

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	17 September 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2022-23.
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/24/270
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Graeme Simpson
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.3, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To share the Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2022-23 report and provide a commentary on the performance of Aberdeen City Council compared with the national position.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Note that care experienced children and those children who need protection in Aberdeen City, are, predominantly, receiving care and protection in line with national averages;
- 2.2 Note that where performance differs from national averages, there are improvement plans in place; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Social Work Officer to update the Education and Children's Services Committee on the 2023/24 Statistical Report following its publication in Spring 2025.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Aberdeen City stands up positively in most respects with the national picture reported in the three reports Child Protection, Looked After and Secure Care. 2022-23. [National Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland: 2022 to 2023 \("the report"\)](#). This is an annual retrospective report reporting on data relating to Child Protection activity and activity in relation to Looked After Children.
- 3.2 The report contains extensive statistical information using snapshot data as at 31 July 2023 in line with Scottish Government reporting, from which we have identified the following areas of interest:

Where Aberdeen City is broadly in-line with the national average:

- Children registered on the Child Protection Register with a previous registration period which occurred more than two years ago
- Neglect and Parental Mental Health are the predominant concerns recorded when a child's name is placed on the Child Protection Register
- Reducing rate per 1,000 of looked after children and young people
- Proportion of looked after children in secure care
- Majority of looked after children are living in the local community

Where Aberdeen City differs from the national average:

- Rate of registrations of children on the child protection register is higher
- Proportion of children looked after with a disability is higher
- Rate of children receiving Continuing Care is lower
- Proportion of children receiving Aftercare is higher
- Proportion of children looked after at home or with kin is lower
- Proportion of children placed in foster care is higher

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

3.4 CHILD PROTECTION

3.4.1 On 31 July 2023, 2,094 children were on the Child Protection Register in Scotland. This is a 4% increase on the number of reported on 31 July 2022 (2,019). On 31 July 2022, there were 115 children's names appearing on Aberdeen City's Child Protection Register, and 112 children's names appearing on 31 July 2023.

3.4.2 The published Local Authority Child Protection Statistics benchmarking tool illustrates that across our comparator authorities on 31 July 2023, there has been an increase of 0.7% in the number of children appearing on the Child Protection Register compared with 31 July 2022. Aberdeen City's comparator authorities, are City of Edinburgh, Dundee City, South Ayrshire, Argyll & Bute, and Renfrewshire.

3.4.3 On 31 July 2023, Scotland's rate per 1,000 children on the Child Protection Register was 2.3. This is a slight increase from 2022 (2.2 per 1,000). On 31 July 2023, Aberdeen City's rate per 1,000 children on the Child Protection Register was 3.1 per 1000, a slight decrease from 2022 (3.2 per 1,000). Comparator Authorities rate of registration on 31 July 2023 was 1.8 per 1000, see Figure 1.

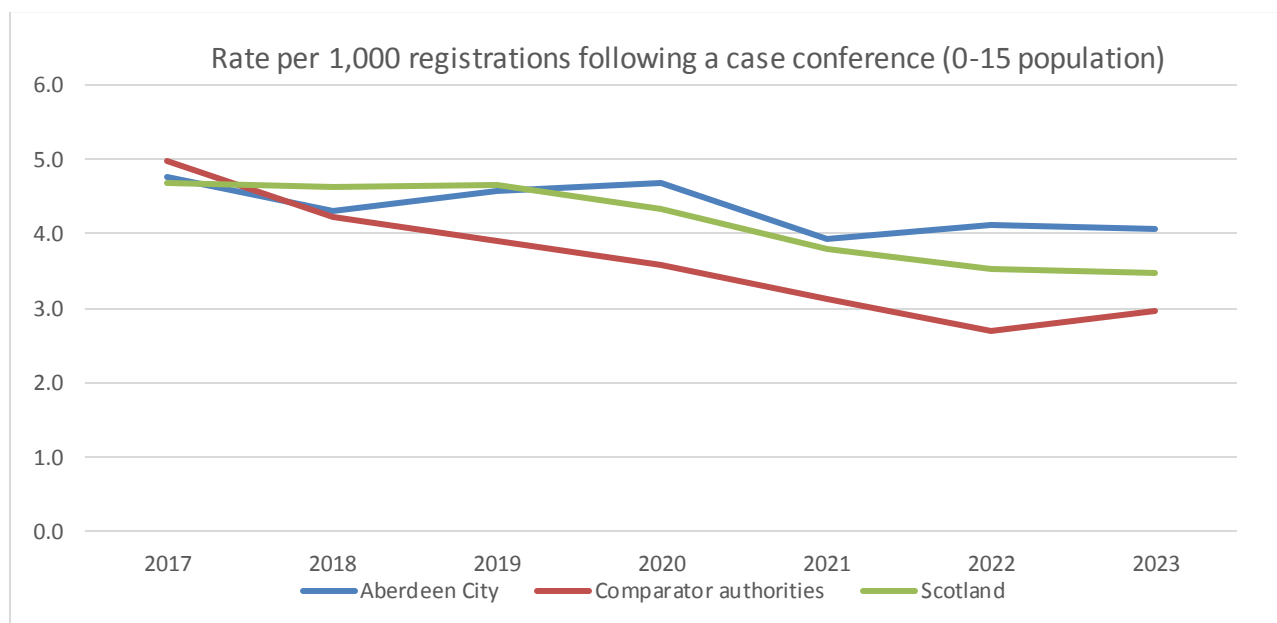
3.4.4 Placing a child's name on the Child Protection Register is a significant decision in a child's life. Such a decision will always be based on individual circumstances and the professional judgement of the multi-agency team around the family. Our local data tells us that in 2022 – 2023, 93% of children subject to an initial Child Protection Planning Meeting were placed on the Child Protection Register. The high conversion rate demonstrates that our threshold for deciding to convene an initial Child Protection Planning Meeting is aligned

