



Community Planning
Aberdeen

**Aberdeen City
Children's Services Plan
Annual Report
April 2020-2021**

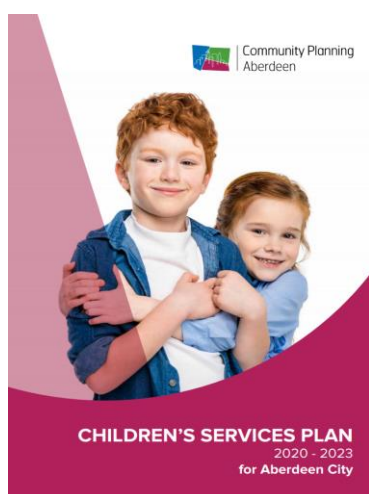
Introduction

Aberdeen City's Children's Services Board, in conjunction with the Community Planning Partnership, is pleased to present the first Annual Report for the Children's Services Plan 2020 – 2023. This report outlines our key achievements in the last year and our ambition to continue to improve the lives of children, young people and families in Aberdeen.

The priorities that we identified within our Children's Services Plan 2020-2023 have become even more important in the last year due to the substantial impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had. Although being challenged like never before, there has been some exceptional joint work between our communities, 3rd sector organisations and statutory partners. While the enduring impact that the pandemic will have on children's lives cannot be under-estimated, we will look forward with a focus on recovery.

2021 is the year in which we expect children's rights to become directly incorporated into law in Scotland. This is exciting and important for our children and young people, and for everyone who cares about them. We will make sure that children and young people in Aberdeen understand their rights, and that they are supported to claim them. Children in Scotland have the right to grow up loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential. We will [#KeepThePromise](#) to make sure that they can. We will work towards keeping brothers and sisters together, shifting the balance of care to support more children to stay at home or with kin, and increase the participation and voice of children and families in shaping our service delivery.

This year has seen the review of several strategic plans; our Children's Services Plan, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, the National Improvement Framework and our Corporate Parenting Plan incorporating the Champions Board Plan.



After the publication of our Children's Services Plan, we began to refresh our Local Outcome Improvement Plan in January 2021 reflecting on the impact of COVID-19 and the work we had achieved. We have revised our Stretch Outcomes with this in mind.

We have focussed our priorities: improving the mental wellbeing of our children through a whole family approach; improving the developmental milestones of children in their early years; supporting our care experienced young people and those in our priority localities to have positive destinations and the same outcomes as their peers; reducing young people's involvement in offending behaviour through appropriate and effective interventions. In all these things, we will be informed by the voices of the children, young people and families in our City.

Our Stretch Outcomes

95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026



90% of Children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026. This is reflected in interactions, activities, supports and services

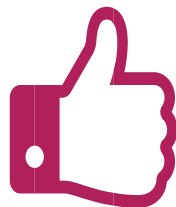


95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026

As corporate parents we will ensure **95%** of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026



Child friendly city where **all** decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026



30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026

We want to make Aberdeen a place where all children and young people can prosper!



Reflecting on Our Priorities

The impact of the Covid pandemic in 2020 on our families and on our workforce as well as our analysis of our data have all significantly impacted on the identification of our priorities:

COVID – 19

Public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 have changed the way that we interact with each other. Children have experienced changes in the way that their education is delivered, they have been less able to socialise with friends and family, and access to the activities and services in which they might normally participate has been limited. The Children's Services Partnership has worked together to mitigate the most significant impacts by flexing and tailoring our services.

From the beginning of the first lockdown there were concerns about the negative effects of increased isolation on the wellbeing of children and young people and it was recognised that there was likely to be a much deeper impact on children and young people in care or on the edge of care.

The pandemic exposed and amplified pre-COVID levels of social and economic inequality and poverty and the measures introduced to suppress the virus have disproportionately affected low-income families with young children. Between March and November 2020, the number of people receiving Universal Credit in Aberdeen City more than doubled from 7,966 in March to 17,829 in November. 44% of families were noted to have poverty needs at the point of request for assistance to the Fit Like Hubs. One parent described feeling like they were drowning having lost their job as a result of the pandemic. The critical challenge across our local systems is how we can work effectively to highlight these impacts on children and young people, to promote recovery and to enable improved outcomes.

One of the priorities for our services during, and as we emerge, from the pandemic is in relation to hidden harm. Hidden harm is harm or abuse that is obscured from public view. This can be for various reasons; occurring behind closed doors, not being seen by professionals, not being recognised or reported. For individuals and families already known to us, services adapted to provide both direct face to face support and to utilise digital means of communication. However, for those not already identified as being vulnerable, the closure of schools, and community health services delivering services only on a virtual basis, significantly limited the ability of professionals to have their eyes on children, young people and families. This would suggest many children who will have experienced harm or neglect may not yet, and may never have, their vulnerability identified; the consequences of which are likely to emerge in the coming years.

