



Community Planning
Aberdeen



DRAFT 17 February 2023

Aberdeen City's

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023 - 2026

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INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



The Aberdeen City Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2023-26 articulates the outcomes Community Planning Partners hope to realise for children, young people and families by working together over the lifetime of this Plan. Our vision remains to make Aberdeen a place where all children and young people can grow up loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential.

Considerable gains have been made in integrating services over the last reporting period. Co-location and co-delivery are increasingly evident across the universal services and our multi-agency Fit Like Hubs provide a model for targeted partnership integration and delivery. We now need to build on this positive start to ensure services at universal, targeted and specialist levels of our Tiered Intervention Framework provide effective early and preventative Family Support. We recognise that co-designing more integrated services with service users and their families will be critical to delivery of this Plan. There is also a need to improve the alignment of children's services with adult services in order to take a whole family approach and be well prepared for the introduction of the National Care Service.

In developing this plan, we have listened to the priorities for our children and young people, their families and those who support them through opportunities to engage with the emerging data informing this Plan and from survey data held across the Community Planning Partnership. The data gleaned from this early engagement was considered alongside a range of wider data sources to help identify priorities for transformation, development and improvement. We formally consulted on our draft Plan from 20th February 2023 and took account of what children, young people and families told us. Meaningful and effective participation will be central to the delivery of this Plan and we will monitor and report on how our children and young people have directly influenced service delivery through Community Planning Aberdeen.

Our Children's Services Plan is one of a suite of Statutory Plans which support delivery of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan. Strategic plans for children include our Corporate Parenting Plan, Child Protection Improvement Plan, Children's Rights Report, Aberdeen City's Health & Social Care Partnership Strategic Plan, the education National Improvement Framework Plan, Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan and Accessibility Plan, our Community Learning and Development Plan, Community Justice Plan, Locality Plans and our Child Poverty Plan. We have worked to integrate the full range of statutory Plans into this Children's Services Plan and clearly linked the Plan to work being coordinated through the local Autism and Carers' Strategies. In setting our priorities for action we have tried to analyse information more holistically and this has highlighted a need to think carefully about the data we collect to aid future monitoring and planning.

As we move forward we would hope to better align the timing of published Plans to support our delivery of more integrated services as believe that this alignment will help us maximise the difference we make to the communities we collectively serve.

National Policy and legislation

The Promise, the UNCRC and Morgan Review drive the delivery of more agile 'up stream' services which are co-designed with children and families and routinely re-set to ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes for all children and young people. These policies place increased emphasis on our access to live data to determine the success of our system and our joining up of children's and adult services.

Statutory Plans and Strategies

IJB driven Plans:

Carers Strategy
Autism Strategy
ACHSCP Strategic Plan

Local Authority driven Plans:

NIF education Plan
Parental Involvement and Engagement Plan
Children's Rights Report
ELC Delivery Plan
Accessibility Plan
Community Learning and Development Plan
Corporate Parenting Plan

Shared Plans:

Child Poverty Action Plan
Community Justice Plan
Locality Plans

Children's Services Plan

Local Outcome Improvement Plan

Work recently committed

In preparation for delivery of policies and legislation the Community Planning Partnership has already committed to:

- GIRFEC pathfinder to align children and adult services and improve transitions for those with disabilities
- Establish a Bairns Hoose at the Links Hub and look at the location of the Courts
- Collaborate to develop a Family Support Model
- Develop a Business Case around complex care

LOIP stretch outcome 4: 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026

LOIP stretch outcome 5: 90% of children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026

LOIP stretch outcome 6: 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

LOIP stretch outcome 7: 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026

LOIP stretch outcome 8: 30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026

LOIP stretch outcome 9: 95% of our children with additional support needs/disabilities will experience a positive transition to adult services by 2026

As a Community Planning Partnership we recognise that we are in a period of change. This more integrated Plan has triggered a refresh of governance arrangements which are currently being established and will be kept under review. We know that the needs of our families continue to change and as a result we will keep this Plan under regular review to ensure that it aids our children and families to recover from the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

Eleanor Sheppard

Interim Director Children and Family Services (Chair of the Children's Services Board)

FOUNDATIONS WHICH CONTINUE TO BE DEVELOPED



We provide a range of universal and more targeted resources and services for families and are making good progress in integrating our offer to families.

Getting it Right for Every Child continues to guide working practices

The principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) continue to form the foundations of inclusive planning to ensure that children and young people get the right help from the right people at the right time. However, we increasingly speak about Getting it Right for Every Child and Family. The establishment of the Aberdeen Protects site in 2021, which deliberately brings together policies and guidance relating to children and adults, will help drive more integrated whole family approaches in the future.



The partnership GIRFEC Operational Guidance has been updated in keeping with the national guidance. This will be rolled out as our new Plan is published and kept under routine review thereafter. We aspire to develop a more regional approach to better support those who live in one Local Authority area but access services in another.

Our children and young people have told us that the format of our Child's Plan is not as accessible as they feel it should be. We will therefore engage with our children and young people to review the Child's Plan format over the lifetime of this Plan.

9.7% of the 755 young people who responded to a recent children's rights survey didn't feel that their right to privacy is respected. 15.9% didn't feel that what is best for them is considered by people making decisions about them. There is a need to ensure that we maintain focus on the active participation of our young people in decision making.

Young people are becoming far more aware of the children's rights agenda and better mechanisms are now in place to check how well we enable them to claim their rights.

"We are never forced to do anything that we don't want to do which allows us to do the things we love doing at the moment and for the future." (young person aged 12)

“I think there are good opportunities to join clubs that will help me develop skills and trips that are useful for life skills.” (young person aged 10)

Feedback suggests that some children and young people are not always getting what they feel they need from us. 50% of respondents to the recent survey didn't feel that they get the extra support they need in all areas of their life. Considerable supplementary evidence suggests a need to continue to work to address the mental health and additional support needs agenda. There is a need to keep the children's rights agenda in the forefront of our minds and become more sophisticated in our data collection to enable us to accurately determine how effectively our policies and approaches support individual groups.

“Make sure people are aware support is available and how they can get it if they need.” (young person aged 16)

The universal provision of the named person service continues to ensure that every child, young person and family knows who to contact when they need access to relevant support and that such universal support is non-stigmatising. Utilisation of the SHANARRI (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included) wellbeing indicators is well embedded. There is no obligation on children and families to accept advice or support from the named person. Children's rights are at the heart of our approach but only 70% of the 755 children and young people recently surveyed believe that they have a chance to say what they think and have their views listened to. There is a need to continue to maintain a focus on children's rights in keeping with the anticipated Statutory Guidance on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and carefully consider how children and young people can independently access information from a range of services through the development of a single information source. A formal complaints process for children and young people will be established over the lifetime of this Plan.

There is good provision of play, greenspace and cultural offers for children and families

Play is now embedded across Early Level in Early Learning and Childcare and Schools, in School Age Childcare and across our communities with work on-going to promote high quality play pedagogy in the early stages of primary schools.

As part of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Aberdeen, two new Outdoor Nurseries were opened in January 2022, further demonstrating our commitment to outdoor learning and learning through play. Both Hazlehead and Duthie Park Outdoor Nurseries provide high quality, challenging learning experiences, in a safe and nurturing environment, facilitated and scaffolded by highly trained practitioners. These provisions have an outdoor focus, offering unique and varied experiences for children, families, staff and wider communities.

Hazlehead Outdoor Nursery provides a woodland habitat for children to reap the benefits from, as well as local connections with the horticulture work of the Environmental Services team on site, whilst Duthie Park Outdoor Nursery has a range of natural and man-made green spaces for children to explore and learn from throughout the park. Each setting has an indoor space available, which acts as the emergency shelter in adverse weather conditions. However, the outdoors are at the core of each setting's ethos with learning and routines taking place daily outside, in almost all weathers.

At this year's Beautiful Scotland awards Aberdeen was awarded a Gold Medal and best city. The city was also joint first in Scotland and awarded the Beautiful Scotland Rose Bowl. The city is a Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society Award winner for our horticulture displays. Aberdeen has an incredible 34 Its Your Neighbourhood groups representing the city. More groups than any other local authority in Scotland. The awards recognise the dedication of all our community partners, schools,

Friends groups, volunteers and staff in caring for and maintaining the city's green spaces. The environmental and social benefits of their work are there for us all to enjoy, across the city.

Aberdeen has a long tradition of horticultural excellence and community partnership, one that we have continued to build upon even during the last few difficult years of a global pandemic. Our parks and green spaces are one of our greatest assets – along with those who faithfully and lovingly care for them.

Along with the Beautiful Awards, Aberdeen has had 7 sites awarded Green Flags. The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

- Duthie Park, Green Heritage award and 10th anniversary of being awarded a green flag
- Hazlehead Park
- Seaton Park
- Johnston Gardens
- Victoria Park
- Slopefield Allotments
- Garthdee Field Allotments

A recent survey of our children and young people elicited positive responses about our parks and green space with one child observing:

“Aberdeen City Council helps us enjoy the rights that we have by providing peaceful areas to relax in, give us good education and they provide us with a huge playground so we can go for walks and get fresh air.” (Age 11)

Our recent bulb planting initiative has seen 160,000 spring bulbs delivered to 112 schools, nurseries, 'Friends of', residents groups, community councils, churches and individuals. Our Clean Up Aberdeen campaign has seen 2777 volunteers involved in 235 clean ups, filling 1700 bags. The first Wee Forest has been planted in Aberdeen thanks to the joint efforts of Aberdeen City Council's Environmental Services team, NatureScot, and pupils and staff of Woodside Primary School. Our forest has seen, around 600 native trees planted by the school's "Wee Foresters". It is Aberdeen's first and only Wee Forest and is the most northerly of all Wee Forests in Scotland.

Our Queens Green Canopy planting has seen more than 20,000 trees planted across the city this year. Aberdeen has been selected as one of the initiative's Champion Cities. The Champion City programme has been launched to celebrate some of the nation's outstanding cities which have trees as a central part of their plans for green spaces. Being a Champion City is a great honour as we are one of only 20 cities across the whole of the UK to be awarded this.

Young people benefit from a range of cultural offerings but most routinely highlight the benefits of local community groups, school extra-curricular and music making activities when asked what they enjoy most.

78% of the 755 children and young people who responded to the recent children's rights survey felt they had good opportunities to meet with others and join groups and organisations. However, the inspiring young people who recently presented to full Council spoke of how access to activities are currently more restricted as family finances are impacted by the cost of living crisis. There is a need to keep the current cost of living crisis at the heart of this Plan.

Children and young people do not have fond memories of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*“I didn’t like that swimming pools were closed and all other things were also affected by COVID 19.”
(Young person aged 10)*

We are collaborating to greater effect than we were before

The COVID-19 pandemic guided us to take a more agile approach to the delivery of services and accelerated the participation of children and young people in their design. The pandemic also triggered a review of the data we collect to ensure that we were able to respond to the changing needs of children and families, with greater agility. Helping to ensure that the basic needs of families were met was a key priority over the periods of national lockdown and relied on effective multi-agency working. The Aberdeen City Council Data and Insights Cluster coordinated partnership data sets to help identify families most in need. This use of technology has transformed partnership insight and service delivery and will be built upon.

The use of single agency data has also become more sophisticated and now supports the earlier identification of risk. Data dashboards allow more robust data analysis at school, community and city-wide level to improve our understanding of unmet need and helps us reshape services to address gaps in provision. Access to live data is transforming service improvement planning and enabling services to make timely requests for assistance but there is more to do. There is now a need to ensure that those supporting delivery of the Children’s Services Plan 2023-26 have easy access to live matched partnership data to help them maintain strategic oversight of progress against this Plan.

A central request for assistance process was established in early 2020 to enable professionals to quickly access support for children and families identified in immediate need. This centralised approach continues to enable services to work with partners to address need and gain invaluable insight into emerging trends which may indicate that rights are being compromised. We now want to build on this success, expanding the single referral system to allow all agencies to utilise it. This will further develop our understanding of need and vulnerability and support services to adapt their offer in response to emerging trends. It will also allow us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of risk and vulnerability across the Tiers of Universal, Targeted and Specialist.

Closer collaboration is enabling our approach to respond to sudden changes positively, this was clearly evident in our joint work to support the children and young people who fled Ukraine. The Local Authority, Integrated Joint Board, local college and other key partners continue to work closely together to support those displaced due to conflict. Partners now routinely plan and deliver together. Taking this highly collaborative approach has enabled us to successfully support around 400 Ukrainian children and young people at any one time and ensure effective provision of education, healthcare and employability supports to families.

We are seeing clear benefits in co-location

Collaboration across the wider partnership has accelerated and integration and co-location has guided the pooling of resource to ensure that children are able to claim their rights. An example of this is the joint delivery of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) by health and education at the Links Hub.

There is clear evidence that this more preventative and integrated approach is leading to a reduction in referrals to statutory and specialist agencies. There is also evidence that our work to support displaced persons due to conflict or resettlement schemes is stronger when we work together and plan more holistically and this will be further developed over the lifetime of this Plan.

Case Study Links Hub

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

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

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

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

Our integrated Fit Like Hubs provide a helpful model to guide our work towards further integration. Education, Children's Social Work, Community Learning, Health and third sector collaborated to establish our Fit Like Family Wellbeing Hubs in 2020. Fit Like Family wellbeing Hubs were established in order to ensure timely access to support for children and families when so many services were not able to deliver face to face support to those most vulnerable. The Hubs work to ensure that:

- Children and families receive the right support at the right time
- Children and families rights and individual wellbeing needs are addressed
- Children and families receive accessible and proactive support with their practical and emotional needs
- Children and families voices are heard



Delivery of these aims is underpinned by embracing a children's rights approach, in line with the move to bring the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots Law. Partners are grateful to young people at Northfield Academy who helped shape the development of the Hubs by sharing what was important to them and for proposing a welcoming name for the service.

Case Study Fit Like Aberdeen

The Hubs have moved from co-existence to collaboration and co-production in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

Coexistence: In November 2020 the multi-agency practitioners clarified what practitioners from the different agencies could do and with whom. This helped develop an understanding of the uniqueness that each partner brings to the collective and helped individual agencies move from a single agency agenda to a shared one and developed an openness to doing things differently together.

Co-operation: By sharing information and recognising the mutual benefits and values of partnership working, practitioners pulled together collective knowledge and skills which enabled them to develop a shared understanding and ethos that is embedded within the framework of the promise.

Co-ordination: By planning together, shaping roles, responsibilities and pooling resource and being open to risk taking, practitioners accepted the need to adjust, to do things differently and make the necessary changes to avoid overlap. Taking a test, learn and develop approach helped increase the capacity of those attached to the Hubs.

Collaboration and Co-production has brought about cultural changes with shared leadership resulting in strong multi-agency partnership working to co-deliver effective and early intervention supports to children young people and families

Those keen to seek support independently don't always know where to look

The pandemic triggered the development of a range of approaches to make information more easily available to families. Opportunities for families to self-refer into services were also established and well received. There is now a need to look at all of the digital content available across the partnership to ensure a single point of access to information to improve cohesion across the Community Planning Partnership.

Capacity building programmes for parents and carers are not yet aligned

The Education Service has worked to increase access to parenting support by working in partnership with a range of partners to test different approaches in keeping with the Aberdeen City Council Parental Involvement and Engagement Plan.

