



Community Planning
Aberdeen



**ABERDEEN CITY
CHILDREN'S SERVICES BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



Our published Plan for children, young people and families 2023-26 articulates the outcomes Community Planning Partners are currently working to realise for children, young people and families across Aberdeen. As we reflect on progress made in the second year of the Plan, we continue to be thoughtful of how the needs of our families continues to change. This yearly review therefore presents an opportunity to check that our planned improvement projects are still the most appropriate and help determine any further amendments required to our agreed Plan.

In preparing this report we have reviewed data sets made available since publication of our last Annual Report in March 2024 and reflected on progress in delivering our Plan to identify any changes that need to be taken account of. Early findings have been shared with a range of stakeholders for validation and challenge, including our Young Ambassadors and Aberdeen Youth Movement.

We continue to integrate the full range of statutory Plans and reports in an attempt to better align reporting and reduce duplication. As a result, this Annual Report covering 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, details the progress the Community Planning Partnership has made in delivering against several key national policies including:

- addressing child poverty;
- delivering The Promise; and our
- Corporate Parenting Plan.

In addition to our planned improvement work and work supporting delivery of national policy, the Children's Services Board has continued to keep abreast of impending legislative changes to ensure our collective readiness for what lies ahead. This has seen the Children's Services Board participate in planning for The National Care Service (NCS) through our local Programme Board, oversee preparations for our first Bairns Hoose, monitor the progress of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 and consider the implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.

This report only provides a flavour of how partners are working together to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Aberdeen City. I continue to be humbled by the collaboration and increasing sense of shared accountability demonstrated by members of the Children's Services Board.

Eleanor Sheppard

Executive Director – Families and Communities (Chair of the Children's Services Board)

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS



As of the end of January 2025, 32 multi-agency Improvement Projects have been initiated and testing is now well underway, 8 of our projects have now achieved their aims.

Some other key achievements over the reporting period are listed below.

- Secured funding from Scottish Government through our Fairer Futures Partnership, developed a high level implementation plan and appointed a Lead Officer to help drive the changes forward
- Helped develop a national team around the Person Toolkit as part of our involvement in the Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE) national pathfinder
- Continued to prepare for the opening of our Bairns Hoose
- Initiated a whole system approach to healthy weight in response to findings from our last Annual Report, and secured the support of a range of partners to help us address this risk
- Through our engagement with the Scottish Government Data Pipeline, we have realised a 12% increase in uptake of Early Learning and Childcare for eligible 2s
- There has been a rise in primary school attendance, with the attendance of those who are looked after increasing at a faster rate than their peers. Local attendance levels are slightly better than national levels (92.3% in 2023 compared to 92.2% nationally).
- Reduction in the rate per 100,000 of young people admitted to hospital due to assault from 52.9 in 2022 to 43.5 in 2023. The local rate is lower than the national rate
- The number of presentations at National 5 increased to 11,236 in 2024 from 10,660 in 2023, an increase of 576 and the highest number on record for the local authority. At National 5 in S4, the per pupil presentation increased to 5.49 in 2024 from 5.22 in 2023, an increase of 0.27.
- There is clear evidence that far more people are now claiming the benefits they are entitled to
- The Improvement Service Community Planning Tool shows that 92% of our communities are performing well compared to their comparator communities when looking at child poverty in isolation. When looking at wider measures, this percentage drops to 78%.
- There has been a reduction in the number of workless households in Aberdeen (1,700 less than in 2022)

We are proud of our achievements, but there is clearly more to be done.

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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR PRE AND POST-NATAL SERVICES?



What does the data published since March 2024 tell us?

Between 2008 and 2023, the standardised birth rate in Aberdeen fell from 10.2 per 1,000 pop. to 7.8 per 1,000. Births to younger mothers has seen a significant fall. For mothers under 20 there has been a 77.5% drop from 2002 to 2023 and for mothers from 20 to 25 a 44% drop (this will be partially attributable to age specific fertility rates). However, in contrast, births to mothers aged 40 and over has increased by 190% over the same period.

What is getting better?

Babies exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks has increased again from 41.3% in 2021 to 41.9% in 2023.

Levels are now well above the national average and the gap from national is increasing.



In 2024, we are on target to have increased the number of Health Visitors by 10.6 Whole Time Equivalents.



93.6% of babies were born at 37+ weeks gestation, slightly above the Scottish average 93.2%.



92.2% of pregnant women in Aberdeen City did not develop gestational diabetes, above the Scottish average of 90.8%. This reflects positively on the hard work and dedication of everyone involved in maternal healthcare in our area.

Looking forward, we anticipate that the increased number of health visitors will likely lead to a more robust delivery of the Universal Health Visiting Pathway. With more health visitors, we can ensure earlier interventions for children, helping them meet their developmental milestones more effectively.

What has stayed the same?

The percentage of babies born of healthy weight in the three years ending in 2024 was 82.0% compared to 82.4% in the three years to 2023. This is broadly tracking national averages



76% of babies born in Cults/Bieldside are breastfed, compared to only 16% in Heathryfold and Middlefield. The variation at community level continues to be significant.



There has been a reduction in the number of unborn children on the Child Protection Register (from 53 from Aug 2022 to July to 45 from August 23 to July 24). However, this age group remains the highest.



The number of unborn children on the Child Protection Register has slightly reduced but this group remains the largest on the Register suggesting that we are not yet be providing the right support for some families at community level. The collaboration as part of the Fairer Future Partnership presents a valuable opportunity to refresh our focus in order to effectively address the needs of families.

What is worsening?

Exposure to second hand smoke at 6-8 weeks has increased from 7.4% in the three years ending 2021 to 8% in the three years ending 2023



Levels of maternal obesity have increased again to 25% in the three years ending 2023/24. This is slightly below the Scottish average (27.6%). Although the city sits below the national average, levels are increasing more quickly locally.



There has been a rise in premature births. Levels are now above the national average (8.7% locally compared to 8.3% nationally) and the highest recorded locally over the last 10 years. The inequality gap is steadily reducing. 17% of births are premature in Summerhill, compared to only 3% in some communities.

We are making little, if any, impact on levels of second hand smoke at 6-8 weeks. Levels of maternal obesity continues to be of concern. There is a need to better understand the rise in premature births given the long term effect this can have on individuals.

Families living in SIMD 1 are proving particularly challenging to support within our current system. There is an urgent need for us and our partners to collectively identify these families. By doing so, we can better track their progress, gain a deeper understanding of the issues they face, and work with them to support positive outcomes in a person-centred and family-led manner.

So, what next?

In broad terms, a falling birth rate, and consequently an aging population, is likely to present challenges for any local authority area. These include uncertainty in the design and delivery of local services and, in the longer term, challenges to the economy of a declining workforce and falling consumer demand. Supporting Aberdeen to remain a family friendly city must continue to be a priority.

The improvement projects outlined in our current Plan are still thought to be appropriate and relevant. Considerable focus is currently being given to ensuring all families receive appropriate financial support by collaborating with NHS health points services and the local population to raise awareness of available resources.

We need to conduct further scoping work to understand the opportunities for pre and ante-natal women related to healthy weight, this ties in with the ongoing work across Aberdeen on healthy weight management and the Fairer Futures Partnership. We need to better understand the factors which sustain household smoking behaviour and what it would take to address this.

The rise in premature births, particularly in some areas of the City, may be worthy of consideration as we engage with Professor Marmot and Public Health Scotland through the Collaboration for Healthy Equity in Scotland (CHES).

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THOSE UNDER SCHOOL AGE AND THE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THEM?



What does the data published since March 2024 tell us tell us?

There has been a reduction in applications for Early Learning and Childcare provision (ELC) due to a drop in birth rate and steady increase in the number of parents and carers who are now choosing to defer their child's entry into primary 1.

What is getting better?

There has been a rise in the proportion of children meeting developmental milestones from 87.4% in 21/22 to 89.8% in 22/23. This is better than the national and family group average. However, uptake across communities varies significantly.



Based on the data on eligible 2s shared through the Scottish Government Data Pipeline, there has been a 12% increase in uptake of ELC for eligible 2s (205 of the 456 thought eligible are attending).



32 ELC Modern Apprenticeships have now successfully moved into the ELC workforce, this is helping to address some recruitment challenges experienced by the local authority. Recruitment of health visitors has improved over the year.



The increase in those meeting developmental milestones is welcomed, however there is greater coverage of assessments in higher SIMD deciles and this heavily influences the city wide data. There is clear evidence that data linkage helps to increase the uptake of eligible 2 Early Learning and Childcare placements, our work to link data for additional uses must continue. There is also evidence of an increase in the number of Modern Apprentices (90 starts for Social Services (Children and Young People) in 2023/24) compared to 85 in the previous year.

What has stayed the same?

The percentage of children who have been identified as having developmental concerns at the 27-30 month review has increased from 6.2% in 2022 to 8.3% in 2023. This is lower than the national average of 16.9% and reflective of poor coverage in some communities. The level of concern at community level ranges from 18% to 1%.



The proportion of ELC settings graded good or better dropped over 2023/24 to 80.2%, due largely to challenges experienced by our funded providers (national average 89.8%). The average Care Inspectorate gradings for Local Authority ELC provision have increased across all Quality Indicators (QIs).



Considerable variation in the uptake of immunisations remains. 100% of families living in the Oldmarch ward benefited from the MMR at 24 months, compared to only 68% in the City Centre (west). Similar patterns are evident when looking at the 6 in 1.



Health Visitors have worked hard to undertake assessments of children at 27-30 months and coverage is improving across the city, however some families continue to find it hard to engage with established arrangements and health colleagues are testing out different arrangements to increase uptake. The differences evident across areas of the city in those identified as having developmental concerns, must be better understood, particularly given the potential lasting impacts in later life.

The increase in average Care Inspectorate gradings for Local Authority provision is welcomed, but variation requires our continued focus. There is a need to review mechanisms in place to support Funded Provider settings to fully respond to Care Inspectorate recommendations timeously.

What is worsening?

There has been a rise in infant deaths (aged 0-1 years) per 1,000 children from 2.5/1000 in the four years ending 2020, to 3.1/1000 in the 4 years ending 2021. Levels are lower than those nationally, although the gap to national has reduced.



In 2023/24, 98.72% of our eligible pre-school population and 78.92% of our eligible ante pre-school population were placed in ELC, a slight decline from last year. This is attributed to an increasing % of families choosing to defer entry to primary 1 (17.9% in 23/24 compared to 14.2% in 2022/23.)



The drop in uptake of the 6 in 1 at 24 months is greater than national averages. Only 95.1% of children were vaccinated in 2021-2023 from 95.9% in 2020-22 (national 9%). There has been a 0.9% drop in MMR update over the same time period (90.1% in 2021-23 from 91.0% in 2020-2022 much lower than the national average of 93.8%



The historical shortage of Health Visitors has impacted on work for this age group, it is hoped that recent improvements in staffing levels will support longer term improvement. There is considerable evidence of variation in data at community level and this needs to be addressed through the provision of services more tailored to the needs and wants of individual communities rather than taking a generic approach across the city. This is being progressed through our Fairer Futures Partnership and through our Future Libraries Model.

There is considerable evidence that parents and carers, recognising the impacts of recent world events on their child and knowledge of the more expansive and flexible funded offer of 1140 hours of ELC, are choosing to delay entry to both ELC and school to support their child's development. The impact on both ELC and primary school placements will require ongoing monitoring.

There is a need for the Children's Services Board to support the Child Protection Committee and Alcohol and Drugs Partnership collaboration to encourage and educate around infant safe sleeping given that local analysis has identified that alcohol and drug use escalates risk. The rise in infant deaths is of considerable concern.

So, what next?

The improvement projects outlined in the current Plan are still thought to be appropriate, but the need to reflect on the needs of families living in different communities is again evident and will drive our work over the coming year. There is a need to maintain our focus on safe sleeping.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR PRIMARY AGED PUPILS?

What does the data published since March 2024 tell us?



There has been a rise in primary pupil numbers from 14,573 in September 2022 to 15,210 in September 2023. The rise in school applications means that some families are now not able to access the school of their choice. This has led to an increase in school placement appeals from 167 in session 22/23 to 236 in session 23/24.

Greater diversity is evident (26.9% primary pupils are registered as being from an ethnic minority locally compared to only 12.2% nationally, with 56.7% identifying as being 'white UK' compared to 77.7% nationally). However, the number of children who have English as a second language has reduced from nearly 22% in 2022/23 to just over 19.1% in 2023/24. Despite the reduction, the percentage of learners who have English as a second language is significantly higher than the national average of 8.6%.

What is getting better?

There has been a rise in primary school attendance, with the attendance of those who are looked after increasing at a faster rate than their peers. Local attendance levels are slightly better than national levels (92.3% in 2023 compared to 92.2% nationally).



The proportion of adults satisfied with local schools has increased 71.3% to 72.3% in 2023. Although still slightly below national (73.7%) the rising local trend is at odds with a declining national trend.



There has been an increase in the number of children registered for free school meals across primary 6 and 7, from 682 in 2021/22 to 876 in 2022/23. This growth in registration is greater than the 5.7% growth in population across P6 & 7.



The percentage of primary 7 children with poor dental health has decreased. In 2023 79.7% of children had good dental health, an improvement of around 4%. Outcomes are better than the national average of 75.2%. Levels of tooth decay ranges from 56% in Torry west to 96.5% in Braeside/Mannofield.



There has been a 25% increase in the number of young people participating in universal sports activities.



There has been improvement across all CfE measures and the city is now in line with national averages, up one ranking position on P1.4 and 7 for literacy to 18 of 32, and up 2 ranking positions on attainment gap for P1, 4 and 7 Numeracy to 20 of 32.



The rapid increase in school population has resulted in there being less flexible space available in school buildings to support children in primary schools. Despite this lack of flexibility, there is evidence of improvement in primary curriculum for excellence (attainment) levels and attendance

continues to be better than the national average. There is evidence that collaboration with partners around key risks, for example around dental health, is improving outcomes for children.

What has stayed the same?

The percentage of primary 1 children with poor dental health has fallen slightly. In 2024 70.6% of children had good dental health. Outcomes are poorer than the national outcome of 73.2%



The number of children claiming free school meals is slightly higher than the national average (77.15% locally compared to 76.4% nationally) but with considerable variation at community level.



Attendance rates per 100 for looked after children sat at 88.2% in 2022/23. Local levels are considerably better than the national (84.3%) and family group average (86.1)



This age group again highlights the considerable variation in patterns of behaviour and outcomes across communities which can be masked by looking at city wide data sets. We must maintain our focus on need at community level.

What is worsening?

The number of children hospitalised due to asthma, 0-15 years, increased from 105.4 per 100,000 in 2022/23 to 117.8 per 100,000 in 2021/22 and appears to be rising further. Although better than the national average of 11.9, there is an encouraging declining trend nationally which is at odds with an increasing local trend.



When looking at our relative position compared to other Local Authorities in LGBF, attainment in CfE is down one ranking position on attainment gap for P1,4 and 7 Literacy to 21/32, down one ranking position on P1,4 and 7 for numeracy to 19/32



There has been a rise in the number of children living in poverty from 20.5% in 2021/22 to 21.8% in 2022/23. Local levels are in line with national averages but greater than the family group.



Although attendance is better than the national position, the city sees poorer school attendance at P1 (91.6%). This dip at Primary 1 is not seen nationally.



More than 1 in 5 children across Aberdeen City are now experiencing poverty and there is considerable variation at community level when looking at the health outcomes of parents and carers, which can directly impact on children and young people and maintain intergenerational poverty. Our continued focus on attainment, attendance (particularly at primary 1) and child poverty will be important. There is a concerning trend around hospitalisations due to asthma, which is bucking the national trend.

So, what next?

Planned work to increase alignment with adult services should continue alongside the development of our community based Family Support Model in Northfield and Torry.

There is a need to consider if more could be done to address the concerning emerging trend around hospital admissions due to asthma, and monitor the impact of the Low Emission Zone on these levels over time. There is a need to look in more detail at attendance at the primary 1 stage.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR SECONDARY PUPILS?

What does the data published since March 2024 tell us?



There has been a rise in secondary pupil numbers from 10,430 in September 2022 to 10,977 in 2023. The pupil population has become increasingly diverse. The most recent (re-baselined) population estimates from National Records Scotland identified that our city population has grown by 2.4% since 2011.

There were 4,675 young people in the senior phase of our secondary schools at the point of school census in September 2023. This is 210 more than at the time of the census of September 2022 (4,465). There is clear evidence this has increased further in 2024.

What is getting better?

77% (75%, 71% at earlier data points) of learners feel positive or very positive about their body image, showing a further increase of 2% from November 2022.



Reduction in the rate per 100,000 of young people admitted to hospital due to assault from 52.9 in 2022 to 43.5 in 2023. The local rate is lower than the national.⁶



8.6

There has been a drop in alcohol related hospital admissions for those aged 11-25 from 255 per 100,000 in 2022 to 226.4 per 100,000 in 2023. However, this sits slightly above the national average (211.5)



The overall average total tariff score has risen from 882 in 2023 to 893 in 2024. This is still below national (918) although emerging trends suggest that local data could overtake national in the next 2 years.



The number of presentations at National 5 increased to **11,236** in 2024 from 10,660 in 2023, an increase of 576 and the highest number on record for the local authority. At National 5 in S4, the per pupil presentation increased to **5.49** in 2024 from 5.22 in 2023, an increase of 0.27.



37% of young people achieved 5+ awards at level 6 in 2022/23, better than the 36% in 2021/22. This is one percentage point behind the national average of 38% although bucks the national trend.



There are encouraging signs in some health and education outcomes. Despite the gains, some groups of children continue to do less well than others with clear signs of less positive movement in some communities.

Variation across our secondary schools is evident, the recent rapid increase in pupil numbers (particularly coming through the early stages of secondary in August 2024) is thought to be a factor.

What has stayed the same?

Uptake of the HPV vaccine in S3 girls has increased from 76.6% to 79.2% in the three years ending 2023. This remains marginally below the national level of 80.7%. There is considerable variation at community level with only 58% of those in Tillydrone being vaccinated.



The number of presentations at Higher increased to 5,944 in 2024 from 5,689 in 2023. The A-C pass rate for 2024 was 73.59%. This represents a decrease from 75.02% in 2023. The National pass rate has decreased by 2.2% from 2023 and currently sits at 74.9%.



The physical wellbeing survey told us that there are times where children and young people do not have the right access to food to meet their nutritional needs. 3%, 238 (compared 3.7%, 256 in 2022).



63% of young people secured 5 passes at level 5 in 22/23, this is slightly down on 21/22 (66%) with the Local Authority position against others largely unchanged (20th out of 32 Local Authorities in 2022/23 compared to 19th in 2021/22).



School exclusion rates per 1000 children have reduced from 52.9 in 2018/19 to 25.7 in 2022/23. However, this is still higher than the national average of 16.6. Although significantly reduced, exclusion rates for those who are looked after are significantly higher than national levels (164 per 1000 compared to 97 per 1000 nationally)

41% of young people from SIMD 1 achieved 5+ passes at Level 5 in 2022/23. This is better than the 34% in 2021/22 but still some way from the national average (50%) 19% now achieve 5+ at Level 6, a 6% improvement and now gaining on the national average of 22%



The proportion of children entering positive destinations in 202/23 was maintained at 93.6%, this is still some way from the national average of 95.9%



We are still some way from the virtual comparator in terms of education outcomes and must maintain our focus on this area and work to address the variation from school to school.

Focused work on sustained positive destinations should be initiated as Skills Development Scotland continue to work with HMRC to find a resolution to data sharing arrangements which could let us better understand those who do not secure a longer term positive destination.

There is also a need to monitor the number of young people who are economically inactive due to anxiety/mental health needs as 51 young people were economically inactive due to anxiety/mental health needs as of October 2024.

What has worsened?

There has been a continued rise in death by suicide in 11-25 year olds from 7.86 per 100,000 in 2021 to 8.2 per 100,000 in 2022 (crude rate). Despite local data being positive against the national (10.9 per 100,000) our locally rising trend is at odds with plateauing national data.



The average total tariff score for those living in SIMD 1 has reduced from 591 to 481. This is some way from the national average of 658.

At National 5, the A-C pass rate for 2024 was **73.3%**. This has decreased from 74.6% in 2023.



The physical wellbeing survey highlighted an increase in the time spent on technology with 28% (27% in 2022) stating that they spend more than 6 hours on technology at the weekend. 946 of these are Primary stage learners.



61% (69% last year) of learners who completed the health and wellbeing survey have at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity a day

There is a need to take further action on the health led National Self Harm Plan to get ahead of the concerning rise in suicide. We need to better understand our local data in order to amplify our preventative offer.

The disparity in outcomes across communities is considerable and we must have a laser focus on variation at community level.

So, what next?

There is a need to maintain our Plans around the senior phase curriculum and also continue to give close attention to personal and social education programmes to ensure that our young people know how to keep themselves safe. Programmes should take account of the higher prevalence of rates of death from suicide and in Aberdeen North (12.6 per 100,000) compared to Aberdeen Central and Aberdeen South (sitting at 10.5 and 10.4 per 100,000). We will ask our Mental Health and Wellbeing Group to consider if any further action is required. Work to improve school attendance should continue.

The disparity in outcomes continues to suggest that the wider family supports currently in place are not making a difference to some groups, confirming our findings from last year's annual report and the need to think quite differently about how we work with and for families in need of our help and support. This will be progressed through our planned Fairer Futures Pathfinder.

What does our analysis by life stage tell us we need to address?

For the most part, our established plan remains appropriate. There is a need for us to maintain our current focus on child poverty, safe sleeping, attendance (particularly at primary 1) /attainment, addressing variation and improving transitions between child and adult services.

As we discovered during our last annual review, we must continue to look for ways to join data sets and look at community level data to ensure that we work to a shared and clear understanding of the problems our communities face. We need to continue to explore new ways of supporting our communities and citizens through our work to develop our Family Support Model as part of our Fairer Futures Partnership with Scottish Government. We need to continue to progress our whole system approach to healthy weight.

We need to start to be curious around air pollution and try to better understand why more children are presenting at hospital due to asthma. We also need to look carefully at what more can be done to prevent suicide given concerning local trends. We need to initiate some work around positive destinations.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN THE CITY?

What does the data published since March 2024 tell us?

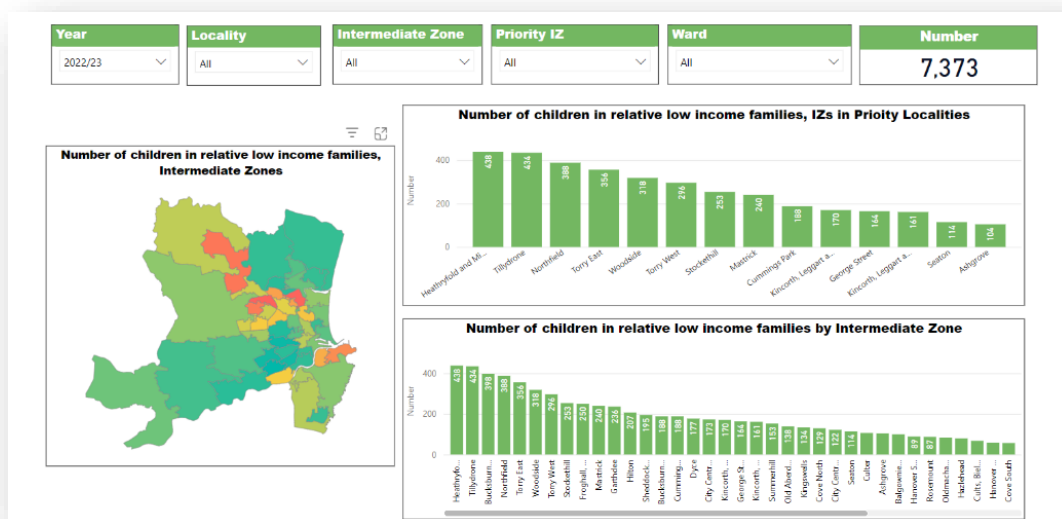


The cost of living crisis continues to impact on the resilience and mental health of families, with increasing numbers of people feeling socially isolated across our communities. Community level data shows that poverty is an overarching factor in long term outcomes for children and families.

The number of children living in poverty

Recognised statistics, contributing to the national child poverty dashboard, detailing the exact number of children living in poverty across the city vary according to the methodology and source used. Families Living in Low-Income circumstances is a generic term used to describe relative poverty defined by a variety of these measures. The most recent data (June 2024 End Child Poverty measure) estimated that for 2022/24 21.8% (20.5% in 2021/22) of children in the city were living in households where the household income is below 60% of median income **after housing costs** (more than 1 in every 5 children). This shows us that that despite a range of interventions put in place locally, there continues to be a steady rise in the number of children living in poverty.

Data from 2022/23 shows that in some city communities, according to the separate official statistics which populate the majority of data in this document, over 35% of children are living in relative poverty compared to only 3.7% in other communities. This data refers to children living in households where the household income is below the current 60% of median income **before housing costs**. Around 61% (4,500) of children in low-income families are in working households. The concentration of children living in low-income families varies considerably across Aberdeen City.