The establishment of "Vulnerable Hubs" in April 2020 went some way to providing support to children and young people with identified wellbeing vulnerabilities. (See our **Spotlight** below to read more about the Hubs.) Among the older age group, over the course of the pandemic, more care experienced young people, reached out to and increased their levels

of engagement with our Youth Team. The young people's feedback in relation to their experiences will continue to inform service planning and design going forward.

Workforce

Staff across the Children's Services partnership have so commendably risen to the challenges of the past year. The pandemic has undoubtedly impacted on the morale and wellbeing of our staff. Notwithstanding the extent to which colleagues have responded – sometimes at personal cost to themselves - to the needs of the individuals with whom we work and support, has been heartening and a testimony to their commitment, resilience and professionalism.

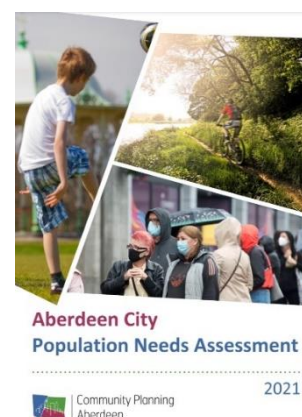
Other areas of pressure have been in relation to recruitment in some areas of service. This is not usually a retention issue but rather demonstrates the challenge of attracting the professional workforce to the north-east of Scotland in the first place where property and living expenses can be high.

Future development of our workforce will be to continue upskilling the children's services workforce across the partnership in trauma informed practice, and in relation to the particular issues for children with disabilities such as neuro-development pathways.

Data Development

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic we undertook a refresh of our Population Needs Assessment. This, along with the experiences of our staff, children and families has given us a wealth of information that will help inform our future priorities.

We know we have work to do across the partnership to join-up our data reporting so we have a holistic overview of whole family vulnerability. Existing data systems do not easily speak to each other. As a consequence, sharing relevant data in relation to children and families is currently labour intensive and time-consuming.



Some progress has been made to address these issues during the coronavirus crisis:

- The development of the “Aberdeen Together” brought together the data of ACC & HSCP social work and housing services to develop a City overview of vulnerability. This work is positive and continues to be built upon, forming business as usual going forward.
- The development of our Quality Assurance Framework which enables us to look at particular issues in detail on particular topics; in this period we have examined our use of the national risk framework tools and our partnership response to the issue of Neglect.
- Shortly into the pandemic, the Scottish Government requested weekly data around Adult and Child Protection.

- This gave positive assurance to Scottish Government and our local Chief Officers in relation to limited, but key, data as to the responsiveness of services to protect vulnerable adults and children.
- Understanding the vulnerability of individuals and families can only be fully achieved by pulling data on a multi-agency basis. This has been a strong focus locally. It is challenging and complex but critical to understanding emerging vulnerability, the risk of harm as well as the impact of services to improve outcomes. Locally, our Chief Officer Group have lent their weight to challenge themselves and partners to improve this position and will be a major focus for the coming period.

Highlights and Key Priorities

Despite the challenges, we have made significant improvements for children and young people across the partnership over the course of 2020/21. In the pages that follow we will share with you just some of the highlights and our key priorities for 2021/22

Getting it Right for every Child

We strive to get it right for every child. A new GIRFEC Performance and Improvement group has been established to lead the review of our agreed GIRFEC Operational Guidance in keeping with the updated national guidance anticipated in December 2021. The updated guidance will have to take account of decisions around the National Care Service and the refreshed national Child Protection guidance.

The group are currently engaging in a series of national consultations which will inform the updated national guidance and continuing to engage with the Scottish Government to help shape the revisions to the guidance. Running parallel is an internal review of current systems and processes to ensure that local learning is taken into account as the Operational Guidance is refreshed. The terms of reference of the group are currently being revisited given the focus required on systems and processes over the coming months.

Best Start in Life

95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026



National data indicates that COVID-19 is likely to significantly impact on the developmental milestones of 2-4 year olds due to the various impacts of lockdown restrictions

The proportion of babies exclusively breast-fed at 6-8 weeks is higher (36.8%) compared to Scotland (28.1%)

13.7% of women in the City with a known smoking status were recorded as a 'current smoker' at their first antenatal appointment lower than the Scottish average

85% of babies born were a healthy birth weight

79.5% of p1s were classified as 'healthy weight' – slightly higher than the figure for Scotland of 76.6%

This aim is the responsibility of our “Best Start in Life” group who tell us:

The Best Start in Life Outcome Group focus on meeting the needs of children and families and what matters to them. Giving support at the first opportunity, to promote child and family health, support early development and learning, promote play and provide proactive support for parents and carers, reinforcing families and strengthening communities.

