

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services Committee
<b>DATE</b>	20 February 2024
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Secure Care Pathway Review
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CFS/24/051
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Graeme Simpson
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	2.1.1 & 2.2

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Committee members on the learning identified in the recently published Secure Care Pathway report and to highlight any immediate implications for the delivery of services to children and young people from Aberdeen who are in or on the edges of secure care.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report; and
- 2.2 Note that the outcome of our self-evaluation will contribute to the annual review of the statutory Children's Services Plan with required actions being built into the plan.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

#### 3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 In May 2022 the Scottish Government asked the Care Inspectorate to undertake a rights based thematic review in relation to Secure Care. The Secure Care Pathway Review ran from August 2022 through to August 2023.

- 3.1.2 The Independent Care Review in February 2020 highlighted:  
***"There is limited information about the circumstances of young people who are placed in secure care, their experiences of secure care and their destinations and outcomes on leaving secure care"***.

- 3.1.3 The intention of the thematic review by putting the voices of care experienced young people at the heart of the review was to support an improved understanding of the role of secure care and how it supports to improve the outcomes for some of our most vulnerable young people. It two aims were:
1. Understand how young people experience secure care

2. Understand the extent to which the Secure Care Pathway and Secure Care Standards are making a difference to how staff and managers understand and approach their work and whether they are helping to improve young people's experiences.

## **3.2 Methodology**

- 3.2.1 All 32 local authorities were asked to identify young people who fell into the following groups:
  - young people who were living in secure care on 13/7/22
  - young people who left secure care between 1/3/22 and 12/7/22.
  - young people whom LA's had considered placing in secure care between 1/3/22 and 12/7/22.
- 3.2.2 From the 126 young people identified 30 young people were chosen and over the course of the review the inspection team tracked their plans and outcomes. They met with the young people where they were agreeable to this and met with relevant staff from the team around the child. In addition they interviewed all CSWO's and other relevant managers.
- 3.2.3 One young person from Aberdeen City was within the group of 30.

## **3.3 Review Findings**

- 3.3.1 The findings of the Review were published in early October 2023. Learning was on a national basis as opposed to learning specific to each partnership. Six learning themes were identified for local partnerships to consider. These are
- 3.3.2 **Theme 1: Understanding the purpose and role of secure care:**

The purpose and role of secure care is to provide a safe and restricted environment that some young people need. It should enable them to get the care and therapeutic support that they require. While some young people are in secure care because they are a risk to others, some are in secure care because they are at risk of harm and in need of the specialist support provided by secure care services. The report concluded that young people, their families and staff working with young people do not always fully understand the role and purpose of secure care.
- 3.3.3 **Theme 2: Identifying and responding when young people are at high risk of harm:**

Across Scotland, children's services partnerships differ in their approaches to identifying, responding to and monitoring young people at high risk of harm who may require secure care. This includes before, during and after secure care to prevent admission or readmission and to support planning during secure care. The report concluded that there were inconsistencies to the extent to which staff and leaders from key agencies are involved in assessing and planning support for young people during their secure care journeys.
- 3.3.4 **Theme 3: Providing young people with stability of care**

The importance of stability of care and consistent relationships with staff for young people cannot be overestimated. The review found that too often, young

people were moved around the care system including in and out of secure care, especially when their behaviour was challenging as a result of trauma and distress resulting in changes of staff working with them.

### **3.3.5 Theme 4: Providing families with suitable support**

The review highlighted that early and effective family-based support was not always available for families. This was particularly challenging for families caring for children and young people with complex needs (i.e. caring for young people who are care experienced or having ASN) to ask for help. The report noted that the provision of flexible and timely intensive support was not consistently available. In addition, it noted families were not always receiving the practical and emotional support they needed to stay in touch when young people were living away from home. There was a lack of support available to families to prepare them for young people returning to their care.

### **3.3.6 Theme 5: Meeting the housing needs of young people**

The report identified that when young people left secure care they were not always prepared for leaving. They were often not well provided with support to make steps towards independent living or returning to live with family. Almost 1/3 of young people in the Review sample became homeless during the review period or were at risk of homelessness. The Review highlighted that suitable intermediate care settings were not consistently available for young people in or on the edges of secure care. At times, young people were placed with family members or in care settings that were unlikely to be sustainable because there were no other options available.

### **3.3.7 Theme 6: Providing young people with intensive and specialist support**

The report found there were inconsistencies in the provision of support to young people living in the community. This included therapeutic support to address emotional distress and risks of self-harm and suicide and substance misuse. It noted more consistent, intensive community-based support could help to prevent young people moving or returning to secure care. The review found it was easier for young people to access and engage with therapeutic and specialist support while in secure care and there was a lack of continuity of therapeutic support when young people moved in and out of secure care. Multi-agency partners were much less likely to be involved in post-secure care planning and provision of support.

## **3.4 Next Steps**

**3.4.1** Over recent years Aberdeen City has placed very few children in secure care. The majority of recent placements have been as a result of the risks young people present to themselves (mental health/drug use) as opposed to being in conflict with the law. While locally we have done much to mitigate the need for secure care there is always more we can do. Many of the learning/action points identified within this thematic review reflect local experiences. They also reflect some of the areas of improvement already identified within our Children's Service Plan 2023/26 and Corporate Parenting Plan.