The working age population

In the year from July 2023 – June 2024, 19.5% of Aberdeen’s working age population (over the age of 16) were economically inactive compared to the 25.5% recorded between July 2022 and June 2023. The trend for this overall measure, from the commencement of 2024, is offering early indications of a reduction in inactivity with Aberdeen reverting to pre-pandemic levels and also being lower than Scotland levels, after a run of outcomes (covering April 2021- September 2023) where the city’s inactivity levels were higher than the national picture. This improvement is welcomed and suggests that our interventions are making a positive difference.

Of those who were economically inactive, 32.8% were students, 28% were long-term sick, 18.4% were looking after home/family and 11.8% were retired (prior to national retirement age). Looking at the trend patterns for each of these groups suggests that student inactivity, although lower than at June 2023, has been on an upwards trajectory, while inactivity due to long term illness is similar to that in 2022/23 and 2021/22 and improving in comparison with Scotland levels. This may be indicative of there being fewer opportunities for students to work flexibly or could equally show that studies are being prioritised.

After an extended period of very low inactivity among the retired cohort, the 2023/24 data indicates that this is returning to ‘normal historical’ levels, but with this cohort still being more economically active than at Scotland level. Of those who were of working age and not working, 88% stated that they were not actively seeking employment. The last set of official statistics on the % of inactive population in Aberdeen seeking employment (October 2022-September 2023) was 14.2%, below the Scotland level.

In the 2023 calendar year, there were an estimated 13,500 workless households in Aberdeen, a fall of 1,700 on 2022, with reversion to the previously common position where the proportion of workless households in Aberdeen (16.2%) was below the Scotland level (17.4%).

Employment rate/Economic Activity by Minority Ethnicity (16-64 years)

NOMIS data (derived from Annual Population and Labour Force Surveys) shows that between July 2023 and June 2024, 63% (64.5% in 2022/23) of those who are classified as being of minority ethnic background were employed, compared to the wider city figure of 76%. The first figure is statistically unchanged from the previous year, but with a widened gap of around 4 percentage points to the city’s overall outcome.

The city level minority ethnic employment rate outcome is higher than the Scotland figure of 56% whilst the unemployment rate was 15.7% (10.7% in 2022/23) the lowest figure of the four large urban local authorities where sample data was available. This was 10 percentage points higher than the overall city figure. Although the city has a more favourable picture compared to others, there is a need to understand this more fully given the significant shift in demographic and increasing diversity evident across the city.

Economic Inactivity rates for Aberdeen among minority ethnic groupings at 25% (28% in 2022/23) were, with the exception of a single authority, the lowest of each of the 14 local authorities for which data was available. This was higher than the overall figure for the city which was 19.5%. There is no specific data from this source outlining the proportion of inactive persons who were seeking employment. This data may be indicative of family members accompanying students at both city universities, but worthy of further interrogation.

In combination, the change in data for 2023/24 is suggestive that, the employment and unemployment rates, although better than most comparable local authorities is most statistically influenced by a movement from economic inactivity. Some caution requires to be exercised around interpretations derived from the source dataset as the sample sizes for each local authority do not enable the generation of full granular outcomes for all 32 authorities.

Rise in homelessness

In 2023-24, there were 1,778 homelessness presentations to the council, an increase of 0.5% on the previous year, whilst still high, a less sharp rise than the 25% reported in 2022-23.

In March 2024, 442 households were in temporary accommodation (up from 399 in March 2023), 90 of these households had either pregnant women or children in them.

483 young people (aged 16 - 24 years old) applied for homeless assistance in 2023/24, up 3.9% (+18) on 2022/23. 105 of these were from applicants aged 16/17 years old, a 10.5% (+10) increase on the 95 received the previous year with most reporting being asked to leave their family home.

378 were from applicants aged 18 -24 years old, a 2.2% (+8) increase on the previous year.

Analysis at individual case level shows that most are due to a breakdown in relationships and the service will work in collaboration with other Council Clusters to review a sample of cases to elicit learning. Sampling of cases to date illustrates that the conflict being experienced in the family home is influenced by a number of other factors (such as other children within the home, illness, financial pressures) and the involvement of other services with the family leading up to the point of crisis.

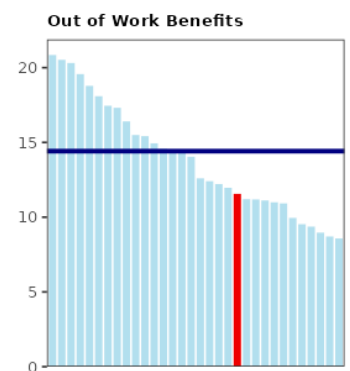
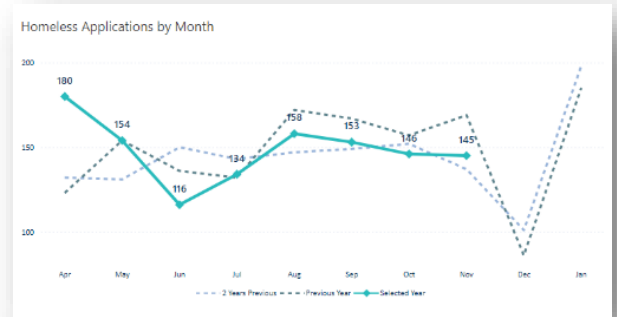
Work to address homelessness is being driven through our engagement with [Homewards](#).

Claimant count

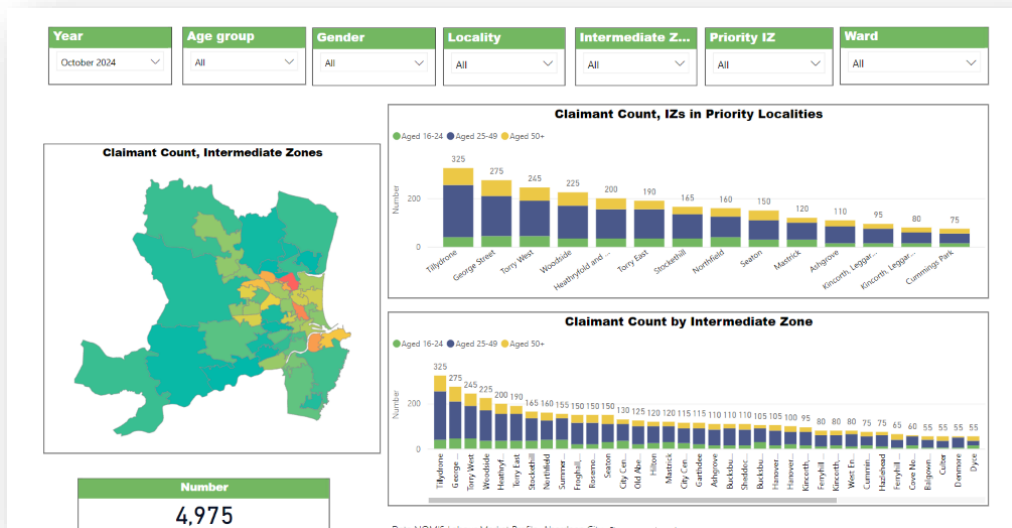
The city level claimant count rose from 4,595 in October 2023 to 4,975 in October 2024. However, there was a slight drop (875 in October 2023 to 870 in October 2024) in the number of 16–24-year-olds claiming. These trends are at odds with those reported last year, suggesting that more families are now claiming the benefits they are entitled to and this is welcomed.

In October 2024, there were 1,592 Claimants in our priority localities, higher than in October 2023 (1,530). This represents 30.1% of all claimants in the city, a marginal reduction on the positions recorded at prior snapshot points as a consequence of the overall rise in the claimant count, and some shifts in claimant activity within other non-priority localities.

The claimant count continues to vary across the city by zone, with Tillydrone having the highest proportion of claimants.

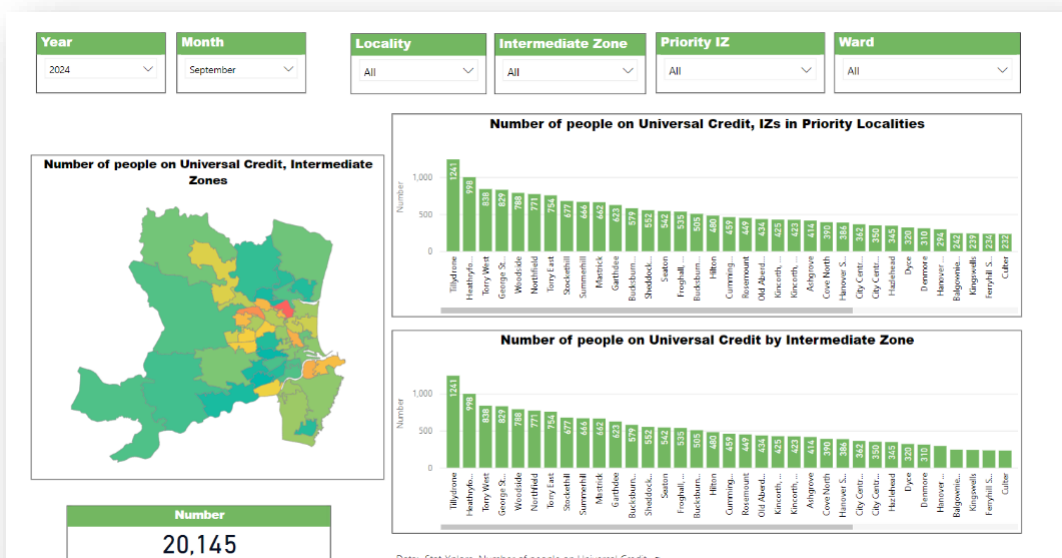


The Improvement Service Community Planning Tool shows that the Local Authority area has increased by one place against other community planning partnerships for this measure. Aberdeen City now sits 20 out of 32 Local Authorities (compared to 21 of 32 last year) for levels of Out of Work Benefits. This is still below the national average but is the highest within our Family Group suggesting that our financial inclusion arrangements are more effectively supporting families to claim their entitlements.



Universal credit

There has been a considerable rise in the number of people claiming Universal Credit, from 18,470 in September 2023 to 20,145 in September 2024. There is considerable variation in the level of claimants at community level, with Tillydrone being home to the highest proportion of claimants. Some caution is needed in interpreting these figures since small numbers of people continue to transfer to Universal Credit from legacy benefits.



Spread of poverty across the city

Poverty is not spread equally across our city. The number of children living in relative low-income families, based on the official statistics released in March 2024, varies across the city by ward zones.

In 2022/23, Hazlehead/Queens Cross recorded the lowest number of children (147/ 4.1%) and Northfield/Mastrick, the greatest number, although this number is improved from the previous year. There is a high of 967 in Northfield/Mastrick, (28.2%, 30.4% in 2021/22) and 684 in Torry/Ferryhill (24.0%, 23.1% in 2021/2022), both figures are improved on 2022.

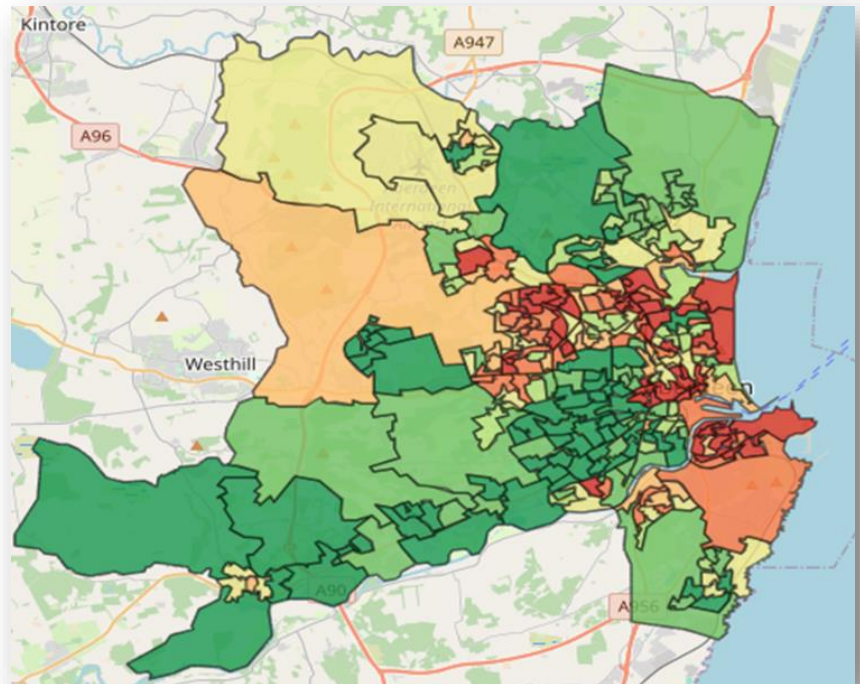
Hilton/Woodside/Stockethill (25.5%) and Tillydrone/Seaton/Old Aberdeen are both sitting at around 690 children living in relative low-income families. Tillydrone/Seaton/Old Aberdeen continues to have the city's highest proportion of children living in relative low-income families at 32.3%, a small increase on 2021/22.

The George Street/Harbour ward has a relatively lower number of children in this category than these zones at 465 children, but despite falling out with the priority locality structure, is now experiencing the second highest % of child poverty behind Tillydrone.

Dyce/Bucksburn/Danestone has experienced the greatest material rise in both the numbers and % of children in relative poverty, with 761 children (517 in 2021/22) and 24.8% (16.9% in 2021/22). Numerically and proportionately, this ward now sits above Torry/Ferryhill in terms of relative poverty based on this measure.

These patterns of change are suggestive that child poverty trends at ward levels have been less fixed relative to each other than in most previous years, with gains in some priority neighbourhoods whilst others, and some out with priority activity definitions, have experienced a less positive direction of travel. This signals a need to continue to sharpen our focus at community level.

The Scottish Government Child Poverty Map – Aberdeen City (Improvement Service, based on Official Statistics) shows the spread of relative child poverty across the city.



The impact of this spread is seen across a range of outcome measures from the Community Planning Outcome Tool. A colour RAG (Red / Amber / Green) rating has been used to show where there has been statistically significant movement locally and/or in comparison with Scotland trends.

2022/23 2021/22	Average Highest Attainment - 2022/23	Child Poverty (%) - 2022/23	Crime Rate, per 10,000 - 2022/23	Depopulation Index - 2022/23	Early Mortality, per 100,000 - 2022/23	Emergency admissions per 100,000	Out of work benefits (%)	Participation rate
Aberdeen city least deprived	6.0 (6.1)	3.7 (3.9)	564.4 (717.8)	91.3 (91.8)	245.3 (250.3)	19591.0 (18298.6)	3.1 (3.4)	96.0 (96.5)
Aberdeen city most deprived	4.9 (5)	35.3 (35.0)	1779.8 (2057.2)	102.0 (101.6)	782.3 (787.2)	25449.7 (29916.6)	25.3 (26.8)	85.0 (83.8)
Scotland least deprived	6.1 (6.1)	6.1 (6)	500.9 (519.3)	94.2 (94.2)	244.8 (243.6)	18280.9 (18309.4)	3.9 (4.3)	96.4 (96.2)
Scotland most deprived	5.1 (5.1)	38.8 (37.3)	1829.4 (1882.5)	100.4 (100.3)	799.6 (794.7)	31497.9 (32122.0)	30.7 (31.4)	87.7 (87.2)

Improvements noted include:

- a reduction in the % of children experiencing child poverty in the least deprived communities (from 3.9 in 2021/22 to 3.7% in 2022/23. This is significantly lower than the national average of 6%.
- A considerable fall in crime rate across communities in Aberdeen
- A very slight reduction in early mortality per 100,000, bucking the national trend.

Areas of concern include:

- An increase in the percentage of children living in poverty in the most deprived communities (from 35% in 2021/22 to 35.3%). The rise locally is less acute than the national rise from 37.3% to 38.8%.

Grant applications and Advice Services

There were 1,630 applications to the Best Start scheme in the 12 months from September 2023 to 2024, (1,455 in the previous annual period) with the Best Start Foods component representing both the greatest year-on-year change in component application levels (1,465 +315)) and in the proportion of accepted applications (63% +3 p.p.) In 2022/23, these figures were 1,150 and 60% respectively.

Applications against the Best Start ELC and School Age component totaled 525, similar to the prior year. There were 1,065 Applications against the Pregnancy and Baby component, a more marginal rise in the proportion of all accepted applications (+2 p.p.) and an increase of 280 applications on 2022/23.

In common with the national trend, the number of applications being received against the Best Start scheme for both the Pregnancy/Baby component and the Foods component has risen in 2023/24 as a consequence of both population and circumstantial changes, alongside the increasing accessibility/knowledge of the supports available through the Scheme.

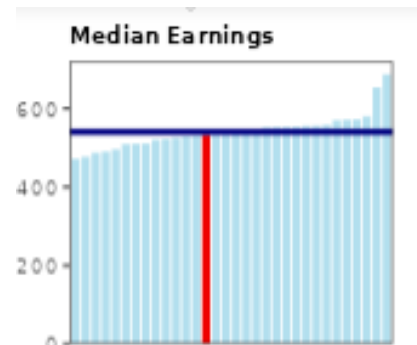


Earnings from Employment/Self-Employment

The Improvement Service Community Planning Tool shows that the Local Authority area currently sits 20th (22nd in 2021/22) out of 32 Local Authorities for Median Earnings, more or less in line with the national average. In 2022/23 Median Earnings for Aberdeen rose to £533 (+7%), slightly faster than the Scotland level.

Median Earnings is an important metric in that it evidences the financial gains from employment/self-employment across the full spectrum from the lowest to the highest earners and is materially and dynamically linked to estimates of relative poverty.

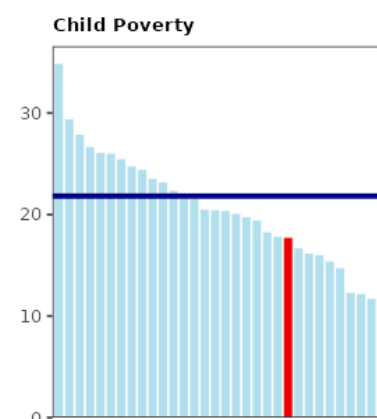
It is important to note that changes in Median Earning levels may have consequential effects on calculations of relative poverty that are not directly related to a fall or increase in household incomes of lower earners, although this may influence the number and percentage of households/individuals classed as being within lower income family circumstances by these core poverty measures.



Benchmarking Child Poverty performance

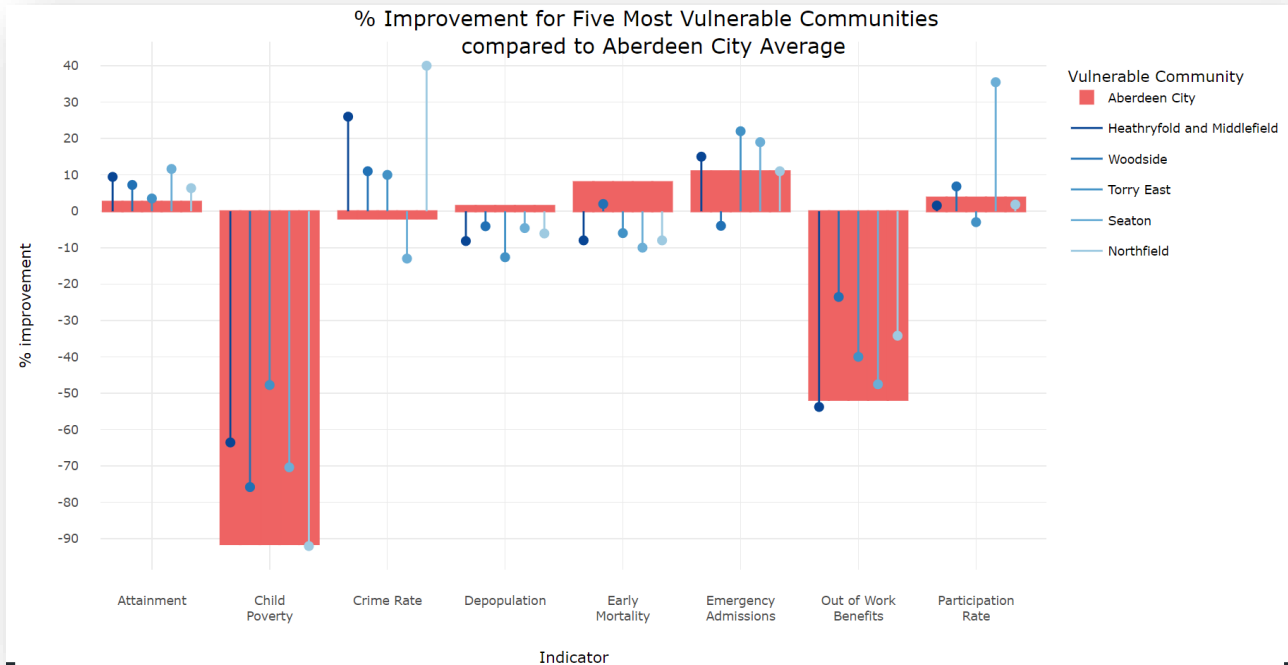
The Improvement Service Community Planning Tool shows that 92% of our communities are performing well compared to their comparator communities when looking at child poverty in isolation. The city centre (north and east), Bucksburn north, Woodside, Tillydrone, Torry East and Northfield are not keeping pace with their comparator communities.

However, when looking at child poverty and its associated measures, this drops to only 78% of communities who are outperforming similar communities. This drop is largely driven by attainment and participation levels signaling a need to continue to prioritise these areas.

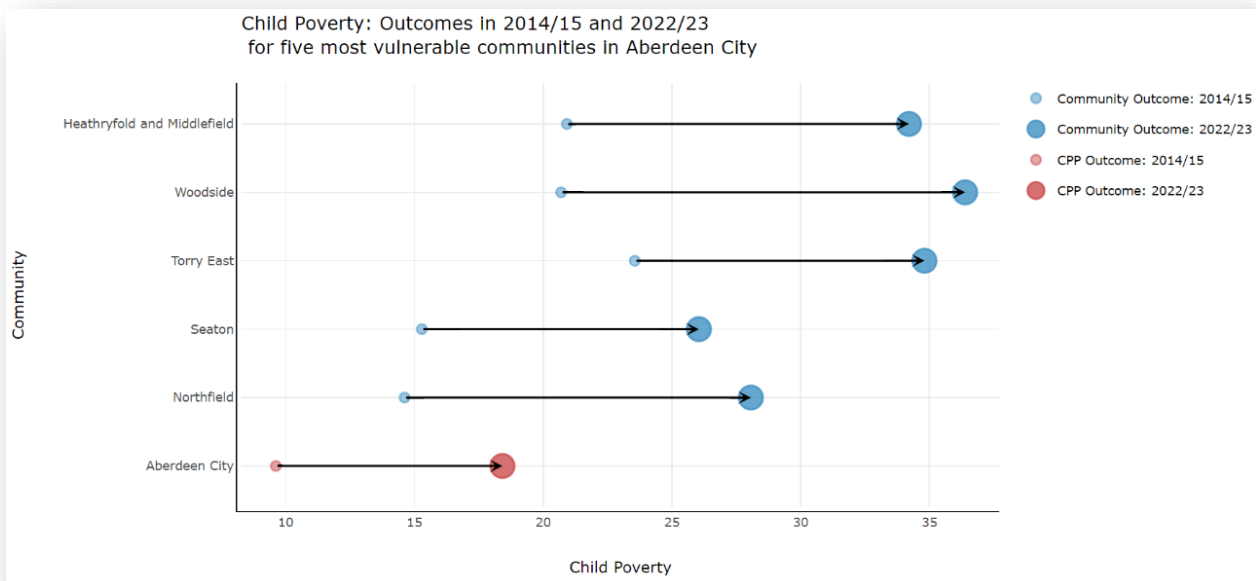


Levels of child poverty in the city are slightly below the national average; Aberdeen sits second behind Perth and Kinross in levels of child poverty when comparing levels of poverty with our Family Group. The Local Authority area currently sits 23 out of 32 Local Authorities for levels of child poverty which is below the national average, this is unchanged from last year.

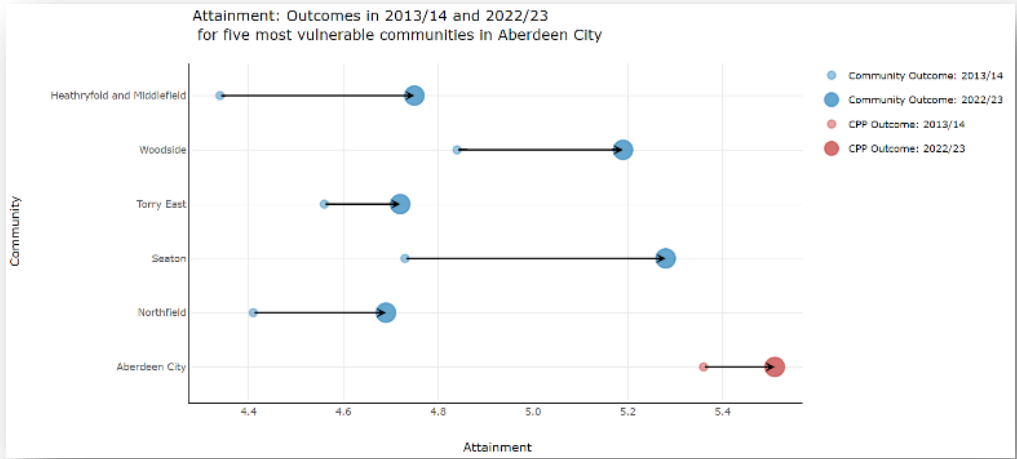
The Community Planning outcomes tool allows us to look at changes in our communities most vulnerable to child poverty over time and identify differences at community level. The visual demonstrates the considerable differences in crime and participation rates in what the tool has identified as our 5 most vulnerable communities.