The ACC Stronger Families Series (SFS) launched in August 2021 and provides focused learning to support the wellbeing needs of all. The Series has been shaped in collaboration with parents, head teachers, family practitioners and third sector partners. Key sessions already delivered include:

- Penumbra - Self Harm
- NHS – Stress, Worry & Loneliness
- Sleep Scotland – Sleep for teenagers
- ACIS – Teenage Brain Development
- 4 Pillars – Supporting Grampian's LGBT+ community
- Emotion Coaching – an introductory session
- ACIS – Working through our worries together
- Priority Families – Peer Relationships/ Peer Pressure

619 parents and carers signed up to five virtual events although rates of attendance have not exceeded one third of those signed up. Feedback shows that 96% of parents who attended the workshop and completed the evaluation believed that their knowledge had increased in the subject area. When asked to score their confidence levels in applying their newfound knowledge the average score was 6.42 across the whole series. (1 = not confident, 8 = extremely confident). When asked how they rated the practical suggestions and advice given during each live event to support their child the average rating was 6.98 across the series. (1 = poor, 8 = excellent). Parents reflected a wide range of personal 'take aways' from the sessions:



"My normal is not my son's normal. Great advice."

Twelve education practitioners were trained to support delivery of a toolkit produced by Parent Network Scotland. Training focussed on key areas: selfcare, confidence, new research and developing new online delivery skills. The training was well received by the 12 practitioners:

"Very positive experience. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and stretched me. It increased my confidence in what I could do online and helped me to master new skills with the IT. It reaffirmed to me how important it is to challenge myself to do things out of my comfort zone so I can grow and develop personally and professionally"

The Toolkit uses evidence-based interventions to support family wellbeing and has been effectively used over school session 2021/22. Four courses were completed with 20 parents and 32 children involved. The Pilot evaluation showed an increase in all parent's understanding of their child's emotions, with 85% parents feeling more able to identify their feelings, and 80% more aware of how to support their child with emotions as shown by this feedback from parents:

"I now have more understanding of how my children think and see things from their side"

"I learned about the importance of filling my cup, self-compassion"

"My awareness is much higher; it did open my eyes in many areas I had no idea of"

Following the successful completion of the Toolkit two parents are currently completing Parenting Matters SCQF Level 5 in Supporting Family Relationships and will be offered a place on Personal and Social Development to continue their Parent Academy Journey. Engagement with the Wellbeing Toolkit will continue.

The Education Service and Health are now joint funding a test of change with Place2Be and the impact of this intervention of children and families will be evaluated over the lifetime of this Plan. There is now a need to consider how all such programmes fit with a single information source and ensure better alignment.

More responsive targeted supports help mitigate risk

Education Recovery and Scottish Attainment Challenge funding has enabled the expansion of the Family Learning Service to families who wish to access it.



Family learning is a citywide provision, offering a holistic, family-led approach with the primary focus of encouraging families to learn together. The team specifically design activities to enable parents to understand how best to support their children's learning. Working with this method of engagement and learning fosters positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promotes socio-economic resilience, and challenges educational disadvantage.

The expansion of the offer to families has resulted in a 33% increase in the number of families being supported in April 2022 compared to 2021. In 2021 there were on average 113.3hrs per

month dedicated to 121 support for families, in 2022 this has increased by 63% to 184.7 hours per month. Evaluations returned by 94% of families who use the service evidenced improvement in confidence, knowledge, and skills around parenting.

'I can go on and on talking about how comfortable you have made us to be, you have always put smiles on our faces, thanks for being good to us, thanks for checking up on us all the time and thanks for being a friend to my family even in a strange land like this. My family and I can never forget the impact and support of Family Learning in our home.'

Education Recovery funding and Scottish Attainment Challenge funding has also enabled the provision of Youth Workers to provide early and preventative support to young people across the city. There is a growing body of evidence that supports the maintenance of this approach to help mitigate harms as we emerge from the pandemic.

The number of participants registered for a youth work activity in schools between August 2021 and the end of August 2022 was 1018. The number of sessions attended during this period is 7318; equating to 7513 learner hours.

The youth work team is licensed to deliver the Hi-5 and Dynamic Youth awards and 29 young people have achieved a Hi-5 award with 23 achieving a Dynamic Youth Award.



Youth work offered targeted transition support for pupils moving from primary to secondary school in order to lessen anxiety about this key transition point. One parent said:

“The course really helped build up my son’s confidence and excitement about going to the academy – he has very little nerves or worries at all now and is so excited to start! The course was excellent and covered so many good areas which helped to prepare him, and he loved being part of it and looked forward to Tuesdays! The course was excellent – can't praise it enough 😊 hope it is continued next year for the next set of P7's “

Family Learning and Youth Work provision will be maintained through use of Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding and the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund over 22/23. There is a need to look at how this resource and other Tier 2 resources can be better aligned around our emerging Family Support Model.

The Education Service offers a range of Additional Support Needs (ASN) and outreach Services including Hearing Support (inclusive of Aberdeen School for the Deaf), Vision Support, English as an Additional Language (“EAL”), Dyslexia Outreach, Child Planning Support, Links Early Learning and Childcare Hub, and the Wellbeing Team. There is now a need to look at the needs of parents and carers supporting children and young people with a disability to ensure that provision over the Community Planning Partnership is aligned and that transitions are well planned, this should be informed by the lived experiences of families and participation in a GIRFE pathfinder will help progress work in this area.

A range of preventative services, such as the Priority Families team and Youth Justice Management Unit wrap around vulnerable families to help protect children and ensure they are safe. Care Inspectorate feedback evidences the strength of this approach.

The Priority Families service worked with 40 families comprising 178 individuals, 78 adults and 100 children between July 2021 and September 2022. Over 50% of families were female single parent households, with the average number of children in a family being 2. School aged children made up the significant majority (91%), with only 9% of children being of pre-school age. Most families were in receipt of benefits.

The seven functions below indicate the main areas that Priority Families service supported families with over this period:

- Parenting skills
- Routines & boundaries
- Problem solving
- Home conditions
- Financial position
- Child health & wellbeing
- Adult health & wellbeing

The work of the team in supporting families has resulted in significantly improved outcomes including a 72% reduction in criminal charges, contributing to an overall reduction of 70% in crime and antisocial behaviour linked to the families. Parents being supported reported a 69% increase in their own parenting skills and a 64% improvement in their home environment.

There has also been positive impact on school attendance and achievement. Joint working with education resulted in a young person who had 13% school attendance rate at the point of referral achieving a 95% attendance rate by the time the case was closing, he went onto sit Nat 4's and is now in college doing a Pathways to Uniformed Services Course and is sustaining a part time job. A second young person wasn't engaging with school or the Home Liaison Officer and with support went to college and has now moved onto an apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering.

Despite the range of supports available, families and professionals report a lack of clarity around the availability of support and this will be addressed through this Plan.

More collaborative practices are aiding the development of a partnership Family Support Model in keeping with The Promise, an improved neurodevelopmental pathway as a pathfinder for the Children and Young People's Mental Health Delivery Board and will help shape the further integration required to care for and protect children as we develop a Bairns' Hoose.

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



A range of effective support is available to new mothers and

A team of 27 hospital and community based midwives support those giving birth in the city, in addition there is a specialist substance misuse team including a Public Protection Midwife based at Aberdeen Maternity Hospital. The various teams utilise Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) to identify the wellbeing needs of expectant mother and child to provide appropriate levels of support or referral to specialist teams and services.

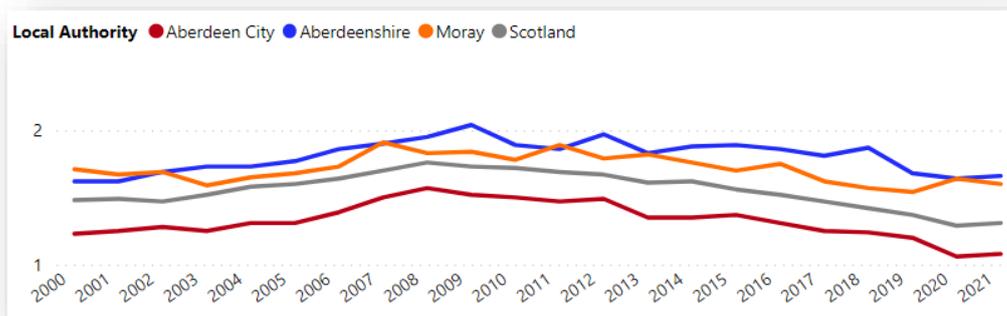
The Universal Health Visiting pathway offers a minimum of 11 visits to families with children under school age. Each Health Visitor makes use of the GIRFEC framework to identify any additional needs and make appropriate referrals or implement interventions to support the wellbeing of mother and child.

The Family Nurse Partnership offers a more targeted and intense approach to supporting mothers who are under 25 from the ante natal period to aged 2. Mothers then graduate back to the universal services.

Despite low fertility rates, the birth rate is increasing

National records for Scotland data shows that local fertility rates continue to reduce although rates are broadly following the national trend.

Fertility rates by Local Authority

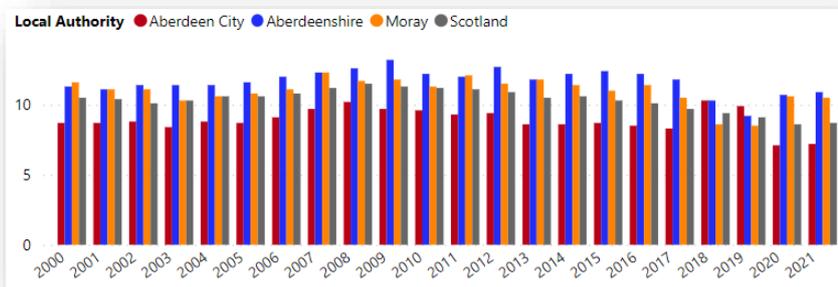


Source: [National Records of Scotland](#)

Despite this, and according to the Public Health Scotland data below, the number of births rose slightly in the city over 2021. In 2021 there were 2041 births, a slight increase from the 2007 births in 2020 bucking a reducing 5 year trend. This change is thought to be partially attributed to the number of international families arriving in the city to study with birth rates also thought to have been impacted by the pandemic.

National records for Scotland data identifies the birth rate by Local Authority per 1,000 (standardised). This data shows that Aberdeen continues to have a far lower birth rate than neighbouring Local Authority areas.

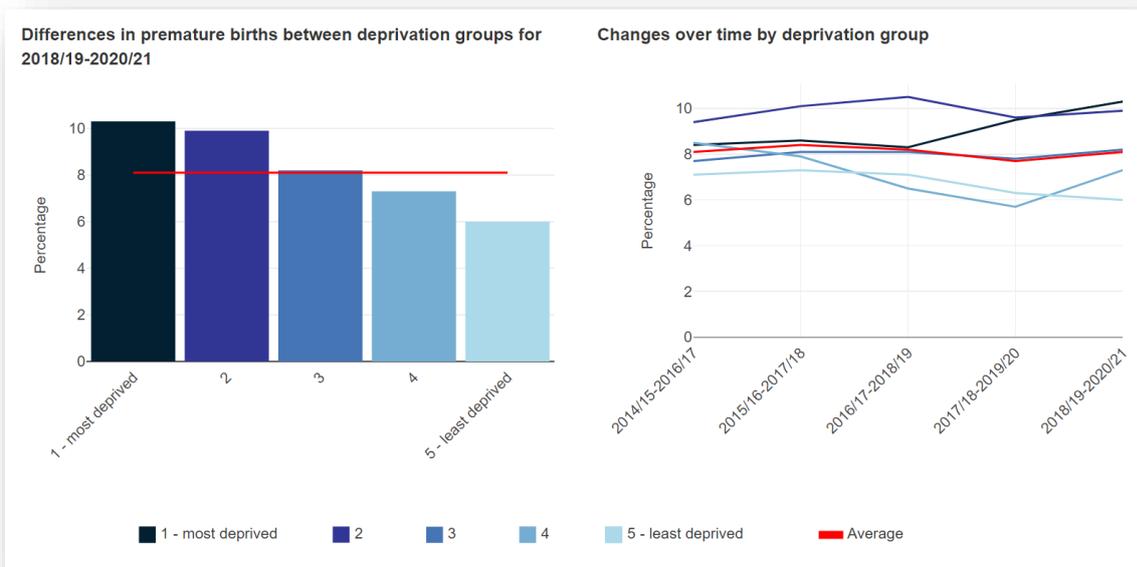
Birth rate by Local Authority per 1,000 (standardised)



Source: [National Records of Scotland](#)

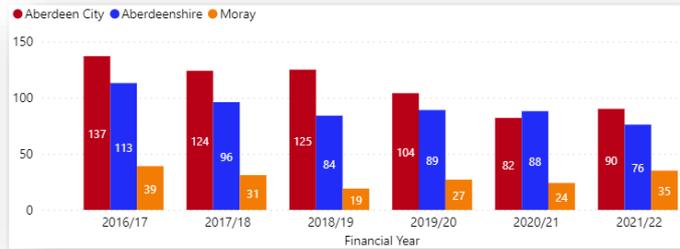
Poverty is a factor in the health of mothers and babies

Although the number of premature births is reasonably stable, the level is heavily influenced by deprivation.



According to Public Health Scotland data, slightly more babies born locally are a healthy birth weight (85.56%) compared to the national average of 84.17%. However, 90 babies were born with low birth weight over 21/22 and more premature babies were born to mothers living in areas of deprivation. Income maximisation for expectant and new mothers should continue to be prioritised as part of this Children's Services Plan 2023-26.

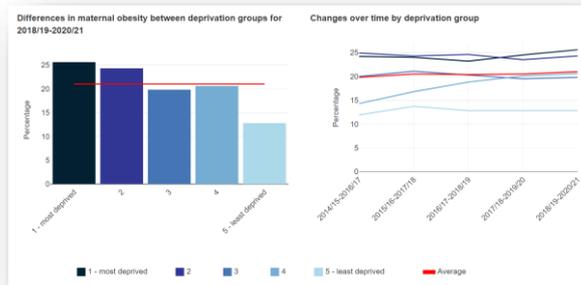
No. of babies of low birth weight (for gestational age)



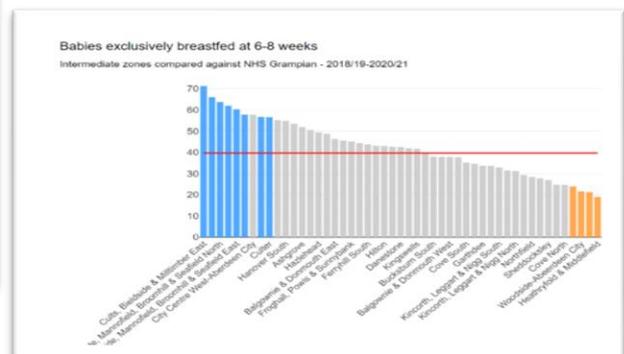
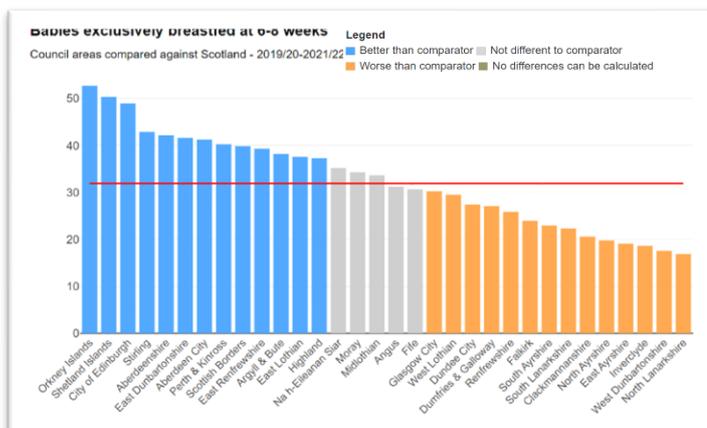
Source: [Public Health Scotland](#)

Maternal obesity sits at 21.04% locally compared to 25.27% nationally.

