

Community Planning
Aberdeen



Is Aberdeen Keeping The Promise?

Year 2 Evaluation Report

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



[The Promise](#) made following the Independent Care Review made it clear that the current 'care system' in Scotland isn't working and that families need earlier, preventative supports which are easy to access, support children to remain in their communities, and where that is not possible, that support is provided in ways that do not feel stigmatising.

The Promise can only be kept by Community Planning Partners working together. As a result we have organised all of our work to keep the Promise in our partnership Plan for children. Our Children's Services Plan is one of a suite of Statutory Plans supporting delivery of the [Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#) (LOIP).

Our [Children's Services Plan 2023-2026](#) takes full account of the foundations of The Promise and of the Priority Areas in Plan 21-24. All partners represented at the Children's Services Board assume collective responsibility for the delivery of The Promise and routinely monitor progress. Taking this approach helps ensure that we focus our time and resources effectively and that we can demonstrate progress towards delivery.

In evaluating our progress, we have reviewed the impact of work undertaken since Plan 21-24 was first published to get a clear sense of where we are, what we still need to do and any barriers to fully delivering on Plan 21-24.

In June 2023, The Promise Scotland assessed that Scotland was unlikely to fully deliver on the Plan 21 – 24 by March 2024. Within their assessment they acknowledged the impact of COVID on staff and services as well as the impact of the cost of living crisis. The elements of Plan 21 - 24 which are anticipated not to be fully delivered within timescale will be carried forward into the next national plan that will shape how Scotland #keepsthePromise. **Plan 24 – 30** is anticipated to be published in Spring 2024.

We intend to continue to adopt many of the data sets informing this evaluation to help us track on-going progress. This will help ensure that we maintain a focus on the areas for action in Plan 21-24 when subsequent Promise Plans are published. We are proud of the changes we have made but recognise there is more to do.

Graeme Simpson

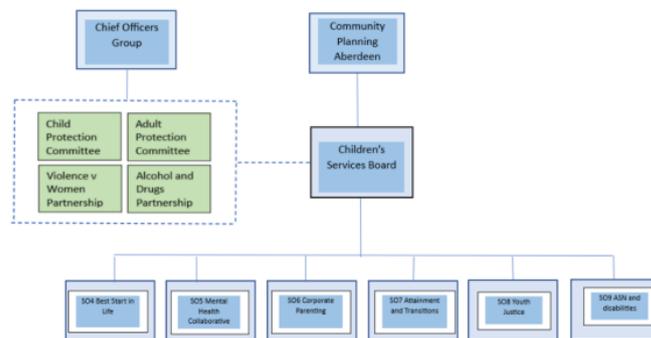
Chief Social Work Officer and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Group

GOVERNANCE



The Aberdeen City Community Planning Partnership has a range of highly effective governance arrangements in place including our Chief Officers Group (COG), Child Protection Committee (CPC) and Children’s Services Board (CSB). These arrangements, where candor, curiosity and accountability between partners is actively encouraged, has significantly aided more common practice and a shared and ongoing culture of improvement around public protection.

The Children’s Services Board is governed by and accountable to the Community Planning Management Board, which in turn is accountable to Community Planning Aberdeen.



The Children’s Services Board has responsibility for:

- The delivery of the Children’s Services Plan and associated Stretch Outcomes 4-9 of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan
- Working together as a Community Planning Partnership to improve outcomes for children and young people within Aberdeen City
- Leading the implementation of national policy and legislation pertaining to children and young people such as The Promise.

Actions that support delivery of The Promise are embedded within the Action Plans of each of the Sub Groups. As a result, each Sub Group has a direct responsibility in delivering The Promise. We continue to recognise the fundamental and corrosive impact of poverty on the lives of children and families and have deliberately woven actions to address poverty through the work of all Sub Groups. The Children’s Services Board routinely report progress against the [child poverty agenda](#) to ensure that learning from evaluation in associated areas informs our next steps.

Corporate Parenting Group

Aberdeen City's Corporate Parenting Group is a Sub Group of the Children's Services Board. It has responsibility for delivering on aims set out in the LOIP and associated Children's Services Plan under Stretch Outcome 6 and coordinating our evaluation of progress against The Promise. The Group leads on the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Improvement Plan and quality assurance activity in relation to children and young people with care experience.

The Corporate Parenting Group aims to ensure that; *"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"* and has established a number of Improvement Projects to help realise this aim. These include those designed to:

- Reduce by 5% the number of children entering the care system by 2024.
- Ensure that 100% of children and young people leaving care are offered a health assessment to identify gaps in their health provision and needs by 2024.
- Increase the number of young people with care experience by 10% receiving multi-agency throughcare/aftercare support by 2023.
- Reduce the number of children being permanently removed from parents with care experience.
- Increase by 100% the number of partners supporting kinship carers by 2023.
- Ensure that 80% of the identified multi-agency workforce successfully complete Corporate Parenting training aligned to the Promise by 2025.

In preparing this evaluation, the Corporate Parenting Group has worked with Community Planning Partners to evaluate progress against each of the 25 actions listed in Plan 21-24. These 25 actions are organised under the 5 priority areas, A good Childhood, Whole Family Support, Supporting the Workforce, Building Capacity and Planning.



Our Progress in delivering Priority 1, A Good Childhood

The Promise made a number of commitments to children and young people and Plan 2021-24 highlights 25 priority areas for action over the lifetime of Plan 2021-24. We have listed the policy context and then evaluated our progress against this context to help identify areas to be further progressed over the third year of the Plan 21-24. Next steps that are not yet planned for are included in red, all other next steps listed are already included in currently published Plans. Readers should note that there is some crossover between the 25 priorities for action.

On a Good Childhood, The Promise says, ‘Children who have been removed from their family of origin and live in and around the ‘care system’ will have a good, loving childhood. Ensuring that children in Scotland’s ‘care system’ feel loved, their needs are met, and their rights are upheld is a priority for 21-24. This change is urgent, it must be a focus for all organisations that have responsibility towards care experienced children and young people’.

On support, Plan 2021-24 says, ‘Every child that is ‘in care’ in Scotland will have access to intensive support that ensures their educational and health needs are fully met. Local Authorities and Health Boards will take active responsibility towards care experienced children and young people, whatever their setting of care, so they have what they need to thrive’.

Undertaking strategic analysis

As a Community Planning Partnership we have worked together to explore the factors that contribute to children being placed within the care system to help us better work together to prevent family situations escalating to the point of statutory measures requiring to be put in place. Taking this approach has helped shift our focus to prevention and helped us identify particular groups of children and young people currently more at risk. The need to focus on the children and young people on the edges of care, those in conflict with the law, those who experience multiple traumas and children with disabilities has been built into our Children’s Services Plan and a number of tests of change are progressing well.

Establishing our Edge of Care Pilots

The Education Service and Children’s Social Work collaborated with partners to develop a shared sense of what is meant by the ‘edges of care’ in an attempt to ensure that appropriate supports are in place and targeted to help restrict the number of children who experience the care system. This thinking guided the establishment of two Edge of Care Pilots to explore new ways of partnership working and early evaluation is positive. Staff teams within the pilots were empowered to think creatively and consider the needs of children and families more holistically.

Following the initial identification of young people by senior leaders in Education and Children’s Social Work, the pilot team brought together information to build a more informed understanding of need, this included building relationships with the families to understand their situation more fully. As the pilot has progressed and relationships have been built, plans for young people have

become more bespoke in response to the critical insight gleaned from families and the young people.

From the outset the pilots recognised the criticality of how young people and families were engaged with. Connecting with the learning gained via the Fit Like Service, staff adopted a relational and trauma informed approach. This ensured that the support offer for each young person was based around the barriers they identified to being able to engage in education. Interventions are therefore individualised and have included:

- play-based support and structured work to explore feelings and emotions
- supporting parents to understand the impact of feelings on behaviours, academic input (literacy / numeracy/ASDAN awards/ dynamic youth awards),
- liaising with schools adapting timetables, strategies and other supports,
- activities including sport, working with others and managing relationships.
- families are supported to access weekly community connection sessions, financial support, support to access health

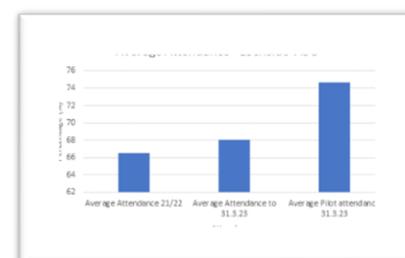
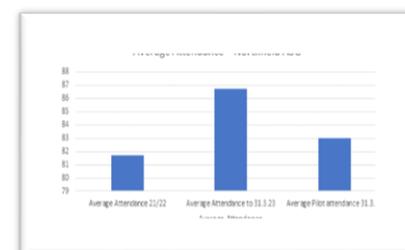
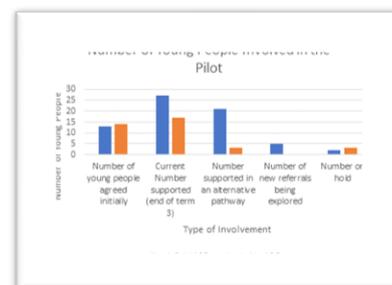
As the pilots progressed, the benefit of a weekly meeting between a key school link and the pilot team became apparent with a notable positive impact on transitions around school where these structures were in place. This practice has been now been replicated across both settings.

Young people engaging in the pilots are keen to share they feel listened to and value having an adult they can trust to talk to. Families tell us they value having someone who is seen to be neutral in terms of school and other agencies. As the pilot has progressed positive relationships have been built up allowing families to be more honest about the issues being experienced at home and allowing staff to target support more successfully.

The core measures identified to measure impact were the number of young people involved in the pilot, attendance at pilot sessions, exclusions and the number of VPD reports (Vulnerable Person Database). Consideration was also given to a number of indicators that would give an indication of progress towards more positive outcomes.

The number of young people engaging with the pilots has varied over time according to assessed need. Since September 2022, 68 young people have been supported across both ASGs.

Where it was agreed in consultation with staff, young people and families that the pilot was not the most appropriate intervention the family have been supported to access alternative supports. This has included more focused support through the Virtual School (8), Fit Like Family Wellbeing Service (8), Reaching Aberdeen Families Together (RAFT) (2), Craigielea (1), Employment (2) or revised supports in school (1). This highlights the need to view the pilots as part of a wider



model (or continuum) of Family Support and accept that no one model will work for all children and families.

Average attendance for young people engaged in the pilot has improved against levels from the previous session across both schools. In most cases this increase in attendance is thought to be due to a key worker being on site and available to the young person should they require support.

The number of exclusions for young people engaged in the pilot has reduced since the pilot began and this can be attributed to the positive relationships developed and resultant changes being made to the offer available in schools.

As young people have engaged with the pilot there has been a reduction in the number of Police Concern reports school has received in connection with their behaviour in the community. This could be related to the increase in attendance at pilot sessions however it is too soon to draw firm conclusions given that the pilots have only been fully operational from December 2022.

Sadly, progress in school session 2023/24 has been hampered by the fixed term nature of the resource supporting the two pilots. The loss of staff with established relationships with families is thought likely to be detrimental to the pilots and requires to be considered fully.

