



Make a real difference

Chief operating officer

In partnership with starfish



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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in working at Sense. Joining our team means making a real difference to the lives of disabled people with complex needs, every single day.

We believe that every disabled person with complex needs should have the opportunity to connect with others and be included in the world. We use our knowledge and expertise to deliver personalised, creative and flexible support at every stage of life.

In this pack you'll learn more about who we are, the impact we have and the values that guide us. You'll also see why this leadership role is such a unique and rewarding opportunity. At Sense, you won't just lead a charity – you'll help shape a future where disabled people are connected and included, no matter what.

From innovative support services and inclusive education to creative programmes and powerful advocacy, our work is broad, bold, and always person-centred. We're proud of what we've achieved – and even more excited about where we're heading.

If you are interested in finding out more contact our search partners, Starfish Search by emailing: erin.fuller@starfishsearch.com



Click here to hear more about the role, directly from James, our chief executive.

Our Board of Trustees is fully committed to supporting the chief officers' group in leading Sense into its next chapter – a chapter defined by ambition, collaboration, and meaningful change. We are looking for someone who brings vision and the courage to lead with purpose. Someone who embodies change, champions co-production, and embraces the power of technology to drive innovation and inclusion.

If you are driven by impact, passionate about equity, and ready to lead a talented and committed team, this could be the role that defines the next stage of your career. This is a pivotal moment for Sense, and we hope you feel inspired. We can't wait to hear from you.

James Watson-O'Neill

Chief executive



About Sense



Sense is a leading disability charity with extensive knowledge and expertise in delivering support for disabled people with complex needs.

Our tailored approach ensures that every person is empowered to live fully – from the first few weeks of life through all the major milestones of adulthood.

We celebrate the moments of connection that bring more joy to life. Together, we always find a way, no matter how many barriers a person might face.

Whether it's communicating with your child for the first time, learning to live more independently or finding friendship through our sports and arts activities – these are the moments that make a difference.

Sense was started 70 years ago, by two mothers whose children were born deafblind. No one knew how to help them. Taking matters into their own hands, they proved that with the right support at the right time, their children could communicate, learn and develop.

Sense continues their mission to this day – breaking down barriers to create a world where every disabled person is included and connected. Where children can communicate with their parents and receive the best possible start in life, young people and adults can develop skills, build confidence and connect with their community, and families can find the hope and resilience to thrive, not just survive.

Together, we can achieve long term change. That's why we go to any lengths, step up in the face of adversity and unite with the 1.6 million disabled people with complex needs in the UK.

Regardless of how long it takes, how many barriers we need to overcome or how hard we have to fight, we'll stop at nothing to create a world where disabled people are connected and included, no matter what.



Where we work

No matter how many barriers a person might face, we offer personalised, creative and flexible support in people's homes, and in our centres, colleges and residential services. We operate across England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Sense centres