Public Health Scotland data shows that the percentage of babies exclusively breastfed at the 6-8 week review is higher in Aberdeen (41.24%) when compared to the national average of 31.88%. Again, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile is an influence.

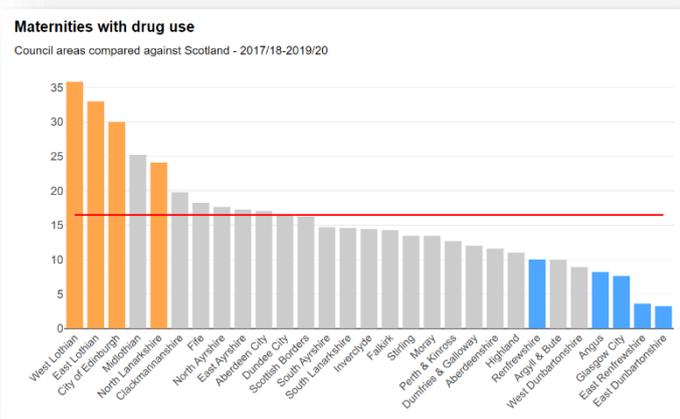


Breastfeeding initiation at birth is above target and higher than national levels although there is some variation across communities. Variation is more complex than simply looking by SIMD quintile. There is evidence locally that an increase in the level of peer support enables improvement in this area and this approach will be further developed. An improvement project has been initiated by health to support an increase in initiation and decrease in drop off at 6-8 weeks across the Sheddocksley, Summerhill and Mastrick communities. Progress will be reported to the Children's Services Board as there may be a role for others across the Partnership.

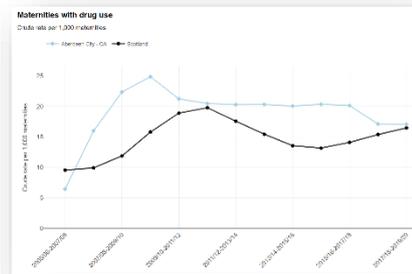


A specialist infant feeding team continue to progress towards UNICEF sustainability in breast feeding.

Public Health data from 2020 suggests that levels of maternities with drug use are now similar to our virtual comparators.

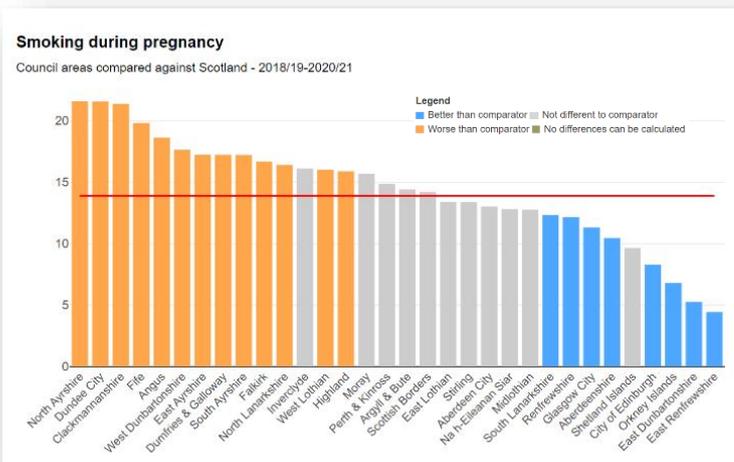


Legend
 Better than comparator (blue square)
 Not different to comparator (grey square)
 Worse than comparator (orange square)
 No differences can be calculated (dark grey square)



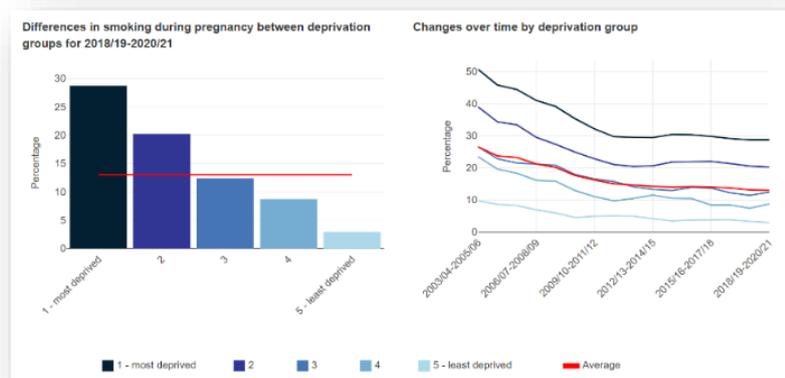
This requires to be monitored carefully as more current data becomes available for review.

Levels of smoking during pregnancy are lower than the national average when looking at whole population data. A reducing trend is evident over many years.



A review of data by SIMD quintile evidences limited variation in trend across SIMD quintiles, although there is evidence that very little progress has been made in addressing the link between SIMD quintile and smoking during pregnancy.





We need to better prepare those who are care experienced for parenthood

The number of unborn babies placed on the Child Protection Register has remained fairly stable over the last year although has fluctuated over time. The circumstances for pre-birth registration generally reflect known risk factors in the parents' life, addiction, mental health, domestic violence or indeed where there has been a previous child who has had to be removed from parental care.

The risk of experiencing compulsory intervention and/or having a child removed is greater for care leavers who become parents and access to and experience of advocacy is often poorer. Research highlights the following disadvantages for many care experienced parents, adversely impacting their and their children's outcomes:

- Influence of past experiences on parenting capacity
- Systemic disadvantage
- Parents' relationships with social workers
- Disadvantaged access to support

As one care experienced young parent stated : *"I'm a parent and it was just expected I'd fail. I felt like I was being judged throughout my pregnancy and it was a case of when my baby would be taken, not if"*.

Whilst losing a child to care is a traumatic experience for any parent, care experienced parents report intense feelings of failure having wanted to be good parents to their own children (Critchley, 2022) and often have shallower support systems to draw on. Locally, NHS Grampian have been awarded CORRA funding for a project to explore how we best support parents who have a child permanently removed from their care. So far, the project has engaged with 3 birth mothers and 1 birth father with further engagement being the priority over the coming 6 months. This project will have some crossover with how we think about supporting care experienced parents who have lost a child to care.

There is a need to work to improve the health outcomes of expectant and new mothers living in areas of deprivation and maximise uptake of the benefits they are entitled to.

There is also a need to better prepare those for whom we have Corporate Parenting Responsibilities for life beyond care, including preparing them for parenthood.

These areas will be including in the Children's Services Plan for 2023-26.

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



Health teams have been redesigned to meet need

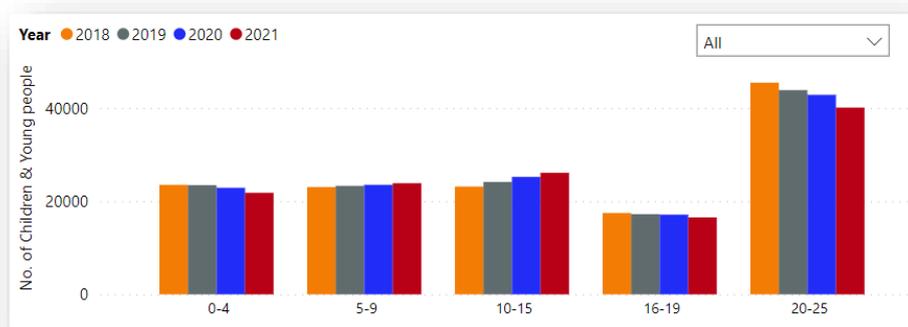
A team of 47 full time equivalent Health Visitors undertake the role of named person for our youngest children across the city until they attend Primary School, this is below the number of posts required. In order to proactively respond to recruitment challenges, the team are now supported by 12 full time equivalent trainee health visitors and this is helping to provide a pipeline of talent to fill the vacancies. Community Nursery Nurses complement the work of the team further by offering targeted packages of support to address the needs identified and delegated by Health Visiting teams.

In June 2020 the Health Visitors aligned their workforce to the locality model used by the Local Authority. This has helped develop a more flexible workforce who benefit from stronger relationships with colleagues serving the same communities and increased knowledge of the services available at community level. The Service adopted a new data system, MORSE, which is improving access to and the quality of data. Health continues to progress plans to merge all services for children and families under a Children's and Family Service and have appointed a Portfolio Lead.

More children are accessing services than before

Local Health data evidences a gradual rise in the child population over the last 10 years although this is not yet showing in published Public Health data. This is thought to be due to the recent increase in population of international students and the number of families seeking refuge in the city as a result of conflict.

Population of children and young people by age (Aberdeen City)



Source: [Public Health Scotland](#)

3.98% of the Aberdeen City population are now between 1 and 4 compared to 3.81% nationally. The universal services continue to be agile to ensure that all children secure an Early Learning and Childcare placement and access health services within the current levels of available resource.

Continued effective information sharing between the two Higher Education Institutions and the universal services will continue to be critical to support longer term planning.

The pandemic has impacted on children achieving developmental milestones

Local Government Benchmarking data evidences that a very high proportion of children (97%) are meeting their developmental milestones according to the 27-30 month review undertaken by Health Visitors. This is far higher than the national figure which sits at 85%.

However, only 83.05% of children were reviewed compared to the national average of over 90% due to the impact of the pandemic and shortages in qualified health visitors described earlier.



Lower coverage could account for why the data is at odds with anecdotal feedback by ELC settings and Health Visitors who identify considerable delays in speech and language development and social skills due to limited opportunities for socialisation. It could also indicate that those hardest to reach have not been assessed. The Health Visiting Service is working to increase the number of children who are reviewed to 95% over the lifetime of this Plan.

Health Visiting colleagues continue to make good progress in the roll out of their new data system which will enable more granular analysis of need to inform single and multi-agency planning. The Children’s Services Board will be apprised of progress in this area.

The development of early speech and language skills continues to be a concern

Education and Health are embedding the use of the CIRCLE framework to help support early child development. There is early evidence that the percentage of children with a speech and language disorder (as recorded on SEEMiS, the school management information system) is reducing slightly although it is thought too early to draw firm conclusions.

Stage	Number of Pupils - Speech or language disorder -	Roll by Stage 05-01-2023	% of Roll	Number of Pupils - Speech or language disorder -	Roll by Stage	% of Roll	Number of Pupils - Speech or language disorder -	Roll by Stage	% of Roll
N4	13	750	1.73%	-	-	-	-	-	-
N5	50	1852	2.70%	-	-	-	-	-	-
P1	66	2055	3.21%	67	2073	3.23%	87	2028	4.29%
P2	95	2252	4.22%	109	2041	5.34%	98	1983	4.94%
P3	116	2172	5.34%	99	1982	4.99%	103	1980	5.20%
P4	105	2117	4.96%	101	1993	5.07%	111	2107	5.27%
P5	102	2114	4.82%	110	2111	5.21%	90	2014	4.47%
P6	90	2227	4.04%	84	2001	4.20%	69	2014	3.43%
P7	70	2093	3.34%	65	1999	3.25%	52	1960	2.65%
S1	67	2097	3.20%	61	1930	3.16%	47	1950	2.41%
S2	59	2007	2.94%	46	1949	2.36%	39	1905	2.05%
S3	42	2007	2.09%	41	1907	2.15%	41	1817	2.26%
S4	41	1980	2.07%	40	1833	2.18%	34	1756	1.94%
S5	31	1501	2.07%	31	1599	1.94%	34	1503	2.26%
S6	21	918	2.29%	33	1057	3.12%	15	885	1.69%
Grand Total	968	28142	3.44%	887	24475	3.62%	820	23902	3.43%

The impact of the implementation of the CIRCLE framework on speech and language skills will be reviewed when the education census is completed again in September 2023 in order to determine next steps for the Children’s Services Board.

The uptake of immunisations is lower than it should be

The uptake of the 6 in 1 immunisation at 24 months (96.45%) is slightly below the national average of 97.1%. Update of the MMR locally (91.61%) is considerably lower than the national average of 94.45% and not related to SIMD quintile. The issue appears to be as a result of appointment system which prioritises certain immunisations. The system is currently being reviewed to address this vulnerability in addition to holding additional clinics to improve the uptake

of immunisations. Progress will be reported to the Children's Services Board to determine any role for other partners in securing improvement in this area.

The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has increased uptake

The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has offered the opportunity for greater collaboration between health and education. Health Visitors have welcomed the opportunity to co-locate with education at the Links Hub. There is anecdotal evidence that the integrated delivery model in operation at the Links Early Learning and Childcare Hub is effectively reducing the risk of children who are vulnerable requiring access to specialist services. This evidence is strengthened with a review of demand data. At the time of opening the Links Hub, only 40 children were registered to attend. Over an 18 month period the number of children registered has increased to 117 with almost all families self-referring to the service.

The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in August 2021 led to an increase in the number of children accessing and benefiting from funded ELC provision. As a result of the ELC Expansion Programme, Aberdeen City now offers a mixed delivery model of ELC provision:

- In 46 of our primary schools;
- In 46 Funded Providers;
- At the multi-agency Links Hub;
- At our Gaelic Medium Unit based in Gilcomstoun Primary School;
- At our 2 Outdoor Nursery provisions at Duthie and Hazlehead Parks; and
- Through 70 childminders

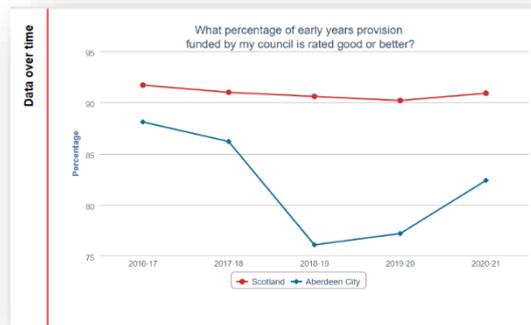
As of June 2017, 82% of 3 year olds and 91% of 4 year olds accessed ELC provision in Aberdeen. By December 2022, almost all three and four year olds in Aberdeen (90.7% and 97% respectively) take up their statutory ELC entitlement.

One of the key actions under Priority 1 of '*Best Start: Strategic Early Learning and Childcare Plan for Scotland 2022-26*' is to maximise uptake of ELC amongst two year olds. 35% of those thought eligible for an ELC placement at 2 years of age currently access their provision. This is 10% higher than the national average but still presents significant room for improvement. The Scottish Government is currently working with the UK Government to establish a data sharing agreement that will enable local authorities to target information about the ELC offer to households with an eligible two year old child, as has been the case in England for a number of years. Aberdeen City Council is currently engaged in this process which will be rolled out by summer 2023.

All Early Learning and Childcare settings offer a PEEP (Parents as Early Education Partners) programme to support parents and carers with programmes designed to reflect the self-reported needs of parents and carers. Families can also access support through the Local Authority Family Learning team. These programmes are not currently influenced by Health Visiting colleagues and this has been identified as an area for development.