to our thinking within that subsequent meeting, that the threshold is met to record the child's name on the CPR.

3.4.5 The concept of significant harm is one which is framed by professional experience and judgement. We recognise that within discussions focussed around risk, professionals seek to do all they can to mitigate against future harm. Whilst registration is a recognition of the need for multi-agency child protection planning it is not the process itself that is the factor that will reduce risk. We also know that parents can feel shame and judged by the decision to place their child's name on the Child Protection Register (CPR). In recognition of this and of Aberdeen City's higher rate per 1000 children on the CPR, we would like all professionals to be clear that registration is necessary, ie that we are only utilising Child Protection Registration for children where there is a clear risk of 'significant harm' and a multi-agency child protection plan is required to protect the child or young person.

3.4.6 With this in mind, an event on 'Collectively meeting the Needs of our Children and Young People' held on 8th May 2024 was attended by over 140 professionals from across the partnership. Central to this event was developing a more consistent understanding of the concept of 'significant harm'. Feedback from those who attended was very positive and highlighted the need for further work to progress on thresholds for child protection intervention. A report on this will be presented to the next Child Protection Committee (CPC) for their consideration and agreement on next steps.

Figure 1



3.4.7 Figure 2 below shows the number of children who were registered in Aberdeen City between the period of 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023 (263), the proportion of children who had a previous registration period (23%) and duration since the last registration period. This is an increase from 18% for the period 1 August

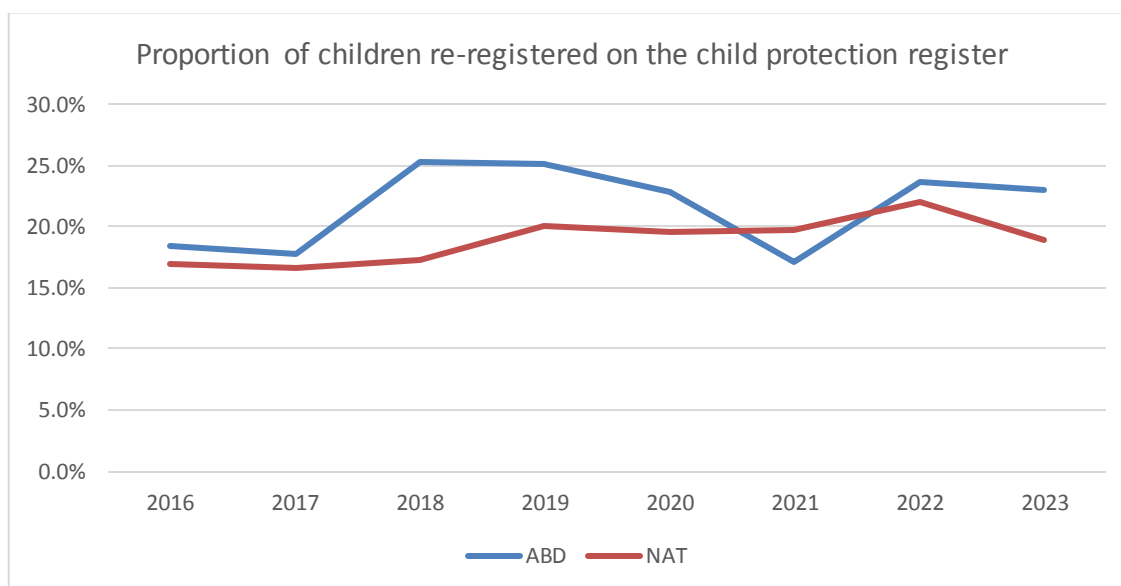
2021 – 31 July 2022 (42 children of 235 had a previous registration period). On 31 July 2023, 19% of children across Scotland had a previous registration period, a fall from 22% on 31 July 2022.

