

# EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2021 – 2023



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## 1. Our Vision

Children’s Hearings Scotland is committed to being an organisation with equality, diversity and inclusion at its heart. It is important to us that our people, volunteer community and the infants, children, young people and families we serve feel valued and respected in all that we do. We want our staff and our volunteers to reflect the diversity of those who attend children’s hearings and wider Scottish society as a whole.

This strategy will bring our vision to life, providing an ambitious framework for all of our equality, diversity and inclusion work over the next three years and into the future.

Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion should be clear in all that we do.



## 2. Bringing the Strategy to Life

We need a strong commitment from everyone involved in Children’s Hearings Scotland to making this strategy a reality. Everyone, from our Board and staff to our volunteers, has a role to play if we are to create and maintain a culture which is inclusive, diverse and fair.

Our organisation will ensure that all staff and volunteers are educated about equality, diversity and inclusion, and aware of the legal context within which Children’s Hearings Scotland operates as a public body (see Appendix 2).

We will ensure that people feel empowered to challenge bias and assumptions – both their own and other people’s – and supported when they do. Our policies will be inclusive and we will strive to ensure we are doing all that we can to make Children’s Hearings Scotland a welcoming environment for everyone.

People will feel empowered to both raise awareness of and to celebrate the diversity of our staff, volunteers, and the infants, children, young people and families that we serve. The greatest tool we have in bringing this strategy to life is our commitment as an organisation to the values of Children’s Hearings Scotland. These values will be at the heart of all that we do around equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.

## **Children’s Hearings Scotland’s values**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Creating the strategy**

In 2019, Children’s Hearings Scotland formed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group which reviewed current practice and thinking within the organisation, and is focused on shaping it moving forward. The group established that while there was much good practice already in progress, a strategy was needed to provide direction, identify priorities and to create an overarching framework in order to make a clear impact.

Since its first draft, the strategy has undergone many updates, each informed by the feedback and views of the CHS community (made up of our Board, National Team and volunteer community) during an extensive consultation period.

We have consulted with staff, volunteers and people with lived experience of the hearings system, as well as specialists in the equalities field. This version of the strategy is a reflection of all of the feedback gratefully received on the content, language and scope of the document.



# 3. What is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?

## What is equality?

Ensuring individuals or groups of individuals are not treated differently or less favourably, on the basis of their specific protected characteristic, including areas of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age.

## What is diversity?

It aims to recognise, respect and value people's differences to contribute and realise their full potential by promoting an inclusive culture for all.

## What is inclusion?

An inclusive organisation is one where everyone feels valued. An organisation where people feel safe to come up with different ideas, raise issues and suggestions, knowing this is encouraged. Inclusion doing things differently to how they have been done before.

As a public organisation, our starting point for all equality, diversity and inclusion work must be the Equality Act 2010, and the Protected Characteristics contained within it:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

However, if our end goal is to ensure that we fully reflect the community that we serve - the infants, children, young people and their families who attend children's hearings - we must also consider other significant characteristics such as neuro diversity, socio-economic background, education level, employment status and, crucially, lived experience of both the children's hearings system and care overall.

## Individual Needs

In our work around equality, diversity and inclusion, it is important that we remain mindful that people are individuals with their own backgrounds, experiences and needs. People who share a protected characteristic are not a homogenous group. People may also often have more than one protected characteristic meaning that their experiences will be very different to others with one of the same characteristics. Whilst we strive for a diverse community, we must continue to treat everyone as individuals, providing the support that they require when they require it, as identified by them.



## 4. Themes and Priorities

Three key themes and eight priorities have been identified within this strategy.

### Themes:

1. Communications and engagement;
2. Training, development and support;
3. Recruitment and retention.

### Priorities:

- Ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of all Children's Hearings Scotland's strategic plans, particularly our Corporate Plan;
- Empower people to speak about diversity and to feel they can challenge assumptions and bias within the CHS community;
- Create a clear link with the work already being done by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and its Inclusion Network;
- Ensure that the work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group (and any subsequent groups) complements and supports work being done in other Children's Hearings Scotland work streams (i.e. the Staff Forum, wellbeing support for volunteers, children's rights and inclusion);
- Gather data on our current volunteers and use it to inform recruitment, training and communications;
- Provide more training for both staff and volunteers, including training on specific protected characteristics;
- Consider and pursue accreditation – i.e. Disability Confident, LGBT Youth Scotland Charter, Stonewall Employers – to ensure the work we are doing is up-to-date on current practice and endorsed by experts in the field;
- Have our equalities mainstreaming outcomes form the clear and coherent action plan for our equality, diversity and inclusion work.