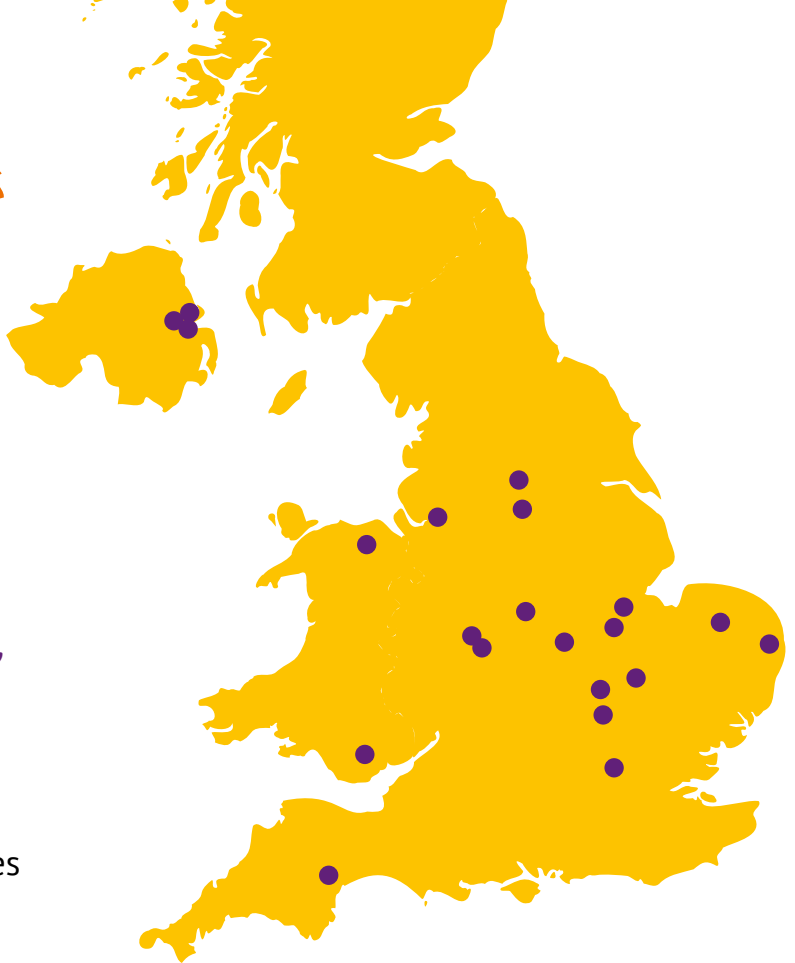
Our hubs are innovative and accessible spaces that are a focal point for the whole community. Disabled people with complex needs of all ages can go there and find the support and opportunities they need to thrive. We also have smaller centres focused on specific services as well as specialist colleges, providing tailored education plans for disabled young people.

At home

From tailored multi-sensory impairment support to virtual activities for siblings and young carers, we have a range of in person and virtual home-based services to support disabled people and their families. We also have supported living and residential care schemes, providing a safe place for disabled adults to call their own.

In the community

With over 100 charity shops across the UK and close partnerships with local organisations, we're proud to be at the heart of the communities we serve.



Through our sister charity, **Sense International**, we provide support for deafblind people in eight countries across the world. Whether it's for vaccine distribution, access to education, or advocacy, the Sense International team has a wealth of experience in achieving our mission by forging local partnerships where they're needed most.

Our history

70 years of moments and milestones



1946

Margaret Brock contracts rubella during pregnancy. Her son, Christopher, is born deafblind as a result.



1953

Peggy Freeman faces the same and her daughter, Bunty, is also born deafblind.



1954

Peggy and Margaret first meet.



1955

The start of Sense. Peggy sends the first Sense newsletter to other parents of deafblind children.



1955

The group grows via newsletters and now includes 12 families known as The Rubella Group.



1961

The Rubella Group officially register as a charity.



1970

The Education Act is a breakthrough moment after years of campaigning.

1971

Support is expanded to include deafblind young people and adults.



1974

The first ever Sense holiday takes place.



1980

Manor House opens – the first of its kind in the UK, providing housing, training and education for disabled adults.



1980

Sense's first family centre in Ealing opens.



1981

The Rubella Group becomes known as 'Sense'.



1983

Support extends to people with acquired deafblindness, including those with Usher syndrome.



1994

Sense International is set up, extending our reach to multiple countries around the world.

1995

Protests by disabled people lead to the landmark introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act.



2001

As a result of Sense's 'Yes to Access' campaign, the government publishes its first deafblind guidance.



2010

The Equality Act is passed by Parliament. It outlaws discrimination and harassment which includes disability.



2013

Sense launches and wellbeing pioneering arts, sports programmes.



2017

Sense TouchBase Pears opens in Birmingham, offering specialist provision for disabled people with community activities.



2024

Over 25,000 campaigners sign our plan for change petition.



2025

Sense marks its 70th anniversary.

70

Our impact 2023/2024

Over the last year we've supported over 32,000 disabled people with complex needs and their families to feel connected and included.



We increased our reach to almost

32,000

people and families – that's 2,000 more than last year.



For every pound Sense receives, **76p** is spent supporting disabled people with complex needs. The other **24p** is put back to work to raise the next pound so we can support even more people and their families.

