

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services Committee
<b>DATE</b>	26 November 2024
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Learning outcomes from Care Inspectorate Thematic Review – Disabled Children and Young People's experiences of Social Work Services
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	F&C/24/330
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Carol Davie
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.6

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### 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To update the Committee on the findings of the Care Inspectorate Thematic Review, August 2024, in relation to Disabled Children and Young People's experiences of Social Work Services and of the actions being taken by the service to address the findings.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1. note the Thematic Review;
- 2.2 approve the Action Plan (at Appendix A) developed to address findings and instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to report progress on delivering on the Key Findings in Autumn 2025, and
- 2.3 note that multi-agency learning from this Thematic Review will be used to inform the refresh of the Children's Services Plan.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1.1 The National Review of Services for Disabled Children (2011) highlighted the need to deliver better outcomes for disabled children and young people, as well as their families.
- 3.1.2 In 2021, the Scottish Government produced the [Disabled Children and Young People \(Transitions to Adulthood\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#). The aim of the Bill was to improve outcomes for disabled children and young people in their transition to adulthood.
- 3.1.3 The Scottish Government published the Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for disabled children and young people: a statement of intent, in September 2023.

The strategy embedded the commitment to the seven [Principles of Good Transitions](#) - ARC (Association for Real Change).

3.1.4 In May 2023, the Care Inspectorate announced its intention to undertake a thematic review of the social work services involvement in relation to ensuring that disabled children receive timely care and support, and that their rights are respected. The Care Inspectorate aim was to explore and concentrate upon the overall experiences of children and young people with disabilities, who have Social Work involvement.

### **3.2 Care Inspectorate – Disabled children and young people’s experiences of social work services: a thematic review.**

#### **Methodology**

3.2.1 Information was gathered from social work teams across all thirty-two local authorities in Scotland. A survey focusing upon staff perspectives was utilised, as well as related data from information and recording systems. Additionally, publicised data, research, and literature were scrutinised.

3.2.2 The Care Inspectorate noted their desire to undertake a more in-depth review of four local authority areas and sought volunteers from across the country. Aberdeen City Council volunteered to be part of this process. Greater scrutiny of our service would, we believed, offer not only an opportunity for reflective learning but an independent perspective of whether we were meeting the needs of the children and young people in line with the research, and key national strategies.

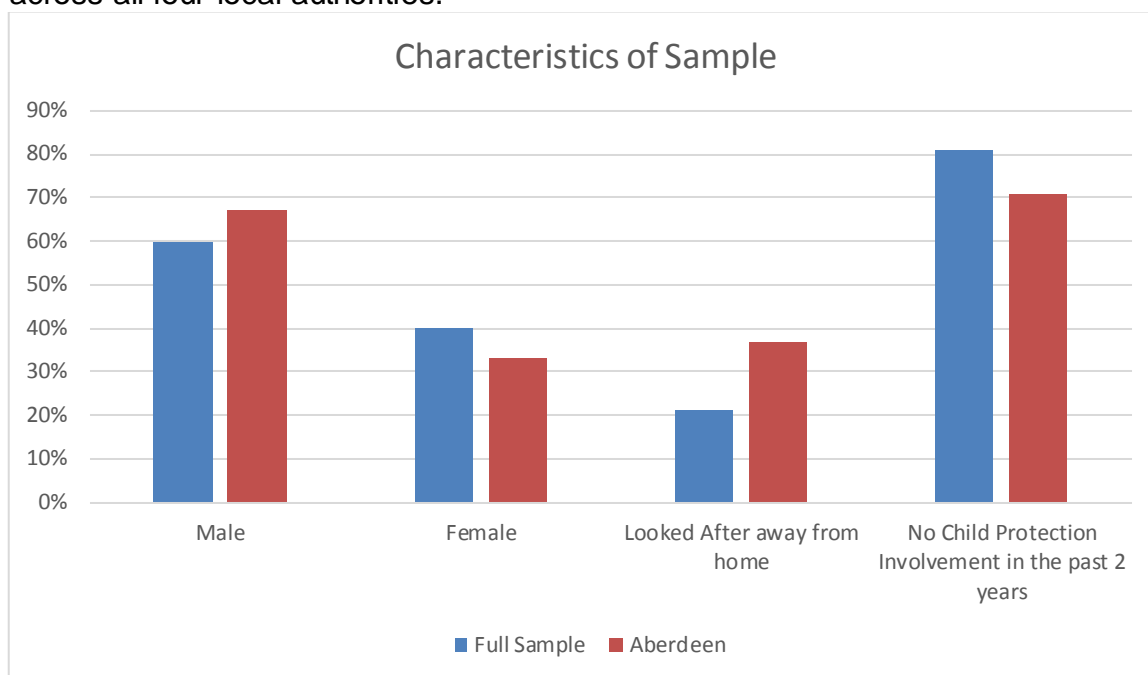
3.2.3 As part of the “deeper dive” into local practice, the Care Inspectorate chose thirty children who were recorded as having a disability on our recording system. These were children supported via the Children with Disability Team, as well as our three Permanence and Care Teams. They scrutinised records for each child and met with the professional teams around the children and young people, including representatives from our service, health, education, and our commissioned services.

