

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	29 April 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan Annual Report 2023/24
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/078
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne and Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Eleanor Sheppard
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1 and 2.4

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This Annual Report outlines work undertaken by the Children's Services Board over 2024/25. The report also proposes changes to the agreed Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan to support Community Planning Partners to positively respond to changes in published data and national policy intent.
- 1.2 This report satisfies a number of instructions from Committee including:
- to ensure that yearly progress reports are presented to Committee & thereafter for approval by the Community Planning Aberdeen over the lifetime of the Plan (21st March 2023);
 - to report progress in developing a Family Support Model and progress on the impact of delivering improved multi-agency support to Kinship Carers through the Children's Services Plan annual progress report (4th July 2023);
 - to instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to provide an update on work to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children through the Children's Services Plan Annual Report (20th February 2023);
 - to update on progress to deliver a Bairns Hoose within the Annual Report (20th February 2024); and
 - to consider the findings of the health & wellbeing annual report and plan next steps as part of work being taken forward through the Children's Services Plan (30th April 2024).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 note the progress made in delivering the Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan from April 2024 to date;
- 2.2 note the changes evident in data sets released over the reporting period;

- 2.3 approve the Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan Annual Report 2023/24;
- 2.4 delegate authority to the Executive Director Families and Communities to submit the Annual Report to the Community Planning Aberdeen Board for ratification; and
- 2.5 delegate authority to the Executive Director Families and Communities to submit the Annual Report to Scottish Government pending approval from the Community Planning Aberdeen Board.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1. Part 3 (Children's Services Planning) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 requires every local authority and its relevant health board to jointly prepare an Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan in respect of a three-year period. The current Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan was approved by the Education and Children's Services Committee in March 2023.
- 3.2 The legislation also requires every local authority and its relevant health board to jointly prepare a report on the impact of plans on an annual basis, and to submit these Annual Reports to the Scottish Government for review.
- 3.3 The agreed Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Strategic Plan is one of a suite of Statutory Plans which support delivery of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan. In preparing the Plan in March 2023, considerable work was undertaken to align reporting arrangements in order to better integrate the full range of statutory Plans. Better integration of Plans is supporting delivery of more integrated services, helping make the best use of time and resources and providing a clearer insight into the needs of children and families. Our approach has been positively evaluated nationally from a Children's Services Planning perspective.
- 3.4 As a result of this integration, this Annual Report includes the annual Child Poverty Plan Action Report (LCPAR) which is required to comply with the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. Our approach has been deemed to be 'strong' from an external review from a child poverty perspective. Given the embedded focus on poverty within the Annual Report, the Report was presented to the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee in April 2025 for comment, prior to being presented to the Education and Children's Services Committee for Council approval. The Committee asked a number of questions about the Report, asked some clarifying questions and made helpful suggestions on sources of support.
- 3.5 In addition, this Annual Report responds to the Committee's request (formerly Public Protection Committee) for an annual report on the progress of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities outlined in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It also helps deliver our duty to report to Scottish Government Ministers every three years on how the Local Authority

is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities as detailed in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

- 3.6 More integrated evaluation and reporting is helping Officers identify the issues to be addressed more clearly than is possible when looking at policies in an isolated way. There is a need to continue to integrate the development of strategies, policies and associated Implementation Plans wherever possible.

Approach taken to developing the Annual Report

- 3.7 In preparing this report the Children's Services Board has reviewed data sets made available since publication of our last Annual Report in March 2024 and reflected on progress in delivering our Plan. This has helped identify changes that need to be taken account of. Early findings have been validated by a range of stakeholders, including with Young Ambassadors (10-16 yrs) and Aberdeen Youth Movement (16-25 years). Reviewing both data and insights has helped us draw firmer conclusions on the activity most likely to realise improved outcomes and therefore help the Children's Services Board assess the adequacy of the current Plan.