Find out more

Find out more about our impact [here](#).

View our annual report and accounts [here](#).



£13.9million

was the total amount raised by amazing supporters.



150,000

dedicated supporters generously donated, fundraised, campaigned and volunteered.



£3.2million

of the total raised came from 168 kind and generous supporters who remembered us in their Will.



542

disabled people were supported to achieve their career goals via our employment programme.



279

disabled people and their families were supported to go on a short break.



5,174

disabled people and their families were empowered to try out inclusive sports and new activities.



5,208

children and families were shown new ways to communicate, connect and play.



8,683

disabled people and their families connected through our wellbeing activities and workshops.



757

siblings and young carers were supported to take time for themselves and form new friendships.



341

people were supported to live more independently in our accommodation services.



Over **90%**

of our services were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission.



982

disabled people unlocked new skills for daily life and work through our day opportunities and specialist colleges.

Our values

Everything we do is underpinned by our values. These values shape the way we work, how we treat each other, and how we support people.

We include



We are determined to provide a place where everyone belongs. Where difference is valued and no one is left out. We take time to understand each other, however we may communicate. And we involve each other, especially in the things that affect us directly.

We challenge



We think risk is a part of life to embrace and work with, not avoid. We constantly challenge ourselves and the status quo, working hard to make the world a place for everyone. When things go wrong, we're honest, we learn, we do better.

We collaborate



We bring people together and make connections. Because, though we may all connect differently, we are all connected. And by sharing, learning, working and contributing together, we can achieve so much more.

We celebrate



All achievements are worth celebrating. Those moments and milestones – the ordinary and extraordinary – that give meaning and purpose to life. We notice them and celebrate. Inspiring us to keep going.

We find a way



We think creatively, seeing potential and possibility. Always finding a way, however long it takes.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity, diversity and inclusion are central to how we work. We want our people to be as diverse as those we support, and we work hard to ensure everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential.

At Sense we are diverse in age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity and culture. We each have our own lived experience, we each bring unique qualities, and we each play our role in building an inclusive workplace, where everyone can thrive.

Read more about our EDI strategy [here](#).

Accessibility for all

At Sense, accessibility is more than a principle – it's a commitment that shapes everything we do.

Everyone regardless of disabling barriers, background or circumstance, should have equal access to opportunities, support, and a fulfilling life. This belief drives our work and is central to the culture we're building.

It's a truly exciting time to join us as we move forward in creating an ambitious new strategy. You'll be joining an organisation where accessibility, equity and inclusion are at the heart of every decision. We're realigning our vision and operations to ensure that accessibility for all is not just a goal, but a lived reality – embedded across our services, systems, and leadership.

We welcome and actively encourage applications from candidates of all backgrounds, particularly disabled people, and others who are underrepresented in leadership roles. We value the insight and experience that diversity brings, and are committed to building a team that reflects the communities we support.



Proud to be a Disability Confident Leader

Sense is proud to be a Disability Confident Leader – the highest level of the UK Government's Disability Confident scheme. This recognises our commitment to being an inclusive employer and supporting disabled people to thrive at every stage of their career.

Being a Disability Confident Leader means more than a badge – it reflects our deep-rooted belief that accessibility is a right, not a privilege. We're proud to champion the inclusion of disabled people in every aspect of our work, and we are continually learning, improving, and challenging ourselves to remove barriers.

As a leader, we:

- Ensure inclusive and accessible recruitment.
- Offer meaningful opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships.
- Support existing staff through reasonable adjustments and inclusive policies.
- Promote disability awareness and challenge stigma.
- Share best practice and encourage others to do the same.

This leadership reflects our wider commitment to accessibility for all – in our workforce, our services, and our culture.

Arthur's story

How Arthur found his voice

Since finding Sense, Arthur's mum, Samantha, has learned about how to communicate and play with her son. Together with their support worker, the family are enabling Arthur to explore his senses – including vocalising for the first time!

