

Children's Hearings Scotland **Biodiversity Duty Report 2021-23**

1. Introduction

Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS), as a public body in Scotland, has a duty under Section 1 of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to further the conservation of biodiversity - the wildlife, habitats and other forms of nature - in Scotland by how it exercises its functions. This is usually referred to as the 'biodiversity duty'.

The biodiversity duty aims to (1) protect biodiversity through the management of specific sites, habitats and species (2) increase the level of understanding and connection between people and the living environment (3) promote consideration of all our impacts on the natural world through our actions and decisions, including through procurement and use of resources and (4) encourage staff, partners and customers to engage with and understand and consider biodiversity. Public bodies are required to fulfil this duty in a manner consistent with the proper exercising their functions.¹

This report is designed to meet the accompanying requirement of Section 36 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 to report on our compliance with the biodiversity duty.

This is the fourth Biodiversity Duty Report CHS has produced and covers the 3-year period 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2023.

2. About CHS

Children's Hearings Scotland is one of a number of organisations that work within the Children's Hearings System, Scotland's unique care and justice system that exists to ensure the safety and wellbeing of infants, children and young people in Scotland.

Our activities focus on recruiting, training and supporting volunteer Panel Members who make decision in children's hearings (sometimes known as the 'Children's Panel'), and Area Support Teams (ASTs) who provide support and direction at a local level.

CHS had around 45 staff during the reporting period (called the 'National Team') and is led by a Chief Executive, who also holds the role of National Convener (an independent position with legal responsibility to recruit suitable people to serve as Panel Members and ensure they have the right training), and a Senior Management Team.

CHS is governed by a Board, members of which are appointed for a period of three years.

¹ For more, see here: <https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity/scottish-biodiversity-strategy/biodiversity-duty>

3. Relevance of Biodiversity at CHS

CHS is a small public body, with no specific environmental responsibilities. CHS does not own, regulate or manage land. CHS leases an office of approximately 304m² in central Edinburgh from the Scottish Legal Aid Board occupying approximately 8.5% of the building. CHS does not have responsibility for any outside space as part of this lease.

3.1 Hybrid working

CHS is a national organisation delivering a tribunals across the country. It has a number of roles which are carried out regionally across Scotland. In most instances, these roles are based from home with regular attendance at our main offices in Thistle House as well as partnership meetings across their local areas. These roles involve significant levels of travel across localities to support our Panel Members and Partnership work.

4. Actions to Protect Biodiversity and Connect People with Nature – *what we are doing to benefit biodiversity directly, to tackle the main drivers of biodiversity loss, or to achieve wider outcomes for nature and people.*

4.1 Tackling biodiversity loss through smart working

CHS has offices based at Thistle House in Edinburgh. The office is located very close to Haymarket station and offers excellent public transport links, which most members of staff use to travel. Landfill waste is discouraged within the offices with all recycling opportunities provided, including food waste recycling. Reducing energy use is consistently encouraged throughout the office, with lights being switched off in rooms not in use, and monitors set to sleep mode after short periods of inactivity, as well as being turned off at the end of the day. Working in a hybrid environment has led CHS to becoming a largely paperless organisation, promoting a digital first approach.

4.2 Connecting People with Nature

CHS has an active and established group representing staff voice called the Team Forum. The Team Forum has four main aims in terms of how it represents and supports the National Team at CHS (see fig 1). Staff wellbeing is always at the heart of initiatives driven by the Team Forum, with a large emphasis placed on encouraging people to connect with nature on a regular basis and during the working week/day. In 2021 CHS launched its first Activity Challenge, sponsored and led by the Team Forum.

The challenge was simply to encourage staff to get outside and enjoy physical activity in nature during the darker and colder months of the year. The initiative was so successful it has become an annual tradition.



Figure 1

For 2023, the Team Forum polled the National Team to choose a theme with which to guide its activity planning. The theme of Health and Wellbeing was chosen by the staff body. One of the initiatives launched as part of this was to promote physical and mental health through a Munro Challenge which encouraged staff to team up and track their activity steps climbing 'virtual' Munros, with double points awarded to those climbing actual Munros.

5. Mainstreaming Biodiversity – *what we are doing to incorporate biodiversity measures into its wider policies, plans or strategies, including decision-making structures and staff and organisational roles and responsibilities.*

5.1 Reducing CO2 through smart working

As referenced above, the smart-working initiatives that CHS embarked on when moving to offices at Thistle House and promoting hybrid working has had CO₂ reduction as one of its planned primary aims.

5.2 Cycle to work

CHS offers a cycle to work scheme open to all members of staff. In the past, a number of staff members have taken advantage of this initiative to purchase bicycles to cycle to work. The offices at Thistle House offer secure storage for bikes, with a new cycle lane directly opposite the front door, linking users to the wider cycle routes and networks across Edinburgh, including the Waters of Leith.

5.3 People strategy & initiatives

Not only has our staff led Team Forum promoted wellbeing through outdoor activities but our People and Culture (HR) team has incorporated in its plans and strategies initiatives which supported wellbeing through outdoor activity and connection. Sunshine Hours and Winter Wellness Walks supported staff in the darker months, staff were encouraged to allocate time to taking walks or holding walking meetings and being outdoors while it was light outside.