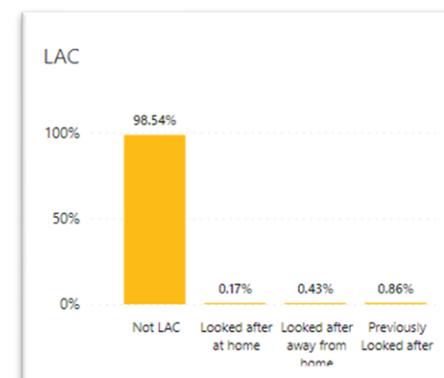
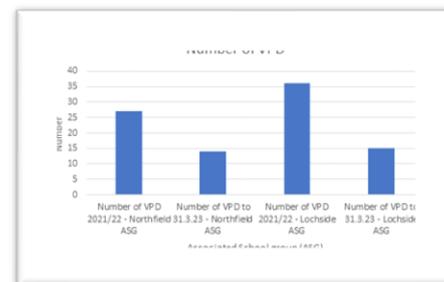
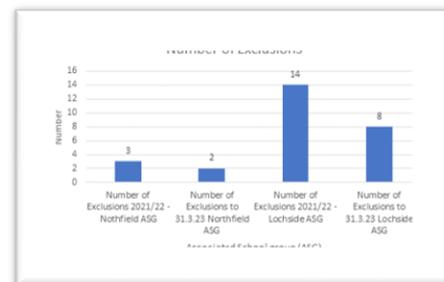
As the full evaluation is concluded consideration will be given to how this model might be scaled up as we continue to develop our preventative Family Support model. Nationally defining 'care experienced' and 'edges of care' in legislation would enable easier identification of those who have experienced care in Management Information Systems and aid the easier extraction of data to monitor trends given the very low numbers of those with a current status of 'Looked After' in our schools. The use of grant funding resulting in the appointment of fixed term posts will be considered fully.

Family Support through our Fit Like Hubs

The Fit Like Hub, a multi-disciplinary rights based and family first service established in 2022, continues to help ensure that families can access early and preventative support. Our Fit Like Hubs have supported 1043 families with an increasing percentage of self-referrals (currently 10%). In April 2023 401 young people/families were engaging with the service and 146 of the 401 are families who were being supported for the first time.

There is clear evidence that engagement with the service realises:

- Parents feeling supported to manage their anxieties and worries
- Parents/carers and children and young people feeling listened to and heard
- Strengthened family relationships
- Improved child mental health and wellbeing.



Those accessing the service tell us that it feels like a bespoke service and that it is the first time support has 'felt right'. As a result we have the confidence in our ability to deliver high quality, rights based integrated services that adapt based on what children and families tell us. Families tell us that they appreciate this and other more integrated services and this feedback is helping to shape our work to establish a Bairns Hoose.

Increasing the provision of universal support

Schools are working in partnership with Fit Like Aberdeen and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) colleagues to further develop LIAM (Let's Introduce Anxiety Management) supports. This multi-agency collaboration will continue to build on the current supports we have in place across many schools in order to strengthen the universal offer to children and families. All school nurses are currently trained to deliver LIAM, as are some Fit Like staff. 25 schools also have trained staff with 23 further staff currently being trained.

Supporting the prevention and early intervention model has seen Sport Aberdeen commit to increasing the accessibility of sport and physical activity, ensuring that barriers to participation are removed for care experienced children, young people, their families and support networks. This has included a commitment to offering free 'Get Active' memberships to care experienced children, siblings, parents and carers, with over 600 distributed to date. The introduction of an Active Schools Coordinator has also seen improved access to Active Schools extra-curricular and leadership programmes, with work being undertaken with sports clubs and organisations to bridge the gap into universal services. This places emphasis on working in partnership with children, young people and their families to access community-based sport and physical activity, building connections and promoting wider wellbeing, whilst reducing the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences and trauma. The increase of capacity and therefore focus on increasing provision has been made possible through an increased level of resources being provided by Sport Aberdeen, funding from Aberdeen City Council and the successful application in 2022 for additional funding from Sport Scotland to provide additional staffing resource with a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Integration to provide more targeted support

Health and education offer targeted Early Learning and Childcare at the Links Hub for those families who seek additional support. The popularity of this model has seen enrolments increase from 40 when the setting was first operational in August 2021, to over 110 now as a result of professional or self-referrals by families. Aberdeen Sports Village are working in partnership with the Links Hub to offer learn to swim programmes to the young learners who attend the Hub.

Case Study Links Hub

The partnership between health and (early) education sits at the heart of the work undertaken at Links Nursery and Hub. The setting prides themselves on building trusting, therapeutic relationships, which give families the opportunity to voice their needs and the challenges they face. The focus being to reduce referrals to other services out with the Hub and to increase and improve engagement of families within our service.

There is a weekly children's meeting held within the Links Nursery and Hub to promote information sharing and multiagency working. Speech and Language Therapy, Health Visitor, Centre Manager and Excellence and Equity Practitioners are represented. Robust planning support takes place for children and their families who are facing adversity, with Child A providing an example of how this approach is improving outcomes:

Child A's parent was recently diagnosed with a health condition impacting their capacity to parent. The parent was also struggling with Child A's behaviour, which had deteriorated since the onset of their own ill health. Nursery noted this behaviour change, a change of pattern in attendance, and other family member doing almost all pick-ups and drop-offs. These changes prompted a discussion with health visitor, which resulted in a home visit where parent shared her challenges. This information was conveyed at our meeting, which led to structured support from health and education. Parent was offered one-to-one PEEP (Parents as Early Education Partners) sessions with our Excellence and Equity Practitioner (within the hub) alongside behavioural support within the home. Travel support was also offered to increase the child's attendance. The parent disclosed that they felt a support network now surrounded them.

Outcomes: there has been an increase in engagement with both health visitor and hub centre manager and an improvement in child A's attendance at nursery and at health-related appointments.

It is important to note that families are involved at all levels of future planning support for their children. This new, collaborative way of working at the Links Nursery and Hub involves children at the heart of decisions made to improve their positive future health and education outcomes.

The centre opened in 2021 with 40 registered children and now has around 110 children supported on a daily basis evidencing the desire of parents to access joined up services.

Provision of Intensive Support

All children in care have access to a social worker and a multi-agency plan ensuring health and educational needs are actively addressed. There are well-established formal review processes which have been enhanced following the adoption of D365. Every effort is made to retain children and young people in placements within Aberdeen City. Work has been undertaken by children's social work to achieve parity of service across all groups of looked after children.

Craigielea is an intensive, alternative to care provision which provides a holistic package of support to children, young people and their families with an escalating risk profile. A multi-professional team of social workers, teachers, family resource workers and a mental health practitioners wrap around children/young people and their family to support them to remain at home, within their communities and education provision.

Health continue to offer universal and targeted monitoring of health and wellbeing to ensure children and young people reach their optimal development and opportunity to thrive. A specialist nurse for care experienced children and young people monitors health and wellbeing of those aged up to 26 years and links with other multi-agency partners, including when children are placed out of Authority. Work is ongoing to ensure a stronger CAMHS connection to relevant young people with experience of care.

The Children's Services Board are currently working to streamline referrals for health assessments, with improvement projects specifically aiming for 100% of children and young people leaving care being offered a health assessment to identify gaps in their health provision and needs by 2024 (improvement charter 6.2) and 100% of children leaving care are referred to services that can meet assessed mental health needs within 4 weeks of the health assessment being completed by 2024. (improvement charter 5.1). To achieve this, we are co-designing with young people with care experience, a health assessment pathway for care leavers. One part of this will be referral pathways to specific support for health matters identified during the assessment therefore ensuring that support is provided. Training for multi-agency staff is being developed to increase awareness and confidence in identifying the health needs of care experienced young people and to make the appropriate referral.

Single Points of Contact (SPOC) of Police Sergeant Rank have been identified for all Aberdeen City Children's Homes. These Officers are 'Trauma Informed' to support the building of positive relationships. Work between 'Who Cares Scotland' and the Police to establish a participation group to support the on-going building of positive relationships has not progressed as would have been hoped due to staffing issues. This will be a focus for the coming year.

Establishment of a Bairns Hoose

The Child Protection Committee (CPC) identified the need to prioritise those who have experienced multiple trauma and recognise the establishment of a Bairns Hoose will help reform ways of working with and for this group.

Our ambition is that our Bairns Hoose maximises the potential to fully incorporate the Justice element. This will include having distinct space for Age of Criminal Responsibility interviews but also a remote court suite that enables children and young people to give evidence to Court. This builds on our strong response to the change in legislation around the age of criminal responsibility and our contributions to the national guidance. Discussions with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) have also identified opportunities for Hearings including the reincarnation of these outlined in Hearings for Children: The Redesign Report

The Aberdeen Health Determinants Research Collaboration is led by the Council and extends across NHS Grampian, University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University. It will work with our commissioned external research contractor to support evaluation activity around the Bairns Hoose.

In summary, work is underway but we now need to clearly define and establish our model of Family Support and continue testing the provision against our identified vulnerabilities through a shared evaluation framework aligned to our soon to be established Bairns Hoose. This will help us measure the impact of our model during a time when we see great changes in the needs of children and families. Greater certainty around the impact of the Verity House agreement will also support planning. As a result, this action may not be fully delivered by 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we need to continue with plans to:

- Fully evaluate our Edge of Care Pilots and determine next steps
- Continue to shape our model of Family Support and establish an evaluation framework to test to strength of our model of Family Support

- Increase the number of care experienced young people by 10% receiving multiagency throughcare/aftercare support by 2023.
- Ensure 100% of children and young people leaving care are offered a health assessment to identify gaps in their health provision and needs by 2024.
- Reduce by 5% the number of children entering the care system by 2024.
- Develop our workforce so that at least 80% of the identified multi-agency workforce successfully complete Corporate Parenting training aligned to the Promise by 2025.
- Support care experienced young people prepare for parenthood, with 80% of care experienced parents reporting that they believed they were sufficiently prepared for parenthood by 2026.
- Successfully deliver our Bairns Hoose

On a right to education, Plan 21-24 says:

- Care experienced children and young people will receive all they need to thrive at school.
- There will be no barriers to their (CEYP) engagement with education and schools will know and cherish their care experienced pupils.
- School improvement plans will value and recognise the needs of their care experienced pupils with robust tracking of attendance and attainment so that support can be given early.
- Care experienced young people will be actively participating in all subjects and extra-curricular activities in schools
- The formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from education will end.
- Schools will support and ensure care experienced young people go on to genuinely positive destinations, such as further education or employment.

Planning for care experienced children and young people

A multi-agency Child's Plan is in place for all children in the care system and they are regularly reviewed, Plans outline what the child or young person needs to thrive at school with appropriate plans to address any barriers to access. Plans reflect the current situation faced by children and young people although some could be deemed to lack aspiration. This will be a balance we continue to strive for. Although many children who experience care thrive at school, there is evidence that only considering the needs of the child, in isolation from those of the family, negatively impacts the child. There is a need for us to consistently take a family first approach in all we do.

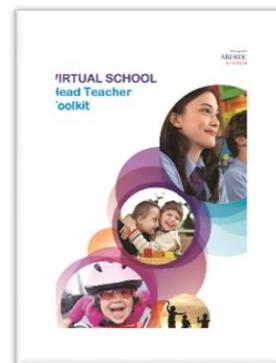


For the second year, School Improvement Plans recognise and plan for the needs of children and young people with care experience. This planning is helping realise more creative approaches to meeting the needs of the group. Schools are being asked to scrutinise the performance of this group during quality improvement visits by central. In session 23/24 there will be an increased

level of scrutiny by the Virtual School through termly visits with the Learner Pathways Advocates and designated managers in secondary schools.

Role of the Virtual School

A Virtual School Head Teacher has been in place for many years and actively contributes to the sharing of national best practice. There is clear evidence that having this post established has improved the consistency of data being held in the School Management Information System and improved the quality of provision for many. However, there is also evidence that as relationships between the Virtual School and partners has strengthened, relationships with school based designated managers for cared for young people have been compromised. We now need to address this through a review of our Toolkit.



Understanding what it means to be care experienced

A programme for schools that supports the school community to have a greater understanding of 'What it means to be Care Experienced' has been developed with the intention of rolling this out in schools in 2023/24. This programme has taken cognisance of Plan 21-24, UNCRC and Angela Morgan's Review. The delivery of the programme will be further informed by resources and training developed and piloted by Who Cares? Scotland as well as input from the Each and Every Child initiative who have established positive relationships with Education in Aberdeen City.

Strengthening the universal support available

All schools have engaged with the CIRCLE framework to look at the environmental factors that can trigger poor attendance in schools. There is emerging evidence that this is helping to increase attendance and engagement from those who find attending school more challenging. As a result, this work is being embedded in our work to further develop Learning, Teaching and Assessment.