Key achievements

- 3.8 Over the last year, the Children's Services Board has successfully worked with a range of partners to:
- secure funding from Scottish Government through our Fairer Futures Partnership, developed a high level implementation plan and appointed a Lead Officer to help drive the changes forward;
 - develop a national team around the Person Toolkit as part of our involvement in the Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE) national pathfinder;
 - prepare for the opening of our Bairns Hoose;
 - initiated a whole system approach to healthy weight in response to findings from our last Annual Report, and secured the support of a range of partners to help us address this risk;
 - realised a 12% increase in the uptake of Early Learning and Childcare for eligible 2s following engagement with the Scottish Government Data Pipeline;
 - increased school attendance at a faster rate than our peers;
 - reduced the rate per 100,000 of young people admitted to hospital due to assault from 52.9 in 2022 to 43.5 in 2023. The local rate is lower than the national rate;
 - increased presentations at National 5;
 - increased the number of people now claiming the benefits they are entitled to;
 - reduced the number of workless households in Aberdeen (1,700 less than in 2022); and
 - the Improvement Service Community Planning Tool shows that 92% of our communities are performing well compared to their comparator communities when looking at child poverty in isolation. When looking at wider measures, this percentage drops to 78%.

Learning from the data review

- 3.9 Undertaking the annual review has broadly confirmed the appropriateness of the current plan, although some new risks are evident which will require additional action to be taken by the Sub Groups who report to the Children's Services Board.
- 3.10 Our Best Start in Life Sub Group will continue to focus heavily on ensuring all families receive appropriate financial support by collaborating with NHS health point services and the local population to raise awareness of available resources, as well as continuing to collaborate to understand opportunities for pre and ante-natal women related to healthy weight. The Sub group has also identified the need to maintain our focus on safe sleeping, in collaboration with the Child Protection Committee and Alcohol and Drugs Partnership.
- 3.11 There is a need to better understand the factors which sustain household smoking behaviour and to consider what more might be done around the rise in premature births in some areas of the city as part of our Collaboration for Healthy Equity in Scotland (CHES). In addition, there is a need to collaborate with Public Health colleagues and organisations such as the Asthma and Allergy Foundation to better understand the concerning emerging trend around hospital admissions due to asthma, and monitor the impact of the Low Emission Zone on these levels over time. This fact finding work is likely to inform our work to develop the next Local Outcome Improvement Plan and may have actions extending well beyond Children's Services.
- 3.12 The Attainment and Transitions Sub Group will maintain Plans around the senior phase curriculum, and the Education and Lifelong Learning Service will continue to address variation. Emerging data suggests the need to now initiate some work on improving long term positive destinations and this will be taken forward in close collaboration with Skills Development Scotland. The Education Service will maintain their focus on school attendance, but there is a need to look in more detail at attendance at the primary 1 stage.
- 3.13 There is also a need to continue to give close attention to personal and social education programmes to ensure that our young people know how to keep themselves safe, particularly in relation to suicide. We will ask our Mental Health and Wellbeing Group to consider if any further action is required.
- 3.14 Our Children with Disabilities Group will be asked to prioritise planned work to improve transitions between child and adult services by making use of the GIRFE Toolkit developed as part of the national GIRFE pathfinder.
- 3.15 For the most part, our established plan remains appropriate. The disparity in outcomes at community level continues to suggest that the wider family supports currently in place are not making a difference to some groups, confirming our findings from last year's annual report and the need to think quite differently about how we work with and for families in need of our help and support. This will be progressed through our planned Fairer Futures Partnership and our Future Libraries Model.

- 3.16 As discovered during our last annual review, we must continue to look for ways to join data sets and look at community level data to ensure that we work to a shared and clear understanding of the problems our communities face.
- 3.17 There is a need to continue to carefully target those groups recognised as most likely to be impacted by poverty, and to increase our knowledge and support of them whilst maintaining an awareness that the evidence may challenge our responses in areas, and for residents, falling out with historically understood need/priority. Our place-based approach to the development of our Future Libraries may offer a helpful context to explore some of the challenges facing families more fully.
- 3.18 ABZ Works offers invaluable support to citizens, but we now need to extend its reach further and continue to deepen their understanding of the barriers that our citizens face. The Improvement Service are supporting an external review of our approach to Employability and the Children's Services Board will support the implementation of any proposed changes, in part through the development of our Future Libraries Model.
- 3.19 Health partners need to continue to understand and address the barriers that can result in poor health outcomes for some groups and communities.
- 3.20 Undertaking the Annual Review has again shown that richer information is available when policies and plans are aligned. It will be important to fully embed the establishment of our next Children's Services Plan with work to develop our Local Outcome Improvement Plan for 2026-2036, which as members know is our overarching poverty strategy. This will trigger a need to review the general timescales for development of the Children's Services Plan (which has a 3 year cycle) to better align with the 10 year LOIP.