3.4.8 11% of Aberdeen City’s children registered in 2022-2023 had a previous registration period which occurred more than 2 years ago. This is on a par with Scotland’s re-registration data which highlights 12% of children on the register have had a previous re-registration period occurring more than 2 years ago.

Figure 2 – Aberdeen City Registrations & Re-registrations

	2022/ 2023	% of Children re- registered
Number of Children placed on the CPR in Aberdeen City	263	
Children placed on the CPR with a previous registration in the previous:		
0 – 3 months	3	1%
4 – 6 months	9	3%
7 – 12 months	8	3%
13 – 24 months	12	4%
More than 2 years	28	11%
Total number of Children placed on the CPR in Aberdeen City with a previous registration period between 0 months – more than 2 years ago	60	23%

Figure 3



3.4.9 Predominant factors that result in children’s names being placed on the Child Protection Register in Aberdeen City over the course of 2022 – 2023 relate to parental mental health (including substance misuse), neglect and emotional abuse. An analysis of re-registration data told us that all but one child was re-registered under a different category of concern when they were re-registered

illustrating an appropriate response to the multiple and various categories of registration.

3.4.10 Across Scotland, domestic abuse, neglect, and parental mental health are most recorded concerns at registration.

3.5 Looked after Children

3.5.1 The national [report](#), reports there has been a 2% decrease in the number of Looked After Children in Scotland from 2022, to 2023. In Aberdeen City there was a marginal increase during that same period (487 in July 2022 snapshot to 500 in July 2023).

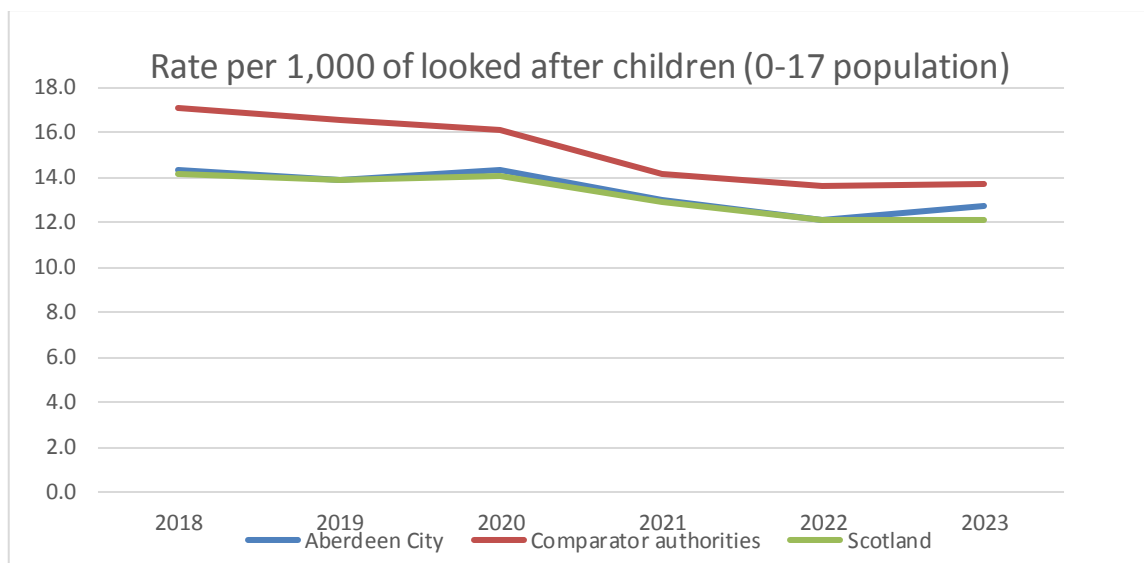
3.5.2 Like all local authorities Aberdeen City has received a number of young people claiming asylum via the National Transfer scheme. All young people transferred to Aberdeen via this route are deemed looked after children. In addition Aberdeen City has been a dispersal city for asylum seeking adults a number of whom have claimed to be under 18 years of age following their arrival in Aberdeen. If, following an age assessment, there is reason to believe the individual could be under 18, in line with National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021, statutory legislative responsibilities are placed on the local authority that this group also become *looked after* children. See Table below 23 UASYP (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People) were given looked after status in ACC in 2023.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
How many asylum claims were for children the local authority were responsible for?	1	0	2	14	21
How many age assessments were undertaken	1	0	0	5	10
How many of these age assessments resulted in the individual being assessed as a child?	1	0	0	5	7

*data up till July 2023

3.5.2 Figure 4 illustrates that the rate of looked after children per 1,000 population (0-17 years) is steadily reducing nationally (to 12.1), in comparator authorities (to 13.6) and locally (to 12.2). So Aberdeen City continues to be in line with the national trend and slightly lower than our comparator authorities.

