

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services
<b>DATE</b>	24 June 2025
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Bairns Hoose Update
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	F&C/25/157
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Alison McAlpine
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	2.2

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on progress in relation to Aberdeen City's Pathfinder activity to develop our Bairns Hoose.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 note the update of progress made by the Aberdeen City Pathfinder to deliver a Bairns Hoose and the Scottish Government grant award for 2025/26 to support delivery of Aberdeen's Bairns Hoose;
- 2.2 note that an incremental approach to opening the Bairns Hoose will commence from the Summer of 2025;
- 2.3 instruct the Chief Officer, Children & Family Support Services/CSWO to arrange a visit for Committee Members to the Bairns Hoose upon completion of the build; and
- 2.4 instruct the Chief Officer, Children & Family Services/CSWO to provide a service update, in June 2026.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

#### 3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The Scottish Government's vision for a Bairns Hoose in Scotland is that *"All children in Scotland who have been victims or witnesses to abuse or violence, as well as children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused significant harm or abuse will have access to trauma informed recovery, support and justice."*
- 3.1.2 A Bairns Hoose is based on the concept of 'four rooms'. It brings together the four elements of justice, health, social work and recovery support into a single

setting to deliver integrated and compassionate support to best meet the needs of children who are victims of abuse or have witnessed violence as well as children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused significant harm to others.

- 3.1.3 Aberdeen City's Executive Group for Public Protection noted their commitment in 2023 to fully deliver a Bairns Hoose in Aberdeen. In doing so the unused part of the Links Hub was identified as a possible location for the Bairns Hoose.
- 3.1.4 In summer 2023 the Scottish Government invited applications for Partnerships to become a Pathfinder. Aberdeen City partnership was awarded "Pathfinder Status" in November 2023. Being a Pathfinder, Aberdeen City has been awarded some funding in 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 to support the system and practice change required to deliver on the [Bairns-Hoose-Standards](#) and capital funding to support the development of a Bairns Hoose building that can deliver the integrated transformational service envisaged. The national Pathfinder phase of the Bairns Hoose policy will run until 31 March 2027.
- 3.1.5 To oversee the multi-agency transformational change required to deliver a Bairns Hoose, a Delivery Group was established with a number of workstreams.

**VOICE** – to ensure our service design is informed by and takes full account of the voice and views of children, young people and families.

**Systems and Processes** – Adapting and transforming existing systems and processes to enable alignment to the Bairns Hoose Standards.

**Capital & Resources** – Overseeing the building development and the resource required to deliver a Bairns Hoose on a sustainable basis

**Governance** – oversight of reporting duties to Scottish Government, Independent Funding Partners as well as internal governance

**Evaluation** – to lead learning and begin to understand the impact of a Bairns Hoose service model.

- 3.1.6 The Delivery Group reports directly to the Child Protection Committee and the Public Protection Chief Officer Group.

## 3.2 Voice, Participation and Recovery Support

- 3.2.1 Children First is Scotland's national children's charity, protecting children from harm and supporting recovery from trauma and abuse. It leads the development of a child-focused recovery offer in Aberdeen City's Bairns Hoose, providing recovery, rights, and advocacy support. They are available to deliver tailored support for families through the court and legal processes ensuring appropriate levels of recovery service are in place.
- 3.2.2 Recognising that *recovery* supports may already be in place and/or may not always require to take place through the confines of Bairns Hoose, we are working to strengthen links to other existing support services, such as our Fit Like Wellbeing Hubs. Children First are working in collaboration with Victim Support Scotland, Cybersafe Scotland, and Grampian Women's Aid to ensure appropriate access to support and knowledge that will guide children and their families appropriately.

