



**the promise**  
**scotland**

# Is Aberdeen Keeping the Promise?



**Community  
Planning  
Aberdeen**



# INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



[The Promise](#) made following the Independent Care Review made it clear that the current ‘care system’ in Scotland isn’t working and that families need earlier, preventative supports which are easy to access, support children to remain in their communities, and where that is not possible, that support is provided in ways that do not feel stigmatising. It recognised the impact of poverty but also the need to embed a trauma informed and rights based approach to service delivery.

The Promise can only be kept by Community Planning Partners working together. As a result we have organised all of our work to keep the Promise in our partnership Plan for children. Our Children’s Services Plan is one of a suite of Statutory Plans supporting delivery of the [Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#) (LOIP).

Our [Children’s Services Plan 2023-2026](#) takes full account of the foundations of The Promise and of the Priority Areas in Plan 21-24. Partners represented at the Children’s Services Board assume collective responsibility for delivery of The Promise and routinely monitor progress. This report is a product of our most recent monitoring of progress.

In June 2023, The Promise Scotland assessed that Scotland was unlikely to fully deliver on Plan 21–24 by March 2024. Within their assessment they acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on staff and services as well as the impact of the cost of living crisis. Outstanding elements of Plan 21 -24 will therefore be carried forward into the next national plan (Plan 24-30) which is anticipated to be published in Spring 2024. Publication of the new Plan will trigger a further review by the Children’s Services Board to ensure that our work remains fully aligned.

In evaluating our progress to date, we have reviewed the impact of work undertaken over the past year, which was steered by earlier evaluations against Plan 21-24, heard from those with lived experience and considered the findings of our own evaluation activity to help provide a clear sense of where we are at as we transition to Plan 24-30. The Scottish Government has committed to bringing forward a “Promise” Bill within the lifetime of the Parliament. This will incorporate change to the Children’s Hearing System, and the regulatory framework for children’s services. We also await the details relating to the implementation of the Children’s (Care & Justice) Act. These changes are critical to being able to fully drive the change Plan 21 – 24 requires.

We are proud of the changes we have made but recognise there is more to do.

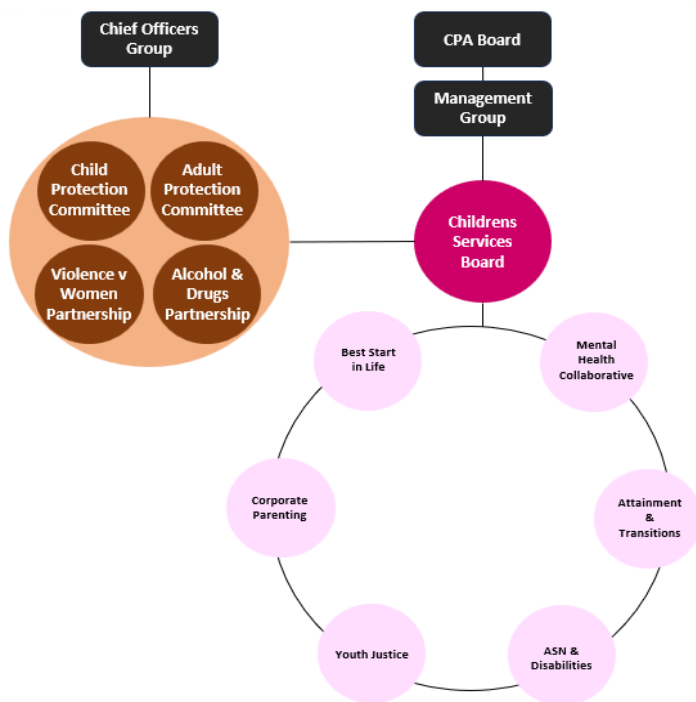
**Graeme Simpson**

Chief Social Work Officer and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Group

The Community Planning partnership has a range of highly effective governance arrangements in place including our Chief Officers Group (COG), Child Protection Committee (CPC) and Children’s Services Board (CSB). These arrangements, where candor, curiosity and accountability between partners is actively encouraged, has significantly aided more common practice and a shared and ongoing culture of improvement around public protection.

The Children’s Services Board is governed by and accountable to the Community Planning Management Board, which in turn is accountable to Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA). The Children’s Services Board has responsibility for:

- The delivery of the Children’s Services Plan and associated Stretch Outcomes 3-8 of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan
- Working together as a Community Planning Partnership to improve outcomes for children and young people within Aberdeen City
- Leading the implementation of national policy and legislation pertaining to children and young people including The Promise



The work of the CSB directly aligns to that being driven by a number of other Outcome Improvement Groups within the CPA

Structure. These linked priorities have guided the partnership to bring the stands of public protection closer together to enable more effective delivery of a whole family approach. This shift has triggered an increase in shared learning events and on-going work to align learning and development programmes. The CSB has particularly strong links with our Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, Anti-Poverty Group, and Violence Against Women and Girls partnership.

Actions that support delivery of The Promise are embedded within the Action Plans of each of the Children’s Services Board Sub Groups. As a result, each Sub Group has a direct responsibility in delivering The Promise. More detail on our CSB subgroups can be found here on the CPA Website on the [Children’s Services Board Webpage](#).

### Corporate Parenting Group

Aberdeen City’s Corporate Parenting Group is a Sub Group of the Children’s Services Board. It has responsibility for delivering on aims set out in the LOIP and associated Children’s Services Plan under Stretch Outcome 5, and coordinating our evaluation of progress against The Promise. The Group leads on the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Improvement Plan and quality assurance activity in relation to children and young people with care experience.

The Corporate Parenting Group aims to ensure that; *“95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026”* and established a number of Improvement Projects (in bold below) to deliver this aim over the lifetime of the Children’s Services Plan. Improvement projects are progressing well.

**Project aim - Reduce by 5% the number of children entering the care system by 2024.** The number of children in the care system has slightly reduced in 2023/24, but is less than hoped reflecting an escalating need/risk profile and the capacity of services to hold children within their family. We remain committed to ensuring ‘where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they must stay’. This will remain a priority as we transition into Plan 24-30.

**Project aim - Ensure that 100% of children and young people leaving care are offered a health assessment to identify gaps in their health provision and needs by 2024.** Work is progressing at pace to develop a pathway to ensure all care leavers are offered a health assessment and we anticipate this will be embedded by the end of 2024. Learning from these assessments will inform future improvement activity.

**Project aim - Increase the number of young people with care experience by 10% receiving multi-agency throughcare/aftercare support by 2023.** This improvement project has been successfully completed and the aim achieved.

**Project aim - Reduce the number of children being permanently removed from parents with care experience.** The remit of our Family Nurse Partnership has extended to intensively support pregnant care experienced parents. The outcomes of this work will continue to be monitored.

**Project aim - Ensure that 80% of the identified multi-agency workforce successfully complete Corporate Parenting training aligned to the Promise by 2025.** The updated Corporate Training module has been launched. Tracking of completion rates will be actively monitored to ensure completion of the project.

## Our Progress in delivering Priority 1, A Good Childhood

The Promise made a number of commitments to children and young people and Plan 2021-24 highlighted 25 priority areas for action over the lifetime of Plan 2021-24. We have listed the policy context and then evaluated our progress against this context to help identify areas to be further progressed as we transition to Plan 24 – 30. Readers should note that there is some crossover between the 25 priorities for action.

**On a Good Childhood, The Promise says,** ‘Children who have been removed from their family of origin and live in and around the ‘care system’ will have a good, loving childhood. Ensuring that children in Scotland’s ‘care system’ feel loved, their needs are met, and their rights are upheld is a priority for 21-24. This change is urgent, it must be a focus for all organisations that have responsibility towards care experienced children and young people’.

**On support, Plan 2021-24 says,** ‘Every child that is ‘in care’ in Scotland will have access to intensive support that ensures their educational and health needs are fully met. Local Authorities and Health Boards will take active responsibility towards care experienced children and young people, whatever their setting of care, so they have what they need to thrive’.

### BRIGHT SPOTS:

Through the later part of 2023/24, children’s social work entered into a partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children’s Care and Protection (CELCIS) and Coram Voice to initiate our widest reaching participatory activity with our care experienced community in order to determine the extent to which our children and young people experience a good childhood and have the right supports in place.

‘Bright Spots’ is a research and service improvement project set up by Coram Voice to understand what is important to children in care and care leavers and share learning about what makes life good for them by measuring subjective well-being.

Having demonstrated our strategic buy in and commitment to embedding the voice of children in local decision making processes, 2 cohorts were surveyed. The ‘Your Life Your Care’ survey was presented to 345 children/young people aged 4 – 17 years, and ‘Your Life Beyond Care’ to 227 young people aged 16 – 26 years.



Over the first 3 months of 2024, concerted efforts by the two cohort leads has helped gain responses from a very high proportion of children and young people meaning we can have confidence in the survey findings and use them to support our planning as we move to Plan 24-30. The initial findings and areas for consideration and improvement are detailed below. These need to be read with a health warning and it is important that assumptions are not made while we work with CELCIS over the coming months to dig into the data to better understand the

responses given by our children and young people. This activity will also support us to ensure we target our improvement activities on the correct areas.

### Your Life, Your Care (for those aged 4 – 17 years)

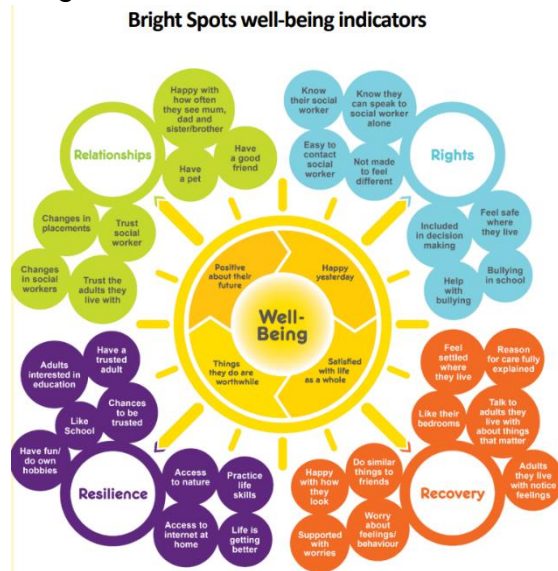
249 children in care responded to the survey from a total eligible population of 345: a response rate of 72%. This is very high compared to the national average.

Positive findings include:

- More than half of children and young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen had the same social worker over the last year and significantly fewer children and young people had three or more social workers in this period compared to the Bright Spots comparator group.
- 70% of young people gave high or very high scores (7 to 10) for happiness with the way they look. This is significantly higher than the proportion of the Bright Spots comparator group (61%).
- Six out of seven (86%) children and young people in care (8-17yrs) felt their lives were getting better.
- 61% of all children aged 8-11yrs with brothers and sisters felt that the time they were able to spend with them was 'just the right amount', higher than the Bright Spots comparator group (47%).
- Almost all (99%) of young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen felt that they had an adult who they trusted and who sticks by them no matter what; a significantly higher percentage than the average (91%) of the Bright Spots comparator group of local authorities.
- All of the youngest children (4- 7yrs) trusted the adults they lived with, and all children aged 8-11yrs trusted the adults they live with 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. 95% of 8-11yrs and 94% of 11-17yrs indicated that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- 93% of children and young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen always felt safe where they lived, this is significantly higher than the percentage of the Bright Spots comparator group (86%). Unusually, this is also higher than the percentage for the youngest children (4-7yrs) in Aberdeen (87%)
- The proportion of children and young people in Aberdeen City who spent time outdoors in nature more than once a week (88% of children (8-11yrs) and 89% of young people (11-17yrs)) was higher than the general Scottish population (67%).
- 92% of 8-11yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt listened to when decisions were made about their lives, and this was even higher for young people (11- 17yrs) (94%).

Areas for consideration stemming from the survey responses from those aged 4-17:

- Fewer children and young people in Aberdeen had received an explanation about why they were in care and did not want to know more when compared to children and young people in the Bright Spots comparator group. (48% to 65% for 8-11yrs, 69% to 78% for 11-17yrs).



- As children and young people in Aberdeen got older, fewer reported having a pet at home (78% of 8-11yrs and 56% of 11-17yrs), and significantly less children and young people (11-17yrs) had a pet when compared to the Bright Spots comparator group.
- The proportion of young people (11-17yrs) with a really good friend was well below that of the general population (91% to 97%).
- A quarter of children (8-11yrs) and one in ten of children aged over 11yrs did not know they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own. These proportions are both significantly above those for the Bright Spots comparator groups
- Many of the comments from children and young people across all age groups related to their relationships with parents, and brothers and sisters. Children and young people (8-17yrs) reported mixed views and experiences of family time, and the complexity of many family arrangements came across, such as children seeing some of their brothers and sisters but not others. Just over a third (34%) of children aged 8-11yrs reported that the amount of time they spent with their mum was 'just right' and 18% felt time with their dad was just right. Of young people aged 11-17yrs , more children (45%) felt time with their mum was 'just right, but just 20% thought time with their dad was 'just right'.
- A significantly higher proportion (43%) of children and young people (8-11yrs) in Aberdeen reported being afraid of going to school because of bullying when compared to the Bright Spots comparator group. Of those who were afraid, most were getting help.
- Whilst the majority (87%) of children (4-7yrs) said that they 'always' felt safe at home, when compared to the Bright Spots comparison group, a higher proportion of children (4-7yrs) in Aberdeen said that they didn't always feel safe where they lived.

The proportion of young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen City giving positive scores was significantly above the Bright Spots group for several key wellbeing indicators:

- Very high/high scores for feeling that the things they do are worthwhile (76% to 65%).
- 'Very happy' yesterday (44% to 35%).

Very high scores for feeling positive about the future. (45% to 36%)

### Life Beyond Care (for those aged 16-26)

156 young people responded to the survey from a care leaver population of 227: a remarkable response rate of 69%. This is very high compared to the national average. Positive findings include:

- Two-thirds (66%) of comments about Youth Team Workers or Social Workers were very positive. More care leavers than children and young people (11-17yrs) in care in Aberdeen trusted their worker (79% to 69%) and found it easy to get in touch with them (75% to 58%). Workers came second only to friends as providers of emotional support identified by care leavers.



- 43% of care leavers had a pet, which is a significantly greater proportion than the 28% of the Bright Spots comparator group. Over half (54%) of care leavers with pets felt they were a source of emotional support.
- More than nine in ten of care leavers (92%) who answered felt that they had a person who they trusted, who helped them and stuck by them no matter what. This is significantly above the proportion for the Bright Spots comparator group (86%). 96% had a person who listened to them. 90% had a person who believed they would be a success. 88% had a person who told them when they'd done well.
- Care leavers (94%) in Aberdeen more often had access to the internet at home compared to young people (83%) in the Bright Spots comparator group.

Areas for consideration stemming from the survey responses from those aged 16-26:

- Three in four young people with experience of care felt that where they lived now was right for them. One in four did not. 30% did not 'always' feel safe in their home and 36% did not 'always' feel safe in their neighbourhood. 41% did not 'always' feel settled in their home.
- One in five (22%) care leavers felt lonely 'often/always', over twice the rate for young people in the general population. This was more than seven times the rate for young people in the general population (3%). One in six care leavers (17%) did not have at least one good friend. This is more than eight times greater than the rate for young people in general population (2%).
- Over a third (35%) young people indicated that they had a long-term health problem or disability, and over half (27) of those providing further information mentioned mental health conditions (most commonly depression and anxiety).
- Nearly half (47%) of care leavers in Aberdeen were not in education, employment or training compared to just 13% of 16-24 year-olds in the general population. The proportion finding it difficult to get by financially was almost three times that of the general population of 16-24 year-olds.
  - Almost a third of care leavers (31%) gave low scores for happiness with their appearance. The Bright Spots comparator group figure was 28%.
  - 54% of care leavers reported high or very high happiness the previous day compared to 75% of young people (16-24yrs) in the general UK population. Care leavers in Aberdeen also had greater levels of anxiety the previous day, with almost a third of care leavers (31%) giving high anxiety scores compared to 22% of the general population.

Over a third of care leavers gave low anxiety scores, and this rate was just under that of the general population (35% to 37%). One in five care leavers (21%) gave very high scores when asked to what extent they felt things they did in their lives were worthwhile.

There was a degree of polarisation in Aberdeen, with wellbeing indicators suggesting some care leavers doing very well, and others doing much less well. Wellbeing findings in Aberdeen were broadly similar to the Bright Spots comparator group. There are indications from the survey, that the structural inequalities that exist for our young care leavers disproportionately impacts on them. We recognise that as a partnership we need to continue our efforts to mitigate these inequalities and support our care leavers to maximise their potential.



As noted the above findings require to be read with caution. It is important that assumptions are not made while we work with CELCIS over the coming months to dig into the data to better understand the responses given by our young people. This activity will also support us to ensure we target our improvement activities on the correct areas.