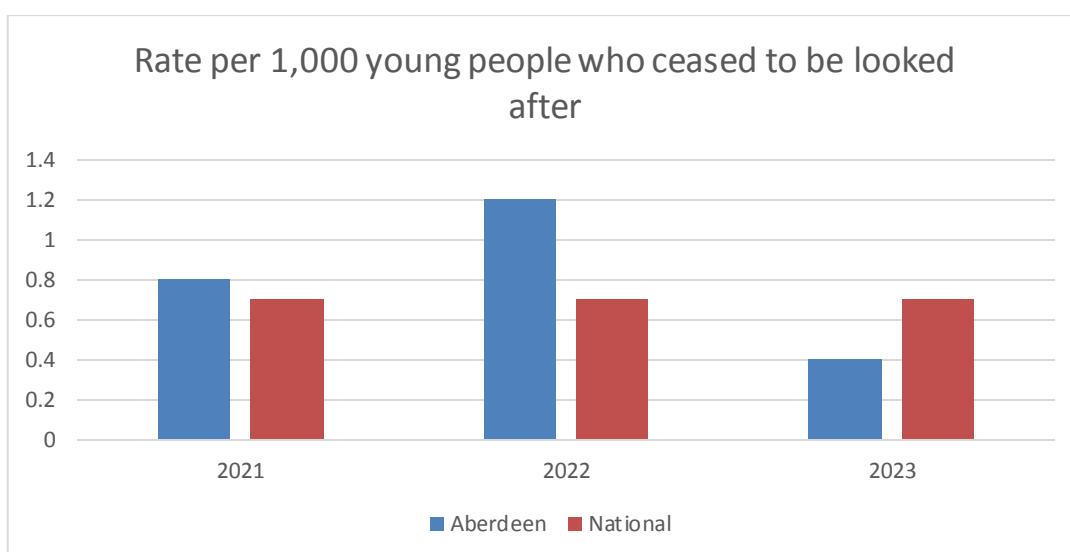
Figure 4



3.5.3 The number of children who started to be looked after in Aberdeen City during 2022-23 was 138, this was an increase from 100 in the previous year. This increase was slightly above the national trend which highlighted an increase to 3,004 from 2,909 in the previous year's national report. This variation also will have been impacted by the number of UASYP who arrived in Aberdeen.

3.5.4 The number of children who ceased to be looked after during 2022-23 is down 12% since 2021-22 (3,730) and down 31% since 2012-13 (4,731). In Aberdeen City during 2022-23, the rate was 0.4, per 1,000 young people which was down from the 1.2 per 1000 in the previous year. See Table 1.12 in [CSW Statistics Additional Tables](#). The table below highlighted that there will be monthly/annual fluctuations however the overall trend in Aberdeen City shows a decline in the number of looked after children.