- 3.2.3 Within the City, our most common reason for child protection referral continues to be in relation to physical harm at the hands of a parent/carer and here, most children will remain within their families with no criminal charges being professed. This has required us to carefully consider how best to support these families to think differently about how to manage the needs of children and their parent carers and to establish appropriate linkages with services who can mitigate against further harm.
- 3.2.4 The voices of children, young people, and their families are central to Bairns Hoose planning therefore the VOICE workstream is dedicated to embedding systemic listening and learning practices, aligned with UNCRC and The Promise, ensuring that these voices are heard and acted upon in strategic planning and evaluation. This approach is also by necessity, integrated across all workstreams to consistently inform service development and delivery.
- Children and their families have contributed directly to the design of our Bairns Hoose, influencing features such as outdoor space, access to food, shower facilities and the overall aesthetic.
  - A consistent feedback tool has been co-developed with children and young people to ensure their experiences inform service improvement.
  - A local advisory group aligned with the Lundy model, has been established to promote sustained participation and influence.
  - Children and young people are leading on the design of a dedicated Bairns Hoose logo for Aberdeen City which we hope to be ready in summer 2025, reinforcing ownership and identity.
  - Advocacy, Rights and Recovery staff have provided coordinated, holistic support to families throughout their journey.
  - A target has been set for 95% of children and families to report a positive impact from the support received via the Bairns Hoose.

### **3.3 Improvement Activity**

- 3.3.1 Integration has been a key feature of Aberdeen's pathway planning for Bairns Hoose. Openness to change and candid challenge between agencies and services has been an approach that has matured since the outset of this project. Meeting the Bairns Hoose Standards will require much more than a 'lift and shift' of individual areas of expertise into one building. Instead, partners believe that we need to be greater than the sum of our individual parts in order to truly deliver preventative support to more effectively respond to the needs of this group of vulnerable children. This will ensure that children do not fall through current gaps and that the systems and processes they find themselves in do not inadvertently cause them further harm.
- 3.3.2 Collaborative discussions across the partnership including with the NHSG has led to detailed planning to enhance the health element within our Bairns Hoose as well as the health pathways connected to this. This will see activity to improve the responsiveness of support to children/young people who have been abused, harmed or those younger children who may have caused harm to others. This improvement work will also enable an increasing preventative lens to the health needs of children who connect with the Bairns Hoose.

- 3.3.3 A health coordinator will be embedded within the Bairns Hoose. This role will undertake initial health and wellbeing medicals and screen all children for unmet health needs. They will also connect with existing health professionals connected to the child/young person to progress identified actions. Their role will also consider the needs of parents/carers recognising that responding to their needs is often the most effective means to support the recovery of the young from their harmful experiences.
- 3.3.4 In 2025, a specific test of change will embed specialist Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) within Bairns Hoose to enhance communication support for children and young people. The focus will be on identifying communication needs before interviews or court attendance, fostering an inclusive communication environment, and training staff with tools like Talking Mats. The project's success will be measured through training, feedback, case studies, and an impact report to guide future service development.
- 3.3.5 Collaboration via a joint Justice workstream continues to take place with our colleagues in Aberdeenshire in order to plan improvement within our legal processes and systems.
- 3.3.6 A workshop is planned to enable a deeper dive around the “Justice” element of the Bairns Hoose to more fully explore the required change needed. The Partnership are committed to thinking innovatively, challenging where necessary systems and processes that may in fact be counter-productive to the recovery that we are committed to offering. Our partnership with the University of Edinburgh is providing an additional opportunity to explore international models of delivering justice support to children and young people who have been harmed or whose behaviour has harmed others.
- 3.3.7 The policy landscape and expectations are changing at pace and we continue to enhance our planning to ensure our Bairns Hoose is ‘future proofed’ - i.e. potential increase of age of criminal responsibility; changes to the rules of evidence for children; Trauma Informed Domestic Abuse Management (TIDAM) and the implementation of the Children’s (Care & Justice) Act.
- 3.3.8 Insights from the Justice workshop will ensure that all considerations related to the provision of remote evidence are addressed, and that relevant connections to broader policy agendas are appropriately integrated.
- 3.3.9 Planning for the opening of our Bairns Hoose is expected to conclude in the coming months, with the aim of becoming operational in late summer 2025. It is acknowledged that full implementation may be phased, and not all components will be fully active from the outset.
- 3.3.10 As the above work further develops we will continue to explore opportunities to maximise the space within the Bairns Hoose on an incremental basis, for example, whether the space could be used for a wider cohort of need, for example in vulnerable adult interviews or for children who come into conflict with the law.