There is a need to continue to focus on the delivery of quality ELC services

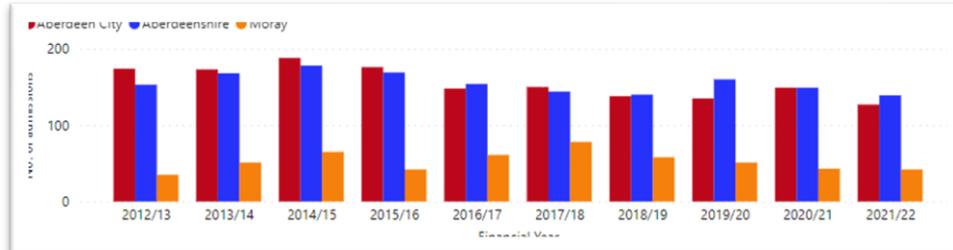
The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has impacted on the quality of Care Inspectorate evaluations in some settings, this trend is replicated nationally and continues to be a focus for the Education Service. Currently only of funded ELC provision are achieving grades of good or better when inspected. This is an improvement from last year but the Education Service need to maintain sharp focus in this area and will build this priority into the Education National Improvement Framework Plan and report progress to the Children's Services Board.



Closer collaboration and integration by the universal services helps to improve outcomes
 Closer collaboration between health and education has triggered a review of how Health Visitors are allocated across the city. Allocating Health Visitors across localities has helped develop closer working at community level; this is helping to strengthen the universal services. This change is also helping to improve communication from the named person at the point of transition to primary one and will continue to be developed over the lifetime of the 2023-26 Plan.

There is evidence of a decrease in the number of unintended injuries than before.
 Public Health data evidences that lower numbers of children under 5 are now presenting at Accident and Emergency with unintentional injuries than before. This should now be routinely monitored and maintained.

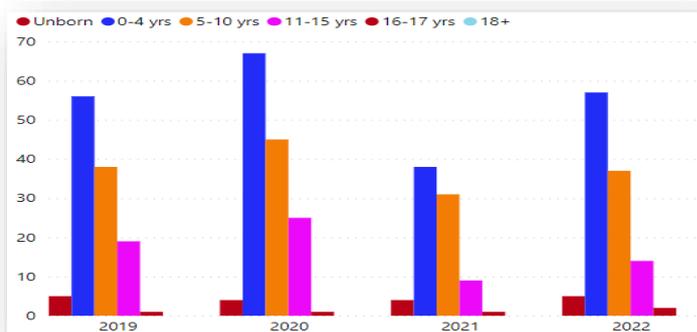
Unintentional injuries in children under 5 years old



Source: [Public Health Scotland](#)

We need to better understand and prevent the rise in child protection registrations
 We recognise the sharp increase in the number of child protection registrations of those aged 0-4 as hidden harm and neglect is identified. Our work to develop a Family Support Model should take this sharp increase into account and aim to mitigate the risks. This will be a focus of our Children's Services Plan for 2023-26.

Age of children on the Child Protection Register (as of 31st July)



Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

Health are working to increase the number of children seen for the 27 month review and increase the uptake of immunisations, progress will be reported through the Children's Services Board to help determine if there is a role for the Board in supporting improvement in either area.

The Education Service will focus on improving the quality of Early Learning and Childcare provision and report progress to the Board.

Health colleagues will work to increase the update of immunisations.

Closer alignment between the universal services will be maintained and developed.

The impact of the use of the CIRCLE framework will be monitored to ascertain if further work on early speech and language is required.

It is important to better understand the significant change in the number of children placed on the child protection register and consider our enhanced support offer to families at a universal and targeted level that mitigates the risk of neglect and harm.

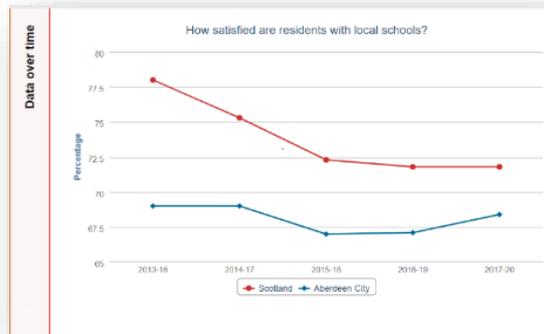
These areas will be included in the Children's Services Plan for 2023-26.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL AGE POPULATION AND THE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THEM?



Satisfaction with local schools is improving but remains low

Children from across the city benefit from access to education in one of our 61 schools. According to Local Government Benchmarking data, an increasing number of families are reporting satisfaction with local schools although satisfaction levels are still some way from the national average. There is a need to understand this more fully and this will be addressed in the first instance, through the Education Service National Improvement Framework Plan.



Children are increasingly aware of their rights

A recent survey of 755 children and young people across the city highlighted how our children and young people are more able to speak about their rights and how to claim them. It's now important for us to take a rights based approach in all of our work.

“I think they help with our rights because they give us 100 percent of all our rights for us to enjoy our life as a under 18. They give us a right to a education, a right to rest and play, a right to take part in any activities and groups with other children around us or even from far away.” (Age 11)

The number of children in our schools has increased significantly

Recent school census data shows that the increase in school population is considerable across Local Authority schools. The table below captures the Aberdeen City outcomes from each national pupil Census from 2019 to 2022 conducted in September of each year.

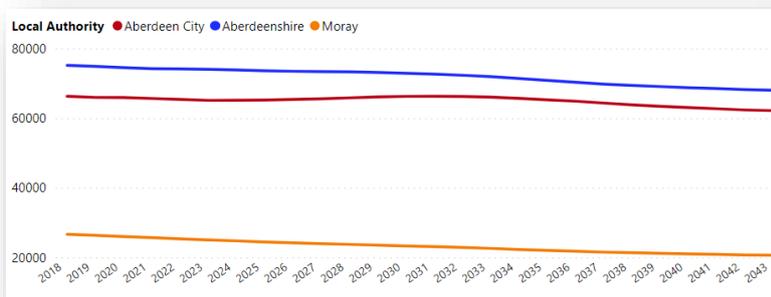
Census date	Total number of pupils	Primary	Secondary
Sept 2022	25,003	14,573	10,430
Sept 2021	24,260	14,084	10,041
Sept 2020	23,695	13,963	9,596
Sept 2019	23,156	13,915	9,106

The school roll has increased from 23,156 pupils in primary and secondary schools in September 2019, to 25,003 (+ 8.0%) in September 2022. Primary pupil numbers have risen by 4.7% (658 additional pupils) and the Secondary pupil cohort has increased by a more substantial 14.5% (1,324 additional pupils).

The rise is due to the significant increase in the number of international students moving to the city with dependants, to the large number of families seeking refuge in the city and a reduction in the number of families choosing the private sector. The significant rise in the number of secondary pupils is partially reflective of the number of young people choosing to remain in school given the uncertainty in the local economy and the now established trend of fewer young people securing places in private secondary schools at the point of transition from Primary 7 to Secondary 1.

The National Records for Scotland data predicts a reduction in the number of children and young people in the city in the longer term.

Population projections of children and young people aged 0-25



Source: [Public Health Scotland](#)

Our school population is becoming more multi-cultural.

Although the number of children and young people in our schools who identify as being Polish has remained consistent over the last 4 years, the number of families of African descent has nearly doubled (from 967 in 2019 to 1756 in 2022). There is also a considerable increase in the number of children who identify as being 'white-other' due to an increase in the number of families making Aberdeen their home whilst fleeing conflict. This increasing diversity across all of the life stages brings considerable opportunity.

This change has triggered an increased focus on making information available in the most appropriate language and careful consideration of how to respond to the needs of particular groups in more integrated ways exemplified through our Settle in the City programme. The Settle in the City programme was co-delivered by health and education and co-designed by those accessing the service over the school summer holiday period.

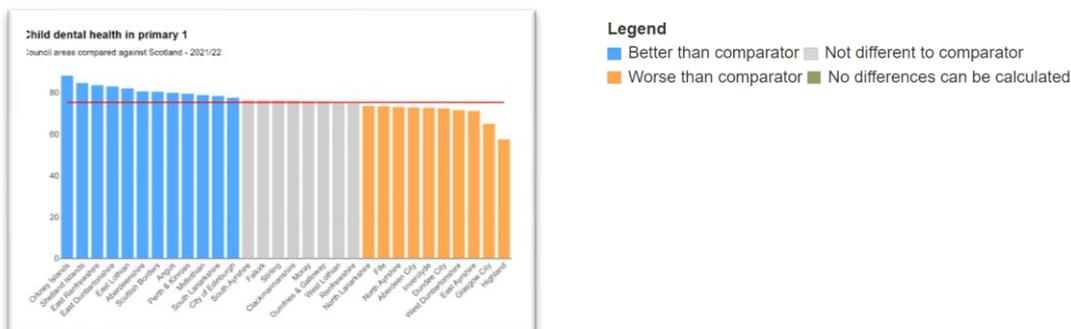
The programme offered a warm welcome to children fleeing the war in Ukraine and provided an ideal opportunity for the universal services to better understand need prior to children being formally enrolled in Early Years and school settings. The considerable change in demographic guides us to engage further with ethnic minority groups to better understand their experiences of accessing services given they are one of the 6 groups likely to be most impacted by poverty.



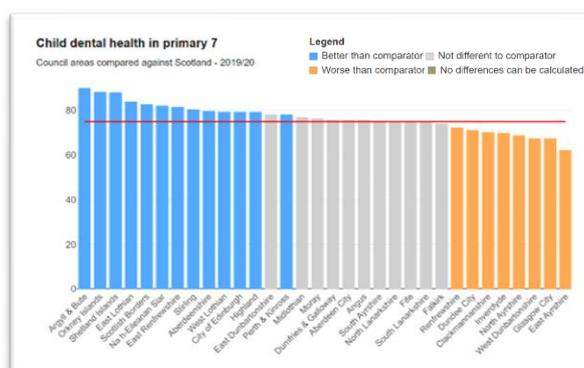
The English as an Additional Language Service (EAL) continues to be the highest-recorded Pupil Need Category in the School Management Information System with 13.7% of children and young people designated as having EAL in September 2022. 42.2% of all outreach requests are directed towards the EAL Team: 78% of these pertain to young people who are 'New to English' (Level 1) or 'Early Acquisition' (Level 2) when assessed against the *Learning in 2+ Languages* guidance, the vast majority of these young people have made Aberdeen their home due to their fleeing conflict. From the Sept 2022 census, 16.07% of all pupils are recorded as having EAL. The national percentage sits at 7.68% from 2022 census, Aberdeen has the second highest proportion of children with EAL. The Team continue to review delivery models to maximise reach and impact.

The historical shortage of dentists has impacted on levels of dental health

When children arrive in Primary 1, 72.78% have good dental health compared to 75.2% nationally. This is thought to be largely due to the difficulties families experienced in securing a dentist for a period of time. Groups of children with no visible signs of tooth decay ranges from an average 35% in some schools serving areas of deprivation to over 80% in others in less deprived areas. There is a need to better understand and address this area.



Levels of dental health significantly improve by the time children are in Primary 7 with 75.71% recorded as having good dental health compared to 74.96% nationally.



There is strong evidence that the current Childsmile intervention improves levels of dental health by Primary 7 and this should be maintained but we need to do more to prevent the high numbers of children, particularly those living in lower SIMD quintile, experiencing poor dental health at the primary 1 stage.

The nature of bullying incidents in schools has changed

A key measure which indicates that children are thriving in inclusive schools is the level of bullying incidents reported. The data identifies that data has been relatively static when you take account of school building closures. Bullying incidents where racism was recorded as the reason have reduced. Further scrutiny of the data has identified changed trends in bullying incidents. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of bullying incidents which refer to body image/physical appearance. Additionally, there is a gender aspect which is evident and identifies that 70% of bullying incidents are raised by girls.

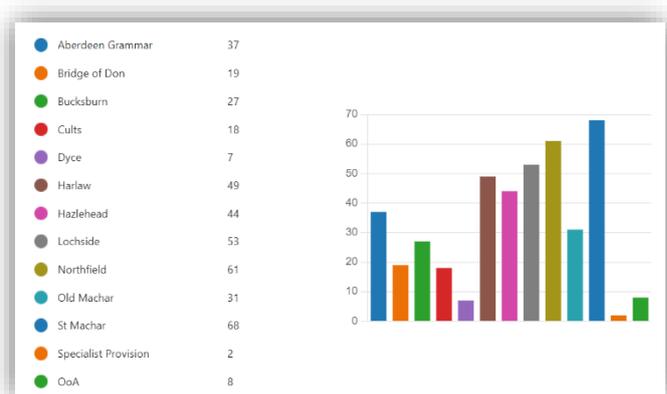
The impact of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown has witnessed a rise in the number of incidents recorded around mental health. The data highlights that the nature of bullying has changed considerably and that there is a need to review the Anti-bullying policy to ensure that we proactively respond and capture all perceived incidents of bullying as well as confirmed cases. This will be prioritised by the Education Service over session 22/23 but there may be a role for multi-agency partners in the longer term.

Schools can access to advice and guidance from other professionals

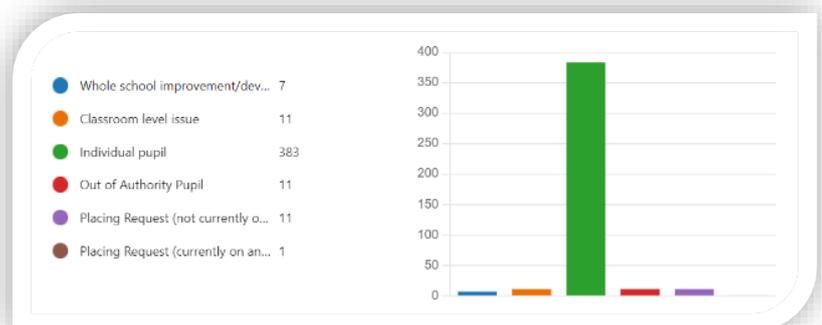
Recruitment challenges triggered a reimagining of the School Nursing Services in collaboration with Head Teacher colleagues leading to the introduction of new roles to support the school Nursing team. School nurses have realigned with school localities to improve collaboration, continuity and team work across the universal services. All referrals are now managed by the single point of contact and reviewed and triaged on a weekly basis to ensure that needs are responded to proportionately and at pace. Mental health has become a more significant focus for School Nursing colleagues.

Over the academic year 2021-22, 424 Early Intervention Consultations were carried out by Educational Psychologists across Aberdeen City. The highest proportion of requests from assistance were from the Dee Locality (161 Dee, 127 Don and 136 West.)

The breakdown by Associated Schools Group evidences greater need in some areas than others.



Almost all consultations relate to the needs of specific pupils.



357 new cases were referred to the service over session 2021-22 with only 67 following up on a previous consultation. 101 of the consultations led to specific pieces work for the service, resulting in 77 files being opened for pupils and 24 more strategic pieces of work being undertaken with schools. Most consultations sought guidance on strategies to support self-regulation, with the second more prevalent factor being strategies to support social & emotional needs. The third most prevalent factor involved advice to support those with Autistic Spectrum Condition.