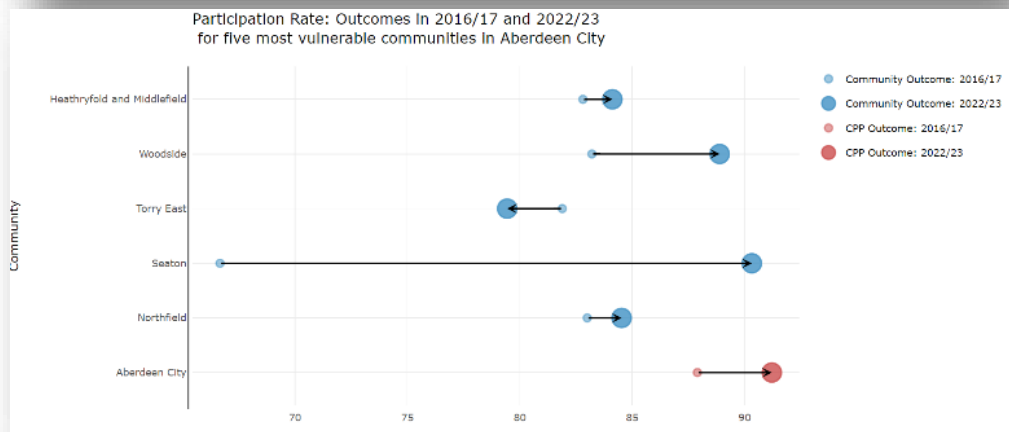
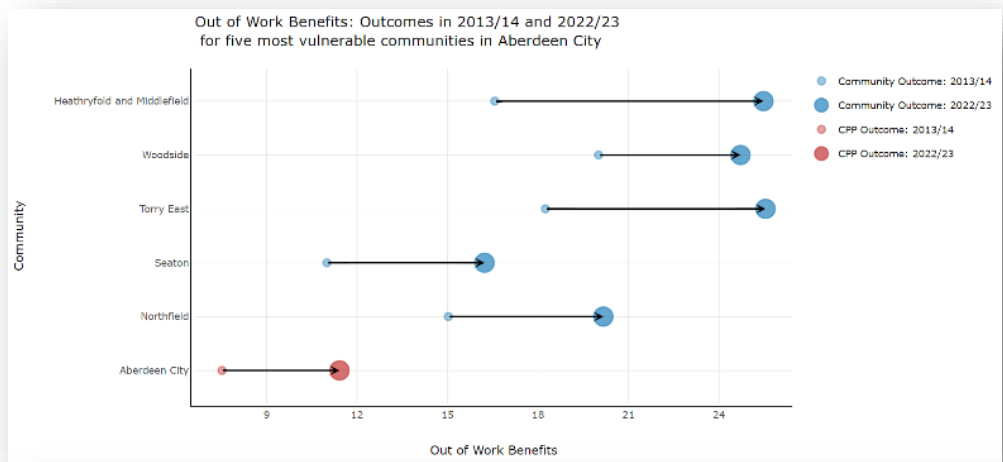
When looking at how these more vulnerable communities are faring against levels of child poverty, we can see that levels of child poverty are increasing (against a baseline from 2014/15) at a faster rate than the city mean growth.



Levels of attainment across our 5 most vulnerable communities show similar variation around attainment. Gains are evident across all communities, although the scale of improvement varies considerably.



Out of work benefits, the participation rate and emergency hospital admissions show similar levels of variation.



Groups Most at Risk of Poverty

Those groups identified as being most at risk of poverty through the national priority plan continue to face particular challenges locally. We continue to build our knowledge of how poverty impacts individual groups. The data below outlines the present data and offers, where possible, the most recent trend directions from the available data.

Single Parent Families: In August 2024, there were 410 (5.5% of all claimants) single parent Housing Benefit Claimants in Aberdeen City. This compared to 527 in March 2024 and 573 as at December 2023. In August 2023 this figure was 651 (8.1% of all claimants). Of this number, 50 households had 3 or 4 dependants, in comparison with 98 in August 2023. In August 2024, the number of Universal Credit Claimant single parent households was 5,437, an increase on both December 2023 (4,692 households) and that is August 2023 (4,628).

Disability: At September 2024, there were 2,125 (1,260 in September 2023) Aberdeen resident applications to the Scottish Child Disability Scheme, providing for 2,625 (2,090 in September 2023) child recipients. The number of households in receipt of the child disability element of Universal Credit in August 2024 was 1,082, up from 813 in March 2024, and 688 in August 2023.

Youngest Child Less Than One Year Old: In August 2024, there were 431 households in Aberdeen City in receipt of Universal Credit with a child under the age of 1 year old, the same as in August 2023. The % of families where the youngest child was in this age group and was experiencing relative poverty in 2023/24 was 31%, slightly lower than in 2022/23 but greater than for those families with children overall (23%). The distance between these two cohorts has closed marginally.

Larger Families(3+ children): The number of Housing benefit claimants with 3 or more child dependents in August 2024, were 88. This is a 53% reduction on August 2023 (156 claimants), and lower in comparison with 128 in December 2023. There were 1,802 households with 3 or more children who were in receipt of Universal Credit at the same point in time, roughly similar to that in August 2023.

Younger Mothers: In August 2024, there were 12 Housing Benefit Claimants with dependents under the age of 25 years, which had reduced from 13 in August 2023 but increased from 8 in December 2023 and the 9 in March 2024.

Minority Ethnic Families: 63% of those who are in ethnic minority families are employed compared to 76% of those who are white in Aberdeen City. There is presently no consistently reliable data around the influences behind this differential at national or local levels. Most recent Common Advice data (2022/23) indicated that 234 (5.5%) clients of declared Minority Ethnic background had engaged with ACC/CAB financial advice services from a total of 4,204 with a known ethnicity. This was slightly higher than in 2021/22.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN THE CITY?



There is a need to continue to think about how we collect and align data to ensure that we continue to build an understanding of the challenges facing our residents. The Child Poverty Employability Coordinator will work to understand these needs more fully over the coming year and develop a co-designed child poverty employability action plan.

What is getting better?

The number of people now successfully claiming universal credit has increased from 7.705 in March 2020 to 20.145 in Sept 2024.



92% of communities are performing better in child poverty than might be expected (when comparing them to similar communities). The city centre (east and west), Tillydrone and Bucksburn East have the poorer outcomes.



90% of communities are performing better in out of work benefits than might be expected (when comparing them to other similar communities). Torry east, Heathryfold/Middlefield, Woodside, Mastick and Northfield have the poorest outcomes.



In the 2023 calendar year, there were an estimated 13,500 workless households in Aberdeen, a fall of 1,700 on 2022.



A reduction in the % of children experiencing child poverty in the least deprived communities from 3.9 in 2021/22 to 3.7% in 2022/23. This is significantly lower than the national average of 6%.



A considerable fall in crime rate across communities in Aberdeen




There are some positive indications that more families are claiming their full entitlements, that there are less workless households and that we are faring reasonably well when comparing progress against our comparators. However, we cannot be complacent as there continues to be significant evidence that long term outcomes are significantly impacted by poverty (as clearly evidenced through our earlier review of data by life stage) and that recent economic shocks have increased risk significantly.


The disparity in outcomes at community level remains considerable. There is a need to carefully consider how services are delivered for and with those who need our support most.

What has stayed the same?

The claimant count, as a % of the working age population has remained stable at 3.2%. This is in line with the national average.



The claimant count, as a % of the 16-24 population, has increased from 3.3% to 3.7% in 2024/25. This is higher than the Scottish average of 3.5%, and much higher than the family group average of 2.3%.



In 2022/23 Median Earnings for Aberdeen rose to £533 (+7%), slightly faster than the Scotland level.



There is a need to understand the rise in claimant count in our 16 to 24 population better. NOMIS November 2024 data shows that there is a higher proportion of those aged 16 and 17 claiming locally compared to Scotland wide and UK wide data.

	Aberdeen City (Level)	Aberdeen City (%)	Scotland (%)	Great Britain (%)
Aged 16+	4,950	3.2	3.1	4.2
Aged 16 To 17	40	1.1	0.7	0.2
Aged 18 To 24	855	4.1	4.2	5.5
Aged 18 To 21	475	4.5	4.7	5.9
Aged 25 To 49	2,940	3.3	3.6	4.8
Aged 50+	1,115	2.7	2.2	3.2

Source: ONS Claimant count by sex and age
Note: % is number of claimants as a proportion of resident population of the same age

view time-series compare other areas query dataset...


There is also a need to work with our communities, as part of our Future Libraries model, to increase access to the supports they require in a way that is better suited to their needs and wants.

What is getting worse?


The Scottish House Condition survey suggests that more children are living in fuel poverty (now 26.1%).




There has been a decline in the number of people rating a neighbourhood as a very/fairly good place to live from 93% to 93%. This is 3% lower than the national average.




There has been an increase in the number of city voice respondents who reported that there was a time during the last 12 months when they were worried they would not have enough food to eat (from 5.4% in 2019 to 9.4% in 2024)



There has been a rise in the number of city voice respondents who reported that there was a time during the last 12 months where they were worried that they would not be able to heat their homes (from 10.0 to 24.6)



The number of children in relative low income families has increased from 5,450 in 2016/17 to 7,378 in 2022/23



483 young people (aged 16 - 24 years old) applied for homeless assistance in 2023/24, up 3.9% (+18) on 2022/23. 105 of these were from applicants aged 16/17 years old, a 10.5% (+10) increase on the 95 received the previous year with most reporting being asked to leave their family home.

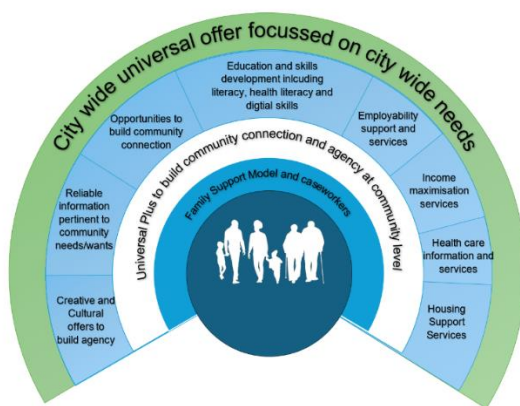
Torry (east and west), Northfield, Heathryfold/Middlefield and Commings Park have the poorest outcomes.



Analysis of need as part of our work to develop our Future Libraries model has highlighted the very high proportion of citizens who feel socially isolated. There is a need to address this social isolation through our Future Libraries model and help citizens develop the agency they require to feel in control of their choices.

So, what next?

Data shows that poverty continues to impact on our families and that this is likely to continue, although there are some signals from more recent information of an apparent stabilisation of the employment market and an increase in those who are economically active and in employment/self-employment may feed through to future improvements in poverty related measures. There will be a need to ensure that the issues highlighted through this annual review of data are shared with the Local Employability Partnership to ensure that they are taken into account as new priorities and Delivery Plan are developed.

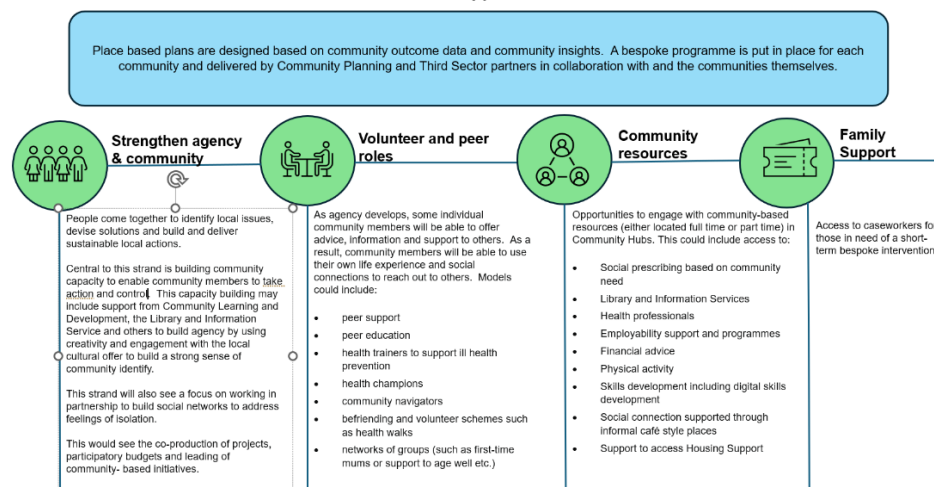


There is a need to ensure that our communities have the agency they require to continue to overcome the challenges they are experiencing as we develop our Future Libraries Model.

There is now a further tranche of data-based evidence that families are increasingly being supported to access locally and nationally managed entitlements and this is encouraging but does highlight the number of those who need our continued help, and those whose changed circumstances have required engagement with support mechanisms for the first time.

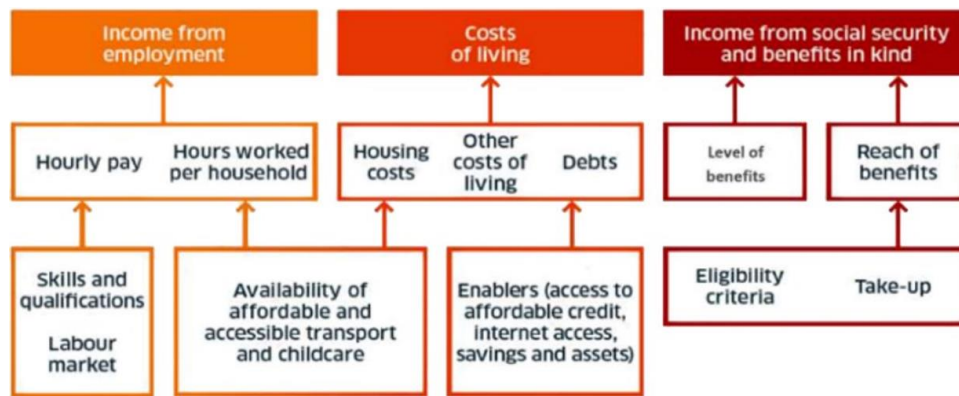
There is a need to continue to carefully target those groups recognised as most likely to be impacted by poverty, and to increase our knowledge and support of them whilst maintaining an awareness that the evidence may challenge our responses in areas, and for residents, falling out with historically understood need/priority. Our place-based approach to the development of our Future Libraries may offer a helpful context to explore some of the challenges facing families more fully.

Placed Based Approach



Best Start, Bright Futures

Best Start, Bright Futures tells us that the three drivers of poverty are income from employment, cost of living, and income from social security and benefits in kind. We know that impacting these drivers will positively impact levels of child poverty and so have structured our report under these three headings whilst recognising how interrelated they are.



Our shared Local Outcome Improvement Plan continues to guide how the Community Planning Partnership works together to tackle and prevent poverty long term. However, the cost of living crisis, combined with existing inequalities, have increased the risk of acute poverty.

The Community Planning Aberdeen Anti-Poverty Group is dedicated to ensuring that we respond to emergency need now as well as work together across other Outcome Improvement Groups and with community partners to prevent further harms in the future. Our Citizen's panel data reveals that too often people are forced to make a choice between food and fuel due to a lack of income from employment or social security.



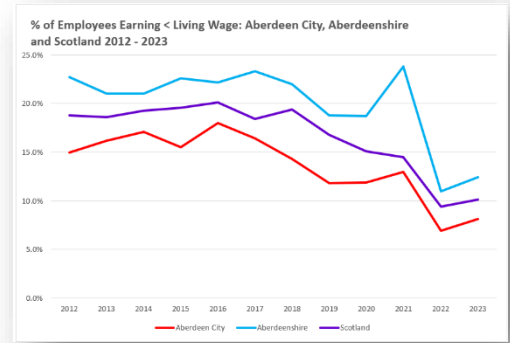
The Anti-Poverty Group brings together a range of partners to ensure communities are able to access the support they need to prevent unnecessary short term suffering. Examples of this work are provided in the following sections and range from funding community organisations to provide local support services in our most deprived communities through the Fairer Aberdeen Fund, to income maximisation work through the Financial Inclusion Team, increasing access to affordable food through foodbanks and cash first initiatives, and preventing fuel poverty through provision of fuel vouchers. This early intervention and response work bolsters the efforts of the Children's Services Board, and other Outcome Improvement Groups, in a bid to end child poverty now and in the future.

The findings from this Annual Report will help to shape our work over 2025 to start drafting a new Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) for 2026-2036. The refresh of our Children's Services Plan will be fully aligned to our work to establish a new LOIP so that a holistic approach is taken and to ensure that all of Community Planning Aberdeen Outcome Improvement Groups play their role in addressing child poverty. To ensure alignment with LOIP 2026-36, the next refresh of the Children's Services Plan will cover the time period 2026-2031.

Income from employment

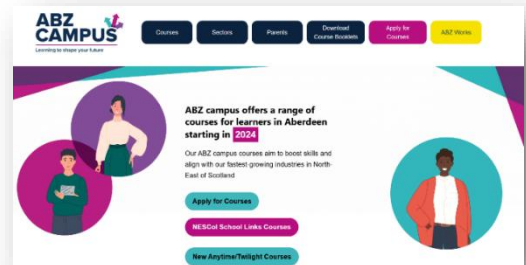
In 2023/23, the employment rate, as measured through the Annual Population Survey, across Aberdeen City sat slightly below the national average (73.5%) for the first time at 72.8%. The most recent 12-month data (July 2023-June 2024) indicates that this has risen to 75.9%, and reverted to a level ahead of the Scotland figure (75.5%). This pattern of improvement has now been demonstrated over three consecutive dataset releases. This data will require careful monitoring.

In 2023, those earning less than the real living wage had fallen to 8.1% in Aberdeen. This equates to half the proportion of those working compared to 2013. This data will require to be carefully monitored to ensure continued positive movement.



ABZ Campus

Our education service continues to ensure that a wider range of courses are available in growth and volume sectors, in part through delivery of ABZ Campus, to ensure that our young people are well placed to be economically active post school. ABZ Campus Phase 2 has reached the mid-point in course delivery with over 700 participants on over 60 courses across a range of providers in schools, NESCOL and other partners.



Focus groups have provided valuable and positive feedback on the experiences of young people on ABZ Campus courses and we continue to engage with young people to ensure that we are continuing to 'get it right' for them.

Learner Voice
Almost all found the information about courses easy to access and understand
Almost all felt valued and welcomed in their host establishment
Almost all said they received regular feedback about how they were progressing
Most rated learning and teaching as 'good', almost all were happy with the quality of the learning and teaching

Delivery of a pilot virtual or *anytime* courses has commenced with fourteen courses offering young people from both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire an opportunity to benefit. Given this is a pilot year, the numbers of participants remains modest with a view to expansion in future years.

ABZ ANYTIME/TWILIGHT COURSES BY LEVEL
Anytime Courses
SCQF Level 7
History Advanced Higher (Aberdeen City)
Modern Studies Advanced Higher (Aberdeen City)
Online Art & Design Portfolio Development (Robert Gordon University)
Environmental Awareness (SRUC)
Access Course in Physics – Engineering (University of Aberdeen)
Access Course in Chemistry (University of Aberdeen)
SCQF Level 6
Local Food Production (SRUC)
SCQF Level 5/6
Veterinary Terminology (SRUC)
SCQF Level 5
Equine (SRUC)
Horticulture (SRUC)
Investigation into Modern Agriculture (SRUC)
The Principles of Animal Care (SRUC)
Twilight Courses
SCQF Level 6
Higher Computing Science (RGC Online)
Higher Applications of Mathematics (RGC Online)

10 young people are enrolled in an Employability Course as part of ABZ Campus with a further 6 young people benefiting from a pilot programme for young people with additional support needs.

Plans for Phase 3 of ABZ Campus (Session 2025-26) are well underway with course offers being finalised with partners, publicity planned, and course choice within schools commencing in January 2025. As we continue to develop ABZ Campus, we have received contact from five other local authorities who have asked for collaboration and dialogue to understand the positive journey of ABZ Campus. This is offering us further opportunities to explore possible connections to reflect on and improve our own offer, including working with individual schools to increase their in school offer to young people.

Aberdeen Computing Collaborative

The Aberdeen Computing Collaborative has made significant progress this year in enhancing computing science and digital skills across the North East given the importance of skills in the prosperity of the region. The Collaborative has spearheaded a £16 million bid to advance computing science and digital skills in support of the North East Investment Zone. This initiative aims to:



- Deliver professional development for educators, ranging from early years practitioners to secondary school specialists.
- Foster a digital workforce to meet the needs of the North East's expanding digital sector.

The bid, led by Aberdeen City Council with contributions from Aberdeenshire Council, Opportunity North East, Robert Gordon University, University of Aberdeen, and North East Scotland College, seeks £10 million in investment zone funding to enhance digital skills through school-based activities. The outcome of the bid will be known early in 2025.

A survey was conducted to gather insights into young people's experiences with computing science and digital education in schools to help define next steps. Key findings include:

- **Comfort and Access:** Most learners feel comfortable using computers and have access to a computer at home. 92.6% of respondents felt confident or very confident about using computers. 89.5% of all respondents had access to a computer at home.
- **Perceptions of Lessons:** Learners highlighted the need for computing science lessons to be more dynamic and less repetitive, with many expressing excitement and interest in learning more about technology.
- **Appealing Learning Methods:** Hands-on activities and real-world applications are seen as key motivators for learner engagement
- **Career Importance:** The majority of respondents consider computer skills crucial for future careers, highlighting the need for effective computing education.

What is your experience of Computing Science/Digital in school? (Learners could select multiple options)	619 Responses
Doesn't seem relevant to the real world	8.40%
I do more fun computing in my own time	27.95%
I enjoy it but it's really difficult	18.09%
I learn things I already know	22.78%
I like creating with digital tools	35.86%
I would like more time to develop my skills	30.05%
I'm excited by my computing lessons	31.99%
It's difficult because the tech is so old	25.04%
Lessons are boring	23.59%

These results emphasize the importance of tailoring education to make lessons more engaging and relevant to learners' aspirations.

A subject-focused professional learning day was organised for computing science teachers, led by STACS (Scottish Teachers Advancing Computing Science). This was funded by the Scottish Government. The event received overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees, who found it highly beneficial in enhancing their teaching strategies and subject knowledge.

A Scottish Government grant has facilitated the purchase of equipment for a new Digital Space at ONE TechHub on Schoolhill. This state-of-the-art facility will:

- Serve as an event and training space for schools and other users.
- Provide opportunities for hands-on digital activities.
- Strengthen connections between schools, the Aberdeen Computing Collaborative, and local digital sector businesses.



The Digital Space become operational in January 2025, marking a significant step forward in providing innovative digital learning opportunities. Aberdeen Computing Collaborative remain well positioned to respond to the outcome of the Investment Zone bid when known.

ABZWorks update

This year has seen significant changes to the delivery of employability services in Scotland, with the move to the third phase of the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind strategy and the end of the Fair Start Scotland programme. Local Authorities now have a greater responsibility to deliver a broader range of employability services and a greater focus on people with disabilities and/or long-term health issues. This change has resulted in a 162.8% increase in referrals for employability support received by ABZWorks this financial year to date.

The team continues to review approaches in order to maximise the number of citizens they are supporting and will respond positively to an externally supported review currently underway.



ABZ Child Poverty Coordinator led work

A Child Poverty Employability Coordinator, funded by the Scottish Government through No One Left Behind, has been in post since March 2024.

Activities delivered to date include:

1. Commissioning of Rocket Science to carry out a study looking at barriers into employability for parents. The key barriers identified were: access to and cost of childcare; travel; lack of flexible employment opportunities; and upskilling/retraining needed to enter the workforce. The report and next steps will be published on the ABZWorks website in due course.
2. Ongoing distribution of the Lone Parent Fund to remove financial barriers to employment for those newly employed; it has been accessed by 23 parents this financial year to date.
3. Offering childcare support to enable parents to engage in employability activities. At the time of writing, six have received direct funding while others had received support through contracted training provision with childcare costs built into the contract costs.
4. The commissioning of a variety of training provision specifically for parents, including an ELC access to childcare course, an in-work support course, a confidence to cook course, and an enterprising new parents course which aims to support people into self-employment. A Financial Inclusion officer has been embedded in the ABZWorks team to ensure participants are accessing this support, and with a particular focus on parents. As a result of this intervention, one family is now £18,000 a year better off (they had been in receipt of only £434 per month).