All schools in the city continue to engage with Compassionate and Connected Communities with early impact evident in reduced levels of exclusion. Levels of exclusion continue to reduce but the gap between those who are cared for and their peers remains. Children and young people who have experienced trauma are more likely to present dysregulated behaviours which can be challenging to manage in a busy classroom. Systems are in place to manage and mitigate risks but challenges remain. The education reform programme seeks to place learners at the centre more fully, and this may help provide options in the longer term.

As part of the work of the Children & Young People's Mental Health Task & Delivery Board, as a local authority we are currently piloting the 'One Good Adult' project. This allows us to focus on the voice of children and young people at the heart of our recruitment processes. This was an agreed approach at the Health and Wellbeing Summit in October 2022 and is now established within our recruitment processes for all education staff. This is to be extended to other services within the local authority and partner agencies for those supporting children and young people in their daily positions.

Supporting mental health and wellbeing

We continue to commission Mental Health Aberdeen to support all children from age 10+ with counselling support where required. 100% of children who have completed an end of session questionnaire, report an improved wellbeing outcome following this support.

The pilot of DBI (Distress Brief Intervention) has extended to 6 Secondary Schools in partnership with CAMHS and Penumbra focusing on learners aged 14-16. This programme offers more targeted support for young people who have been identified or self-identify the need for support and helps some of our most vulnerable learners to access trained staff and a pathway to support through Penumbra and CAMHS if required. We are beginning to see early signs of improvement through our data report in relation to the Who-5 wellbeing index, which may suggest that earlier responsive intervention is supporting young people previously indicating low mood.

Sport Aberdeen's SPACE (Supported Physical Activity for Care Experienced) programme has continued to work with Aberdeen City Council's Integrated Children and Families Services, the Virtual School and other third sector organisations to improve access to physical education, alongside positively impacting school attendance and skills development. A child-centred, relational and trauma-informed approach has seen 22 children/young people access bespoke 1-2-1 provision as part of their curriculum, with 4 young people achieving Active Schools leadership qualifications with enhanced pathways into positive destinations.

The SPACE programme has taken an evidence-based approach to improve mental wellbeing through the power of sport and physical activity and has seen the following outcomes:

- 100% of young people reporting SPACE has helped them become more active
- 73% of young people reported SPACE to improve their self-confidence a lot.
- 27% of young people reported SPACE to improve their self-confidence a little bit.
- 55% of young people reported SPACE to improve their mental wellbeing a lot.
- 45% of young people reported SPACE to improve their mental wellbeing a little bit.

The Active School Coordinator has also worked collaboratively with other professionals to upskill their understanding and confidence to embed sport and physical activity across their programmes, supporting physical and mental health and wellbeing of those accessing their services.

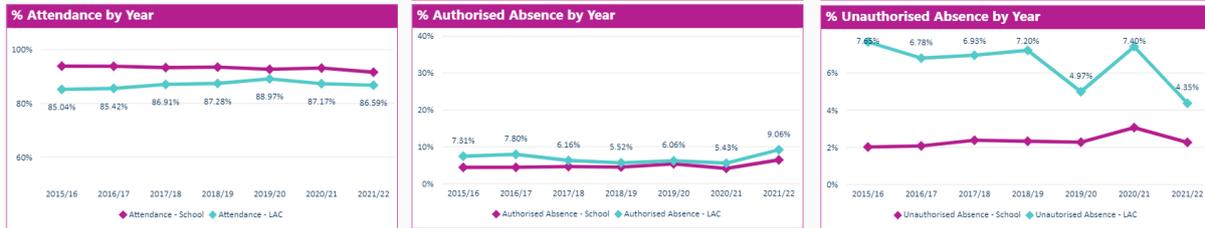
The SPACE programme has won several local and national awards, with it winning the UKActive Award in Supporting Communities. Winning a UK wide award within the sport and leisure sector highlights Aberdeen's place of leading the sport and physical activity sector in supporting Care Experienced Young People and how this is helping to keep The Promise.

Improving access to data

Power BI School profiles continue to be used to help track education outcome trends for care experienced children and young people and further enhancements have been made to Broad General Education trackers in advance of the 2023/24 school year. The trackers enable easy analysis at school and local Authority level based on the status of the child and support school and service level improvement Plans. There is a need to now routinely analyse this data to ensure we take an agile response to improving outcomes as circumstances change.

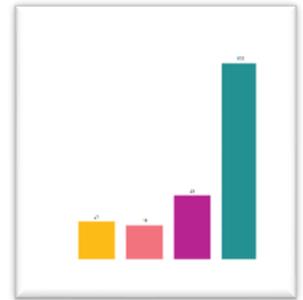
School attendance

Children and young people who are Looked after away from home enjoy school attendance only two percentage points lower than their peers (91.44%). The attendance of those looked after at home is significantly lower at 82.05%, however, there is a marginal increase from the previous year.



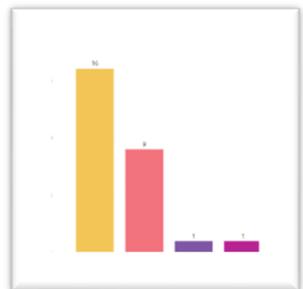
Attendance is tracked monthly and there has been an increased focus on supporting accurate recording of attendance of our Looked After Children, some of whom have a personalised curriculum that involves support by 3rd sector partners and commissioned services. There will be a greater focus in 2023/24 on closer tracking of attendance for all those who are both currently and previously Looked After (Care experienced) both in schools and centrally through the Virtual School.

The majority of cared for young people have attendance greater than 95%. There is a need to understand and address the issues faced by those with poorer levels of school attendance through our Edge of Care pilots.



Exclusion

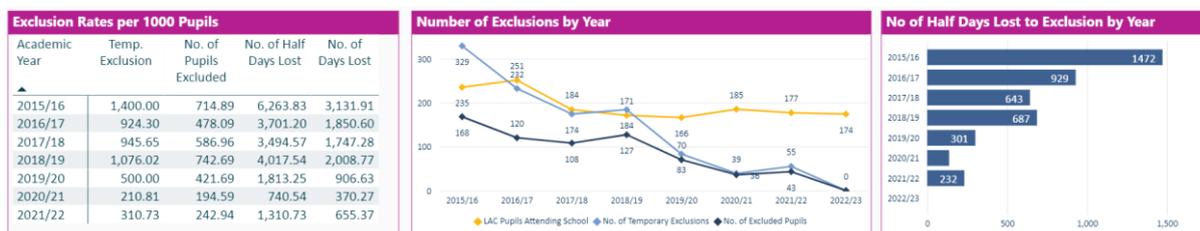
Exclusions have reduced steadily over the past 5 years with a marginal rise in 21/22 which mirrors that of the city population. This was the first full 'in school' academic year following the covid pandemic. Many children and young people found the transition back into a school setting challenging and required a degree of support to adjust. This is especially true for children with experience of care as a result of their lived experiences. Schools were supported to plan for the transitions and gave consideration to the personalised support that would be required. This transition may account for the marginal rise in number of exclusion incidents. The number of days lost to exclusion continues to be carefully monitored.



Validated data shows that children who are Looked After at home continue to be more likely to be excluded than those Looked After away from home.

19 Looked After children have been excluded to date this academic year with 9 of those having repeat exclusions and accounting for 22 of the 32 total incidents. 14 of the children are Looked After away from home and 5 are Looked After at home. Secondary pupils account for 89% of the exclusions. There is a need to offer a wider range of courses to engage young people more fully in their education and this will be driven through Phase 2 of ABZ Campus.

It is also noted that the 2 highest points for exclusion are prior to both the October and Easter holidays. Schools continue to be alert to the holiday build up for our children with care experience in order to better support. It is hoped that a year round model of support as is being piloted in both Northfield and Lochside ASG, will in time help prevent peaks of dysregulation.



Aligning support from the Edge of Care Pilots to our Family Support Model

Two Associated Schools Groups are supporting our exploration of new ways of working in a family first and rights based way to support those on the edge of care. We now need to consider how best to make clear our offer to families given the varied range of provisions available to families through Pupil Equity Funding resource and consider the potential implications of this resource as the Verity House Agreement becomes embedded.

There is also a need to ensure that supports already available through established Partnership Forums and targeted Family Support Model all work together to support vulnerable groups and this alignment is being driven through the development of a Family Support Model evaluation framework.

Actively increasing uptake of Early Learning and Childcare

An increase in the uptake of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in the city with 94.74% of our eligible population placed in 2022/23 compared to 91.22% in 2021/22, importantly there has been a 50% increase in the uptake of eligible 2s places. This will be maintained.

Priority access to after school activities

Sport Aberdeen’s Active Schools programme strives to be inclusive by design, with all extra-curricular activities free for children to access. The Active Schools team work with school staff, social work and third sector organisations to ensure that children who face the greatest barriers to participation are supported to access opportunities including pathways into positive destinations through leadership and volunteering opportunities. Offers are created through a needs-based approach to ensure young people are supported through bespoke timetables to access education and wellbeing opportunities which can be otherwise missed.

Attainment and destinations data

Curriculum for Excellence data for Looked After Children continues to show a gap in both literacy and numeracy between those children who are looked after and their peers and this will be keenly focussed upon despite the small numbers in the cohort (100 across all primary stages and 70 across secondary schools) which can skew data. There is a need to prioritise our use of resource in this area.

Although a lower percentage of young people who are Looked After move into a positive destination when compared to the virtual comparator, the percentage remains constant. Small numbers in the leavers cohort impacts of the percentage change achieved. There is a need to continue to focus on this area with a range of partners including Further and Higher Education in order to ensure that our looked after children consistently achieve a positive destination. This will be realised through Phase 2 of ABZ Campus and a refresh of the role of the Virtual School.

For the 2021/22 cohort, 5 young people did not move into a positive destination (3 are Looked after at home and 2 are Looked After away from home). All 5 had a high level of complex need and were supported through the Virtual School. 3 have subsequently moved on to college, 1 into employment and 1 on to ABZ works.

From the cohort of leavers, INSIGHT data indicates that 1 young person did not achieve any qualifications and was supported to move on to a college course that did not require qualifications from school. A range of supports were and continue to be in place to support him to succeed but this raises questions around the breadth of the curriculum available to support young people who may be struggling to engage due to family circumstances.

There has been a constancy of attainment at SCQF level 4 for literacy and numeracy over the past 3 years for children who are Looked After. It can be seen that the attainment of those who are Looked After away from home at this level has increased in 2021/22 to close the gap between their peers to 8%.

The attainment levels for children who are Looked After remains relatively unchanged with little year on year fluctuation. The percentage gap between Looked After children and the city population achieving 4 or more qualifications at SCQF level 3 has remained constant in 2021/22. It is anticipated continuing to broaden the range of curriculum pathways available to children and young people through the ABZ Campus alongside focussed work from Pathways Advocates will see an increase in the number of subjects being achieved as well as the level at which they are achieved. This will be an area of considerable focus and impact will be monitored through improvement charter 7.1 which is aiming to increase the % of care experienced learners entering a positive and sustained destination to be ahead of the Virtual Comparator for all groups by 2025. As well as introducing and embedding Pathway Advocates, the project is creating a refreshed programme of termly Pathway Planning meetings for each secondary school, with a robust tracking mechanism and calendar for intervention and partner working.

Pathway planning

A pathway planning process has helped to clarify roles and responsibilities in supporting young people to secure a positive destination. The Virtual School works alongside school staff, the Throughcare and Aftercare Team and ACC employability teams to support the transition onto independent living and a positive destination. Further training is scheduled to take place in September 2023 where there will a concentrated focus on the importance of targeting care experienced young people during any pathway planning process.

Pathways Advocates were introduced in 8 out of the 11 Secondary schools with recruitment to the remaining 3 ongoing. The role of the Pathways Advocate is to provide young people who are care experienced (those currently and previously Looked After) with an opportunity to have an informed advocate based in school to advise and support in the area of choices, vocational pathways and future options. The Advocate is distinct from the Pastoral / Guidance role, and from the expertise offered by SDS, but works alongside these partners.