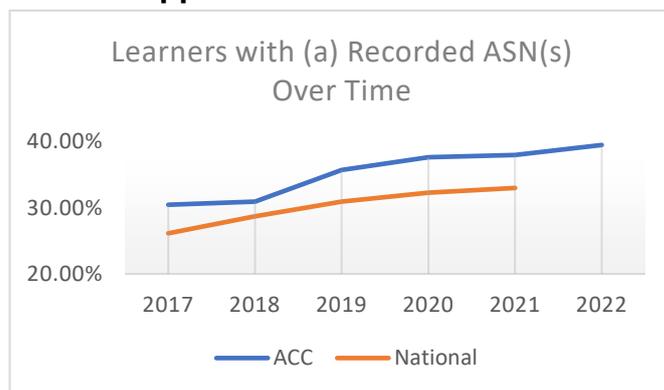
236 consultations have been requested to date this academic session demonstrating a growing demand. Consultation this year almost all relate to self-regulation strategies.

- Self-regulation relating to behaviour was the number one category,
- Self-regulation relating to emotions was second,
- Self-regulation relating to attention & concentration & ASC were joint third.

This data will continue to inform the professional learning offered by the Service. These needs clearly mirror other evidence sources and have helped inform the priorities for action in this Plan.

More children are now identified as having an additional support need

Around 39.5% of children and young people in our schools are now identified as having at least one additional support need (ASN), this represents an increase of c.3.8% compared to levels recorded in 2019. More secondary pupils (44%) are identified as being in need of additional support compared to 36.8% in primary. There is considerable evidence that those who experienced the periods of lockdown at the point of transition (current S1 and S2 pupils) have been disproportionately affected by the restrictions.



There is an increase in the number of children declared disabled

There is also an increase in the number of children assessed or declared disabled from 266 in 2019 to 406 in 2021 (165 in Primary and 241 in Secondary). Nearly 16% of our children and young people who responded to a recent survey told us that they don't think that those declared disabled are treated with respect and provided with the same opportunities as their peers. There is a need to address this through this Children's Services Plan.

The increase in the number of children who are recorded as having additional support needs from 2017 is attributed to work to engender greater consistency in the recording of needs with the more significant increase noted from 2020 to 2021 thought to be being directly attributable to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; this is echoed in National data. The agile approach being taken by Council ASN and Outreach Services will be maintained and further developed over the lifetime of the 2023-26 Plan.

Children's Social Work has a co-located team integrated within the Orchard Brae School campus. This operational structure has supported the development of strong multi-agency working and provides families with a single point of reference for their child. Feedback from families reinforces the value of agencies being co-located delivering integrated services and support.

The remit of this team is to consider the needs of children and young people with a disability in need of care and protection or where the child's needs have been assessed as requiring support under Section 23 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. There are at any point in time circa 150 children open to the Children with Disabilities (CWD) Team. For many of these children, social work staff assume the role of Lead Professional.

The vast majority (currently 90%) of children are supported to live within their families with currently 97 children (63%) receiving packages of care to support their more complex needs. This care package support is provided via our partnership with Aberlour who deliver community based support including short breaks or via Self Directed Support arrangements which families manage themselves. The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic for this group of children has been significant. Many will have experienced social isolation far longer than their non-disabled peers and access to community based support and services was severely restricted during the pandemic. There is a need to improve the visibility of available supports to enable families to self-serve via self-directed support arrangements.

Currently 32 children (21%) are open to the team as a result of care and protection concerns. A further 5 children (3%) are supported via compulsory supervision orders within their family home, with 15 children (10%) currently living out with their family network. The majority of this group will require support throughout their lives and this has implications for how we work with adult services as we consider potential organisational changes resulting from The National Care Service.

We recognise the need to improve the planning for young people with a disability as they transition to adulthood. Embedding the Principles of a Good Transition as set out by ARC (Association for Real Change) is central to providing all families with a disabled child the clarity they require of the proposed support arrangements beyond childhood. This work will be progressed through our involvement in a GIRFE pathfinder in partnership with Scottish Government.

Evidence from Learning Reviews continues to highlight that as a partnership the impact of disability is not as recognised as we would want when considering neglect and harm to children. Supporting staff across all agencies to better recognise the vulnerability of children with a disability is a priority within our Child Protection Improvement Programme and should be highlighted in the refreshed Children's Services Plan.

Children with Autism Spectrum Condition found the move back to 'in school' learning more challenging

3.47% of Aberdeen City's children and young people in schools have an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) recorded. This equates to 499 primary and 384 secondary pupils. Approximately 30% of requests for assistance pertain to a child/young person recorded as having an ASC. There is a general feeling that these figures are lower than expected.

26.8% of requests for Outreach Support were submitted to the Autism Outreach Service showing a high level of need across this group of children and young people, demand for Autism Outreach Support is considerably higher than it was pre-pandemic. In order to respond positively the Autism Outreach Service have reviewed their model of support, which is founded on an evidence-based, building confidence and capacity teaching framework of three steps: I Do, We Do, You Do. Since the full implementation of the new model (in late 2021), feedback from schools highlights the importance of maintaining consistency, but also the value of targeted training, sharing resources and strategies, modelling approaches, building staff confidence, and being easily reachable. Feedback also demonstrates schools' value of the engagement with parents, a multi-agency approach, and working in collaboration to promote consistency.

There is now a need to reimagine our approach to supporting the neurodiverse across the partnership and this will be taken forward through the development of a neurodevelopmental pathway as a pathfinder for the Children and Young People's Mental Health Delivery Board. This work will help inform our Autism Strategy.

'Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum, Learning and Education' (CIRCLE) is a research-based approach to universal support for all children and young people as they emerge from the pandemic. Following the identification of a 'CIRCLE Lead' in each ELC, Primary and Secondary setting, professional networks are being established and benefitting from input from partner agencies such as NHS Grampian. The approaches advocated by the CIRCLE Framework are being utilised to support settings to implement flexible strategies of support. Implementation is led by the needs of the individual setting and their unique context, and designed to afford consistency across Aberdeen City whilst leaving school-level autonomy. Support for staff is available via CIRCLE Surgeries and bespoke Microsoft Teams (virtual) channels. These are providing valuable opportunities for sharing experiences, practice, and reflections as the impact of the CIRCLE Framework is monitored. This work will be on-going with impact regularly reviewed by the Children's Services Board over the lifetime of this Plan.

Young Carers need our support

There are an estimated to be around 2000 Young Carers in the city with 135 of them currently being supported through the Young Carers Service. This number has steadily increased since the current service was established in April 2019 but raises questions around the high percentage of Young Carers who are not accessing support. The Young Carers Service is the only dedicated Young Carers service in Aberdeen City, working with children and young people from age of 5 to 20 years old by providing a range of supports including 1-to-1 interventions, family work, group work, short breaks, social activities, signposting/linking to other services and supports, and training for professionals. 151 referrals have been made since April 2019 which suggests that there is a need to better identify Young Carers across the city.

A refreshed Carers Strategy has been recently approved. This Children's Services Plan has been aligned to the actions agreed within the Strategy.

A range of plans are used to coordinate supports

Support for individual pupils is coordinated through a range of Plans. There are currently 2403 Individual Education Plans, 1178 Child's Plans and 24 Coordinated Support Plans located in SEEMiS with Children's Social Work holding approximately 1500 Plans at any one time.

Our children and young people tell us that the Child's Plan format isn't clear for them and we should now review the template in response to this feedback.

The mental health and wellbeing of children and young people continues to be a concern

We need to continue to focus on mental health and wellbeing. 43.9% of requests for assistance pertain to children/young people recorded as having a Social, Emotional, Mental Health Need ("SEMHN"). 42% of the referrals were for primary pupils and 58% for those in secondary. This triangulates against school data, whereby 8.0% of young people in Aberdeen City are recorded as such, the second most prolific Pupil Need Category.

Several approaches have been adopted to strengthen the universal offer to children and families impacted by a SEMHN: Compassionate and Connected Communities (CCC) training has been rolled out to education and health staff across the city. This provides training at individual school level designed to enhance the consistency in approaches to understanding the wellbeing needs of a school's community and building a greater number of trauma informed staff within the system. A pilot with Penumbra continues to deliver Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) training in six secondary schools. This has increased from 2 as part of the initial pilot and supports school staff to immediately respond to young people facing distress; this links directly with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) supports if required.

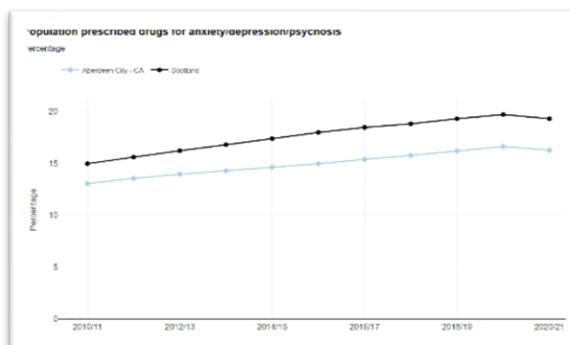
Counselling in schools has been expanded and we continue to see an increase in young people reporting high levels of anxiety: as of October 2022, 266 young people were receiving counselling support with 100% of young people reporting the intervention as having a positive impact. 20 full-time equivalent (FTE) counsellors work across schools to support children aged 10+. A pilot is planned in 4 primary schools, which will focus on support for children aged 3+.

"I live in a fairly safe area with low crime. Our schools have classes dedicated to health a wellbeing and we are reminded in almost every class that we have a person to talk to. My school told me about a mental health charity which I have since used." (young person aged 14)

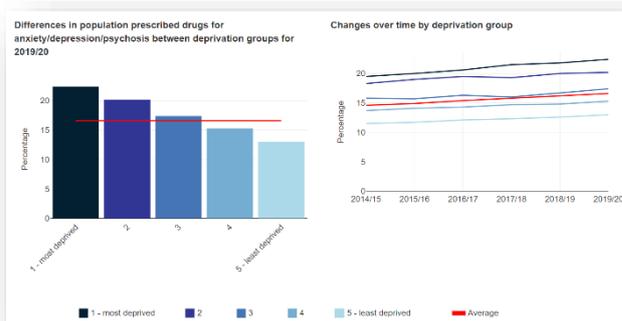
Across our school communities large numbers of children and young people do not believe that they have good mental or physical health. They recognise the challenges that they personally face, and this has been reflected through our most recent surveys identifying areas such as anxiety, body image and lack of sleep as key indicators impacting on their health. Low Intensity Anxiety Management (LIAM) and Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) continue to be offered as training supports for staff. Evaluation of both programmes highlights a positive impact and these interventions will be maintained.

Referrals to CAMHS remains high with 1477 referrals in the last year with 1018 referrals accepted and 459 redirected referrals.

Percentage of patients seen within 0-18 weeks by CAMHS



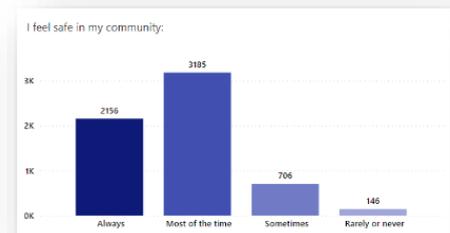
The current wait time for a routine Choice appointment is 6 weeks with a further 20 week wait for a follow up appointment.



Considerable work has been undertaken to understand the mental health and wellbeing needs of young people and the partnership now has access to improved information through 2 pupils surveys to help support our work in this area over the lifetime of this Plan and beyond.

During March 2022 6193 (38%) of children and young people in P5-S6 undertook a physical wellbeing survey. 3796 (63.1%) of respondents stated that when speaking with friends or someone they were in a relationship with, they always felt safe and respected with 80 (1.29%) reporting this to never be true. This was similar both within primary and secondary. 3241 (52%) stated that they were always made to feel good about themselves with 3796 (61.3%) reporting that they are encouraged to do things they enjoy.

Within the same survey mentioned above, children and young people were asked to consider how they feel within their local community. 5341 (86.2%) stated that they felt safe in their community always or most of the time. Across associated school groups the number of respondents who felt safe in their community sometimes, rarely or never varied from 3.3% to 19.3%. Those living in more deprived areas felt more unsafe. There is a need to consider our response to this as part of this Plan.



Children and young people reflected on the results of the pupil survey and their personal experiences of support for health and wellbeing in schools during the Health & Wellbeing summit on the 14th October 2022. Our young people shared that they seek increased opportunities to talk about difficult subjects such as self-harm, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and fears and stresses. They would also welcome an increased focus on areas such as self-confidence and body image with particular consideration of the needs of our boys and careful consideration of gender equality with particular focus on physical activities and opportunities being offered. Children want to be shown how to believe in themselves and provided opportunities to do this not just told to do it.

Our young people also told us that they do not all feel that there is someone in their lives that listens to them. In response to this and ensuring the voice of all children is heard there has been agreement through the Health & Wellbeing Summit that we will engage in the 'One Good Adult' pilot in collaboration with Scottish Government, COSLA and NES, supporting and working with practitioners to understand what children want and need from us as professionals. This agreement will be built into our Children's Services Plan for 2023-2026.

Bereavement triggers poor wellbeing

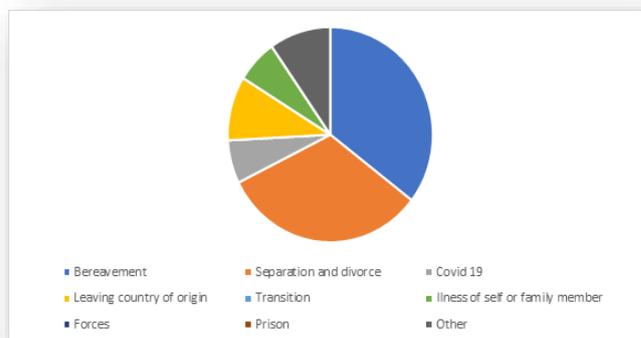
Learning from case reviews continues to reinforce the huge impact the death of a significant family member has on children and families. We recognise that the loss of a loved-one might constitute one of the biggest traumas in the person's life. Bereavement in childhood has shown to link to higher levels of anxiety and depression (continuing into adulthood), increased risk-taking behaviour and youth offending, impacting on academic attainment, continued learning and aspirations for the future. Although it is recognised as one of the vulnerabilities for families being referred to the Fit Like? Family Wellbeing Team, it is likely that bereavement is under reported due to historical loss or perceived impact on current presentation/family's needs both from professionals and families directly. Bereavement was reported at the point of referral for 68 young people representing 6% of all Requests for Assistance.

Seasons for Growth (SfG) is an educational group work programme supporting children and young people who have experienced significant loss and change in their lives. It is an internationally proven programme, with a wide evidence base. Specially trained group facilitators or *Companions*

work in pairs to deliver an eight-session programme with two follow up reconnector sessions for the pupils.

The Educational Psychology team have trained 51 SfG teacher and support staff *Companions* across 23 schools. Our *Companions* provide education and peer support for children in our schools with two companions currently work within the Fit Like Hubs. The training will continue to be offered across the city for those working with Aberdeen's children and young people.

The latest data shows that 70 pupils received support via the Seasons for Growth programme over a recent 5 month period with bereavement and parental separation the focus in most cases.



“Each of the children who participated in the group became more relaxed and were able to discuss their feelings more freely by the end of the programme. The children became a support for each other and bonded during the course of the sessions.”