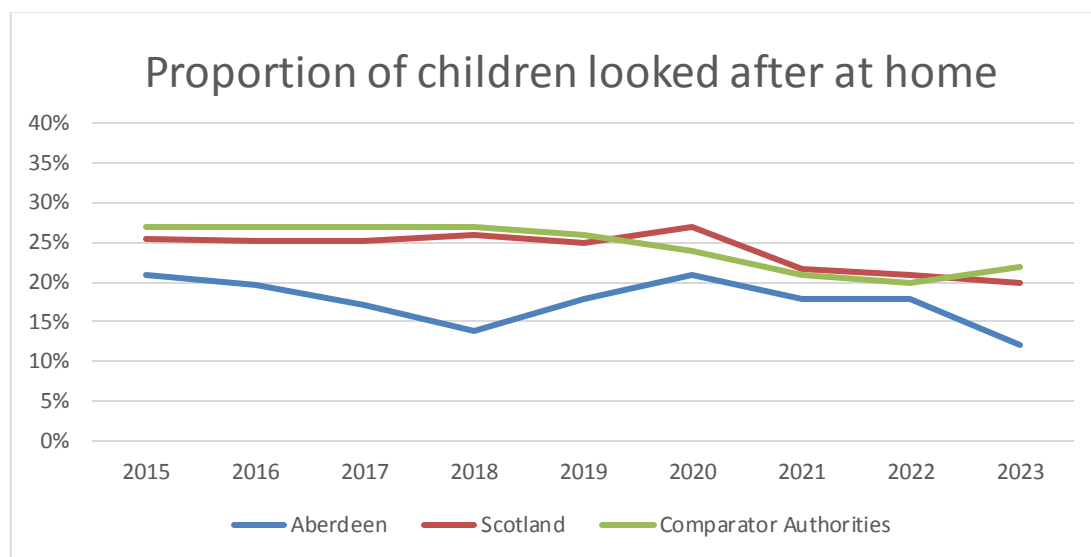
Figure 5



- 3.5.5 The 2020 [Independent Care Review report -The Promise](#) reemphasised that legal measures to secure children's care should only be utilised where there is no alternative. This aspiration was echoed in the [2023 Children's Hearing System Review report](#). It is consequently anticipated that the numbers of Looked After Children will continue to reduce in the coming years. This reduction does not reflect a reduction in demand but rather a need for all agencies to think differently about how they support children, young people and families without the need for statutory intervention. This is in recognition that the use of compulsion with regard to care and protection of children can compromise the very fabric of family life which by nature is diverse and unique and therefore formal legislative measures should be utilised appropriately and proportionally.
- 3.5.6 Historically, Aberdeen City have been known for a high conversion rate from referral to hearing. This is indicative of the fact that we only refer children to the Reporter when we are clear that there are grounds for as well as a need to have compulsory measures of supervision of children. Whilst our high conversion rate has fallen slightly over this reporting period, Aberdeen City's conversion rate is still one of the highest nationally.
- 3.5.7 The national report identifies the percentage of looked after children living in the various settings. In 2023, the majority of Looked After Children (86%) were placed in the community settings – kinship care 34%; foster care 32% and 20% were looked after at home. A smaller proportion of Looked After Children (10%) were placed in residential accommodation.
- 3.5.8 In Aberdeen City, the proportion of all Looked After Children placed in the community as at 31 July 2023 was 80%. Our balance of care was kinship care 24%; foster carer 44% and 12% were looked after at home. There were 13% of looked after children who were cared for in a residential setting. This includes local authority residential care settings.
- 3.5.9 Aligned to the national trend, locally there has been a decrease in the proportion of Looked After Children living at home. However, as can be seen in Figure 6, there was a fairly significant gap in 2018 which had narrowed over 2021/2022 but has increased again in the July 2023 snapshot, at 12% compared with 20% nationally and 22% in comparator authorities.
- 3.5.10 Looked after children with three or more placements has reduced since 2021 in Aberdeen City, from 7% to 4% in 2022 and 5% in 2023. Across Scotland and in comparator authorities it has been 4% since 2020 and hence Aberdeen is now more aligned to the national picture. This remains an area that is kept under close scrutiny and aligns to our work on Brothers and Sisters.
- 3.5.11 Alongside our strongly embedded approach to the core principle of minimum intervention as illustrated in our conversion rate for compulsory measures of supervision within referrals to the Children's Hearing System, in the city we have over a number of years worked to further embed a relational approach to our practice. Both these factors have mitigated our need for compulsory orders. We will continue to track this data and the outcomes for children living at home

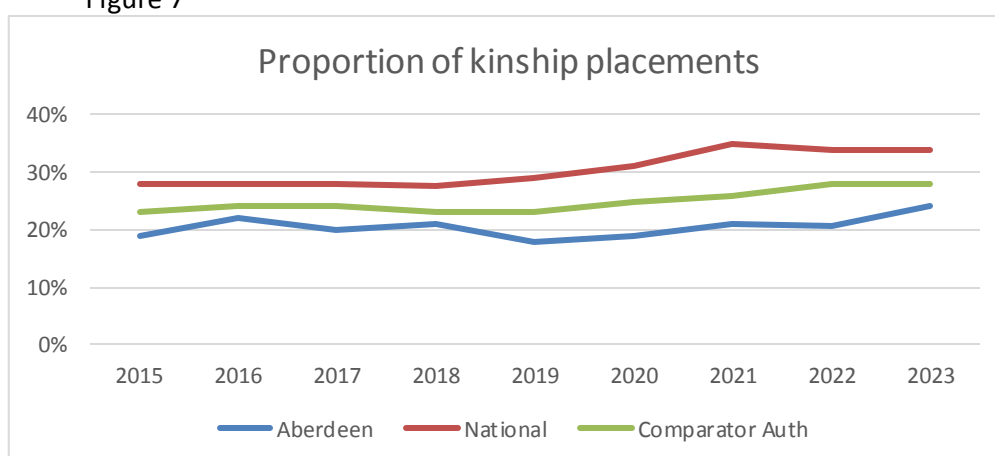
to ensure effective consideration continues to be given to the utilisation of compulsory orders.