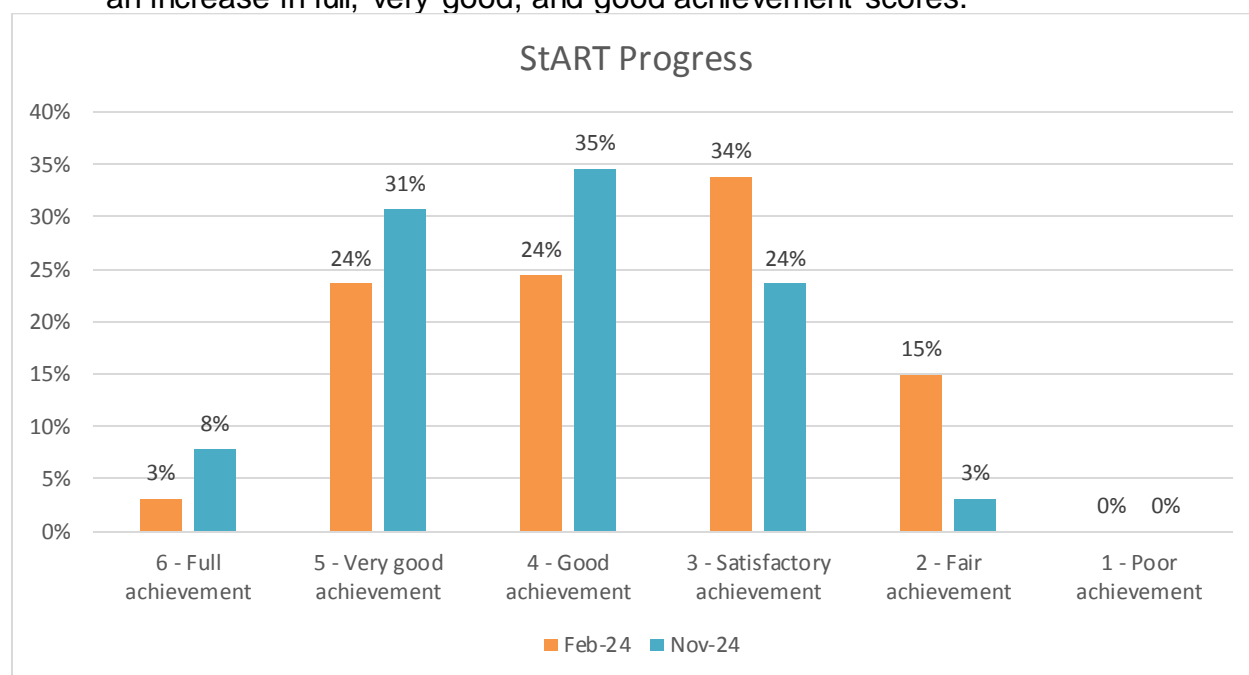
3.3.11 While partners continue to note their commitment to deliver the Bairns Hoose to the fullest possible extent, they have also flagged the fiscal pressures all public agencies are experiencing and the potential impact on their capacity to contribute financially to the operational delivery of the Bairns Hoose.

3.3.12 As a Pathfinder site, we were required to complete a self-assessment and readiness tool (StART) at the beginning and throughout our Bairns Hoose journey. The purpose of the StART tool is to support pathfinder partnerships in understanding their own current state of implementation in order to inform improvement priorities, and to provide a national picture of progress against the Standards. The StART tool is designed to help review progress and developments as well as learning for improvements.

3.3.13 In February 2024, Aberdeen City undertook a self-assessment of the 127 criteria to fulfil the eleven Standards, providing a structured opportunity to plan and measure improvement. Aberdeen City committed to regularly reviewing our self-assessment and did so again in November 2024.

3.3.14 The chart below illustrates the progress Aberdeen City have made from our position against the standards in February 2024 (orange column), and again in November 2024 (blue column).

Throughout the implementation and delivery process, we expect to continue to see a reduction in percentages for fair and satisfactory achievement, and to see an increase in full, very good, and good achievement scores.



## 3.4 Bairns Hoose Design and Development

3.4.1 Construction work began renovating our building in January 2025 after approvals and the tendering process. Despite an ambitious schedule, work is expected to finish by early July 2025, following the design plans agreed upon in 2024.