@ S4G Companion during evaluation

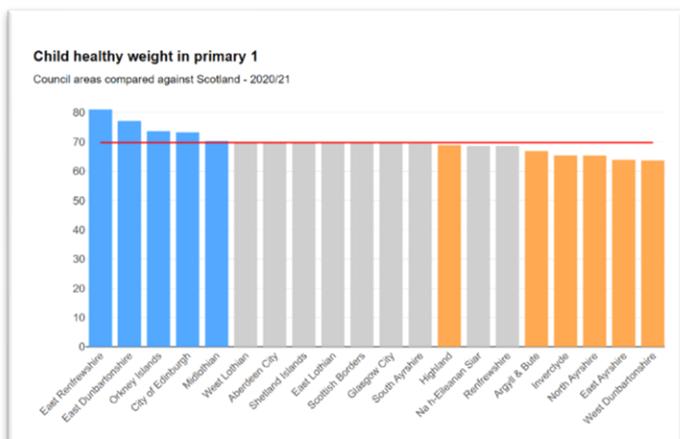
There is clear evidence that the impact of support received in school, usually transfers into the home environment. The training of Companions will be maintained.

We have a range of established 3rd sector services offering bereavement support to children. Bereavement services are often considered at a time of loss as a response to an event that requires a one-off intervention, we now need to think about the impact of bereavement throughout the whole lifespan as learning reviews evidence that professionals do not always appreciate the enduring nature of bereavement on all surviving members of the immediate and extended family.

There is need to continue to focus on improving levels of physical activity

The restrictions in place to keep everyone safe from the pandemic impacted on levels of physical activity in our children and young people. Although public health data does not yet highlight a significant issue in this area, there is anecdotal evidence that this should be an area of focus.

In 2021 69.94% of children in Aberdeen had a healthy weight when they entered Primary 1. This is slightly above the national average of 69.76%.



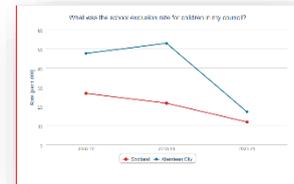
Legend

- Better than comparator
- Worse than comparator
- Not different to comparator
- No differences can be calculated

The number of instances of individual exclusion (per 1000 pupils) for those living in SIMD 1 is significantly higher than those living in SIMD 5 (36.1 compared to 5.7 per 1000). The exclusion rate (per 1,000 pupils who were looked after) in 2020/21 has steadily reduced (76.5 compared to 248.1 in 20218/19) and currently slightly lower than in Scotland (77.8). The Local Authority is currently placed 14th out of the 32 Local Authorities for the exclusion of Looked after children.

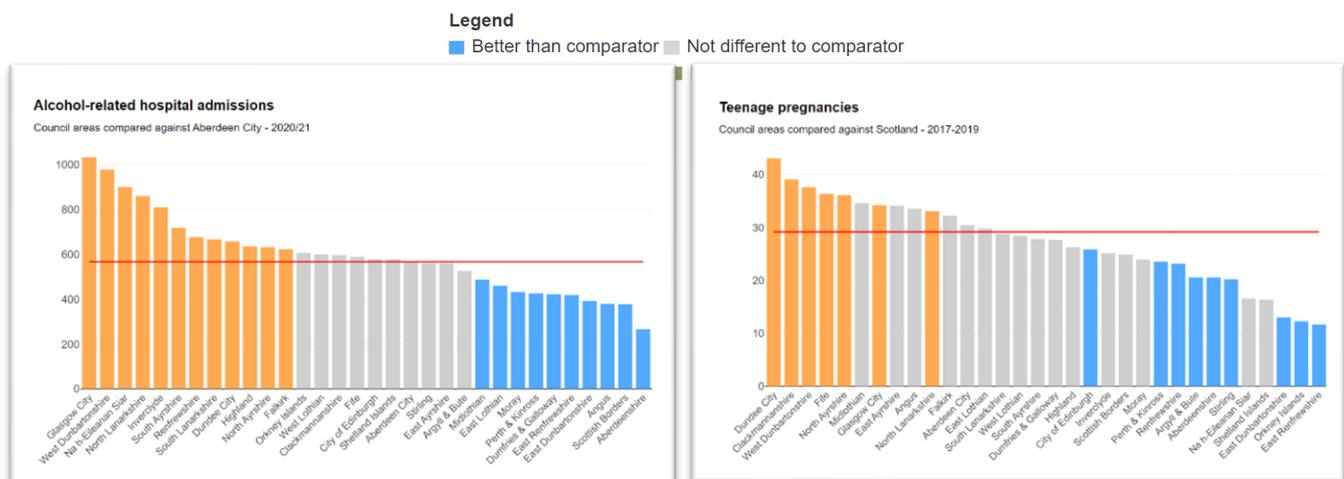
The exclusion of those with additional support needs is lower than national averages (22.5 compared to 25.5 per 1000). There is a need to continue to monitor this data as the Edge of Care pilots progress to support those who are care experienced or on the edge of care, and carefully consider barriers to school attendance as we work together to address child poverty.

There is also a need to fully understand how parents and carers experience services to see if greater cohesion could help better improve outcomes for children and families.



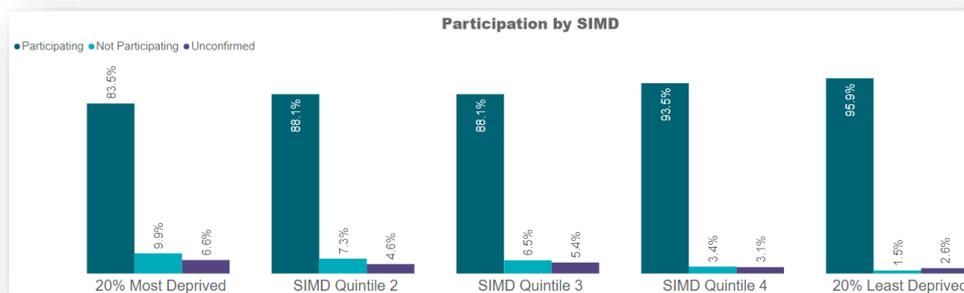
There is evidence of improvement in many Health outcomes

The level of alcohol related hospital admissions for 11-25 year olds has steadily reduced over time. Levels are now broadly in line with comparator Local Authorities.



The level of teenage pregnancies has reduced over time in keeping with the national trend. The local level is currently sitting at 30.47 per 1000 females aged 15-19 compared to 29.16% nationally.

In keeping with the lower uptake of vaccines in younger children, the uptake of the HPV vaccine in S3 girls is lower than the national average. Uptake is slightly lower across some SIMD quintiles.



In 2020/21, 76.5% of looked after children in Aberdeen City had a positive destination (based on 9-month follow-up survey and children who were looked after for the full year). This is higher than the rate for 2019/20 of 63% and lower than the rate for all children in Aberdeen of 92.1%. The considerable variation from year to year is attributed to the small number of children across each year group.

The percentage of school leavers in a positive follow-up destination varied by deprivation (based on SIMD) with 81.5% of school leavers in the most deprived quintile having a positive destination compared to 95.5% of those in the least deprived quintile. The percentage for least deprived quintile has increased from 2019/20, whilst the % for the most deprived has decreased by 0.8%.

It is important that the education service continues to broaden curricular pathways to offer a wider range of vocational qualifications across the senior phase so that all young people feel long term success.

Over 2020/21, far fewer young people were immediately employed upon leaving school compared to our virtual comparator (13.8% compared to 24.8%). However, a far higher number of our young people secure further and higher education placements locally when compared to our virtual comparator.

	Further Education	Higher Education
Aberdeen City	30.84%	45.72%
Virtual comparator	23.79%	42.63%

21 young people left school with no qualifications. The establishment of ABZ Campus from June 2023 will help address this issue.

**ABZ
CAMPUS**

Learning to shape your future

In June 2023, we are launching a new range of courses across our secondary schools. Our new courses aim to boost skills and align with our fastest growing industries in the North-East of Scotland. To find out more you can go to our employability website

<http://www.abzworks.co.uk>

Our young people tell us that they are concerned about their future career prospects and want to have the skills they require to thrive in the future. The broadening of the curriculum and development of skills will be supported through the development of ABZ Campus, through the Aberdeen Computing Collaborative and by embedding the Aberdeen City Skills Framework.

The Scotland wide [Careers Review](#) has made 10 recommendations designed to deliver the ambition of [Scotland's](#)



[Career Strategy](#). Now accepted by Scottish Government, the review recommendations are being taken forward into implementation planning and detailed co-design.

Some of our children report feeling unsafe

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is a peer mentoring programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence.

By February 2023 all our secondary schools across the city will have received training for staff and partners in the MVP programme. Currently 7 of our secondary schools are trained and implementing the programme with some extremely positive examples of changing the attitudes and mindset of our young people being seen. One of our more experienced teachers, who has successfully delivered the programme for a number of years, is about to undertake the Training the Trainer programme which will add to the local expertise available and allow us to expand the programme further.

MVP training this year has included partners including educational social work and Police Scotland colleagues. All of our Home School Liaison Officers, who work closely with children and families particularly within family home settings, will attend the final training in February so that all staff can use the strategies and initiatives explored around social media influences, which often negatively impact on our young people and their ability to attend and be engaged in learning.

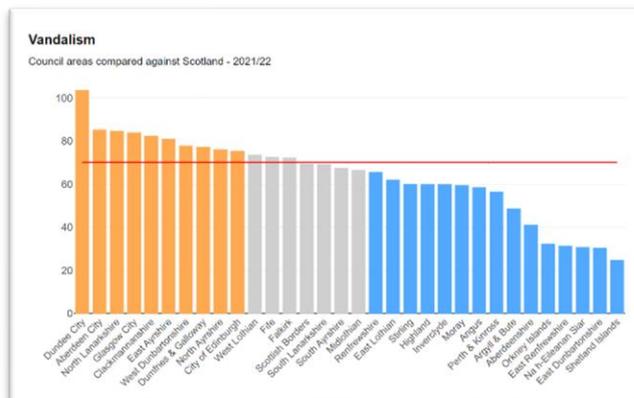
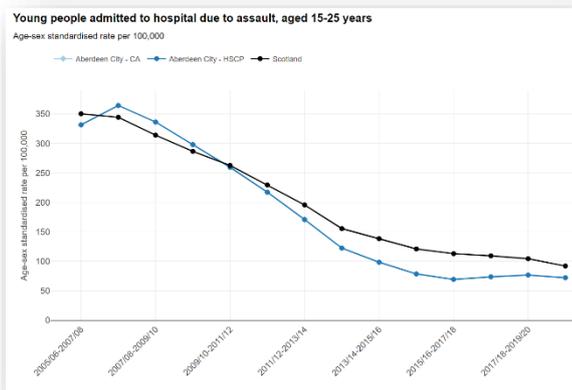
Evaluations from staff attending the training showed that there is a significant increase in the number of staff who feel that they have the necessary skills to educate others about gender-based violence. There is evidence of increased awareness of issues, an increase in those who believe that bystanders can make a difference, and a rise in the number of staff who thought that they would challenge gender-based violence. Both pupils and staff refer to an improved ethos within school and reduction of barriers between older and younger pupils. Mentors and staff identify a positive impact on mentors' confidence and the enhancement of a range of skills such as team-work and presentation skills.

Police Scotland missing persons operational coordinators collate and monitor information from missing persons investigations in their area to better understand local issues, patterns and concerns. Where appropriate, information is shared with relevant partners to ensure missing people are located and agencies are aware of potential risk to establish safeguarding measures. The National Coordinator through the Framework Implementation Project has been working with multi-agency partnerships, to identify good practice and understand local issues and challenges of multi-agency responses to missing people and their families. Work on this area should continue in our Children's Services Plan.

Looking forward we will include our senior stage primary pupils as part of the mentors in violence prevention transition programme from Primary to Secondary and will look to develop more consistent approaches around supporting young people who identify as LGBTQ and seek LGBT Charter accreditation. This work will be built into our Children's Services Plan.

Despite having wonderful green spaces to be proud of, levels of vandalism are higher than we would like. There is a need to understand how children and young people perceive levels of

vandalism and how this links with their feelings of safety in their communities. The evidence is that the number of young people aged 15-25 who are admitted to hospital due to assault has reduced.

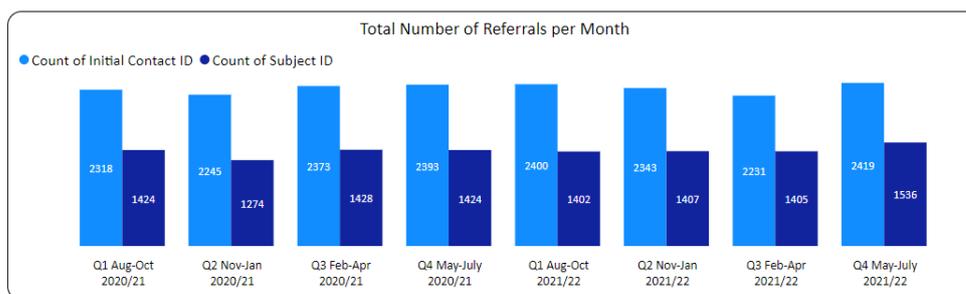


This is really encouraging but it is thought helpful to better understand how safe our children and young people feel in their communities to determine next steps.

We work well together to offer care and protection

Evidence from Inspection and local Learning Reviews highlight that there are well established referral routes for “named persons” and agencies to refer into the specialist services of Children’s Social Work when they are concerned about the care and safety of children.

Referrals to Children’s Social Work in 2021/22 totalled 9393, this is very similar to the total number of referrals in the previous year indicating a consistency of practice. The average number of referrals per quarter between August 2021 and July 2022 was 2348. This equates to approximately 36 referrals every weekday throughout the year.



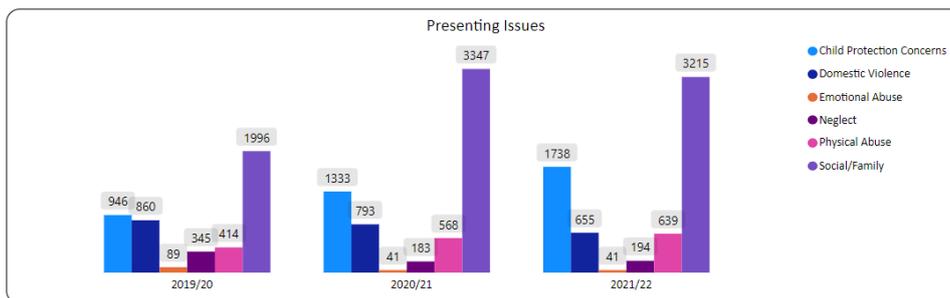
Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

By far the greatest number of referrals come through Police Scotland. Consistent numbers of referrals have been received from Education, NHS, Public/Family, and Social Work staff over the past year. Every referral is given full consideration by Children’s Social Work. A significant proportion of new referrals result in No Further Action as they relate to matters which, when screened do not meet the eligibility criteria, although work is undertaken to offer short term intervention to de-escalate concerns and revert families to universal or targeted services.

Of the 9393 referrals, 4351 were NFA (46%), this is consistent with data from previous years. The reasons for referral continue to highlight the predominant reasons are “social/family issues”, child protection concerns, neglect, physical and emotional abuse and domestic abuse.

The escalation in social/family, child protection and physical abuse referrals was noted through 2020 and 2021 when we experienced periods of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Referrals on the issue of neglect and emotional abuse declined as children were less frequently seen by universal services. These numbers have not changed significantly to date perhaps indicating the longer term implications of the pandemic on families. There is a need to think about how these areas of concern could be better addressed through the Children’s Services Plan in order to better complement the work of the Child Protection Committee and better position ourselves for delivery of The Promise.