Figure 6



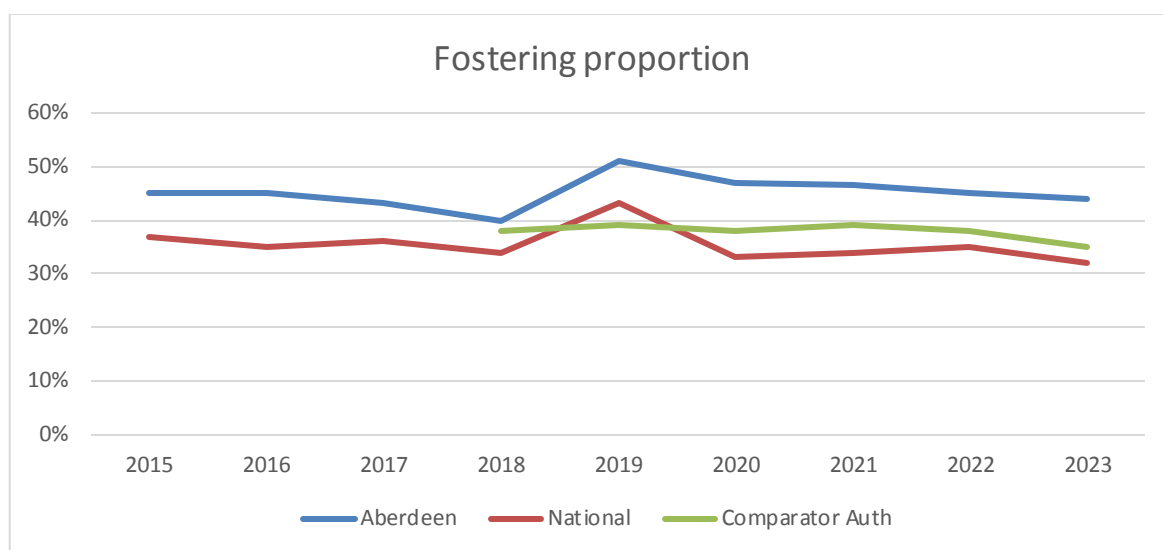
3.5.10 Nationally the proportion of Kinship placements has increased over the past few years to 34% in 2023 (Figure 7). Locally the report highlights a positive increase in the proportion of children looked after by friends or relatives in 2022/23. It has increased by 3% to 24% as seen on Figure 5. This increase aligns with our commitment to support children to remain within their family network when they cannot be cared for by their parents. It also reflects our use of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to strengthen our support offer to kinship carers. It also recognises our work with partners as set out in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (Reduce by 5% the No. of children entering the care system by 2024 and Increase by 100% the No. of partners supporting kinship carers by 2023).

Figure 7



3.5.12 As noted Aberdeen City has a higher proportion of looked after children placed in foster care. While this trend is decreasing over time, it reduced by 1% between 2022 and 2023, closing this gap remains a priority as set out in the LOIP and the statutory Children's Services Plan 2023 -23.

Figure 8

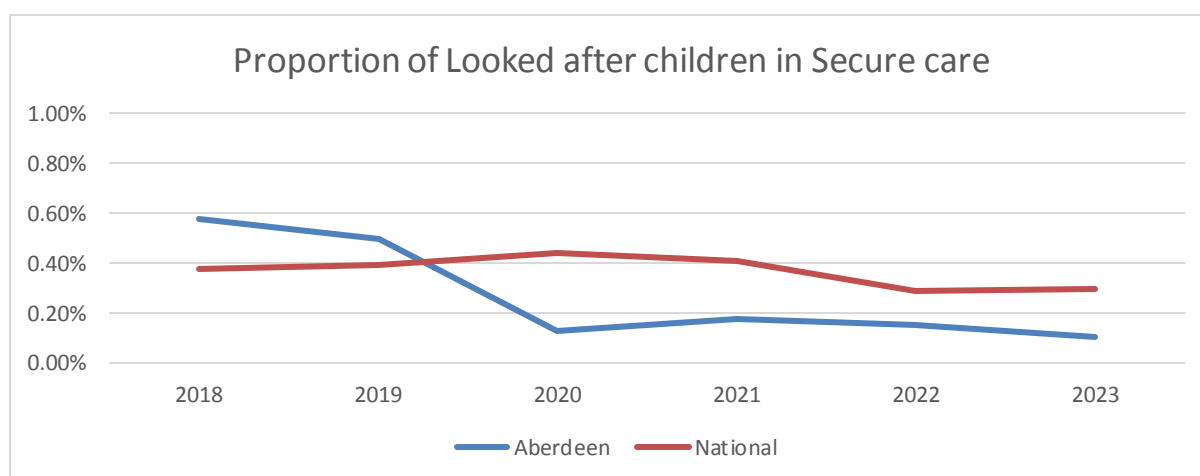


3.6 Secure Care

3.6.1 The number of children in secure care is very low and is less than 1% of the looked after population and has been so for 10 years. Looking at averages across calendar years (see Figure 8), Aberdeen City is below the national percentage reported for the past three years.

3.6.2 The Care Inspectorate undertook a Thematic Review in relation to children in and on the edges of secure care. It recognised that a more robust and integrated multi-agency approach is needed to reduce the risk of children entering into secure care and to support them better as they exit. A report on the findings of the Report was presented to Committee on [20 February 2024](#). Work is being taken forward by the Corporate Parenting Group at a local level to drive the recommendations. The report however recognised that Scottish Government funding is required to action many of the findings.