### Theme one: communications and engagement

We will:

- Celebrate and raise awareness of different equalities groups through internal and external communication;
- Create language guides to be shared with our community which will highlight the most up-to-date terminology to be used when referring to equalities groups and those who share a protected characteristic;
- Communicate with our volunteers regularly on our equality, diversity and inclusion work, ensuring that they are given ample opportunities to provide feedback and input;
- Ensure that the wider staff group is also given an opportunity to feed into equality, diversity and inclusion work through regular updates, consultations and awareness raising by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group or any subsequent group;
- Work with the Children's Hearings Scotland Children's Rights and Inclusion Coordinator to ensure that young people are also invited to review and provide input into our equality, diversity and inclusion work;



- Ensure that any consultation we undertake is meaningful and designed to engage with those with lived experience of a protected characteristic;
- Create and maintain strong partnerships with equalities organisations (experts in their field) to ensure that our work within equality, diversity and inclusion is up-to-date and appropriate;
- Disband the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, when this strategy is published, and replace it with a Strategic Group made up of a cross-section of our community – both staff and volunteers.

## **Theme two: training, development, support and accreditation**

We will:

- Provide up-to-date, relevant equality, diversity and inclusion training for our staff and volunteers;
- Ensure that all Children’s Hearings Scotland staff undertake a full day of values-based diversity training;
- Make our online diversity training module mandatory for all members of the CHS community, both staff and volunteers, as a starting point for more specific training in this area;
- Bring in experts on different protected characteristics to provide up-to-date and relevant training for staff and volunteers;
- Ensure that all Panel Representatives (or those with a wellbeing responsibility role within an Area Support Team) are fully aware of the support resources available in order for them to best support those with protected characteristics or any other support needs locally;
- Map resources across Scotland and create a bank of national and local organisations who can provide consistent, validated training which can be used by the National Team for staff training, and by Area Support Teams for learning and development;
- Ensure that every local Area Support Team’s learning and development programme contains at least one equality, diversity and inclusion focused session per year;
- Add equality, diversity and inclusion training into all new staff members induction programme;
- Ensure that there are clear routes to report any concerns or incidents of harassment or discrimination and for these to be managed fairly and fully, with the appropriate support put into place;
- Throughout the life of this strategy, pursue at least one form of equality, diversity and inclusion accreditation e.g. Disability Confident, LGBT Youth Scotland Charter, Stonewall Employers.



## Theme three: recruitment and retention

We will:

- Ask that all volunteers complete the equalities monitoring section in the new digital system, providing them with information on why we need this data and what we will do with it. This will include data on all protected characteristics and will give us baseline data on who our CHS community are, and it will help direct and shape our volunteer recruitment campaigns;
- Use the data which is captured through the new system to review, celebrate and build upon how diverse our Panel Member community currently is;
- Use our data combined with the data gathered by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration on those attending children's hearings, to ensure that our Panel Member community accurately reflects the communities it serves;
- Ensure that this data is the base on which to identify how and where to target recruitment for both Panel Members and Area Support Teams;
- Focus on who we are reaching through our recruitment campaigns and create a specific plan to ensure that we are targeting under-represented groups;
- Make regular equalities training mandatory for all those involved in the recruitment and selection process;
- Support all Area Support Teams to champion diversity and ensure that they are actively encouraging applications from people from under-represented groups. As noted above, we will use the data gathered, by both Children's Hearings Scotland and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, to ensure that Area Support Teams understand which groups are under-represented in their area;
- Actively work to understand and eliminate barriers to volunteering with Children's Hearings Scotland and taking on more responsibility, such as by joining the Area Support Teams.



# 5. The Action Plan

In April 2020, Children's Hearings Scotland published its most recent set of equality mainstreaming outcomes. These outcomes, which cover the period April 2020 to March 2022, will form the initial action plan for this strategy.

As our equality, diversity and inclusion work grows and becomes part of everything we do at Children's Hearings Scotland, a fuller action plan will be created to specifically address all points outlined within the strategy. For now, the overarching outcomes are outlined below. For more information, including timescales and success measures, please see the full document [here](#).

## Outcome 1

Providing training and development opportunities for the CHS community that ensure our community is up-to-date in its knowledge, skills, attitudes and legal obligations concerning to equality, diversity and inclusion, and are able to apply these approaches to all aspects of their roles.

### Outcome 1.1

Having completed mandatory introductory online training on equality, diversity and inclusion, all staff can demonstrate and apply awareness of how to support protected characteristics when carrying out their respective roles.

