children's hearings scotland

Eight things we did to make your children's hearings better for you



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Children and young people are at the heart of **children's hearings**.

At **Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS)**, we support the volunteers who make important decisions at hearings.

During 2025–26, we changed some of the things we do to make children's hearings better. Children and young people helped with many of these changes by sharing their experiences and ideas.

This report tells you what changed and what difference we know it made.

Sometimes we don't know straight away if a change has made things better. That is why we keep listening and learning.

1 Meeting the Chair before your hearing

Going into a hearing and meeting three **Panel Members** for the first time can be difficult.

Young people in Moray came up with an idea to help. They suggested meeting the **Chair**, the person who leads the hearing, before it starts.

What changed?

The idea was tried out in Moray for two years. In 2025, we started doing this across all nine CHS regions in Scotland. The **Chair** can now meet the child or young person in the waiting room and say hello before the hearing begins.

What difference did it make?

Some young people told the adults who supported them that meeting the **Chair** helped them feel more at ease.

One **Social worker** said:
"The young person voiced that there was one less stranger in the room."

Another said:
"This was the young person's first hearing and it made her less anxious to meet the **Chair**."

People who support children noticed a difference too.

89% of advocacy services that answered our survey saw good things about the change. 72% of social workers who answered said it was making the start of hearings more child-friendly.

2 Helping all at CHS understand trauma

Trauma can happen when someone goes through something very difficult or frightening. It can affect how someone feels, thinks or reacts.



Children and young people who come to children's hearings may have experienced **trauma**. It is important that the people working with them understand how **trauma** can affect them.

What changed?

Everyone who works or volunteers at Children's Hearings Scotland completed training about **trauma** over two years.

The first part helped people understand what **trauma** is.

The second part, completed in 2025–26, helped people learn more about:

- how **trauma** can affect people
- how children and young people can be affected by **trauma**
- how children and young people can recover from **trauma**
- how to support children and young people who have experienced **trauma**

Why does this matter?

Everyone who works or volunteers at CHS has now had training to help them understand **trauma** and how it can affect children and young people.

This gives staff and volunteers more knowledge about some of the experiences and needs children may bring with them to a hearing.

3 Young people helping to shape CHS

In April 2025, CHS started its **Experts by Experience** group.
The group has 10 young people aged 14 to 25. They all have their own experience of children's hearings.

What changed?

In their first year, the Experts helped shape 31 pieces of work at CHS and five pieces of work with other organisations.

They helped with things like:

- choosing new **Panel Members**
- improving information for **Panel Members**
- understanding how to improve children's rights
- looking at how well hearings are working
- running workshops for **Panel Members**

They also visited the Scottish Parliament with young people from **Our Hearings Our Voice**. They met the **Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise** and asked questions about the future of **children's hearings** and support for young people leaving care.

What difference did it make?

Young people with experience of hearings had a direct say in work happening across CHS.

Ryden said:
"Being in **Experts by Experience** gives me an opportunity to provide input, influence and have a sense of involvement in the system I was once stuck in with the feeling of no control."

4 Making hearing information shorter

Panel Members need information to help them make decisions.



But some hearing papers were very long. They could include lots of information about things that happened in the past.

Care-experienced children and young people were asked what they thought about hearing papers. One said they were “too daunting to even open.”

What changed?

CHS worked with the **Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA)** to make the information shorter.

A long document called the **Record of Proceedings** started being replaced with a shorter document called the **Chronology of Decisions and Reasons**.

This gives **Panel Members** a shorter record of decisions made about a child and the reasons for them.

The new version started being used in March 2026.

Why does this matter?

The new document gives a clearer account of a child’s journey. It also leaves out some old information that children can find upsetting or difficult.

Children and young people who were asked about the new format said it:

“is so much better and less overwhelming.”

5 Understanding children of different ages

Babies, young children and teenagers can have very different needs.



During 2025–26, CHS gave **Panel Members** two new guides to help them think about the needs of younger and older children when making decisions.

What changed?

One guide is about older children. The other is about babies and children aged 0–3.

Babies and very young children may not be able to tell people what they need using words. The guide helps **Panel Members** think about other ways to understand what they need.

Why does this matter?

Panel Members now have more information to help them think about what children of different ages might need.

One **Panel Member** said the guide:
"reminded me that although they can't verbalise how they feel there are other ways of finding that out."



The guide for older children had been viewed or downloaded nearly 300 times. The guide about babies and very young children had been viewed or downloaded nearly 250 times.

6 Looking at what happens in hearings

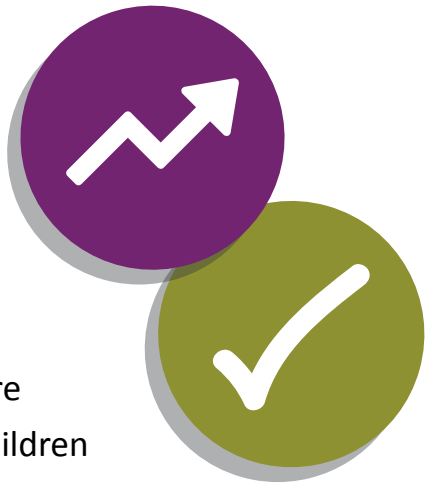
Panel Members make important decisions at **children's hearings**.

