

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services Committee
<b>DATE</b>	12 September 2023
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2021-22, and an Aberdeen comparison.
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CFS/23/260
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.3 and 1.2

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To share the Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2021-22 report and provide a commentary on the performance of Aberdeen City Council compared with the national position.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Note that care experienced children and those children who need protection in Aberdeen City, are, predominantly, receiving care and protection in line with national averages; and
- 2.2 Note that where performance differs from national averages, there are improvement plans in place.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Aberdeen City stands up positively in most respects with the national picture reported in the [National Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland: 2021 to 2022 report \("the report"\)](#). This is an annual retrospective report reporting on data relating to Child Protection activity and activity in relation to Looked After Children.
- 3.2 The report contains extensive statistical information using snapshot data as at 31 July 2022 in line with Scottish Government reporting, from which we have identified the following areas of interest:

Where Aberdeen City is in-line with or better than the national average:

- Reducing numbers of looked after children and young people
- Proportion of looked after children in secure care
- Majority of looked after children are placed in the community

Where Aberdeen City differs from the national average:

- Number of children on the child protection register
- Proportion of children looked after at home or with kin
- Percentage of children placed in foster care

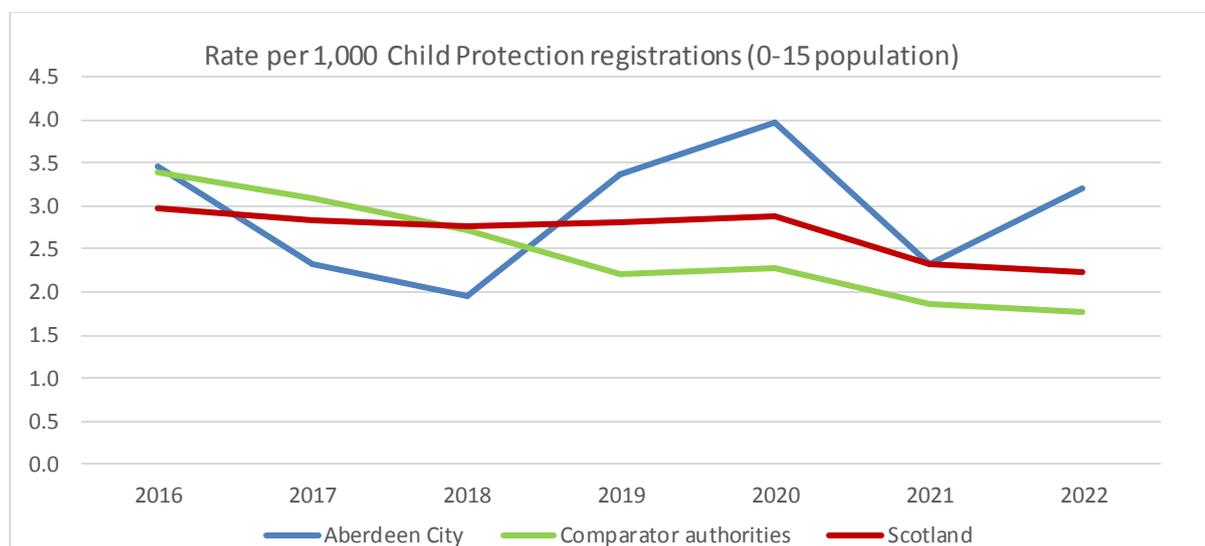
3.3 The Scottish Government are proposing to extend the breadth of data included in the annual report. Going forward this will include data in relation to Brothers & Sisters as well as children considered via Care & Risk Management processes.

### 3.4 CHILD PROTECTION

3.4.1 It is reported (page 6 of [the report](#)) that across Scotland, the number of children on the Child Protection Register has decreased by 4.2% over the last year. Looking at published Local Authority Child Protection Statistics [benchmarking tool](#), in comparator authorities it is a decrease of 5.6%. The number of children on the Child Protection Register (a snapshot on 31 July 2022) in Aberdeen City in 2022 was 115, an increase from 83 in 2021 which constitutes a rise of 38.6%. If we look at the averages across 2021 and 2022 Aberdeen City has an average number of children on the register of 93 in 2021 and 105 in 2022. Although still a rise, it is just under 13%.