This project has encompassed the ethos intrinsic to the Promise 5 Foundations having provided our care experienced community the opportunity to share their voice, and feel they are genuinely being listened to. The findings will be fully considered as we transition to Plan 24 – 30 and as we refresh single service and multi-agency Plans such as our Children's Services Plan.

### **Undertaking Strategic Analysis 23/34**

We have continued to work together as a Community Planning Partnership, exploring factors contributing to children and young people being placed within the care system to enable shared work to prevent escalation where possible. We continue to focus on the children and young people on the edges of care, those in conflict with the law, those who experience multiple traumas and children with disabilities. These are intrinsic to our Children's Services Plan.

Collaboration has taken place, led by NHS Grampian and children's social work, to engage with our Care Experienced Community regarding their wellbeing experiences in order to improve health access. We know those leaving the care system, reflecting their often complex health needs, intrinsic to trauma they experienced in early childhood can struggle to access key health services. Work is underway to develop an equitable access pathway for our care experienced community in terms of their health and wellbeing needs. This process has incorporated consideration of the transition process from children's to adult health services, which our young people tell is remains an area where improvement is required. This also recognises research that evidences health outcomes for care experienced young adults are among the poorest of all groups. We anticipate this pathway being in place by 2025. This is of critical importance given that over a third (35%) young people indicated in a recent Brights Spots survey that they had a long-term health problem or disability, and over half (27) of those providing further information mentioned mental health conditions, most commonly depression and anxiety.

A formal mechanism has been established for the Aberdeen City Council Executive Director Families and Communities and Chief Officers to review any proposals for out of authority placements for children and young people. This process is helping to identify vulnerabilities in our system contributing to children entering the care system and will support our system shift towards prevention.

### **Improved systems**

All children in care have access to a social worker and a multi-agency plan ensuring health, care and educational needs are actively addressed. The Bright Spots survey results tell us that more than half of children and young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen had the same social worker over the last year and significantly fewer children and young people had three or more social workers in this period compared to the Bright Spots comparator group.

There are well-established formal review processes which have been enhanced following the adoption of D365. Our Educational Psychology Service has now moved over to the platform with plans progressing for the Housing Service to transition to D365 too. Adopting the same system

will help remove some of the challenges faced in joining data sets from different data platforms and help build an accurate and up to date chronology, this should help us to plan and support care leavers more effectively.

### **Support for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

NHS Grampian has set up a specific clinic to complete Initial Health Assessment (IHA) for UASC under the age of 18 in response to the rise increasing presentations. Children and young people attend with support from a trusted professional and the support has been well received with attendance sitting at 90%. A part-time nursing post that is currently advertised to support the growth of this clinic and there are efforts to identify a budget to enable medical input, making the clinic a one-stop appointment.

### **Delivery of Intensive Support**

Our Craigielea Intensive Support Service supported 52 young people as an alternative to care in 2023/24. The impact of poverty continues to be recognised among this group and our support included ensuring families basic needs were met. Funding provided by Tiny Changes supported a continuing focus on family wellbeing. Along with our 3rd sector partner Includem and other community partners including SHMU and Sport Aberdeen, children, young people and families achieved a range of positive outcomes across academic subjects, award programs and community initiatives. Outdoor group work activity sessions were facilitated and young people supported to prepare for independent living. There are plans in place for staff to undertake training to support an increased provision of dynamic youth awards for our young people moving forward.

Support plans are holistic and utilise relational approaches. Systemic discussions with young people, their family, and a range of professionals - social workers, teachers family resource workers, family aid and a mental health practitioner ensure planning is very much led by the identified needs of the young people.

The service continues to provide whole family support, preventing breakdown, while maintaining and nurturing relationships. Over 80% of the young people who have engaged with Craigielea support have been supported to remain within a community setting. There has been a significant increase in the number of young people referred for support, in diverse circumstances. Group work has been identified as a need for families. This includes an adults wellbeing group, peer mentoring opportunities, peer group work offering socialisation to isolated young people, family art sessions focusing on nurture, achievement, capacity building as well as relational based work and community networking. This work will be maintained.

### **Further progress on establishing our Bairns Hoose**

Aberdeen City was awarded Bairns Hoose Pathfinder status in November 2023 and this has provided a focus to developing a multi-agency collocated provision to support children and young people who have experienced harm and abuse. This provision will be well connected to our wider family support offer but will ensure the child's recovery is at the forefront of our intervention from the outset. We have partnered with the University of Edinburgh to evaluate our implementation of our Bairns Hoose. An early Pathfinder activity was to undertake a self-assessment of our current practice against the Bairns Hoose Standards. This will be repeated at different stages of the Pathfinder phase. The Pathfinder phase will run up to 31/3/26.

Our Bairns' Hoose Delivery Group (BHDG) is a multi-agency oversight group, preparing and progressing our changes under 5 intrinsically linked work streams, VOICE, SYSTEMS & PROCESSES, CAPITAL, GOVERNANCE, and EVALUATION. The group meet regularly to progress the work required to deliver our Bairns' Hoose, learning from our children, their families and all professionals working in this area what is currently working well, and where improvements must be made.

The building we have identified as our Bairns Hoose offers flexibility in terms of the physical space required for a Bairns Hoose as well as good transport links. Central to delivery of a Bairns Hoose is the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM), introduced across Aberdeen City in November 2022. Once building works have been completed the Aberdeen City SCIM trained staff (Police and Social Work) will relocate to the Bairns Hoose.



Building on our existing partnership and alignment with the Fit Like Service, Children 1st will work to develop a trauma recovery service. Children's Rights and advocacy will be central to this role. This activity will build on the ongoing efforts to capture the voice and views of children, young people and families going through child protection processes. Their voices have directly influenced the planning for the design of the proposed Bairns Hoose.

Our achievements within this reporting period so far have included:

- A structural 'trauma flow' for the Bairns' Hoose was finalized, and approved by full Council.
- Police Scotland and Social Work capacity has been enhanced to ensure all joint interviews utilise the SCIM.
- Advocacy Workers were recruited and inducted, and an organizational development plan for the Bairns' Hoose team was developed
- Work was initiated to ensure alignment of existing processes and practices to the Bairns' Hoose Standards. Operational guidance with clear roles and remits is being developed.
- Learning from the Year 1 evaluation of SCIM delivery was integrated into BH planning.
- A communications plan to engage across the Children's Services workforce was developed.

We look forward to opening our Bairns' Hoose in 2025.

### Development of a Family Support Model

Extensive multi-agency planning is well underway to develop our approaches to Family Support ensuring preventative intervention mitigates the escalation of children, young people and families from a crisis. Our proposed Family Support Model (FSM) will be holistic and seek to bring greater coordination of whole family support activity, with a particular focus on the joining of children and adult services. Through our work as a Fairer Futures Partnership, we will develop a systems

learning approach and seek to utilise the lived experiences of individuals both in terms of shaping the support offer as well as providing support to others. The Bright Spots learning that a higher proportion of those aged 4-7yrs who said that they don't always feel safe where they live is a key consideration for those leading the work.

Scottish Government has committed to providing practical support to enhance the development of this approach and to capture learning to share nationally. We will test our planning in a specific neighbourhood within the City over the coming 12 months. Our approach recognises the importance of establishing a community space that is accessible without 'referral' and provides an environment that is welcoming and trauma informed. Strong links will be established to our Child Poverty planning and supporting parents routes back into employment. Learning from this approach will inform the scaling up of this approach across our City.

### **Recommissioning Family Support Services**

As an authority we have recommissioned key family support services from our valued 3rd Sector partners. Our model ensures early and preventative support to families including services they can access directly. The shape of these services was directly influenced by feedback on the experiences of families and young people as well as from stakeholders.

We have adopted an approach that supports a stronger alignment for our family support services. This will ensure greater flexibility and collaboration by services as well as a responsiveness to demand and need as opposed to one which is restricted by contracts. This will minimise service duplication and identified gaps are quickly responded to.

**In summary,** we are pleased that the Bright Spots survey found that six out of seven (86%) children and young people in care (8-17yrs) felt their lives were getting better and believe this reflects positively on the work we have undertaken to deliver on the Promise. Our young people have told us that they value the stability of having the same social worker. Our focus on relational practice is central to delivery of support and improving outcomes.

Work is well underway to define and establish our model of Family Support through our Fairer Futures Partnership with Scottish Government, this will include the support provided to children, young people and families via our Bairns Hoose and focus heavily on transitions between children and adult services. As evidenced by our participation in Bright Sports we actively seek and respond to feedback, and take pride in taking an agile approach to respond to emerging need as is evident in our work to support UASC. This agility will continue to be important as we move to delivery of Plan 24-30.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Scale up Edge of Care Pilots as part of our emerging model of Family Support (Fairer Futures Partnership)
- Conclude activity to ensure all children and young people leaving care are offered a health assessment to identify gaps in their health provision and needs.
- Remain focused on reducing the number of children entering the care system.

- Continue to ensure the design and delivery of our Bairsns Hoose is informed by the voice and views of children, young people and their families. Utilise StART Tool to evidence embedding Bairsns Hoose Standards across our partnership.
- Respond positively to the Bright Spots feedback

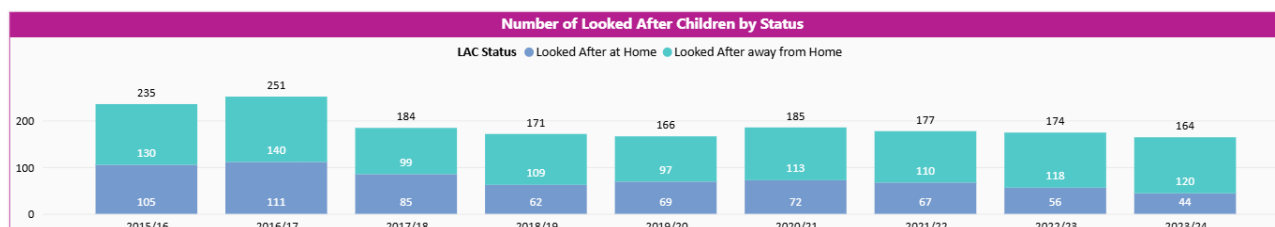
### On a right to education, Plan 21-24 says:

- Care experienced children and young people will receive all they need to thrive at school.
- There will be no barriers to their (CEYP) engagement with education and schools will know and cherish their care experienced pupils.
- School improvement plans will value and recognise the needs of their care experienced pupils with robust tracking of attendance and attainment so that support can be given early.
- Care experienced young people will be actively participating in all subjects and extra-curricular activities in schools
- The formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from education will end.
- Schools will support and ensure care experienced young people go on to genuinely positive destinations, such as further education or employment.

### School Improvement Plans and Tracking

All School Improvement Plans now recognise the needs of their care experienced. Significant time has been invested in improving the tracking of care experienced young people. Data is collected at 3 points during the year and the progress of care experienced young people is an agenda item on all school attainment reviews. Headteachers are now asked to share plans in place for supporting improvement in attainment for care experienced learners. The new pupil tracking system being adopted by all secondary schools which links to the systems already in place for primary schools, will allow us to extract live data on the progress of all care experienced learners and plan appropriate interventions to support increased attainment, including ensuring sufficient breadth of curriculum.

The number of children who have a looked after status in our schools has decreased.



### Role of the Virtual School

The Virtual School continues to support children and young people. Direct work is primarily focused around children and young people within our Children's homes in the city with a focus on working towards re- engagement with school or moving into a positive post school destinations. The Virtual School toolkit is in the process of being reviewed given emerging vulnerabilities in some attainment and positive destinations data. A recent Bright Spots survey tells us that nearly half (47%) of care leavers in Aberdeen were not in education, employment or training compared to just 13% of 16-24 year-olds in the general population. The proportion finding it difficult to get by financially was almost three times that of the general population of 16-24 year-olds. This would suggest that our supports require to be reviewed to support improvement in the longer term.



The Council have recently restructured and now have education, children's social work, housing and corporate landlord sitting in the same directorate. Chief Officers are currently collaborating to determine the resources required to coordinate the work of all Clusters as they prioritise the needs of those at risk of/who have experienced care. It is thought that this will lead to more integrated teams supporting those who have experienced care both during school years and beyond.

### **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)**

Data sharing arrangements with Education means that those who are care experienced are flagged on the SDS database. Validation meetings (with guidance teams) take place to enable the changing needs of individual pupils to be considered on an ongoing basis. This information provides the basis for SDS targeted services, providing more intensive support through a coaching approach, which is delivered on a 1:1 basis. SDS continues to embed a coaching approach to building relationships with care experienced young people through our CIAG services, utilising feedback and research to drive continuous improvement

### **ABZ Campus to broaden the curriculum**

Following the launch of Phase 1 of ABZ Campus in Session 2023-24, planning swiftly commenced for the introduction of Phase 2 in 2024-25. Key additions to ABZ Campus through Phase 2 were:-

- An increase in the range and scope of school-based and partner-led courses from 31 2023/24 to 54 2024/25.
- An introduction to greater regional working between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.
- An introduction of a new suite of 14 anytime/twilight courses to be available across Aberdeen City and 'Shire young people, delivered by partners and schools.
- Continued commitment to the importance of listening to our young people and their experiences of our ABZ Campus Courses
- The piloting of an ASN Employability experience for young people with more complex needs.

For session 2024-25, we have successfully increased the range of courses to support the delivery of a broader range of pathways more suited to some. Over 1200 applications were

received for the 54 Phase 2 ABZ Campus courses offered for session 2024-25, an increase in applications of around 300. This resulted in a total of 846 places offered to young people. 15 of these places were taken up by Care Experienced young people.

Regular reporting on our progress with [ABZ Campus](#) evidences how we continue to listen to our young people about their experiences of ABZ Campus. Work to broaden the offer continues in addition to consideration of further partnerships with local business in order to offer bespoke work experience packages for young people to complement the work experience placements offered by the Council.

There is evidence that our children and young people are accessing a broader range of experiences and courses in school. Bespoke programmes have been established to provide opportunities to develop navigation and hillwalking skills as part of their youth achievement and John Muir awards, as well as 6 week courses to learn about vehicle mechanics. Our care experienced young people are offered the opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's awards as a supported group as well as through school channels and this will continue.

**NESCOL**

NESCOL works closely throughout the academic year with local authority social work teams to ensure opportunities exist for transition support into College. The College also works closely with regional universities to ensure that support from college to university is seamless and supportive.



**Sport Aberdeen**

Sport Aberdeen provide a leadership programme for Care Experienced Young People over school holidays, which has resulted in some participants volunteering within universal Active Schools programme. Over the last year, 40 bikes and safety equipment have been allocated to care experienced young people in partnership with Angus Cycle Hubs and young people have benefited from a targeted Learn to Swim programme funded by Scottish Swimming. Access to volunteering for young people was also made available through a horse care course at Hayfield Riding Centre which led to 5 young people achieving a national progression award from the University of Highlands and Islands for Horse Care.

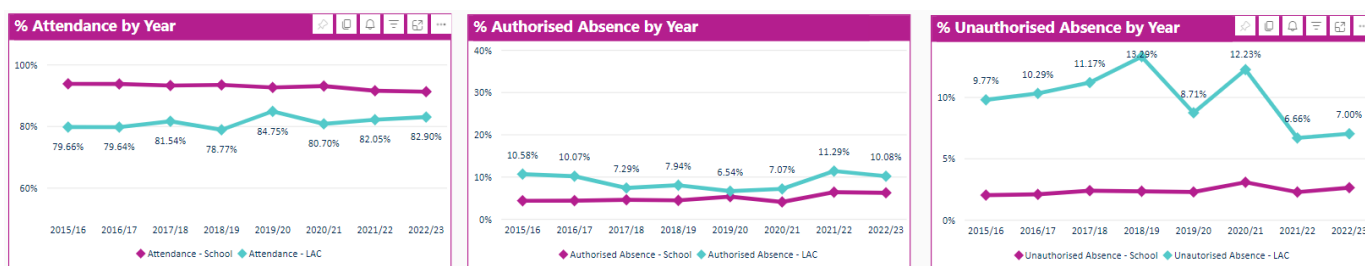


## Pathways for those with additional support needs

A wide network has been established to support the development of the #WHATif (Inspiring Futures ) pathway pilot. The pilot will offer 5+ participants (some of whom will be care experienced or have experienced care) the opportunity to develop and apply life and employability skills in a workplace which is of relevance to their personal motivators, skill sets and future aspirations. These include Aberdeen North Foodbank, King's Church Foodbank Warehouse, The Bridge Cafe, Dyce ELC, Dyce Primary, Instant Neighbour and Bon Accord Care – Kingswood Court Day Centre.

## Attendance

The attendance for those looked away from home has increased and is now 90.99%, almost in line with their peers 91.14% . Attendance for children and young people looked after at home has increased over the last 3 years from 80.70% to 82.90%, however this is still significantly below peers and below pre pandemic levels of 84.75%.



Attendance is tracked monthly and an increased focus on the recording of attendance has resulted in more accurate reporting of our Looked After Children who are on flexible pathways which involve input from 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector and other partners. We recognise the need to continue to focus on improving attendance.

