

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Staff Governance Committee
<b>DATE</b>	2 February 2026
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Aberdeen City Bairns Hoose – Integrated Working
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	F&C/26/012
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Shepherd
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	2.2

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To share with Committee members the development of an integrated staffing model to deliver Aberdeen City's 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 for Aberdeen City's children and young people;
- 2.2 note the integrated staffing model being utilised to deliver the Bairns Hoose Service;
- 2.3 note the University of Edinburgh will continue to evaluate the Partnership's delivery of a Bairns Hoose, at least, until 31 March 2027; and
- 2.4 note the Chief Officer, Children & Family Support Services/CSWO has been instructed to provide a service update to the Education and Children's Services Committee 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, delivering integrated and compassionate support to best meet

the needs of children who are victims of abuse and/or witnesses to violence as well as children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused significant harm to others. Delivery of the ‘four rooms’ can only be achieved on a multi-agency and collaborative basis.

- 3.1.3 In July 2023 the Scottish Government invited applications from Partnerships to become a Bairns Hoose Pathfinder. Aberdeen City was awarded “Pathfinder Status” in November 2023. The unused part of the Links Hub was identified as a location for the Bairns Hoose. As a Pathfinder, Aberdeen City has been awarded some funding to support the system and practice change required to deliver the [Bairns' Hoose standards – Healthcare Improvement Scotland](#). The national Pathfinder phase will run until 31 March 2027.
- 3.1.4 To oversee the multi-agency transformational change required, a Bairns Hoose Delivery Group was established with a number of workstreams. The Delivery Group reports directly to the Child Protection Committee and the Public Protection Chief Officer Group.

### 3.2 Current Situation

- 3.2.1 Work to redevelop the empty space at the Links Hub to deliver a Bairns Hoose was concluded in Summer 2025. The Bairns Hoose began to be operational on an incremental basis from August 2025. All “four rooms” are now fully operational.
- 3.2.2 While redevelopment of the building has been concluded, delivery of a Bairns Hoose and of the practice standards go well beyond the physical space. It requires transformational change to multi-agency practice, systems and processes. All key delivery partners – Police Scotland; NHS Grampian; Children’s Social Work have committed to adopt a co-location approach to our Bairns Hoose. Additionally, as part of our Pathfinder, we have partnered with Children First to deliver a recovery service from our Bairns Hoose.
- 3.2.3 Staff from the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA); Crown Office (COPFS) and Scottish Court & Tribunal Service (SCTS) will utilise the Bairns Hoose remote court facility as required.
- 3.2.4 The Bairns Hoose Standards place significant emphasis on the need to consider staff, who are delivering the Bairns Hoose service as one team - **Standard 10: Multidisciplinary staff training and support - The people who help me at the Bairns' Hoose work as a team. They get the help they need to do their jobs well.**

### 3.3 Staff Located in the Bairns Hoose

- 3.3.1 **Child Interview Staff** - Aberdeen City has moved to ensure all children, interviewed as part of a child protection investigation, are interviewed by staff trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM). This is a trauma informed and rights respecting model which seeks to secure best evidence from a child, mitigating them having to recount their abusive experiences on multiple occasions. Consequently Police Scotland and Social Work staff who are SCIM trained are located in the Bairns Hoose.

3.3.2 Interviewers are reporting that the design and technology of the interview rooms has significantly increased the quality of the interviews. The relaxed environment is allowing children to feel more comfortable and able to engage more effectively in the interview. Feedback from the children and young people also speaks positively about how they feel within the Bairns Hoose.

**3.3.3 Health Staff** - A health coordinator has been embedded within the Bairns Hoose. This role will undertake initial health and wellbeing medicals and screen children for unmet health needs. The coordinator will 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 children/young people from their harmful experiences.

3.3.4 A specific test of change is being undertaken to embed specialist Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) within Bairns Hoose to enhance communication support for children and young people. The focus will be on identifying communication needs before interviews/court attendance. The project's success will be measured through training, feedback, case studies, and an impact report to guide future service development.

3.3.5 Utilising ring fenced Scottish Government funding, additional paediatrician capacity has been created. This is enabling, when required, forensic medicals to be undertaken in the Bairns Hoose. This is a first in Scotland and learning from this will inform national practice.

**3.3.6 Recovery Staff** - Children First is a national children's charity committed to protecting children from harm and supporting recovery from trauma and abuse. They are leading the development of a child-focused recovery offer, providing recovery, rights, and advocacy support. They will deliver tailored support for families through the court and legal processes ensuring appropriate levels of recovery service are in place.

3.3.7 Recognising 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 additionally are collaborating with Victim Support Scotland, Cybersafe Scotland, and Rape Crisis Scotland to ensure appropriate access to support and knowledge that will guide children and their families appropriately.