A project will get underway in January with 25 young parents paid the Real Living Wage to co-design an employability support package for young parents. This is being funded via the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Accelerator monies.

A child poverty employability action plan will be developed in the coming year.

Targeting those most at risk of poverty

Eight 'Test and Learn' projects were commissioned over the year. Four have been delivered to date and we await evaluation reports from the providers. Another four are due to begin early in 2025. These are short-life projects are designed to test out innovative ideas for engaging with target groups and delivering employability services differently in light of the move to the third phase of No One Left Behind.

The service has continued to deliver popular jobs fairs, including a 'generic' event, a jobs fair for disabled people, and another for refugees and displaced people. Feedback from participants and employers continues to be positive. A redundancy support and jobs fair event was also held following the closure of the Stewart Milne Group. Securing information about the number of attendees who secured work as a result of the event is extremely challenging, however the Department for Work and Pensions confirmed that very few Stewart Milne Group employees had applied for unemployment benefits, suggesting that the majority rapidly secured employment, which is reflective of shortages in the construction sector. Plans for future events are being developed meantime.



The Fit Next programme for school leavers without a positive destination, removing barriers to employability participation, building confidence, social circles, employability skills, introductions to training providers and employers, and work experience continues to be delivered and to secure positive outcomes with our young people. We have leveraged employer input through Community Benefits clauses attached to major Council contracts and corporate social responsibility opportunities to secure ongoing support from employers in these sessions.

Two Fit Next cohorts were supported this year. Of the 22 participants, four progressed to college, two gained employment, two have completed a work experience placement and continue to engage with the service, and 11 have progressed onto commissioned training courses. Three completed the Fit Next programme and asked for no further support and have now disengaged from ABZWorks.

The ABZWorks team has secured several local and national awards in recognition of the quality of their work. The team built on their success of winning the SURF Award for Removing Barriers to Employability for our work with Care Experienced Young People, by winning a CoSLA Excellence Award for Achieving Better Outcomes for the Most Vulnerable In Partnership, recognising our work with HMP Grampian, hospitality firm Greene King, and Skills Development Scotland to create an accredited hospitality training programme and pipeline to employment for prisoners approaching release to the city. Additionally, the ABZWorks procurement framework for the commissioning of employability services was shortlisted for a UK-wide GO! Procurement award.

There is clear evidence of the impact of ABZWorks. An internal and external evaluation is currently being concluded to help inform how best to increase the reach of the service.

ABZWorks Development Grant

At the time of writing, the third phase of ABZWorks Development Grants, created to support grass roots organisations, particularly those in the priority areas, to build their capacity to develop and deliver employability activities and build links with hard-to-reach groups, is underway. Up to £10,000 is available per organisation.

To date 54 applications have been made, 21 in the current round, and 12 grants are in the process of being awarded.

Work Experience Programmes

Paid work experience programmes with guaranteed interviews for those who complete continue to be delivered, aligned to sectors where we know there are skills shortages (we have one underway currently for care experienced young people, and another for eligible city residents of all working ages in the health and social care sector, and the aforementioned scheme for parents within local authority ELC settings). Additionally, we have secured agreement with NHS Grampian to offer four opportunities within the organisation, with one post live at the time of writing.

This financial year to date of eight Early Learning and Childcare placements, three parents moved onto the relief pool, two are ongoing at the time of writing, and two did not complete the placement, and one was unable to start but continues to receive employability support. Two placements were provided in PEEP groups, with one intern moving into employment and the other placement ongoing.

A lower number of placements was secured for care experienced young people this financial year. Four have been offered placements to date. One progressed to college, one is working towards achieving a Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card, and two disengaged but support

remains available to them. Discussions are progressing with social work about creating an internship at Westburn to support development of employability activity for care experienced young person. Talks are ongoing with the Corporate Landlord about the provision of a small number of placements within areas of the service which has hard-to-fill posts and which may provide progression routes for suitable interested individuals.

Using United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Funds and working in partnership with NHS Grampian and Alcohol and Drugs Action, ABZWorks has developed a paid work experience scheme for people in recovery from substance use. Given the often significant challenges faced by people in recovery, this project has had limited success in terms of work experience placements due to the work required to prepare people. However, huge progress has been made by several of the individuals participating in the programme with sustained engagement just one measure of success. To date 12 people have been referred to this project to and signed up with ABZWorks, with more referrals in discussion. Of those, one disengaged, and two have progressed to rehabilitation. Those who continue to engage are receiving keyworker support, while ongoing drop-in and relationship building sessions continue for others who are approaching a stage in their recovery which would enable them to meaningfully and safely engage, or to seek advice on employability support availability. One individual has surpassed the need for a placement and moved into permanent employment in January, while another is applying for health care roles. Both will continue to receive support from all agencies, including their dedicated ABZWorks keyworker, to smooth their transition into employment and help sustain it.

An additional benefit of this project has been the formation of a Recovery Support Group with membership including training providers, HMP Grampian, Aberdeen in Recovery, Alcohol and Drugs Action, Narcotics Anonymous, and SACRO.

Employer Engagement

The second ABZWorks Conference took place, this year stretching to a two-day event, with day one focused on training provision and employability, and day two focused on employer engagement, the energy transition, and the ABZ Pipeline. The employer event provided some solid information on skills gaps, information from employers about recruitment and retention challenges, and a commitment from several to provide work experience placements across all working ages, form an employer arm of the Local Employability Partnership, broad support for the ABZ Pipeline and a clear desire to be part of the project development and future delivery.

The number of training providers have now signed up to our dynamic purchasing system for the procurement of employability services, which was co-designed with providers and continues to grow. Aside from ABZWorks Development Grants, all employability provision is being procured via the framework, which enables us to provide a broad range of services to city residents at all stages of the pipeline. Our approach is being used as an example of best practice by the Scottish Government's Improvement Service. This financial year 59 contracts have been awarded, with a total value of £899,810.73, providing a broad and person-centred range of activity to employability programme participants across No One Left Behind and United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund monies. We will offer more contract opportunities on receipt of the 2025/26 grant offer from Scottish Government, which we anticipate receiving in spring. We anticipate it will include a further year of funding for a child poverty employability post.

The Employer Recruitment Incentive scheme, which provides up to £6,000 to employers to offset the costs of taking on new members of staff, has unfortunately not been available this year due to a grant funding delay. Subject to funding we hope to relaunch it in the next financial year to incentivise the recruitment of not only young people, but also eligible parents, refugees and

displaced people. We anticipate an increase in the funding amount in the next financial year in line with the rise in the Real Living Wage.

A successful series of employer engagement sessions to promote inclusive employment in the city for key groups was delivered and well received by the business community. These sessions aimed to not only increase employer confidence and increase the number of opportunities for groups including parents, young people, displaced people and refugees, disabled people, and people with convictions, but also raise awareness of the broader support available from Aberdeen City Council via ABZWorks, as well as partner agencies including the Department for Work and Pensions, and Skills Development Scotland.

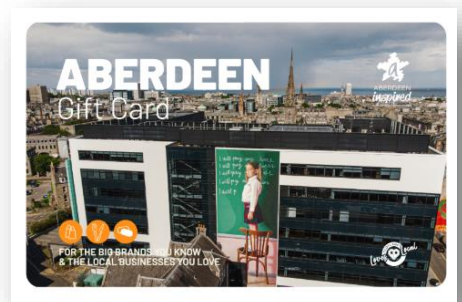
Supporting residents into Fair Work

Increasing training and reskilling opportunities as well as business creation is key to both developing new fair work employment opportunities; reducing the number of people in receipt of Universal Credit and to diversifying the economy. We are taking forward a number of initiatives to support people who will be coming off (or significantly reducing) their benefits.

In the past year, 730 people have received employability support via ABZWorks and the number continues to rise. Of those, 119 have moved into employment, 12 into self-employment, 30 into further or higher education, and 144 have gained accredited qualifications. At the time of writing, 789 training places have been taken up across commissioned provision.

We continue to provide Aberdeen Gift Cards to employability programme participants to remove some of the financial barriers to employment. This money is spent locally, boosting the economy and supporting jobs, while equipping individuals with essentials for interviews and starting work, such as interview clothes, transport costs, haircuts, etc. To date, £1,395 has been distributed via Aberdeen Gift Cards.

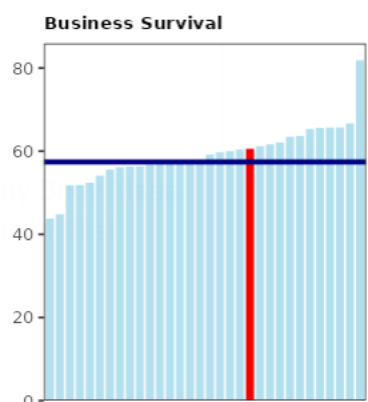
In line with Scottish Government grant funding requirements, all recipients of employability funding, whether by contract or grant, via Aberdeen City Council must commit to paying their staff the Real Living Wage. This is embedded in contracts and grants.



Supporting citizens to start a business and reduce their universal credits

Business survival rates are currently better than the national average (compared to last year when survival rates were in line with the national average). Despite this, the Local Authority relative position has decreased from 18th out of 32 last year to 21st out of 32 this year. Aberdeen City Council sits in the middle of the Family Group.

ABZWorks offers a salary payment for eligible parents setting up their own business, paid at Real Living Wage rate for hours worked on their business, to support their progression and mitigate the risk of financial hardship as individuals build up their enterprise. Eight parents have benefited from this to date and the opportunity is being discussed with others as they develop and progress their business plans.



We have partnered with the Scottish Childminding Association to provide seed funding to eligible city residents who wish to become registered childminders, removing the financial barriers which often prevent people from taking up this career opportunity, however this is proving to be a slow burner. A marketing campaign will be launched to promote the opportunity and associated benefits of being a childminder.

Supporting care experienced young people into sustained employment.

Through our employability support for care experienced young people project we've put in place a range of initiatives to help remove barriers and provide support and opportunities to help them feel confident and ready for employment. 59 young people have been supported over the last year. The programmes have been very successful across a number of outcomes, including: sustained engagement; achieving qualifications; engaging in work experience; progressing into a positive destination; sustaining that destination.

We have worked to build on the successful design and delivery of a pilot project co-designed with a small group of care experienced young people in 2023 and are now focusing on creating a structured employability service at a location where care experienced young people feel comfortable and supported, and where they can meet a range of trusted employability professionals.

A new project has been developed in partnership with care experienced young people and we are working with Social Work youth team colleagues to create a paid work experience placement to enable a care experienced young person to be at the heart of the design, development and delivery of this activity.

Focus on Numeracy

The ABZWorks team was tasked by the Finance and Resources Committee to manage the distribution and delivery of Multiply monies. Multiply is designed to improve numeracy levels of city residents aged 16+ who are not in education.

Activities undertaken to date include: the development of a mathematics portal by the education service; commissioning the University of Aberdeen to deliver Level five mathematics qualifications; Family Learning delivering numeracy activities to support parents' understanding of mathematics and develop their ability to support their children's numeracy; and Community Learning and Development delivering a range of accredited numeracy activities to adult learners.

Additional activities will come on stream this year including a pilot project to improve parents' numeracy and financial management skills, with a parent on a paid work experience internship embedded in the team to ensure lived experience is brought to the co-designed activity.

Focus on Growth and Volume Sectors

We are in talks with Ufi VocTech Trust about securing grant funding to use technology and digital innovation to provide targeted content, courses and digital work experience to school leavers, unemployed people, workers at risk of redundancy, and adult returners.

Subject to the funding being approved, Aberdeen City Council as lead accountable body will work with NESCol and Aberdeenshire Council to produce content that will be locally-specific employment information. The programme will ensure that participants gain essential meta-skills and practical knowledge, instilling confidence, and preparing them for the future job market – directly or through further study.

The ABZ Pipeline project commenced in 2024 to produce a skills development pipeline model through 3-18, with a focus on potential experiential career learning and progression activities. Our aim is to work in partnership with our partners to “implement a systematic and progressive approach to skills development, aligned to learner needs, across the North East of Scotland” which also takes account of industry needs. The Project Officer has engaged with employers and industry bodies from across the energy sector to strengthen links with education and employability services as well as assessing learners’ awareness of growth and high demand sectors. The project has also highlighted the potential for employers to provide resources to use prior and post the experience to amplify learning. One industry body is now doing this for Primary Schools (GUH, Subsea Expo).

Through engagement with NESCol, a plan has been drafted for a series of practical green skills workshops for young people in the senior phase. By linking with multiple employers there is huge potential to enrich young people’s skills and understanding, thus helping to support a just transition in developing ‘green skills’ and awareness of career opportunities.

Green skills courses have been commissioned, as have a number of digital skills courses, while the ABZWorks Development Fund has also been used to lever the development of digital skills across the city.

Planning for the future

The coming year will see a requirement through No One Left Behind funding to provide Supported Employment Support, providing Specialist Employability Support targeted at those who typically, require longer-term access to services including significant aftercare and in-work support to sustain employment. Participants may include, but are not limited to, people with disabilities, severe mental ill health and addictions who require support from workers with relevant experience and training.

Our work to date, particularly on paid work experience schemes, but also in partnership with HMP Grampian and Greene King, and with NHS Grampian and Alcohol and Drugs Action, puts us in a strong position to continue to provide Specialist Employment Support. Additionally, we have commissioned Values into Action Scotland to provide a Specialist Employment Support Service for disabled people, with the contract running until 31 March 2025, in line with No One Left Behind funding provision.

Going forward, the work of ABZ will be heavily influenced by the externally supported review of services currently underway.

Scottish Attainment Challenge funding supporting pupil and family wellbeing.

Scottish Attainment Challenge funding continues to be targeted to support the wellbeing of pupils and families. For 2024-25, Strategic Equity funding of £955,190 is allocated to continue providing youth workers, family learning workers, and Financial Inclusion Team support to schools, children, young people, and families across the city. Data from our yearly school [wellbeing survey](#) suggests that the interventions are making a considerable difference to our children and young people, with almost all local outcomes more positive than national averages.

Youth work funding primarily focuses on early intervention and specifically targets children, young people, and families identified to be most at risk of disengaging from education, particularly at points of transition. By collaborating with school staff and partners, the focus areas include improving attendance, reducing exclusions, increasing engagement, and raising attainment and achievement. Transition continues to be significant focus, with many effective programmes supporting primary-secondary transition, offering young people opportunities for social development, skill-building activities, and confidence-building in working with new people.

The Family Learning Team partners with schools, local community groups, and other agencies to engage parents, carers, and their children in learning activities that positively impact the whole family. These activities include outdoor learning, cooking classes, and parenting workshops, fostering positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. Individual and targeted support is also provided for behaviour, school attendance, helping parents to support their child's learning or providing advice and support for families whose children have additional support needs. The family learning team has developed strong relationships with various partner agencies to ensure families access the right support at the right time.

Families may be signposted or self-refer to the Financial Inclusion Team. Engagement with this service has led to significant financial gains for families across the city and has helped remove some of the barriers to school attendance experienced by families living in poverty such as access to suitable clothing. A Support for Families booklet detailing sources of support is updated regularly and issued electronically to all families with children in city schools three times each year. Hard copies are also available in all city schools.

Youth Work

Youth Workers in schools are an integral part of our model of Family Support aligned to The Promise. The Youth Work and Family Learning Teams have also committed 6 staff (4 youth workers and 2 Family Learning staff) to the multi-agency Edge of Care pilots. The learning and feedback from young people and families indicates that the 'pilots' offer valuable support to young people and families who have an escalating need and risk profile. Education Scotland and the ACC Youth Work and Family Learning teams have worked on an adapted version of the national Promise Award to make it more suitable for youth work and family learning providers across Scotland. This locally developed Keeping the Promise training will be delivered nationally by Education Scotland and by ACC Family Learning.

To address instances of increased youth disturbance reports in the city centre during school holiday periods, the ACC youth work team, with support from Community Safety and Police Scotland, have developed and delivered engagement and interventions in the city centre covering holiday periods. Activity has been focused on diverting young people away from risk taking behaviours in the city centre and included initial relationship building and capturing young people's voice relating to what there is to do in the city centre, where they are traveling from, instances of risk taking behaviours they take part in and their perceptions of feeling safe.

In some instances already formed relationships from youth work in schools has proved valuable in engaging young people in a different context. Alongside detached youth work provided by the ACC Youth Work team and Police Scotland, a Young Peoples City Centre Partnership Group has been formed to bring together city wide youth services and organisations across the partnership including ACC, H&SCP, business and the third sector. This group aims to support youth activity in our communities and city centre, identification of safe spaces for young people, to better understand the needs of young people regarding risk taking through action research and address health outcomes related to vaping and alcohol and substance use.

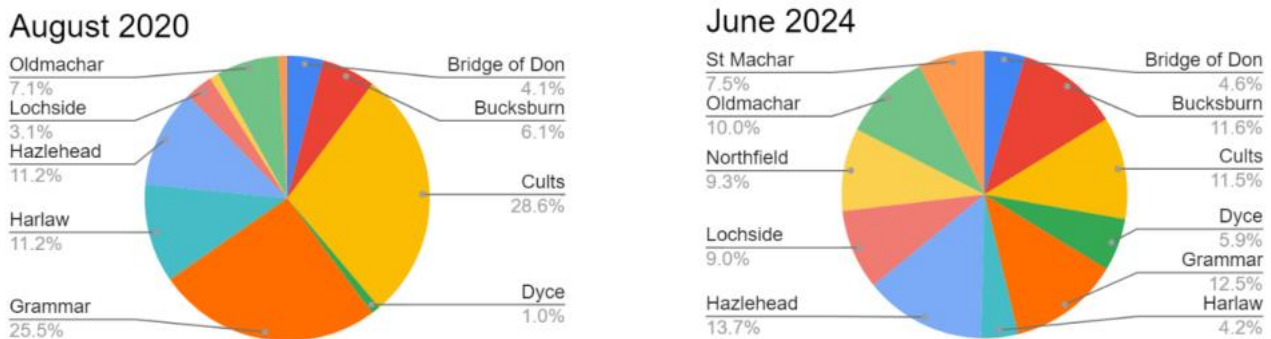
Progress against the Community Learning and Development Plan are regularly [reported](#) to Committee and exemplified through [case studies](#).

Removal of the costs of the school day

In all our schools, curriculum costs are fully covered, and resources for home learning are provided to learners who require them. Secondary schools have eliminated all fees for subjects that previously incurred costs, particularly in Home Economics, Art, and Technology. Yearly data analysis shows a steady increase in the number of S4-S6 students enrolling in practical classes in the majority of our schools since the removal of all curricular costs, which would suggest that some students had previously avoided these subjects due to the charges, even if they had an aptitude for and enjoyed them. This ongoing change has made access to the full curricular offer more equitable and inclusive.

Removal of Music Service costs

The Music Service has worked hard to ensure that children who may not have previously engaged with the service due to costs, have equitable access. The data below shows continued progress towards the aim to offer tuition on a more equitable basis across the city.



The service continues to [monitor](#) progress carefully.

Request for Assistance

The Request for Assistance (RFA) process is a vital mechanism for accessing support across services, providing a single access point for the ASN & Outreach, School Nursing Service, Children’s Social Work, Autism Outreach, and the Virtual School. It enables data analysis at system-wide, category, and individual levels, supporting targeted interventions and risk mitigation. Over three years, it has transformed working practices, resource allocation, and service commissioning. The system is now expanding to include all children’s services as part of a Family Support Model, with Version 2 in development.

The rollout of the Microsoft Education project has impacted on the current RFA process due to an incompatibility with the new Education Identity. A temporary workaround using legacy identities is in place but this highlights the need for RFA Version 2 as a long-term solution. The RFA Version 2 project is transitioning in-house, building on work from the Education Psychology Service Microsoft Project. The new system will enhance service levels and broaden access to RFA for partners supporting children, young people, and families.

Digital and Technology colleagues are defining the scope and timeline for Version 2, which will resolve compatibility issues and improve functionality. This approach ensures a sustainable and integrated solution. The RFA process remains critical in supporting children and young people by streamlining service access and enabling data-driven decisions. Version 2 will address current challenges, enhance the system’s value for all stakeholders and be a central component of our emerging family support model.

Wider achievement in schools

Day visits, which include all curricular and outdoor activities have been steadily increasing since 2022. There is now less reliance on privately booked coach travel due to increased costs, with pupils accessing free public bus travel wherever possible.

P6 and P7 residentials must now be planned and booked much earlier than in previous years due to increased demand and the closure of many outdoor centres over recent years. In order to keep costs to parents and carers at a minimum, schools have been thinking more creatively about P7 activity weeks. Kittybrewster primary pioneered an activity week where the staff and pupils camped using some of the equipment we hold centrally for our Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions.

The numbers of pupils participating in Aberdeen's Duke of Edinburgh's award programme has reached a record high with over 1000 participants. This is due to pupils continuing through the higher award levels along with new groups being set up including at Orchard Brae, the Virtual School and Oldmachar Academy. The Aberdeen Open Award Centre, which offers DofE opportunities to any young people in the City, is now based at Northfield Academy and has trained new volunteers to increase their capacity.



Aberdeen City has always had strong numbers of young people undertaking the John Muir Awards. Aberdeen has the 3rd highest level of pupils in Scotland achieving the award (443 young people achieving the award with 83 of these being inclusion awards in 2023). Other awards being undertaken in the city are: Saltire awards, Dynamic youth awards, Hi5 awards and Youth achievement awards.

The Amped project which is an automotive project based at Northfield Academy has now expanded to Hazlehead Academy where an after school programme is delivered for pupils interested in a career in the automotive sector. Due to the nature of the workshop training, groups sizes are limited to 4 with 20 young people enrolled in the course each term.

The Evolve system for the approval and management of educational visits, sports fixtures, and extracurricular activities is now well established having been running for 2 years. It has been widely praised by staff who prefer the simplicity and speed of the system. The Evolve system is now being rolled out to the youth work team. In 2024 statistics from Evolve shows:

- 2443 staff actively using the platform
- 3887 off site visits recorded
- 65,698 participant days recorded.

Access to Health Services

Tackling child poverty is a priority within NHS Grampian Health Inequalities Action Plan. Health services are working to mitigate the cost of attending appointments or hospital stays by designing a cash first approach.

NHS Grampian's partnership project funded by the Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund (CPAF) is underway to identify and address costs and cost-related barriers facing families accessing healthcare for their child. The intention is to map financial supports which may be available for families, to engage with families to understand their challenges and co-develop

solutions and then design a test of change. The CPAF application was with Aberdeenshire, with the intent to build on lived experience work there for the benefit of our whole population.

Aberdeen City is a vital partner in this work and colleagues within Aberdeen City and third sector organisations have been contributing to the initial mapping process to understand what supports families could be offered. Moving forward, there will be engagement with families and NHS staff to co-design support mechanisms for the benefit of all families accessing healthcare in Grampian such as to food and travel subsidies for patients and parents or carers.

Families have told us that they have missed appointments because they cannot afford the cost of travel and being able to claim costs back after the effect is not a solution. There is a new work stream underway to poverty proof discharge processes. This will include routine financial enquiry and onward referral where appropriate.

So, what next?

Far richer information is available when policies and plans are aligned. It will be important to fully embed the establishment of our next Children's Services Plan with work to develop our Local Outcome Improvement Plan for 2026-2036. This will trigger a need to review the timescales of the Children's Services Plan to better align with the LOIP.

There is a need to continue our work to ensure that the school curriculum is aligned to both growth and volume sectors, and to anticipate the skills required by the future workforce for example through our continued support of the Aberdeen Computing Collaborative.

ABZ works offers invaluable support to citizens, but now need to extend its reach further and continue to deepen their understanding of the barriers that our citizens face. ABZ Works will be a key partner in the development of our Future Libraries Model.

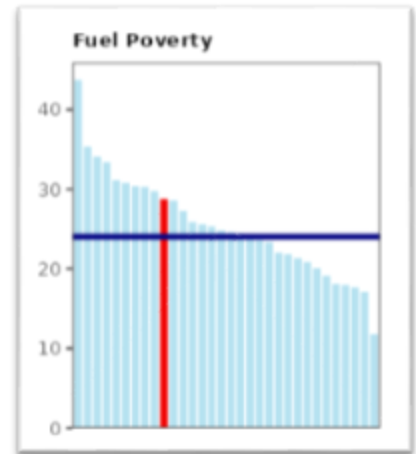
Health partners need to continue to understand and address the barriers that can result in poor health outcomes for some groups and communities.

Costs of living

The wider challenges created by the current Cost of Living crisis around fuel costs and high levels of inflation create a greater risk of families falling into poverty. Levels of fuel poverty in the city are currently far higher than the national average with the Local Authority ranked 10th out of 32 Local Authorities in this measure.

24.6% of City Voice respondents surveyed in 2024 reported they were worried they would not be able to heat their home, a decrease from 32.0% in December 2022.