Internal evaluation of the work of the Board

- 3.21 In addition to our planned improvement work and work supporting delivery of national policy, the Children's Services Board has continued to keep abreast of impending legislative changes to ensure readiness for what lies ahead and continues to evaluate the impact of established arrangements.

Next steps

- 3.22 The Plan put in place two years ago, with the additions made last year to focus on communities with a high prevalence of families living in SIMD 1, healthy weight and joining data sets continues to be relevant.
- 3.23 A number of key areas have been identified for further investigation to help inform the development of the next Local Outcome Improvement Plan (and associated Children's Services Plan). They are to:
- better understand the factors which sustain household smoking behaviour and to consider what more might be done around the rise in premature births in some areas of the city as part of our Collaboration for Healthy Equity in Scotland (CHES).
 - collaborate with Public Health colleagues to better understand the concerning emerging trend around hospital admissions due to asthma,

and monitor the impact of the Low Emission Zone on these levels over time.

- 3.24 We require to initiate some work to address new vulnerabilities identified through this Annual Review. These are to:
- look in more detail at attendance at the primary 1 stage.
 - give close attention to personal and social education programmes to ensure that our young people know how to keep themselves safe, particularly in relation to suicide.
 - Work with health partners to better understand and address the barriers that can result in poor health outcomes for some groups and communities.
- 3.25 Some work requires to be accelerated. This includes:
- planned work to improve transitions between child and adult services by making use of the GIRFE Toolkit developed as part of the national GIRFE pathfinder.
 - Extending the reach of ABZ Works by supporting the implementation of the recommendations made following the review of Employability.
- 3.26 The Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services high level plan has been amended to take account of these additions (changes shown in red).

Strategic Stretch Outcomes					
Increase the number of 0-5s who meet developmental milestones by 2026	Improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and families by 2026	Improve the attainment, health and wellbeing and positive destinations of our care experienced by 2026	Improve the attainment and positive destinations of our children and young people by 2026	Reduce the number of young people charged with an offence by 2026	Increase the number of children with ASN or disability who secure a positive destination by 2026
Strategic Priorities					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve the health outcomes of expectant and new mothers ➤ Improve uptake of benefits ➤ Improve access to emergency formula and food for infants ➤ Address early speech and language needs ➤ Increase the uptake of immunisations ➤ Improve the quality of ELC provision and maintain uptake ➤ Investigate factors sustaining household smoking and the rise in premature births 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Focus on prevention and early intervention ➤ Provide access to joined up services and bereavement support ➤ Respond quickly in a stigma free, needs and rights led way ➤ Increase levels of physical activity ➤ Increase the provision of child friendly environments within local communities ➤ Investigate the rise in hospitalisations due to asthma and ➤ Ensure school PSE Programmes help keep children safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deliver a Bairs Hoose ➤ Deliver The Promise ➤ Increase the provision of health assessments for the care experienced ➤ Continue to close the gap between those who have care experience and their peers ➤ Increase the no. of foster carers available locally ➤ Keep brothers and sisters together ➤ Ensure adequate provision of legal advice and advocacy ➤ Implement the recommendations of the Secure Care Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement refreshed guidance on the use of restraint ➤ Better track those who are in or on the edge of the care system ➤ Improve learning transitions from P7 to S1 ➤ Deliver ABZ Campus to widen the range of courses ➤ Deliver Aberdeen Computing Collaborative to ensure long term employability ➤ Delivery of Tier 2 services to close the gap through SAC funding ➤ Continue to address the cost of the school day and child poverty in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reduce levels of anti-social behaviour ➤ Deliver Mentors in Violence Prevention across all secondary schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delivery of neurodevelopmental pathway ➤ Establish better assurance systems ➤ Increase the number of Young Carers receiving support ➤ Improve transition planning from child to adult services ➤ Ensure that the voices of children (including those who use alternative communication systems) are central to processes and Plans ➤ Decrease the number of children not accessing full time education
Enabling Priorities					
Access to services	Increase integration	Reduce risks	Commissioning	Data	Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement a single Request for Assistance process ➤ reduce the number of access points to information and services ➤ investigate and address any issues in P1 attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build on the integration models including that at ELC Links ➤ Establish an assurance system to test the strength of the system ➤ Improve alignment between children and adult services ➤ Develop a Target Operating Model for children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Better understand why children are placed OOA ➤ Understand the long term impact of ELC on outcomes for families ➤ Agree and implement a whole system approach to addressing obesity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aligned to the 10 principles of family support ➤ Jointly respond to the needs of those displaced ➤ Evaluate readiness for implementation of the UNCRC ➤ Support the implementation of recommendations arising from the review of Employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve knowledge of the 6 groups by co-designing with service users and children ➤ Improve data matching ➤ Improve the tracking of the outcomes of those most vulnerable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase knowledge poverty agenda and of benefits ➤ Increase knowledge of trauma and risk ➤ Develop ways of working (SIMD1) to better support the provision of rights