Work to enable greater clarity on the detail of referrals is ongoing and will be assisted by the implementation of a the new D365 case management system. This in time will allow for more flexible data scrutiny and reporting.



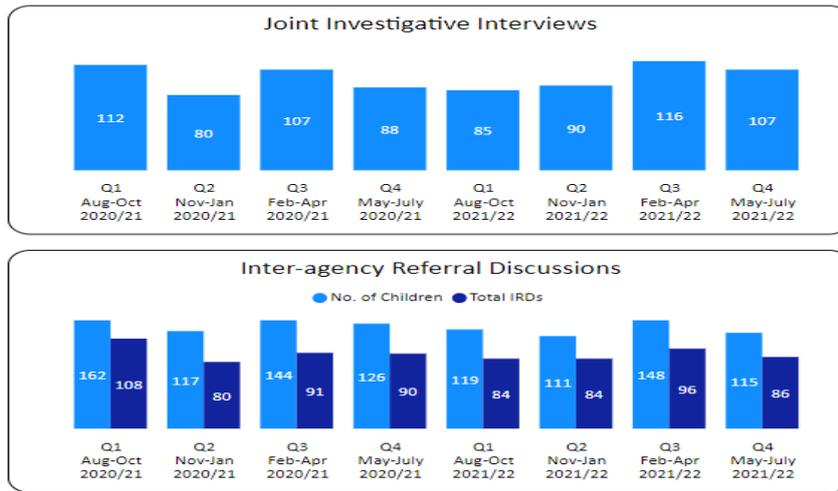
Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

Aberdeen City has a mature and highly effective Child Protection Committee which provides strong assurance in relation to the governance and delivery of child protection services. We are not complacent and continue to strive to improve how we respond and support children and young people who have experienced abuse and neglect.

In December 2022, implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) was rolled out in Aberdeen City (at the same time as the other two NE Local Authorities). Building on our existing and well established Initial Referral Discussion (IRD) processes and in line with the Scottish Governments aspiration we are planning to develop a ‘Bairns Hoose’ service in the City. This will provide a trauma informed service that puts recovery at the heart of our response to child protection referrals and our support to children and young people.

The numbers of IRDs have been stable throughout recent years while recognising some predictable instability during the height of the pandemic. The IRD process has been updated to reflect the New National Child Protection Guidance for Scotland which came into effect in September 2021. The rationale for the updated IRD process has been well received by professionals.

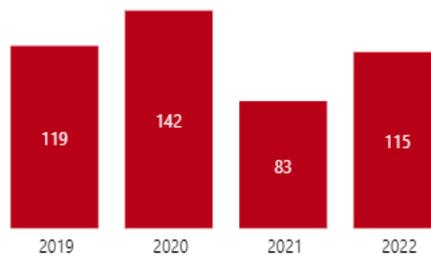
Numbers of Joint Investigative Interviews (JII) have been with a total of 398 JIIs were conducted in 2021/22 compared to 387 in 2020/21. We have historically high numbers of JIIs in this area compared with national figures. We will continue to monitor the impact of implementing SCIM on the number of child interviews undertaken both at a local level and with other areas who have implemented SCIM.



Source: Police Scotland

The number of children on Aberdeen City’s Child Protection register is consistent with both the national figure and our comparator authorities. Inevitably we experienced some variation in levels of registration during the pandemic but over the past year levels of registration have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

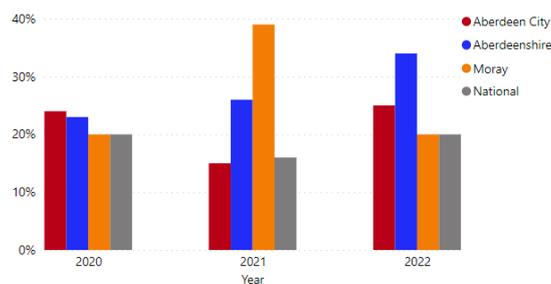
No. of children on the CPR (31st July), Aberdeen City



Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

We would recognise that in previous years the level of re-registration rates sat above the national picture. This was a focus of improvement activity for the Child Protection Committee prior to the pandemic and in recent years we have seen a far more aligned position.

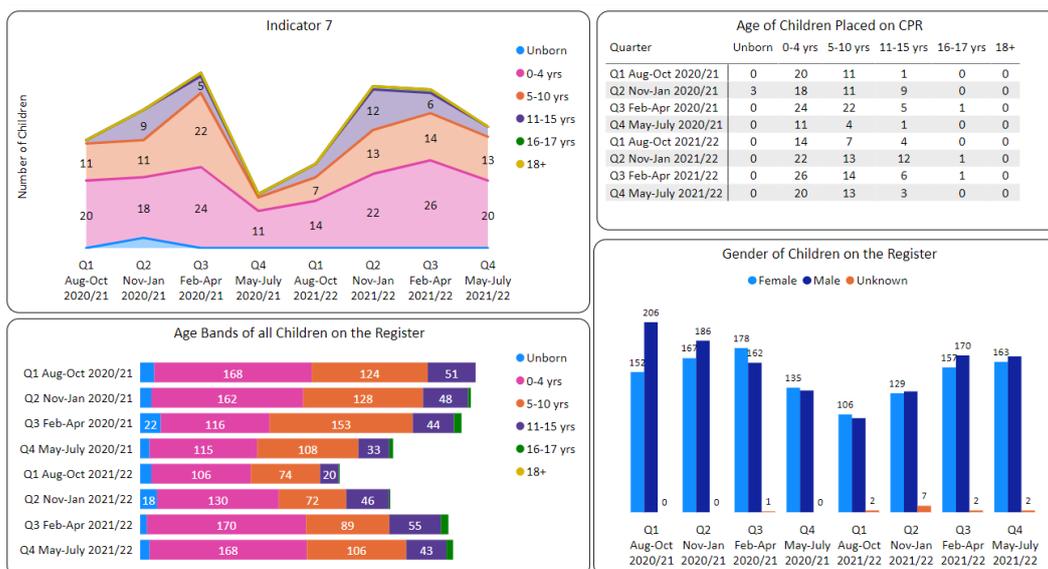
Percentage of re-registrations within 18 months of de-registration



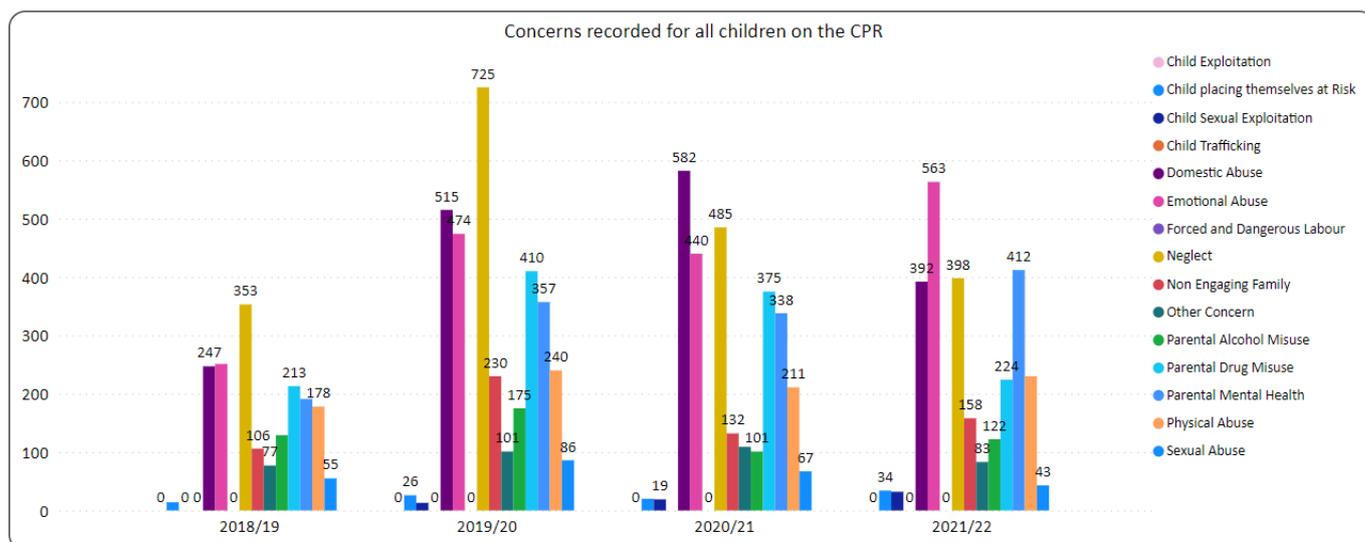
Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

In line with other local authorities the majority of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) are under 10 years old. While this is to be expected, given there are alternative ways of addressing areas of concern relating to older children, our data highlights the partnership is progressively willing to utilise the CPR for older children where appropriate. Although it may vary quarter on quarter, on average there is no significant disparity in numbers of boys or girls on the CPR.

The table to the right represents the categories of concern for children placed on the CPR in the period from August 2021 – July 2022 (with comparator data for the previous year too). The main categories of concern remain domestic abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, parental drug misuse and parental mental health. Parental alcohol misuse is probably underrepresented. These mirror the most common causes recorded nationally and unsurprisingly the predominant reasons why children accommodated out with the parent's care.



Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

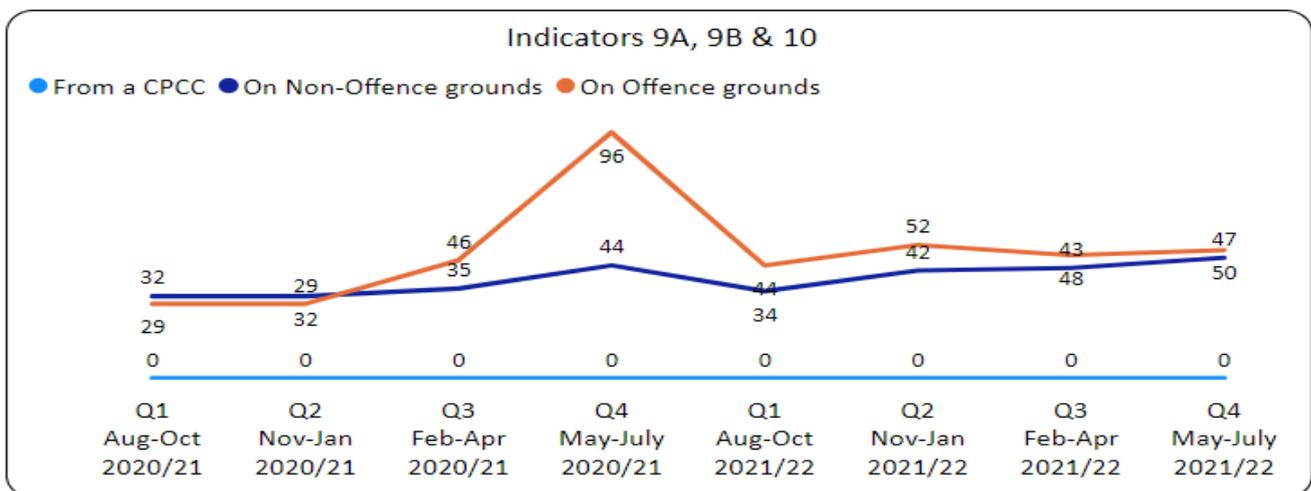


Source: Children's Social Work, CareFirst Team

There has been an increase in referrals to the Reporter on offence grounds

Numbers of children referred to the Scottish Children’s Reporter Association (SCRA) on offence grounds increased sharply from Q2 of 2020/21 (November to January), spiking in Q4 (May-July 2021) before falling back to more typical levels in Q1 of 2021/22 (August – October). This pattern does not appear to be linked to the implementation of the Age of Criminal Responsibility Act 2019 in December 2021, where we might have expected to see a reduction in the number of children referred on offence grounds.

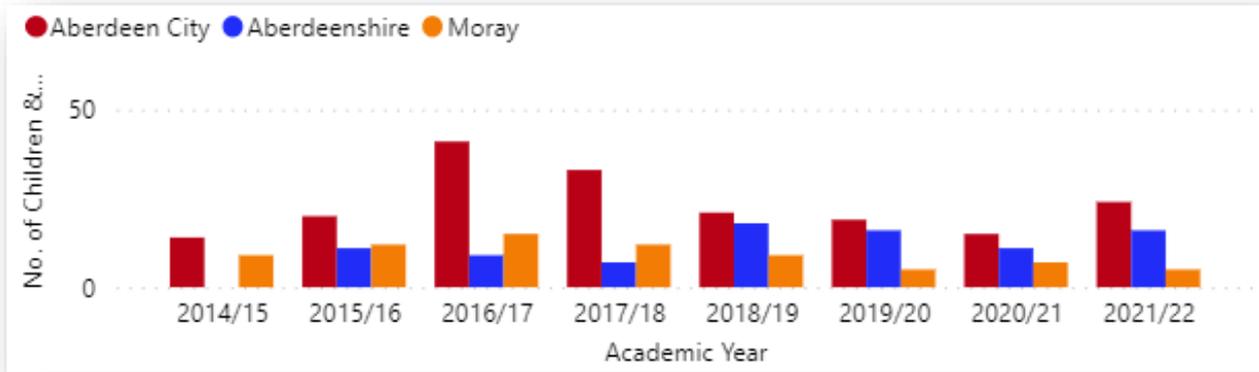
This is only one piece of the picture, however. The number of these referrals that result in a children’s hearing on offence grounds is extremely low, indicating that our collective preventative and early diversionary approaches remain highly effective. For example, in the period July 2021 to December 2022 there were 421 referrals to SCRA made for 242 children, resulting in 2 hearings on offence grounds. Children who are subject to a CSO who accrue a new charge must have that charge reported to SCRA, as do those with an open referral. Some charges accrued by children will be dealt with through early effective intervention however The Lord Advocates Guidelines on offences committed by children dictate which offences must be reported, and this impacts on the numbers that SCRA receive.



Source: [SCRA](#)

There has been a slight but steady upward trend in the number of children referred on offence grounds over the 12 months from August 2021 to July 2022. It is possible that this is linked to the more recent push to keep 16/17 year olds within the hearing system rather than adult criminal justice system. SCRA continue to work with local partners on processing of joint referrals, in a bid to increase the number of joint referrals retained by the Reporter. The number of children for whom the local authority secured via a child protection order (CSO) has remained steady over recent years. This demonstrates that social work staff are confident about the circumstances which merit use of emergency orders to secure children.