3.4.2 The rate (per 1,000 pop 0-15) of children on the Child Protection Register in Aberdeen City is 3.2 which is an increase on the 2.3 rate from the previous year. This is also higher than the Comparator Authorities (1.8) and Scotland average rate of 2.2 in 2022. See Figure 1.

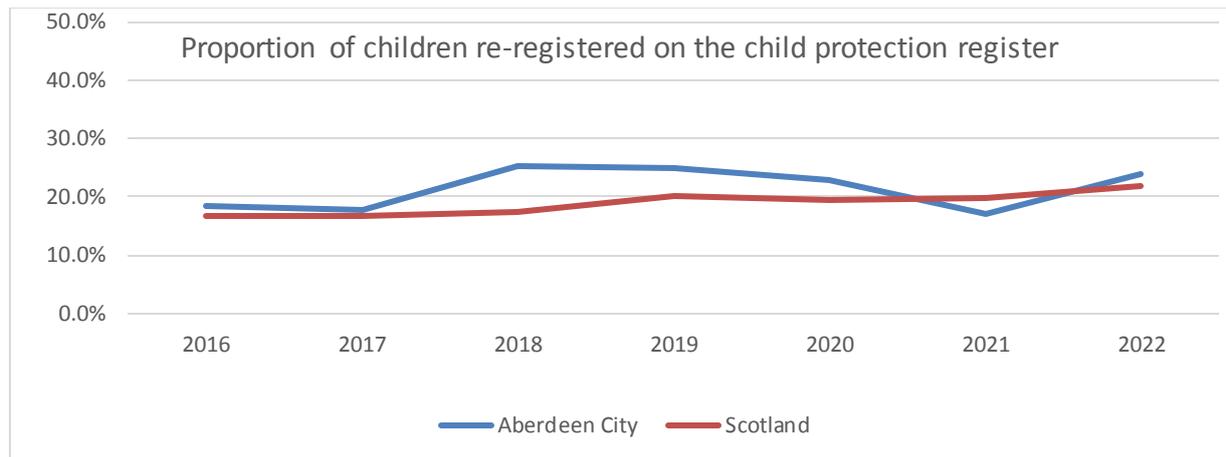
Figure 1



3.4.3 The number of re-registrations has increased in 2022 but remains closely aligned to the national position. In July 2022 28 children on the Aberdeen City register had a previous registration period. This compared with 14 in July 2021. Comparing with National data reported on page 17 of the report, the proportion of children on the CPR (Child Protection Register) who had been registered previously (for any reason) on 31 July 2022 was 24%. This remains in broad alignment with the national figure of 22% (see Figure 2).

3.4.4 Predominant factors that result in children’s names being placed on the Child Protection Register relate to parental mental health/addiction needs. Recognising that the pathway to recovery will often include episodes of relapse it is not surprising the re-registration of children’s names feature on the CPR. In 2018/19 the Child Protection Committee (CPC) undertook an audit of re-registration cases which found a lack of support post registration was not a contributing factor. The CPC continues to track this data, ensuring a timely response if appropriate.

Figure 2



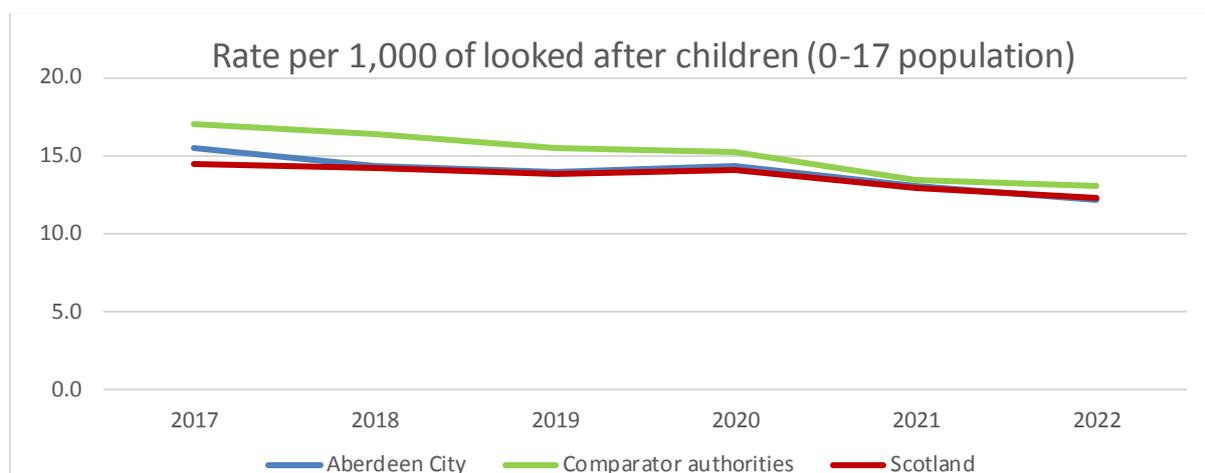
3.4.5 The decision to place a child’s name on the Child Protection Register will always be based on individual circumstances and the professional judgement of the multi-agency team around the family. At its meeting in June 2023, the Child Protection Committee, acknowledged the slight increase in the numbers on the Child Protection Register and agreed there was value to exploring our collective thresholds in relation to registration. This will be taken forward by the Child Protection Committee later in the year.