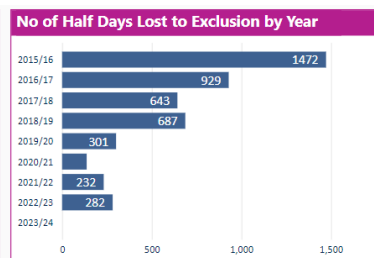
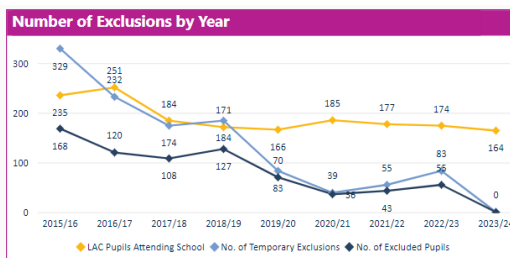
## Exclusion

The number of exclusions has risen slightly for the second year following a steady reduction over the previous 5 years. Validated data shows that children who are looked after at home continue to be more likely to be excluded than those Looked After away from home. The number of primary age Looked after young people excluded has steadily reduced over the last 5 years and is at the lowest it has been in the last 8 years. There has been a rise in the number of secondary Looked After Young people excluded for the second year running, further emphasising the need to broaden the curriculum further.

There is a need to broaden the curriculum at individual school level in order to offer a wider range of courses to suit all learners. This requires to be done alongside the work on Phases 2 and 3 of ABZ campus.



Academic Year	Temp. Exclusion	No. of Pupils Excluded	No. of Half Days Lost	No. of Days Lost
2015/16	1,400.00	714.89	6,263.83	3,131.91
2016/17	924.30	478.09	3,701.20	1,850.60
2017/18	945.65	586.96	3,494.57	1,747.28
2018/19	1,076.02	742.69	4,017.54	2,008.77
2019/20	500.00	421.69	1,813.25	906.63
2020/21	210.81	194.59	740.54	370.27
2021/22	310.73	242.94	1,310.73	655.37
2022/23	477.01	316.09	1,620.69	810.34



There are no informal exclusions of care experienced young people, however a few children are not able to attend school full time and this is being addressed by the service as there is evidence that this practice is increasing the likelihood of children entering the care system.

The legislative framework around exclusion does not support delivery of The Promise aspiration and this could compromise full delivery of this action. The service will update the Minimising Exclusion Policy and guidance when Included, Engaged and Involved is refreshed by March 2025.

### Mental health and wellbeing

The mental health of our children and young people is improving. All settings continue to participate in the Schools Health and wellbeing Improvement Network ([SHINE](#)) mental wellbeing survey and the ACC Physical Health and Wellbeing survey to support our understanding of the needs of all P6/7 and Secondary learners across our settings.

The interventions provided and work undertaken across our settings has led to an improved data picture. Positive improvements were seen in a number of areas compared to the previous two survey returns (March 2022 & November 2022). Of particular interest were the following:

- reduction of pupils reporting low mood and at risk of depression
- improvements in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which measures mental health difficulties
- increases in reported self-confidence levels and optimism
- improvements in physical health
- improvements in feelings of safety, inclusion, good health, aspects of sleep, and being listened to.

Generally, Aberdeen City outcomes now sit above national comparator data, although interrogation by Looked After status of not possible. That said, there is correlation with the Bright Spots data feedback where 70% of young people gave high or very high scores (7 to 10) for happiness with the way they look. This is significantly higher than the proportion of the Bright Spots comparator group (61%). The Bright Spots data also showed that the proportion of children and young people in Aberdeen City who spent time outdoors in nature more than once a week (88% of children (8-11yrs) and 89% of young people (11-17yrs)) was higher than the general Scottish population (67%). The service will continue to monitor the strength of wellbeing support available in our schools and continues to explore a means of capturing data by group within the SHINE survey.

## **Ensuring the appropriateness of environments**

School Circle Framework leads continue to support implementation of the Circle Framework in order to improve the quality and accessibility of learning environments. All schools have engaged in the development with between 60 and 70% of schools attending regular online network meetings. Qualitative feedback from Quality Improvement visits indicate that there has been impact, with an improved quality of learning environments reported in Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland inspection reports. Staff confidence and knowledge continues to grow.

During session 23/24 we increased our partnership working with the NHS Speech and language service through delivering joint sessions and ensuring there is consistency of language and appearance of learning environments. Further collaboration with Speech and Language, health visitors and other allied health professionals is planned for session 24/25.

## **Understanding groups, including the care experienced and those experiencing poverty.**

Updated school profiles and a new PowerBi Broad General Education tool, help school leaders drill down into data by SIMD profile, by demographic information and cohort. As a result, Head Teachers have easier access to information allowing them to determine the gap in their school by identifying target groups/pupils experiencing disadvantage. The use of these tools will be monitored over session 2024/25 to help drive more consistent usage.

At authority wide meetings over session 2023/24, several sessions have focused on effective use of data, case studies, attendance and opportunities to have professional dialogue whilst building knowledge and confidence. Head Teachers have also benefitted from sharing good practice with colleagues in a similar sector as well as across an Associated School Group. The findings of a recent review of the adequacy of our provision for all children with additional support needs will be used to support the further identification of next steps.

## **SPACE (Supported Physical Activity for Care Experienced) programme**

The Virtual School team works closely with Sport Aberdeen through the SPACE programme, to reduce barriers to engagement with extra-curricular activities. This provides children and young people with meaningful active and social activities, which contribute to building capacity, confidence, resilience and a forming a sense of community. In addition, SPACE aims to align with and deliver on Sport Aberdeen's commitment to keep the promise.

To achieve its outcomes and objectives, SPACE delivers the following provision:

- 1-2-1 and small group sport and physical activity interventions as part of the school day.
- Opportunities to achieve SQA accreditation through activities e.g. National Progression Award – Level 4 Horse Care with University of Highlands and Islands.
- Partnership working with Virtual School Aberdeen, CSW and 3rd sector organisations.
- Support access to sport and physical activity for ACC care experienced children and young people who are placed in another authority.
- Provide opportunities for parent and caregiver engagement with the service.
- Support access to a range of activities through the Active Schools universal, targeted and specialist framework.

Those who have experienced care will continue to have priority access to Active Schools activities. The SPACE programme has supported 33 Care experienced young people with 4 being supported to have a positive destination which made use of sport and physical activity skills.

### **Supporting Our Vulnerable Learners into Positive Destinations**

During session 2023/24 Scottish Attainment Challenge has funded Pathways Advocates who have supported 248 vulnerable young people (202 are care experienced) to choose and engage in pathways to enable their entering a positive post school destination. The number of young people supported in each of the 11 schools has differed according to identified need with the number supported ranging from 9 to 57 per school.

Attendance, positive relationships and progress in school are tracked for each young person, with these fluctuating across the session for differing reasons and often signalling a need for intervention. Of the 27 young people who have been closed to the Pathways Advocate, 25 have moved into a positive destination with the other 2 who have been identified as moving into a negative destination, having identified supports beyond school through Skills Development Scotland. Building on the successes of this year funding allocation for Pathway Advocates has been increased for next session with all schools having a minimum of 0.2FTE and additional resource allocated proportionally based on need.

SDS continues to look at ways to support more care experienced people into apprenticeships. Recognising that care experienced young people may take longer to make sustained positive transitions after leaving school, and may require more attempts to do so, SDS worked with Scottish Government to extend enhanced contribution rates for care Modern Apprentices from age 19 up to the age of 29.

SDS continue to support care experienced young people to access opportunities, services, and support through additional financial support. Local teams undertook work with SAAS on the Care Experience Bursary to ensure that SDS was added to a list of signatories, enabling careers advisers to confirm an individual's status as care experienced. All of this work aims to ensure that the routes and pathways we fund are genuinely open to everyone.

### **Preventing children from experiencing poverty wherever possible**

Schools continue to address child poverty at school level with a range of approaches in place to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis on families. We continue to work with other services across the Council and other agencies to share data and information on child poverty appropriately.

Schools provide free breakfast provision/clubs, promotion of the uptake of free school meals, clothing grants and other benefits, school uniform and clothing swaps, partnerships with foodbanks and signpost families to the financial inclusion team. We routinely [evaluate](#) the impact of arrangements in order to secure continuous improvement. Close collaboration and joined up working with our Money Advisors and workers who support families in their homes means children and families are able to be signposted to the most appropriate source of support and interventions are more timely and effective.

The Support for Families Information Booklet is shared 3 times per year electronically through school communication channels and hard copies are available in schools for staff to issue e.g. to new families enrolling. The week following the email being sent in July 2024 saw:

- 549 calculations completed.
- £135,458.20 per week of new benefits.
- 98.5% of the completed calculations showed an entitlement to benefits.

Money advisors help parents and carers to deal with creditors, negotiate payment plans, apply for insolvency options, and access emergency funds or food banks if needed. Feedback from parents has been very positive.

### **Anti-bullying approaches**

Despite recent work to refresh our Anti-bullying policy, the Bright Spots survey told us that a significantly higher proportion (43%) of children and young people (8-11yrs) in Aberdeen reported being afraid of going to school because of bullying when compared to the Bright Spots comparator group. We are pleased that most of those who reported being were afraid were getting help, but must work to understand this better to help us determine appropriate next steps.

**In summary**, there is evidence of improved quality across all sectors, although a level of variability still exists, particularly across secondary, and this is being prioritised by the education service. Data trends are heavily influenced by the relative size of cohorts, and there will be a need to keep progress under routine review.

Work continues at pace to ensure our care experienced young people are able to fulfil their potential through our work to broaden the curriculum and through an identified Pathways Advocate to help empower and enable young people of secondary school age to be in a position to thrive upon leaving schools. All schools now recognise the needs of care experienced children and young people in their improvement plans and there are central tracking arrangements in place which are being carefully monitored to ensure that they are used as an early warning system to help improve attendance, reduce levels of exclusion in secondary and support all of our young people who have, or continue, experience care into a positive post school destination. Despite all of this, there is clearly more to do.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Routinely analyse live outcome data for those who are care experienced to enable a more agile response to increase full time attendance in school
- Scale up our approach to Pathways Advocates
- Broaden the curriculum further through the third phase of ABZ Campus and in individual schools
- Conclude our review our Virtual School Toolkit and establish the team we need to work across the Directorate to support our children and families. Test new approaches with multi-disciplinary partners to help care experienced young people secure positive sustained destinations

- Undertake further engagement to understand those who feel afraid to attend school due to bullying.

#### **On relationships, Plan 21-24 says:**

- All children living in and around Scotland's 'care system' will be maintaining safe, loving relationships that are important to them.
- There will be no barriers to 'contact' and children will be supported to have time with people they care about.

#### **On brothers and sisters, Plan 21-24 says:**

- Scotland will stop the practice of separating brothers and sisters, unless for reasons of safety.
- Relationships between brothers and sisters will be cherished and protected across decision making and through the culture and values of the people who care for them.

### **Supporting relationships that are important**

We acknowledge that the national shortage of foster carers, including carers (and adopters) with capacity to care for large sibling groups remains is a challenge. This continues to impact on our balance of care but also our capacity to always place large sibling groups in the same setting. Although the instances when we have do so are small we want to reach a position where this is not the case. Although reducing, the number of children and young people placed with external fostering agencies requires us to think carefully about how we support children and young people to maintain contact with people that are important to them.

The Bright spots survey illustrated that almost all (99%) of young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen felt that they had an adult who they trusted and who sticks by them no matter what; a significantly higher percentage than the average (91%) of the Bright Spots comparator group of local authorities. All of the youngest children (4- 7yrs) trusted the adults they lived with, and all children aged 8-11yrs trusted the adults they live with 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. 95% of 8-11yrs and 94% of 11-17yrs indicated that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. This illustrates that despite the challenges, our children are broadly well supported.

The Bright Spots survey also tells us that two-thirds (66%) of comments about Youth Team Workers or Social Workers were very positive. More care leavers than children and young people (11-17yrs) in care in Aberdeen trusted their worker (79% to 69%) and found it easy to get in touch with them (75% to 58%). Workers came second only to friends as providers of emotional support identified by care leavers.

The continued recruitment of nurturing carers, within the Council's fostering resources is essential to help ensure children are only separated from their siblings because that is in their best interest and not due to limited resources. The same applies to keeping children in their home area.

## **Supporting brothers and sisters**

Following on the development of a Brothers and Sisters position statement, the concept of and the ethos behind the statement continues to be embedded and developed across and throughout children's social work. Our planning for children continues to take a child centred approach. Independent Reviewers ensure the voice and views of our young people are central to their planning. This includes capturing and monitoring their contact with people that are important to them. Encouragingly, 61% of all children aged 8-11yrs with brothers and sisters felt that the time they were able to spend with them was 'just the right amount' in the Bright Spots survey, significantly higher than the Bright Spots comparator group (47%). However, the Bright Spots survey also highlights that children between 8 and 17 reported mixed views and experiences of family time, and the complexity of many family arrangements came across, such as children seeing some of their brothers and sisters but not others. There is a need for us to continue to be guided by the voices of our children and young people.

Data collection in respect of brothers and sisters is highly complex and nationally and locally requires further development. We continue to engage with Scottish Government and CELCIS to support our continuing development and this will inform our next steps. Our emphasis is on social work practice to promote and record sibling relationships. This ensures that even when brothers and sisters cannot live together their care plans promote maintaining relationships in a meaningful manner.

There are challenges without clear nationally agreed definitions to drive consistency. The Scottish Government recognise the complexity of this data, which can be held across a number of systems. Accordingly the plan for reporting on this data is one which will continue to evolve over the coming years. A monitoring of the number and type of placements where siblings who lived together are separated with further clarity required regarding the performance of the local authorities to maintain relationships is considered essential to support monitoring of this priority.

## **Family Time Hub Service**

Family contact can be a significant stressor for kinship placements. Consequently we have aligned support from the kinship service with the Family Time Hub Service (our setting that supports family contact). Our approach has sought to capture the voice of children, young people and kinship carers/families to identify priority areas for support and service development. We have developed a suite of helpful information for children, young people and families to promote positive family contact. This, we believe, will reduce barriers to children being able to maintain safe and loving relationships with those important to them and also for the need for the Service to be involved in their facilitation.

Our approach will continue to be developed in line with feedback from our kinship families and the voice of our children and young people to iteratively create support that meet their needs. Reflecting our duty to minimise the intervention of the state into family life we will continue to embed a more flexible and supportive approach to managing family time arrangements for children and young people living in kinships families. Understanding and quantifying the demand and range of contact that is facilitated to prioritise the assessment element, will inform our future planning and increase our use of data to support reporting in relation to brothers and sisters.

### **Support for Kinship carers**

The Kinship Team continue to build relationships with Third sector organisations to augment and enhance the offer of support accessible to carers. In doing so we have raised the profile of kinship carers and their needs to ensure the support is effective and easy to access. A Community Planning Improvement Project enabled a 900% increase in the number of Third Sector partners offering support to kinship carers. Kinship carers have told us that this activity has made them feel more connected to each other and to the wider support community in our City.

### **Support from the Adoption Team**

The Adoption team promote family time between adopted children and their siblings as routine. The team also promotes children maintaining links to care givers once they move to adoption. The Fostering team support foster carers to promote and maintain significant relationships in a child's life. This can include arranging 'play dates' with friends, maintaining contact and communication with previous carers, supporting contact with brothers, sisters and external family members or promoting and recognising special events such as parents or siblings birthdays with a card or gift. This practice will be maintained.

### **Our Children's Houses**

Our local residential children's homes and Throughcare/Aftercare service continues to be developed with and for young people and all continue to be highly evaluated by the Care Inspectorate (very good evaluations across all themes). The sense of safe relationships as key to making successful transitions continues to be developed.

We are proud that there have been very few non-sustained tenancies; very few instances of homelessness or negative accommodation outcomes due largely to the enduring relationships as a key aspect of aftercare support.

We recognise that our capacity to provide long term local residential care for children with complex disabilities/enduring needs is very limited. As a consequence we are looking with one of partners to develop a small residential provision for four young people. This we envisage will support us to bring some young children back to the city who are currently placed out with, while also preventing young people going out of the city in the first instance.

### **Supports from the Third Sector**

Avenue have developed a priority referral route for care experienced children and family to access a Family Time service, Avenue support families with financial barriers regarding travel costs and some flexibility to increase access for families.

**In summary**, our work to support relationships is well developed. When brothers and sisters cannot live together we ensure that their relationship is maintained through regular and bespoke contact arrangements. The reducing number of young people placed Independent Fostering Agencies foster carers is welcomed. We want to continue to grow our internal fostering/adoption capacity to ensure brothers and sisters can remain together where such is in their best interests but also local to other family members who are important to them.

Our investment in kinship care supports continues to pay dividend and is enabling families to manage family time in a manner that is beneficial to the child/young person. This is an area we want to build on further.

We await the Scottish Governments response to the Children’s Hearing Review but are ensuring our practice locally takes full account of the capturing the voice and views of children and young to ensure they continue to have meaningful relationships with people that are important to them.

#### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Aligned to the Government’s response to the Hearings System review, further improve decision making to ensure that maintaining relationships for children and young people is aligned to the needs of the child
- Continue to embed feedback from children, young people and kinship families to ensure our support offer continues to meet need.
- Expand our local foster care provision to address the balance of care.
- Expand local residential provision for children with disabilities/complex needs.
- Continue to engage with Scottish Government in relation to data collection in respect of brothers and sisters.

#### **On youth justice, Plan 21-24 says:**

- The disproportionate criminalisation of care experienced children and young people will end
- 16-and 17-year-olds will no longer be placed in Young Offenders Institutes for sentence or on remand
- There will be sufficient community-based alternatives so that detention is a last resort
- Children who do need to have their liberty restricted will be cared for in small, secure, safe, trauma-informed environments that uphold their rights.

#### **Diversionsary Work 23/24**

Considerable multi-agency and diversionsary work continues to take place across the Partnership between Children’s Social Work (CSW), Justice Social Work, Police Scotland, SCRA and our court system in the city. We have had no under 18s placed in young offenders institutions (YOI) in the last year and no young person has been placed in secure accommodation on offence grounds. Robust processes are in place which continue to flag under 18’s appearing in court to the relevant supports. Effective communication is well developed across the relevant systems to ensure information is shared in a timely manner, helping to ensure no child has been remanded unnecessarily.

Extensive work has been undertaken preparing for the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. The planning includes consideration of community-based alternatives to deprivation of liberty required to ensure that children aren’t placed in secure accommodation or YOI unnecessarily. The Children’s Social Work team are well connected to the CYCJ team leading on the Act. We have also participated in national work on “redesigning secure care”, joining practitioners and senior managers groups/workshops, aimed to seek views



on what secure accommodation model is required to meet the needs of our children and young people. We await the Scottish Governments response to this consultation.

Our next steps will feature reviewing established processes to minimise the risk of a child being placed within YOI. Continuing to develop communication links between police, justice social work and children's social work to ensure that relevant information is shared to inform suitability for a child to be given bail conditions or supervised bail as an alternative to remand.

Police Scotland have employed Early Intervention Workers who to carry out intervention with C&YP in conflict with the law. Disposals which are a diversion from prosecution are used, such as referral to these Early Intervention Workers. Police have an appropriate age of criminal responsibility suite in Aberdeen City, where young people can be seen by Police in a more age appropriate setting. If a young person is to be held for court the next day, this will not be in a cell - a safe space will be made available. The Police continue to have a dedicated Children and Young People team who have developed relationships with children's homes, in order to minimise the unnecessary charging of care experienced young people residing there by implementing processes which don't involve all crimes being reported to the Police.

Our Bairns Hoose will give full effect to all intended expectations including the capacity to support young people under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has been harmful to others. This recognises that in most instances these young people are likely to have experienced abuse and harm themselves. In accordance with the Scottish Governments intention to increase the age of criminal responsibility we have future proofed to the design of our Bairns Hoose. Our Bairns Hoose will include a suite which will enable all young people to give remote evidence to a court. We have engaged with colleagues from SCTS, COPFS and our local judiciary in relation to ensure our design incorporates court expectations and they remain highly supportive of this development.

**In summary,** over the past year we have invested time to ensure we are well placed for the enacting of the Children's (Care & Justice) Bill. There remains uncertainty as to the final shape of the Bill and the funding that will accompany it to allow agencies to give full effect to it.

Our focus on diversion remains strong although aspects of this will move to a new provider in the coming year. We welcome the continuing intention of the Scottish Government to increase the age of criminal responsibility and our developing Bairns Hoose takes full account of this intention.

#### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue to prepare our workforce for the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. Undertake a self-analysis of resource required to give effect to the provisions of the Bill.
- Support commissioned Diversionary Service
- Move forward with our plans for a local Bairns Hoose

### **On advocacy, Plan 21-24 says:**

- All care experienced children and their families will have access to independent advocacy at all stages of their experience of care.
- Advocacy provision will follow the principles set out in the promise.
- Care experienced children and young people will be able to easily access child centred legal advice and representation.

### **Access to Advocacy 23/24**

Children and young people continue to access independent advocacy. The requirement to consider advocacy needs is increasingly embedded into our multi-agency systems. Independent advocacy is provided through the Children's Hearing System and via our Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service. Aberdeen children, young people, and young adults aged 0-26 years old, who are care experienced/involved in child protection processes, can access the Rights Service. Improvement activity includes increased individualised non-instructive advocacy including pre-birth babies, babies, infants, and those who are neurodivergent. As well as safeguarding their rights and participation, this helps tell their story and becomes a relevant 'snapshot' of their life at that time.

The Rights Service works closely with the local Advocacy providers (Who Cares? Scotland and Advocacy Services Aberdeen). All 3 services are committed to ensuring that children can express and make informed and relational choices about who they want to advocate for them. Individuals are signposted to other provision where their need for advocacy falls outside the remit of these services. The 3 services are equally committed to workforce development. Ensuring those with experience of care are able to access lifelong advocacy will be informed by the national Scoping and Delivery Report due to be undertaken in the coming year.

### **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People (UASYP)**

A multi-agency group led by Children's Social Work, continues to meet to plan to plan for the needs of UASYP. Planning takes onboard feedback from young people who have arrived in Aberdeen via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). A new and emerging group are spontaneous arrivals who are contesting the age attributed to them by immigration services. The national Guardianship Service supports all UASYP including those who arrive spontaneously and claim to be minors. Recruitment to a small UASC specialist team commenced in Jan 2024. The team support our expanding community of UASC. The team plans to extend their network linking in with community and 3rds sector resources to help support the complex needs of this community, and sharing idea's with teams in other area's practicing in this specialist area.

### **Those in custody**

If arrested and in Police custody, young people are provided the right to have a solicitor and a responsible person present during formal police processes. If they have psychological impairment which inhibits their understanding, a local authority appointed Appropriate Adult will be present.

## Hearing our children and young people

A recent Bright Spots survey highlighted that 92% of 8-11yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt listened to when decisions were made about their lives, and this was even higher for young people (11- 17yrs) (94%). We are proud of this and will continue to ensure that the voices of our children and young people guide our practice.

**In summary**, continuing progress is being made to support and enable children to fully claim their rights. The full implications of the UNCRC is still being determined as we work through the self-assessment process suggested in the recently published Statutory Guidance. It is likely however, that it will require the Courts to determine the parameters of the incorporation for some young people.

The route map to provide care experienced people access to lifelong advocacy is unclear. The Scottish Government have recently intimated their intention to consult on what a lifelong advocacy service will look like.

Locally we have difficulty accessing legal representation for children and young people which has created delays whilst provision is sought from legal services in the central belt. There is a lack of specialised legal and justice professionals who understand children and young people's behaviour and developmental needs.

### Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:

- Fully engage with the Scottish Government's consultation on the development of a lifelong advocacy service for care experienced young people.
- Assess ourselves against the Statutory Guidance on the UNCRC to ensure that our young people are enabled to fully claim their rights
- Continue to work with others to support UASC
- Continue to work to secure legal representation for those who need specialist advice

### On moving on, Plan 21-24 says:

- Decisions about transitions for young care experienced people who move onto independent living or need to return to a caring environment, will be made based on individual need.
- Each young care experienced adult will experience their transition as consistent, caring, integrated and focussed on their needs, not on 'age of services' criteria
- Housing pathways for care experienced young people will include a range of affordable options that are specifically tailored to their needs and preferences.
- Youth homelessness will be eradicated

## Housing support

Our data indicates the growing numbers of looked after young people remaining in placement on a Continuing Care basis, thus promoting their opportunities for successful transition. The

Throughcare Housing Protocol is well embedded and recognises the statutory duties to care experienced young people and the requirement to support access to housing resource, reducing the risk of homelessness and associated vulnerabilities which can be lifelong. We have developed an integrated model with a Housing and Support Officer collocated in the Youth Team. This supports care experienced young people and UASYP to access housing in a proactive manner. The Bright Spots survey highlighted that three in four young people with experience of care felt that where they lived now was right for them. One in four did not. It also illustrated that:

- 30% did not 'always' feel safe in their home
- 36% did not 'always' feel safe in their neighbourhood; and that
- 41% did not 'always' feel settled in their home.

There is a need for on-going work in this area.

Aberdeen City has been selected to be part of the Prince of Wales Homeward project which aims to eradicate Homelessness. Homeless presentations by young people continue to feature in our data. While the pathway for young people transitioning from care to independent living is well established there are likely to be some young people with a historical episode of care who present as homeless. Addressing this is a focus of the Homeward Project.

### **Young parents with care experience**

Linked to outcomes identified in our LOIP, CSP and Corporate Parenting Plan, The Family Nurse Partnership is now working with care experienced pregnant young parents (mothers and fathers) to provide bespoke support to ensuring they feel confident in becoming parents. As of March 2024 the programme was working with 7 participants known to be Care Experienced, with initial positive feedback. We need to build on this initial engagement to better understand our next steps and scale up this support offer.

### **Learning from the Care Inspectorate Thematic Review**

The Care Inspectorate initiated a [Thematic Review of Disabled Children and Young People's Experience of Social Work Services](#) across all 32 local authorities. The Care Inspectorate were keen to undertake a more in-depth review of four local authority areas. Aberdeen City Council volunteered to be part of this process in order to gain 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. Our participation has provided some key local learning outlined below.

Inspectors noted that 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, but in keeping with partnership audits of practice previously undertaken, the range of communication systems deployed can be a barrier to hearing the voices of disabled children. Children's Social Work will now work closely with colleagues within the Speech and Language Service, and Specialist Occupational Therapist at Child and Family Mental Health 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.

The children's social work organisational structure with a designated Children with Disabilities team was commended. The co-location of the Children with Disabilities Team within a school for children with additional support needs (Orchard Brae) was recognised as innovative and allows for timeous responses to critical need and the protection of children. The dedication of the key personnel within the social work and education service and their investments in the children they mutual 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.

There is evidence that timeous 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 for us to signpost and enhance awareness of community supports. Fit Like Hubs were recognised as a key component to timely community-based support without any requirement for a referral to statutory services. In keeping with the national picture, the volume of complex need across the Local Authority outweighs the support available and this drives an increase in referrals to services below the threshold for intervention by social work which can result 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.

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 a holiday playscheme. There is a need to further enhance community support.

Nationally the quality of record keeping and reports were variable. However, within Aberdeen, the majority of Child's Plans were good or better, this correlates with our own previous audit activity. Parental views are recorded more frequently than those of children. There is a need to amplify the voices of our disabled children and young people, utilising appropriate communication systems to achieve this.

In Aberdeen, transition experiences are variable, however the Care Inspectorate acknowledged that we had recognised this. Our children and families continue to tell us that the transition for children 'aging out' of children's services remains a time of anxiety. Despite work being undertaken, our recent Bright Sports survey highlighted that almost one in five care leavers in Aberdeen did not know who their Youth Team or Social Worker was, compared to less than one in ten of the Bright Spots comparator group. Almost a third had had more than one worker in the last 12 months, and 13% had not had a worker during this time. Significantly fewer care leavers (72%) in Aberdeen said they were involved in their pathway planning compared to young people (87%) in the Bright Spots comparator group. There is clearly more work to be done.

The Scottish Government's [Transition to Adulthood Strategy, September 2023](#), captured recent research, and engagement, on the experiences of children transitioning to adulthood. Work is actively progressing between Adult Social Work and Children's Social Work, Health and

Education services to fully understand the challenges and to implement improvement over the coming year.

Improvement activity required to address the local findings of the Thematic Review will be taken forward both on a single and multi-agency basis.

**In summary,** work is underway to improve the experience of disabled care experienced young people transitioning to adult services and supported living arrangements. This will incorporate the Transition to Adulthood strategy. Supporting to prepare pregnant care experienced young people will remain a focus and contribute to supporting them to manage their housing needs in a manner that protects their child and themselves. Our participation in the Homewards project will support our learning to how we as a City work to eradicate homelessness. This includes youth homelessness some of who will have historical experience of care.

#### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue to improve the transition experience for young people with disabilities and those with complex health needs.
- Continue to explore learning from the Homewards Project to support planning for all young people at risk of homelessness.
- We want to develop our understanding the impact our FNP is having to support care experienced parents to reduce the number of children who are removed from care experienced parents (mothers and fathers).

#### **On physical intervention, Plan 21-24 says:**

- All care experienced children, wherever they live, will be protected from violence and experience the safeguard of equal protection legislation.
- Restraint will always be pain free, will be used rarely, and only when required to keep a child safe
- There will be well communicated and understood guidance in place that upholds children's rights and reflects equal protection legislation.
- The workforce will feel supported to respond to behaviour in a trauma informed way that reflects a deep understanding of the children in their care

Our residential care service continues to focus on promoting recovery from trauma with Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) as our core reference point. Our ethos of care does not require any physical restraint to be taught to staff. Membership in the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group (SPRAG) helps us both contribute to and be informed by its activities which are designed to positively reduce and/or eliminate the use of physical restraint within residential care provision. We continue to develop understanding on the use of physical restraint across every form of care. Reporting procedures are clear for residential care e.g. to Care Inspectorate, however, development is required to ensure oversight across every setting (including Police, Education, Health, etc.). We await imminent national guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools. In preparation for the updated education guidance, there is a formal

recording mechanism in place. We will also be focusing on developing oversight of the use of restraint in fostering and kinships settings as a priority area.

All Police officers are trained in EP legislation as well as various forms of restraint, of which, the training is refreshed annually. All physical intervention must be legal, necessary, proportionate and justified. Restraint will be used when required to keep a young person safe but also protect others including police officers. All officers access mandatory training in being trauma informed, ACRA and UNCRC.

**In summary**, we are beginning to develop a means of better understanding the use of physical intervention, and other restrictive practices, across the partnership and have ensured that our local policies and guidance promote alternatives and trauma informed care. We are still awaiting the national guidance on the use of restraint and restrictive practices in schools and hope that publication will enable delivery of this action within the coming months.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Implement the education guidance when it is published and monitor compliance and emerging trends to inform service delivery
- Develop means of understanding the use of physical restraint and reporting arrangements across every form of care, particularly with external providers and across every setting (incl. Police, Education, Health).

## Our Progress in delivering Priority 2, Whole Family Support

**The Promise says,** 'All families need support at different times of their lives and family support is a crucial emphasis for 21-24. The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises family as the fundamental group in society and the natural environment for growth and wellbeing. Supporting families is a children's rights imperative. 'Families' means all families including families of origin, kinship, foster and adoptive families. Support will not be predicated on the setting of care. Supporting families to stay together and thrive was an imperative before the pandemic and is of even greater import now.'

**On Family Support, Plan 21-24 says:** The 10 principles of intensive family support will be embedded into the practice (planning, commissioning and delivery) of all organisations that support children and their families, directly or indirectly.

- Holistic and relational
- Therapeutic
- Non-stigmatising
- Patient and persistent
- Underpinned by children's rights
- Community Based
- Responsive and timely
- Work with family assets
- Empowerment and agency
- Flexible

### Preparing for a whole system model of Family Support

This year our extensive multi-agency planning has become more developed and work is underway to improve our approaches to Family Support ensuring preventative intervention mitigates the escalation of children, young people and families from a crisis. Our planned approach will be holistic and seek to bring greater coordination of whole family support activity. Adopting a systems learning approach and seeking to utilise the lived experiences of individuals both in terms of shaping the support offer as well as providing support to others.

This approach has been shared with the Scottish Government who have indicated an enthusiasm for the proposed approach and provision of practical support to enhance the development and to capture learning to share nationally. More information on the model can be found here: [Community Planning Aberdeen: Family Support Model Development Plan \(April 2024\)](#)

We will test our planning in a specific neighbourhood within the City over the coming 12 months. This approach recognises the importance of establishing a community space that is accessible without 'referral' and provides an environment that is welcoming and trauma informed. Strong links will be established to our Child Poverty planning and supporting parents routes back into



employment. Learning from this approach will inform the scaling up of this approach across our City.

### **Understanding demand and need**

During COVID we introduced a Request for Assistance (RfA) process to respond more flexibly and timeously to emerging need. We recognise the limits of the current system. Accordingly with partners we are in the process of creating one single pathway for families to access family support services. Ensuring the voices of parents, children and young people are fully captured in the process our service standards were developed in keeping with principles of the Family Support Model.

This year has seen the roll out of Phase 1 of the testing. The RfA prototype system has been shared with partners for comment and suggested improvements have been incorporated where possible. The resource will be integrated into our existing systems to allow a single point of truth for those supporting families as well as a single point of referral. We are looking towards phase 2 where families will be able to self-refer.

