



# STARCATCHERS

Scotland's Arts and Early Years Organisation

Inspiring babies, toddlers  
and young children



**STRATEGIC  
PRIORITIES  
2021-2026**

# WELCOME

In 2021, Starcatchers celebrates 15 years of arts, creativity and performances for Scotland's youngest children. In that time, we have grown from a pilot project to an organisation working locally, nationally and internationally. We have been a pioneer, a catalyst, a changemaker, enabling more of our children to access their rights to arts and cultural life. Yet we have only just scratched the surface of the impact the arts can have on early childhood experience in Scotland and, subsequently, how this might impact on our society more broadly.

As we continue to understand the adaptation and renewal required by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, planning for the future is challenging, but the need for Starcatchers' work is increasingly important. We are sharing this document and our priorities for the next five years so that the audiences we engage with, the artists we work with and the partners and stakeholders who support us, understand our direction and can join us in achieving our goals.

As ever, we remain committed to ensuring that our youngest children can access their rights to arts and cultural life, reinforced by the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law in 2021. At the heart of all our work is the ambition for our youngest children to have access to the best artistic and creative experiences that bring joy, wonder and magic to their lives. Our role as an advocate will be central to enabling our youngest children to have these experiences and that they become a normal part of childhood in Scotland.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the inequalities in our society. In recovering from this crisis over the coming years, we believe positive change will come from listening to those with the most marginalised voices. We will amplify these voices through the work we do, where and how we do it, and by demonstrably working with more people of colour, of differing abilities and who are from a more varied socioeconomic background.

We must also explore how to deliver our work in ways that minimise our impact on the planet. With our youngest children at the heart of our work, we must ensure that they have a greener and healthier environment to grow up in.

Our commitment to nurture diversity and the environment in the arts and early years must be more than a declaration, it must be a demonstration of work that truly reflects early childhood in 21st century Scotland.

In the last 15 years Starcatchers has achieved so much – much more than I could ever have imagined. What I know, is that there is much more work for us to do as is clear in the ambition and vision outlined in this document.

Rhona Matheson  
Chief Executive  
Starcatchers  
March 2021



# Our Vision & Mission

## Our Vision

is that our youngest children, those aged 0-5, fulfil their right to access arts and creative experiences that give inspiration, joy and wonder to early childhood in Scotland.

## Our Mission

is to inspire babies, toddlers and young children by including them in high quality live performances and creative experiences that fulfil their right to access a rich arts and cultural life in Scotland regardless of where they live or their background.

Starcatchers offers innovative, beautiful, collaborative arts and creative experiences that babies, toddlers and young children aged 0-5 can share with their parents and carers. Engaging with and participating in these activities brings joy and wonder, and fosters the understanding that very young children are creative agents with their own capabilities and voices.

**Placing the child's voice at the heart of everything we do also means looking after things that are central to children's wellbeing. This means making strong choices to actively support diversity and inclusion so that all babies can grow up in a more equal and just society. It also means a commitment to climate action, carbon reduction and new models of sustainable working.**

ARTICLE 31 OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION  
ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD  
(UNCRC).

1.

States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2.

States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 31

(leisure, play and culture)  
Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

Starcatchers was founded to provide our youngest children with the opportunity to experience theatre and the arts. Integral to that was the belief that all children, regardless of their age and stage of development, have a right to access arts and cultural life as outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

This belief is unwavering. **As Scotland incorporates the UNCRC into domestic law, our resolve to ensure that all our youngest children have access to age-appropriate, quality arts and cultural experiences is reinforced.**

We believe that Scotland should be the best place in the world to grow up and that Starcatchers, as Scotland's Arts and Early Years Organisation, has an integral role to play in achieving this goal.

# Our Values

Our organisational values are our touchstone – they guide and support us and those we work with. They help us deliver our work with purpose, focus and confidence.

## Creative and Curious

We believe in the innate creative capacity we all have and we know that nurturing curiosity and asking questions allows us to create and deliver exciting, innovative work.