3.2.4 A children’s rights-based approach was adopted and the participation and engagement of children, young people and their families was central to the review. The views of the child and parents/carers were sought via a survey, and in order to gain a greater understanding of how families view the service, six families from the thirty within the local study group, were chosen and consented to engage more fully with the Care Inspectorate.

3.2.5 Staff Focus Groups, with representatives from all four areas engaging in the more in-depth work, which included Dundee City Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and the Western Isles Council, took place. These offered an opportunity to share practise experiences, benchmark performance and contrast urban versus rural social work intervention, for children and young people with disabilities.

### **3.3 Data**

3.3.1 The overall national sample involved the reading on 117 children's records, of which 30 were from Aberdeen. Neurodiversity was the main category of disability across all four local authorities.



3.3.2 The Care Inspectorate met with the Service prior to the publishing of their report, to offer insight into the national findings, but predominately to provide verbal feedback in relation to the more in-depth exploration of service delivery to children and young people with disabilities, in Aberdeen. Their high level feedback is outlined at paragraph 3.5.

3.3.3 [The Care Inspectorate published their overall findings in August 2024.](#) An animated [version](#) is also made available for children and young people.

### 3.4 KEY NATIONAL MESSAGES

3.4.1 Eleven key national messages were identified. These were:

1. *Respectful relationships were key to building a culture of listening to and respecting children and young people's views. This ensured they were engaged in decisions about their care and support.*
2. *Too many disabled children and young people's views feelings and wishes were not being heard.*
3. *When children and young people received the right support at the right time from social work services, this helped them to grow and develop.*
4. *Increasing complexity of need and high demand for services was outweighing the availability of supports.*

5. *Children and young people were not always provided with meaningful choices about the support they received.*
6. *Parents and carers routinely provide a significant level of care and support. Their wellbeing must be promoted and protected.*
7. *The quality of social work assessments, plans and reviews were variable and were not always properly addressing all the child or young person's needs.*
8. *The experience of transitioning into life as a young adult continues to be characterised by unpredictability and uncertainty for too many disabled young people.*
9. *Compassionate and dedicated social work staff were helping to improve the lives of children and young people. High workloads and recruitment and retention of staff significantly challenged staff teams.*
10. *The social work role was not always easily understood by families and/or other professionals.*
11. *Reliable data and a shared definition of disability are not available to inform future planning or to support the setting of budgets.*

### **3.5 KEY LOCAL MESSAGES**

In relation to Aberdeen, the Care Inspectorate shared the following key messages:

- 3.5.1 Relational practise with children and families is at the core of practice in Aberdeen and key to building a culture of listening to, and respecting children's views.

There is a need for us to continue to prioritise building relationships with the children we are involved with. We will work closely with our colleagues within the Speech and Language Service, and Specialist Occupational Therapist at Child and Family Mental Health in order to utilise appropriate communication tools to engage with children and young people and ensure that all staff working with children and young people with disabilities are trained in the use of Makaton.

We will also work alongside our colleagues within the Children's Rights Service and Who Cares.

- 3.5.2 An organisational structure with a designated Children with Disabilities team offers a level of expertise when communicating with children and young people with a disability and transferring that to needs led assessment. There is a need to maintain this arrangement, and build upon the level of expertise via multi-disciplinary working.

- 3.5.3 The co-location of the Children with Disabilities Team within a school for children with additional support needs (Orchard Brae) is innovative and allows for timeous responses to critical need and the protection of children. There is a need to maintain this arrangement and develop other co-location opportunities across the city.

3.5.4 The dedication of the key personnel within the social work and education service and their investments in the children they mutually care for, were regarded as the catalyst for positive working relationships amongst professionals and with families. We must therefore continue to build upon our collaborative approach to supporting children with disabilities and those who care for them.

3.5.5 There is evidence that timely help and support has a positive impact on the outcomes and that progress is being made in making support available more quickly. There is a need, therefore, for us to sign post and enhance awareness of community supports. We are working collaboratively with our colleagues in education to develop access to information for families in relation to available community based supports, the eligibility criteria of statutory provision, education services, and transitions to adulthood, and financial matters. We aim to utilise the Aberdeen City Council Website, and news letters to parents. We will also build upon the already successful parents information evenings arranged within ASN provision in the city.

3.5.6 Fit Like Hubs were recognised as a key component to timely support, and unique to service delivery, offering community-based support and enabling families to do so, without any requirement for a referral to statutory services. However, in keeping with the national picture, the volume of complex need across the Local Authority outweighs the support available. This drives an increase in referrals to services below the threshold for intervention by social work, saturating them, which ultimately results in statutory intervention, often at the point of crisis.

There is a need to think strategically about thresholds, with a collaborative approach, alongside health, and the third sector, to meeting needs, reduce higher level demand and prevent intervention being crisis led. This will be driven within our Children's Services Board and the work within the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, stretch outcome 8.