### 3.5 Looked after Children

3.5.1 On page 3 of the report, it is reported that nationally there has been an 5% decrease in the number of Looked After Children in Scotland from 2021, to 2022. The decrease is similar for Aberdeen City at 5.7% during that same period (516 in 2021 July snapshot to 487 in July 2022).

3.5.2 The number of Looked After Children in Scotland has reduced by around 3,000 in a ten year period. This reduction is also true of Aberdeen City which averaged around 738 Looked After Children in 2011/12 and this decreased to averaging 523 by 2021/22. Figure 3 illustrates that the rate per 1,000 population (0-17 years) is steadily reducing nationally (to 12.3), in comparator authorities (to 13) and locally (to 12.1).

Figure 3



3.5.3 The 2020 [Independent Care Review report -The Promise](#) reemphasised that legal measures to secure children’s care should only be utilised where there is no alternative. This aspiration was echoed in the [2023 Children’s Hearing System Review report](#). It is consequently anticipated that the numbers of Looked After Children will continue to reduce in the coming years. This reduction does not reflect a reduction in demand but rather a need for all agencies to think differently about how they support children, young people and families without the need for statutory intervention.

3.5.4 The national report also identifies the proportion of children remaining in the community.

“In 2022, the majority of Looked After Children (88%) were placed in the community. This included 34% of children and young people placed with Kinship Carers, 33% placed with Foster Carers and 21% were looked after at home.

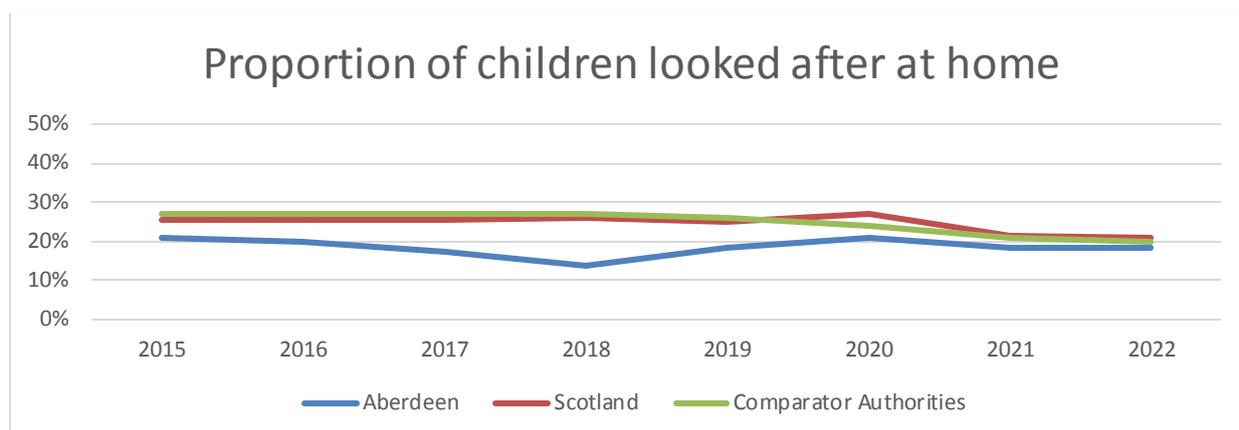
A smaller proportion of Looked After Children (10%) were placed in residential accommodation, including 5% placed in a local authority home.”