### **Further development of our Edge of Care Pilots**

The Pilots have now been operational since November 2022. Our evaluation of their impact indicates that they have had a positive impact on the lives of the young people and families. This can be seen through a range of quantitative and qualitative data which indicates improvements in relation to levels of 'engagement/inclusion' and 'achievement'. The learning and feedback from young people and families indicates that the 'pilots' offer valuable support to young people and families who have an escalating need and risk profile. Adopting a whole family approach has been essential. It is also recognised that levels of need and risk are not static however. How we support families to move up and down the continuum of support without experiencing multiple changes of people supporting them, continues to be an area to work through.

Feedback from staff working in the pilots, strongly supports the value of a co-located and integrated approach to delivering enhanced support to young people and their families. Adopting a relational approach is central to the support offer and staff have been able to build meaningful relationships with young people and families who had become wary and distrusting of professionals. However for many families change takes time and periods of progress can be interspersed with periods of regression. Consequently perseverance and tenacity are key elements to the skill set of staff.

Support being available all year round is considered important by families. Feedback from the young people and families speaks positively of this and the connection staff maintain during holidays. This provides a context to strengthen family relations and for the young people to experience different opportunities with different young people than their normal peer group. It enables progress to be maintained preventing regression.

We have learned that the shape and delivery model needs to be iterative to reflect the needs of the community. Accordingly the size and shape of each Edge of Care Pilot team will vary also recognising that need is not static. Through necessity staff have at times had to work across Pilots and while this can work for a time limited basis it is also important that funding for the Pilots enables staff to be recruited on a permanent basis. Re-aligning the priorities of the Looked After

Children Attainment Fund and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund will enable us to deliver more certainty to the structures.

The Edge of Care Pilots have positively contributed to the outcomes being experienced by young people and their families. As such this type of support is essential to support young people with complex needs who are on the edges of school and care to prevent them being accommodated outwith their family network.

### **Integrated working**

The Kinship Service has developed a partnership with CAMHS to provide wellbeing support to kinship families. Assistant Psychologists, as part of their development, are undertaking extended placements with the kinship service. In doing they provide preventative psychological support as well as group support to kinship families. This model not only enhances the support offer to kinship families but strengthens professional relationships and understanding of each other's role/service. Evaluating this model will be a focus in the coming year.

PEEP continues to be hugely successful in Aberdeen and the team have developed specific groups for Kinship, Fostering and Adoption teams. They are well attended and feedback from carers is that they enjoy the play approach and the relationships forged. PEEP also participates in an Intergenerational group, exemplifying social values and inclusion. The Kinship and Adopters PEEP groups are consistently attended and are co-run by PEEP and staff from the respective services. This model enables adoptive families to forge positive links with other adopters, enhancing their support network and allowing them to share and discover new community resources.

Our Birth Parents Project, led by NHS Grampian, continues. This projects engages with birth parents whose children have been removed from their care on a permanent basis. Through this vastly increased self-awareness, self-confidence and future aspirations have been observed. The birth parents have produced two videos - one describing their lived experience and the second discussing how the recommendations from the project will have a positive impact.

Trauma informed weekly sessions are being delivered to mothers in prison who do not have their children in their care. This work has demonstrated increased supports being made available for some involved and is building the skills and capacity by those who have engaged with the project.

### **Integrated Working at Locality Level**

We have been scaling up new ways of working to support our early intervention work. Continued investment in Youth Workers, Family Learning and Financial Inclusion services through schools is helping deliver early preventative work. The delivery of collaborative and creative approaches to address and meet the needs of children, young people and families across the city continues to be the focus for this resource which is contributing to:

- Increased and easier access to Access to Money support
- Reduced levels of exclusion
- Increased levels of attendance
- Increased levels of parental engagement
- Increased levels of attainment

Learning from this way of working will contribute to the development of our Family Support Model. This resource continues to have a clear remit for intervene early and target support to those children, young people and families most at risk of disengaging from education. Data and feedback from schools, children, young people and families indicates that the resource is proving successful in achieving planned outcomes and is sufficiently agile to be able to respond to emerging needs in a timely manner.

### **'Fit Like' Family Wellbeing Service 23/24**

The multi-agency Fit Like Family Wellbeing service continues to respond to children, young people and families where wellbeing concerns have been identified by professionals. Families are able to self-refer and are doing so in increasing numbers. In the past year 599 new requests were made with 378 (63%) new families offered support.

On average, the Fit Like team provide scaffolding for approximately 400 families. A sample of 115 families who moved on from Fit Like help saw, 76% families went on to engage in universal support, 13% families required social work support and 9% families accessed a service from CAMHS. We saw a variation of the time that families engaged in support ranging from less than 6 months 30%; 6-12 months 33%; 12-18months 20% and 18+ months 17%.

The level of need experienced by families over the past year has intensified with parental mental health, poverty and child and adolescent emotional and mental health being saturated themes in the requests for assistance. The service continues to evolve to respond to the increasing demand for support and complexity prevalent in families lives.

*Getting support from the FitLikeHubs was so scary at the start, luckily for me I was given someone who has been absolutely amazing. She's supported me with so much, I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for her support. She's literally saved my life, which sounds extreme but when someone is so low and life's so difficult and someone comes in and makes such a big impact on how they support you, it can be life changing. To have someone come in and show you so much respect, not judge you and listen to you has not been something I am used to but [worker] has done all this and showed me that I can trust her. She's not given up on me when I thought I wasn't worthy of any support, she's allowed me the time to feel comfortable to be open and honest to her. I feel I still have lots to work on with [worker] but I am so thankful for how much she taken me on with her advice and support and continues to allow me to move forward. [Parent]*

The Fit Like service have developed a range of group work programmes for parents / carers / children and families in the areas they tell us they need help with: Parent Led CBT – helping parents support their anxious children, Distress to Success – helping parents understand and respond to their child's distress behaviour, Stay and Play – giving families the opportunity to come together in a relaxed family friendly environment which offers support and guidance when needed, Girls Group – a rights led group.

Throughout 2023/2024 178 parents/carers have engaged with our groups. Feedback included: *I felt the group covered a lot of what we go through as a family. And how to handle certain situations whether its meltdowns, sleeping, mood swings, hitting. I feel I have learned so much*

*coming to the group and will try what I have learned and hope that it works for my son and family. Thank you so much [Parent : Distress for Success Group]*

*All the information provided was great, great topics, presentation was great as it was so relaxed but professional. The environment felt safe, the ladies made me feel welcome. There was also a few new videos for me that have really stuck with me. [Parent: Distress to Success]*

LIAM (Lets Introduce Anxiety Management) Groups have been introduced in schools, with 9 schools reaching up to 90 children throughout 2023/2024. Young people told us: *I feel I was listened to and able to speak. I feel I have improved a lot. [Young person attending the LIAM Group]*

The Fit Like Hubs in partnership with Children Social Work and Education colleagues have developed a local child protection pathway, to support families where there is escalating need to get the right support from the right service at the right time. This pathway has been further developed with the integration of other Tier 2 services, allowing services to respond to family's needs in a timely way, preventing overlap and duplication and providing opportunities for effective collaboration. This has allowed for a co-ordinated, integrated approach to supporting families and minimises the need for families to keep repeating their stories to various professionals.

Our data and evaluation of the Fit Like Hubs has consistently demonstrated that support delivered in a non-stigmatising and trauma informed manner often enables families to feel held emotionally and their needs deescalated to universal/community based supports mitigating an escalation into Children's Social Work or CAMHS.

**In summary**, delivery of family support, aligned to the needs of families, is increasingly the norm for our partnership. Demand however continues to outstrip capacity and children continue to escalate into statutory provision more than we would want. We recognise the need for a greater level of consistency to service provision and we want families to independently access support at times they need. We continue to recognise the impact of poor parental mental wellbeing on children and the need to work with adult colleagues to align support to meet this gap.

Our family support model will seek to deliver this and build on the significant learning to date. The model will continue to ensure alignment to the 10 principles advocated in The Promise.

#### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

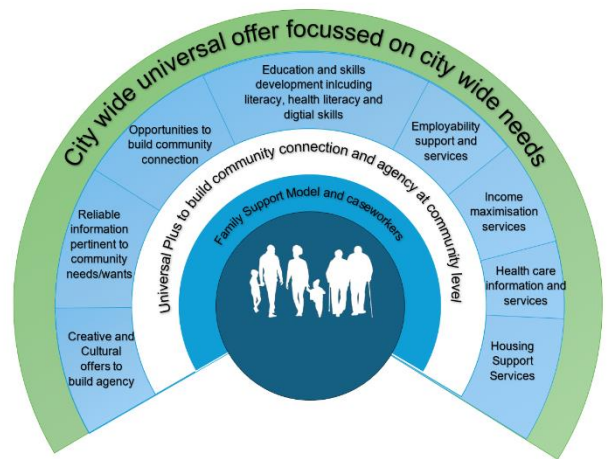
- Ensure we have early, accessible and aligned support services for parents and carers in place which complement our family support model
- Develop a family support model in two 'test' sites which draw on the accumulated learning and is aligned with the 10 principles of Intensive Family Support.
- Develop and deliver on a Bairns Hoose
- Continue to explore and develop models of integrated and colocated partnership working.

**On peer and community support, Plan 21-24 says:** There will be a consistent, national approach to ensure there are places in every community for parents of young children to meet other local parents, to stay and play with their children, and get support and advice

## Future Libraries Model

Considerable work has been undertaken to look at a future libraries model for the city by taking a co-design approach with library users and key stakeholders. The output of our Co-Design work guides the establishment of city wide universal offer based on city wide needs and a linked Community Hub Model offering support designed around the needs and wants of individual communities.

Work is currently progressing to offer a more preventative model. A city wide universal offer, based at the Central Library, and through a dynamic on-line presence, will enable our citizens to access traditional and non-traditional services in a less constrained and more vibrant library environment. This triggers the need to look at the use of physical space in the central library to ensure it offers a welcoming environment that can be used for a wider range of purposes. There is also a need to think of spaces that families can access together. This will include opening the café space, ensuring there is a suitable mix of quiet and more social zones for different purposes and ensuring that the use of private rooms across the Central Library are considered. The participation of library users in this process will be important.



Additional supports available will be maximised through collaboration with partners to take a whole systems approach in order to offer more comprehensive programmes and activities for all age groups. It is thought that the offer available would broadly reflect the areas of focus in the visual above:

- City wide creative and cultural offers (and exhibitions) which could be linked to the ACC Cultural Investment Framework
- Reliable information (including about city wide needs such as smoking cessation and healthy diet)
- Opportunities to connect with others, develop participation and voice in order to create a Civic Engagement Hub
- Education and skills information and signposting
- Employability information and signposting
- Income maximisation information
- Health care information
- Information on housing support services and signposting

In addition, a Place Based approach will be developed which will be aligned to our testing of our Family Support Model. A Community Hub model is proposed to prioritise strengthening agency and community connection for communities with higher levels of need. This would see a range

of multi-agency partners co-locate in communities with a significant health gradient and work collaboratively to address the gradient through delivery of a shared plan based on the needs and wants of the community. The level of programmed support available would be relative to the challenges facing communities and the co-location of services would make extending library opening hours more feasible.

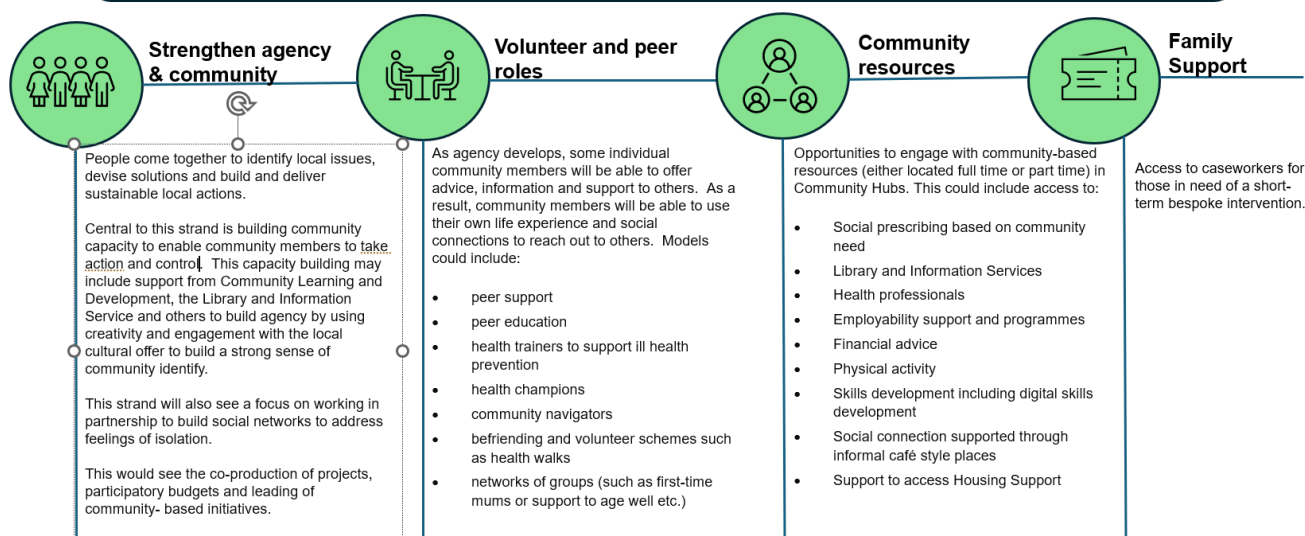
A bespoke programme, co-designed with the community to address community needs and wants would operate from the Community Hub. The programme would ultimately be designed to address the health gradient and gap evident across the community. In addition to a traditional library service, areas of focus for the programme are likely to include partnership and whole system delivery of:

- Access to support and reliable information around particular needs across a community, including planned programmes of support (for example diabetes, healthy diet)
- Frequent opportunities to connect with others to build agency, voice and a sense of control. Creative and cultural offers will be utilised to build agency and the insight gleaned used to inform the local programme, develop participation and a sense of community connection/activism.
- Education and skills information and support, including programmes with a particular focus on literacy, health literacy and digital skills
- Employability information and support through the delivery of tailored programmes
- Income maximisation support
- Health care information and delivery of targeted programmes
- Housing support
- More bespoke home service, for example the offer for residents in care homes etc.

It is proposed that as agency is developed in members of the community, they would be encouraged to develop skills through a planned programme of volunteering. It is thought that some of those community volunteers would be offered opportunities for further training to support their progression into the paid role of 'Case Worker' linked to our Family Support Model. Case Workers would have a key role in helping members of a community navigate the supports available to them, which would complement the work of the Library and Information Service staff. The research would suggest that the use of those with lived experience can be a powerful means of supporting those most in need of our help.

## Placed Based Approach

Place based plans are designed based on community outcome data and community insights. A bespoke programme is put in place for each community and delivered by Community Planning and Third Sector partners in collaboration with and the communities themselves.



This work is now being coordinated through our Fairer Futures Partnership.

## Easter in the City 23/24

Our In the City programmes continue to be made available to children and young people across Aberdeen City over the school holiday period. The programmes, shaped by the feedback of young people and their families, includes a range of short, half-day and full-day activities ranging from sport, art and outdoor activities to drama camps, and science sessions. In line with previous

years, the programme was delivered across three strands; universal activities, activities designed to support children/young people with additional support needs, and a programme for young people who directly, or through their family, identify as part of a 'priority group' this included children who are looked after or at risk of becoming looked after.

Sport Aberdeen's, We Too and community assets were heavily involved in delivering the programme.



Partnership social media channels were used to highlight the programme and available places to maximise uptake. The average enjoyment rating as given by children and young people who attended the activities was 9.6/10. This high rating was consistent with the previous programmes.

## Increased collaboration

Utilising Corra funding ACVO (TSI) have appointed a Promise Lead. The value of this post has been increasingly felt over the past year. Relationships between the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector and public sector have strengthened and there is a stronger alignment to our collective endeavours to supporting

families and delivering support that meets their needs. An event was held in summer 2024 to recognise and celebrate the contribution of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector to #keepthepromise. As well as showcasing activities, it provided a further opportunity to connect and strengthen our aligned endeavours.

### **Provision of holiday programs for Care Experienced Young People**

We asked our care experienced young people to review the range of activities available to them so that we could have confidence in our offer. The report was compiled by nine care experienced young people who attended a range of groups/activities. Their report shared resonating, useful, and insightful suggestions and views, which are helping guide our work in this area.

The Summer holiday period saw a range of gatherings for our Care Experienced Community including summer activities for our the older age range of our care experienced community, with a series of activities for children, young people and their families.

A calendar of Christmas events including a switching on the Westburn Christmas Lights, a seasonal YPR service walk, Christmas crafts and a Christmas lunch where staff cooked and shared a meal with invited Care experienced young people and their families. Care Day in Feb 2024 was celebrated along with the Bright Spots survey launch and a custom written rap, performed live by our artist in residence who is also a member of our care experienced community, which received local press coverage. Young people also engaged with many of the activities on offer including percussion workshops held SHMU and a graffiti project.

At the beginning of 2024 we moved to appoint a Participation & Engagement officer. This post was previously occupied by Who Cares? Scotland, however after valuable learning from previous sessions and feedback from our young people it was positioned within our Rights Service. Following interviews which included care experienced young people our Participation and Engagement Officer took up post at the end of March 2024.