Panel Practice Advisers are volunteers who observe hearings. They help **Panel Members** learn about what they are doing well and what they could improve. During 2025–26:

- 2,496 hearing **observations** took place
- 1,493 **Panel Members** were observed
- 10 **Experts by Experience** helped with work about the words used in hearings and children taking part

What changed?

Our Experts worked with the CHS team that looks at how well hearings are working.



They helped create information for **Panel Practice Advisers**.

The information includes things young people said were important, including the words people use and how children take part in hearings.

Why does this matter?

Things that young people said were important are now considered when **Panel Practice Advisers** observe hearings.

Watching what happens in hearings helps us understand what is working well and what could be better. It also gives **Panel Members** a chance to learn and improve.

7 Learning from feedback and complaints

Sometimes things don't go as well as they should.

Feedback means telling us what you think about your experience. A **complaint** is a way of telling us when you are unhappy with something that happened.

Both can help us understand what is working well and what might need to change.

What did people tell us?

Feedback showed how important it is to:

- make sure people feel heard and respected
- make sure hearings are run well
- use words that children can understand.



What changed?

We shared feedback with **Panel Members**. We also used what people told us to help update the information **Panel Members** use to do their role.

Why does this matter?

When people tell us about their hearing, we can use what they say to understand what might need to change.

What people tell us can also help us improve the information and support we give **Panel Members**.

8 Young people helped us choose new Panel Members

Panel Members make important decisions about children's lives.

In 2025, **Experts by Experience** and young people from **Our Hearings Our Voice** helped CHS choose new **Panel Members**.

What did young people do?

Young people looked at the questions people would be asked at their interviews.

They also made a question of their own about **homelessness** and how it can affect children and families.

Everyone who was interviewed was asked their question.



What changed?

Something young people thought was important became part of the way CHS chose new **Panel Members**.

What difference did it make?

Young people had a real say in something that everyone being interviewed to become a **Panel Member** had to think about.

One person who was interviewed said:
"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."

What difference has our work made?

During 2025–26, CHS made changes to improve **children's hearings** and the support we give to the people involved in them.

Some of these changes are already making a difference.



Some children have found the start of their hearing easier

Children across Scotland can now meet the **Chair** before their hearing begins. Some young people told us this helped them feel more at ease and less anxious.



What children and young people think is helping us improve hearings

Their ideas about the words people use and how children take part are now included when hearings are observed.



Young people with experience of hearings have a bigger say in our work

Our **Experts by Experience** helped shape 31 pieces of work at CHS and five pieces of work with other organisations during their first year.



Hearing information has been made easier to read

A shorter way of sharing information about a child's journey started being used in March 2026. Children and young people asked about the new format said it was better and less overwhelming.

Panel Members have more information about what children of different ages might need

New guides help them think about the needs of older children and babies and very young children.

We are using what we learn from hearings to improve our work

What we have learned from observing hearings, feedback and complaints has helped us improve the information and support we give **Panel Members**.

Young people helped change how new Panel Members are chosen

A question created by young people became something everyone interviewed to become a **Panel Member** had to think about.

Every change in this report has been made to improve the experience of children and young people. We know some changes are already helping.

We will keep listening to find out what is working well and where things can still be better.

If you'd like to share feedback with us about your children's hearing, we'd love to hear from you. Scan the QR code to find out how your feedback can help make change.

What do these words mean?

Advocacy worker

Someone who can help you understand your rights and make sure your views are heard.

Care-experienced

A child or young person who has experience of being in care. This can include living with foster carers, with relatives or in another place away from home.

Chair

The Panel Member who leads your children's hearing.

children's hearing

A meeting where important decisions are made about what help and support a child or young person may need.

Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS)

The organisation that supports and trains Panel Members and other volunteers who are part of children's hearings.

Chronology of Decisions and Reasons

A document that gives Panel Members a shorter record of decisions that have been made about a child and why they were made. It started replacing longer Records of Proceedings in March 2026.

complaint

A way to tell us if you are unhappy about something that happened or how you were treated.

Experts by Experience

A group of young people aged 14 to 25 who have their own experience of children's hearings. They use their experiences and ideas to help shape CHS's work.

Feedback

Telling us what you think about your experience, including what went well and what could be better.

homelessness

Not having a safe and secure home to live in.

Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise

A Scottish Government minister whose job includes work to support children and young people and help Scotland keep the Promise.

Observations

When a Panel Practice Adviser watches a hearing to learn about what is working well and what Panel Members could improve.

Our Hearings Our Voice

A group that gives children and young people with experience of Children's Hearings opportunities to share their views and help make things better.

Panel Member

A trained volunteer who takes part in children's hearings. Three Panel Members take part in a hearing and make decisions about what should happen to help keep a child safe and supported.

Panel Practice Adviser

A volunteer who observes children's hearings and helps Panel Members learn about what they are doing well and what they could improve.

Record of Proceedings

A document that was used to keep a record of earlier hearings and decisions. It is being replaced by a shorter Chronology of Decisions and Reasons.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)

An organisation that is part of the Children's Hearings System. SCRA helps arrange Children's Hearings and gives people information about when and where their hearing will happen.

Social worker

Someone whose job is to support children and families when they need help.

trauma

Something very difficult or frightening that happens to someone and can affect how they feel, think or react.

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3rd Floor Thistle House | 91 Haymarket Terrace | Edinburgh | EH12 5HE

t: 0131 460 9569 | www.chscotland.gov.uk

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