In schools where advocates are in post, there are early indications of positive relationships being built with young people and school staff, an additional layer of tracking and monitoring being undertaken and information being shared with school staff to help them to better understand the needs of children and young people with experience of care. In some schools the reach of the support has been extended to other young people who may be at risk of becoming care experienced or have other identified needs. This approach will be formally evaluated over school session 2023/4 to determine next steps.

Police Scotland continues to provide avenues of support to CEYP who wish to join the police and provides a commitment to provide a mentor throughout the probationary period.

Further Education supports

NESCoL, in collaboration with the Virtual School, Social Work and Widening Access Partners, work to ensure a smooth transition to and from College takes place. Transition sessions are offered to all young people who identify as care experienced to allow them to familiarise themselves with the College buildings, staff and IT platforms in advance of their course commencing.

The Introduction of NESCoL S.P.A.C.E (Student Platform for All our Care Experience) allows the College to routinely poll students with care experience and find out what is important to them. The insight gleaned continues to shape supports such as enhanced support from Academic Tutors/Curriculum Managers and contact with the Student Advice and Support Team. New applicants with care experience coming to college for the first time are contacted by the Student Advice and Support Team to discuss and support their transition. This allows them to be in control of their transition, establish where they feel they need extra support and allow us implement support measures

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support is available to NESCoL students via the Student Wellbeing Advisers, in-house Counselling Service provided by ACIS Student, via our online platform Spectrum Life and our regional partnerships with organisations such as Aberdeen Foyer.

Access to mentoring

The MCR Pathways programme has been in place for 3 years. There have been a number of challenges throughout the lifetime of the programme including recruitment for both ACC and MCR as well as the impact of Covid-19.

In total 278 young people have engaged with and report benefiting from the MCR Pathways programme. As of February 2023, of those young people who are active or have previously been active with MCR Pathways, 12.59% are care experienced, 16.14% previously care experienced with the remaining 71.25% being identified as vulnerable. This balance is impacting on the extent

to which the programme impacts on our aim to increase the number of care experienced young people achieving a sustained destination. However, the programme may be helping to reduce the likelihood of needs escalating.

The high number of volunteers (144 trained volunteer mentors and 66 progressing through training) committed to delivering one to one mentoring is exceptionally positive and helping us discharge our Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Our young people who choose to engage with the programme tell us that they value and benefit from time with their mentor and qualitative evidence is strong. There is a need to consider a sustainable long term approach to mentoring over school session 2023/24.

National reform programme

The publication of 'All Learners in Scotland Matter' in Late May 2023 presents an opportunity to respond positively to on-going education reforms. The guiding values and Call to Action steer the service to continue to sharpen its focus on high-quality teaching and learning, continue to widen the range of different learner pathways, establish alternative routes to success, and consider the range of appropriate assessments required to reflect the unique talents of each learner, support their ambitions, and meet the needs of a changing world. The service will continue to work on these key themes and has considered the report fully in establishing priorities for 2023/24.

In summary, work is underway with considerable testing being undertaken to help deliver on Plan 21-24. There is now a need to drive changes in the senior phase curriculum through Phase 2 of ABZ Campus and evaluate the impact of the pilots underway to help determine the shape of the system in the longer term. This will help inform the best use of available resource. Data will continue to be a focus with individual schools now being asked to monitor groups routinely to help identify and share best practice and address issues timeously. The legislative framework around exclusion does not support delivery of The Promise aspiration and this could compromise full delivery of this action by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Implement the new BGE trackers
- Routinely analyse live outcome data for those who are care experienced to enable a more agile response
- Evaluate our Edge of Care pilots, exploring options to scale up
- Evaluate the impact of our Pathways Associates
- Consider a sustainable approach to mentoring
- Broaden the curriculum further through the second phase of ABZ Campus
- **Review our Virtual School Toolkit.**

On relationships, Plan 21-24 says:

- All children living in and around Scotland's 'care system' will be maintaining safe, loving relationships that are important to them.
- There will be no barriers to 'contact' and children will be supported to have time with people they care about.

Contact arrangements

All infants, children and young people who are looked-after away from home have 'contact', also known as family-time, arrangements considered and regularly reviewed within their child's plans. There is evidence of improved compliance with stated contact arrangements. This is an operational requirement.

Children and young people are supported in their understanding and connections with important relationships to them throughout their lives and in a variety of ways considering their individual needs and stage of development. Children's social work aspire to place children within one-hour distance of Aberdeen and are working with parents across the partnership to enhance contact experiences for the child e.g., by offering parents support to recover from their own trauma. Considerable time has been invested in enhancing the skills of workers undertaking supervision of contact between children, young people and their families.

Trauma informed relationships

Trauma informed, relational approaches are well embedded within children's social work and continue to be extending across the partnership. Authority to Accommodate processes have been refreshed to have greater focus on identifying and maintaining family relationships and promoting Kinship options. As a result an increased number of children are now in kinship care arrangements.

Former residents of Children's Homes locally are supported to maintain relationships with staff and other residents after they move out for example by being invited to visit and join for meals. We know many children and young people also maintain contact with and are supported by foster carers they have previously lived with, however, our evidence of this is largely anecdotal and we are considering how we can better capture and evaluate the value of this support.

Support for kinship carers

Our kinship families range from over 75's to early 20's they are great grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles and connected persons. Some have children right from birth to adulthood. Some may have had previous social work involvement and some none at all. The children and young people they care for have all experienced some form of loss and some may also have experienced trauma of varying degrees. All should expect to be loved and nurtured in a family network of carers who are also nurtured and cared for.

In consideration of this our support cannot be a "one size fits all approach", we need a diverse multi agency approach which matches the diverse nature of our carers and that is cohesive and trauma informed.

Recognising the importance of widening the support available, through our improvement project 6.3 we are aiming to increase by 100% the number of partners supporting kinship carers by 2023. Through this we have achieved a 900% increase in the number of partners supporting kinship carers, from 2 to 20 from Jan to June 2023. During this period, we have also seen an 89% increase in the number of carers receiving specific support. 36 partners and carers attended the information events, following which we've seen a direct increase in number of partners supporting kinship carers.

In summary, work is underway and progress has been made but we continue to rely on a disproportionate provision of external, versus internal, foster carers in comparison to other local authorities which means many of our children and young people are placed far from their existing relationships and communities in Aberdeen. The current challenges in securing placements is likely to compromise our ability to deliver fully on this action by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Aligned to the Hearings System review, further improve decision making to ensure that maintaining relationships for children and young people is aligned to needs of the child
- **Establish a mechanism to share information on the safe loving relationships important to young people**
- Expand our local foster care provision to readdress the balance of care. The national foster and kinship carers allowance is predicted to have a positive impact on our recruitment of carers, as it will offer equity across the local authorities in Scotland.
- Increase by 100% the number of partners supporting kinship carers by 2023.

On brothers and sisters, Plan 21-24 says:

- **Scotland will stop the practice of separating brothers and sisters, unless for reasons of safety.**
- **Relationships between brothers and sisters will be cherished and protected across decision making and through the culture and values of the people who care for them.**

Developing a position statement

In recognition of this important and complex area of work, we established a Brothers and Sisters working group which has set out our pledge to brothers and sisters in a [position statement](#). The group have developed local data collection methods to support our understanding of how many siblings are separated, the reasons why and to ensure these decisions are reviewed where appropriate.

An improvement session on best practice for brothers and sisters was delivered to over 100 children's social work staff. There is on-going work with housing providers to agree flexible options for carers to keep brothers and sisters together.

In summary, there is a strong commitment to making the necessary changes to our practice, however, availability and flexibility of homes for sibling groups remains a challenge. Whilst recognising the complexity of family life, we are working on improving our collection of brothers and sisters data and developing multi and single agency learning and guidance to support practice rooted in maintaining relationships for brothers and sisters. However, given the considerable challenge in securing placements for siblings, we may not have delivered this action fully by 2024. Where brothers and sisters cannot be cared for together planning will ensure that meaningful relationships are maintained.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Launch and embed multi-agency guidance on maintain relationships for brothers and sisters.
- Respond to learning following a review of foster carers registration
- Continue to develop our data sets

On youth justice, Plan 21-24 says:

- The disproportionate criminalisation of care experienced children and young people will end
- 16-and 17-year-olds will no longer be placed in Young Offenders Institutes for sentence or on remand
- There will be sufficient community-based alternatives so that detention is a last resort
- Children who do need to have their liberty restricted will be cared for in small, secure, safe, trauma-informed environments that uphold their rights.

Diversionsary work

Considerable multi-agency and diversionsary work is in place across the Partnership. We have consistently reduced the number of children and young people being looked after in secure care by providing intense support services to young people and their families. Local policy has been developed to ensure that where a decision about secure care is made, this will be timeously reviewed by the Chief Social Work Officer. In the last year, no 16 or 17 year old have been placed in a Young Offenders Institution. We have reviewed our processes to ensure an early flag for 16 and 17 year olds appearing from court to custody is made so that support for their needs can be considered prior to court appearance. We have engaged with and contributed to the reimagining secure care work and have sought to understand and prepare locally for the changes associated with the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill.

Developing a Bairns Hoose

A key development over the last year has been early planning for the provision of a Bairns Hoose. Our proposed Bairns Hoose will be part of an existing ELC provision, co-delivered by health and education, located within an area of the city well served by public transport and accessible from the Airport and Harbour. The location provides for privacy, anonymity and multiple entry/exit points to ensure that we manage the needs and safety of all who will utilise our Bairns Hoose.

The building has valuable outdoor space to allow children and young people space. The project is committed within the Council Capital Programme as it requires refurbishment and adaption to offer all 4 rooms required. Feedback elicited from children and young people by Children’s 1st has informed the outline business case. It is our intention to develop the building in two Phases.

Phase 1 will realise the development of purpose built Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) facilities providing:

- interview facilities;
- space for co-location of SCIM staff (Police and children’s social work);
- location of a 3rd Sector Trauma Recovery Service;
- space for ‘safe and well’ medicals to be undertaken; and
- exploring viability of locating Police Scotland’s ‘IRD desk’



Phase 2 will help realise full delivery of all 4 rooms through:

- a further interview space for Age of Criminal Responsibility (ACR) interviews which could also be used for vulnerable adults
- Remote court facility
- Medical suite with the capacity to undertake forensic medicals
- Shower facilities.
- Multi-purpose space allowing for direct work with families / staff learning / Children’s Hearings – SCRA court led processes / wellbeing space for staff.

The financial contribution of all partners is being negotiated and not yet agreed.

Our Partnership recognises more needs to be done to prepare and support children giving evidence to Court. A recent practice review highlighted that current arrangements lead to our children and young people feeling they are not believed, distressed and hurt. We appreciate the importance of building the confidence of children and young people as well as the Court system about utilising a remote court facility. As such the development of this will fall within Phase 2 of our project. We recognise that young people can only take part in Court processes remotely if the Court has confidence in the space and supports.

The provision of a Bairns Hoose has the potential to meet the needs of vulnerable adults who need to give evidence to Court. Where appropriate, and through careful timetabling, provision would be made through our Bairns Hoose. The Crown Officer and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPF’s) are an active partner within the Delivery Group and we are engaging with Scottish Courts and Tribunals (SCTS) to fully understand their requirements. We have engaged with a local Sheriff and liaising with the Sheriff Principle to seek their engagement and input.



Our Bairns Hoose Reference group will seek feedback from young people who have given evidence in Court both as witnesses and those accused of harming others to fully inform our plans.

In summary, work is underway and good progress has been made but we now await the recommendations from the secure care redesign and the government's response to the financial memorandum associated with the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill. This could compromise our ability to fully deliver on the action by the end of 2024 although local work remains on track.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Prepare the partnership's workforce for the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill and scope readiness for the changes being introduced to inform commissioning processes which intersect with this group
- Move forward with our plans for a local Bairns Hoose

On advocacy, Plan 21-24 says:

- All care experienced children and their families will have access to independent advocacy at all stages of their experience of care.
- Advocacy provision will follow the principles set out in the promise.
- Care experienced children and young people will be able to easily access child centred legal advice and representation.