3.5.7 Aberdeen has one key commissioned service offering outreach and short break support, (Aberlour Children's Charity) and one key commissioned service via Autism and Neurodiversity, offering holiday playscheme. As a result, choice can be limited, and often children have. The restricted number of, and access to mainstream services has also led to families using their own families and community supports.

There is a need to further enhance community support, and we are working alongside our key service providers to consider how to expand the provision they offer.

We also wish to incorporate a Specialist Occupational Therapist and a trained Counsellor, to be shared across children and adult services to equip families to care for the children and young people within their own family and community support systems.

3.5.8 Whilst limiting choice, working with one key service provider has enabled strong working relationships, shared values, and goals. This, was regarded as being key to service delivery at a high standard, as evidenced, within the thematic review and the Care Inspectorates Inspection of Aberlour Services. We therefore will continue to work closely with our third sector colleagues to ensure that children and young people with disabilities have better outcomes.

- 3.5.9 Nationally the quality of record keeping, and reports were variable, however, within Aberdeen, the majority of Child's Plans were good or better. Child's plans were reviewed more frequently through formal review processes, and there is evidence of very well-established multi-agency working. There is a need to continue such practice and to think progressively about information contained within the Child's Plan, and how this is presented in a manner that will ensure appropriate planning for the child/young person.
- 3.5.10 Parental views were recorded more than that of children within the information systems and reports. There is a need to amplify the voices of our disabled children and young people, utilising communication systems to achieve this.
- 3.5.11 Nationally, the experience of transitioning to adult services can be unpredictable and destabilising for children, young people, and their families. In Aberdeen, transition experiences were variable, however there was an acknowledgement that we had recognised this, and have developed a multi-agency approach to improving transitions, and developing a protocol in line with the Scottish Government Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for disabled children and young people strategy.
- 3.5.12 Nationally, there is no reliable data and no shared definition of disability. We must therefore consider [Celcis](#) findings in this regard, and embed the following into our data collection practises across all cross-sector stakeholder partnerships - *"The collection of good quality information about disabled children is critical to increasing and ensuring the awareness and visibility of disabled children and their needs and experiences is present among national and local policy-makers and services so that the support needs of disabled children are understood and can be met with the right support and investment."*
- 3.5.13 The Care Inspectorate commented that locally there was a dedicated work force, who go, "above and beyond" in terms of commitment to the children and young people and to providing support which will have meaningful impact to them and their families. There is a need therefore to ensure that staff health and wellbeing are a priority and we work within the parameters of the [Setting the bar](#), to avoid staff burnout, and ensure enhanced service delivery.

## **3.6 Implementation of key learning**

- 3.6.1 The Care Inspectorate noted that, *"the responsibility for improvement sits with us all. The actions noted...will require a shared approach across Scottish Government, local authorities, national and local organisations, and public bodies, including the Care inspectorate."*
- 3.6.2 The learning from this thematic review will be discussed with both the Children's Services Board and the Child Protection Committee and taken into account of programmes of work are being developed. An Action Plan has been developed to drive new actions against the key learning (Appendix A). It is proposed that an update on progress be presented to the Education and Children's Services Committee within one calendar year.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve. Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	Many of the key messages from the thematic review are already in place in practice in the city. The remaining areas are already incorporated into strategic planning.	The Local Outcomes and Improvement Plan and Children's Service Plan are well governed by the Chief Officer Group. They will be ensuring that the terms of the thematic review are incorporated into current and future strategic planning.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Compliance</b>	No significant risk identified	Services across all multi-agency partners will be aware of the key messages and requirements and ensure compliance.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Operational</b>	Required improvements and developments in practice are not identified and actioned.	Leadership supports participation and planning across the multi-agency partnership in the delivery of changes required as a result of the findings.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Financial</b>	No significant risk identified			<b>Yes</b>
<b>Reputational</b>	Organisational failings in	The public can be assured that: the	M	<b>Yes</b>

	relation to children with disabilities can bring significant media interest and scrutiny of services delivered to children and young people.	Council ensures compliance with legal requirements, national standards, and guidance; partners respond to self and external scrutiny; and identified areas for improvement are addressed.		
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risk identified			<b>Yes</b>

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-2023</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <u><a href="#">Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</a></u>	The contents of this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
<b><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></b>	
<b>100% of our children with Additional Support Needs/ Disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026.</b>	Children's Services partners deliver on the outcomes of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan Prosperous People (Children & Young People) Stretch Outcome 8 and to ensure our children with ASN/disabilities and their families receive the support they need in a timely manner.
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	The work is relevant to the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, the Children's Services Plan. Local stakeholders progress the findings and expectations of the Thematic Review

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	This report to introduce members to the key findings of a Thematic Review conducted by the Care Inspectorate and does not require a full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment to be completed.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Ali McAlpine, Lead Service Manager, Integrated Children & Family Service



<b>Other</b>	
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## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

NA

## 11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A – Action Plan

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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