I'd say Arthur, he's a bit of a goofball – he loves to play. Arthur doesn't speak so he expresses himself with his hands and eyes, and when he's in a good mood he'll blow raspberries! Arthur was born deafblind. We couldn't read to him and didn't know how to play together. I remember the first time I met someone from Sense, it helped me realise that caring for a disabled child doesn't all come naturally, there's a lot you have to learn.

Nicky is a Sense MSI (multi-sensory impairment) specialist. She arrived into our lives with so much useful information and so many ideas for building him a support programme. I think the first big hit was the resonance board. Arthur absolutely loved it, especially feeling the vibrations of windchimes. He actually started to reach out and play with the chimes, which was a real milestone. You don't hear his laugh very often, but he was laughing then.

Nicky also introduced Arthur to a sound-activated strobe light. Up until then, he didn't speak, but when he realised this toy responded to noise, he started vocalising! It was incredible. He wanted to experience the flashing lights. It just melts your heart to hear him.

We're really truly grateful for Sense. If it wasn't for Nicky, he probably wouldn't be where he is now, vocalising and exploring the world around him. It's been an absolute godsend.

At the beginning, we didn't know what milestones we'd ever be able to reach. Now, it's easier for us to see that this is only the beginning. Children like Arthur, you don't realise how resilient they are. He's already achieved so much. I'm looking forward to seeing what the future will bring.

Samantha, Arthur's mum.



Watch Arthur's video here

Hazel's story

Breaking down barriers on the slopes

People might not expect Hazel, who is a blind adult with complex needs, to enjoy skiing – but she absolutely loves it. Tracey, who supports Hazel at Sense TouchBase South East, knew that enabling her to take on this 'sensory explosion' would give her confidence in her own abilities and connect her with new people.

Hazel is full of imagination and energy. In the past, barriers and limited access to activities meant she was often left excluded. But at Sense, we believe there shouldn't be any barriers for people taking part in life.

Hazel has always loved being active – dancing, trampolining and playing sensory tennis at her Sense day centre. So, when the chance came to ski at The Snow Centre in Hemel Hempstead, we knew she'd be up for it.

One barrier Hazel faces is travel and she often finds it overwhelming. At first, even getting in the minibus was a challenge. But with time, patience and the right support, she did it. And that confidence has started to ripple through her whole life.

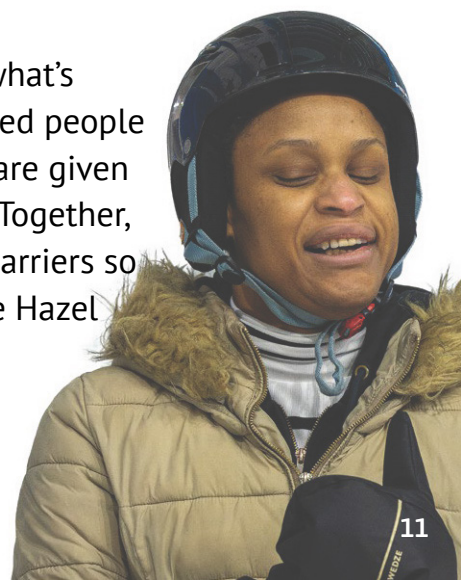
Her first ski sessions were slow and steady, adjusting to the snow, the cold, and meeting new people. Step by step, she grew more comfortable, from touching the sit ski to zooming down the slope with a huge smile on her face.

Skiing has become a sensory adventure and a source of real joy for Hazel. She's grown in confidence, is more open, and more connected – her family couldn't be happier.

Hazel's story shows what's possible when disabled people with complex needs are given the chance to thrive. Together, we can break down barriers so that more people like Hazel can take part in life.