- 3.4.2 Under the coordination of the Delivery Group, multi-agency partners have worked jointly over 2024/25 to ensure the building's design and layout met the practical and therapeutic needs of those it is intended to support and protect. During this time, children, young people, and their families have actively contributed their views, all of which have been incorporated, directly shaping planning and decision-making.
- 3.4.3 We are particularly appreciative of those who visited the site during its development and those who have assisted in evaluating furnishings. Their candid feedback on elements such as texture, style, colour, and overall atmosphere has been instrumental in creating a space that genuinely reflects the needs and preferences of its future users.
- 3.4.4 Care is being taken to ensure the building can be compliant of technical requirements from the point of interview with a child through to linking the child's evidence to Court, where this is necessary. Space has been created to maximise every opportunity for recovery, as well as to include a dedicated health and wellbeing suite that has been future proofed in order that it can potentially undertake forensic medicals if this is in a child's best interests. This latter point is building on feedback from a young person who fed back that the facilities proposed for her medical did not feel as safe and supportive as those which she had attended for an interview.

### 3.5 Evaluation

- 3.5.1 Aberdeen City's Bairns Hoose progress is being evaluated, by the University of Edinburgh (UoE). It is underpinned by a [Programme Theory](#) designed to measure progress against national standards, ensure continuous improvement, and inform future service delivery. The findings have been shared through key reporting mechanisms in addition to within Bairns Hoose Delivery Group meetings, in recognition that our learning is fluid throughout our pathfinder journey.
- 3.5.2 The evaluation aims to test whether the model improves outcomes for children across five areas: **recovery, safety, justice, rights, and reduction of systems harm**. Five core assumptions guide the approach:
- I. A dedicated, child-friendly Bairns Hoose building will enhance children's comfort, safety, and evidence quality.
  - II. Multi-agency coordination, led by a Bairns Hoose Coordinator, will ensure timely, joined-up responses to children's needs.
  - III. Access to tailored recovery support, including Advocacy, Rights and Recovery (ARR) workers, will improve outcomes for children and families.
  - IV. Justice processes will be less harmful through trauma-informed interviews, remote court access, and better communication.
  - V. Updated forensic medical protocols and broader health assessments will support children's physical and mental recovery

- 3.5.3 The UoE recently shared findings from a survey of professionals across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, conducted in November 2024. (Aberdeenshire are also a Bairns Hoose Pathfinder and we are sharing learning but also developing aspects collaboratively.) The survey offers key insights, notably that current practice is felt to evidence a strong initial response, but weaker long-term support, especially for recovery. The main barriers to improvement were felt to be high workloads, limited resources, and inconsistent multi-agency collaboration. Justice processes were noted to be distressing and needed to be more child friendly. Professionals felt that there were knowledge gaps in relation to the Bairns Hoose model.
- 3.5.4 Since the time of this evaluation, improvement activity has been progressed, resulting in enhanced information sharing among all agencies regarding developments. Our children have been involved in helping us produce documentation on Bairns Hoose services, and those who might benefit from a recovery service have been offered this following a joint investigative interview where appropriate.
- 3.5.5 Over 2025/2026, our strong linkage with a Scottish Government Improvement Advisor will aid to maximise the benefits of improvement methodology allowing live data to inform continuous learning and positively impact outcomes for children.

### **3.6 Funding**

- 3.6.1 As a Pathfinder, Aberdeen was awarded **£281,875** to spend between January and March 2024 (£120,500 capital funding and £161,375 revenue funding). In 2024/25, the maximum funding of **£500,000** was sought and (£116,654 capital - £81,00 of this for video recording equipment and £358,936 revenue funding). All funding has to be utilised within the agreed time frame. There is no opportunity to carry forward funding. A quarterly return requires to be submitted setting out progress and spend. During 2024/25 due to staff vacancies etc there was a small underspend in the revenue budget and where possible we have successfully negotiated converting this funding to capital spend.
- 3.6.2 Our funding application for the 2025/26 Pathfinder year has requested the maximum level for both revenue and capital elements. Feedback on the application was again positive, with confirmation of full awards of **£700,000** (£500,00 revenue and £200,000 for capital spend.)
- 3.6.3 On top of core funding, **£36,027** has also been secured for 2025/26 to allow a test of change project to enhance core service provision as detailed above.
- 3.6.4 When it became known there was scope for additional capital funding requests in 2025/26, a further application was submitted in respect of funding that could focus on the fixtures, fittings and equipment within the Bairns Hoose as well as the garden and entrance area to our Bairns Hoose. Our additional submission aligned with the wishes and needs of our children, young people and their families. This has recently resulted in a further **£293,000** of funding to further support our meeting of Bairns Hoose standards.