3.27 With Committee approval, the areas identified will be built into the workplan of the Children's Services Board.

3.28 It is proposed that this Annual Report be presented to the Community Planning Aberdeen Board for formal ratification in April 2024. The Annual Report will be submitted to Scottish Government thereafter.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Closer alignment of services could help realise efficiency in the longer term.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Section 8 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 requires the Council and NHS Grampian to prepare a Children's Services Plan every 3 years and to keep that Plan under review under section 11. Section 13 of the Act provides that as soon as practicable after the end of each 1 year period, a local authority and the relevant health board must publish (in such manner as they consider appropriate) a report on the extent to which children's services and related services have in that period been provided in the area of the local authority in accordance with the children's services plan. This Report and Appendix satisfies these duties.
- 5.2 The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets out steps required to be taken by the Scottish Government, Local Authorities and Health Boards to tackle child poverty. The Act creates a requirement for Local Authorities and Local Health Boards to annually agree and publish a Child Poverty Action Report. Following ratification the Report must be submitted to Scottish Ministers.
- 5.3 The Corporate Parenting duties included in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 are designed to ensure that the attention and resources of various organisations are explicitly focussed on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked after children and young people, and care leavers. This part extends the duties of corporate parents and the reporting responsibilities of local authorities.
- 5.4 Aberdeen City Council has a duty to report to Scottish Government Ministers every three years on how it is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities as detailed in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.
- 5.5 Section 59 of the 2014 Act provides that corporate parents must prepare a plan for how they propose exercising their corporate parenting responsibilities and must keep this plan under review; corporate parents must consult with one another before preparing or revising the plan and must publish the plan or revised plan.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Risk of not changing our local system to	Delivery of the Children's Services Plan and regular	L	Yes

	reflect changes in national policy.	review of the appropriateness of the Plan to ensure maximum impact.		
Compliance	Risk of not complying with legislation	This Annual Report complies with the Statutory Guidance and legislative requirements.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk that we make a lesser impact by working to a high number of strategic plans	The Plan pulls all strategic Plans together to help maximise impact.	L	Yes
Financial	Risk that we don't have sufficient resource to meet the needs of priority groups	The Plan will help us make best use of available resource by ensuring partners work to a common purpose.	L	Yes
Reputational	Risk that we don't prioritise those in greatest need.	Mitigated by undertaking a detailed strategic needs assessment and looking at the data by group before drawing conclusions.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No risks identified			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p>Work with the city's universities, North East Scotland College and businesses to increase educational and training options and the number of care experienced young people and young people from deprived communities, going onto positive destinations, including further and higher education, vocational training and apprenticeships.</p> <p>Ensure local education services identify young people with mental health problems and help them get early support and help, where appropriate, to transfer to adult services.</p> <p>Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked-after young</p>	<p>The needs of children and young people most often require a strong multi-agency response. This Plan will support the further integration and collaboration across services supporting children and families to help realise improved outcomes.</p>

<p>people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems</p> <p>Commit to realising the potential of each individual, by seeking to widen curriculum choice and implement progressive choices.</p>	
<p><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></p>	
<p><i>95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026</i></p> <p>90% of children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026</p> <p>As corporate parents we will ensure 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.</p> <p>95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026</p> <p>Fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026</p> <p>95% of our children with disabilities will experience a positive transition to adult services by 2026</p>	<p>This Plan details how all children's stretch outcomes will be realised over the next year and will help to coordinate our work across the Community Planning Partnership.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p>	
<p>Regional Cultural Strategy</p> <p>Prevention Strategy</p> <p>Children's Services Plan</p> <p>National Improvement Framework Plan</p>	<p>The Children's Services Plan prioritises prevention and is closely aligned with the National Improvement Framework. The Plan is designed to bring all statutory Plans for children into one Plan to improve service delivery.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	No
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Aberdeen City Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023-26](#)

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A - Annual Report April 2024 – March 2025

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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