**3.4.2** The Secure Care Pathway thematic review identified a small number of actions/reflective questions for local Corporate Parents to consider and evaluate local practice and services. Responding to these requires a multi-

agency response and it will therefore be fully considered at the next Corporate Parenting Group meeting. Given the significance of this report for CAMHS we have asked that a representative attend this meeting.

- 3.4.4 An evaluative report will thereafter be brought to the Children's Services Board for their consideration. Identified gaps in service provision or practice will directly contribute to the annual review of the statutory Children's Services Plan with required actions being built into the plan.
- 3.4.3 The Thematic Review recognised that a number of learning/action points require a response at a national level both in terms of the resources made available to services as well as approaches to address the national challenge of recruitment and retention of staff across children's social work and social care services.
- 3.4.5 The findings of the thematic review have a strong alignment to the draft Children's Care & Justice Bill that is currently being considered by the Scottish Parliament. Specifically the Bill proposes a redesign of the secure estate to ensure it better meets the needs of young people who need this restrictive form of intervention. In addition the Bill stresses the need for sufficient community-based alternatives so that detention is a last resort.

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

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. It is important to recognise that the cost of placing a young person in secure care is significant circa £350,000 per child per year. The Council has limited control over these decisions but are responsible for the full costs of placing a young person in secure care.
- 4.2 While the thematic review is rightly focused on improving outcomes the financial implications are a further reason to ensure every effort is made by partnerships to provide appropriate intensive community based alternatives to secure care. Given the complexity of the needs of the small number of young people who potentially meet the legal threshold for secure care the cost of delivering community based alternatives are also financially onerous.
- 4.2 The financial memorandum that accompanies the Children's Care and Justice Bill is still subject to ongoing debate and consideration. It is therefore unknown at this point what financial resource will be assigned to delivering on the recommendations of the Bill including developing an alternative to secure care community option.

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

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications from this report, however, the quality of support provided to children and young people in need of care and protection, including those in or on the edges of secure care are focused within statutory joint inspections of services delivered to children in need of care and protection. The partnerships response to the Secure Care Pathway Review will therefore be considered within this context.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No specific implications identified.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No significant related risks	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Compliance</b>	Failure to act on the findings of the thematic review will inhibit the partnerships capacity to deliver on the Secure Care Standards and improve the outcomes for young people in or on the edges of secure care.	The annual reporting on progress to deliver on the Children's Services Plan will take account of the self-evaluation on the findings of this thematic review. The Care Inspectorates joint inspection of services delivered to children in need of care and protection will also take account the findings and delivering on the Secure Care Standards.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Operational</b>	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people who are in or on the edges of secure care is central to the multi-agency planning for all children and young people open to Children's Social Work.	The number of young people in secure care remains low. All placements are subject to review by the Chief Social Work Officer at least every 4 weeks.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Financial</b>	There are no significant related financial risks from this report.	Committee will be kept appraised on the outcome on the progress of the Children's Care & Justice Bill.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Reputational</b>	Failure to deliver on the Secure Care Standards will have a reputational impact on the Council. It will also adversely impact on the assessment of Children's Services within future strategic joint inspections.	The self-evaluation of practice and services against the recommendations of the thematic review will identify strengths and gaps at a local level.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	None identified.	N/A	N/A	<b>N/A</b>

## 8. OUTCOMES

<u><a href="#">COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022-2023</a></u>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<p><b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b></p> <p><u><a href="#">Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</a></u></p>	<p>Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people in or on the edges of secure care has a direct relevance to the delivery of the following statements contained within the Council Delivery Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure local services identify young people with mental health problems and help them get early support and help.</li> <li>• Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked-after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems</li> <li>• Continue to seek to support young people to receive care in Aberdeen, to reduce “out of authority” placements.</li> </ul>
<u><a href="#">Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</a></u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>Aberdeen City Council’s social work services play a central role to supporting and assuring that the multi-agency partnership delivers on the LOIP – Prosperous People (Children and Young People) Stretch Outcomes 4 to 9.</p> <p>In addition the work of the Child Protection Committee is highly relevant to ensure our children are safe from harm. Children, young people and families who are adequately protected from threats to their health, safety and economic wellbeing are more likely to prosper than those who are not.</p>
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people is central to the planning for all children and young people open to Children’s Social Work. This activity is relevant to the Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, and the Children’s Services Plan.
<b>UK and Scottish Legislative and Policy Programmes</b>	<p>Ensuring the effective planning for children and young people is central to the planning for all children and young people open to Children’s Social Work and supports the Scottish Government’s drive to #KeepthePromise.</p> <p>This wide ranging and ambitious programme impacts on a range of statutory duties on the Council in relation to vulnerable and care experienced children.</p> <p>In addition the Child Poverty programme and the development of Whole Family Support are key policy initiatives which have relevancy.</p>

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Not required for this report.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required for this report.
Other	Not required for this report.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Secure care pathway review 2022-23](#)

## 11. APPENDICES

None.

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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