3.5.5 In Aberdeen City, looking at the Local Authority Looked After Children Statistics [benchmarking tool](#), the proportion of all Looked After Children placed in the community in 2022 at the snapshot time was 84%, this included 21% in kinship care, 45% in foster care and 18% looked after at home.

A balance of 12% were in residential settings within and external to ACC.

3.5.6 Aligned to the national trend, locally there has been a decrease in the proportion of Looked After Children living at home. However, as can be seen in Figure 4, there was a fairly significant gap in 2018 which has narrowed over the past two years at 18% compared with 21% nationally and 20% in comparator authorities.

Figure 4



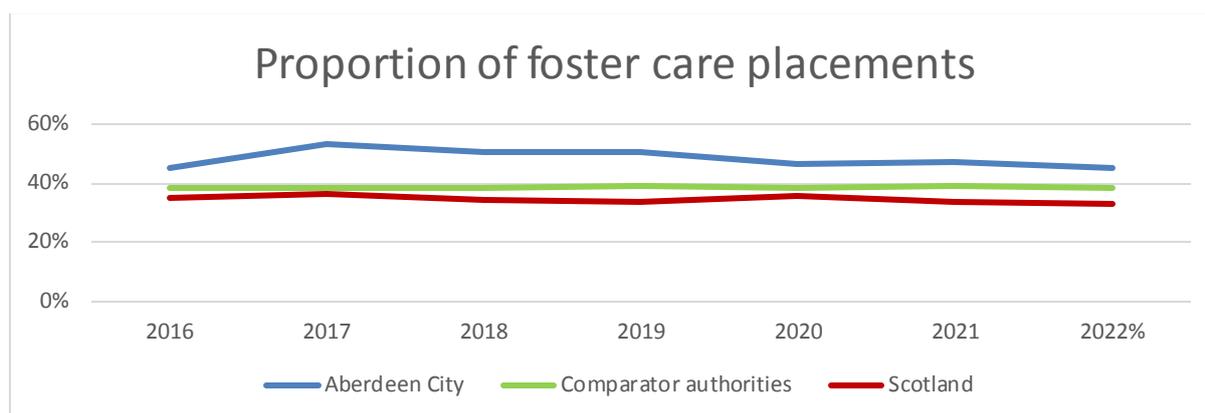
3.5.7 The proportion of Kinship placements has increased over the past few years nationally, the proportion of children looked after by friends or relatives has also risen slightly across Aberdeen City. It has increased by 2% from 19% in 2020 to 21% in 2021 and 2022 as seen on Figure 5. This was in line with the target set in the LOIP (Local Outcome Improvement Plan) for “43% of looked after children should be at home or with family and friends by reporting of 2023 data”.

Figure 5



3.5.8 Comparing Aberdeen City with comparator authorities and national data for children placed in foster care ([using CLAS data](#)) it can be seen in Figure 6 that there is a higher proportion of fostering placements used by Aberdeen City compared with comparator authorities and national data. The trend is decreasing over time for the City.