## Bold and Brave

We are unafraid of new ideas and taking risks. **We want to be pioneers, challenging perceptions of what can be made or shared with babies, toddlers and young children.**

## Collaborative and Connected

We celebrate our existing partnerships and seek out new relationships in the knowledge that our work is stronger because we are working with others who have diverse backgrounds and different expertise. We are open and care about those we work with ensuring that all voices are heard and respected.

## Reflective and Responsive

We are a reflective organisation. We want to learn from the work we have delivered, understanding the successes and challenges to inform what we do next, and sharing our experience openly so as others can also learn from what we have done.

# Our Strategic Priorities 2021 - 2026

We have identified four strategic priorities for the next five years:

**EXCELLENCE**  
+  
**ACCESS**  
+  
**ADVOCACY**  
+  
**SUSTAINABILITY**

they will support the delivery of our vision and mission, providing the foundations for how we assess and measure our success. As we navigate a new social and economic landscape in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, these priorities will help guide the organisation, the choices we make and the work we create.

**Underpinning these priorities sit two actions for change – Diversity and Environment.**

As we strive to address some of the most significant challenges of our time, we aim to achieve positive action through our activities and our model of working.

There is currently an inequity of access to the arts. We must actively work together with those facing marginalisation and exclusion to find out what is needed and wanted, and how we positively effect change. **We will strive to amplify the voices of the under-represented, this means actively diversifying the artists we work with, the work we make, the audiences we engage with, and the staff and board who support the organisation.**

We recognise that our world is in a climate crisis. With our youngest children at the heart of all our work, it is our responsibility to find new ways of working that can reduce our impact on the planet and reduce our carbon emissions. Starcatchers' activities should contribute to children having a greener, healthier environment to grow up in.

# EXCELLENCE



**Goal:**

## **To create exceptional arts experiences for our youngest children**

Starcatchers believes that all of our youngest children have the right to experience excellent, innovative, beautiful arts and creative experiences. Just because the audience is very young does not mean they do not deserve the very best, in fact it is because they are so young that their earliest experiences should be exceptional.

In providing these experiences, Starcatchers values the expertise, curiosity and creativity of the artists we work with across all areas of the organisation. We strive to ensure that they are properly supported and remunerated for the work they deliver, have opportunities to develop their practice and feel valued as a key member of the Starcatchers team. We believe that excellence thrives on diversity, and are actively seeking to achieve a creative workforce that is representative of Scottish society.

We want the Early Years workforce in Scotland to have confidence in their own creative capacity as well as in understanding and using the expressive arts in their work with children and families.

## In order to achieve this goal, we will:

- Seed, nurture and grow new productions for the 0-5 age group by commissioning artists who have ambitious artistic visions for creating work for very young children
- Engage and support artists who want to work in a community context, building relationships with groups of very young children and their parents and carers, and deliver programmes that respond to participant needs while allowing for artistic excellence
- Develop our Playspace artist development programme to provide inspiration and support for artists to develop their practice and create exceptional work for our youngest audiences
- Initiate opportunities for artists that reflect and expand the diversity of those working in our sector starting with a focus on race and disability
- Invest in the Early Years workforce through our core Creative Skills Programme, which uses the expertise of Starcatchers Artists to share practice and build confidence and capacity

## What will success look like?

- Scotland has a hub where artists working with or for young children can come to develop their skills, deepen their knowledge, share good practice, forming a strong cohort of Early Years Artists who can work locally, nationally and internationally
- Scotland's Early Years Artists have access to continuing professional development in Early Years practice and in equitable, sustainable methods of working
- Scotland's arts practice for Early Years is internationally recognised
- Increased diversity in artists engaging with our programmes and making work for very young children
- Scotland has an Early Learning and Childcare workforce with the skills and confidence to provide consistent, high quality expressive arts opportunities for young children as part of their practice



# ACCESS



**Goal:**

## **Ensure that babies, toddlers and young children are able to access the arts**

Engagement in arts and creative activities has a fundamental role to play in early childhood, contributing to early learning, development, confidence and wellbeing. Starcatchers has been delivering projects, touring productions and engaging in communities for 15 years and breaking down barriers to participation has been an important part of our work to date.