Figure 8



3.6.3 Aberdeen City welcomes the move by the Scottish Government to end the placement of 16- and 17-year-olds in adult prisons. Instead, the young people

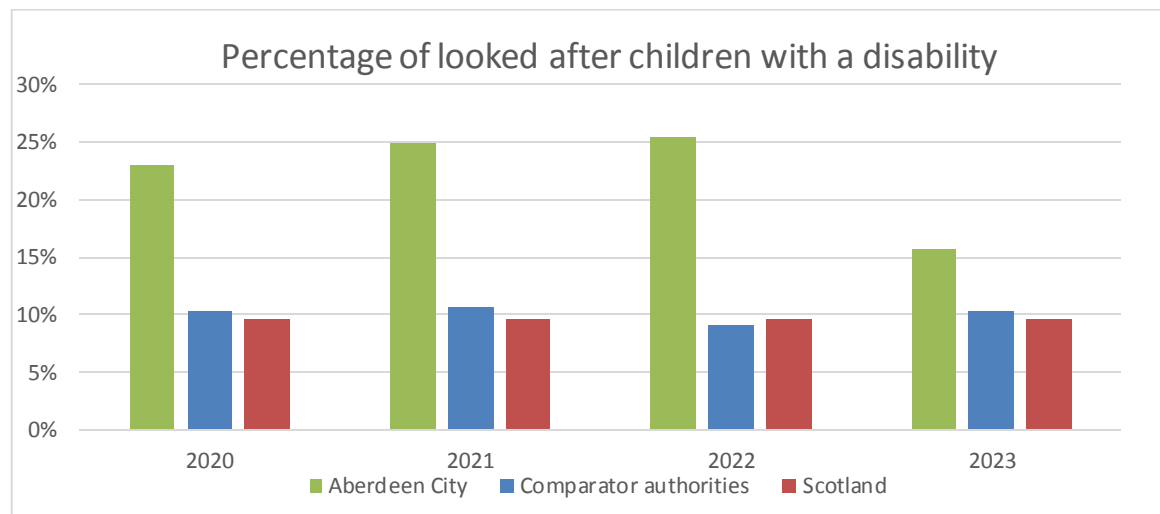
will be more appropriately cared for within a residential secure setting. This change may see an increase in the number of children placed in secure care in subsequent years.

3.7 Children with a Disability

3.7.1 Aberdeen City has a larger proportion of looked after children with a disability compared with Scotland and comparator authorities. That said the number and proportion reduced from 122 (25%) in 2022 to 79 (16%) in July 2023. Scotland had 10% of looked after children in both these years. Comparator authorities had 9% and 10% consecutively. See Figure 9.

3.7.2 This is a new category of data reporting. Work has been initiated to interrogate this further to get a better understanding of both the fluctuations and variations in the Aberdeen City data. It is anticipated that the reduction in the current year is due to changes in the transfer and reconciliation of data as we transferred to our new D365 case management system. In October 2022, we revised our system to capture information on disabilities, our revised data collation on disability to record yes/no/not known/not yet assessed. We however recognise that the data still indicates Aberdeen City is an outlier. As such we will liaise with comparative authorities to better understand our divergence and to identify any learning. An update on this activity will be provided as part of next year's report.