Figure 6

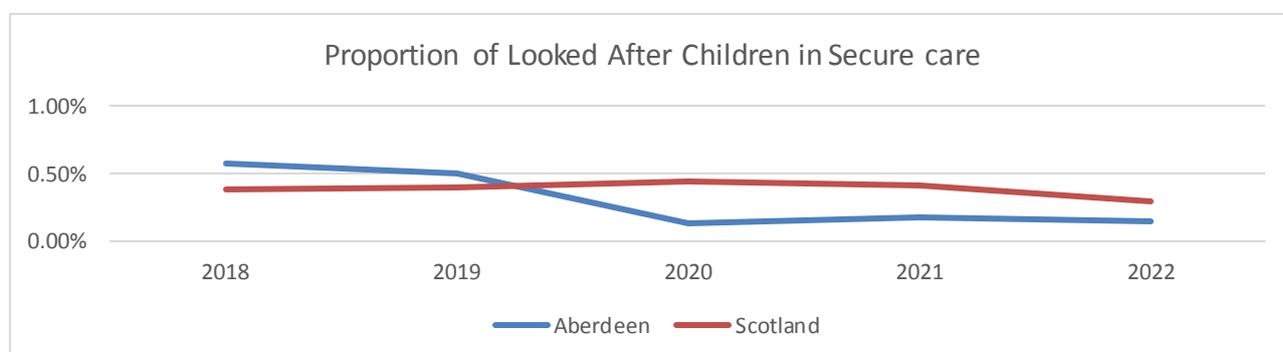


3.5.9 Resetting our 'balance of care' is a longer term aim, set out in Aberdeen City's refreshed Children's Services Plan 2023 – 26 and Aberdeen City's Corporate Parenting Plan 2023 – 26 both of which were presented to committee earlier in 2023.

3.5.10 Addressing the balance of care is a challenge we share with many local and comparative local authority partnerships. Strategic plans seek to address this. We are committed to supporting children and young people to remain within their families and communities where it is safe to do so and returning Looked After Children and young people to placements in the City where such is in their best interests. In line with The Promise, we are endeavouring to keep brothers and sisters together. Where we cannot, we ensure that we review this decision and that children are connected to the people who are important to them.

3.5.11 The number of children in secure care is very low and is less than 1% of the Looked after population and has been for 10 years. Looking at averages across calendar years for Aberdeen City is below the average national percentage reported in the [publication tables](#) for the past three years. See Figure 7. The Care Inspectorate are undertaking a national inspection of Secure Care. This inspection is due to be reported on in September 2023 and its findings shared with members later in the year.

Figure 7



#### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, the costs associated with care for children out with their family are significant. Reducing the proportion of children being looked after in out of authority foster and residential placements will be positively significant.

#### 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

#### 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications 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>	Many of the improvements required to support more children to be looked after at home or kinship as part of the requirements of Plan 21-24. These are already built into a variety of strategic plans. It is expected that gaps will emerge as the Council and partners scrutinise the requirements of Plan 21-24 in detail.	The Child Protection Committee, Children's Services Board and Community Planning Management Group have oversight of the delivery of the relevant aspects of strategic plans in this respect. They are ensuring that the terms of Plan 21-24 are incorporated into current and future strategic planning.	M	Yes

<b>Compliance</b>	No significant related risks.	Services across all multi-agency partners are aware of legislative requirements and ensure compliance	L	Yes
<b>Operational</b>	Care experienced children and young people are a vulnerable cohort whose needs require to be recognised and met. Competing resource demands may have an impact	These are duties which have been incorporated across existing structures and will be consolidated in practice	L	Yes
<b>Financial</b>	That the number of children having to be looked after away from home continues to remain high leading to poorer outcomes and higher resource costs.	Plan 21-24 and various strategic plans are in place to address these issues	L	Yes
<b>Reputational</b>	Organisational failings in relation to child protection 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

<b>Environment / Climate</b>	Not applicable for this report			
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## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 23-24</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
	The information in this report has no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
	<a href="#">WorkinginPartnershipPolicyStatement.pdf (aberdeencity.gov.uk)</a>
<b><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></b>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The report seeks to provide an update on how ACC compares with National 'performance' in Child Protection and Care Experienced children. This links with Corporate Parenting activities, including the following improvement projects within the LOIP:</p> <p>Increase to 43% by 2023 the proportion of children and young people who are supported to live in kinship care or are looked after at home by 2023</p> <p>For the Child Protection programme, in particular stretch outcomes 4, 5, and 6 with the following key drivers:</p> <p>4.1 Ensuring that families receive the parenting and family support they need</p> <p>4.2 Keeping Children Safe</p> <p>5.2 Increasing children's knowledge and understanding of their own physical and mental wellbeing and take an early intervention and prevention approach</p> <p>6.2 Supporting attainment of balance of care where children are able to remain more often at home and or with kin.</p>

## 9 IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	It is confirmed by Chief Officer Graeme Simpson that no Integrated Impact Assessment is required

<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	Not required

## 10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 [Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2021-22](#)

10.2 [Children's Services Plan 2023-26](#)

10.3 [Aberdeen City Corporate Parenting Plan 2023-26](#)



CP Programme  
2021-24.pdf

10.4 Child Protection Programme 2021-24

## 11 APPENDICES - NONE

## 12 REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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