Preparing for incorporation of the UNCRC

All policies relating to children take full account of the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child with considerable work undertaken to develop our practice in this area as exemplified in our [children's rights report](#). The Partnership remains poised to undertake a rapid review of our readiness for incorporation following publication of statutory guidance on implementation of the UNCRC over school session 2023/24.

Access to Advocacy

Children, young people and their families have access to advocacy beyond the Children's hearing system and we have built in prompts for our workforce to consider the need for advocacy into our multi-agency working, including within Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) processes.

The Rights Service works closely with the local primary and secondary Advocacy Services providers (Who Cares? Scotland and Advocacy Services Aberdeen), to provide independent advocacy for those children and young people who want it at their Children's Hearing.

The Rights Service provide access to independent advocacy for care experienced children, young people, and young adults in line with its remit. This includes those being cared for or living outside of the city. Those children and young people can also access other independent advocacy

services, aligned to their current care arrangements. All children/young people involved in child protection processes are considered for referral.

Champions Board

Our well established Champions Board is currently testing a range of approaches to ensure greater involvement and influence in the direction and delivery of strategic plans which impact of their rights. As the Partnership works towards incorporation of the UNCRC, we continue to drive the active consideration of children's rights in all of the work we do including through the development of individual Child's Plans and through the use of Integrated Impact Assessments to support strategic decision making.

In summary, work is underway and supporting access to and provision of advocacy is embedded from a children and young person's perspective, however, the route map for ensuring care experienced people can access lifelong advocacy is unclear. Locally we have difficulty accessing legal representation for children and young people which has created delays whilst provision is sought from legal services in the central belt.

There is a lack of specialised legal and justice professionals who understand children and young people's behaviour and developmental needs. Scotland requires legal support which is individual tailored to children and young people and supports them to access their rights. The Scottish Government have recently intimated their intention to begin consulting on what a lifelong advocacy service will look like. This could hamper our ability to fully deliver on this action by the end of 2024, although local work remains on track.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Fully engage with the Scottish Government's white paper on development of a lifelong advocacy service when published later in 2023/24.
- Consider the statutory guidance on the UNCRC when published to ensure that our young people are enabled to fully claim their rights

On moving on, Plan 21-24 says:

- Decisions about transitions for young care experienced people who move onto independent living or need to return to a caring environment, will be made based on individual need.
- Each young care experienced adult will experience their transition as consistent, caring, integrated and focussed on their needs, not on 'age of services' criteria
- Housing pathways for care experienced young people will include a range of affordable options that are specifically tailored to their needs and preferences.
- Youth homelessness will be eradicated

Housing support

The Throughcare Housing Protocol recognises the statutory duties towards care experienced young people and the requirement to support access to housing resource, reducing the risk of homelessness and associated vulnerabilities which can be lifelong. In April 2021, a Housing Support Officer became co-located with the Youth Team. This post supports our care experienced young people to navigate Housing systems taking a relational approach and aims to make sure that transitions from care into their first tenancy are as coordinated and transparent as possible. For 2022, the focus will be on developing more resources to support young people and staff to manage these transitions and systems. An evaluation of the impact of this role was undertaken in 2023.

The data indicates the growing numbers of looked after young people remaining in placement on a Continuing Care basis, thus promoting their opportunities for successful transition. The Council has taken on properties to support unaccompanied asylum seeking young people move on to independent living with outreach support.

Young parents with care experience

Responding to the voices of several of our young parents with care experience, enhancing the support and preparation of our young people with care experience for life beyond care, including parenthood, has become a strategic priority in our children's services and corporate parenting planning.

Support for those with a disability

Work is ongoing to improve the transition planning for young people with a disability/enduring health needs. How adult services ensure care experienced people can access lifelong advocacy remains unclear.

In summary, work is underway and we have undertaken a review of support in relation to 'moving on' alongside several of our young people with care experience, to identify gaps in this area and ensure our priorities align with the ask from our children and young people. Improvements are required and as a partnership we particularly need to better understand and respond to the holistic health needs of young people with care experience. There is a need for us to better align systems for children and adults. We hope that our focussed work on Homelessness will help us achieve this action by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Extend access to a specialist care experienced children's nurse up to age 26 years
- Extend access to CAMHS up to age 26
- Continue to expand and develop housing pathways and multi-agency support to care experienced young people, including unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, beyond being 'in care'.
- Continue to strengthen the alignment of planning at transition stages

On physical intervention, Plan 21-24 says:

- All care experienced children, wherever they live, will be protected from violence and experience the safeguard of equal protection legislation. •Restraint will always be pain free, will be used rarely, and only when required to keep a child safe
- There will be well communicated and understood guidance in place that upholds children's rights and reflects equal protection legislation.
- The workforce will feel supported to respond to behaviour in a trauma informed way that reflects a deep understanding of the children in their care*

Clarifying education policy

Our draft guidance - Supporting learners : A relationship and rights focused approach to physical intervention and seclusion has been issued to schools. Initial feedback has been positive highlighting the importance of shared definitions and the supportive nature of the debrief guides. We will update our local guidance in line with any changes once the finalised national guidance is available.

Use of restraint

Restraint is not utilised within our local children's homes and training is provided for kinship carers and foster carers to ensure that physical restraint is not utilised. Commitment to using alternatives to physical intervention has long been established as part of our fostering contracts. We are working to ensure that external providers of care are aligned to our values by supporting staff to be alert to the impact of restraint and ensure debriefing opportunities. We aim to reduce our use of care providers who use physical restraint and include our position on 'use of restraint' within children and young people's Individual Placement Agreements. The Police continues to engage with national OST (Officer Safety Training) and their Partnerships, Prevention and Community Wellbeing Division (PPCW) to discuss the use of restraint and accessing trauma informed training.

In summary, work is underway and we are beginning to develop a means of better understanding use of physical intervention, and other restrictive practices, across the partnership and have ensured that our local policies and guidance promote alternatives and trauma informed care. We are still awaiting the national guidance on the use of restraint and restrictive practices in schools and hope that publication will enable delivery of this action by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Implement the education guidance and monitor compliance and emerging trends to inform service delivery
- Develop means of understanding the use of physical restraint and reporting arrangements across every form of care, particularly with external providers and across every setting (including Police, Education, Health etc).

Our Progress in delivering Priority 2, Whole Family Support

The Promise says, 'All families need support at different times of their lives and family support is a crucial emphasis for 21-24. The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises family as the fundamental group in society and the natural environment for growth and wellbeing. Supporting families is a children's rights imperative. 'Families' means all families including families of origin, kinship, foster and adoptive families. Support will not be predicated on the setting of care. Supporting families to stay together and thrive was an imperative before the pandemic and is of even greater import now.

On Family Support, Plan 21-24 says: The 10 principles of intensive family support will be embedded into the practice (planning, commissioning and delivery) of all organisations that support children and their families, directly or indirectly.

- Holistic and relational
- Therapeutic
- Non-stigmatising
- Patient and persistent
- Underpinned by children's rights
- Community Based
- Responsive and timely
- Work with family assets
- Empowerment and agency
- Flexible

The Children's Services Plan provides the direction of travel for working with community planning partners to shape a model of family support based on the 10 principles of Family Support outlined in The Promise. The trauma-informed recovery service aligned to the Bairns Hoose will operate on a whole family basis, deliver on the 10 principles and be closely aligned with our Fit Like Hub to enable a stepping up and down of support.

Understanding demand and need

Our request for assistance process, which allows us to amend our response in light of live demand data, is being updated to include access for our multiagency partners. Phase 1 is ready for launch and will not only gather information on the number of referrals but will also allow referrals to be tracked from allocation to a worker to the point any agency disengages.

This will allow all services to be more agile, ensure the needs of families are being met and build a stronger picture of the journeys taken by our families. Phase 2, will explore how families can self-refer at the point of need.

An aim for a universal provision of PEEP

A very high proportion of community, health and Early Learning and Childcare staff are now trained to deliver the programme but the number of programmes in place is low due in some cases to confidence and in other cases staffing challenges across Early Learning and Childcare.

Through improvement Charter 4.3, an offer of co-delivery will be tested with the aim of increasing confidence in the delivery of this important intervention in order to further strengthen our universal support offers. As well as ELC staff, to achieve our aim of increasing by 40% the number of PEEP programmes delivered by multi-agency partners by 2025, we are also committed to expanding delivery to a wider set of partners and we are pairing up partners/services that have similar goals to deliver PEEP together, for example ChildSmile health will be delivering PEEP with nurseries). To support partners commit to PEEP delivery and the required training, we are developing a tiered training criteria, including provision of funded training spaces to mitigate barriers.

Integrated working at locality level

Partnership Forums continue to work to identify the issues being faced across a community to determine priorities, agree how to allocate resources, and identify where gaps in provision remain. Support afforded however, can be inconsistent.

Youth Workers, Family Learning Workers and Financial Inclusion workers were first put in place over 2021/22 as part of the Education Recovery Grant, with a clear remit for early intervention and to target those children, young people and families most at risk of disengaging from education. This resource has been maintained through use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding. There are numerous examples of where this more flexible allocation of resource has successfully improved outcomes for learners and families with examples highlighted later in this report but there is a need to develop an evaluation framework to more effectively track progress across the range of Tier 2 supports. Taking this approach will enable us to see where further support is required.

Further consideration of Locality working is now required to ensure consistency and to maximise the impact of our collective resource.

Family Learning funded through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding

The primary reason for most of the referrals to the Family Learning service is for support with behaviour, low attendance at school or support for families with a child who has additional support needs. When work begins with families and a trusted rapport is built, other areas in need of support are often discovered, such as poverty, poor mental health and the breakdown of family relationships.

Families being referred for 1:1 support generally present with a higher level of need, with 16% of families currently with social work input, on the cusp of social work support or experiencing child protection concerns. Family Learning frequently support the maintenance of de-escalations from social work, the service is recognised by colleagues as an essential role in the support received by families. The team have developed strong relationships with a wide variety of partner agencies with the goal of ensuring that families access the right support at the right time.

Family Learning Case Study funded through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding

Working together with home and school

A child displaying aggressive behaviours at home and in school was referred to Family Learning. The child was only attending school for 2 hours each morning at the time of referral and found it difficult to be in class, spending most of the time in school in the nurture room. The referral outlined the parents' need for support to understand the child's emotions and to establish structured routines and boundaries within the family home. Family Learning began building positive relationships with the parents and supported them to attend an 'Understanding Emotions' group. 1:1 support was offered in the family home, establishing positive routines and encouraging mum and dad to work together to respond appropriately to the distressed behaviours of their child. At the most recent multi-agency meeting for the young person, there has been a marked improvement.

The child is now accessing a full timetable, and most of his timetable is within the classroom with his peers. The child can recognise when he is becoming frustrated, and there is a system in place to allow space for him to deescalate. Mum and dad are noticing that their young person is less heightened at home, and they are seeing a clear reduction in heightened behaviours.

Family Learning Case Study - Young Parents Group

Family Learning have been running a support group for Young Parents under the age of 25 in Seaton Community Centre since September 2022. This is a space for young parents to meet other parents their own age and develop a peer support network. Participants have said that they previously struggled to access regular parent and toddler groups due to the difference in age between them and the other parents who attend. Each week they make lunch together and take part in an activity which is decided by the participants themselves. A core group now attend regularly. The group have worked on a variety of creative projects and participants have been able to take part in activities they otherwise wouldn't have enjoyed. The participants have had speakers in from services like St Machar Credit Union, ABZ Works and CFINE and have since signed up to access these in the community regularly. Visits have been undertaken to Aberdeen Art Gallery and SHMU, which group members have enjoyed. Some of the participants are quite vulnerable and have a limited support network.