The Local Authority continues to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City. The Supporting Families Booklet continues to be routinely shared with families through the school Groupcall system, along with a link to the benefit calculator. 98.5% of the 549 completed calculations showed an entitlement to benefits with an increase of £135,458.20 per week of new benefits, compared to £3673.09 previously. This routine sharing must be maintained.



Free period products

Access to Free period products has continued to improve with a focus on the awareness of provision and consistency of service.

A survey of pupils in June 2024, showed that 94% pupils were aware they could access products in school and 81% aware they could access products from community venues. This is a marked improvement from the baseline survey in 2022 where the reported figures were 84% and 61% respectively. The survey also showed that 32% pupils had picked up products, a slight increase from 30% in 2022. Period dignity is a priority of the councils statement of provision and schools have continued to develop manageable systems of free access.



A range of disposable and reusable products continue to be provided. Whilst sustainable options are gaining popularity, disposable products are still preferred. The council continues to work with CFINE to provide for the preferred needs reported by young people. 1294 boxes of products have been provided to schools between January 2024 and December 2024. This work must continue.

Deep Dive in Poverty

A Child Poverty 'deep dive' undertaken with the Public Health System Leadership Group on the 28th of May brought together NHS Grampian, Aberdeen City and pan-Grampian partners. The Group considered how best we can work collectively to achieve impact for the benefit of children and young people living in poverty in Grampian. The key themes to emerge were with regards to addressing costs and barriers faced by children, young people and families accessing our services, strengthening our partnership working and considering how best we use data together. This has led to the closer partnership working. The Child Poverty lead for NHS Grampian is now vice-chairperson on the Anti-Poverty Outcome Improvement Group which facilitates our shared ambition to progress partnership working and collaborative activity in this vital area.

Addressing food insecurity

Over the year the Fairer Aberdeen Fund supported the distribution of 629 tonnes of free food (the equivalent of 1.5m meals), and 1079 food bank users were referred to other support services. There

were 7,600 shops at community pantries, providing a more dignified and sustainable approach to food insecurity.

In addition, the Anti-Poverty Committee's cost of living fund has funded an additional 30.5 tonnes of free food (Equivalent to 72,620 meals) distributed to 69 organisations across the City and 500 weekly shops provided. Through this funding, 73 people were also provided income maximization support and advice.

Access to free Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

Over 95% parents and carers who responded to the last Parent and Carer Consultation (June 2023) identified ELC as having a positive impact on their child's development. The service continues to review demand for provision on an annual basis to ensure that the delivery models are designed around the needs of children and families.

The Scottish Government are currently undertaking some pilots to determine how best to further roll out School Age Childcare. The Authority has recently reported to Education and Children's Services Committee on the National Delivery Framework for School Age Childcare and remains well positioned to react positively to when more detailed delivery plans are developed in 2025/26. This will set out what a targeted School Age Childcare offer will look like for families within communities and providing a clear timescale for delivery.

Community support

Community Flats are supported in Cummings Park, Tillydrone and Seaton, to support people with a range of issues. Over the last year they supported people with welfare reform issues and have helped to address social isolation.

The Fairer Aberdeen Programme supported 135 parents and families with complex needs and 297 young people accessed 2,127 counselling sessions.

There were 600 contacts with older people to develop digital skills to help them keep in touch with their families and to access online services.

5,420 people saved with a credit union which provided £2.1m affordable loans, helping people avoid pay day loans and doorstep lenders.

981 households of older people and people with disabilities were supported with income maximisation and sourcing charitable funding, achieving a financial gain of over £537,000 and 1,742 households in priority areas received assistance with repairs, adaptations, and handyman services.

Fairer Aberdeen

Over 2023/24 the Fairer Aberdeen Programme funded 35 initiatives designed to tackle poverty and a total of 51,445 people have benefitted. The reach of the funding is wide with projects funded to support the development of pathways into work, family support, money advice and affordable loans and early intervention programmes designed to address gender based violence.

The Fairer Aberdeen Programme supported 827 volunteers, providing 139,495 hours of volunteering time, with a value of £2.2m. 5 Community Projects or Flats were funded in priority neighbourhoods to support community capacity building as well as providing a range of services and support. Funding was allocated to provide 220 winter clothing packs for families affected by poverty. There is now a need to ensure that the totality of offers available to families is more clearly

mapped and aligned to ensure that we maximise the impact of all available resource.

Provision of free breakfast clubs

There are an increasing range of breakfast clubs/wrap around supports for families. We have a mixed model of Breakfast provision in the city which can broadly be divided into the following three categories:

1. Registered provision – A Breakfast Club registered as childcare with Care Inspectorate and for which a fee is paid by parents / carers. (23 primary schools)
2. Unregistered provision – A free Breakfast service provided directly by the school. Often funded via Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to give children and young people a nutritional start to the day. (7 primary schools & 2 secondary schools)
3. ACC Catering service – A Breakfast service provided directly by Aberdeen City Council Catering Service at no or low cost to families, again to ensure children and young people start the day with some breakfast. (7 primary & 7 secondary schools)

The provision of free breakfasts for school pupils in Scotland is not a universal entitlement and is not currently in the Programme for Government for 2024-25. However, there is a very strong indication that it is likely to be included in future, as a targeted offer, as part of the Tackling Child Poverty agenda.

In the meantime, we are assured that we have good coverage of breakfast provision across the city and, in particular, in our priority areas with 70% of Primary Schools and 50% of Secondary Schools having access to Breakfast Club provision. We will continue to work with facilities colleagues, Head Teachers, internal and external School Age Childcare providers to ensure that breakfast is available where it is required and where need is identified.

Provision of IT

Aberdeen City Council is continuing its ambitious £17.7m investment in digital education services. Phase 1 of the delivery into schools was completed in October 2024 with phase 2 commencing in January 2025. High speed wide area connectivity, improved wifi access, modern devices and a better classroom experience are all included in the programme. Work will continue until December 2025 at which point the technical delivery will be replaced by new approaches to learning and teaching that have been run as tests of change during the phased roll out.

The programme will deliver: 14,000 laptops for learner use in schools, ensuring access to technology and promoting digital literacy; a device for every teacher to enhance lesson preparation, research, and communication and an improved classroom experience through the provision of Smart panels and classroom technology.

A virtual desktop environment is being piloted for subjects requiring high-specification computing, such as Art & Design, Computing Science, and Design & Technology, allowing remote access to advanced resources. Digital Champions across schools have received training to support the deployment of new educational services and this work will continue through the remaining technical delivery and beyond.

Warm Spaces

Warm Spaces have continued across the city, with a mix of Council premises and community and third sector organisations providing support.

There are 33 warm spaces across Libraries, Community Centres, Learning Centres, The Art Gallery, The Bon Accord Centre, Sport Aberdeen, Aberdeen Performing Arts and Faith Groups. Warm spaces continue to provide free access to safe, welcoming spaces across the city with a choice of location, activity and access to information, with each WarmSpace with its own unique offer including access to board games, family friendly activities and provider programmes.



The Warm spaces model in the city is influencing the development of safe spaces for young people in the city centre, being progressed through the Youth Network Partnership, starting with a test location within the Vaccination Centre in the Bon Accord Centre by AH&SCP and ACC CLD.

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Fuel Support

Fuel poverty can have a significant impact on people's mental and physical health, particularly over winter. The Anti-Poverty Committee's cost of living fund has provided 292 households with payment vouchers towards their fuel bills as well as tailored energy efficiency advice. Families have been able to heat their homes over winter to help ensure their general wellbeing, contributing to improvement in health outcomes in the long term.

Provision of free bus passes

The provision of free bus passes for children and young people has been promoted since the launch of the Under 22 Free Bus Travel Scheme. All 5-21 year olds resident in Scotland are eligible for Young Persons' Free Bus Travel, using a National Entitlement Card with the free bus travel product on it. The scheme has been promoted through multiple channels nationally and locally including through schools in order to increase awareness and to maximise uptake.

As of December 2024, over 32,615 young people have applied for and obtained a National Entitlement Card with free bus travel and are benefiting from this service, this is a considerable increase from the 29,621 reported in the last Annual Report.

Emergency formula

The Best Start in Life Group has had oversight of ensuring the implementation of a local Infant Feeding in a Crisis Pathway to that appropriate infant formula is available for new parents.

The Group work in collaboration with CFINE Aberdeen City Council and NHS Grampian to develop a 'cash first' approach using Pay Point. Significant progress has been made with all families referred while being supported by family nurse or health visitor supported. To date 58 vouchers issued to 41 families through the pathway. 11 families have had repeat support.

As well as receiving the voucher, all families received follow up contact from an adviser from the SAFE team, most with instructions as to how to use the vouchers and offered a financial screening appointment via phone, home visit or agency appointment.

In addition, 35 families were offered a benefit check and additional support with food access, grants for energy support and referrals for additional child related items such as from Abernecessities. 19 families were identified as having the full entitlements in place or were on maternity leave and

receiving maternity pay. Some were awaiting Child Benefits payments to start and did not require additional support with this from SAFE.

To date 16 families have had follow up support resulting from a benefit check. This has included support to claim additional welfare support via Social Security Scotland and Department of Work and Pensions. Including best start grant/food cards and Scottish Child Payment and from DWP there has been a variety of support with UC new claims /transfers from legacy benefits and noting additional elements to be added to the existing UC claim, Child benefit applications and advice on claiming childcare costs. From this support the financial gain is estimated to be in the region of £15,000. p/a. This cannot be noted as an exact figure without cross referencing all case outcomes for individual cases on the SAFECRM system alongside the pay point system. The full impact and evaluation of the pathway can be viewed in the [project end report](#).

Participants have provided positive feedback on the approach:

“The vouchers were a massive help to our family since our daughter requires the anti-reflux formula. This is about 133% of the price of an already expensive one. Monthly this adds up quickly. This has allowed us to prepare for winter, an expensive time generally. The other services such as the safe team and pantry have been a great help also. The pantry really helps us maintain cooking healthy meals without forking out an arm and a leg. The safe team have guided us through almost our first year financially which without, we would be struggling a lot more.” Local father who Received help from SAFE, IFP vouchers twice and attends the pantry on a regular basis.

“You give me £60 voucher for formula, and I also received pantry food, thank you, it has really helped”. Local mum who received lots of help with various issues relating to their baby.

Now that we have tested the pathway and confident that it is meeting the needs of those identified we recognise that at present it is limited to referrals from two professionals working with young parents. Therefore, we will now focus on spreading the pathway across the partnership agencies to ensure that regardless of touchpoint that people across Aberdeen City who need this support can be directly referred and use the Infant Feeding in a Crisis Pathway.

The Cash First approach is also being tested by the Anti-Poverty Group with single males aged 18-45 as part of a new project. It is hoped that cash first initiatives can be a longer term solution to food insecurity and poverty. Recognising that some of these males will be fathers and that this approach can support them foster positive relationships with their children.

The project enhances the already established Early Years Financial Inclusion pathway. Both pathways have been well received by Midwives, Health Visitors, the Family Nurse Partnership and Allied Health Professionals. The Financial Inclusion pathway is a universal pathway that asks and offers all women and families if they require financial support

Moving into the next phase of the work, the group is looking to extend the reach of the project providing training on the pathway and its referral process to other practitioners and services likely to come into contact with those who may need to use the Pathway. Work will also include the development and sharing of promotional materials in key settings (such as Libraries and ELC settings to increase the scope of self-referral from families themselves).

Food vouchers for holiday periods

Vouchers have been distributed to families who are eligible due to low income during holiday periods. The voucher, with a value of £25 for each two week period, continues to be welcomed. Around 700 less vouchers have been issued over each holiday period when compared to the numbers reported in the last annual report, suggesting that less families are now eligible due to changed circumstances.

Spring Holidays, 2024 – 4503 learners

Summer Holidays, 2024 – 4182 learners

Autumn Holiday, 2024 – 4402 learners

Winter Holiday, 2024 – learners

Best Start Food Grant

The number of Best Start and Best Start Foods grant applications received from city residents has seen a decline over recent years. In 2022/2023, there were 3,120 applications, while in 2023/2024, the number decreased to 1,750. As at the year-to-date (YTD) figure for 2024/2025, there have been 935 applications.

This trend aligns with the Scotland-wide data, where applications decreased from 85,825 in 2022/2023 to 53,266 in 2023/2024, representing a 37.9% reduction. The city's share of Scotland-level applications also dropped slightly from 3.6% in 2022/2023 to 3.3% in 2023/2024.

School Clothing Grants

As of December 2024, 4284 free school clothing grants have been approved over the year. This equates to grants for 2669 Primary pupils and 1,615 secondary pupils and is broadly in line with those awarded last year.

Access to Out of School Care (SAC)

While we have good coverage of SAC in Aberdeen there is still a demand for more places. Therefore it is important that we work with our partners to continually assess supply and demand across the city, and when and where possible either expand on existing provisions and/or create new services. As SAC is a paid for service, it is important that any new services are viable and sustainable. Expansion also has to take account of space available and the maximum number of registered places according to Care Inspectorate registration.

With almost a quarter of respondents (24%) saying they will require School Age Childcare for their preschool children currently attending an ELC nursery and/or childminder it is important that we also look ahead and consider future coverage. Therefore we must continue to facilitate communication between parents, carers currently accessing ELC Nursery provisions and childminders and all SAC providers regarding future supply and demand.

Affordability continues to be a concern for many families with almost 17% saying they do not access SAC due to cost. We are also increasingly aware that cost can be an ongoing concern for many families who are currently in work but facing cost of living challenges. 46% of families saying they were not aware of any available financial support and only 28% of respondents currently receiving support it is essential that this information is made more readily available. We will work with the Financial Inclusion Team and all SAC providers to ensure that all parents and carers are made aware of what financial support is potentially available to assist with the costs of SAC. We will also link with the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) to ensure that all information shared is current and in line with their of their existing drive to promote potentially available childcare financial support and benefits.

In order to respond positively to the findings of this survey, the Early Years team have:

- established a focus group with our School Age Childcare partners to help develop and inform the refresh of the Aberdeen City School Age Childcare Policy;
- gained Committee approval of updated and refreshed School Age Childcare [Policy](#)
- engaged and communicated with parents, and carers whose children are currently attending ELC nursery and childminder settings to monitor future projections of potential supply and demand. At this time we also communicate the importance of planning ahead with regards to wrap around care once children transition to primary school;
- continued to promote the availability of potential financial support and benefits available to assist in the cost of childcare; and
- developed a more detailed understanding of our own SAC services which we will continue to consult and engage with Aberdeen City Council service users directly to ensure that we are continuing to meet their needs within our services.

So, what next?

There is considerable work being undertaken in this area and this will continue in line with current plans. The Education and Lifelong Learning service remains ready to progress any expansion of targeted School Age Childcare in line with national policy when known.

There is a need to look at potential duplication across different partners to ensure that we can demonstrate best value around common themes such as financial advice, counselling and wider family support. This may be best undertaken as part of our model of Family Support and will rely on a high level of common data collection and sharing, and openness to new commissioning arrangements.

Income from social security and benefits in kind

Money Advisors in schools

The Council has attached Money Advisors to schools to help support families within their own communities through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding.

As the Advisors have become established, they have become more familiar with the scenarios facing families, and as awareness of the service has grown, their impact has significantly increased. The notable rise in financial gains achieved through the Advisors indicates their growing effectiveness and integration within the community. Additionally, the increased use of the On-line benefits calculator and the Financial Inclusion Service through alternative routes suggests that families are now accessing support through a variety of channels.

Over the last year the 2 Money Advisors who are attached to the Financial Inclusion Services have helped families achieve:

- Financial Gains of £374,610.85
- Assisted/Assisting 102 households with debt issues.
- Helping with total debts of £765,953.16
- 224 households were given full benefit checks.
- Assisted 47 households to claim benefits.
- Assisting 3 households to challenge being turned down for benefits.

Families who have accessed the Financial Inclusion Service independently of the school Money Advisors have been helped to achieve further:

- Financial Gains - £647,787.14
- Assisted/assisting 135 household with debt issues
- Helping with debts of £1,572,482.65
- 163 households given full benefit checks.
- Assisted 51 households to claim benefits.
- Assisted 28 households to challenge being turned down for benefits.

Data from the online benefits calculator shows that 2435 families have used the online benefit calculator. Of the completed calculation, 1679 families had £471,803.73** per week of new benefits identified.

**This does not confirm if they went onto claim the benefit as this is anonymised and could be people doing several calculations.

Maximising the update of benefits

Significant progress has been seen as more families access entitlements through Money Advisors linked to schools, funded by Strategic Equity Funding. Money advisors offer confidential help on financial matters, assisting families in accessing benefits, grants, emergency funds, and food banks.

Resources and support booklets are available electronically through schools and in hard copies, covering various stages of a child's development to support parents. These booklets are shared thrice yearly via school communication channels. Data available indicates a substantial increase in benefits being accessed following booklet distribution (from £15,301.26/week to £135,458.20/week) following August 2024 distribution.

Comprehensive support from advisors assists families with dealing with creditors, negotiating payment plans, and accessing emergency funds, positively impacting child poverty, wellbeing, development, participation, family resilience, and preventing family breakdowns and homelessness.

The implementation of the Policy in Practice LIFT Dashboard has further enabled the Local Authority to identify households most in need, allowing for targeted support and effective resource prioritisation. Since 1 November 2024, targeted communications have been initiated with 86 families affected by the benefit cap. These efforts involve engaging households through various channels, offering specific discretionary housing payments to mitigate income losses caused by the benefit cap, and working towards long-term financial improvements to achieve exemptions from the cap.

Additional funding of £96,382 for Scottish Welfare Fund has been made available to support Crisis Grant applications. This also includes provision of benefit and financial advice, as well as further support to ensure the provision of adequate emergency food.

Scottish Child Payment

Social Security Scotland data shows that in 2023/24, there were 1,720 applications from city residents to the Scottish Child Payment fund. This represented a significant reduction on 2022/23 which peaked at over 5,700.

As at 30th September 2024, this figure was 820 offering a half-year position that, notwithstanding variable monthly trends, would indicate a forecast figure at 2024/25 year-end that could be similar to, or potentially lower than, in 2023/24.

This figure represents 4% of all applications to the national scheme, similar to that recorded in the previous years of this payment, This is below the population adjusted average for Scotland's Urban Local Authorities, and in line with Edinburgh, our closest matching authority.

At the end of September 2024, the scheme had 10,335 children in Aberdeen benefitting from this scheme. At the same point in 2023, this number was 10,265. Taking recent population projections and previous estimates into account, these numbers represent roughly similar proportions of the city's children for each year.

Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund

Funding secured from the Scottish Government has secured the development of a "Low Income Family Tracker" which allows Aberdeen City Council to identify families in crisis, or those at risk of falling into crisis, who would benefit financially from targeted pro-active engagement. The tracker brings together indicators of poverty from multiple data sources held by the Council, The Department for Works Pension and other publicly available data. This is now operational and is informing targeted prevention work.

Free school meals

Data taken from the annual Healthy Living Survey saw free school meal uptake in Primary Schools rise from 72.3% in 2023 to 74.5% in 2024. Uptake in Secondary Schools fell from 56.5% in 2023 to 49.7% in 2024.

Uptake of free school meals varies considerably from school to school and the school catering service continues to work with local schools to better understand the factors influencing children and young people to not take up their entitlement and reports progress to [Committee](#). According

to the most recent data from the Healthy Living Survey, the percentage uptake in Primary Schools currently sits at 74.5% and 49.7% in Secondary Schools.

A number of initiatives are in train to help to address uptake challenges in our Secondary Schools. The Catering Service concluded the implementation of a pre-order App for all Secondary School pupils in October 2024, and there are early signs that the App has been well received. An additional snack bar has been added to the available catering service points in Cults Academy.

The work to establish a food hub at St Machar Academy to test an alternative approach has unfortunately been delayed. The food hub is to be situated outwith the main school building and provide 'grab and go' food provision, allowing pupils to be outwith school to meet their friends but still take up their free school meal entitlement. The installation of the pod is now expected in summer 2025, coinciding with other works taking place in the school playground including external dining facilities. An external point of sale and external dining facilities are also proposed as part of the proposals for a new extension at Harlaw Academy.

Update of Early Learning and Childcare for Eligible 2s

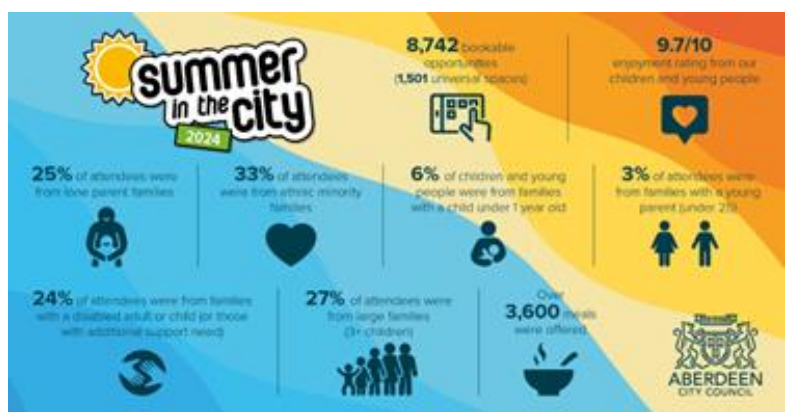
202 Eligible 2 year old children were placed in ELC in 2023/24, representing approximately 37.4% of the eligible population. (+6% from 2022/23). The introduction of a new Data Pipeline Project with the DWP has helped to increase uptake through better targeting of those who are eligible. The team have also implemented improved processes to increase uptake further and we expect to see higher numbers again in 2024/25. Work to expand uptake is included in our refreshed [Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan](#) published this year.

In the City Programmes

In line with the aims of the previous 'In the City' holiday programmes, the main focus remains to encourage participation and to maximise the positive opportunities available to young people and their families with a particular focus on those within the Tackling Child Poverty Plan priority groupings.

The programme continues to engage with the widest demographics, providing free opportunities for both priority families and those who do not identify as part of a priority group to take part. The programme targets the 5-14 years age group with some activities still being made available for those not in this age range. Bookable opportunities for priority families have taken the form of short, family, half-day and full-day sessions.

Since summer 2021, the programmes have provided more than 64,000 bookable opportunities, including weeklong/ multiday camps and childcare camps, day long and short activities being offered, as well as numerous drop-in activities in parks, museums, galleries and local communities and bespoke programmes for those with complex additional support needs.



The enjoyability rating as provided by children and young people for the Summer 2024 programme was 9.7 out of 10. This rating was consistent with the previous programme. Progress continues to be reported to [Committee](#). On-going funding of the programme will be considered as part of the Council budget setting process.

So, what next?

In addition to the work already in place and being progressed through the Children's Services Plan, the Council and its Community Planning Partners remain committed to using all available tools to enable young people and families to access financial support and the benefits for which they are eligible.

Having delivered significant improvement in benefits uptake, Community Planning Aberdeen have reset targets for the city to increase this by a further 10% by 2025.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROMISE



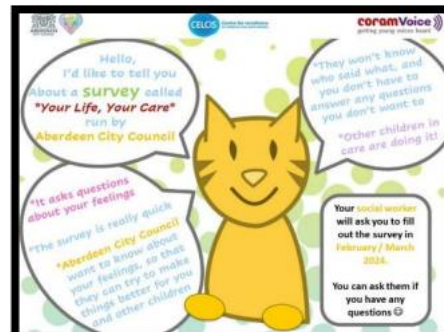
Central to the work of the Children's Services Board is delivery of The Promise. The Children's Services Board reviewed progress in delivering Plan 21-24 in October 2024. The [evaluation](#) highlighted that good progress is being made in a number of areas but that there is more to do. This position is reflected nationally.

Bright Spots

Through the later part of 2023/24, children's social work entered into a partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) and Coram Voice to initiate our widest reaching participatory activity with our care experienced community in order to determine the extent to which our children and young people experience a good childhood and have the right supports in place.

'Bright Spots' is a research and service improvement project set up by Coram Voice to understand what is important to children in care and care leavers and share learning about what makes life good for them by measuring subjective well-being. Having demonstrated our strategic buy in and commitment to embedding the voice of children in local decision making processes, 2 cohorts were surveyed.

The 'Your Life Your Care' survey was presented to 345 children/young people aged 4 – 17 years, and 'Your Life Beyond Care' to 227 young people aged 16 – 26 years.



The initial findings and areas for consideration and improvement are detailed below and are being discussed with CELCIS to better understand the responses given by our children and young people.

Your Life, Your Care (for those aged 4 – 17 years)

249 children in care responded to the survey from a total eligible population of 345: a response rate of 72%. This is very high compared to the national average.

Positive findings include:

- More than half of children and young people (11- 17yrs) in Aberdeen had the same social worker over the last year and significantly fewer children and young people had three or more social workers in this period compared to the Bright Spots comparator group.