Figure 9

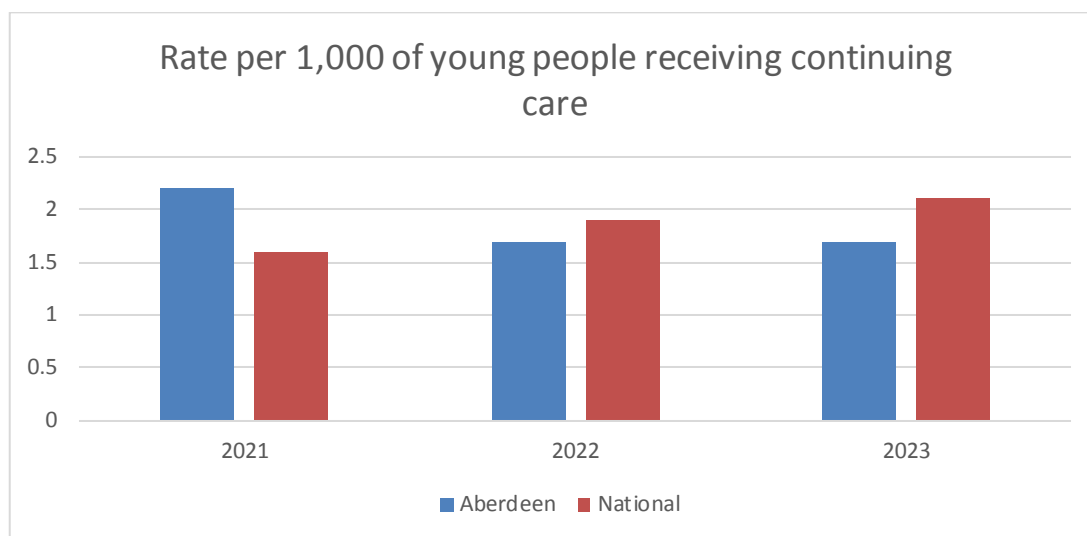


3.8 Continuing Care and After Care

3.8.1 During 2022-23, 777 children across Scotland were receiving continuing care, which is 2.1 per 1,000 young people, this is an increase from 1.9/1000 in 2021-22. In Aberdeen City during 2022-23, 31 young people (1.7/1000) were

receiving continuing care, which was exactly the same as in 2021-22. See Table 1.13 in [CSW Statistics Additional Tables](#)

Figure 10



3.8.2 The proportion of children receiving after care in Aberdeen City in 2023 was 201 out of 276 eligible, this is 73%. This is higher than the National proportion of 4151 out of 8517 eligible young people (49%) See Table 4.7 in [CSW Statistics Additional Tables](#). This is a decrease for Aberdeen from 82% in the previous year and from 50% nationally.

3.9 Aims and next steps

3.9.1 Resetting our 'balance of care' is a longer term aim, set out in Aberdeen City's refreshed Children's Services Plan 2023-26 and Aberdeen City's Corporate Parenting Plan 2023-2026 both of which were presented to committee earlier in 2023.

3.9.2 Addressing the balance of care is a challenge we share with many local and comparative local authority partnerships. Strategic plans seek to address this. We have also established constructive relationships with some of our comparator local authorities to explore whether there is learning we want to share and capture.

3.9.3 We are committed to supporting children and young people to remain within their families and communities where it is safe to do so and returning Looked After Children and young people to placements in the City where such is in their best interests. In line with The Promise, we are endeavouring to keep brothers and sisters together. Where we cannot, we ensure that we review this decision and that children are connected to the people who are important to them.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, the costs associated with care for children out with their family are significant. Reducing

the proportion of children being looked after in out of authority foster and residential placements will be positively significant.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications from this report.

7 RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Many of the improvements required to support more children to be looked after at home or kinship as part of the requirements of Plan 21-24. These are already built into a variety of strategic plans. It is expected that gaps will emerge as the Council and partners scrutinise the requirements of Plan 21-24 in detail.	The Child Protection Committee, Children's Services Board and Community Planning Management Group have oversight of the delivery of the relevant aspects of strategic plans in this respect. They are ensuring that the terms of Plan 21-24 are incorporated into current and future strategic planning.	M	Yes
Compliance	No significant related risks.	Services across all multi-agency partners are aware of legislative requirements and ensure compliance	L	Yes

Operational	Care experienced children and young people are a vulnerable cohort whose needs require to be recognised and met. Competing resource demands may have an impact	These are duties which have been incorporated across existing structures and will be consolidated in practice	L	Yes
Financial	That the number of children having to be looked after away from home continues to remain high leading to poorer outcomes and higher resource costs.	Plan 21-24 and various strategic plans are in place to address these issues	L	Yes
Reputational	Organisational failings in relation to child protection can bring significant media interest and scrutiny of services delivered to children and young people.	The public can be assured that: the Council ensures compliance with legal requirements, national standards and guidance; partners respond to self and external scrutiny; and identified areas for improvement are addressed.	M	Yes
Environment / Climate	Not applicable for this report			

8 OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 24-25</u>	
	Impact of Report
	The information in this report has no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
	WorkinginPartnershipPolicyStatement.pdf (aberdeencity.gov.uk)
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan (refresh April 2024)</u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The report seeks to provide an update on how ACC compares with National 'performance' in Child Protection and Care Experienced children. This links with Corporate Parenting activities, including the following improvement project within the LOIP:</p> <p>5. By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.</p> <p>For the Child Protection programme, in particular stretch outcomes 4, 5, and 6 with the following key drivers:</p> <p>4.1 Ensuring that families receive the parenting and family support they need</p> <p>4.2 Keeping Children Safe</p> <p>5.2 Increasing children's knowledge and understanding of their own physical and mental wellbeing and take an early intervention and prevention approach</p> <p>6.2 Supporting attainment of balance of care where children are able to remain more often at home and or with kin.</p>

9 IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	It was confirmed by Chief Officer, Graeme Simpson on 10.07.2024 that no Integrated Impact Assessment was required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	Not required

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 [Children's Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2022-23](#)

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

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

10.4 [Aberdeen City Child Protection Committee Annual Report 2022/2023](#) (Page 14)

11 APPENDICES - NONE

12 REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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