Through engaging with the Young Parent Group they have been able to access 1-2-1 support from Family Learning workers, Family Learning courses and Grounded Counselling. Two of the group members have children transitioning to primary school after the summer and are now thinking about volunteering opportunities in the community and potentially returning to work. Family Learning staff continue to signpost them to appropriate support and opportunities.

Establishing the Fit Like Service

The Fit Like Family Wellbeing Team is a collaboration of children's services, health and voluntary sector working together to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, young people, and families in Aberdeen City. The Family wellbeing Team is designed to be an integrated whole system approach to change the way in which early help services support families. Delivery of Fit Like family wellbeing is underpinned by embracing a children's rights approach and work to develop Fit Like Hubs has been and continues to be directly informed by the voices of service users. The service provides holistic early intervention support to children, young people and their families mitigating the need for them to access statutory children's social work services or CAMHS and is staffed by a range of agencies and disciplines including:

- ACC - Education; CSW; Community Learning and Development; Youth services

On peer and community support, Plan 21-24 says: There will be a consistent, national approach to ensure there are places in every community for parents of young children to meet other local parents, to stay and play with their children, and get support and advice

There are a wide range of Third Sector supports available to children, young people and their families in the City. A Promise lead has recently been appointed as a Third Sector interface and the post holder now sits on our Children's Services Board.

Provision of holiday programmes

The education service continues to work with officers from across the organisation and local partners to plan and deliver holiday programmes during Summer, October and Easter school holidays. The offer consists of a priority programme for those families at greatest risk of poverty and a universal offer. Evaluations from parents and young people continue to be consistently high sitting at 9.7 out of 10. The allocation of £100,000 as part of the council budget 23/24 and allocation of a central Officer to coordinate is enabling provision over school session 23/24.



Support to manage family finances

Financial inclusion advisors have been attached to schools as part of our approach to education recovery. Over the period April 2022 to March 2023 the enhanced Financial Inclusion Team's advisors helped families achieve the following:

- Financial Gains of £1, 077, 325.24
- Assisted/Assisting 194 households with debt issues
- Helping with total debts of £1, 129, 447.58
- 381 household with given full benefit checks only
- Assisted 57 households to claim benefits
- Assisting 12 household to challenge being turned down for benefits

The service continues to be promoted to ensure all parents have access to advice and support. As well as financial support we are developing pathways to ensure that 100% of urgent requests for first stage infant formula and nutritional support for pre-school children are met by 2024.

Through improvement charter 4.1 we are Establishing a pathway where health professionals & emergency food providers can access a cash first approach for urgent first stage formula, nutritional support for the whole family and income maximisation support. This coincides with a reporting system collating the number of referrals and repeat referrals for emergency first stage formula and nutritional support to ensure demand can be monitored and areas for targeted support identified.

To ensure awareness of available supports, we are adapting the trusted sources of information such as our "Pathways to Support" live document to include an infant feeding early years section where urgent first stage formula support, nutritional support and early years income maximisation.

We are committed to increasing by 10% the no. of parents with children under 5 who are completing a full benefits check by 2024. Through our improvement charter 4.2, we are establishing new direct referral route for staff supporting/engaging with parents with children under 5 to both the Council's Financial Inclusion Team and to the Money Talk Team. In embedding the referrals we are developing and holding staff training sessions to ensure that staff are aware and using the referral routes. Finally, we're also co-designing and testing new ways of promoting how to access support to families with children under 5 & pregnant women, such as social media promotion, via their health professionals and community groups.

Parenting Support

A range of supports are available from the 3rd Sector and it is hoped that the inclusion of the 3rd Sector in our Children's Services Board will help map provision across our communities to increase visibility. There is also a need to look at how supports funding by the Council through various grants are contributing to the emerging model of Family Support.

Partnership work with Save the Children was positively received last session and provided key supports to parents in some of our pilot settings. Heathryburn and Woodside schools were trained to embed a Families Connect programme, a facilitated network for parents of pupils aged 3-6.

The Peep Learning Together programme has a peer-led element and supports parents and carers to:

- value and build on the home learning environment by making the most of everyday learning opportunities.
- build and strengthen attachment relationships with their child through listening, talking, playing, singing and sharing books together.
- help babies and children to make the most of their opportunities by becoming confident communicators and active learners, ready for school.
- Community groups are free and available to any parents and carers with children from birth to 5 years. Information on locations and times are available on request.

Peer support groups are also available for families who may need either additional or specific support, such as low mood, young parents, looked after children, English as an additional language. These groups are available by self-request or via a Health Visitor or other professional.

Safer schools app

In June 2021, the Safer Schools app was launched for pupils, parents/carers and staff and provides relevant and current information on a wide range of safeguarding, wellbeing, and online safety subjects. The app has been well received by our parent forum members and our child protection committee, as proving a useful resource for all. All schools have signed up to the app, which was shared with all parents via a range of communication channels – direct email, text message and social media. A focus on the Safer Schools app has been included in the monthly newsletter to parents/carers. A new version of the app, Safer Schools (Scotland), will be launched soon and will provide usage data for adults using the app.

In summary, work is underway but there is a need to further join up services delivering targeted supports. The appointment of a Third Sector Promise lead is exceptionally positive and will help us move this recommendation forward more fully. We remain optimistic that this action will be fully delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Develop our use of communities and volunteers to support preventative activity
- Map Tier 2 provision and include these supports in our evaluation framework to help us measure the strength of our local system
- Encourage the Third Sector to engage with the refreshed Request for Assistance tool and work collaboratively to help mitigate risk

On service integration, Plan 21-24 says: Scotland's family support services will feel and be experienced as integrated to those who use them.

Delivery of SCIM

Community Planning Partners (CPPs) led the implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) on behalf of the region in November 2022. Regional co-delivery of SCIM builds on over 20 years of co-located practice with colleagues from the Police and children's social work. Our implementation has been recognised as best practice nationally. As a result of this maturing relationship, feedback from children and young people is directly shaping SCIM practice as well as informing our thinking around our Bairns Hoose.

Effective multi-agency working

Our 2019 Joint Inspection of Children's Services highlighted a commitment to multi-agency working. The Joint Inspection noted that 'Joint working was effectively promoted by leaders who collaborated and shared a clear vision, values and aims'.

Since publication of the 2019 Joint Inspection report, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Planning Partners have had considerable success in delivering integrated rights based services. Our multi-agency workforce, who have experienced such integration, speak openly about the transformational nature of integration for those they serve and of the impact on the multiagency workforce.

Recognising that children's needs will move up and down, we continue to actively engage with Children's 1st to deliver a trauma recovery service. Children's 1st independence will enable honest reflections from children, young people and families and live connections with wider community based services within our Family Support Model to provide effective scaffolding for families. Children 1st already support delivery of Tier 2 services in the city and Moray Council enabling seamless transition between services and access to more holistic support through established services.

Integrated provisions

The Partnership has a focus on prevention, Leaders have encouraged the deliberate utilisation of a number of policy levers, such as the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare, to progress opportunities for co-location and integration and more rights based approaches. There is strong local evidence of the impact of integration on staff and those accessing services. Now partners (including Police and Health) are based in the Council Headquarters and this is further strengthening our relationships and shared decision making. The partnership is keen to explore wider alignment across the region to better reflect the geographical reach of Police Scotland and NHSG.

Operationally children's social work already have a Housing Support Officer and Drugs worker embedded within the Youth Team, an integrated Health and Social Work maternity hospital team and have integrated Includem into Intensive Support Services at Craigelea to improve children, young people and family's experiences of services and support.

We are committed to increasing the delivery of co-located services by health and education by 2024 to improve health and educational outcomes for young people and their families. Through improvement charter 7.2 we are co-designing with young people and partners a Healthy Hub model to be located within Northfield Academy that could then be spread to other areas. The project is working with young people to name the hub and to explore community data in order to help identify target groups and support required to be provided/available through the Healthy Hub and to produce modern child friendly communication plan to launch and to encourage young people to attend the Hub.

The Hub will promote healthy lifestyle choices to support physical and mental wellbeing and help support young people through a (vocational) pathway (in hospitality or care for example) and into a positive and sustained destination.

Two Children's social work teams are in the process of locating to city schools.

Shared policies and goals

The following effective multi-agency partnerships and governance arrangements are already in place:

- Chief Officers Group (COG)
- Child Protection Committee (CPC)
- Children's Services Board (CSB)
- Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (ADP)
- Adult Protection Committee (APC)
- Violence Against Women Partnership (of which the COG has an oversight role).
- Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

Managing the move from child to adult services

Multi-agency partnership interface across transitional points e.g. from children's to adult's services needs to improve. We aspire to offer family support services which are easily accessible, prevent families from having to re-tell their stories, and are experienced as integrated by all who use them.

In summary, work is well underway and considerable progress has been made in ensuring that services are experienced as being more joined up. This will continue to be developed over the lifetime of our Children's Services Plan. 'Moving on' has been identified by The Promise Scotland team as a priority for this year. We are confident that this action will be delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Learn from the current review of commissioned family support services with a view that they will continue to operate in a collaborative and collegiate bases.
- Continue to explore and maximise opportunities for integration
- Take advantage of the changes coming from legislation and policy e.g. the Care and Justice Bill to work with colleagues in other services to deliver support to children and families
- Further develop our transition planning for young people transitioning to adult services

On family therapies, Plan 21-24 says: All families will have direct and clear access to family therapies and specific support across a range of issues, so that accessing support is seen as something that a range of families may need throughout life.

An Aberdeen approach to Family Group Decision Making is being considered as part of our improvement work. There are a range of therapeutic supports within the Third Sector that families can access.

Bairn's Hoose and SCIM

In Autumn 2022, Aberdeen City's Public Protection Chief Officers Group unanimously committed to delivering an Aberdeen City Bairns Hoose on a collaborative basis. A multi-agency Bairns Hoose Delivery Group was established in early 2023 to drive this work forward on behalf of the CPC and CSB and has responsibility for:

- Planning, implementation, and delivery of a Bairns Hoose to provide trauma-informed recovery, support and justice
- Ensuring that delivery of trauma recovery support aligns to the wider Family Support Model
- Ensuring as a partnership that trauma recovery lens is central to the delivery of IRD's (Interagency Referral Discussions) and SCIM (Scottish Child Interview Model) interviews.
- Developing the capacity of a Bairns Hoose to deliver a trauma-informed remote Court facility for children and young people.

- Engaging with partnerships across the North East of Scotland to explore opportunities for co-delivery and shared learning to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Therapeutic care

Aberdeen City Council has an established therapeutic approach to provision in our residential children's homes that is based on the Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). DDP is used to help children and young people who have been traumatised by hurt and/or neglected within their families in their early years, making it difficult for them to feel safe and secure. The approach aims to help children and young people address difficulties with attachment (finding it hard to feel safe with parents or in primary relationships) and inter-subjectivity (finding it hard to give and take relationships). Theraplay training is provided to kinship & foster carers with the Family Network Team offering intensive therapeutic family support.

In summary, work is well underway and considerable work has been undertaken to shape services around The Promise. We now need to progress plans to develop and implement our Trauma Recovery Services, associated with our Bairns Hoose, and finalise an evaluation framework to help us test the strength of our arrangements. We are hopeful that this area will be fully delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Commission a trauma-recovery service aligned to SCIM across the North East
- Learn from the 'Supporting Birth Parents who have had children permanently removed Project' to improve our support offer.
- Wellbeing
- Supervision and support

Our Progress in delivering Priority 3, Supporting the Workforce

The Promise says, Children experience the 'care system' through people. Over Plan 21-24, support for people who care and continue to care if times get tough, will improve. There will be consistency of approach, values and understanding across Scotland's workforce.

On workforce values, Plan 21-24 says: There will be a national values-based recruitment and workforce development framework in place and adhered to by all organisations and professions involved in supporting children and their families.

Multi-agency planning for the workforce

Aberdeen City's Corporate Parenting Group has responsibility for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Improvement Plan, collation and monitoring of data and quality assurance in relation to children and young people with experience of care, delivering on identified aims set out in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and driving the implementation of The Promise across the Partnership. The Corporate Parenting Group engages with children and young people with experience of care and seeks to ensure all improvement activity takes full account of their views and lived experiences.