We want to find a balance in what it means to be a national organisation that works locally, sharing work with communities across Scotland enabling our youngest children to fulfil their right to access the arts.

We are committed to the role that artists can play in communities as a catalyst to bring people together, to inspire and to create. We want to deepen our understanding of what can be achieved when we work inclusively with our youngest children and the adults who care for them, focusing on long-term participatory engagement in their community.

We want to provide accessible opportunities for artists who reflect the diversity of 21st century Scotland. Artists who want to make work for this audience are inspired, challenged and engaged with others who are working in this field locally, nationally and internationally.

We are committed to sharing the expertise and learning we gain as we work with our youngest children to create artistic experiences. Our evaluation and research reports will always be available to those interested in understanding our approach and learning from our experience ensuring that the field of Arts for Early Years is strengthened through knowledge transfer.

## In order to achieve this goal, we will:

- Tour our productions to communities across Scotland engaging with new venues where possible and continuing to visit venues with whom we have established relationships
- Research, develop and progress a Centre of Excellence model to focus activity in Wester Hailes building long-term relationships and delivery of activity that responds to the needs of children, families and the community as well as the organisation and our partners
- Deliver our established engagement programmes alongside children, parents, local support organisations and statutory services and explore options for delivery of these models in other communities
- Work with artists, other arts organisations and specialists to grow the Playspace programme and disseminate opportunities across Scotland
- Continue to deliver the Creative Skills Programme in person and online offered free of charge or at a very low cost to participants
- Continue to embed and implement robust research and evaluation processes that allow us to share findings locally, nationally and internationally
- Develop our approach to commissioned training to engage with private providers and other organisations
- Explore opportunities to develop paid-for programmes of activities for children and families

## What will success look like?

- Increased numbers of very young children across Scotland fulfil their right to access arts and cultural life
- Families with young children will be able to experience high quality arts experiences in their local area
- Very young children will be able to access high quality arts experiences through the early learning and childcare services they attend
- Families with young children will have direct involvement in planning for local provision of arts experiences, in expressing their needs and shaping the provision
- Research and evaluation findings influence policy and practice locally, nationally and internationally
- Scotland continues to be recognised as a leader in pioneering arts practice for very young children

# ADVOCACY



**Goal:**

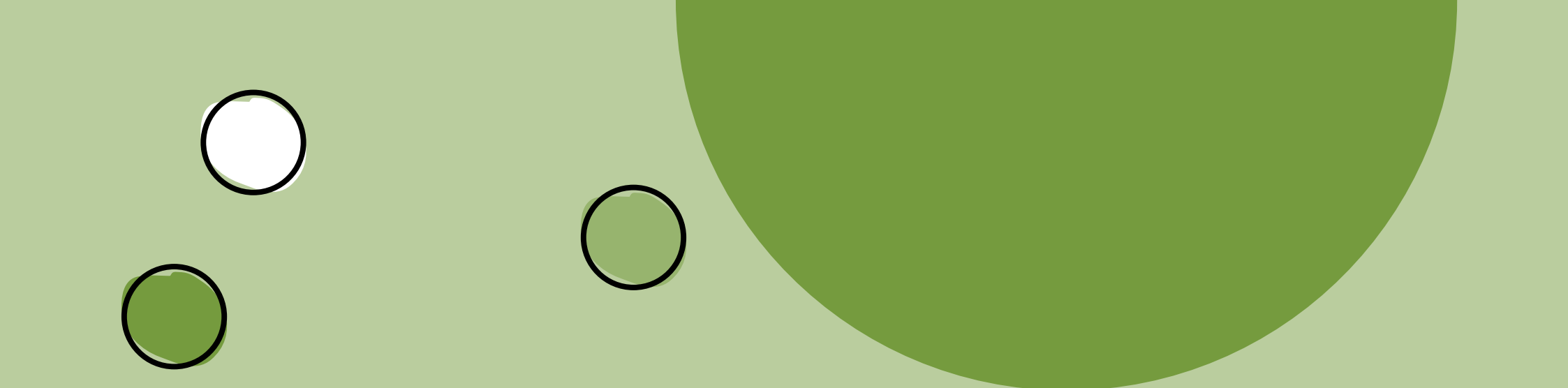
**To advance children's right to engage with and participate in arts and cultural experiences from birth and, through this, amplify young children's agency and voice.**

