHS and ensure our compliance with all provisions.	**1. Learning for our Panel Community** By the end of Q4, our Panel Community will be fully trained and ready to welcome the new legislation through a training programme focused on the changes and requirements.
					2. Supporting good practice By the end of Q4, our Panel Practice Manual will be fully updated and re-released to reflect and uphold the legislative changes within the Care and Justice Act.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
4	Driving Transformation	Driving Digital	Delivering our digital ambitions	We will publish a digital strategy and data strategy for CHS that meets the needs of children's hearings aligning to our reform planning and strategic outlook.	**1. Digital ambitions** A one-year digital strategy will be developed by Q1 with an accompanying one year implementation plan outlining our digital delivery to Q4.
					2. Data ambitions A data strategy will be published by Q1 with an accompanying one year implementation plan outlining delivery to Q4.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
5	**Delivering Positive Outcomes**	**Planning for Reform**	Quality hearings for children	We will improve the quality and consistency of Panel Member decision-making at Children's Hearings, by strengthening our observation practice and process.	**1. Strengthening our observation practice and process** By the end of Q4, we'll have created new practice guidance for observations at hearings, and commenced the implementation of the new guidance for our Panel Practice Advisor community.
					2. Evidence-driven quality improvement By the end of Q4, we'll have used the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) to implement a robust improvement framework focused on strengthening our quality across our regional delivery.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
6	**Delivering Positive Outcomes**	**Learning Transformation**	Continue to transform learning for everyone at CHS	We will continue to transform and strengthen our learning offer to volunteers and staff, through the provision of high-quality learning that meets the evolving needs of children's hearings.	**1. The evolution of CHS learning for all** By the end of Q2, we will have a transition plan that brings all learning for all people at CHS, volunteers and staff, under one function.
					2. Creating a baseline for learning By the end of Q1 we will have conducted a learning needs analysis of our volunteer community and a review of learning provision, including the delivery methods across CHS, creating a baseline on which further development can be built.
					3. Increased digital learning By the end of Q2 we will publish a digital learning plan, outlining how we will deliver a greater percentage of pre-service training digitally by January 2027 and the percentage target we intend to achieve.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
7	**Valuing Our People**	**Planning for Reform**	Drive our communications and engagement ambitions	Through a programme of clear communications and effective engagement around hearings system reform, we will inspire understanding among all of our people and empower them to play their part in shaping and delivering change.	**1. Defining our Communications Strategy** By Q1 develop and start delivery of a refreshed Communications and Engagement Strategy that ensures our people are informed and engaged with the reform of children's hearings.

	Strategic Theme	Priority Area for 2026-27	Headline	Objective	Outcome
8	**Valuing Our People**	**Strengthening Leadership**	Continue delivery of our People Strategy and its ambitions	We will further progress our ambition to be an employer of choice, securing and retaining top talent with a package of employee focused, values driven policies and plans.	**1. Further strengthen our leadership at CHS** By the end of Q3 we will have delivered a learning programme of enablement and coaching for our senior managers, further strengthening the foundations for children's hearings reform.
					2. Bringing our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy alive By the end of Q1, develop an implementation plan for our strategy to be achieved by the end of Q4. This will include awareness raising, training, and improvements to policy and design, including a focus on inclusive and values based recruitment.

Our Resources

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

For 2026-27, our published Grant in Aid is £5.301 million, including cash and non cash elements and adjustments to support National Insurance contributions, with a further £836,000 allocated to capital costs.

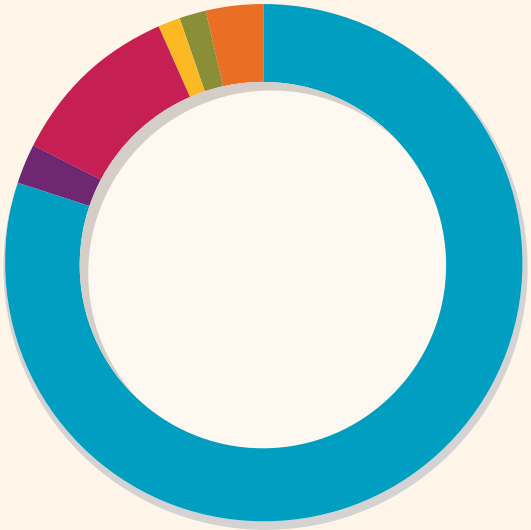
These resources are allocated across CHS's functions to ensure that we can recruit, train and support our Volunteer Community whilst delivering the best quality hearings.

300 volunteer Area Support Team members

2,500 volunteer Panel Members

110 colleagues in the CHS National Team

Our Expenditure



80.1%	Volunteer Support
2.5%	Governance
10.9%	ICT
1.4%	Corporate
1.4%	Property
3.6%	Development & Reform Activity

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