Despite progress made, the Bright Spots survey highlighted that one in five (22%) care leavers felt lonely 'often/always', over twice the rate for young people in the general population. Almost a third of care leavers (31%) gave low scores for happiness with their appearance.

**In summary**, there is growing local network of support that is accessible to families that enables them to access support in the manner they need at the time they need. The strengthening relationship between with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector is welcome recognising they are exceptionally well placed to form instigate these connections.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Further develop our use of communities and volunteers to support preventative activity aligned to learning from our Bright Spots survey.
- Implement our Future Libraries Model
- Continue to seek feedback from our children, young people and families



**On service integration, Plan 21-24 says:** Scotland's family support services will feel and be experienced as integrated to those who use them.

Throughout this report we have demonstrated that integrated and wherever possible collocated working is increasingly the norm as to how we deliver support to children, young people and families in Aberdeen City. There are numerous examples including but not restricted to: The Fit Like Service; Youth & Family Learning workers delivering preventative support in schools; the delivery of SCIM and development of our Bairns Hoose; the Edge of Care Pilots and how we support kinship families.

These efforts and successes will be further enhanced by the plans to develop a Family Support Model across the city. While initially starting off in two communities learning will be captured that will allow us to iteratively scale up the offer to the whole city. The shape of this model will draw on learning for our endeavours to date but by adopting a systems learning approach seek to ensure the voice and views of children, young people and families shaping the support offer.

### **Shared policies and goals**

We have highly effective multi-agency partnerships and governance arrangements in place:

- Chief Officers Group (COG)
- Community Planning Aberdeen Board (CPA Board)
- Child Protection Committee (CPC)
- Children's Services Board (CSB)
- Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (ADP)
- Adult Protection Committee (APC)
- Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership (of which the COG has an oversight role).
- Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

We are increasingly adopting a whole system approach. The needs of all children, young people and families are on a continuum of need and vulnerability and as such we ensure there is a strong connection between the work of the Children's Services Board and the Child Protection Committee. In keeping with the establishment of the National Public Protection forum, we are now focussing our efforts on improving the linkage between children and adult services.

**In summary**, considerable progress has been made to ensure that services are experienced as being more joined up. This will be further developed as we continue to develop our Family Support Model.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue to develop the planning for our Family Support Model to delivery early and preventative support to families in their communities.
- Continue to explore and maximise opportunities for integration
- Continue to align activities and integrate services across the Public Protection landscape.

**On family therapies, Plan 21-24 says:** All families will have direct and clear access to family therapies and specific support across a range of issues, so that accessing support is seen as something that a range of families may need throughout life.

An Aberdeen approach to Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is being considered as part of our improvement work and a number of staff within the Fit Like service having been trained. We recognise there is a need for such an aligned approach where intensive intervention is required to help support and sustain a child within their family network. This will be a focus during the coming year.

### **Bairn's Hoose / SCIM**

Work to progress delivery of a Bairns Hoose in Aberdeen City continues at pace. Building on our partnership with Children's 1<sup>st</sup> they will deliver a recovery service as part of the Bairns Hoose model. Work has commenced to recruit recovery workers and to develop pathways to support early intervention to assist a child's recovery from harm/abuse.

We want to eradicate/minimise system harm that can often compound the abuse/harm a child experiences. Ensuring a child, young person and their parents/carers understand the child protection and justice system is central to this aspiration. Ensuring a rights based approach will be central to the delivery of our Bairns Hoose which will:

- Provide trauma-informed recovery, support and justice
- Ensure appropriate pathways to CAMHS
- Ensure that delivery of trauma recovery support aligns to the wider Family Support Model
- Ensure that trauma recovery lens is central to the delivery of IRD's (Interagency Referral Discussions) and SCIM (Scottish Child Interview Model) interviews.
- Deliver a trauma-informed remote Court facility for children and young people.

### **Therapeutic care**

Aberdeen City Council has an established therapeutic approach to provision in our residential children's homes that is based on the Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). DDP is used to help children and young people who have been traumatised by hurt and/or neglected within their families in their early years, making it difficult for them to feel safe and secure. The approach aims to help children and young people address difficulties with attachment (finding it hard to feel safe with parents or in primary relationships) and inter-subjectivity (finding it hard to give and take relationships). Theraplay training is provided to kinship & foster carers with the Family Network Team offering intensive therapeutic family support.

There are a range of therapeutic supports across Universal services and within the Third Sector that families can access. This includes but is not restricted to school counselling services; delivery of LIAM in schools; access to school nursing as well as accessing support via the Fit Like and other family support services.

## **Sport Aberdeen**

Sport Aberdeen offered 5 Family Fun Days to provide opportunities for children and young people to develop friendships with peers. In addition a Christmas event was held for 40 families who enjoyed participating in a range of activities on offer. In addition, 700 free Sport Aberdeen memberships have now been given out to care experienced young people and their carer / parent - dependant on their circumstances.

**In summary**, work is well developed and in some places embedded to ensure a therapeutic response to children who have experienced harm/abuse. These will continue to be developed in the year ahead and as our Bairns Hoose opens. We note the references to FGDM in the Children's Hearing Review and await the Scottish Governments response to this. We however want to further develop our thinking in relation to FGDM to empower families identify ways they can better protect and safeguard children within the family network.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Test and develop trauma recovery pathways in and around our Bairns Hoose
- Further consider the thinking around FGDM to support families who require intensive intervention.
- Ensure trauma recovery and a rights based approach are incorporated into the planning for our Family Support Model.
- Strengthen links with CAMHS to support children and young people access appropriate psychological supports.

## Our Progress in delivering Priority 3, Supporting the Workforce

**The Promise says,** Children experience the 'care system' through people. Over Plan 21-24, support for people who care and continue to care if times get tough, will improve. There will be consistency of approach, values and understanding across Scotland's workforce.

**On workforce values, Plan 21-24 says:** There will be a national values-based recruitment and workforce development framework in place and adhered to by all organisations and professions involved in supporting children and their families.

### One Good Adult

Aberdeen City Council is currently involved in piloting the 'One Good Adult' resource developed in partnership with NES, Scottish Government and Children in Scotland. Senior Leaders and Service Managers are encouraged to make reference to this as part of the application and interview process and a series of engagement sessions were held in schools to gather feedback and to inform our approach to implementing this within our recruitment processes for adults working in our schools. The children and young people involved in these engagement sessions developed a range of questions about the areas that they felt were important linked to the themes of:

- Mental Health
- Be(ing) Kind
- Open-mindedness
- Equality and Inclusion
- Reliability
- Encouraging Success

This has provided children and young people with an opportunity to influence decision-making and support the appointment of staff in our schools and senior roles across the Local Authority where applicants often comment that the panel of children presents the toughest challenge. Children and young people form a panel in all head teacher recruitment processes. Pupil panels were also part of the recruitment process for the Executive Director Families and Communities, the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning and other senior Council positions.

### Multi-agency planning for the workforce

Aberdeen City's Corporate Parenting Group has responsibility for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Improvement Plan, collation and monitoring of data and quality assurance in relation to children and young people with experience of care, delivering on identified aims set out in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and driving the implementation of The Promise across the Partnership.

One of the improvement projects aligned to Stretch Aim 5 focused on the need to update and refresh our Corporate Parenting training and for this to be available to all local partners to bring a greater consistency to our language and understanding of the duties of being a Corporate Parent. An updated Corporate Parenting online module was developed. To test and refine the module in person training was delivered to 2 cohorts of newly qualified social workers and 2 years of probationary teachers. The finalised online module was launched in May 2024. The module will feature a music video, with bespoke lyrics written and performed by our artist in residence and member of care experienced community.

As previously noted work has commenced to bring a strong alignment and integration to our public protection activity. Our Child Protection Committee's Learning & Development Sub Committee is leading work to develop a Workforce Development Framework in line with the recently published Child Protection National L&D Framework. This framework will influence all future L&D activity for the whole public protection partnership and ensure the training needs of the various workforce groups in Aberdeen are accurately, consistently met.

Write Right About Me (WRAM) is a programme of work that supports the entire children's service workforce reflect on how we write about and record information about children and young people. It abouts a trauma informed and rights based approach but also ensures their life long needs are considered when we write about them. A WRAM reflective learning e-resource has been developed setting out key principles of Rights, Voice, Participation. Development of Essential Knowledge for workforce (family brothers and sisters, rights, voice and participation, etc.).

### **Children's social work**

Online guidance has now been made available for social workers presenting children's permanence plans to panel to clarify the responsibility to "listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need." A development session was also facilitated for panel members with the Children's Rights Service with a view to supporting their understanding of their duties in line with the above.

The children's social work workforce have access to a broad spectrum of learning and development opportunities through the CSW Training Calendar and access to CareKnowledge. The training is easily accessible and ensures that our regulatory responsibilities are met, and that the workforces is equipped with the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles. Since last year the CSW induction programme has continued to evolve moving from an overly skills based competency to relational recruitment model. Recruiting on a muti agency basis, involving those with lived experience; candidate genograms; and onsite visits, aimed at ensuring candidates are able to show a rounded understanding of the needs of care experienced children and young people and opportunity to engage with young people staff and environments before entering the job.

### **NESCoL**

While NESCoL has made significant strides in meeting the workforce values set out in The Promise, there are still areas where further change is needed to fully align with the principles and

commitments of the Promise. This includes full organisational roll out of Trauma Informed Practice Training for staff and Managers at NESCol. Nescol continue to support the Students' Association to capture the "Student Voice" ensuring meaningful and relevant support is provided to our Care Experienced Learners.

## **ACVO**

ACVO put in place a Development Officer post with a particular focus on capacity building and support for Third Sector partners in understanding their role to deliver The Promise as well as better understanding how their existing work connects to its priorities. This has involved linking in with national Promise Scotland representatives; speaking directly to Third Sector partners through the Children and Young Peoples Forum; as well as providing a number of information sessions. Future plans to engage with Third Sector will include events and online resources related to The Promise for Third and Public sector colleagues.

## **Professional Learning available through the Educational Psychology Service**

In session 23/24 the educational psychology service increased the training offers available to school staff, including new offers of Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), Executive Functions, Teenage Brain Development. These new packages have been well received, with growing interest and positive feedback, all training offers contain follow-up implementation coaching for the setting.

Further investment in the ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) programme has taken place, increasing the number of ELSA trained staff in schools and ELCs to over 50. This programme has received positive evaluations and cohort 4 will run in session 24/25. Additionally, an ASN ELSA programme was created and piloted, to develop ELSAs with 'Emotionally Connected' expertise in class teams working with some of the most vulnerable children across the city. This had an introductory cohort of 11 (reduced by staff absence). This was very positively evaluated by those in attendance, and using the ELSA model, career long support and development for those trained will continue.

Training by the EPS of school staff as 'companions' in the Seasons for Growth programme (a programme to support bereavement, loss and change) has increased the number of learners receiving support in school by 56 this year to 147. These training packages will inform the priority area of the EPS to work alongside key partners to assist schools in supporting the needs of all learners but new materials and packages are also being developed.

In response to the changes in legal status of UNCRC and The Promise, the EPS has collated and developed resources for accessing and capturing the voices of Children and Young People in Consultations and practice. These resources will guide EPS practice alongside operational guidance to support consistent and supportive practice in the involvement of Children and Young People.

**In summary**, well established systems are in place and these continue to be kept under review to ensure that our efforts to support the workforce reflect national best practice. In recognition

that staff in CSW experience increased risk of vicarious and secondary trauma and burnout, more targeted support is being offered to the workforce. This support is probably most widely seen within the practice of supervision. Training that will complement and build on supervisor's experience, knowledge and skills will be delivered early 2025; with initial commitment to roll this out to line managers across our service. We welcome the anticipated establishment of a National Social Work Agency in the coming year. This will ensure a more consistent approach to staff learning and development on a national basis. Although this may not be fully established by 2024.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Roll out Corporate training module on a multi-agency basis
- Deliver enhanced support to practitioners to combat the risk of vicarious trauma.
- Develop a suite of child protection e-modules to support self-guided learning.

**On trauma informed, Plan 21-24 says:** Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and families and those on the edge of care will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding trauma informed practice across their work and within their workforce.

Ensuring our multi-agency workforce is trauma informed and where necessary trauma skilled is a priority of our Corporate Parenting Plan. Every member of the children's services workforce has a role to play in understanding and responding to peoples affected by trauma.

Utilising ring fenced funding we have developed trauma informed resources, accessible to all multi-agency partners. To support greater awareness of these and ensure a greater level of consistency across our workforces we intend to develop a role to support partners further consider how they can enable staff to be trauma informed and to think about how well our services are aligned to the [Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change](#).

We are embedding the national child protection guidance, which is aligned to trauma-informed principles, and there is ongoing work in relation to building trauma-informed universal workforce development plan, drawing upon existing national tools and applying a local lens, this will include simplifying some of the language used to describe different training packages. All of our multi agency child protection training courses now discuss trauma informed practice in depth during training, sign posting attendees to the NHS Trauma Training Programme along with additional toolkits, videos and guidance documents.

Our workforce continue to utilise taurus; Beacon House resources; DDP levels 1 and 2 as well as specific development opportunities attached to specialist roles. Within Health services practitioners continue to undertake NES training on Trauma Informed practice in order to have a trauma informed lens. There has been a good uptake on this.

Our Kinship Adoption and Fostering Service facilitates training for staff and carers to ensure a trauma informed approach to caring for children. Teams have staff who are skilled in Theraplay interventions and this features in mandatory training for carers as well as direct individual support. The Teams have staff trained in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy Level 1, and also Systemic Family Therapy. The aforementioned approaches feature in children's transitions to adoption as well as in direct support with foster and kinship carers.

NESCoI have produced a Trauma Informed Practice training program to ensure that everyone understands the impact of trauma and can respond in ways that are sensitive, supportive and effective. In addition, NESCoL are rolling cycles of mandatory Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Training all our staff to ensure they are aligned with the values of The Promise. Feedback from staff have been very positive with staff reporting feelings of empowerment.

Skills Development Scotland career coaching is based on relationships. Most staff have completed Trauma Skilled (Practice Level 2) via TURAS and there is now a need to audit confidence. SDS staff are trained in career coaching approaches and models, all of which have core skills of being person centred, non-judgemental, impartial and active listening. The coaching



nature of our delivery means individuals often disclose significant personal information. Whilst SDS do not have professional supervision for staff, SDS do however support staff through fortnightly reflective practice, Team Leader monthly My Contributions, Employee Assistance Programme and a range of wellbeing initiatives. The SDS Evaluation and Research team is currently undertaking research with staff on being trauma informed and have a Trauma Informed Practice Team Leader Facilitator guide to help this learning be embedded.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration are currently rolling out Transforming Connections Trauma Skilled Training programme to support their ambition to become a trauma informed and responsive organisation. This training is part of the National Trauma Transformation Programme (NTTP) available to support all members of the workforce. The sessions are mandatory to all staff and training dates have been identified for every Locality. Locally, this is being delivered as two sessions in Aberdeen. The first date took place in September 2024, with the second date in May 2025. Additionally, separate events are planned for all managers and Senior Practitioners with a focus on supporting front line staff to practice in a trauma informed manner.

The Children's Third Sector Forum has identified a number of Third Sector partners that are actively engaging in trauma awareness training. This has included but is not limited to Turas Training and other NHS offered training opportunities; as well as external providers. Training has involved supporting organisations to more readily recognise signs of trauma, improve knowledge of sign posting and referral processes; as well as how to develop environments for service users that also take into account the impact of trauma

Following a audit of practice, a key part of our refreshed LOIP Projects has seen the development of multi-agency Neglect training and a toolkit published through ThingLink that to date this has seen 428 users. The aim of this project and associated training is to support early intervention by increasing 'confidence in identifying and taking action on harm'. Practitioners will often try and reduce/stop the harm from continuing soon after it has already happened. But the aim of this project is to increase the knowledge and confidence of staff to enable them to support children and families not already known to the social work service and therefore have not yet reached that need for social work intervention. Increasing practitioners confidence is key to enabling them to identify neglect sooner and provide early intervention/support to a child/family. Having access to the right tools and resources in order to reduce the long term impact of neglect. This will potentially reduce the length of time that support from external agencies is required, with families receiving support quicker.

**In summary,** work is well developed. This growing capacity is building our confidence and resilience to meet the needs of care experienced children and families including those on the edge of care. The Children's Services Board recently completed a Trauma Informed Readiness Self-assessment across the six dimensions identified in the Roadmap for Creating Trauma Informed Responsive Change, this highlighted the need for greater consistency but also the need to do more to ensure the physical spaces in which we invite families to engage with services need to become more trauma informed while also removing barriers that enables families to access directly/self-refer into services.

## Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:

- As far as possible ensure key buildings are designed through a trauma informed lens – Bairns Hoose, community spaces to deliver the Family Support Model.
- Further embed understanding of trauma informed approaches across the public sector.
- Deliver support to services to bring enhanced awareness to trauma practice tools and resources, ensuring workforce plans have trauma informed practice at their core.
- Involving children and families in planning, policy and guidance development and continue to raise awareness of the importance of Child Voice.