- 70% of young people gave high or very high scores (7 to 10) for happiness with the way they look. This is significantly higher than the proportion of the Bright Spots comparator group (61%).
- Six out of seven (86%) children and young people in care (8-17yrs) felt their lives were getting better.
- 61% of all children aged 8-11yrs with brothers and sisters felt that the time they were able to spend with them was 'just the right amount', higher than the Bright Spots comparator group (47%).
- Almost all (99%) of young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen felt that they had an adult who they trusted and who sticks by them no matter what; a significantly higher percentage than the average (91%) of the Bright Spots comparator group of local authorities.
- All of the youngest children (4- 7yrs) trusted the adults they lived with, and all children aged 8-11yrs trusted the adults they live with 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. 95% of 8-11yrs and 94% of 11-17yrs indicated that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- 93% of children and young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen always felt safe where they lived, this is significantly higher than the percentage of the Bright Spots comparator group (86%). Unusually, this is also higher than the percentage for the youngest children (4- 7yrs) in Aberdeen (87%)
- The proportion of children and young people in Aberdeen City who spent time outdoors in nature more than once a week (88% of children (8-11yrs) and 89% of young people (11-17yrs)) was higher than the general Scottish population (67%).
- 92% of 8-11yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt listened to when decisions were made about their lives, and this was even higher for young people (11- 17yrs) (94%).

Areas for consideration stemming from the survey responses from those aged 4-17:

- Fewer children and young people in Aberdeen had received an explanation about why they were in care and did not want to know more when compared to children and young people in the Bright Spots comparator group. (48% to 65% for 8-11yrs, 69% to 78% for 11- 17yrs).
- As children and young people in Aberdeen got older, fewer reported having a pet at home (78% of 8-11yrs and 56% of 11-17yrs), and significantly less children and young people (11-17yrs) had a pet when compared to the Bright Spots comparator group.
- The proportion of young people (11-17yrs) with a really good friend was well below that of the general population (91% to 97%).
- A quarter of children (8-11yrs) and one in ten of children aged over 11yrs did not know they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own. These proportions are both significantly above those for the Bright Spots comparator groups
- Many of the comments from children and young people across all age groups related to their relationships with parents, and brothers and sisters. Children and young people (8- 17yrs) reported mixed views and experiences of family time, and the complexity of many family arrangements came across, such as children seeing some of their brothers and sisters but not others. Just over a third (34%) of children aged 8-11yrs reported that the amount of time they spent with their mum was 'just right' and 18% felt time with their dad was just right. Of young people aged 11-17yrs , more children (45%) felt time with their mum was 'just right, but just 20% thought time with their dad was 'just right'.
- A significantly higher proportion (43%) of children and young people (8-11yrs) in Aberdeen reported being afraid of going to school because of bullying when compared to the Bright Spots comparator group. Of those who were afraid, most were getting help.

- Whilst the majority (87%) of children (4-7yrs) said that they 'always' felt safe at home, when compared to the Bright Spots comparison group, a higher proportion of children (4-7yrs) in Aberdeen said that they didn't always feel safe where they lived.

The proportion of young people (11-17yrs) in Aberdeen City giving positive scores was significantly above the Bright Spots group for several key wellbeing indicators:

- Very high/high scores for feeling that the things they do are worthwhile (76% to 65%).
- 'Very happy' yesterday (44% to 35%). Very high scores for feeling positive about the future. (45% to 36%)

Life Beyond Care (for those aged 16-26)

156 young people responded to the survey from a care leaver population of 227: a remarkable response rate of 69%. This is very high compared to the national average.

Positive findings include:

- Two-thirds (66%) of comments about Youth Team Workers or Social Workers were very positive. More care leavers than children and young people (11-17yrs) in care in Aberdeen trusted their worker (79% to 69%) and found it easy to get in touch with them (75% to 58%). Workers came second only to friends as providers of emotional support identified by care leavers. 43% of care leavers had a pet, which is a significantly greater proportion than the 28% of the Bright Spots comparator group. Over half (54%) of care leavers with pets felt they were a source of emotional support.
- More than nine in ten of care leavers (92%) who answered felt that they had a person who they trusted, who helped them and stuck by them no matter what. This is significantly above the proportion for the Bright Spots comparator group (86%). 96% had a person who listened to them. 90% had a person who believed they would be a success. 88% had a person who told them when they'd done well.
- Care leavers (94%) in Aberdeen more often had access to the internet at home compared to young people (83%) in the Bright Spots comparator group.

Areas for consideration stemming from the survey responses from those aged 16-26:

- Three in four young people with experience of care felt that where they lived now was right for them. One in four did not. 30% did not 'always' feel safe in their home and 36% did not 'always' feel safe in their neighbourhood. 41% did not 'always' feel settled in their home.
- One in five (22%) care leavers felt lonely 'often/always', over twice the rate for young people in the general population. This was more than seven times the rate for young people in the general population (3%). One in six care leavers (17%) did not have at least one good friend. This is more than eight times greater than the rate for young people in general population (2%).
- Over a third (35%) young people indicated that they had a long-term health problem or disability, and over half (27) of those providing further information mentioned mental health conditions (most commonly depression and anxiety).
- Nearly half (47%) of care leavers in Aberdeen were not in education, employment or training compared to just 13% of 16-24 year-olds in the general population. The proportion finding it difficult to get by financially was almost three times that of the general population of 16-24 year-olds
 - Almost a third of care leavers (31%) gave low scores for happiness with their appearance. The Bright Spots comparator group figure was 28%.
 - 54% of care leavers reported high or very high happiness the previous day compared to 75% of young people (16-24yrs) in the general UK population. Care leavers in

Aberdeen also had greater levels of anxiety the previous day, with almost a third of care leavers (31%) giving high anxiety scores compared to 22% of the general population.

Over a third of care leavers gave low anxiety scores, and this rate was just under that of the general population (35% to 37%). One in five care leavers (21%) gave very high scores when asked to what extent they felt things they did in their lives were worthwhile.

There was a degree of polarisation in Aberdeen, with wellbeing indicators suggesting some care leavers doing very well, and others doing much less well. Wellbeing findings in Aberdeen were broadly similar to the Bright Spots comparator group.

There are indications from the survey, that the structural inequalities that exist for our young care leavers disproportionately impacts on them. We recognise that as a partnership we need to continue our efforts to mitigate these inequalities and support our care leavers to maximise their potential.

As noted the above findings require to be read with caution. It is important that assumptions are not made while we work with CELCIS over the coming months to dig into the data to better understand the responses given by our young people. This activity will also support us to ensure we target our improvement activities on the correct areas.

This project has encompassed the ethos intrinsic to the Promise 5 Foundations having provided our care experienced community the opportunity to share their voice, and feel they are genuinely being listened to. The findings will be fully considered as we transition to Plan 24 – 30 and as we refresh single service and multi-agency Plans such as our Children’s Services Plan.

Preparations for the second Change Plan

We welcome the national indicators recently published by Promise Scotland. Baseline data across these indicators has been collated to aid our readiness for implementation.

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
Where children are in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way	The rate of children entering care decreases. For those that do need to enter care, a higher proportion are able to stay living at home with parents, or in a family setting in kinship care or foster care	Number and rate of children in the ‘care system’ during the year	457 as of 31.07.24 compared to 500 as of 31.07.2023.
		2. Number of children (0-17 years) entering the ‘care system’ during the year	200 over academic year ending 2023/24 compared to 138 over 2022/23
		3. Number and percentage of children in the ‘care system’ who are living at home with parents	60 (13%) as of 31/07/24 compared to 61(12.2%) as of 31.07.2023.
		4. Number and percentage of children in the ‘care system’ living in the community	35 (8%) as of 31.07.2023 (Voluntary Home, Other Community, Secure, LA Home)
		5. Number and percentage of children who are living in kinship	96 (21%) as of 31.07.23.
		6. Number and percentage of children who are living in foster care	210 (46%) as of 31.07.24.

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
	The underlying universal support system must support all families and identify those who need more support.	7. Number and percentage of children who are living in residential care each year	51/11 (residential school & other residential) equating to 15% as of 31.07.23.
		1. Rate of registrations to the child protection register from initial and pre-birth Case Conferences during the year per 1,000 0-15 year olds	12.5% as of 31.07.24 (please note not all children are 0-15 as not measured this way in national minimum data set. Also includes pre-birth.)
		2. Percentage of child death reviews which identified modifiable factors in a child's death	Not currently held.
		3. Percentage of children with a developmental concern recorded at their 13-15 months, 27-30 months, and 4-5 year reviews.	13-15mth: Aberdeen – 8.4% Scotland – 12.5% 27-30 mnth: Aberdeen – 10.2% Scotland: 17.9% 4-5 yr: Aberdeen – 17.2% Scotland – 16.6%
		4. Number and percentage of children living in temporary accommodation.	442 households in temp 85 (19.2%) with children
		5. Two year averaged estimate of the number and proportion of children living in relative poverty after housing costs.	7,378/18.9%
		6. Two-year averaged estimate of the number and proportion of children living in absolute poverty after housing costs.	6,011/15.4%
		7. Number and rate of children on the Child Protection Register, with domestic abuse listed as a concern identified.	21 as of 31.07.24. 0.5 per 1000
		Scotland must limit the number of moves that children experience and support carers to continue to care.	The average number of homes a child experiences each year decreases.
For children for whom it is safest to live away from their family, there must be sufficient availability of carers who can provide stable	1. Number of registered foster care households per 1,000 0–17-year-olds, and relative to number of children in the 'care system'.		74 households 1.9 1000 children
	2. Number of foster carer deregistration's in the last year.		1 De-registration in the last year.
	3. Care Homes for children and young people and residential special schools workforce:		

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
	loving environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Size of WTE (Whole-time equivalent) workforce, rounded to the nearest 10 - Vacancy rate in Care Homes for children and young people - Vacancy rate in residential special schools 	<p>50 - ACC</p> <p>8.7% - ACC</p>
		<p>4. The Secure care workforce, in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Size of WTE workforce, rounded to the nearest 10 - Vacancy rate 	Not applicable
	There must be sufficient capacity within children's social services to recruit loving, attentive carers and support them to continue to care, and provide children and young people with stability when moves need to happen	<p>1. Staff working in children's fieldwork services, including qualified social workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WTE (rounded to nearest 10) - Rate per 100,000 0-17 year olds - Stability index 	<p>130</p> <p>1 member of staff to 300 children.</p>
Schools in Scotland must be ambitious for care experienced children and ensure they have all they need to thrive, recognising that they may experience difficulties associated with their life story.	Care experienced young people spend more time in school.	1. Rate of attendance for pupils who experienced care at some point within the school year.	88.36% (2022/23)
		2. Cases of exclusions per 1,000 pupils who experienced care at some point within the school year.	477.01 (rate per 1,000 – 2022/23)
	The average attainment of care experienced young people increases.	<p>1. Proportion of pupils who experienced care at some point within the school year at stages P1, P4, P7 and S3 achieving the curriculum for excellence level relevant to their stage.</p>	<p>P1 (22/23) Reading – 81.82% Writing – 72.73% L&T – 81.82% Numeracy – 90.91%</p> <p>P4 (22/23) Reading – 62.5% Writing – 62.5% L&T – 50% Numeracy – 62.5%</p> <p>P7 (22/23) Reading – 60% Writing – 60%</p>

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
			L&T – 80% Numeracy - 60% S3 – Levels 3 & 4(22/23) Reading – 36.36% Writing – 36.36% L&T – 45.45% Numeracy – 50% S3 – Level 4 (22/23) Reading – 0% Writing – 0% L&T – 9.09% Numeracy – 50%
		2. Proportion of pupils who experienced care during their last year at school achieving at least one SCQF level 5 qualification (or better).	FROM INSIGHT (2023) 29.41%
		3. Proportion of pupils who experienced care during their last year at school achieving at least 1 SCQF level 6 qualification (or better).	FROM INSIGHT (2023) 5.88%
		4. Proportion of pupils who experienced care during their last year at school in a positive destination 9 months after leaving school.	Not currently recorded.
Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.	The number of brother and sisters staying together in the 'care system' increases.	1. Proportion of family groups living in foster families who have been separated.	33.82% (As of 02/01/2025 – from D365)
		2. Number and proportion of new foster care households approved for family groups of 2 children, and 3 or more children.	1 new fostering household approved in 2024 to take a family group of 2/3.
Scotland must strive to become a nation that does not restrain its children.	The use of physical restraint in residential care should be reduced, and where possible eliminated.	1. Number of incidences of physical restraint reported between 1st January and 31st December in care homes for children and young people.	Aberdeen City does not utilise physical restraint as a means of managing children's behaviour within our care homes. We are aware that we commission care from external providers who do

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
			utilise this approach. It is the duty of the care provider to record such instances.
		2. Number of incidences of seclusion reported between 1st January and 31st December in care homes for children and young people.	Aberdeen City does not utilise seclusion as a means of managing children's behaviour within our care homes. We are aware that we commission care from external providers who do utilise this approach. It is the duty of the care provider to record such instances.
		3. Number of incidences of Physical restraint reported between 1st January and 31st December in secure care.	Nil
		4. Number of incidences of seclusion reported between 1st January and 31st December in secure care.	Nil
		5. Number of incidences of physical restraint reported between 1st January and 31st December in school accommodation services.	
		6. Number of incidences of seclusion reported between 1st January and 31st December in school accommodation services.	
Scotland must seek to uphold the wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people and ensure that there is timely access to, mental health support before crisis point so that children can avoid hospitalisation.	The number of staff employed in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is proportionate to demand.	1. Number of staff employed in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	
Care experienced children and young people have access to	Health outcomes, and access to health services improve for	No Indicator Identified	

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
support ensuring that their health needs are fully met.	care experienced children and young people.		
Scotland must stop locking up children who have often experienced the failures of the state in the provision of their care.	The number of young people entering young offenders' institutions decreases.	1. Number of under 21s in custody.	Justice Team
		2. Average number of children in secure care on a given day throughout the year.	Justice Team
		3. Number of referrals to the children's reporter on offence grounds.	Justice Team
Young adults for whom Scotland has taken on parenting responsibility must have a right to return to care and have access to services and supportive people to nurture them.	The number of young care experienced people receiving support increases.	1. Proportion of young people who are eligible for aftercare services who are receiving services.	73% (2023)
		2. Number and proportion of eligible young people who are going on to continuing care.	44 currently classed as 'Continuing Care'.
Care experienced adults must have a right to access to supportive, caring services for as long as they require them. Those services and the people who work in them must have a primary focus on the development and maintenance of supportive relationships that help people access what they need to thrive.	The number of households experiencing homelessness decreases.	1. Number and rate of people of working age living in poverty.	The number of working age adults living in relative poverty from the most recent data was 29,143. This equates to 19% of adults in this age group.
		2. Number of households living in temporary accommodation.	As at 31st March 2023 there were 7 care experienced households accommodated in temp, at the same point in 2024 there were 8. At 31st December 2024 there were 10 households. Currently there are 8
		3. Number of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.	April 2024 Jan 25 – 25 2023/24 – 25 2022/23 - 18
	Support for people who use drugs or alcohol increases.	1. Number and proportion of people receiving help for problematic drug and alcohol use within waiting times standard.	Alcohol: 18 (Dec 24) 95% started treatments within 21 days Drugs: 22 (Dec 24) 100% started treatments within 21 days

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2024/25)	Data
	Support for adult mental health increases.	1. Number and proportion of people receiving psychological therapy within referral guidelines	

Aberdeen City welcomes publication of Plan 24 – 30, which restates our collective ambition to improve the lives and outcomes of all children and young people with care experience and ensures a stronger preventative approach that mitigates the need for children and young people to enter formal care settings. The Promise Progress Framework will provide an opportunity to ensure a greater level of consistency to reporting progress to deliver on the ambitions of the Promise. It will enable benchmarking against national reporting and enhance opportunities for partnerships to share learning and improvement activity with each other. Wrapped around the framework will be the need to ensure a continuing approach to capture the experiential impact of the changes we as a partnership are making.

The Children’s Services Board have agreed to adopt the Framework as a data reporting tool that we consider on a regular basis, appreciating that some data sets are only updated annually. Doing so will allow us to ensure we have early sight of areas where great collective effort may be required to effect the anticipated change.

Whole Family Wellbeing Funding

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) is a £500 million investment over the current Scottish Parliament (2022 to 2026). As part of Element 1, £32 million has been provided in each of the financial years 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024 to support Children's Services Planning Partnerships across Scotland to scale up and drive the delivery of whole family support services in their areas and build capacity for transformational change.

In Aberdeen City we have invested our WFWF in a variety of areas to support our children, young people and their families to improve our holistic whole family wellbeing offer, including:

Scaling up Youth and Family Support

Scaling up new ways of working to support early intervention work. Investment in work of Youth Workers, Family Learning and Financial Inclusion (early prevention work) aligned to Family Support Model.

The development and implementation of collaborative and creative approaches to address and meet the needs of children, young people and families across the city continues to be the focus for this resource which is contributing to:

- Increased and easier access to Access to Money support
- Reduced levels of exclusion
- Increased levels of attendance
- Increased levels of parental engagement
- Increased levels of attainment

Request for Assistance

Developing the second version of our Request for Assistance system in order to create a single pathway for families to access support services.

Testing of the system has been progressing well with really positive engagement from third sector partners. The resource will be integrated into our existing systems to allow a single point of truth for those supporting families as well as a single point of referral. We are continuing to sign up partners looking towards phase 2 where families will be able to self-refer.

Co-Located Multidisciplinary Teams

Piloting co-located multidisciplinary teams in Northfield and Lochside Academies to ensure more effective and holistic planning for the children and families most in need of our support.

The multi-disciplinary teams have been established in Northfield and Lochside Academies. There continues to be a base within Northfield Academy which is on site to be available and accessible to the young people who have been identified as requiring extra support individually and as a family.

Supporting Kinship Carers

Building the capacity of kinship carers to enable them to feel better supported and have their own needs recognised more effectively. A range of engagement activity has been undertaken with kinship carers. This highlighted strengths and areas where improvement have been made. Support to kinship carers is now offered from a variety of multi agencies and this is facilitated, in part by the funding of a CDO spanning Kinship/Family Learning/Fit like Hubs via WFWF. New support groups have been established including a Kinship/ASN group. Two Information Events have taken place,

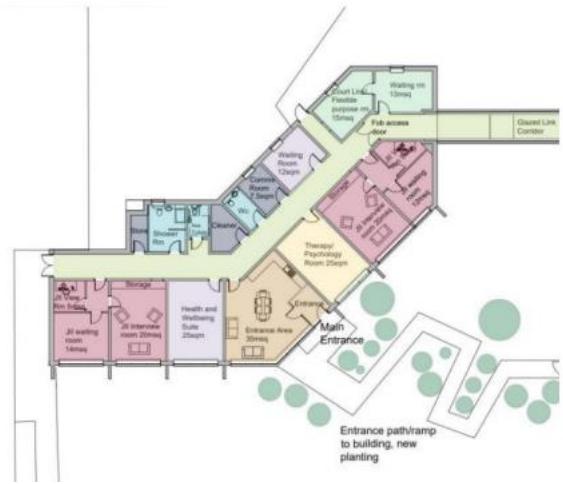
linking kinship families with relevant organisations and a Support Guide has been given to all carers.

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM)

Rolling out SCIM in order to ensure that every child who has experienced abuse or neglect has access to a Bairn's Hoose model of support including access to a trauma recovery service.

We have successfully embedded SCIM across our child protection service. We will take this learning into the development of our Bairns Hoose which will offer a multi-agency and co-located service. This service will be rights focused and ensure 'recovery' is core to our intervention.

The recovery element will be fully aligned to our wide family support offer. The Bairns Hoose has been designed in collaboration with young people to create a trauma informed environment in which children, young people and their families feel safe when accessing child protection supports.



Place2Be

Supporting the development the Place2Be project, focussing on the mental health of children under the age of 10.

Pilot testing has been undertaken at Kingswells School with Place2Be counselling for a year. Place2Talk offers our pupils the opportunity to attend drop-in sessions so they can receive counselling in the moment without needing to be referred or join waiting lists. In the last year 116 pupils have been seen over 66 sessions.

Parent Support – Children with Disabilities

Improving the peer and community support available for children with disabilities within Aberdeen City.

HOW WELL HAS THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES BOARD WORKED TOGETHER?



The working arrangements and successes of the Children's Services Board

The Children's Services Board has led a review of Sub Group Terms of Reference to ensure that the Third Sector is appropriately represented. In addition, consideration has been given to how best to strengthen arrangements to elicit and act on the voices of children, young people and families at Sub Group level. We have considered the accessibility of the reports we generate and now produce child and easy read versions of key reports. Arrangements will continue to be kept under review, particularly as we respond positively to the Statutory Guidance on Part 3 of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.

The Children's Services Board has invested time in considering how best to track progress against our ambitious plan. Revisiting our arrangements for tracking progress has enabled a more direct link to reports being presented to Community Planning Aberdeen, as a result the Board can now more quickly take action when risks and issues are identified. These changes continue to build a culture of collective responsibility and candour amongst Board members.

Considerable time has been invested by our Sub Groups in the development of Improvement Project Charters with examples of on-going work shown in the appendices. Taking this approach has supported new groups of staff from across the Community Planning Partnership to join forces on shared projects aligned with our Plan. The progress of each charter is routinely reported to the Community Planning Aberdeen Board.

Over the course of this year our Sub Groups have helped bring 8 of our 32 projects to a successful completion well ahead of the end of our Children's Services Plan (links to detailed reports on each can be found in the appendix).

Improving our knowledge of our local systems. In addition to providing leadership to our Sub Groups, the Children's Services Board has collaborated to evaluate progress on a number of key national policies. This has included evaluating our progress in realising the changes described in the first Promise Change Plan and our success in embedding children's rights. As we move forward, the statutory Children's Rights Report and progress against the second Change Plan will be fully embedded into our Children's Services Plan Annual Report so that the connections across different policies are fully taken into account. Recently published Promise outcomes have been incorporated into this Annual Report as a first step towards that aim and a Power BI with live tracking data is under development to aid the Board's routine oversight of progress.

The Children's Services Board reviewed the findings of the Children with Disabilities Thematic Review of Children's Social Work Services undertaken by the Care Inspectorate. This has helped ensure we are responding positively to the voices of our disabled children and their families. We are pleased that The Care Inspectorate recognised the quality of local Child's Plans, assessing the majority of Plans as Good or better. We are also proud that the Inspectorate recognise that effective arrangements are in place to support multi agency working. Over the coming year we will work together to broaden the range of opportunities available for those with a disability to help strengthen our arrangements and continue to improve transitions from children's to adult services.

The Board has also taken a keen interest in the Secure Care Pathways Review. This national report highlighted the need to improve transition planning, particularly around issues such as housing and mental health and wellbeing support. Our focus on transition and our work as part of the Fairer Futures Partnership will help us move these areas forward over the coming year.

The Children's Services Board continues to benefit from close collaboration with the Child Protection Committee (CPC), delivering shared audits and quality assurance activity. We have now brought a number of audits to completion, most recently on Transitions to P1.

Audit 6 (Transitions to P1) reviewed the processes in place for vulnerable children transitioning from Nursery to P1. The audit team looked at the quality and consistency of the process. Key learning points included:

- Of the 72% concerns evident, 15 had gaps in the information provided.
- In some cases, risk had been passed on without taking relevant actions prior to transition.
- There were some inconsistencies in the transition meetings and planning, such as information being shared between health professionals but not with Primary school transition colleagues. 21 Childs Plans were not shared with Education

A number of recommendations will be taken forward as a result of the audit. Current shared work with the Child Protection Committee includes starting to undertake our self-evaluation in preparation for our next Joint Inspection.

Collaboration. We continue to benefit from close collaboration with our local Health Determinates Research Collaborative (HDRC). The HDRC, in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, will help us evaluate the impact of our local Bairns Hoose which will become operational in July 2025. The design and development of our Bairns Hoose has been strongly influenced by the voice of children and young people that have experienced abuse and harm.

Our Bairns Hoose will bringing together child protection partners to deliver a collocated and integrated approach to how we investigate and support children and young people who have been abused/harmed. It additionally will have the capacity to support children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has been harmful to others. Ensuring our Bairns Hoose will have a live Court link will enable all children who have to attend court to provide evidence in an environment that is familiar to them and more conducive to their needs.

Building on our partnership with Children First, they will deliver advocacy and recovery support to children (and their family) going through a child protection process. Increasingly we want to see connection to recovery support being initiated from the Inter-Agency Referral Discussion ensuring early and effective support. The impact of delivering recovery support in this manner will be a strong focus of the evaluation the University of Edinburgh and HDRC will provide, enabling us to consider how this improves the outcomes of children and young people.

In addition the HDRC are supporting our Whole System work on healthy weight following the identification of this risk as part of our last Annual Report and evaluation into the impact of the expanded offer of Early Learning and Childcare.