Specifically, the group has oversight of the refreshed LOIP Improvement Project Stretch Aim 6; *"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"*

In September 2022, training on Corporate Parenting and The Promise was jointly delivered by the Virtual School, Lead Officer Corporate parenting and the Principal Planning development officer to all probationer teachers in Aberdeen City. The session was well attended and received. Feedback from these sessions is informing ongoing work to develop and refresh our Corporate Parenting training, including a reworking of the mandatory e-learning module for all Aberdeen City Council staff and creation of local multi-agency training, to ensure relevant policy and legislative changes are included. The training delivered to probationer teachers has been expanded in 2023/24 to include a more in-depth look at The Promise.

Children's social work

Children's social work recruitment practices have moved from being overly competency focused to better balancing competency and values. A workforce Wellbeing Event was held in early 2023 where ongoing supports to staff were showcased. A CSW specific induction programme, cognisant of wellbeing and trauma-informed practice, has been developed and trialled with newly qualified social workers.

In summary, work is underway and well established systems are in place and these continue to be kept under review to ensure that they reflect national best practice. We welcome the anticipated establishment of a National Social Work Agency. This will ensure a more consistent approach to staff learning and development on a national basis. Although this may not be fully

established by 2024, locally we are confident that this area will be fully delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Continue planning for and embedding of the SSSC Supported Year
- Continued planning for and embedding of the National Trauma Training Programme

On trauma informed, Plan 21-24 says: Organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and families and those on the edge of care will be able to demonstrate that they are embedding trauma informed practice across their work and within their workforce.

Ensuring our multi-agency workforce is trauma informed and where necessary trauma skilled is a priority of our Corporate Parenting Plan. We are embedding the national child protection guidance, which is aligned to trauma-informed principles, and there is ongoing work in relation to building trauma-informed universal workforce development plan, drawing upon existing national tools and applying a local lens.

Compassionate and Connected Communities

All schools continue to engage with the Compassionate and Connected Communities (CCC) programme. We have built the capacity of 11 further members of staff to act as trainers for the programme. Taking this approach of on-going training for trainers ensures that we maintain a full 64 trainers across the city with a trainer available in each city school. This ensures an on-going focus on trauma informed practice.

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants

ACC Educational Psychology Service have now trained 52 Support Staff in the Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) programme, with cohort 3 just completing their training. ELSA is a programme grounded in Psychology, written by Educational Psychologists and with strong evidence of outcomes from its widespread use in England and Wales. ACC EPS data shows the training was rated very highly, that outcomes were seen for individuals in Schools with trained ELSAs. ELSA is an intensive training programme with the equivalent of 6 full days of training. The training builds capacity in staff to deliver targeted individual programmes of education in relation to developing self-esteem, resilience and the overall emotional literacy and regulation of learners. Following completion of the training ELSAs receive career-long psychological group supervision 6 times a year, a total of 12 hours per year. This intensive and in-depth training for ACC's Support Staff maps onto the aims of the Scottish Government's 'Pupil Support Staff - Professional Learning Framework'.

Other training offered by ACC EPS that support staff have engaged with include Emotion Coaching, Seasons for Growth, Positive Psychology and Mindfulness. Training evaluation returns remain positive. Three new schools did whole school training, including support staff, on Emotion

Coaching this year. Two new cohorts of support staff have been trained as Seasons for Growth *Companions* this year. Seasons Companions lead small groups of learners.

Companions help the group learn the skills to cope with and make sense of significant loss and change, and help the learners create a peer network of support. Once trained as a companion, twice yearly re-connector sessions are offered as ongoing support and development. Seasons for Growth has very positive outcome ratings for the support staff trained.

Training for Police Officers

Police Trauma Informed sessions have been completed in Aberdeen City with plans for the same in Aberdeenshire and Moray. Probationers now receive an hour and a half input on being trauma informed. Police Scotland now have a cadre of 40 plus Trauma Informed Champions covering the North East. Future plan for mandatory training for all currently being progressed with IT.

Police Scotland CYP team is responsible for driving the Promise; with commitment to improve the care system in conjunction with partners, and in accordance with the Corporate Parenting Plan, whilst supporting workforce development in areas such as Trauma Informed approach and upskilling partners in areas such as CCE. All in accordance with UNCRC. This work is carried out by Risk and Harm Reduction Officers who also work primarily with care experienced children and young people, but also any other children and young people following missing episodes, and also conduct their return home discussions, and attend subsequent Interagency Referral Discussions (IRD), Multi-agency Meetings and Care and Risk Management Meetings (CARM), etc.

Police Scotland provides regular updates to guidance documents and inputs to care home staff and foster placement services. Police Scotland participation group work will feed into this. Local workforce will meantime continue with WRAM sessions as part of their ongoing Trauma Informed training

Training for Children's Social Work

All of our local residential staff continued to be trained in trauma-recovery principles (DDP). Children's social work are working towards increasing staff training levels to Trauma skilled and Trauma specialist. A workforce survey was undertaken with staff across children's social work to establish perceived levels of Trauma Knowledge and Skill and was used to inform a local pilot approach to training for social workers.

Children's social work are represented at the Scottish Government's Trauma Responsive Social Work Services Expert Advisory Group which provides advice, informs, shares and discusses the implantation of the national trauma training programme for social work services.

In summary, work is well underway and good progress has been made in this area. A Multi-agency training plan is currently being developed for approval by the Children's Services Board. We are confident that this area will be fully delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Establish and implement trauma-informed universal workforce development plan

Of on-going relationships, Plan 21-24 says: There will be no blanket policies or guidance that prevent the maintenance of relationships between young people and those who care for them. Settings of care will be able to facilitate the protection of relationships that are important to children and young people.

Relational approaches

Relational approaches are well embedded in local residential care with many young people maintaining relationships with staff and others beyond moving on. Relational approaches are embedded across fostering service via increase in continuing care numbers and relationships being sustained beyond formal arrangements. Police Scotland, as Corporate Parents, uphold our NE Divisional Pledge to support any care experienced young person should they seek our advice in respect to personal and home safety when moving into their own home for the first time. This is also extended to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who are new to the area and require extra support.

A review of policies has confirmed that there is no policy framework which prevents the maintenance of relationships between young people and those who care for them. A dedicated Throughcare and Aftercare outreach post has supported the maintenance of relationships and connection and Pathway Planning should account for how relationships are sustained.

Adopters, kinship and foster carers' training has been enhanced to include supporting relationships for children and young people in care and maintaining relationships is emphasised in our current preparation of adopters.

In summary, work is well underway and good progress has been made in this area. We are confident that this area will be fully delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Develop our understanding of why adopters have been unable to maintain relationships for children and young people to better inform our guidance and support

On workforce support, Plan 21-24 says: A new framework of support will be in place to ensure people involved in the care of care experienced children and young people feel valued, encouraged and have supportive relationships for reflection with high quality supervision and environmental conditions.

Learning and development

We have a long established delivery model of shared learning and development which will be maintained. Effective professional supervision will also be maintained with Organisational Development on hand to support team development as required.

We are keen to ensure that we can respect the wishes of the young people wherever possible, particularly in identifying their central point of contact. We have a commitment from the partnership that staff, irrespective of the job role, will be released to support a child or young person wherever possible.

Peer support networks have been established in schools and provided key support to those supporting pupils directly.

Staff across CSW are provided with professional supervision and support recognising the complexity of the role and personal impact working intensively with children, young people and families who have experienced significant trauma has on the workforce. A review of Supervision practices within CSW has been undertaken with staff and managers and a working group has been established to create consistent guidance, skills and resources across the service.

I summary, work is well underway and good progress has been made in this area and effective systems are in place. We are confident that this area will be fully delivered by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Further develop workforce wellbeing supports
- Give consideration to alignment within social work supervision policy across adults and children's social work

Our Progress in Delivering Priority 4, Planning

The promise says, There needs be a different approach to investment and planning. National partners have a significant role to play in ensuring a new context for funding, investment and planning. Children and families live in local communities and use local services. It is important that their experiences and outcomes are not determined simply by which local community they live in or local service they use. Planning and investment should be nationally coordinated to ensure that children and families get what they need. Whilst the majority of the promise relates to matters which are reserved to The Scottish Parliament, the English Independent Review of Children's Social Care has relevance in respect of cross-jurisdiction issues.

On planning, Plan 21-24 says: Scotland will have a national, strategic planning process in place that ensures that children who are cared for away from their family of origin 'belong to a loving home.'

The planning process will reflect the needs of Scotland's children and young people whilst operating with the expectation that more children will remain with their families. It will reflect the principles of the promise ensuring:

- Scotland's most vulnerable children are not profited from,
- Standards of care are consistent
- End to the selling of care placements to Local Authorities outside Scotland
- Acute and crisis services are phased out to promote early intervention and prevention

Reviewing commissioned services

We have undertaken a review of our commissioned services and expanded our development offer to Kinship and Foster Carers emphasising the importance of love and trauma recovery.

National policy changes

Locally we have welcomed the Hearings System Working Group's recommendation report. As the report recognises, there is significant work already underway, either through existing groups, such as the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership, or through new policy, legislation and practice development. These include, but are not limited to, the introduction of Bairn's Hoose, the updated Child Protection Guidance, GIRFEC refresh, Secure Care Redesign, and the Children's Care and Justice Bill, alongside the proposed National Social Work Agency, amongst others. This individual, and combined, improvement work must be seen in the context of improving systems and practices for and with children, young people, and their families and all will have a positive impact on the children's hearing system, directly or indirectly.

In summary, work is underway locally. We welcome the national changes being proposed and continue to reflect the direction of travel advocated in The Promise in our commissioning arrangements. Considerable work is required at a national level and this is likely to compromise our ability to deliver on this action by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Continue to develop local services which promote early intervention and prevention
- We recognise that there remain differences between the care provided in Aberdeen City versus the external care provision we commissions e.g. we do not use restraint in any of our local care settings, however, further work is required to embed this change nationally
- It remains challenging to set our next steps in the absence of change at a national level. What is required moving forward is a cohesive and joined up approach to improvement, across local and national government and with The Promise Scotland and that existing policy, practice and legislative change do not happen independent from each other, or from the work resulting from the Hearings for Children report.

On investment, Plan 21-24 says: Investment in the lives of children and families will be considered strategically and holistically in the context of their experiences. The Human and Economic Cost modelling that underpinned Follow the Money and The Money reports will be embedded into organisational and budgeting processes across Scotland. That process will have involved organisations working together to spread investment and align budgets.

Considerable progress has been made in pooling resource across the universal services with examples of health and education co-designing and delivering services to vulnerable groups and health funding early intervention for mental health support by Place2Be in a local primary school as a test of change.

There is a commitment from all partners to resource the Bairns Hoose in terms of both workforce and the costs of the physical infrastructure. The business case for the physical infrastructure are now at an advanced stage although the final business case has still to be approved

Partnership commissioning principles have been agreed. All grants for children are overseen by the Children's Services Board.

The use of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund continues to be a focus and evaluated. We are one of the 6 local authorities participating in independent evaluation of the fund.

In summary, work is underway. We continue to explore opportunities to pool resources and will need to carefully consider next steps in light of the Verity House agreement. Despite this uncertainty, we remain hopefully of fully delivering on this action by the end of 2024.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Continue to review the impact of resource allocations to inform future investment and planning

On information sharing, Plan 21-24 says: Organisations with responsibilities towards children and families will be confident about when, where, why and how to share information with partners. Information sharing will not be a barrier to supporting children and families.

GIRFEC arrangements

Well established GIRFEC arrangements are in place and the workforce has a clear understanding of when and how to share information in line with legislation. Operational Guidance reflects updated national guidance.

Data sharing arrangements

The partnership has existing data sharing agreements that enable the routine sharing of appropriate data to produce multi-agency data sets. CELCIS have engaged with the data reporting of our Child Protection Committee to inform national approaches to data reporting. Challenges remain in complex organisational systems which create barriers to identifying and sharing information and data.