- 3.6.5 Learning from the six Pathfinders is being aggregated by the Scottish Government Bairns Hoose Team to support the national roll out of the Bairns Hoose Policy. This will focus on practice learning and how Pathfinders have overcome current barriers/challenges. The learning will also inform what ongoing funding will be required to support delivery of the Bairns Hoose. This will be a focus across all Pathfinders and the national team during the first six months of 2026.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising out of this report
- 4.2 Pathfinder learning will support an understanding of costs of delivering a Bairns Hoose that meets the standards set. Long term funding to embed delivery of the Bairns Hoose model has yet to be confirmed although similar funding as at 2025/26 has been indicated for 2026/27.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising out of this report.

#### **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

#### **7. RISK**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Risks</b>	<b>Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level</b>	<b>Target Risk Level (L, M or H)</b>	<b>*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?</b>
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No significant related risks	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Compliance</b>	The Scottish Government policy is that every child in Scotland will have access to a Bairns Hoose service by 2025. It is anticipated that national reporting will in future include reporting against the Bairns Hoose Standards.	The Child Protection Committee has primary oversight on progress to develop and deliver a Bairns Hoose. Regular reporting will be shared with Aberdeen's Public protection Chief Officers Group.	L	Yes
<b>Operational</b>	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people who	Aberdeen City has a well-established Child Protection data reporting	L	Yes



	<p>have experienced harm or Aberdeen City has a well-established Child Protection data reporting. Those whose behaviour poses a risk to others is central to the planning for all children and young people open to Children's Social Work. Children's Social Work and Police Scotland have lead responsibility to investigate allegations of abuse or where children's behaviour poses a concern to others. While this duty is currently being fulfilled the environment in which these investigations occur does not fulfil the requirements of the Bairns Hoose standards nor best meet the needs of the children and young people.</p>	<p>framework. Going forward the framework will be amended to include reporting against the Bairns Hoose Standards.</p>		
<b>Financial</b>	<p>There are no significant related financial risks from this report. The Business case for the redevelopment of the building to become a Bairns Hoose is concluded. This will enable a tendering exercise to be undertaken.</p>	<p>One of the core principles of delivering a Bairns Hoose service is that by providing early trauma informed support to children and their family it will reduce the demand on services in the longer term and</p>	L	Yes

	All agencies will be responsible for funding the individual service components that will deliver a Bairns Hoose.	reduce the likelihood of children requiring intensive support.		
<b>Reputational</b>	Failure to deliver on the Brains Hoose standards will have a reputational impact on the Council. It will also adversely impact on the assessment of Children's Services within future strategic joint inspections.	By being a pathfinder the Council will benefit from support from the National Bairns Hoose team to deliver a high quality service.	L	Yes
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b>Council Delivery Plan 2024</b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <u><b>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</b></u>	<p>Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people has a direct relevance to the delivery of the following statements contained within the Council Delivery Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure local services identify young people with mental health problems and help them get early support and help.</li> <li>• Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems</li> <li>• Continue to seek to support young people to receive care in Aberdeen, through fostering, adoption and other services and seek to reduce "out of authority" placements.</li> </ul>
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people for whom secure care might be considered has a direct relevance to the following stretch outcomes in the LOIP:

	<p>3. 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review, by 2026</p> <p>4. 90% of children and young people will report that they feel listened to all the time, by 2026.</p> <p>5. By meeting the health and wellbeing emotional needs of our care experienced children and young people, they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.</p> <p>6. 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods (quintiles 1&amp;2) will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026.</p> <p>7. 83.5% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.</p>
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people is central to the planning for all children and young people open to Children's Social Work. This activity is relevant to the Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, and the Children's Services Plan
<b>UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes</b>	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people is central to the planning for all children and young people open to Children's Social Work supports the Scottish Government's drive to #KeepthePromise. This wide ranging and ambitious programme impacts on a range of statutory duties on the Council in relation to vulnerable and care experienced children including those contained in the Children(Scotland) Act 1995, Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and Children (Scotland) Act 2020.

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the Bairns Hoose report presented to Committee in February 2024 has been reviewed and no changes required.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required.
<b>Other</b>	Not required.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

N/A

## **11. APPENDICES (if applicable)**

None

## **12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS**

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