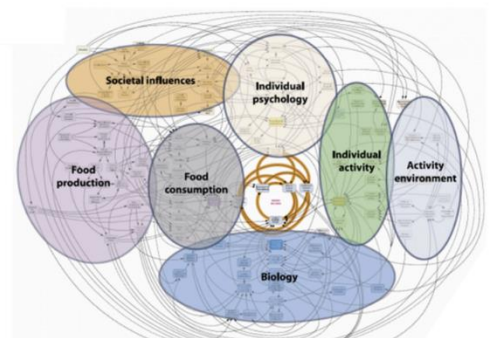
We recognise the need to continue to amplify our collaboration with children and young people and ensure that there are effective mechanisms in place to support the meaningful empowerment and participation of children and young people. We have been working with our wider Community Planning Partnership to ensure that our Children and Young People can be involved as far as possible in our improvement work. Each of our Local Outcome Improvement Plan projects have identified where their work can and should engage children and young people and will continue to report on involvement. This has included the development of a youth engagement toolkit and a promotional material for young people to get involved

As a Board we have agreed to establish a shadow Board of young people to flag up areas of concern and recognise the need to utilise a broader range of mechanisms to help young people shape the next Children's Services Plan. Preparatory work has included developing a directory of Youth Groups representing different demographic groups to ensure both wide and targeted involvement. Shadow Board arrangements have been tested as we have developed this Annual Report and we will continue to refine arrangements to ensure that they are meaningful for young people and linked to the [Youth Engagement Project Charter](#).

As a Board, we have continued to collaborate in order to ensure that there are suitably aligned learning and development opportunities for our staff. Members of the Children's Services Board considered the level of Trauma Training staff in their respective organisation/service would require and a Group are currently establishing formal recommendations for consideration by the Board. An E-Learning Module as an output of our work to Write Right about Me has been made available to staff across the Community Planning Partnership.

Initiating work to take a whole systems approach to [healthy weight](#). Following the publication of last year's Annual Report, we have taken steps to respond to the increasing number of children and expectant mothers who are not of a healthy weight.

Our work on healthy weight was initiated by convening a range of stakeholders to discuss the issue collectively to avoid silo working. The event helped to establish an understanding of what a whole system approach would look like and start developing a shared vision based on a shared understanding of local data.



Attendees learned that 1 in 5 primary 1 aged children in Aberdeen are at risk of being overweight or obese, with higher rates seen in more deprived areas. Among children aged 2-15 in Scotland, one third are at risk of overweight or obesity. For adults, 67% are either overweight or obese, with 29% being classified as obese.

Half of the pregnant women in Aberdeen were overweight or obese in 2022, and obesity continues to rise year-on-year. Deprivation plays a significant role, with those in the most deprived areas nearly twice as likely to be at risk. Trends also show disparities based on gender, age, and ethnicity, with men and boys showing higher obesity rates compared to women and girls. Poor diets, low physical activity, and the severe health and economic consequences of obesity highlight the need

for urgent, comprehensive public health interventions. With the financial cost of obesity in Scotland projected to reach £5.9 billion by 2030, it is crucial to address both individual behaviours and broader social causes.

The event gathered a range of key themes that have been used to develop a high level plan being led by Public Health colleagues. The Board look forward to supporting this important work.

Responding to the needs of a changing population.

Those represented on the Board continue to support a high proportion of displaced children and young people including those fleeing conflict and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. After Glasgow, the city welcomes the highest proportion of displaced people and services continue to respond with agility although this has placed considerable pressure on local services. Mitigating the risk to service provision will require our on-going attention. Aberdeen's Educational Psychology Service are currently creating guidance on working with Refugee & Displaced Families to aide the work of Education and Lifelong Learning staff with supporting this vulnerable group.

As of 31 December 2024 Aberdeen City has received 59 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People (UASYP), representing a 20% increase in the number as at the same point in time in 2023. As you would expect the age profile has also changed over the same period - as of 31/12/23, 18% of UASYP were over the age of 18 years, as of 31/12/24, 58% are over 18 years of age. Age profile is particularly significant given that funding to local authorities reduces as the young person ages, regardless of individual need. Focussed support to this group of individuals is led by a small dedicated resource within our Children's Services Youth Team.

The increase in volume is indicative of increased arrivals into Kent on small boats, with UASYP assigned to local authorities on a rotational basis. Additionally, Aberdeen has received a significant number of asylum seeking adults dispersed via the Hotel Dispersal scheme. Of these, a small but significant number note upon arrival that they are in fact under 18yrs of age. As a consequence they require prompt assessment to determine if there is robust evidence to be clear that they are not a child. Those accepted as under 18yrs of age are considered to be *looked after* and placed outwith the hotels in more appropriate arrangements for their needs. The model we have developed is a highly supported housing dispersal model.

Recognising the vast majority of asylum seeking young people indicate their wish to remain in Aberdeen once their asylum status is resolved has required work to augment our accommodation options to meet the growing demand. Collaboration with housing providers and registered social landlords continues to be a focus. We have also extended our 3rd sector partnership with Action for Children to provide outreach aftercare support. We have developed our approaches to take account of diverse cultural backgrounds, experience of loss and how for many this manifests in trauma. Securing health support, education provision and social integration remain key activities in our strategic planning.

In terms of broader population changes in relation to resettlement and asylum, the displaced population continues to grow, although the pace of arrivals has slowed over the last 12 months. Over 3000 displaced people have been welcomed to Aberdeen city since 2016, the vast majority of whom have arrived since 2021 via Afghan resettlement routes and in 2022, through the Ukrainian scheme routes.

Arrivals also occur through asylum routes and there are currently circa 380 asylum seekers in either Contingency of Dispersed accommodation in Aberdeen.

Data trends in 2024

- The overall resettlement population increased slightly in 2024 compared to 2023. Notwithstanding this, there was significant churn within the population, impacting on service demand levels.
- The biggest increases were evident in the displaced populations which are generally assessed as having higher levels of integration needs:
 - the number of asylum seekers placed in dispersed accommodation increased as per the National Accommodation Plan.
 - 108 asylum seekers had their claims approved (compared to 17 in 2023) and separately a pattern is emerging of those with positive decisions moving from other English/Scottish Local Authority areas to Aberdeen.
 - Demand increased to accommodate Afghan households recently arrived in the UK and supported by the Ministry of Defence with local integration support being provided.
 - The United Kingdom Resettlement Programme restarted with a commitment to welcome 12 households into Aberdeen.
 - The increases were offset by a fall in the asylum Contingency Accommodation population with the closure of one hotel.

To support the needs of families within the displaced population, whole family support was commissioned from Action for Children and Children 1st and continues to be provided.

Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE). In collaboration with ACHSCP, the Children's Services Board has worked as part of a GIRFE Pathfinder with Scottish Government.

GIRFE aligns with the Framework for Health and Community Care and builds on self-directed support implementation across Scotland. The Pathfinders from across Scotland engaged with a range of stakeholders, including children and their families to codesign a toolkit resource entitled *The team around the person*. People with lived experience, from across Scotland, have actively helped to identify the barriers that prevent us Getting It Right for Everyone and have worked with their the local GIRFE team to shape and test the tools detailed within the GIRFE toolkit. The toolkit aims to support a more person-led, consistent and individualised approach to health and social care support. This approach will help to embed inter-agency working across Scotland. This is fundamental to ensuring a GIRFE approach can be taken forward at a local level, as well as across Scotland.

As part of the pathfinder process, Aberdeen has helped to inform the development of a national toolkit to help inform a person led approach to managing transitions between children's services and adult services. This included the application of feedback from parents in Aberdeen who have experience in local arrangements. To help improve the experience of those that are cared for and their families when moving between children's and adults' services, a multi-agency group was recently established in Aberdeen. This group will seek to apply the new GIRFE toolkit to its activities.

Transitions to Pathways from Children's Services

Building on the learning from the GIRFE Pathfinder we have progressed work, on a multi-agency basis, to review the pathways that support the transition of young people entering adulthood. Transitions were specifically flagged by the Care Inspectorates in their 2024 Thematic Review as nationally being an area where improvement was required. Young people and parents highlighted

that transitions were often experienced as being distressing and confusing. These were experiences we recognised locally. Staff across the partnership similarly echoed the transitions process can be a complex one, particularly for young people who require ongoing support from health and social care services.

We established a multi-agency group to redesign our transition pathways and guidance to address the challenges families have highlighted. This work is progressing at pace and our updated transition process will begin to be rolled out from 1 April 2025. The main objectives of this project are to:

- Establish and embed an agreed process/pathway for improving transitions of young people moving on from school, with a key focus on the process of transition for young people requiring ongoing support from health and social care services.
- Develop a clear standard Operating Procedure for staff/services.
- Communicate the revised process/pathway with parents, carers and young people to improve knowledge of the Transitions process within Aberdeen City.
- Ensure an ongoing focus on improving transitions is built into Business as Usual practice informed by the voices of children and young people.
- Ensure Aberdeen City's transition planning and guidance takes account of learning from the Care Inspectorate's Thematic Review and national policy (National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Disabled Young People A Statement of Intent Sept 2023).
- Ensure Aberdeen City's transition planning and guidance aligns to the existing best practice, Principles of Good Transition 3 and COMPASS national tool.

Initiating work to reform how we support families living in SIMD 1. Following the publication of last year's Annual Report, we have taken steps to respond to the evidence of significantly poorer outcomes evident in those living in SIMD1. The Children's Services Board has undertaken a comprehensive [review](#) of the complexity of the challenges being experienced by our families living in SIMD 1 to support proactive planning for our model of Family Support.

As part of this work, Community Planning Partners actively engaged with planning for our [Future Libraries Model](#), which has triggered a need to look at our Future Libraries as a key component of our model of preventative Family Support. The Children's Services Board identified a need to work together to:

- Address the perception of libraries
- Improve the visibility of buildings e.g. Greyhope
- Create a neutral trusted venue in the community where you go for information and support
- Promote Co-location through our Future Libraries Model
- Improve engagement with religious and community groups to maximise the use of facilities
- Consider the delivery of existing programmes such as Bookbug, to consider how they might best be modernised

As a Children's Services Board we are delighted to have been selected as a Fairer Futures Pathfinder. We have commissioned CELCIS as our evaluation partner as we develop our model of Family Support, developed a [High Level Implementation Plan](#) and appointed a [Programme Lead](#) to support this important development. Governance arrangements for our Fairer Futures work have been agreed. We have achieved much over the last year, and will now establish our Fairer Futures Steering Group to coordinate the reform work being undertaken as part of our partnership with Scottish Government. All, 'business as usual' activity will continue to be overseen by the Children's Services Board.

Best Start in life Group Projects

The Best Start in Life Group continues to support infants and their families to realise improvement in early health, this year we have made some significant improvements with two of our projects having achieved their aims through successful improvement activity.

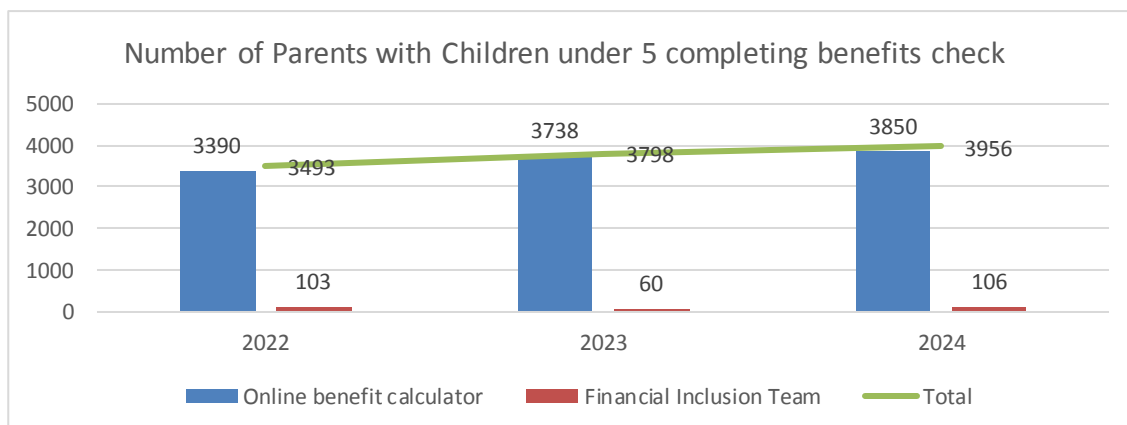
Our 2024 data shows that we are getting better at identifying the early signs neglect among 0-4 year olds associated with Parental Mental Health/Addiction/Domestic Abuse. This is an increase of 13% compared to 2022/23, highlighting the positive impact that our Health visitors and family nurses are having. Work continues to support practitioners likely to come into contact with families in order to maximise our early identification of those in need of our help.

The Group has successfully expanded the provision of PEEP (Parents as Early Education Partners) over the course of 2024, with 147 PEEP sessions offered. Of the sessions delivered in November 2024, 11 were delivered by multi agency partners, an increase of 57% compared to November 2023. Many organisations are now seeking to engage with and support the programme - specifically to promote it or to offer venues to deliver within. In order to take advantage of these offers of support, we are expanding our training to new practitioners with some additional funding. PEEP parents have used some of these funded places with plans for further PEEP development. As a result other PEEP initiatives and new partnerships with other services have been initiated.

Significant progress has been made in the development of the infant feeding in a crisis pathway, working with practitioners to identify parents who need support. So far, all families referred by the family nurse or health visitor have been supported with 58 vouchers issued to 41 families through the pathway to date. 11 families have had repeat support. The full impact and evaluation of the pathway can be viewed in the [project end report](#).

Now that we have tested the pathway and are confident that it is meeting the needs of those identified, we recognise that at present it is limited to referrals from two professionals working with young parents. Therefore, we will now focus on spreading the pathway across partnership agencies to ensure that regardless of touchpoint, people across Aberdeen City who need this support can be directly referred and use the Infant Feeding in a Crisis Pathway.

The Group have also focused on increasing by 10% the number of parents with children under 5 completing benefit checks. This aim has been achieved with a 13% increase in the number of new parents and parents of pre-school children who completed a full benefits check, from 3493 in 2022 to 3956 in 2024 as shown below. Completed checks have been done via the online benefit calculator and the Financial Inclusion Team.



As a result of the completed benefit check, the total financial gains have increased year on year, from £497,183.21 in 2022 to £600,667.29 in 2023 (20.8% increase from 2022) and £762,992.08 in 2024 (a 27% rise from 2023 and an impressive 53.4% cumulative increase from 2022). The full impact and evaluation of the early years financial inclusion pathway and targeted improvement can be viewed in the [project end report](#).

These projects are seeing real improvements to support for those families that have come into contact with them. Updated data suggests that the % of children assessed as reaching their expected developmental milestones (including incomplete assessments which are excluded from the figures above) improved between 2021/22 (87.4%) and 2022/23 (89.8%), but there is still considerable work to do to reach pre covid levels (97.1% in 2020/21). It is acknowledged however that only 67.4% of eligible children were assessed in 2022/23, down from 78% in 2021/22 and 87% in 2015/16. Increasing both the completeness of, and the proportion, of children assessments will remain a key focus of the Group for the year ahead, with a view to expanding the number of practitioners and services that are aware of the supports available and how to refer clients to these.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Group Projects

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Collaborative Subgroup have focused this year on developing a number of projects tackling various aspects of support for Children and Young People.

Feedback from our annual surveys with school pupils have seen an increase in the number of young people who now feel that they are listened to all of the time up from 64% in 2021/22 to 70% in 2023/24, showing progress towards our overall stretch outcome. But work to improve the experiences of those young people most likely be affected by mental health concerns continues.

We are working in our local communities to gather information about the supports available to children, young people and their families. Better understanding of these local supports will help our services and providers better understand the early intervention opportunities to refer those who need our help before their needs escalate to require support from Tier 3 services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

We are refocussing our efforts to ensure that we give Care Experienced Young People regular, consistent and high quality health assessments to make sure they can be supported throughout their time in care and afterwards. We have engaged widely with our partners and gathered feedback from young people to inform this work and will begin testing improvements in 2025.

We have been testing a pilot programme of local youth activity social prescribing through our school community hub in Torry to support young people to feel safe in their community and improve their overall mental wellbeing. Youth workers have started a group for pupils who use the community wing after school; the pupils who took part are now in S1 at Lochside with some now engaged with a cooking group at Deeside Family Centre. The group are currently considering the need to start up another group in 2025.

Our most recent data on children and young people shows promising improvements to their confidence (S1-S6 pupils reporting that they always or often feel confident has increased by 10% from 35% in March 2022 to 45% in November 2023) and the extent to which they feel safe in the community is improving (80.7% in 2021/22 to 87.5 % in 2023/24, a citywide increase of 16.8%). However direct referrals to CAMHS and Children's Social Work remains high.

With this data in mind, next year's work will focus on further improvements to health assessments provided to care experienced young people with the aim of reducing the need to escalate support. Likewise we will focus further on improving the Tier 2 community mental health services to defer more referrals away from CAMHS.

Corporate Parenting Sub Group

The Corporate Parenting Subgroup continues to lead our focus on supporting our Care Experienced Children, Young People and their Families. Driven through our Aberdeen City Corporate Parenting Plan and providing a leading role in ensuring our Partnership Keeps the Promise. The improvement projects being led by the Group reflect this focus.

We have been expanding our training programme to support our colleagues throughout the partnership to better understand their role as Corporate Parents. This year we have undertaken a pilot Corporate Parenting Training module for staff in Aberdeen City Council. Over half of the 7745 staff identified as having a role in supporting those that are care experienced have now been trained. We are now looking to expand this support to other organisations.

Our Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) Programme is now supporting 35 Care Experienced Young People to be confident new parents. The FNP is now providing bespoke support to those young people. Initial feedback has been very positive, with parents reporting they feel 90% prepared for parenthood by 36 weeks.

We have been working to reduce the number of young people coming into the Care system and have successfully realised a 5.1% decrease. The project team is now looking to improve the balance of care on a partnership basis to ensure that where possible young people entering care can remain with their families, with their brothers and sisters and in their local school and community. Where this is not possible we continue to work with our foster carers and residential teams to ensure children and young people receive high quality care.

For those leaving care we are working to further develop our multi-agency and integrated approaches to ensure they receive high quality throughcare and aftercare. Since the initiation of the project there has been a 68% increase in the number of eligible young people receiving aftercare (171 to 288 in 2024), with 78% of eligible young people receiving support in 2024. Further details can be found in the [project end report](#).

The Group continues to give thought to how we deliver on The Promise's expectations around the use of restraint and restrictive practices. Across all our local foster and residential services we have successfully moved away utilising restraint and restrictive practice in how we care for our children. We however recognise that the position across national resources and other agencies is more varied, requiring a lead from Scottish Government. Our Education Service is currently consulting with Trade Unions on guidance for schools across the city which is in keeping with updated national guidance.

Key areas of focus for next year include consideration of how to positively respond to the feedback provided by Care Experienced children and young people through our engagement in the Bright Spots programme. Our children and young people have provided us with very clear feedback on areas where we have improved and areas where we still have further work to do. We will develop a multi-agency plan and adopt a coproduction approach to address the noted areas where further improvement is still required. In addition we will explore how to build on this highly valued engagement work with our care experienced children, young people and young adults. In addition

we will be expanding our whole family support offer to ensure early and preventative support to families mitigating the need for a referral to children’s social work and ultimately supporting our efforts to reduce the number of looked after children living out with their family network.

We recognise there continues to be a need to build on our continuing efforts to ensure all staff, with corporate parenting responsibilities, better understand how their role can contribute to improving the outcomes of care experienced young people. This will include expanding access to the refreshed corporate training developed by the partnership.

The refreshed Keeping the Promise Award which raises awareness of care experienced children and young people and some of the challenges they face has been successfully delivered to central officers in Education. The training materials have been shared with schools and CLD leads with the expectation that the award will be undertaken by all practitioners by the end of this session.

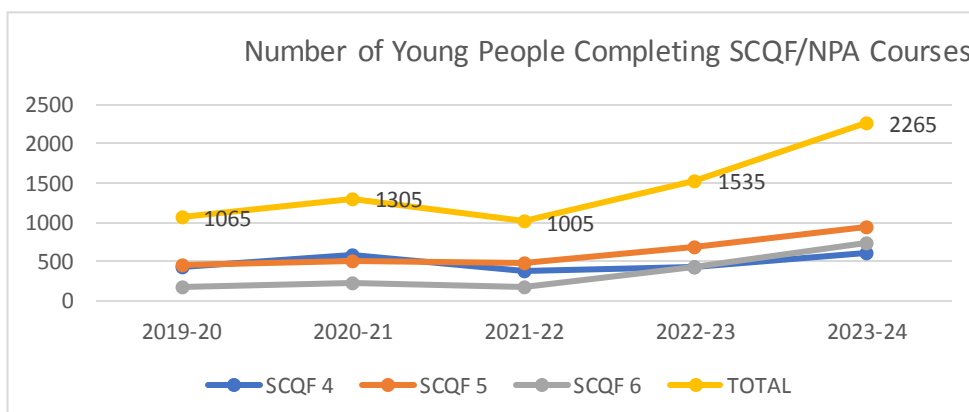
We are also expanding our self-evaluation work to better understand the drivers that contribute to the placement of children/young people out with their family and in high cost residential placements. This self-evaluative activity will continue to inform the development of our whole family support model. This recognises a strong correlation between the mental wellbeing of parents and children who are cared for outwith their family network.

Attainment and Transitions to Adulthood Sub Group

The Attainment and Transitions to Adulthood works in partnership to deliver the best possible educational opportunities for our children and young people, particularly our children and young people living in quintiles 1 and 2. The Sub Group has been focusing on how to improve health and educational outcomes for young people and their families and supporting the expansion of our curriculum offer and our post school opportunities.

We’ve made significant progress in expanding our curricular offer through our ABZ Campus and our broadening courses project where we have achieved our aim with a 56.6% increase in completion rates of SCQF/NPA from the baseline of 1005 in 2021/22 to last academic year to 2265 (2023/24). The full impact and evaluation of project can be viewed in the [project end report](#), however specifically we’ve seen a:

- 125% increase in the completion of NPA (1005 - 2265 students in 2023/24)
- 20.5% Increase in completion of Foundation Apprenticeships (127 - 156 students in 2023/24)
- Increase from 0 HNCs in 2021/22 to 12 in 2022/23 and 9 in 2023/24 respectively.



In 2023/2024, 1128 young people completed digital and technology courses, an increase of 19.75%. Of the three new digital NPA courses, data for 2023/24 showed:

- Esports - that across Level 4 to 6, 16 young people completed the Esports course with a 100% pass rate.
- Games Design, 18 young people completed level 6 with a 100% pass rate, with 54 at level 5 and a 85.19% pass rate and 15 at level 4, with a 66.67% rate.
- Cybersecurity - 79 young people completed level 4 and 5 Cybersecurity, with a 65.52% pass rate for level 4 and 24% for level 5.

Across academic year 2024/25 and into 2025/26 we will continue to expand the reach of our curricular programmes such as ABZ campus and Regional Digital Collaborative to provide more and more opportunities for young people to achieve.

Through our co-delivery project, we now have 2 education and health co-located services:

- The first co-located service is at Links ELC Hub where a Health Visitor is based two days per week. The Health Visitor works closely with the Centre Manager to identify families where vulnerabilities may lie.
- Co-delivery of Health and Wellbeing at Northfield

The full evaluation of project can be viewed in the [project end report](#). The project has now identified areas of improvement to test within the current co-delivery model at Northfield over the next year with a focus on increasing attendance at the school.

The Sub Group has also expanded the use of our online tool aimed at helping staff to recognise signs of harm and neglect among the children, young people and families they engage with. Having trained 626 staff so far, further Face to Face training sessions continue to be held. 72% of those undertaking the training report that they are recognising signs of harm, with 20% reporting they were extremely confident in doing so.

Follow up positive destination data for those who left school in Academic Year 2022/23 has declined slightly since 2021/22 from 90.8% to 90.1%. This figure is even more marked for those young people from SIMD Quintiles 1 (85.0% - 82.9%) & 2 (88.6% - 83.6%). We will work with Skills Development Scotland to address this issue over the coming year.

As such into next year we will be focussing on more targeted work with our more vulnerable learners and those most at risk of not going on to a Positive Destination, such as those living in our more deprived communities. Working in partnership with SDS a number of young people have already been identified. We will support these young people before and in transition though leaving school and into onward destinations providing, 1 to 1 multi agency support.

Youth Justice Sub Group

The Youth Justice Subgroup supports those young people experiencing or at risk of entering the justice system. The Group are keenly aware that this cohort of young people will have a number of needs and may have been impacted upon by adverse childhood experiences. As a result, improvement projects take a trauma informed approach.

We continue to support our local communities and young people with the development of street work sessions and extracurricular activities for young people, particularly during the holidays

including team building and sports activities. Since the last annual report there has been an overall continued reduction in anti-social behaviour calls of 11%.

Our Project to support the reduction in the number of young people going missing from Care homes has come to a successful completion this year. Over the course of the project there has been an overall reduction in the number of Care Experience Young People going missing by 49% since 2022. This has been built on ensuring a trauma informed approach that also takes into account young people's desire to stay out with friends. More details of this project can be found in the appendices, the full details of the work can be found in the [project end report](#)

Adopting a collaborative approach with Police Scotland has contributed to a reduction in the number of charges incurred by our children looked after in our local children's homes, in 2021/22 no children were subjected to charges; this rose to 7 in 2022/23 (based on data sharing) . We are now seeking to expand this success to the wider care experienced cohort, as well as other young people at risk of entering the justice system. We will do this by supporting our police and community services to take a trauma informed approach to cautioning and charging young people; expanding opportunities for 16/17 year olds for Diversion from Prosecution, linking these to community support needs.