Watch Hazel's story here

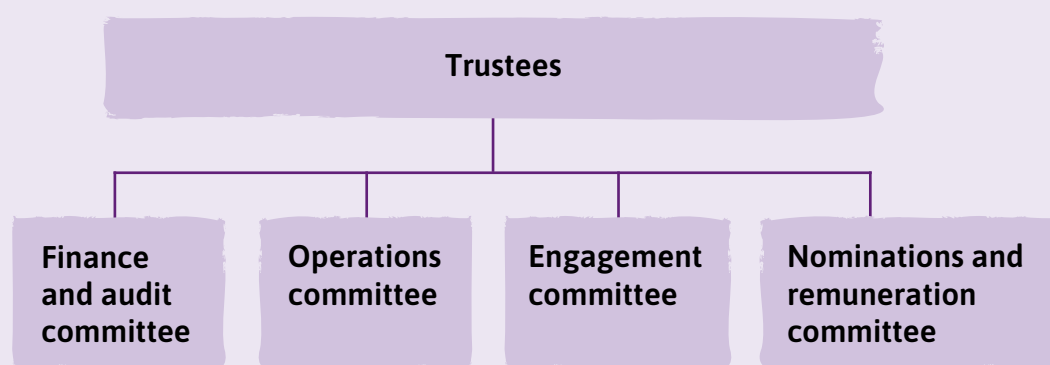


Organisational structure

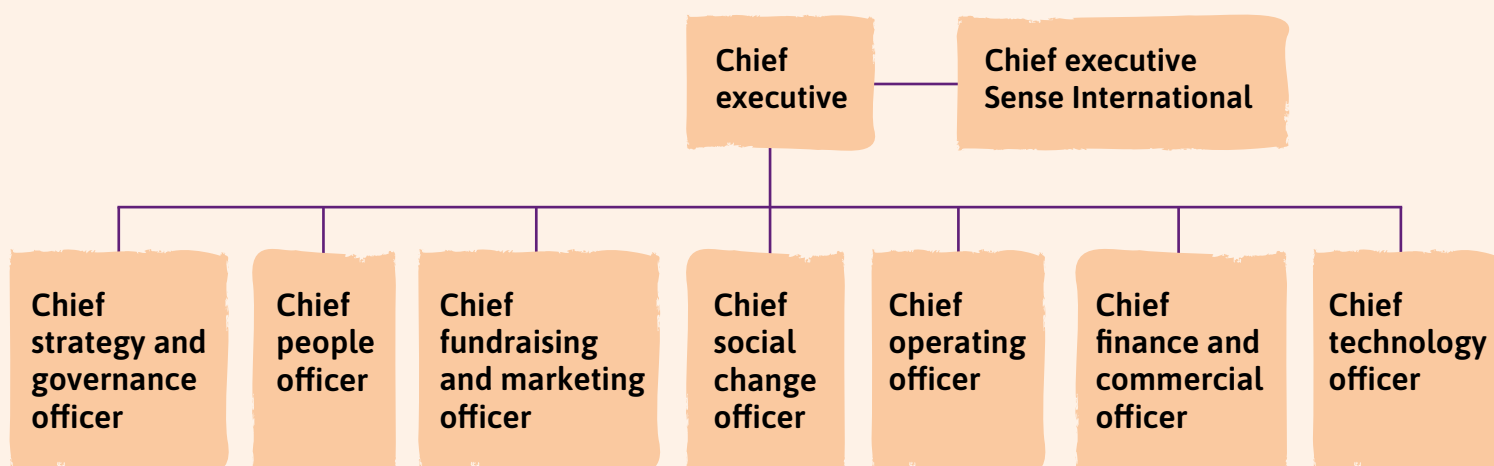


Sense is governed by the Board of Trustees which upholds Sense's vision, agrees and monitors our strategy, protects our assets and funds, and ensures that we comply with legislation and regulation. Trustees also serve on one of four committees. On a day-to-day basis, Sense is managed by a chief officers' group.