The group supports the aim that every child up to 5 years of age in Aberdeen is safe, nurtured, healthy, active, included, respected, responsible and have a voice. The focus is on early intervention and prevention that are developed by partners utilising local knowledge, skills, intelligence and evidence. Key to this is engaging and working with health and social care, locality partnerships and communities, with the joint aim to work upstream to support our most vulnerable young children and their families, reducing child poverty and health & social inequity in Aberdeen.

The focus for the year ahead is on projects to support the LOIP Stretch Outcome 3, - 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026.

Children and their families will be listened to, respected, involved and heard in every decision that affects them. Where children and families need additional or intensive support, it will be given in timescales which meet the needs of the child. The workforce will be supported to provide the support children and their families need to flourish.

Our Best Start in Life group priorities for 2021-2022

- Increasing uptake of family support
- Reducing the number of births affected by drugs
- Reducing repeat emergency hospital admissions for unintentional injury
- Reducing the number of P1 pupils with speech and language delay

Children's Mental Wellbeing

90% of Children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026. This is reflected in interactions, activities, supports and services



Public Health Scotland have reported that the COVID-19 Lockdown has had a negative impact on the sleep, behaviour, mood, physical activity, concentration

Acute mental health has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, in June 2020 there were 298 patients waiting to be seen by CAMHS, of these 52 (17%) had been waiting over 18 weeks

There has been a 280% increase from 2019 to 2020 in referrals of children and young people to CAMHS Eating disorder specialists

Increased presentation of families to Family Support Services re mental health, social isolation, children's development

Increased presentation of families re financial, care experience, wellbeing

This aim is the responsibility of our “Children’s Mental Wellbeing” group who tell us:

The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children, Young People and their families has been a priority for the Children’s Services Partnership for some time, and even more so as we continue to understand the impact that the pandemic continues to have. We are keen to ensure that the opportunities underpinned by our Children’s Services Plan and our LOIP are aligned and are complimentary to the delivery of a transformational whole family approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing in the city, while remaining responsive to emerging evidence of need.

In response to COVID-19 a telephone advice and support line was set up for parents and young people who required support regarding their mental health and wellbeing. This was well utilised, particularly by parents who were looking to support their children. A Parent Learning Hub that was developed prior to COVID-19 to provide digital support for parents was refreshed and relaunched. This provided various options for learning at home and supporting family wellbeing. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) also developed digital supports in the form of ‘Keep CAMHS and Carry On’ podcasts alongside adapted service delivery throughout the pandemic.

As lockdowns ended and schools began to reopen, school-based staff reported an increase in the volume and complexity of mental health and wellbeing concerns amongst young people. A virtual peer support forum was established to enable the multidisciplinary team to come together to share experiences and to support each other at a time when it was more difficult to do this in person due to social distancing measures.

Our Children’s Mental Wellbeing group priorities for 2021-2022

- Improve access to mental health and wellbeing supports
- Increase access to free physical education
- Increase access to digital wellbeing tools

Spotlight on our Fit Like Hubs

This year we have established our Fit Like Hubs in 3 localities: Torry, Northfield and Tillydrone. The role of the Hubs is to support the wellbeing needs of our most vulnerable children from 0 -18 and their families across the city. It is a collaboration of support services including Health, Social Work, Community Learning and Development, Education and 3rd Sector Partners such as Children 1st, Foyer and Alcohol and Drugs Action. The FitLike Hubs provide a single entry point for families to access support. This includes self-seeking support and/or agency request.



Our multi agency team works in partnership to meet the whole needs of families to respond to mental health and wellbeing and support for financial stress, universal access to practical, emotional and financial needs.

We respond to both critical needs and long term needs where requested and needed. We can offer direct support or signpost to universal services.

Good practice has been seen in being able to build relationships with parents and carers which in many cases has enabled the start of forming positive relationships with young people.

We are already seeing some very quick, responsive partnership work putting family at the centre, asking them what they need and when. The breadth of skills, experience, knowledge and resource is offering families choice in how they approach their own family wellbeing and who they would like support from. This is really empowering and feels much less intimidating or threatening for families who have experienced difficulty with statutory services with other services.

We have been able to tailor support from a number of agencies for a child by contacting them via hub relationships and this has prevented repeated stories told by mum or completing forms and has been timely.