### Outcome 1.2

Having completed mandatory introductory online training on equality, diversity and inclusion, all Area Support Team members, Panel Members and trainee Panel Members can demonstrate and apply awareness of how to support people with protected characteristics when carrying out their respective roles.

### Outcome 1.3

Children's Hearings Scotland operates a robust, fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recruitment and selection process for its Panel Member and Area Support Team volunteers.

### Outcome 1.4

Children's Hearings Scotland attracts a diverse range of candidates applying for its employment vacancies by operating best practice recruitment and selection practices that help to make the organisation an employer of choice.

### Outcome 1.5

Extend links and partnership working with specialist equality bodies/organisations who can provide enhanced/specialist training to staff/volunteers on particular protected characteristics.

## Outcome 2

Raising awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion across the CHS community will enhance all our roles and lead to more effective decision making, as we proactively engage with our staff members, volunteers and work in partnership with external equality organisations who can support Children's Hearings Scotland to achieve this aim.



## **Outcome 2.1**

Children's Hearings Scotland will work with specialist organisations to develop practice resources that support our volunteer community to better understand and meet the needs of individuals who share protected characteristics. As a result, our volunteer community will have an increased awareness and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion.

## **Outcome 2.2**

We are proactive in raising awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion across the CHS community i.e. in all our work and volunteering practices and decision-making processes, so that it leads to increased understanding, knowledge and empathy of all protected characteristics.

## **Outcome 2.3**

Our volunteers will play a central role within the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda at Children's Hearings Scotland. They are best placed to ensure that we are raising awareness of protected characteristics, and fostering good relations between members of our community who share those characteristics and those who do not. This will support greater empathy and understanding of the backgrounds of those they come into contact with during children's hearings.

## **Outcome 2.4**

Staff are full competent and confident in carrying out Equality Impact Assessments on any new or revised strategies, policies and processes that they are responsible for developing.

## **Outcome 2.5**

Children's Hearings Scotland is recognised as an employer of choice by individuals with caring responsibilities due to its positive and open recruitment approach and its flexible working and attendance management policies and practices.

## **Outcome 3**

Increasing accessibility, and promoting inclusion has removed participation barriers to all individuals who make up our CHS community

### **Outcome 3.1**

Provide accessible and inclusive communication that meets the access needs of all those with protected characteristics and promotes inclusive language.

### **Outcome 3.2**

Area Support Teams will be more representative of the full spectrum of Scottish society and communities we serve, ensuring equality of opportunity for all, proactively identifying and removing barriers which exist.



## 6. The Impact

As we continue on our journey towards creating an inclusive and diverse organisation, it is important that we consider the potential impact of our work and the benefits it will create for the CHS community, and the children, young people and families who attend children's hearings.

### The impact for children, young people and their families

#### **Increased sense of trust**

For infants, children, young people and their families we know that attending a children's hearing can be an intimidating and nerve-wracking experience, particularly the first time. Having Panel Members who reflect the community that you come from e.g. have a similar background, ethnicity, religion, life experience, may go some way to helping people to feel less intimidated, and have faith that they will understand your life and make decisions with you at the heart of them.

#### **Increased willingness to engage**

A child or young person, if you see yourself reflected in the Panel Members in front of you, you may be more willing to engage with them. This may be particularly true for young people who may be more likely to speak to Panel Members and share their views if they feel a sense of shared identity.

#### **Increased diversity of thought leading to more robust discussion and decisions**

Having diverse Panel Members means people will bring with them their own experiences, backgrounds and options. This, in turn, may lead to Panel Members discussing more options, considering more possibilities and landing on better decisions.

#### **Infants, children and young people feel acknowledged, supported and celebrated**

If we are serious about equality, diversity and inclusion, we should be shouting about it! We should be actively and loudly celebrating Pride, religious holidays, Black History Month and disability awareness to name a few. By doing this, infants, children and young people should feel that their identities and backgrounds are acknowledged, supported and celebrated and that Panel Members are aware of and sensitive to their needs.

### The impact on our CHS community

#### **Increased diversity of thought leading to more robust discussion and decisions**

Having people within the CHS community with different life experiences, characteristics and backgrounds should ensure that discussions are more robust as Panel Members consider options they may not have considered previously. This should, in turn, lead to better decisions being made and a sense for Panel Members that they have truly discussed and exhausted all possibilities before coming to that decision.