6. Nature-Based Solutions, Climate Change and Biodiversity – *what we are doing to integrate biodiversity into nature based solutions to the climate emergency and other socio-economic outcomes.*

CHS has not used any nature-based solutions over the reporting period.

7. Workforce Development – *workforce skills and training*

Annually, CHS promotes ClimateWeek amongst its staff. Staff are informed of, and encouraged to attend information and education sessions run by Scottish Government and partners.

8. Research and Monitoring – *research we are undertaking relevant to biodiversity or nature and monitoring we have undertaken to assess the impact of our actions.*

CHS voluntarily reports its environmental impact in our Annual Report and Accounts, presenting CO₂ footprint figures for:

- Grid electricity usage
- Natural gas usage
- Water supply and treatment
- Recycling
- Commercial waste
- Staff travel by car

Since moving to Thistle House, CHS has worked with our landlords to have access to data to ensure a degree of consistency of monitoring reporting from previous years. The table below details our office related emissions.

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Carbon Emissions (kgCO₂e) – Gas	7,538.2	6,551.2	5,539.5
Carbon Emissions (kgCO₂e) – Electricity	5,780.4	6,368.7	5,693.5
SUB-TOTAL (Gas and Electricity Only)	13,318.6	12,919.9	11,233.0
Carbon Emissions (kgCO₂e) – Water	3.4	3.5	3.2
Carbon Emissions (kgCO₂e) – Refuse	142	176.8	110.6
TOTAL	13,318.6	13,100.2	11,346.8

Our impact associated with business mileage is given below:

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Total Travel Distance (miles)	14,793	10,495	1,002
Emission Factor (kgCO₂/mile)²	0.27436	0.28053	0.28052
Carbon Emissions (kgCO₂e) (travel distance × emission factor)	4,058.6	2,944.2	281.1

Relaxation in restrictions due to COVID-19 meant that business mileage increased in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, when significant restrictions on movement and meeting remained in place.

Overall Total Footprint (kgCO₂e)	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Total Carbon (tCO₂e) Office Operations	13318.6	13100.2	11346.8
Total Carbon Emissions (tCO₂e) Business Milage	4058.6	2944.2	281.1
TOTAL	17,377.2	16,044.4	11,627.9

CHS's carbon footprint increased by 33% between 2020/21 and 2022/23 but only 7.6% between 2021/22 and 2022/23. The overall increase from year one of the reporting period to year three is very much due to increased business milage and Covid recovery. As a National Organisation operating country wide, CHS experienced a dramatic drop in business milage and subsequent increase post Covid. Milage will continue to be monitored and greener public transportation options encouraged where possible.

² Emission Factor for 'average sized petrol car' is used here.

9. Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges – *our main achievements and the challenges we face*

CHS' limited capacity to take action that has a direct impact on biodiversity will always present a challenge.

9.1 Reducing printing and reliance on paper

CHS has embraced, in a significant way, ways of working that are mostly paperless in our offices. In addition, hybrid working helped to reinforce paperless working and instil a more digital first culture.

In addition to changes in staffing behaviours towards printing and paper, during the pandemic, SCRA and CHS shifted to delivering hearing papers digitally, a major achievement and a huge step in reducing our reliance on paper and printing. Predominantly digital papers for children's hearings has remained post pandemic and has had a significant reduction on our shared use of paper.

9.2 Living circular

Around 80% of our carbon footprint in Scotland comes from our consumption habits. In order to tackle this, and in line with Scotland's carbon reduction policy, we have set up the CHS Swap Shop. The Swap Shop is hosted by our Team Forum and promotes the sharing of tools, supplies, and utensils among staff both for work and personal use to avoid the need to purchase these items. In addition, items which may no longer be required by someone are offered out to our staff body in the hopes someone may get use of it before being donated or recycled.

10. Future Plans – *how we will look to further develop our work within the biodiversity duty over the coming years*

Over the coming years, we intend to:

- Support the reduction of carbon emissions by launching an Car Salary Sacrifice scheme for employees. Use of personal vehicles has been an area focus for the Government when it comes to reducing Carbon footprint. This has included, for example, setting a ban on new petrol and diesel cars for 2035 in Scotland and creating clean air and low emission zones within major cities. In line with these changes, CHS is working on launching a Car Salary Sacrifice scheme for it's employees with the focus on low emission vehicles. Through savings for employees, the scheme is aimed to offer CHS colleagues more affordable options for ultra-low and low emission vehicles. Where employees are able to use low emission vehicles for work travel, this will help CHS' aim of reducing it's carbon footprint.
- Continue to monitor our carbon footprint, and use this to identify and take actions to reduce this where possible, particularly around business milage and the promotion of greener public transportation options.
- Include environmental considerations in reviews of our flexible working policies.
- Continue to look for opportunities to deliver our functions, particularly training and meetings online to reduce the need for travel.
- Continue to promote staff wellbeing through connections with nature and time outside such as walking meetings, walking challenges, and social gatherings outside.
- Continue to look for ways to engage with and promote a circular economy (for example, when volunteer devices are due for destruction, we will look to wipe them of data and donate them to educational services).

Opportunities to promote biodiversity are kept under review, but these are restricted due to the limited property footprint with no outside space which could be effectively adapted to promote biodiversity. We will continue to assess the long-term impact and sustainability of home-working arrangements for the organisation and encourage staff to engage with opportunities that either promote biodiversity or help reduce carbon emissions.