Our youngest children are often those who are the least heard and the least able to access their rights.

Babies and very young children realise their rights through lived experience. The arts offer opportunities for self expression, and communication helps young children realise their rights long before they can understand the language that describes them.

Starcatchers has a strategic role in advocating for the rights of babies, toddlers and young children to arts and cultural provision as set out in Article 31 of the UNCRC.

We will work to ensure that access to arts and culture from birth, and throughout a child's earliest years, is a national priority.



## In order to achieve this goal, we will:

- Take a values-based and research-evidenced approach to raising awareness and understanding of the positive impact that access to arts and culture from birth can have on children's development and overall wellbeing
- Collaborate across sectors to demonstrate the wide-reaching contribution that access to arts and culture can have across every aspect of children's lives
- Advocate for children's right to access arts and culture under Article 31 of the UNCRC and demonstrate how this contributes to the fulfilment of other rights under the UNCRC including Article 12, the right to be heard.
- Take positive action to ensure the amplified voices of young children are representative of the diversity of Scottish society
- Listen to babies and young children, to their pre- and non-verbal communication and early stages of language development, and help other adults to hear what young children are telling them

## What will success look like?

- Starcatchers' communications and other profile-raising activities are research-evidenced and share the benefits of the arts for very young children
- New projects, collaborations and activity support agreed advocacy objectives
- Starcatchers presents locally, nationally and internationally at conferences and events across sectors
- Starcatchers provides consultation for organisations seeking to hear and respond to the diverse voices of very young children in their service planning
- Starcatchers is represented across sectors on Boards and Committees, as members of working groups, delivering consultancy and training, and being commissioned to create and/or deliver work

