

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	25 November 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Update on the Learning outcomes from the Thematic Review of services for Children with Disabilities
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/271
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Carol Davie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.6

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To update the Education and Children's Services Committee on progress in response to the Care Inspectorate Thematic Review of services for Children with Disabilities, presented in September 2024 and to inform on the updated Action Plan for 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1. Note the progress made against the Action Plan developed in response to the Care Inspectorate Thematic Review;
- 2.2 Note the development of Transition Planning Guidance and protocol including the establishment of Transitions Group Meetings; and
- 2.3 Note the intention to engage with children and young people to develop accessible material to ensure the Council is adopting a rights centric approach to transitions.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1.1 In early 2024, the Care Inspectorate undertook a rights based thematic review of disabled children and young people's experiences of social work services across all thirty-two local authorities in Scotland. Aberdeen City Council, Children's Services was one of four areas who were involved in a more in-depth scrutiny, as part of this Review. The Care Inspectorate published their overall findings in August 2024.
- 3.1.2 The salient local and national messages were presented to Committee in November 2024, alongside an Action Plan to drive key learning and enhance service delivery for children with disabilities.
- 3.1.3 Whilst the Care Inspectorate asserted that a number of their findings required a response at a national level, others required multi-agency partners to collaborate at a local level to deliver the identified improvement. Committee members

requested an update on progress on delivering the improvements be presented to Committee in 2025.

- 3.1.4 Advancements in medical care have enabled children with complex needs to live longer. Given their complexity of need they require increased support and resources. The 2024/25 cost-of-living crisis has heightened the link between poverty and social work demand, with families facing daily survival challenges and negative effects on wellbeing. These issues are especially significant for families with children who have complex disabilities and therefore require to be factored into our improvement planning.

3.2 Implementation of key learning

- 3.2.1 The learning from this thematic review was presented to both the Children's Services Board and the Child Protection Committee and utilised to inform programmes of work including the Children's Services statutory plan.
- 3.2.2 The updated Action Plan (Appendix A) reflects the progression of key learning at a national and local level.

3.3 Principal Implementation

- 3.3.1 The views of disabled children and their families have and continue to be considered as part of service mapping, understanding unmet need and service planning. Utilising parental questionnaires specific to our service was placed on hold due to families receiving the same request for feedback from commissioned service providers and the Care Inspectorate. Therefore, it was felt to have potential for duplication and overload for families. The outcomes of the surveys undertaken by our partner agencies have however, been utilised to inform our service review and delivery.
- 3.3.2 The voice of the child is imperative in all areas of service planning and delivery. Obtaining the views of children by social workers and our Children's Rights Service, is commonplace. Staff within the Children with Disabilities service have all been trained in the Makaton, to enhance their scope to interact and capture views of a wider group of children with communication challenges. Other communication aids have and will continue to be utilised in line with the child's needs. Consultations with Speech and Language Therapists to assist communication with children are embedded in practice.
- 3.3.3 Positive and constructive feedback has been received in terms of service delivery from parents and children. These have been utilised in service planning and work to ensure gaps in service provision are addressed.
- 3.3.4 Connecting with other local authorities has been central to considering and exploring change ideas. We now have representation within national networking opportunities and learning exchanges across Scotland. A visit has been undertaken to Edinburgh Disability and Neurodiversity Hub, <https://theyardscotland.org.uk/edan-hub/>, with their framework of intervention being recognised as making a significant difference to the lives of the children and

families who use the service. This model has been replicated in Dundee and most recently Glasgow.

- 3.3.5 Work is ongoing to explore with the Health and Social Care Partnership, support from the Occupational Therapy (OT) service to develop stronger and more meaningful links. Although not in place the intention is for an OT worker to be based within the Children with Disabilities Team one day per week. Communication will continue with our partners, to further explore a more integrated approach to supporting families who have a disabled child. This will seek to draw on learning from the Edinburgh model noted in 3.3.4.
- 3.3.6 Support to disabled children must be clearly defined and understood across agencies. With the assistance of children and their families a new information leaflet (Appendix B) has been developed for parents and professionals, Webpage designing has commenced and will be aligned to the Council website. The information will be user friendly and accessible to those with additional support needs. There will also be links to the Fit Like Hub site and the new Transition Protocol. The Intranet Site has been updated in relation to the latter.
- 3.3.7 Children with Disabilities workers routinely attend Parent Information evenings within Orchard Brae and Bucksburn ASN facilities.
- 3.3.8 A Framework for Intervention (Appendix C) has been developed to help families and referrers to the Children with Disabilities Team. This has been shared with and approved by a targeted number of parents we are supporting.
- 3.3.9 Collaboration with Sport Aberdeen to enhance opportunities for children in the community to integrate with peers, as well as alliance with third sector, and private sector colleagues regarding evening, afterschool, and school holiday provisions has been progressed. One off Scottish Government funding in 2025-26 provided opportunities for additional provision, including offering 16 more places for children to attend Playscheme experiences over the October and Easter holidays.
- 3.3.10 Participation in the Carers Strategy Implementation Group, (Appendix D) supported and informed the review of the Carers Strategy.

3.4 Transition Planning

- 3.4.1 One of the key findings from the thematic inspection was the need to improve the experience for young people and their families/carers moving from children to adult social work services. Nationally, the experience was too often described as being unpredictable and destabilising for children, young people, and their families. In Aberdeen, transition experiences were variable, however there was an acknowledgement that we had recognised this and that there was commitment to working together to develop a multi-agency approach to improving transitions and developing a protocol in line with the **National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Young Disabled People**.
- 3.4.2 In August 2024, an Improving Transitions workstream was established in order to improve the experience of young people with significant care needs as they

transition from school to adulthood. The group is formed of representatives from Adult Social Work, Children's Social Work and Education.