Data dashboards

Multi-agency data is frequently scrutinised by a range of partnership groups including the COG, CPC and CSB.

IRDs

Out Interagency Referral Discussion processes have been reviewed over the last year and continue to be fully aligned to the updated National Child Protection Guidance and considered best practice.

In summary, there are already well established systems in place across the Community Planning Partnership. It is anticipated that this area will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Implement the Request for Assistance process to enable us to better analyse the impact of services supporting children and families

Our Progress in Delivery Priority 5, Building Capacity

The Promise says: Over the next 3 years, there will be a focus on work that ensures that the structural underpinning of the 'care system' is orientated to the needs of children and families. This work to build capacity and coherence reflects the planned obsolescence of The Promise Scotland. It will not always be there to provide oversight and accountability and the structures need to move to ensure that the scaffolding around the 'care system' facilitates and upholds children's rights

On legislation, Plan 21-24 says, Over the course of the next Parliamentary term, there will be identifiable progress made towards ensuring Scotland's legislative framework around the breadth of the 'care system' is coherent and cohesive, upholds the conclusions of the Independent Care Review and is compliant with the UNCRC.

The Children's Services Board is alert to and looks out for proposed legislative change. A local review of policies and guidance has been undertaken to ensure UNCRC compliance and strategic planning is informed by and aligned to upholding the UNCRC.

Planning, at a local level with steer from the Scottish Government, to consider the implications and requirements of the Care and Justice Bill is ongoing.

We have an established multi-agency group (CSW, SCRA and CHS) to ensure Children's Hearings, held locally, are as effective and child-centred as possible. This forum enable practice issues to be raised adopting a learning approach. It will also be well placed to respond to the findings of the ongoing review of Children's Hearings.

In summary, change is required at a national level. It is not anticipated that this area will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Continue horizon scan for legislative change and work to consider what this will mean and require of us locally.

On the Children's Hearing system, Plan 21-24 says: The Children's Hearing System will have gone through a redesign process.

That redesign process will bring together children and families, and organisations that hold the responsibility, to rethink the structures, processes and legislation that underpin the hearing system.

The aim will be to ensure there are coherent, cohesive and collaborative proposals on an operating framework for The Children's Hearings System that has been designed with children and families.

That redesign process will be underpinned by:

- giving effect to the promise;
- ensuring compliance with the UNCRC,
- upholding the original intention of The Kilbrandon Review that children involved in offending need care and protection; and
- ensuring The Children's Hearing System and The Courts can facilitate child friendly justice that upholds children's rights and enables their effective participation.

We have welcomed the [Hearing Systems Working Group's Recommendation report](#) and whilst we await change at a national level we continue to work closely with local and national colleagues from SCRA and CHS. Grampian-wide tests of change are anticipated.

Practice and culture change is being promoted to consider how we will best support 16 and 17 years olds, in line with proposed changes to the Children's Hearings system and legislation anticipated from the Care and Justice Bill.

In summary, change is required at national level. It is hoped that this area will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Await the Scottish Government's formal response to the HSWG review
- Explore change at a local level to improve our processes, practice and culture.

On inspection and regulation, Plan 21-24 says A new, holistic framework for inspection and regulation that values what children and family's value, will have been scoped and developed. It will understand the necessary legislative change required to focus on children's experiences and will be underpinned by the principles set out in the promise and give full effect to the secure care pathway and standards.

We have a local interface with our Link Inspector and participated in the Secure Care Pathway Review which is anticipated to publish its recommendations report in September 2023.

In summary, change is required from the Care Inspectorate and we will take learning from the Secure Care Inspection to inform local change. It is hoped that this area will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24. However we also recognise that work to 'reimagine secure care' will take far longer than the lifetime of Plan 21 – 24.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Conversations with the Care Inspectorate and at a national level to continue
- Reflect on and embed learning from secure care review into local practices and processes

On policy coherence, Plan 21-24 says: There will be cohesive alignment in the policy initiatives and frameworks across Scotland. Policy development across Scotland will reflect the realities of people's lives and create a coherent policy environment. The focus of the 21-24 period will be on implementation and alignment not inquiries and reviews.

All policies in place across education and children's services, reflect what is known about incorporation of the UNCRC and The Promise.

Our LOIP, Children's Services Plan, Child Poverty Plan and other local and national strategic plans have been aligned with The Promise and UNCRC.

Locally we have convened a National Care Service (NCS) multi-agency group to ensure early planning and consideration of decisions made in relation to NCS.

In summary, work is advanced in this area. We continue to proactively plan for changes in policy and welcome greater coherence nationally. It is anticipated that this area will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24, although recognise that decisions in relation to the proposed NCS and incorporation of UNCRC will have an impact here.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Create a coherent policy environment across the partnership, informed by the findings of the reviews being undertaken to inform NCS planning
- Policy coherence across the partnership will be supported by local development and implementation of the Bairns Hoose model

- We intend to align reporting of the child protection improvement plan to children's services planning to further support coherence

On data mapping and collection, Plan 21-24 says, Scotland will have a cohesive central picture of all data on the processes and systems that directly and indirectly impact on children and their families, including wider socio-structural factors. The data picture will have been used to fully align data systems, collection and analysis methodologies to what matters to children and families, and the needs of those who take decisions on how best to support children and their families.

A suite of multi-agency data to support monitoring of children's services activity and tracking of trends for our children and young people across the partnership has continued to develop and mature.

Better consistency of data is required at a national level to support benchmarking and a review of what data is collected and reported upon, and whether this really matters to children and families.

In summary, good progress has been locally. It anticipated that this area will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Continue to engage with the Local authority social work services (LASWS) children and families group and Promise Scotland to inform national change
- Our corporate parenting data collected across the partnership relates specifically to looked-after children and we hope to develop routine collection of care experienced data to help us better understand a child/young person's experiences and outcomes beyond care better. Work to improve our workforce's understanding of the language of care is underway to support achievement of this.

On governance structures, Plan 21-24 says, All public appointments to any of Scotland's Boards and Public Bodies which have an impact on the 'care system' will ensure that the values of the promise are embedded in recruitment frameworks. The governance landscape around the various Boards, networks and groups that sit around the 'care system' will be rationalised to enable effective and accountable shared working around the lives of children and families.

Principally this is an area of work for the Scottish Government, however, locally the following work is underway and all members of the partnership are represented at the board and all subsidiary groups responsible for multi-agency accountability and implementation of The Promise.

We have established regional approaches, such the North East Leaders of Public Protection Group and our SCIM arrangements, enable the maximisation of our plans for a regional connection.

The Aberdeen City Community Planning partnership has a range of highly effective governance arrangements in place including our Chief Officers Group (COG), Child Protection Committee (CPC) and Children's Services Board (CSB). These arrangements, where candour, curiosity and accountability between partners is actively encouraged, has significantly aided more common practice and a shared and ongoing culture of improvement around public protection. Local Government benchmarking outcome data for children suggests we are the most improved Partnership.

The Children's Services Board is governed by and accountable to the Community Planning Management Board, which in turn is accountable to Community Planning Aberdeen.

In summary, sound governance arrangements are in place locally. It not anticipated that national governance arrangements will be fully delivered by the end of the lifetime of Plan 21-24.

To fully deliver on Plan 21-24 we now need to:

- Change is required at a national level
- Remain engaged with partners at a national and local level to prepare for timeous implementation of change locally as national direction becomes clearer

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION



Local and National Context

We are now 3 years into our journey to #KeepThePromise and Plan 21-24 is coming to an end. Plan 21-24 was the first of three intended plans and began on 1st April 2021. Undertaking this evaluation has helped confirm many of the next steps we had already identified and identify further two further areas for action which are to:

- Review our Virtual School Toolkit.
- Establish a mechanism to share information on the safe loving relationships important to young people

In its [second report](#), The Promise Oversight Board, acknowledged the challenging context within which The Promise and Plan 21-24 were launched, referencing the disruptive impact of the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis on people and organisations. The Board was realistic in stating that due to the worsening circumstances for so many and the current pace of change, they do not believe that delivering the original aims of Plan 21-24 is realistic by 2024. However, they reiterated that The Promise is non-negotiable and must be kept by 2030.



As our self-evaluation reflects, there is a lot of positive work underway that is making a difference to the lives of children and families which must be celebrated and built on.

The Promise Scotland have advised that they now think that the time period left, between now and 2030, would be better served with a single 6-year plan, with proper monitoring and accountability built in, rather than the original three 3-year plans, and we remain engaged with colleagues nationally to support our local response to future Promise plans.

The Promise Oversight Board's second report identified 3 priority areas for change in Scotland based on the national data available:

- Education
- Brothers and Sisters
- Homelessness

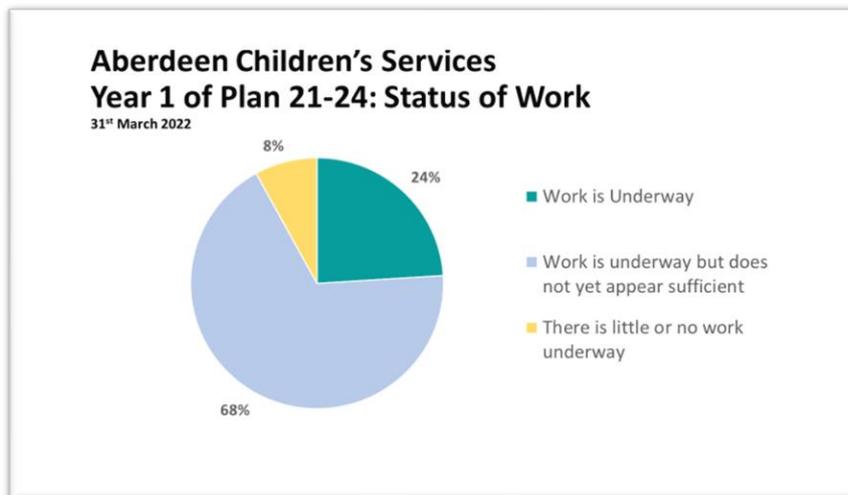
Whilst we have made significant progress locally in all 3 of these areas, we agree that improving the educational outcomes of our looked-after and care experienced children and young people,

keeping brothers and sisters together and connected and ensuring young people leaving care have everything they need should remain local priorities too.

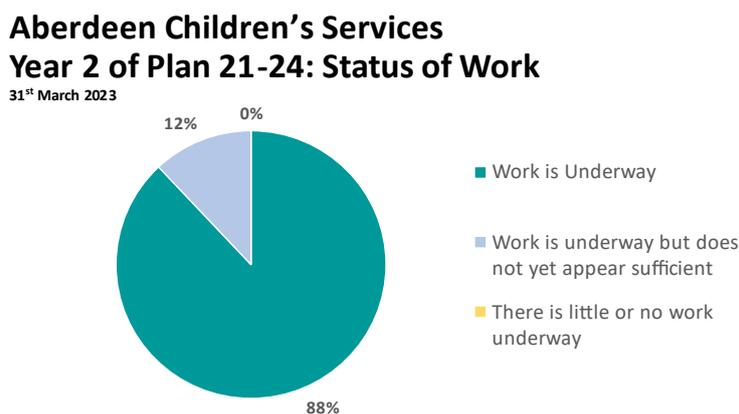
We remain dedicated to developing and embedding our local Family Support Model to deliver on early and preventative support to children, young people and their families with the aim of increasingly preventing them from coming into our care at all.

Summary of Progress

In 2022, we reported our progress against the 25 priority actions from Plan 21-24 as of 31st March 2022.



From this year's self-evaluation against the 25 priority actions from Plan 21-24 we can see that significant progress has been made in the last year and notably we have identified no areas where there is 'little or no work underway'.



The 3 priority actions, planning, legislation and governance structures, where we have identified 'work is underway but does not yet appear sufficient' require change at a national, systems level e.g. by the Scottish Government or Children's Hearings system, before a local response can be made.