Corporate Parenting

As corporate parents we will ensure 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026



96.7% of looked after children in Aberdeen City left school with 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 3 – higher than the rate of 87.1% for Scotland

63% of looked after children in Aberdeen City had a positive destination (based on 9-month follow-up survey in 2019/2020)

24.9% of Looked After Children in the city had more than one placement

In 2020 12% of Looked After Children were 16 or Over

In 2020 19% of Looked After Children remained at home

This aim is the responsibility of our “Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement” group who tell us:

The Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement Group have oversight of the LOIP Improvement Project Stretch aim 5; 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. The multi-agency group which includes representation from the care experienced community provides oversight of the improvement project actions which supports this achievement aim and links in with the Corporate Parenting Plan activities for 2021-2023. The Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement group has specific governance and monitoring in relation to the updated Corporate Parenting Plan and Champions Board plans which are aligned with LOIP priorities.

The updated Plans reflect the duties and commitments, additionally threading the principles of The Promise and findings from The Independent Care Review.

https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Promise_v7.pdf

The group has had multi agency focus on the data around shifting the balance of care and how we safely support care plans where young people can be supported to be looked after at home and equally, looked after within kinship arrangements. Health colleagues having oversight of health assessments and interface with required provision.

A new development is that a Corporate Parenting Lead Officer post has been created and this role will have oversight of the improvement plans in addition to a range of related activities that will support the work of the group.

Our Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement group priorities for 2021-2022

- Improving educational outcomes for Looked After Children
- Supporting families to increase the amount of time that Looked After Children remain at home or with kin
- Improving care experienced young people’s understanding of the services and supports available to them

Attainment and Transitions

95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026



82.3% of School Leavers in the most deprived 20% of our communities went on to a positive destination in 2019/2020

Citywide 89.5% of School Leavers went on to a positive destination in 2019/2020

93 Young People between 2019 and 2021 are undertaking foundation apprenticeships

97% of young people achieved literacy ant level 3; 95%achived level 3 in numeracy

Over 2020/2021 attendance was at 93.7%

This aim is the responsibility of our “Attainment and Transitions” group who tell us:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the local economy with the loss of employment opportunities. The opportunities available to young people in some sectors continues to change and this uncertainty presents a number of challenges for young people and their families and drove the development of a one-stop-shop website, known as ABZ Works. The website was successfully launched to illustrate growth areas and progression pathways on and benefited from being shaped by some of our Care Experienced young people. As a dynamic platform, the website will be continually refreshed allowing Officers to add and change content.

Significant time has been invested in the development of a citywide data system to aid our work to deliver the Alternative Certification Model in the short term and to raise attainment and improve positive destinations in the longer term. The PowerBI platform has enabled the analysis of whole school data subject by subject historical data, and pivot table analysis with individual pupil data sets. In the words of one of the representative head teachers, *‘this is the game changer’*.

An automatic pathway to a full-time college course has been offered to young people across the city who were unable to complete courses at college over session 20/21.

A Strategic group has been established to consider more fully the aspirations of the community at Northfield (young people and parents and carers) to help design a curriculum offer more suited to their interests and ambitions. This approach will enable the community to drive innovation and improvement at local level.

A wider range of Foundation Apprenticeships are being offered and traditional boundaries challenged with the delivery of the programme in one year and the range of options available. Of particular note is the Level 5 Construction Foundation Apprenticeship offered by St Machar Academy, NESCOL and Robertson’s Construction. Participation in the pathway will provide a range of certificates and qualifications that will make successful students some of the most employable young people within Aberdeen City.

‘Lift Off!’ was our first online induction event for the senior students of Aberdeen City. A significant aim of the day was to change the narrative around the future employment prospects of young people, to reaffirm that there are still opportunities in the oil and gas industry and future opportunities in renewables, and to encourage young people that Aberdeen remains a city of opportunity for them and their families. The event was attended by 50% of all of Aberdeen’s S5 and S6 pupils with positive feedback from pupils, providers, and schools with evidence of a strong desire for a similar event next year.

The Wood Foundation operate a programme called, 'Excelerate'. Excelerate is an investment in empowering transformational system change in education, drawing upon international systems of innovative learning and teaching. Following a robust selection process which benefited from international expertise, 4 schools in the City have been accepted onto the programme in 2021/22.

These initiatives have had impact. There is clear evidence of improved attainment across the senior phase with an improvement of over 5% in National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses from last year. Although the assessment methodologies are different and are therefore not directly comparable, considerable improvement is evident in the pass rates and attainment grades as well as across our priority areas.