#### **Better support for Panel Members with disabilities**

At the moment, we do not routinely ask about people's disabilities and/or accessibility needs when they become a Panel Member, Panel Practice Adviser or member of the Area Support Team. If we do not ask, we cannot expect that people will tell us which may mean that people are going without support which we could provide. Understanding our community better, and their accessibility needs, would also allow us to be proactive. It would also allow us to develop national responses where appropriate i.e. providing accessible materials for documents and/or ensuring any national training is facilitated in an accessible space.



## **Members of our CHS community feel acknowledged, supported and celebrated**

By making our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion clear, members of our community will also feel that their identities and backgrounds are acknowledged, supported and actively celebrated. This is particularly important when it comes to recruitment of both staff and volunteers. If you can see your own identity reflected and celebrated within the CHS community, you may be more likely to see a place for yourself there too.

## **Existing members of the CHS community feel able to be open about their identities**

As we have not historically asked for equalities information from our volunteers upon joining us, we do not have a sense of how diverse the CHS community really is. If we are committed to gathering this information, opening up a national conversation and actively promoting and celebrating diversity, people may feel more comfortable to be open about their own sexual orientations, gender identities, religions, ethnicities, disabilities.



# 7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Within the Wider Children's Hearings Scotland Context

## Our Strategic Outlook 2020 – 2023

Children's Hearings Scotland's Corporate Plan sets out four key themes for our work:

**Theme 1** – Better protect and uphold the rights of children

**Theme 2** – Deliver consistently high-quality hearings

**Theme 3** – Continue to build an effective and empathic panel, that is well supported

**Theme 4** – Be well-informed and influential in our environment and communities

Equality, diversity and inclusion undoubtedly cuts across all four, promoting dignity, fairness and inclusion in the children's hearings system. However there are key areas where our work around equality, diversity and inclusion will play an integral role in helping us deliver on our themes.

### Theme 2:

- Undertake work focused on demonstrating and cementing acceptable behaviours and conduct in children's hearings;
- Explore how children's hearings can work effectively with the families of infants, children and young people who attend;
- Ensure that we promote dignity in children's hearings by understanding the impact of stigma and identifying ways to avoid this.

### Theme 3:

- Actively seek to increase the number of Panel Members with lived experience of the children's hearings system and strive for greater diversity of Panel Members;
- Connect, include, celebrate and explore how to better support, our volunteer community by rolling out a new engagement programme.

### Theme 4:

- Ensure that our changing environment and developing knowledge is having an impact internally – by using it to train our CHS community.

## Children's Rights & Inclusion Strategy

In November 2020, Children's Hearings Scotland published its Children's Rights & Inclusion Strategy. In all of our equality, diversity and inclusion work, we will follow the principles of this strategy and, specifically, the pillars of inclusion.

Children feel able to share their views openly, freely and honestly.

Children know that their views are given real weight and listened to in decision-making about their lives.

Children feel empowered and have ownership of their rights.



In consultation, people with lived experience of the children’s hearings system were asked about the ways we can make sure that our Children’s Rights & Inclusion Strategy and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, ‘speak to each other’. They provided the following suggestions:

- Panel Members need to be representative of the local community;
- Look at everything from the child’s perspective, in the best interests of the child;
- The people working on both those should work together- cross working;
- We need Panel Members who understand, empathise and have a connection. This will help them to relate and make good, informed decisions based on the needs of the child and family;
- Representation at all levels of Children’s Hearings Scotland;
- Be child-friendly, people-friendly- you must see things from other people’s perspectives;
- Be honest and transparent.



# Appendix 1 - Jargon Buster

**Area Support Teams:** Area Support Teams are volunteers who support and manage Panel Members in their local area. They in turn are supported by a Clerk, who is a local authority employee.

**CHS community:** The CHS (Children's Hearings Scotland) community encompasses Panel and Area Support Team members, Board members and National Team employees.

**Panel Members:** Panel Members are volunteers from local communities across Scotland who are recruited and trained to make decisions that support infants, children and young people, and their families, attending children's hearings.

**Children's hearings system:** The children's hearing system is the care and justice system for Scotland's children and young people.

**Protected characteristics:** Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

**Equality groups:** persons who share a relevant protected characteristic.

# Appendix 2 - Legal Context

Children's Hearings Scotland is required under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons;
- c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

In addition to this general duty, Children's Hearings Scotland is required by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 to:

- Report on progress on mainstreaming the general duty;
- Publish equalities outcomes and report on progress in achieving these;
- Assess and review policies and practices;
- Gather and use employee information;
- Publish gender pay gap information;
- Publish statements on equal pay;
- Consider award criteria in relation to public procurement;
- Publish in an accessible manner;
- Publish proposals of how the above will be met.



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