**Of on-going relationships, Plan 21-24 says:** There will be no blanket policies or guidance that prevent the maintenance of relationships between young people and those who care for them. Settings of care will be able to facilitate the protection of relationships that are important to children and young people.

Many of our services now function on basis that allows children and families to re-engage with them once their involvement has come to an end. This will be replicated by the recovery service in our Bairns Hoose and Family Support Model.

Craigielea Intensive Support Services practice an open door policy for those who have been supported by the service. Staff maintain an agreed level of contact with young people following instances when they are accommodated out with their family in recognition of the intensive relationship built prior to accommodation. This helps maintain links with their community recognising many return to their community in future.

Creation of a Children's Residential Aftercare Service has supported a growing number of young people to receive Aftercare support from those with whom they enjoy established and trusting relationships. The model has been adopted by locally commissioned services. This approach is part of the ethos of care set out clearly in how we plan and deliver care across our children's home service.

We are aware that many of our foster carers continue to maintain a strong connection with young people they have cared for. This connection can include providing emotional and practical support including inviting them back for special family events. Much of this occurs contact occurs in a manner outside the radar of professional oversight. This is entirely appropriate reflecting the relationships that exist. Foster carers also demonstrate such when children move to adoptive families and provides the child with a live connection to their own history.

Relational approaches are well embedded across our care services with many young people maintaining relationships with staff and foster carers. Relational approaches are embedded across fostering service via increase in continuing care numbers and relationships being sustained beyond formal arrangements. Police Scotland, as Corporate Parents, uphold our NE Divisional Pledge to support any care experienced young person should they seek advice in

respect to personal and home safety when moving into their own home for the first time. This is also extended to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who are new to the area and require extra support.

A review of policies, confirmed that there is no policy framework which prevents the maintenance of relationships between young people and those who care for them. Adopters, kinship and foster carers' training has been enhanced to include supporting relationships for children and young people in care and maintaining relationships.

**In summary**, practice is well embedded in this area.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue to explore why adopters have been unable to maintain relationships for children and young people to better inform our guidance and support.
- Take account of learning from the thematic inspection in relation to children with disabilities and from our Bright Spots programme.

**On workforce support, Plan 21-24 says:** A new framework of support will be in place to ensure people involved in the care of care experienced children and young people feel valued, encouraged and have supportive relationships for reflection with high quality supervision and environmental conditions.

Children's Social Work have refreshed and strengthen their workforce development plan to consider the development needs of the workforce as well as their wellbeing needs ensuring they feel valued and supported to undertake their role. Following a staff survey on supervision practices in spring 2023, a supervision working group was established to develop supervision guidance that aligns to operational delivery and prioritises wellbeing. The development of our newly qualified social workers (NQSW) programme has endured strong alignment to the changes proposed from the introduction of the NQSW Supported Year due to come into effect in autumn 2024.

Within our residential service additional professional development is being progressed based on 'consolidation foundations to practice' incrementally building on a repertoire to allow trauma enhanced skills to take root.

Skills Development Scotland staff are trained in career coaching approaches and models, all of which have core skills of being person centred, non-judgemental, impartial and active listening. A central aspect of coaching is around understanding self and strengths and the impact of mindset, not just with our customers but also as individuals employees. The coaching nature of our delivery means that individuals often disclose significant personal information. Whilst we do not have professional supervision for our staff, we do support staff through fortnightly reflective practice, Team Leader monthly My Contributions, Employee Assistance Programme and a range of wellbeing supports.

**In summary**, good progress has been made in this area and effective systems are in place. The NSAW will support delivery of the Advanced Practice Framework for social work. This will have a focus on staff professional development as development of their self to sustain resilience to deliver services to children and families with complex needs.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Further develop workforce wellbeing supports
- Implement the social work workforce plan.

## Our Progress in Delivering Priority 4, Planning

**The promise says,** There needs be a different approach to investment and planning. National partners have a significant role to play in ensuring a new context for funding, investment and planning. Children and families live in local communities and use local services. It is important that their experiences and outcomes are not determined simply by which local community they live in or local service they use. Planning and investment should be nationally coordinated to ensure that children and families get what they need. Whilst the majority of the promise relates to matters which are reserved to The Scottish Parliament, the English Independent Review of Children's Social Care has relevance in respect of cross-jurisdiction issues.

**On planning, Plan 21-24 says:** Scotland will have a national, strategic planning process in place that ensures that children who are cared for away from their family of origin 'belong to a loving home.'

The planning process will reflect the needs of Scotland's children and young people whilst operating with the expectation that more children will remain with their families. It will reflect the principles of the promise ensuring:

- Scotland's most vulnerable children are not profited from,
- Standards of care are consistent
- End to the selling of care placements to Local Authorities outside Scotland
- Acute and crisis services are phased out to promote early intervention and prevention

### Reviewing commissioned services

We have undertaken a review of our commissioned services and expanded our support offer to Kinship and Foster Carers emphasising the importance of love and trauma recovery.

### National policy changes

We broadly welcomed the Hearings System Working Group's recommendation report. As the report recognises, there is significant work already underway, through existing groups, such as the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership, or through new policy, legislation and practice development. These include, but are not limited to, the introduction of Bairn's Hoose, the incorporation into Scots Law of the UNCRC; updated Child Protection Guidance, GIRFEC refresh, Secure Care Redesign, and the Children's Care and Justice Bill, alongside the proposed National Social Work Agency, amongst others. This rapidly changing policy landscape/improvement work must be seen in the context of improving systems and practices for and with children, young people, and their families and all will have a positive impact on the children's hearing system, directly or indirectly.

We await the Scottish Government's response to the Hearing's System report and recognise that many of the recommendations, if accepted, will require substantial legislative change.

Additionally we welcome the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for foster carers and kinship carers. This will bring greater consistency and provides a statutory footing to the love, care and support they provide children and young people.

We have actively contributed to the redesign work in relation to Scotland's Secure estate. We are conscious that the present financial climate may impact the progress of this work and indeed other legislative change. Unless legislative change is adequately resourced then there is a risk it will not deliver the expected change and undermine the confidence of the care experienced community that we collectively are committed to #keepingthepromise.

Despite work undertaken to date, the Bright Sports survey has highlighted that significantly fewer children and young people in Aberdeen had received an explanation about why they were in care and did not want to know more when compared to children and young people in the Bright Spots comparator group. (48% to 65% for 8-11yrs, 69% to 78% for 11-17yrs).

**In summary**, work is underway locally. We welcome the national changes being proposed and continue to reflect the direction of travel advocated in The Promise in our commissioning arrangements. Considerable work continues to be required at a national level and this need to be reflected in Plan 24 – 30.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue to develop local services which promote early intervention and prevention
- We recognise that there remain differences between the care provided in Aberdeen City versus the care provision we commissions externally e.g. we do not use restraint in any of our local care settings, however, further work is required to embed this change nationally
- It remains challenging to set out our next steps in the absence of a lack of clarity as to the time line associated with legislative and national policy change. What is required moving forward is a cohesive and joined up approach to improvement, across local and national government.

**On investment, Plan 21-24 says:** Investment in the lives of children and families will be considered strategically and holistically in the context of their experiences. The Human and Economic Cost modelling that underpinned Follow the Money and The Money reports will be embedded into organisational and budgeting processes across Scotland. That process will have involved organisations working together to spread investment and align budgets.

Continuing progress has been made in delivering services in an integrated and colocated basis. This reflects knowledge that the sum of our efforts is greater than the individual parts. There are positive examples across universal and targeted services of co-designing and delivering services to vulnerable groups. We need to ensure as public finances become even more stretched we remain focused on developing collaborative ways of supporting children, young people and families to maximise the use of available partnership resource. The commitment from all partners to resource the Bairns Hoose reflects our continuing commitment. This approach will be further developed as we progress our Family Support Model.

Partnership commissioning principles have been agreed. All grants for children are overseen by the Children's Services Board.

**In summary,** work is well underway. We continue to focus on developing early and preventative support to prevent an escalation of harm and involvement in statutory social work services. We recognise this is not only the right thing to do but mitigates the subsequent risk of high cost intervention.

#### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue to review the impact of resource allocations to inform future investment and planning.
- Continue to invest in early and preventative supports.
- Continue to ensure the voice of children and families informs the design of our services.

**On information sharing, Plan 21-24 says:** Organisations with responsibilities towards children and families will be confident about when, where, why and how to share information with partners. Information sharing will not be a barrier to supporting children and families.

#### **GIRFEC arrangements**

Well established GIRFEC arrangements are in place and the workforce has a clear understanding of when and how to share information in line with legislation. Operational Guidance reflects updated national guidance. Audit activity continues to evidence GIRFEC is well embedded.

#### **Data sharing arrangements**

The partnership has existing data sharing agreements that enable the routine sharing of appropriate data to produce multi-agency data sets. CELCIS have engaged with the data reporting of our Child Protection Committee to inform national approaches to data reporting.

Challenges remain in complex organisational systems which create barriers to identifying and sharing information and data.

### **Records of Involvement**

Social Care Database - a record of all planning and decision making forums are recorded on the child's record in D365. Checks can be made on whether they attended or how their views were provided. Aberdeen City Council are actively collaborating with the national My Care Record project to develop digital access to records. Work is progressing to migrate other services over onto the Platform

**In summary,** there are well established systems in place across the Community Planning Partnership. While there will always be a need to consider improvement opportunities this area will not form a prominent focus in plan 24 – 30.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Implement the Request for Assistance process to enable us to better analyse the impact of services supporting children and families.
- Capitalise on opportunities to enable providers to utilise D365 to create a single record for the child/young person.



## Our Progress in Delivery Priority 5, Building Capacity

**The Promise says:** Over the next 3 years, there will be a focus on work that ensures that the structural underpinning of the 'care system' is orientated to the needs of children and families. This work to build capacity and coherence reflects the planned obsolescence of The Promise Scotland. It will not always be there to provide oversight and accountability and the structures need to move to ensure that the scaffolding around the 'care system' facilitates and upholds children's rights

**On legislation, Plan 21-24 says,** Over the course of the next Parliamentary term, there will be identifiable progress made towards ensuring Scotland's legislative framework around the breadth of the 'care system' is coherent and cohesive, upholds the conclusions of the Independent Care Review and is compliant with the UNCRC.

The Children's Services Board is alert to and tracks proposed legislative change. A local review of policies and guidance has been undertaken to ensure UNCRC compliance and strategic planning is informed by and aligned to upholding the UNCRC.

Planning, at a local level to consider the implications and requirements of the Care and Justice Bill is ongoing and we are well connected to the CYCJ.

We have an established multi-agency group (CSW, SCRA and CHS) to support local improvement and delivery of Children's Hearings, that are child-centred. This forum enables practice issues to be raised adopting an active learning approach. Through this we are beginning to explore some of the changes identified via the Children's Hearing review that don't require legislative change. It also will provides a forum that can actively support to deliver the change required from new legislation.

**In summary,** effective arrangements are in place locally, however change is required at a national level. It is anticipated much of this will be carried into Plan 24 – 30.

### **Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Continue horizon scan for legislative change and work to consider what this will mean at a local level.

**On the Children's Hearing system, Plan 21-24 says:** The Children's Hearing System will have gone through a redesign process.

That redesign process will bring together children and families, and organisations that hold the responsibility, to rethink the structures, processes and legislation that underpin the hearing system.

The aim will be to ensure there are coherent, cohesive and collaborative proposals on an operating framework for The Children's Hearings System that has been designed with children and families.

That redesign process will be underpinned by:

- giving effect to the promise;
- ensuring compliance with the UNCRC,
- upholding the original intention of The Kilbrandon Review that children involved in offending need care and protection; and
- ensuring The Children's Hearing System and The Courts can facilitate child friendly justice that upholds children's rights and enables their effective participation.

We broadly welcome the [Hearing Systems Working Group's Recommendation report](#). Whilst we await change at a national level we continue to work closely with local and national colleagues from SCRA and CHS. Grampian-wide tests of change are being taken forward.

Practice and culture change is being promoted to consider how we will best support 16 and 17 years olds, in line with proposed changes to the Children's Hearings system and legislation anticipated from the Care and Justice Bill.

**In summary**, as a partnership we continue to be proactive but change is required at national level. It is anticipated much of this will be carried into Plan 24 – 30.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Await the Scottish Government's formal response to the HSWG review
- Explore change at a local level to improve our processes, practice and culture.

**On inspection and regulation, Plan 21-24 says** A new, holistic framework for inspection and regulation that values what children and family's value, will have been scoped and developed. It will understand the necessary legislative change required to focus on children's experiences and will be underpinned by the principles set out in the promise and give full effect to the secure care pathway and standards.

We have a local interface with our Link Inspector and participated in a number of Thematic Inspections Secure Care Pathway Review; Children with Disability Review. The findings from these will be considered by individual services and at a partnership level so that learning can be built into our annual Children's Services Plan update. There is an increasing focus within these inspections to ensure the voice of children and young people are central to them. We will also in the coming year step up our planning for a strategic inspection given that our last one was in 2019.

**In summary,** change is required from the Care Inspectorate and we will take learning from national thematic inspections but also look at best practice from other published inspections. The findings of the Secure Care Pathway review recognises that unless there is investment from Scottish Government many of the key messages cannot be fully delivered.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Conversations with the Care Inspectorate and at a national level to continue
- Reflect on and embed learning from thematic reviews into local practices and processes

**On policy coherence, Plan 21-24 says:** There will be cohesive alignment in the policy initiatives and frameworks across Scotland. Policy development across Scotland will reflect the realities of people's lives and create a coherent policy environment. The focus of the 21-24 period will be on implementation and alignment not inquiries and reviews.

All policies across education and children's services, reflect what is known about incorporation of the UNCRC and The Promise. exploring ways to meaningfully engage young people in our governance and planning structures as well as establishing an assurance process to ensure that children and young people are involvement in decisions and design of services that affect them.

Our LOIP, Children's Services Plan, Child Poverty Plan and other local and national strategic plans have been aligned with The Promise and UNCRC. Locally we have convened a National Care Service (NCS) multi-agency group to ensure early planning and consideration of decisions made in relation to NCS.

**In summary,** work is advanced in this area. We continue to proactively plan for changes in policy and welcome greater coherence nationally. There will be a need to continue to monitor how the UNCRC is interpreted by the Courts.

### Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:

- Policy coherence across the partnership will be supported by local development and implementation of the Bairns Hoose model
- We intend to align reporting of the child protection improvement plan to children's services planning to further support coherence

**On data mapping and collection, Plan 21-24 says,** Scotland will have a cohesive central picture of all data on the processes and systems that directly and indirectly impact on children and their families, including wider socio-structural factors. The data picture will have been used to fully align data systems, collection and analysis methodologies to what matters to children and families, and the needs of those who take decisions on how best to support children and their families.

A suite of multi-agency data to support the monitoring of children's services activity and tracking of trends for our children and young people across the partnership has continued to develop and mature. Better consistency of data is required at a national level to support benchmarking and a review of what data is collected and reported upon, and whether this really matters to children and families.

**In summary,** good progress has been locally. It is acknowledge that the maturity of our collection and use of data will need to evolve in accordance to legislative and policy change. However we are confident in our capability to respond to these changes.

### Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:

- Continue to engage with the Local authority social work services children and families group and Promise Scotland to inform national change
- Our corporate parenting data largely relates to looked-after children. We want to continue to develop routine collection of care experienced data to help us better understand a child/young person's experiences and outcomes beyond care better.
- The use of data at both a quantitative and qualitative level will drive the development of our Family Support Model.

**On governance structures, Plan 21-24 says,** All public appointments to any of Scotland's Boards and Public Bodies which have an impact on the 'care system' will ensure that the values of the promise are embedded in recruitment frameworks. The governance landscape around the various Boards, networks and groups that sit around the 'care system' will be rationalised to enable effective and accountable shared working around the lives of children and families.

The Aberdeen City Community Planning partnership has a range of highly effective governance arrangements in place including our Chief Officers Group (COG), Child Protection Committee (CPC) and Children's Services Board (CSB). These arrangements, where candour, curiosity and accountability between partners is actively encouraged, has significantly aided our practice and

contributed to an ongoing culture of improvement around public protection. As noted we welcome the intention to establish a National Public Protection Leaders Group.

The Children's Services Board is governed by and accountable to the Community Planning Management Board, which in turn is accountable to Community Planning Aberdeen.

Principally the actions in this area are for the Scottish Government to progress. Locally we continue to ensure that the aspirations of The Promise run throughout our Children's Services Plan and other strategic plans. There remains a strong commitment from partners to deliver the cultural and system change required to improve the outcomes of all children, young people with experience of care.

**In summary**, sound governance arrangements are in place locally. It not anticipated that national governance arrangements will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24.