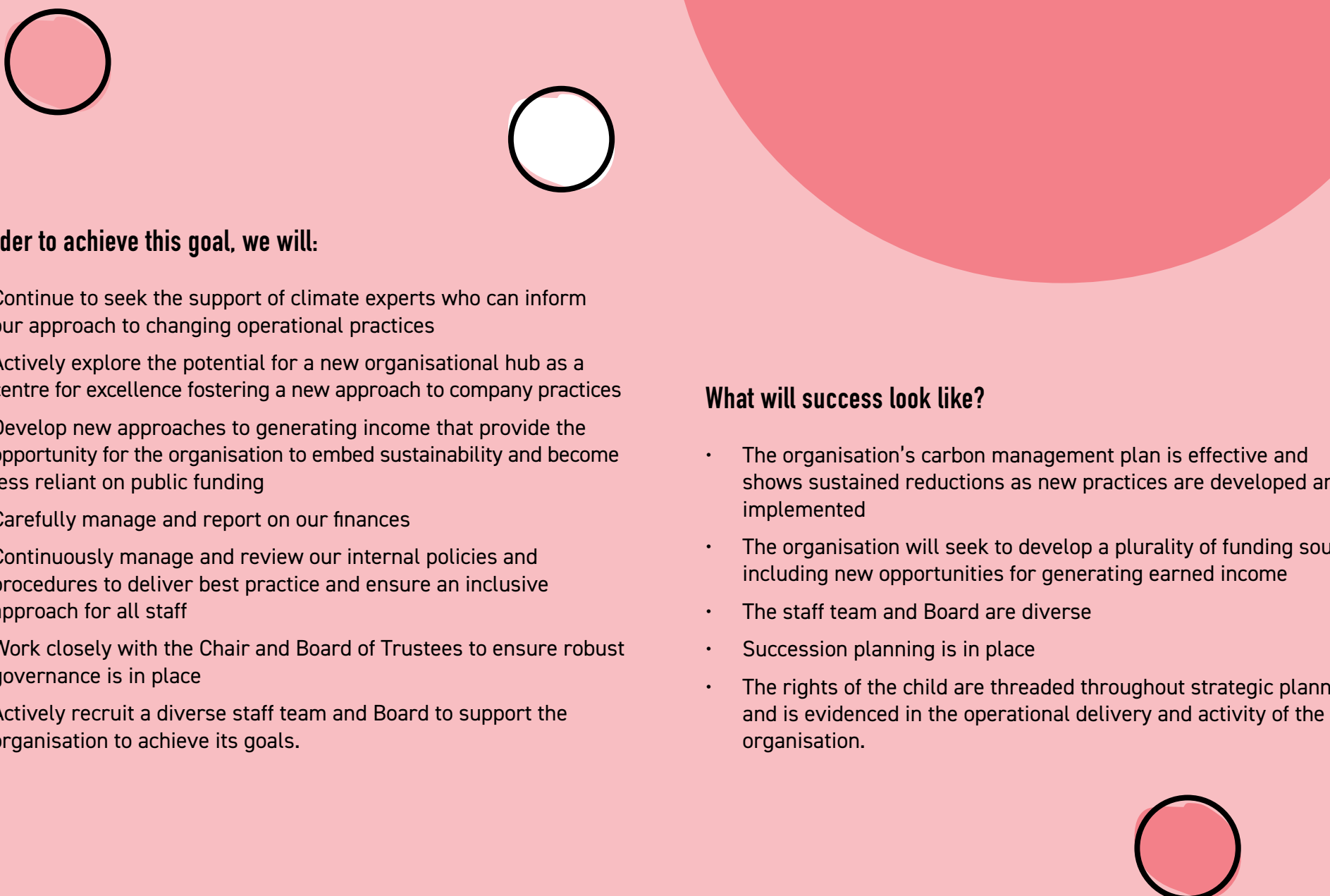
# SUSTAINABILITY



## **Develop and implement a business model that fosters a sustainable approach ensuring a long-term future for Starcatchers**

We want Starcatchers to thrive and ensure our long-term future so that we can continue to deliver activities for and with babies, toddlers and young children in Scotland. With robust business practices and strong governance we will explore new models of working that include the possibility of relocating the organisation within a community. We want to strengthen our financial position sourcing alternative income streams that can reduce our reliance on public funding.

Sustainability is rooted in climate action. This means making positive choices for new, low-carbon methods of working as well as minimising the negative impact our work has on the environment.



## In order to achieve this goal, we will:

- Continue to seek the support of climate experts who can inform our approach to changing operational practices
- Actively explore the potential for a new organisational hub as a centre for excellence fostering a new approach to company practices
- Develop new approaches to generating income that provide the opportunity for the organisation to embed sustainability and become less reliant on public funding
- Carefully manage and report on our finances
- Continuously manage and review our internal policies and procedures to deliver best practice and ensure an inclusive approach for all staff
- Work closely with the Chair and Board of Trustees to ensure robust governance is in place
- Actively recruit a diverse staff team and Board to support the organisation to achieve its goals.

## What will success look like?

- The organisation's carbon management plan is effective and shows sustained reductions as new practices are developed and implemented
- The organisation will seek to develop a plurality of funding sources including new opportunities for generating earned income
- The staff team and Board are diverse
- Succession planning is in place
- The rights of the child are threaded throughout strategic planning, and is evidenced in the operational delivery and activity of the organisation.



# STARCATCHERS

[STARCATCHERS.ORG.UK](http://STARCATCHERS.ORG.UK)



@starcatchersuk

Starcatchers Productions is a limited company, registered in Scotland (SC392561), and a Scottish-registered charity (SC042222).

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