Another main focus of the group has been supporting our readiness for the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. The legislation has the intention of ensuring the better integration of national policy with legislation which aims to improve systems which protect, intervene and where necessary accommodate children. The Act contains a series of measures aimed at improving children's experiences of the care and justice systems, whether victims, witnesses or children who have caused harm. The following progressive intentions are noted;

- Improve opportunities for prevention and early intervention
- Systems are age and stage appropriate and rights respecting
- Age of Referral to Principal Reporter raised to 18 for all referral grounds
- Secure accommodation replaces Young Offenders Institutes (YOI) for 16/17-year-olds
- All children in secure care, will be considered Looked After Children
- Children in secure care will be able to remain in secure care past age 18 but not beyond 19
- Children will no longer be held in police cells, rather this will be in a "place of safety"

The above measures will ensure that children are able to access systems designed with their needs in mind. The majority of children in conflict with the law have experienced developmental trauma, abuse and other adversities. The changes will ensure all children have the same protections.

Looking ahead to 2025/26 our readiness for the implementation of the Children's (Care & Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 will continue to have a strong focus. While there is much uncertainty about the plan for the implementation, we will continue to proactively prepared for this legislative change. We will build on the mapping activity already undertaken which identified key areas of change activity. This will continue to be developed in collaboration with colleagues in Justice Social Work but also utilise our positive links with the [Children and Young People's Centre for Justice](#). The focus for change includes but is not limited to;

- Scoping Early and Effective Intervention options for 16/17-year-olds
- Identifying workforce development needs of Children and Justice Social Work and partners
- Understanding and managing risk in relation to 16/17-year-olds referred to SCRA who will have higher levels of support need and require assessments of needs.

We continue to deliver local dissemination activities to assist our multi-agency partnership to be prepared for changes incumbent from the legislation. In addition we have had a clear focus on our data around 16/17-year-olds currently involved in both Children and Adult systems and attempts at forecast levels of demand by inclusion of data re 16/17-year-olds homelessness needs.

Additionally, we will continue to consider further opportunities to reduce the overrepresentation of care experienced children and young people within the justice system.

Additional Support Needs and Disabilities Sub Group

The ASN & Disabilities Sub Group continues to focus on improving the opportunities for those young people with ASN/Disabilities and their families. Our projects focus on providing community and school based services, as well as providing support for families awaiting diagnosis.

With the aim of supporting this cohort of young people a bespoke Sensory Ambassador programme is being now being tested. This has been developed in collaboration with Education, NHS and third sector partner SensationALL in response to the need of practitioners to gain deeper knowledge, skill and confidence of the broad range of sensory considerations.

The group has also supported the pilot of a Neurodivergent Pathway in order to provide support to those families with children awaiting an autism diagnosis, to test a mechanism to increase the number of families accessing support by 20%. The initial pilot has concluded with significant results. This has included reducing the time taken for children to be assessed as well as providing tools, techniques and links to services to support parents in the interim. Feedback has included:

“Just finally getting the support for our son, which was all we ever wanted, that’s the main thing, like, obviously the diagnosis helps because you can’t often get supported without a diagnosis, but that wasn’t the thing for us, it was getting the support and educating ourselves and being kind of able to help them.”

“We feel definitely feel like we have more tools and more information now than we ever have, and that is all down to the Test of Change”

The project hopes to expand, subject to funding, testing in other sites. The full evaluation of project can be viewed in the [project end report](#).

Our young carers project has continued in its success having now increased the number of young carers accessing support by **20%**. Contributing to the increase has been our targeted promotion and providing the “Think Young Carer Toolkit” training to all schools, external organisations including Health services, Education services, Police Scotland, and numerous Third Sector agencies (15 directly and connecting with others through ACVO and the Third Sector Forum). This has resulted in more professionals understanding who a young carer is, their needs, and what supports are required and where to refer young carers to. You can read more about the work in our detailed [project end report](#).

Though the work of the group has continued throughout 2024/25, direct progress of the group has slowed due to a number of changes in management. The group has now begun to consolidate. Looking to 2025/26 the focus is on renewing engagement in supporting our school pupils with ASN/Disabilities as well as supporting their families.

What next for the Children's Services Board?

Reviewing our progress has confirmed the suitability of the Children's Services Plan 2023-2026. There is a need for us to maintain our current focus on child poverty, safe sleeping, attendance (particularly at primary 1) /attainment, addressing variation and improving transitions between child and adult services. However, undertaking this review has again shown the disparity in outcomes at community level confirming that the wider family supports currently in place are not making a difference to some groups. We need to think quite differently about how we work with and for families in need of our help and support. This will be progressed through our planned Fairer Futures Pathfinder. Outcomes data confirms that we should focus on wider Northfield and Torry.

As we discovered during our last annual review, we must continue to look for ways to join data sets and look at community level data and particular groups to ensure that we work to a shared and clear understanding of the problems our communities face. There is also evidence of the need to continue to progress our whole system approach to healthy weight.

Some new areas have emerged that may require our attention. We need to be curious around air pollution and try to better understand why more children are presenting at hospital due to asthma. We also need to look carefully at what more can be done to prevent suicide given concerning local trends. We need to initiate some work around positive destinations and gain a better understanding of the factors which sustain household smoking behaviour and what it would take to address this.

We propose to continue to deliver on our agreed Plan for 2023-26 but to also invest our time and energy in our Fairer Futures Partnership in order to test new ways of working with those who most need our help. This will see the current Chair of the Children's Services Board move over to chair our Fairer Futures Steering Group, and a new chair be appointed to the Children's Services Board to help coordinate and oversee all, 'business as usual' improvement activity already outlined in our Plan.

Appendix 1. Supporting New Parents: Expanding our PEEP Offer

What are we trying to achieve?

To expand our offer of PEEP (Parents as Early Educators Programme) across the city where demand for our service currently outstrips ability to deliver

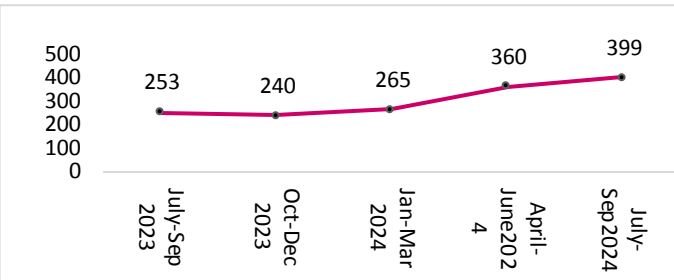
How are we doing this?

We are adopting a multi-agency approach to support and train staff and capacity build by:

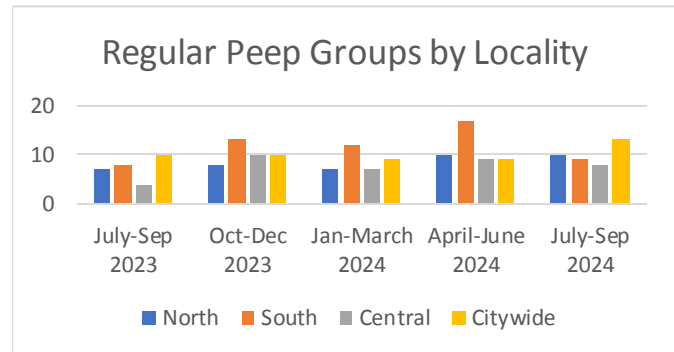
- Developing promotional materials with families and Peep practitioners to share with partners
- Pair up partners/services that have similar goals to deliver Peep (i.e. family learning with libraries, ChildSmile/health with nurseries)
- Provide ELC trained practitioners a term of co-delivery of a group with a Peep team member and/or with a trained practitioner to deliver the Healthier Families pilot.
- Develop a tiered training criteria for Peep delivery, including provision of funded training spaces to mitigate barriers.
- Develop a local Peep Practitioner network

What have we achieved?

- A **63.4%** increase in the number of families that have benefited from Peep (from 253 in Jul-Sep 2023 to 399 in Jul-Sep 2024)



- **11** of our Peep Programmes now being run by Multiagency Partners
- A total of **147** PEEP Sessions have been delivered over 2024
- We also provide a number of regular Peep groups throughout our locality areas



What impact have we had?

There were 106 responses to our annual Peep survey:

- Overall, the feedback has been positive. 83.8% of the parents said that their confidence to support their child's learning and development has improved since attending Peep
- and 63.2% feel their relationship with their child has gotten better
- Asked what Peep could do differently, respondents suggested having longer and more sessions available to families.

What do we plan to do next?

With a significant number of venues and services offering space and promotion of Peep

- We have further Promotional Materials in development
- We are also expanding our training opportunities through 2025
- Expand our initiatives further through our new partnerships

Appendix 2. Supporting Our Care Experienced Young People: Improved Corporate Parenting

What are we trying to achieve?

Improvement in our corporate parenting approach. Our new eLearning pilot is intended to promote a single ongoing multi agency Corporate Parenting Training Programme incorporating the voice of our Care Experienced community; recognising corporate parenting training is an ongoing process where our workforce will require opportunities to engaged in continuous professional development.

How are we doing this?

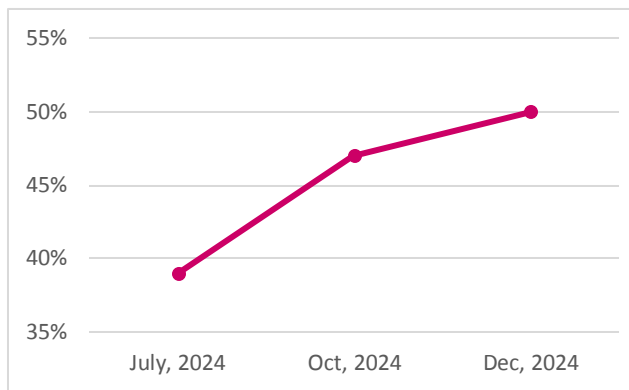
Through our multiagency project we have:

- Developed an eLearning module involving practitioners and Care Experienced Young People
- Began to map the development needs of our workforce across multi agency partners
- Began to pilot an eLearning training module in Aberdeen City council and are begging to expand to other agencies

What have we achieved?

Just over **50%**, of our Aberdeen City Council Staff have been trained in corporate parenting since the module went live in May 2024

Percentage of Staff at Aberdeen City Council Pilot Trained



- Over **150 multi-agency** staff have received in person training, since August 2023 with development and delivery planned on an ongoing basis.
- A further **220** multiagency staff and 100 Children's Panel volunteers, have now also been identified for training

What impact have we had?

Care Experienced Young People have helped and will continue to shape our corporate parenting training.

Our module has been informed by the views of Care Experienced Young People. The training also including media created by them

What do we plan to do next?

- Developing our participatory and co-productive activity with our care experienced community, linking in the Bright Spots Findings, Promise related improvement activity
- Expanding the Aberdeen City Council Pilot to other multiagency partners and Childrens Panel volunteers
- Hold 1 to 1 discussions with professionals in various services within council, as well as with partner agencies and ACVO 3rd Sector Promise Lead, to promote the importance of understanding Corporate Parenting
- We continue to revise content to keep its information as current as possible

Appendix 3. Digital and Tech Courses: Improving our Curriculum Offer

What are we trying to achieve?

Aware that Digital and Technology is a key growth Sector in Aberdeen we are looking to expand our curriculum to include more opportunities for young people to gain qualifications in this area with the aim of increasing the completion rate in digital and tech courses by 20% by 2026.

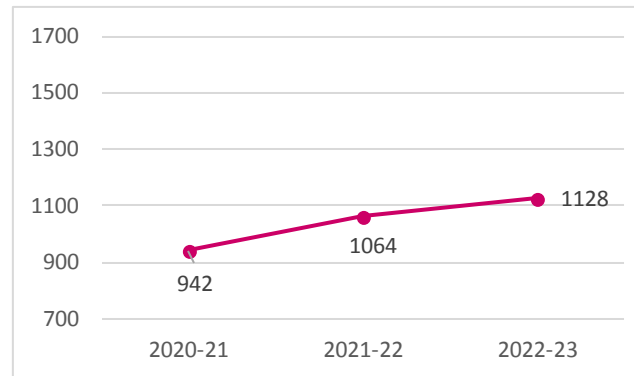
How are we doing this?

- Developing new National Progression Awards and wider range of digital qualifications with aim of 1 NPA, related to digital and tech sector
- Developing and introduce new “gateway qualifications” such as Level 4/ Level 5 Esports, Games Design, Data Science
- Introducing targeted professional learning specifically on teaching of Computing Science and Digital across broad general education (Early Years to S3) to increase confidence of staff and to broaden the pipeline into qualifications through the delivery of professional learning and reduce withdrawals.

What have we achieved?

Across the past 3 academic years we have significantly increased the number of young people competing Digital and Technology Courses a total increase of **20%**

No. Young People Completing Digital and Tech Courses



Pass rates in the courses have been very positive:

100% of pupils taking part in NPA Levels 4,5 and 6 **Esports** passed

The **Games Design NPA** Also saw significant positive results: with 67% passing Level 4; 85% passing level 5 and **100% passing Level 6**

What impact have we had?

Our pupil feedback surveys have highlighted that pupils are very aware **97% agreeing** that computer skills were important for their future career

48% expressed an interest in developing coding skills

What do we plan to do next?

- We intend to establish a Digital Hub in the city at ONE Schoolhill, with the aim of expanding access to eSports and other NPA courses and activities across Aberdeen Computing Collaborative
- Our initial Investment Zone bid has been expanded to a 10 year programme to support Digital as a growth sector. This will help further develop Digital and Tech qualifications

Appendix 4. Supporting Young People at Risk: Reducing the number of missing Looked After Children

What are we trying to achieve?

The project was initiated with the aim of reducing the number of children and young people looked after in Children's Homes from going missing. This was achieved by adopting a multiagency approach and providing individualised support for the young people involved

How are we doing this?

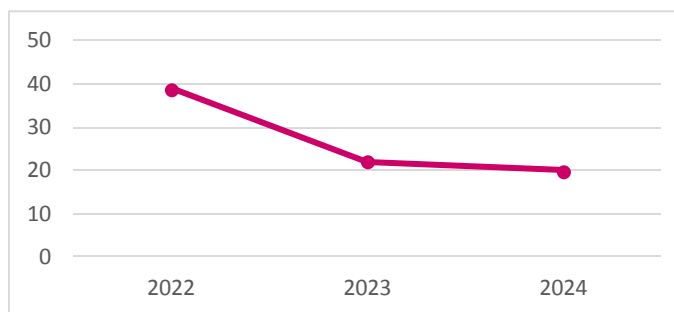
Through our multi agency project we have:

- Been implementing 'Our 'Not at Home' policy for those young people, for instance staying overnight with friends
- Trauma-Informed training delivered to Police Scotland workforce to ensure a trauma informed approach is adopted when engaging with care experienced young people
- Establishing pre-arranged visits to Homes by Police
- Create a new referral pathway for those young people needing support following an missing episode
- Co-design a resource to support young people on entering care to reduce their fears

What have we achieved?

Over the course of the project there has been an overall reduction in the number of Care Experience Young People going missing by **49% since 2022**

No. of care experienced young people reported missing from children's homes to Police Scotland



100% of the children reported as missing in 2023 and 2024 have had a return home welfare discussion with Police or staff at the home.

80% of the children reported missing in 2023 did not go missing again in 2024.

The Not at Home policy has helped our young people's lifestyle and ensures that despite their care experienced status, their absence is managed more similarly to that of a non-CE young person. **There are no reported cases** of a CEYP being reported as missing having previously been classed as 'Not at Home'

What impact have we had?

CEYP themselves report feeling less "hunted" by the Police, when they were simply out with friends

Trauma informed Single Points of Contact for each Children's Home has helped establish positive relations between Police and the young people.

Young People are reported to be less anxious when Police are scheduled to visit the Home

What do we plan to do next?

- Numbers of CEYP reported as missing will continue to be monitored and efforts made to maintain relatively low levels Always with a view to keep all missing children, including CEYP, safe and well.
- We will continue to ensure Police staff are provided with quality trauma informed training and that positive relationships between multi-agency staff and the Children's Homes are maintained
- We will consider how learning from this work could spread to other cohorts of Looked After Children and Vulnerable Adults

Appendix 5. Supporting Families: Neurodevelopmental Pathways Pilot

What are we trying to achieve?

The purpose of the project was to create a new pathway to ensure that children, young people and families receive neurodevelopmental assessment, associated support, and access to services, that meets their needs at the earliest opportunity.

How are we doing this?

We carried out a pilot study in one of our local Primary schools. Our testing included:

- Understanding the nature of the needs within the school and what support the staff felt they needed and engaged with our Parents to understand how equipped they felt to support their children thrive
- Delivering training, modelling and reflective practice with school staff
- Embedding a part time multi-disciplinary team within the school to accept referrals to assess, diagnose children who parents and the school felt could be neurodivergent
- Creating support plans for those children post diagnosis to share with school and parents
- Establishing Family Health Link Practitioners) to 'hold' families through the referral and assessment process and to support both school and home implement the support plans.

What have we achieved?

All parents supported though the project were enthusiastic about the speed of the assessment, reporting that the reduced waiting time helped to reduce their anxiety and helped them to support their child and to make decisions within their lives.

The project help significantly shortened waiting times for the families awaiting diagnosis:

- Parents were supported to request an initial assessment within **2 weeks**
- As well as first clinician observations within **2 weeks**
- Parents waiting feedback from clinicians was reduced to **6 weeks**
- And the time the school had to wait for the outcome was reduced to **12 weeks**

What impact have we had?

Feedback from families included:

“Just finally getting the support for our son, [...] that’s the main thing, [...] the diagnosis helps because you can’t often get supported without a diagnosis, but that wasn’t the thing for us, it was getting the support and educating ourselves and being [...] able to help them.

We definitely feel like we have more tools and more information now than we ever have, and that is all down to the [Project]

What do we plan to do next?

Within the school:

- Developing an enhanced sensory room and use of spaces across the school
- Formulation Planning for specific children on the following assessment and diagnosis.
- Supporting all children in school to better develop their understanding of neurodiversity and inclusion through use of LEANS (Learning About Neurodiversity in Schools)

Regionally:

- The success of the pilot is now helping shape the development of a Grampian wide approach to supporting families awaiting diagnosis

Our LOIP Projects

Stretch Outcome 3: 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026

[Reduce by 5% the no. of children aged 0-4 who are referred to Children's Social Work as a result of neglect arising from parental mental health, addiction and domestic abuse 2026.](#)

[Increase by 40% the number of Peep programmes delivered by multi-agency partners by 2025.](#)

[100% of urgent requests for first stage infant formula and nutritional support for pre-school children are met by 2024.](#)

[Increase by 10% the no. of parents with children under 5 who are completing a full benefits check by 2024.](#)

[Improve dental health at primary 1 to the national average by reducing the levels of dental health in areas of deprivation to 50% by 2025.](#)

Stretch Outcome 4: 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026

[Reduce demand on Tier 3 services by 5% by 2026.](#)

[Reduce waiting time for interventions starting, by each tier 2/3 service by 5% by 2026.](#)

[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.](#)

[Increase by 5% the number of S1-S6 pupils who report that they feel confident by 2025.](#)

[Increase by 10% the % of children living in areas of deprivation who feel safe in their communities by 2025.](#)

Stretch Outcome 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

[Reduce by 5% the number of children entering the care system by 2024.](#)

[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 care experienced young people by 10% receiving multiagency throughcare/aftercare support by 2024.](#)

[80% of care experienced parents will report that they believed they were sufficiently prepared for parenthood by 2026.](#)

[80% of the identified multi-agency workforce successfully complete Corporate Parenting training aligned to the Promise by 2025.](#)

Stretch Outcome 6: 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1 & 2), will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026

[75% of identified multi-agency staff reporting confidence in identifying and taking action on harm by 2026.](#)

[Increase to 3 the delivery of co-located and delivered services by health and education by 2024.](#)

[Increase by 10% the rate of completion of NPA/FA/HNC courses available to young people across the city by June 2024.](#)

[Increase the % of learners entering a positive and sustained destination to be ahead of the Virtual Comparator for all groups by 2025.](#)

[Increase by 20% the number of young people completing courses aligned to support the digital and tech sector by 2026.](#)

[Increase to 50 the no. of people completing more integrated health and care courses by 2025.](#)

Stretch Outcome 7: 83.5% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.

[Reduce by 20% the number of care experienced young people charged with an offence by 2025.](#)

Reduce by 15% the number of care experienced young people reported missing from Children's homes to Police Scotland by 2024.
90% of 16/17 year olds appearing at Sherriff Court in relation to Lord Advocate's guidance will have had an assessment of their community support needs by 2025.
Increase by 5% the no. of 16/17 year olds who are diverted from prosecution by 2025.
Reduce by 15% the number of instances of youth anti-social behaviour calls to Police Scotland by 2025.
Stretch Outcome 8: 100% of our children with Additional Support Needs/ Disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026.
Increase by 10%, the percentage of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) and/or a disability accessing full time education by 2026.
Increase by 5%, the percentage of young people with additional support needs/disability entering a positive destination by 2025.
Increase by 20% the number of registered young carers accessing support from the Young Carers service by 2025.
By 2025, 90% of families with children with an additional support need or disability will indicate that they have access to peer and community support that meets their needs.
90% of identified multi-agency staff working with children and young people with disabilities will report confidence in identifying and taking action on how harm presents in children with additional support needs/disabilities by 2026.
Increase by 20% the number of families of children with autism or awaiting diagnosis accessing support prior to diagnosis and reduce the interval between referral and diagnosis by 2024.
Our Completed Projects
Emergency Formula
Financial Inclusion Pathway
Kinship Care Support
Throughcare and Aftercare Support
Co-Located Services
Breadth of Courses
Missing Looked After Children from Children's Homes
Young Carers
Neurodivergent Pathways

Strategic Stretch Outcomes					
Increase the number of 0-5s who meet developmental milestones by 2026	Improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and families by 2026	Improve the attainment, health and wellbeing and positive destinations of our care experienced by 2026	Improve the attainment and positive destinations of our children and young people by 2026	Reduce the number of young people charged with an offence by 2026	Increase the number of children with ASN or disability who secure a positive destination by 2026
Strategic Priorities					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve the health outcomes of expectant and new mothers ➤ Improve uptake of benefits ➤ Improve access to emergency formula and food for infants ➤ Address early speech and language needs ➤ Increase the uptake of immunisations ➤ Improve the quality of ELC provision and maintain uptake ➤ Investigate factors sustaining household smoking and the rise in premature births 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Focus on prevention and early intervention ➤ Provide access to joined up services and bereavement support ➤ Respond quickly in a stigma free, needs and rights led way ➤ Increase levels of physical activity ➤ Increase the provision of child friendly environments within local communities ➤ Investigate the rise in hospitalisations due to asthma and ➤ Ensure school PSE Programmes help keep children safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deliver a Bairns Hoose ➤ Deliver The Promise ➤ Increase the provision of health assessments for the care experienced ➤ Continue to close the gap between those who have care experience and their peers ➤ Increase the no. of foster carers available locally ➤ Keep brothers and sisters together ➤ Ensure adequate provision of legal advice and advocacy ➤ Implement the recommendations of the Secure Care Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement refreshed guidance on the use of restraint ➤ Better track those who are in or on the edge of the care system ➤ Improve learning transitions from P7 to S1 ➤ Deliver ABZ Campus to widen the range of courses ➤ Deliver Aberdeen Collaborative to ensure long term employability ➤ Delivery of Tier 2 services to close the gap through SAC funding ➤ Continue to address the cost of the school day and child poverty in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reduce levels of anti-social behaviour ➤ Deliver Mentors in Violence Prevention across all secondary schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delivery of neurodevelopmental pathway ➤ Establish better assurance systems ➤ Increase the number of Young Carers receiving support ➤ Improve transition planning from child to adult services ➤ Ensure that the voices of children (including those who use alternative communication systems) are central to processes and Plans ➤ Decrease the number of children not accessing full time education
Enabling Priorities					
Access to services	Increase integration	Reduce risks	Commissioning	Data	Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement a single Request for Assistance process ➤ reduce the number of access points to information and services ➤ investigate and address any issues in P1 attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build on the integration models including that at ELC Links ➤ Establish an assurance system to test the strength of the system ➤ Improve alignment between children and adult services ➤ Develop a Target Operating Model for children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Better understand why children are placed OOA ➤ Understand the long term impact of ELC on outcomes for families ➤ Agree and implement a whole system approach to addressing obesity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aligned to the 10 principles of family support ➤ Jointly respond to the needs of those displaced ➤ Evaluate readiness for implementation of the UNCRC ➤ Support the implementation of recommendations arising from the review of Employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve knowledge of the 6 groups by co-designing with service users and children ➤ Improve data matching ➤ Improve the tracking of the outcomes of those most vulnerable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase knowledge poverty agenda and of benefits ➤ Increase knowledge of trauma and risk ➤ Develop ways of working (SIMD1) to better support the provision of rights