Our Board



Chief officers' group



Chief operating officer

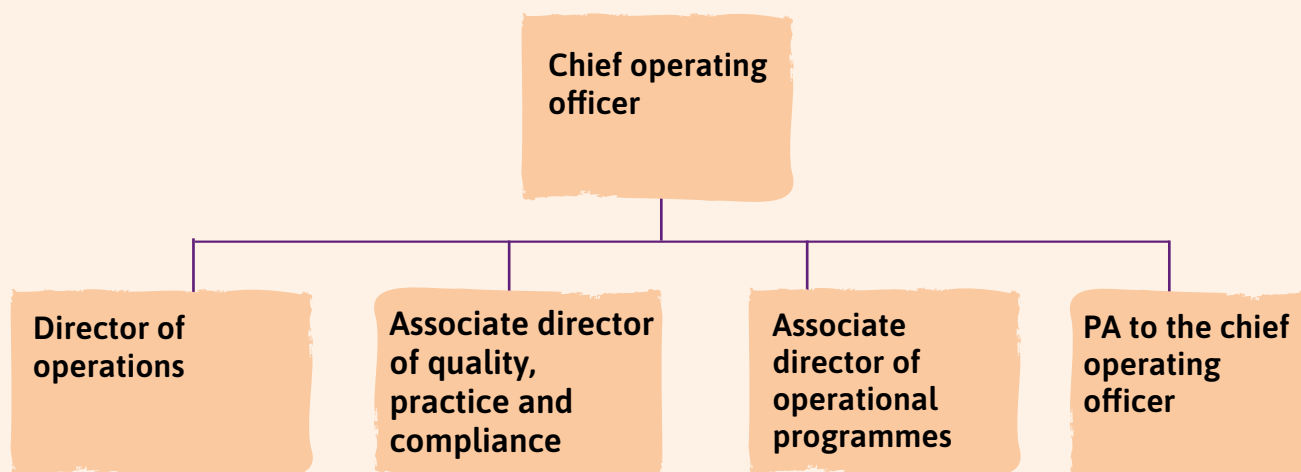
Lead operational excellence and transformational change

This is a pivotal opportunity to join Sense as our new chief operating officer – a key leadership role at a time of ambition, transformation, and renewed strategic focus. You'll share collective responsibility for leading the organisation, shaping its culture, and delivering our long-term vision.

You'll lead and support a high-performing team, including the director of operations, associate director of quality, practice and compliance, and associate director of operational programmes, as well as your PA. Together, you'll drive excellence across

service delivery, performance, and innovation – ensuring Sense's services remain person-centred, future-focused, and responsive to the needs and rights of disabled people with complex needs.

This is a rare chance to shape the future of operational delivery in a values-led, rights-based organisation. If you're an inclusive, strategic leader with a passion for impact, collaboration, and transformational change – we'd love to hear from you.



Key responsibilities

- Provide executive leadership for all Sense services, ensuring modern, innovative, high-quality provision that aligns with emerging best practices.
- Lead a culture of co-production and active participation, ensuring that disabled people with complex needs hold power and lead the design of Sense's services wherever possible.
- Ensure services are fully compliant with regulatory and statutory requirements (including Ofsted, CQC, CIW, RQIA and local authorities).
- Promote a strong culture of safeguarding and safe practice across the organisation.
- Develop robust systems for outcome and impact measurement, using data to inform improvements and innovations.
- Lead long-term strategic planning across operational functions, contributing to the organisation's overarching strategy.
- Drive transformational change initiatives to deliver sustainable improvements in quality, reach, and efficiency.
- Champion co-production with disabled people with complex needs, families, and communities in all aspects of design and delivery.
- Oversee the design and evolution of service models and programmes to ensure they are financially viable, person-centred, and future-focused.
- Ensure services respond to the changing needs of disabled people with complex needs, local and national commissioning priorities, and emerging trends.
- Lead strategic performance management systems, ensuring delivery against key performance indicators and regulatory benchmarks.
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and learning across services.
- Sponsor and oversee significant capital programmes, ensuring that Sense's environments meet the needs of those we support and reflect our ambition for excellence.
- Ensure infrastructure supports operational effectiveness, from digital systems to estate development.
- Build and maintain positive relationships with regulators, commissioners, funders, and other strategic stakeholders.
- Represent Sense at a national level in networks, sector groups, and public forums.
- Responsible for strategic oversight of budgets within their directorate, ensuring effective resource allocation, financial compliance, and alignment with Sense's priorities.
- Champion co-production and participatory approaches by actively reviewing and shaping current and future projects, initiatives, and strategic actions in collaboration with stakeholders, partners, and communities.