Our Attainment and Transitions group priorities for 2021-2022

- Improving our Senior Phase offer and to ensure it links with sector needs
- Increasing support for vulnerable learners
- Improving literacy and numeracy

Youth Participation and Engagement

Child friendly city where all decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026



“We may be small but we have big ideas”

“Just because we’re young, doesn’t mean our voices shouldn’t be heard”

“We don’t get banned from the shops. It’s just a better place to be.”

**World Children’s Day 2021
Watch our video here**



CPP- World
Childrens Day.mp4

We consulted with children and young people on the City Centre Masterplan. It’s their City.

This aim is the responsibility of our “Child Friendly City” Project Board who tell us:

The partnership group continue to progress work to fully embed the UNCRC across the partnership. We have seen commitment from Partners who have identified champions and ambassadors. There has been significant training and awareness raising across our Partnership. We have engaged directly with children and young people in decision-making to implement the many aspects of achieving a Child Friendly City, consulted and involved young people in our comms including the development of ABZ website, in how best to return to school, in the refreshed LOIP and in the development of Aberdeen City itself. The Summer of Play shows our commitment to deliver child friendly services and builds on the success of our Fit Like Hubs

We have been working on a project called “Write Right About Me” which aims to transform the way we write about children, young people, and their families so that it is accessible, non-judgmental and has longevity.

The Aberdeen Young Person’s Rights Service (formerly Children’s Rights Service) are key supporters of care experienced young people in their engagement with the Champions Board, improving dialogue with Corporate Parents, and advocating independently on their behalf through various formal processes. Following a review involving care experienced young people, we have rebranded the service with an extended remit to include children and young people involved in child protection processes as well as expanding the age range of those who can be referred up to 26 years. We use the Mind of My Own app to hear from our children and young people and have received three awards from the device creators for our good practice use of the app.

Our Child Friendly City Project Board priorities for 2021-2022

- Continuing our work to achieve UNICEF Child Friendly City status
- Improving the accessibility of our documents
- Involving young people in our policy and planning
- Making sure our staff are UNCRC ready

Youth Justice

30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026



In 2019/20, 714 young people (under 18 years) were identified as being involved in criminality – up from 672 in 2018/19

Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, the total number of Offences for under 18's increased from 1,481 to 1,595

Between April and July 2020, 185 8-17 year olds committed offences, compared to 361 in the same period of 2019/20

In 2019/20, 435 of the juveniles were aged 8-15 years and 279 were aged 16-17 years

Approximately two-thirds (477) of offenders in 2019/2020 were male and one third (237) were female

This aim is the responsibility of our “Youth Justice” group who tell us:

The YJ Sub-group meets on a 5 weekly cycle and has a well establish core group of around 22 members from across the multi-agency partnership who attend regularly. The administrative planning and communication with group members is led by the Whole Systems Approach lead officer and co-chaired with their support. The Multi Agency Youth Justice Plan 2021-2023 has been agreed by this group and will be finalised and circulated alongside the updated FRAME, Care and Risk Management and Secure Care Procedure, all documents refreshed by this group. There will be a launch of these documents with supporting work force development webinar, introducing practitioners to best practice with those young people in Care and Risk Management processes.

This group oversees Stretch Outcome 9 *30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026* and 5 LOIP Improvement Charters; consisting of three new and two existing Charters.

Our Youth Justice” priorities for 2021-2022

- partnership scoping and direct activity in developing opportunities to listen to the experiences of young people who are in conflict with the law, and by hearing these experiences to consider ways of adopting this into working practices.
- The updated National Guidance re Early and Effective Intervention is being considered within a local practice context and support has been agreed from the CYCJ to consider local responses.
- Sharing and responding to practice experiences of local impact of the Age of Criminal Responsibility
- Sharing, managing and applying data to local practice improvements
- Agreeing a transition protocol with Justice Social Work
- Signing off an agreed position and practice statement re Trauma informed approaches

From the Chair:

As Chair of the Children's Service Board, I would like to acknowledge the support for, and participation in, this work from a range of colleagues across the Partnership. Clearly something of this scale requires a collaborative approach and the range of improvement activity highlighted here illustrates just how much we work together in Aberdeen City to improve our services for children and families in Aberdeen. This has been a year like no other, and in the face of many operational challenges faced by all services, the work of the Children's Services Board has continued. On behalf of the Community Planning Partnership, I would like to thank and commend all colleagues for their contributions.

Graeme Simpson

Chair of the Children's Services Board
Chief Officer Integrated Children & Family Services and Chief Social Work Officer
Aberdeen City Council

December 2021