3.3.8 Many children and young people will not be in a position to accept recovery support in the immediate aftermath of a disclosure. It is therefore critical that effective pathways exist for children, young people and their families to access support at a future point in time when they need it. Working with schools across the Northfield ASG we are testing a referral pathway that will enable access to recovery support at a time that is right for the child.

**3.3.9 Remote Court Facility** - Collaboration via a 'Justice' workstream plans improvement within our legal processes and systems. Families tell us attending Court can be a traumatic experience. The intention from the outset is that by

gathering best evidence we reduce the instances of this happening. However, where it does have to happen, we have developed a remote court facility which will enable children and young people to give evidence from a child centred and familiar environment.

**3.3.10 Bairns Hoose Coordinator** - The Bairns Hoose Standards emphasises the need for children, young people and families to experience Bairns Hoose support in a seamless coordinated and integrated manner. Critical to the success of this approach is the role of the Bairns Hoose Coordinator ensuring timely, joined-up responses to children's needs.

3.3.11 Their involvement will commence from the Interagency Referral Discussion enabling them to identify a point of contact who will support the young person and family to come to the Bairns Hoose for a joint interview and afterwards to ensure they receive appropriate post interview support. This will include ensuring the child and family are supported to give evidence to court where this is deemed necessary.

#### **3.4 Evaluation**

3.4.1 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.

3.4.2 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:

1. A dedicated, child-friendly Bairns Hoose building will enhance children's comfort, safety, and evidence quality.
2. Multi-agency coordination, led by a Bairns Hoose Coordinator, will ensure timely, joined-up responses to children's needs.
3. Access to tailored recovery support, including Advocacy, Rights and Recovery (ARR) workers, will improve outcomes for children and families.
4. Justice processes will be less harmful through trauma-informed interviews, remote court access, and better communication.
5. Updated forensic medical protocols and broader health assessments will support children's physical and mental recovery.

3.4.3 The UoE have also surveyed staff from across the Aberdeen City partnership. 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.

3.4.4 Since this survey, 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 Workforce Development**

3.5.1 The Bairns Hoose standards highlight the need for partnerships to develop “**joint training and supervision to all relevant staff.**” Professional supervision is core to the social work task but less so for other staff groups located in the Bairns Hoose. However, all agencies provide responsive and flexible support to their staff recognising the highly sensitive nature of the work.

3.5.2 The design of the Bairns Hoose provides “breakout spaces” for staff to utilise. Given the nature of the work and the risk of exposure to vicarious trauma the need for trauma informed space is not only relevant to children and young people but also staff. The spaces are adaptable to accommodate one to one support or for larger group debriefs supporting the learning and wellbeing of staff.

3.5.3 Multi-agency learning activity to date includes:

- Legal Webinar – attended by over 120 people COPFS and Police Scotland delivered a webinar to enhance understanding for “staff who are providing direct support to children and families are offered training in court procedure and how to provide court support.”
- SALT Input – Input from specialist SALT staff to support SCIM interviewers use a variety of tools including Talking Mats to foster a more inclusive communication approach/environment.
- Roles and responsibilities – There was an acknowledgment that assumptions can develop as to the various roles and responsibilities of staff. While we are keen to ‘blur the edges’ of roles, making the time to clarify roles and responsibilities has enhanced collaborative working.

Over the course of the coming year the Learning and Development lead for the Child Protection Committee will continue to engage with Bairns Hoose staff to explore how we continue to support their wellbeing and enhance their development.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Subject to continuing pathfinder funding there are no financial implications arising out of this report.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No significant risks identified	NA	NA	NA
<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	Y
<b>Operational</b>	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people who 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. 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.	Aberdeen City has a well-established Child Protection data reporting framework. Going forward the framework will include reporting against the Bairns Hoose Standards.	L	Yes
<b>Financial</b>	No risks identified	NA	NA	NA

<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 risks identified	NA	NA	NA

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>	<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>
<b>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</b>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review, by 2026</li> <li>4. 90% of children and young people will report that they feel listened to all the time, by 2026.</li> <li>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</li> </ol>

	<p>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>	The work of Aberdeen City Council's regulatory care services is relevant to Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, the Children's Services Plan and the IJB Strategic Plan.
<b>UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Care Service Bill</li> <li>• Delivery of The Promise/Plan 21 -24/Plan 24 - 30</li> <li>• Whole Family Wellbeing Support</li> </ul>

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Impact Assessment</b>	As Chief Officer, I confirm that an impact assessment is not required for this report.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required for this report.
<b>Other</b>	Not required for this report.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

## 11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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