**Next Steps as we transition into Plan 24 – 30:**

- Remain engaged with partners at a national and local level to prepare for timeous implementation of change locally as national direction becomes clearer

## APPENDIX A – PROMISE DATA SET

Plan 21-24 action	RAG rating	5 year trend
<b>Priority 1 – A Good Childhood</b>		
Support		<p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) engaging in Active Schools activity.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of CEYP accessing free leisure from 294 in 2019 to 647 in 2024 (the number includes adult members who enable engagement)</p> <p><b>Decreasing trend</b> in the percentage of young people who started treatment in CAMHS within 18 weeks of referral from 93% in 2018 to 46% in 2023</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of families accessing financial support from 295 in 2018 to 1040 in 2022/23.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of children and young people supported universally by the Educational Psychology (EP) Service (407 over 2022/23 and 406 2023/24). Total number of Requests for assistance 2022/23 206 and 210 2023/24)</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of children and young people who were supported through specialist Educational Psychology involvement or assessment throughout the year (26 in 2022/23 and 28 in 2023/24).</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. children and young people looked after in residential care from 12% (67) in 2022/23 to 12% (64) in 2023/24</p>
A right to education <i>(to be updated following publication of national verified data)</i>		<p><b>Improving trend</b> in reducing levels of unauthorised school absence from 6.93% in 2017/18 to 3.70% in 2022/2023 for all Looked After Children and Young People.</p> <p><b>Improving trend</b> in the attendance rates of Looked After Children and Young People from 87.28% in 2017/2018 to 88.36% in 2022/23.</p> <p><b>Improving trend</b> in reducing the exclusion rates of Looked After Children and Young People from 184 temporary exclusions in 2018/2019 to 83 in 2022/23.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the attainment of Looked After Children and Young People in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (combined P1,4 and 7).</p> <p><b>Improving trend</b> in the % of Looked After Children and Young People achieving Early Level Numeracy by the end of P1 from 66.67% in 2018/19 to 90.91% in 2022/23.</p>

**Improving trend** in the % of Looked After Children and Young People achieving First Level Numeracy by the end of P4 from 30% in 2017/18 to 62.5% in 2022/23.

**Improving trend** in the % of Looked After Children and Young People achieving Second Level Numeracy by the end of P7 from 40% in 2018/19 to 60.0% in 2022/23.

**Improving trend** in the % of Looked After Children and Young People achieving Third Level or better Numeracy by the end of S3 from 33% in 2018/19 to 50% in 2022/23.

**Improving trend** in the % of Looked After Children with 1 or more qualification at SCQF Level 3 from 81.82% in 2018/2019 to 88.24% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the % of Looked After Children with 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 4 from 72.73% in 2018/2019 to 64.71% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the % of Looked After Children achieving a literacy qualification at Level 4 from 72.73% in 2018/2019 to 58.82% in 2022/2023.

**Increasing gap** between % of Looked After Children leavers and the local authority average attaining a Level 4 qualification in literacy from 19.4% in 2018/2019 and 34.59% in 2022/2023.

**Increasing gap** between % of Looked After Children leavers and the local authority average attaining a Level 4 qualification in numeracy from 20.26% in 2018/2019 to 36.10% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the % of Looked After Children achieving a literacy qualification at Level 5 from 36.36% in 2018/2019 to 23.53% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the % of Looked After Children with 1 or more qualification at SCQF Level 5 or better from 40.91% in 2018/2019 to 29.41% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the % of Percentage of Looked After Children with 1 or more qualification at SCQF Level 6 or better from 18.18% in 2018/2019 to 5.88% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the % of Looked After Children with 1 or more qualification at SCQF Level 7 or better from 4.55% in 2018/2019 to 0% in 2022/2023.

**Decreasing trend** in the average tariff points achieved by Looked After Children and **increasing gap** between those who have experienced care and their peers.

**Increasing trend** in the % of school leavers who were Looked After away from

		<p>home in positive initial destinations from 81.82% in 2018/2019 to 88.24% in 2022/23.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the % of school leavers who were Looked After at home in positive initial destinations from 63.64% in 2018/19 to 83.33% in 2022/2023.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the % of Looked After Children and Young People considered for a Coordinated Support Plan from 3% in 2019 to 49% in 2023 in the city.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the staying on rates of those who are cared for compared to their peers for S4, S5 and S6</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="438 685 1150 860"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">S4/S5 Staying on Rates</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>2016/17</th> <th>2022/23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>All</td> <td>83.34%</td> <td>87.02%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All Looked After</td> <td>44.8%</td> <td>62.5%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1" data-bbox="438 967 1150 1137"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">S5/S6 Staying on Rates</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>2016/17</th> <th>2022/23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>All</td> <td>65.54%</td> <td>62.43%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All Looked After</td> <td>14.3%</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	S4/S5 Staying on Rates				2016/17	2022/23	All	83.34%	87.02%	All Looked After	44.8%	62.5%	S5/S6 Staying on Rates				2016/17	2022/23	All	65.54%	62.43%	All Looked After	14.3%	30%
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Relationships		<p>We will commence annual reporting of the no. of children who were not placed with their brothers and sisters at the point of placement start date</p> <p><b>Decreasing trend</b> in the no. of children placed with ACC Foster Carers from 15% (81) in 2018/19, to 14% (73) in 2022/23.</p>																								
Brothers and sisters		<p><b>87% (467)</b> of looked after children and young people are placed with siblings (2023 new measure)</p> <p><b>13% of looked after children</b> and young people are separated from a sibling (2023 new measure)</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of foster carers who take sibling placements</p> <p><b>Improving trend</b> in the no. of Kinship Carers receiving multi-agency support</p>																								
Youth justice		<p><b>Decreasing trend</b> in the no. and % of young people in secure accommodation due to criminality (2023: 1/&lt;1%)</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. and % of complex young people in secure accommodation due to SCRA decisions</p> <p><b>Improving trend</b> in the no. of offences linked to young people in local children's homes (nil over reporting period)</p>																								



		<b>Improving trend</b> in the % of young people charged with an offence
Advocacy		<p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the % of CEYP accessing independent advocacy</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of children and young people accessing Young Person's Rights Service who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care experienced (Jun 2023: 14)</li> <li>• Involved in child protection processes (Jun 2023, Legal Status = Promotion of welfare of children in need: 4)</li> </ul>
Moving on		<p><b>Improving trend</b> in the no. of CEYP working with a mentor from 0 in 2019 to 52 meeting mentors (MCR) and 4 supported by the Pathways Co-Ordinator (MCR) in Jan 2024.</p> <p><b>Consistently high trend</b> in the no. of care leavers with a pathway plan from 100% in 2018/19 to 100% in 2021/22.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of young people in continuing care placements from 16 in 2018/19 to 31 in 2022/23.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the provision of pathway plans. 92% of all young people eligible for a pathway plan have one (2023)</p> <p><b>Decreasing trend</b> in the no. of youth homelessness applications from care leavers (0 in 2023)</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of young people not paying Council Tax up to 26 years due to Council decisions</p>
Physical intervention		<p><b>Reducing trend</b> in the no. of restraints used in local children's homes (1 in 2023)</p> <p><b>Reducing trend</b> in the no. of restraints used in education</p> <p>CSW will implement guidance on recording of the use of restraint for all CEYP placed in out of authority placements and other community settings in 2024.</p>
<b>Priority 2 – Whole Family Support</b>		
Family Support		<p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of care experienced 2–5-year-olds attending ELC:</p> <p>2020/21 - 74 (31 – 3-5s and 49 Eligible 2's)</p> <p>2021/22 - 70 (25 – 3-5s and 45 Eligible 2's)</p> <p>2022/23 - 42 (19 – 3-5s and 29 Eligible 2's)</p> <p>2023/24 - 26 (19 – 3-5s and 6 Eligible 2's to date – January 2024)</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of care experienced parents applying for Eligible 2's ELC place for their child(ren):</p>

		<p>2021/22 - 2 2022/23 - 4 2023/24 - 2</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of % of care experienced parents engaging with the Family Nurse Partnership</p> <p><b>Improving trend</b> in the no. of CEYP living with Foster Carers on continuing care arrangement from 8 in 2018 to 24 in 2023.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of families accessing the Fit Like Family Wellbeing Service (585 referrals in 2022 of these 335 (57%) new families accessed support; 599 in 2023 of these 378 (63%) new families accessed support.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the number of families who identified that their circumstances/risks had improved as a result of support provided by Includem - 15 in 2022, 12 in 2023.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the number of kinship care breakdowns from 4 in 2018/19 to 8 in 2022/23</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the No. of kinship carers accessing multi-agency support.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the recruitment of new foster carers with a steady average of around 10 per year (in 2023 12 new foster carers were approved from 6 households).</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of kinship care assessments undertaken, the average for the preceding three years is 22 kinship assessments per year.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no of families supported through the Links Hub. In Year 1 of Links Hub opening, 2022/23, 33 families were identified as in need of intensive support, and 45 families are currently being supported in Year 2, 2023/24. Issues include poverty, domestic violence and alcohol and drug misuse.</p>
Peer and community support		<p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of families being support by Community Learning</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of families the Family Learning Team are engaging with from 236 in 2017/19 to 621 in 2022/23.</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the impact of Family Learning. In 2018/2019 88% of respondents reported an improvement in confidence and 90% improvement in skills &amp; knowledge. In 2022/2023 91% of respondents reported an improvement in confidence and 98% an improvement in knowledge &amp; skills.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of families being supported by Barnardo's young carers service. (2022 - 144 young people/123 families; 2023 152 young people/131 families).</p>

		<p>The average length of engagement with the Young Carers Service is <b>stable</b> at 2-3 years.</p> <p><b>444 parents and families with complex needs</b> were supported by organisations accessing grants from the Fairer Aberdeen Fund. 70% of families agreed risk had been reduced and 4 families no longer required Social Work support.</p>
Service integration		<p>Evidence from multi-agency thematic audits undertaken highlight a positive and <b>stable trend</b>. In 2022 63% of cases audited were evaluated as good or better in 2023 this was 80%. (Not directly comparable due to audit sample, focus and questions.)</p> <p><b>Increasing trend</b> in the no. of shared services delivered (7 on-going collaborations with Children's Social Work)</p>
Family therapies		<p><b>Stable trend</b> in the length of engagement with the Fit Like Family Wellbeing Service: less than 6 months 24%; 6-12 months 28%; 12-18months 19% and 18+ months 18%.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in those moving on from the Fit Like Service. In 2023 of the 113 families who moved on from the Fit Like Wellbeing Service 76% were supported by universal services; 12% were supported by CSW and 11% were supported by CAMHS.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the no. of families accessing support from Includem. In 2022 Includem engaged with 42 young people, in 2023 this was 45.</p> <p><b>Stable trend</b> in the average length of engagement Includem had with young people. 49 weeks in 2022, 43 weeks in 2023.</p>
<b>Priority 3 – Supporting the Workforce</b>		
Workforce values		<b>Increasing trend</b> in the % of the children's workforce, chief officers, elected members and all corporate parents who complete Corporate Parenting training aligned to The Promise
Trauma informed		<b>Increasing trend</b> in the % of children's workforce has undertaken trauma awareness training (100% for ACC), 80% of frontline children's social work practitioners have completed the 4 TURAS Trauma Skills modules
On-going relationships		There are <b>no local policies</b> which prevent on-going relationships
Workforce support		<b>Increasing availability</b> of staff wellbeing supports.
<b>Priority 4 - Planning</b>		
Planning		<p><b>A reducing trend</b> in the % of care experienced children with 3 or more placements from 6% in 2017/18 to 5% in 2021/22</p> <p><b>A reducing trend</b> in the % of care experienced children with more than 1</p>

		placement in the past year from 21.7% in 2017/18 to 18.8% in 2021/22.
Investment		<p><b>An increasing trend</b> in the number of households experiencing poverty (1 in 5 children now live in poverty)</p> <p><b>An increasing trend</b> in the number of families supported to claim all benefit entitlements</p>
Information sharing		<p><b>A stable trend</b> in the number of IRDs held from 417 in 2018/19 to 350 in 2021/22.</p> <p><b>A declining trend</b> in the % of IRD leading to Child Protection Planning Meetings from 64% in 2018/19 to 24% in 2022/23</p> <p>Evidence from multi-agency thematic audits undertaken highlight a positive and <b>stable trend</b> in relation to information sharing to protect children from harm. In 2022 80% of cases audited were evaluated as good or better in 2023 this was 75%. (Not directly comparable due to audit sample and focus.)</p>
<b>Priority 5 – Building Capacity</b>		
Legislation		
Children's Hearing System		
Inspection and regulation		
Policy coherence		<b>Improved alignment</b> of national policy (local arrangements)
Data mapping and collection		<b>Improved access</b> to data through D365
Governance structures		<b>Sound local governance arrangements</b>

## PRIORITIES FOR ACTION



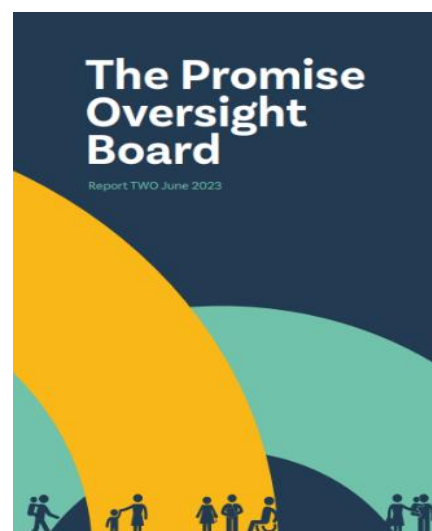
### Local and National Context

We are now 3 years into our journey to #KeepThePromise and Plan 21-24 is coming to an end. Plan 21-24 was intended to be the first of three intended plans that we ensure Scotland delivered on its promise to care experienced children and young people. #keptthepromise.

In its second report, The Promise Oversight Board, acknowledged the challenging context within which The Promise and Plan 21-24 was launched, referencing the impact of the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis on people and organisations. The Board was realistic in stating that due to the worsening circumstances and the current pace of change, they do not believe that delivering the original aims of Plan 21-24 is realistic by 2024. However, they reiterated that The Promise is non-negotiable and must be kept by 2030.

As our self-evaluation reflects, there is a lot of positive work underway that is making a difference to the lives of children and families which must be celebrated and built on.

To help deliver this Promise Scotland intimated their intention to prepare a six year plan – Plan 24 – 30 – which is to be published in June 2024. They also intimated there needed to be a more consistent approach to determining the extent to which Scotland, at a local and national level, was #keepingthepromise. As such there is intended to be a more consistent approach to reporting on future progress. The structure of this report is as yet unclear, however our work to date puts us in a strong position to respond positively to this ask.

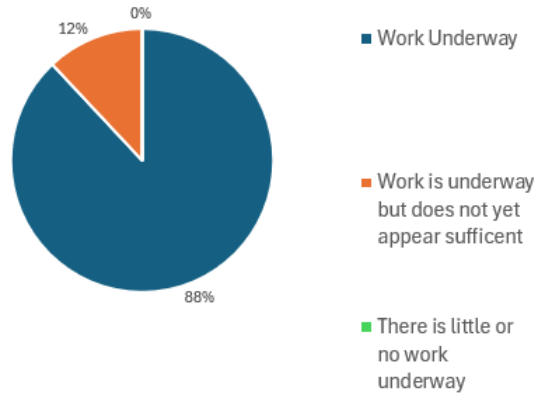


## Summary of Progress

In 2023, we reported our progress against the 25 priority actions from Plan 21-24 as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

### Aberdeen Children's Services Year 2 of Plan 21-24: Status of Work

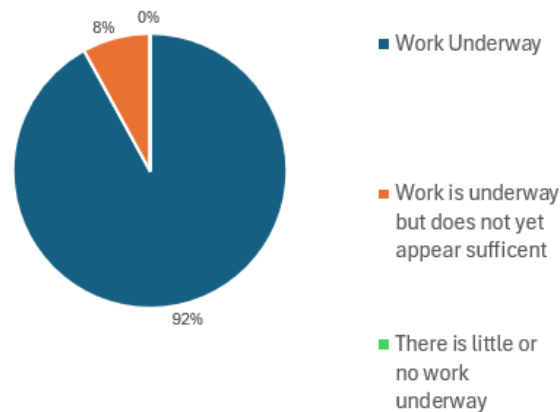
31st March 2023



From this year's self-evaluation against the 25 priority actions from Plan 21-24 we can see that progress has continued over the last year. We have identified no areas where there is 'little or no work underway'.

### Aberdeen Children's Services Year 3 of Plan 21-24: Status of Work

31st March 2024



While the pie chart for Year 3 is broadly similar to the previous year this belies the strong evidence of continuing progress made over the passed year. Much of the change and improvement activity has moved from "underway" to being "embedded". We have however stuck to the same reporting format given this is aligned to the national reporting model and it also provides for consistency at a local level. The priority actions - planning, legislation and governance structures, where we have identified '*work is underway but does not yet appear sufficient*' require change at a national, systems level e.g. by the Scottish Government or Children's Hearings system, before a local response can be made.