

FAQs: Hearing Link and Hearing Dogs Merger

1. What is the background to the two organisations working together ?

Following months of talks, we are delighted to announce an exciting development for Hearing Link. This summer, Hearing Link will merge with another leading UK charity, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, in a move to secure our future services.

This year, Hearing Link celebrates 70 years of supporting people with hearing loss to acquire the confidence and knowledge they need to live life to the full whatever their level of hearing, while Hearing Dogs celebrates 35 years of training hearing dogs to bring independence, confidence and companionship. We have enjoyed a close connection with Hearing Dogs for many years with many of our beneficiaries having been recipients of hearing dogs, and many hearing dog recipients accessing our range of services.

2. Why are we merging with Hearing Dogs?

As with many small charities, the challenging and competitive fundraising environment has proved extremely difficult for Hearing Link.

By merging with Hearing Dogs, and incorporating Hearing Link as a distinct service within the larger charity, we have secured our future to enable us to continue to deliver our life-changing services.

It means that the wealth of knowledge and expertise within our charity will not be lost, and will now be greatly enhanced through the development opportunities provided by our over 100 combined years of experience in helping a growing number of people with hearing loss.

3. What are the key benefits of the merger across both organisations?

- **Impact** – We will be able to provide more life-changing services to a greater number of people and with any level of hearing loss from mild to moderate as well as severe to profound.
- **Integration** – The merger will enable the two organisations to integrate services offering a broader range of helpful advice and support, rehabilitation programmes and practical solutions for people experiencing any level of hearing loss.
- **Efficiencies** – The collaboration will provide logical cost benefits by efficiently combining back-office functions, such as finance and administration, to ensure our donated funds are used in pursuing our core purpose as much as possible.

4. When will the merger take place?

Key dates are as follows:

- 18th July: Public announcement, including joint Patron HRH Princess Anne
- 18th July: Press releases from Hearing Dogs & Hearing Link
- 1st August: Hearing Link and Hearing Dogs officially merge

5. What does it mean for Hearing Link?

Hearing Link's services will continue to run as before, but with the stability of a much larger charity to strengthen our work.

Hearing Link's name will remain unchanged, as will our branding and logo, our website and social media channels, and our email contact addresses, etc. In other words, to anyone seeking our support or wanting to contact us, nothing will be different. We look forward to

continuing 'business as usual', working with volunteers and staff to provide our usual Helpdesk, specialist programmes and services, website and social media platforms into the future.

Guided by our UK network of experienced, knowledgeable and passionate volunteers, we will continue to support people with hearing loss, their family and their friends as they adjust to and overcome their emotional and practical challenges, helping them find better ways to manage their hearing with confidence.

The merger is much like the example of the NSPCC and Childline. The two organisations merged ten years ago, but most people don't realise that Childline is a part of the NSPCC as both have very separate identities. Another example is Guide Dogs and Blind Children UK. The organisations merged four years ago, but only in the last few months have they become more aligned publicly.

6. What does it mean for Hearing Dogs?

Hearing Dogs will also retain its brand identity, as it is well loved and recognised.

Hearing Dogs will continue to work towards their 2020 vision to create 200 partnerships each year, which has been their goal since 2015.

Hearing Dogs will continue to work with people who are born Deaf and BSL users from the age of seven upwards.

As the supply chain for developing a hearing dog is very long (typically taking 2 to 3 years+), Hearing Link services will be more readily available to support those Hearing Dogs applicants and recipients as they wait, and well beyond.

Hearing Link's fundraising expertise in the field of grants from trust and foundations, will enhance Hearing Dog's own fundraising activity.

7. Will the merger affect Hearing Link staff?

There is no immediate change to staff over the coming months.

Lorraine will become Chief Operating Officer reporting directly to the CEO of Hearing Dogs and with responsibility for all Hearing Link activities.

All other line management relationships will remain as they are.

8. How will beneficiaries be affected?

Beneficiaries will see positive developments with the greater integration between the services provided by Hearing Link and the process of applying for and maintaining a partnership with a hearing dog.

Following the merger, the Hearing Link and Hearing Dogs databases will be integrated in accordance with the Data Protection Act. We are working with Hearing Dogs to ensure that no details of any individual, group or organisation is comprised in any way during or after the integration.

9. Will the merger affect our volunteers?

All our volunteer roles will continue as before, working towards our ambition to become a truly volunteer-led service, building volunteering infrastructure, increasing capacity, and improving and enhancing the volunteering experience.

Peer support will remain integral to everything we do, as we continue to deliver services including the Helpdesk, Let's Hear and our specialist group programmes.

10. How will Hearing Link Members be affected?

Each membership package will continue as before, with our Members actively supporting Hearing Link services, rather than the wider Hearing Dogs organisation.

We will use this opportunity to review and update the Hearing Link membership package, to improve the overall membership experience.

11. And what about our donors and supporters?

As we have explained, we don't anticipate any changes to the services we deliver and the way we deliver them. Any donation, regular gift, payroll giving or legacy will still support our ongoing work, enabling us to transform lives for even more people living with hearing loss.

Hearing Link bank account details will remain the same, but we will need to renew our Gift Aid declaration, which will be sent out over the coming weeks where relevant as the charity number will change to that of the larger charity.

12. Are any other stakeholders affected?

We will continue to work with partners and professionals as before.

We will continue to send out the monthly Hearing Link eNewsletter as before – keeping our subscribers informed about Hearing Link news and wider hearing sector information.

13. How are we letting people know?

Press release

We have agreed with Hearing Dogs which organisation will issue a press release to each of our stakeholder audiences on 18th July. In general, Hearing Link will issue the release to the audiology press, while Hearing Dogs will issue to the wider charity sector and to the assistance dogs media.

Face-to-face / one-to-one

Lorraine, Michelle and Wendy are continuing to brief key stakeholders, including Patrons, long-term supporters, key volunteers, specific partners and funders on an individual basis.

Direct email

Following the public announcement on Tuesday 18th, we will send emails to our Community Panel, our current Members, our regular supporters and payroll givers, and selected corporates, professional bodies, former staff and Board members.

eNews

During the week of 17th July, we will issue our July edition eNewsletter for eNews subscribers with information about the merger alongside regular news.

Website and social media:

We will feature a news article with FAQs on our website, www.hearinglink.org and our social media platforms from 18th July.

Any further questions?

If you have any more questions, please contact our Head Office on 0300 111 1113 (phone-lines open 10.00-2.00pm Monday-Friday) or email enquiries@hearinglink.org.