3.4.3 The vision statement of this working group is: '**young people in Aberdeen City will experience a well-planned, person-centred transition that enables them to reach their full potential as adults.**'

3.4.4 The project aligns with the Scottish Government's Principles of Good Transition 3 as well as the UNCRC. Locally, the approach emphasises:

- Early identification and planning
- Cross-service collaboration
- Person-centred support
- Clear, accessible information for young people and families
- Ongoing engagement and evaluation

3.4.5 Key achievements thus far include:

- Improved data sharing between Education, Social Work, and Health to identify young people needing support post-18yrs.
- Early planning mechanisms being developed to support transitions at an earlier juncture than the national 2-year benchmark.
- Collaboration strengthened through co-location of services.
- Use of the national Compass Toolkit to guide transition stages and responsibilities
- Process mapping completed to identify and address service disconnects.
- Standard Operating Procedures being developed to ensure consistency.

3.4.6 A phased approach has been adopted and this consists of:

Phase	Focus	Target Completion
Phase 1	Vision, internal processes, staff/family guidance	July 2025
Phase 2	Service redesign, health transitions integration	October 2025
Phase 3	Evaluation and continuous improvement	March 2027 onwards

3.4.7 This approach has supported the development of new transitions processes which meet our vision and align to work already taking place within the primary areas of Children's Education and Social Work and Adult Social Work. In time we will expand this to include Children's and Adult health services.

3.4.8 The introduction of a twice-yearly Transition Group Meeting is a primary component in terms of ensuring early awareness of the need for support into adulthood and beyond, and that improved outcomes for transitions are achieved. The group is comprised of representatives from Children's Social Work, Education and Adult Services, including the Learning Disabilities, Physical Disabilities and Mental Health services. We will integrate a data capture process to continually understand the needs of young people as they reach the age of 18, and beyond, as pertains to adult services. Embedding this process will assist in financial and service planned.

- 3.4.9 Referrals are considered for young people from aged 14, due to the correlation between early awareness and positive transition outcomes. The group, in considering the information presented to them, refers to eligibility criteria, and makes informed decisions about future support required within statutory adult services. Should young people be deemed as not meeting the Adult Services eligibility criteria, this information can be shared with young people and their families at the earliest opportunity to allow for planning and to signpost them to other external services, such as Skills Development Scotland, ABZ Works, or Aberdeen Carers Support Services.
- 3.4.10 Practice guidance (Appendix E) has been made available electronically to assist in the process. This will be regularly reviewed, ensuring learning from staff feedback is incorporated into the processes. The guidance will support the delivery of planned training/learning in a multi-disciplinary/multi-partnership way.
- 3.4.11 Guidance for young people, their families/carers is planned and will be available early in 2026. This will be available in various formats in recognition of levels of need. Links will be integrated within children's services, adult services, and education web pages. Young People from Bucksburn Academy, with the assistance of Education staff and the Participation and Engagement Officer, within Children's Services, will compile a short video to assist their peers to understand transitions at each stage of the process.
- 3.4.12 Evaluation at each stage of the evolving Transition Pathway, is crucial to delivery of our vision for the young people of our city.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve. Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*Taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Many of the key messages from the	The Local Outcomes and Improvement Plan and Children's Service	L	Yes

	thematic review are already in place in practice in the city. The remaining areas are already incorporated into strategic planning.	Plan are well governed by the Chief Officer Group. They will be ensuring that the terms of the thematic review continue to be incorporated into current and future strategic planning.		
Compliance	No significant risk identified	Services across all multi-agency partners will be aware of the key messages and requirements and ensure compliance.	L	Yes
Operational	Required improvements and developments in practice are not identified and actioned.	Leadership supports participation and planning across the multi-agency partnership in the delivery of changes required as a result of the findings.	L	Yes
Financial	No significant risk identified			Yes
Reputational	Organisational failings in relation to children with disabilities can bring significant media interest and scrutiny of services delivered to children and young people.	The public can be assured that: the Council ensures compliance with legal requirements, national standards, and guidance; partners respond to self and external scrutiny; and identified areas for improvement are addressed.	M	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risk identified			Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-2033</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	The contents of this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
100% of our children with Additional Support Needs/ Disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026.	Children's Services partners deliver on the outcomes of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan Prosperous People (Children & Young People) Stretch Outcome 8 and to ensure our children with ASN/disabilities and their families receive the support they need in a timely manner.
Regional and City Strategies	The work is relevant to the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, the Children's Services Plan. Local stakeholders progress the findings and expectations of the Thematic Review

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	This report updates committee members in relation to the implantation of the key findings of a Thematic Review conducted by the Care Inspectorate and does not require a full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment to be completed. No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Ali McAlpine, Lead Service Manager, Children's Social Work and Family Support
Data Protection Impact Assessment	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Ali McAlpine, Lead Service Manager, Children's Social Work and Family Support
Other	

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[ECS Nov 2024 report - F&C/24/330 - Learning outcomes from Care Inspectorate Thematic Review](#)

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A - Updated Action Plan

Appendix B - Information Leaflet

Appendix C - Framework for Intervention

Appendix D - Carers Strategy Implementation Group

Appendix E - Transition Pathway Guidance

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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