Key responsibilities

Leadership in the chief officers' group

- Demonstrates strong leadership as both a skill and a professional interest, consistently modelling Sense's values in approach and decision-making.
- Shares collective responsibility for corporate leadership across the chief officers' group, actively driving cultural and strategic change through all roles by championing transformation, embedding change management principles, and contributing to the direction and success of Sense beyond individual functions.
- Leads proactively and empowers others to lead across departments and disciplines through a matrixed, collaborative approach.
- Possesses emotional intelligence and coaching and mentoring skills to support team and peer development.
- Acts as the executive lead for one or more committees of the board of trustees and brings experience of working closely with trustees or other non-executives.
- Models and embeds Sense's values through inclusive, values-led leadership, demonstrating a sustained commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion—actively championing disability equality through the social model of disability, and upholding the rights and responsibilities of all individuals to foster a fair and respectful culture, for example by actively promoting anti-racism across the organisation.
- Supports and contributes to Sense's active response to the climate crisis, aligning leadership with sustainability and social responsibility goals.
- Lead a culture of collaboration and inclusion by embedding co-production and participatory methods in the development, implementation, and evaluation of work across the organisation.

Our benefits

Money and pension

- Annual salary of £130,000
- Pension - we'll contribute up to 5% **16**
- Life assurance cover – paying two times your salary to a nominated person
- Death in service benefit

Health and lifestyle

- Employee assistance programme - offering free, confidential advice 24/7, including on relationship breakdown, bereavement or legal problems.
- Wellbeing hub - access to everything from exercise videos to financial tips and guidance.
- Wisdom application - access to mindfulness application.
- Health cash plan - you'll have the option to join our employee health insurance plan, covering costs of healthcare, eye tests, dental treatment and more.
- Employee discounts - on popular high street brands and at Sense shops.
- Cycle to work scheme - to buy a bike tax-free, reducing your costs.
- Travel season ticket loans - to spread the cost of your travel to work, interest-free.
- Free Independent Mortgage Advice – expert, independent mortgage advice and education services. It's completely free of charge with no admin or arrangement fee.

Annual leave

- 27 days annual leave (before bank holidays).
- Buying and selling holiday scheme - buy or sell up to a week's worth of annual leave.

How to apply

A plain text Word version of this document is available **here** but please let us know if you need this information in a different format and we'll be happy to help.

To discuss how we can support you with any part of the recruitment process, please contact us on erin.fuller@starfishsearch.com

To apply

We're delighted that you're considering this opportunity to join Sense at such an exciting time in our journey. If you're passionate about making a real difference, driven by purpose, and ready to help shape the future of support for disabled people with complex needs, we would love to hear from you.

If you have any questions or would welcome a confidential, informal conversation about the role, please contact: erin.fuller@starfishsearch.com – we will be happy to arrange a call.

To apply, please visit www.starfishsearch.com/jobs/sense-coo and click the 'Apply Now' button. You will be asked to submit the following:

- Your CV (maximum three sides)
- A supporting statement (maximum two sides) outlining why this role is the right next step for you, and how your experience aligns with the knowledge and criteria set out in the person specification.

We also encourage you to complete the equality and diversity monitoring form as part of the online process. This information is used for monitoring purposes only and will not form part of the selection process. We look forward to receiving your application and learning more about what you can bring to this important leadership role at Sense.

Shortlisting

The applications will be reviewed by the Chief Executive and shortlisted candidates will be invited to participate in a two-way exploratory conversation with the Chief Executive to support their understanding of this opportunity on 12 November 2025.

Interviews

Please note that final interviews will be held in-person on 17 November 2025 at Sense Touchbase Pears, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6NA. This will include an interview panel, a stakeholder and peer session, a session with SURG (Sense user reference group) and a tour of the building and facilities.

Starfish is proud to be partnering with Sense for the recruitment of Chief operating officer:



Closing date: 13 October 2025

Contact Sense

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in
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289868

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal
President: The Lord Levy



sense