No. of children and young people subject to a Child Protection Order



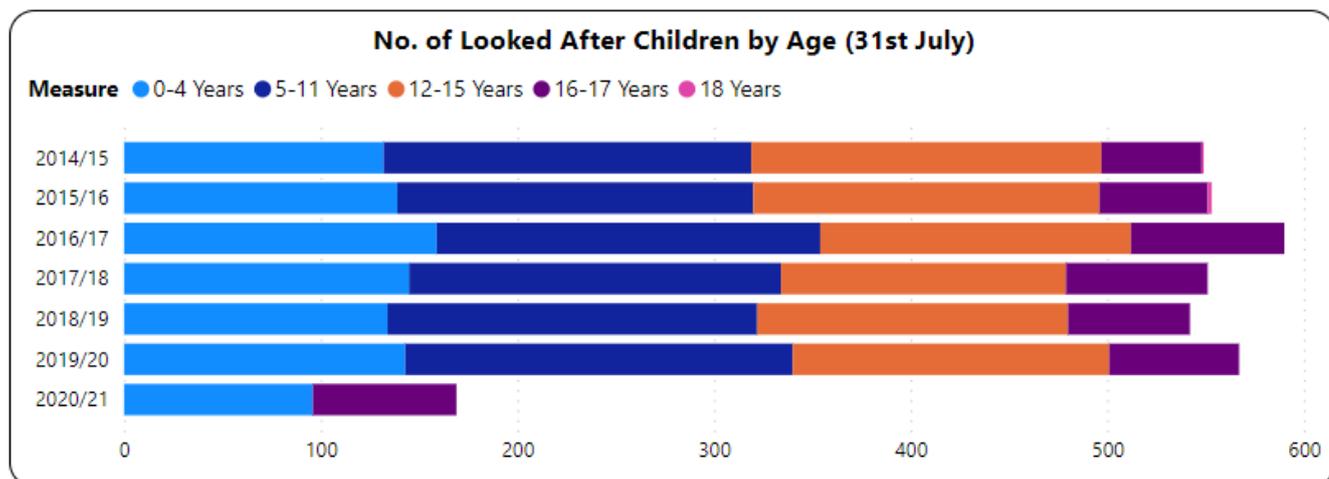
Source: [SCRA](#)

There are often a multiplicity of reasons why children are accommodated out with parental care. This includes: structural inequality, poverty, poor social housing, homelessness; parental experience of childhood trauma/being looked after. Current data evidences that vast majority of the children and young people (circa 90%) who require care and protection will have been exposed to risks associated with their parents/primary care givers life and circumstances.

These risk factors predominantly relate parental addiction, poor parental mental health and domestic violence – often referred to as the “toxic trio”. The Promise recognised that structural impact of poverty also has a corrosive impact on families and like other authorities Aberdeen City’s looked after children population originate from the SIMD areas 1 & 2 of the city. The Promise highlights the need for agencies to enable families to mitigate the impact of poverty in a manner that is empowering and non-stigmatising. The need to join up the many related policies and priorities has been reflected in this Children’s Services Plan.

The number of looked after children is reducing

Over the past three years there has been a steady reduction in the number of looked after children in Aberdeen City circa 15%. As of 30 September 2022, there were 485 children looked after by the local authority compared to 570 as at 1 April 2020. This decrease is across all care types and mirrors a trend at a national level. The % of looked after children in Aberdeen City aligns to the national figure and that of our comparator authorities.



Source: [Scottish Government](#)

As we move to support more children in the community, utilising approaches that wherever possible mitigate the need for statutory measures of care, it is anticipated that the number of looked after children will continue to fall in the years to come. Efforts to bolster the partnership's support offer to kinship carers, developing an integrated Family Support Model, and utilisation of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to enhance preventative and early intervention approaches continue to be moved forward at pace.

Young People are staying longer in our local children's homes

In 2020/21, our residential children's homes demonstrate occupancy rates averaging 90%, in 2021/22 placement demand exceeded availability with periods of occupancy at 100%. Data supports that young people stay in local residential children's homes for longer periods and until they are older. The average length of stay in the period 2020/22 was two years, this doesn't capture the long-term nature of a number of placements, the longest being over six years. As well as supporting and promoting the principles reflected in "Staying Put Scotland", placement duration reflects the core values and ethos of care for our residential homes.

Our ethos is based on a therapeutic approach based on Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). Using this approach with young people to help and support them to recover from trauma and prevent further harm, providing nurturing care and helping with attachment difficulties. Our 'matching' is an important part of this process to try and ensure we can meet long term need and support our children and young people into early adulthood. We have experienced a low placement disruption rate, of under 3% between 2020/2022. The benefits of this approach and matching process is evidenced by the number of long term placements and as young people move on, the increasingly successful sustaining of accommodation/tenancies as well as the increased number in further and higher education.

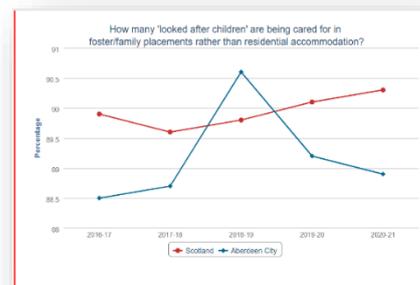
The service has a residential aftercare dimension, complimentary to our core Care Leavers Youth Team, providing care leavers with ongoing connectedness and belonging, (Staying Put Scotland (2013). 'in pursuit of positive outcomes for young people leaving care, research consistently points to the importance of maintaining relationships and attachments'. The residential aftercare service support around 15 young people who have moved on to their own accommodation from a local children's home. This support strand is integral to the care provided and supports enduring relationships. Outcomes suggest the model works well for the majority of moving on young people, with only one instance of a tenancy breakdown of the 15 supported.

There has been a decrease in the number of children placed in foster care

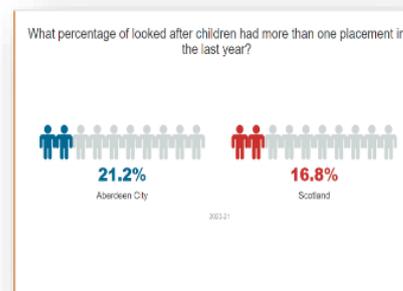
Aberdeen City recognises that it is out of step with the national position and our comparator authorities in terms of the percentage of children placed in foster care (46% of all looked after children as of 30/9/22). Specifically, the number of children placed with independent foster agency's (IFA)s, resulting in children being placed far from Aberdeen, mitigating against sustaining links with family friends and their local community, is far higher than we would want. (Of those children placed in foster care 66% are placed with an IFA which equates to 149 children)).

Given the needs of the children involved it is right that changes are planned sensitively and carefully. This will include a continuing focus on growing our own fostering capacity as well as continuing to develop community-based resources to keep children with their family where it is safe to do so.

The decrease in looked after children is reflected across all age bands. However over recent years in accordance with the delivering on principles of continuing care we are seeing young people remaining in care placements for longer, with transitions being elongated enabling more supported transitions. The impact of this practice is seen in the improvement in the level of tenancy sustainment for our care experienced young people.

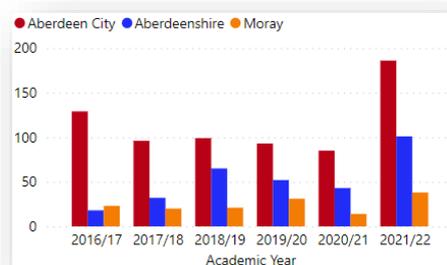


Aberdeen City has over recent years placed very few children in secure care. Indeed, there have been extended periods when we have had no young person in this placement type. As we prepare for the implementation of the Children’s Care and Justice Bill, we anticipate more 16 & 17 year olds being retained within the Children’s Hearing system. This may result in secure care being utilised more often as an alternative to placement in an adult prison. We will continue to ensure a risk based approach is taken to inform decision making. We continue to work to reduce the number of care placements.



Our successful Improvement Project in 2021/22, resulted in fewer children who were jointly reported being progressed by the Crown Office Prosecution Service. Children jointly reported have the offence being dealt with either by SCRA or Crown Office Prosecution Service (COPFS). We identified that, 16 & 17 year olds were more likely than those under 16 years, to be prosecuted by COPFS. Improvement work improved processes and system administration, increasing the number of 16- & 17-year-olds jointly reported being supported in the children’s hearing system. Workforce development was designed and undertaken by SCRA and Whole System Approach lead, along with updating processes and policy with the clear message that 16 & 17 year olds are children and must be offered the same protections and supports as younger children. The impact of this improvement work has been evidenced in the reduction in children jointly reported being held by COPFS. In 2016/17 33% of 16- and 17-year-olds jointly reported were referred to the reporter as an outcome. This had increased to 66% by the year ending 2021/22.

No. of Joint Reports received (referrals)

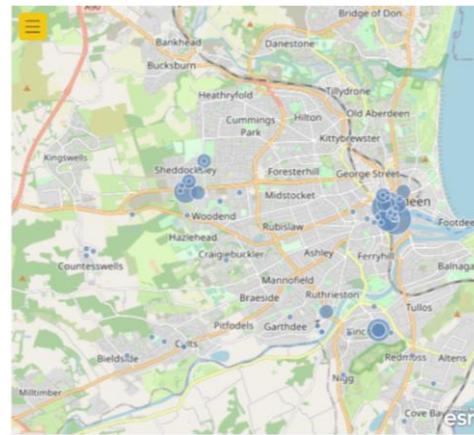


Source: [SCRA](#)

This increase is welcomed. However, it will, in addition to the forthcoming legislative changes, require continued collaboration to ensure strong alignment between Justice Services and Children’s social work. We also await the details of what the Scottish Government intends as an “alternative to custody” service as set out in the Children’s Care & Justice Bill to enable young people who might otherwise have experienced prison/secure care to be supported to remain in the community.

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The number of youth Anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents reported significantly increased in 2021 (3015 incidents), this was particularly high at the beginning of the year, it is expected that these increases were a knock on effect of COVID restrictions being lifted. Over the final 3 months of 2021 there was a 35% decline and remained at a consistent level into the beginning of 2022. Overall youth ASB incidents have reduced slightly in 2022 (2936 incidents) compared to 2021 (3% decrease) but continue to remain significantly higher than 2020 (2066).



There is clear evidence of 'hot spots' in the city that need to be better understood. Early intervention and youth community activities continues to be utilised fully. In 2022, 68 10-16 year olds attended community activity citywide, an increase of 70% compared to 2019 when 40 10-16 year olds accessed community activity.

We need to improve the specificity of pathways plans

All young people in our care, aged 15+ have, as per the statutory guidance, a pathway plan in place. We recognise the need to improve the specificity of these plans to enhance that our planning for young people transitioning from care is as comprehensive and effective as possible.

The number of young people who leave care remains stable. Clearly as the total number of looked after children declines, we would in time expect to see a gradual reduction in the number of carer leavers. We recognise that no matter how well-prepared care experienced young people feel the transition from care is daunting. To support the planning for such transition we have embedded the role of a Housing Support Officer within our Westburn Road Youth Service. This ensures early planning for young people who intend to live independently as well as continuous support as they manage this transition. The development of this post has contributed to a positive and sustained increase in the tenancy sustainment levels for our care leavers.

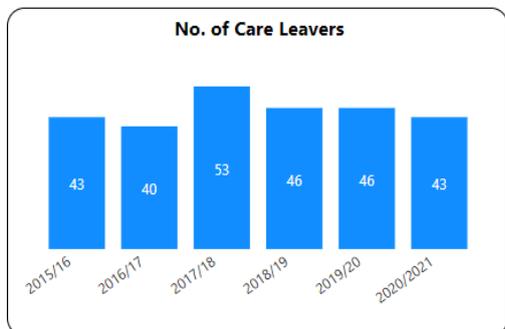


Source: ACC Youth Team

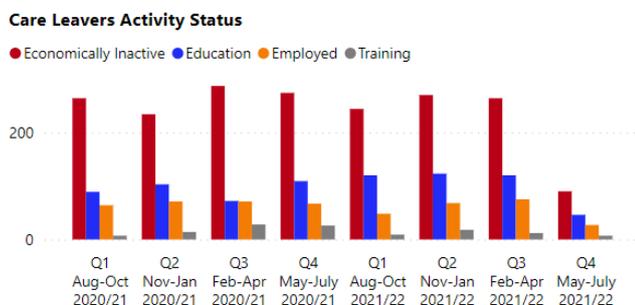
Acknowledging that a key factor that enables care experienced young people to manage independent living is having a structure to their day. We are pleased to see an increasing number of care experienced young people accessing further and higher education however we want to build on this improvement.

Our data highlights too many of our care experienced young people are under utilised in the labour market. Given their trauma impacted lives they will often have limited support to assist them navigate routes into employment. A successful pilot in collaboration with colleagues from the Councils City Growth team successfully developed a framework of support that is more responsive to the needs of care leavers. The approaches and supports developed through the pilot have been adopted as standard.

Access to non-stigmatising money advice services as well as a community larder has ensured a strong focus on enabling young people to navigate the financial challenges of independent living. Young people themselves have highlighted challenges in relation to accessing mental health services and discussions with CAMHS to address this are ongoing. An Assertive Outreach Worker has been embedded in the team to provide targeted relational support to young people who are or may be beginning to struggle with addiction.



Source: [Scottish Government](#)



Source: ACC Youth Team

There is a need to continue to focus on housing support for vulnerable groups

Aberdeen City Council’s Repairs and Maintenance Team responded to a request from our care experienced young people through the Champions Board and produced video tutorials focusing on basic property maintenance tasks for first-time tenancy holders. Based on feedback from young people, a Housing and Support Officer became co-located with the Youth Team in April 2021. This post supports our care experienced young people to navigate Housing systems taking a relational approach and aims to make sure that transitions from care into their first tenancy are as coordinated and transparent as possible. The post also supports care experienced young people who need assistance finding new accommodation or with any issues while they are in their tenancy. Training has been rolled out to all of our Housing & Support Officers around care experienced young people and trauma informed practice is being embedded within the service. An evaluation on the impact of this role will be undertaken in 2023.

We continue to see a positive trend in care experienced young people accessing and sustaining tenancies with 93 young people accessing tenancies during 2021/22. There was an 82.8% tenancy sustainment rate for those households, which rises to 94.6% when taking into account people who went on to a positive destination after their first tenancy.

We need to continue to ensure that the most vulnerable are able to claim their rights

Rights is one of the fundamentals of The Promise/Plan 21-24, valuing that these are for all children and young people in or on the edge of care, as well as those with experience of care. It asserts a rights-based approach required by the forthcoming implementation of the UNCRC into domestic law.

As a partnership and as corporate parents, it is recognised that those children, young people, and young adults who need care and protection are more likely to require support to understand their rights and have these upheld in their day to day lives through practices and services which promote their participation and voice. ‘Voice’ not only refers to what they say but to all aspects of their presentation. This encompasses how we actively listen to what they tell us matters to them to build their confidence and personal growth, to promote understanding of their life story and to best influence service improvements.

Promoting a rights-respecting culture, as described in The Promise, is the responsibility of all who work with children and young people. Those within the child, young person or young adult's network are usually relationally best placed to promote their rights. The remit of the Children's Social Work Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service provides additional, independent trauma-informed advocacy, guidance and support to children, young people and young adults, aged 0-26 years, who have experience of care, who are or have been involved in child protection processes or, where they cannot access this Service themselves, due to, e.g., age or disability, advocacy on their behalf.

Referrals

The data shows the primary referral reasons and overall numbers from May 2021-October 2022. The numbers have remained consistent with some flux in relation to the reasons. It remains that referrals are mostly for children who are currently looked after and who require or have requested advocacy support. Work to raise awareness around the need to promote the voices of those who cannot express their views directly is positively progressing.



Source: Young Person's Rights Service

Over 2020-2022, the impact of Covid 19 has been undeniably significant. It has been something children, young people, and young adults continue to reflect upon with the Service. The predominant focus of referrals over this period has been **family life**. This has included rights issues related to being brought up within or reunited with family, being cared for with brothers or sisters if living apart, and associated challenges when being cared for geographically far from home.

Connected to family life, referrals for children, young people, and young adults in conflict with the law or being criminally exploited and young parents with experience of care are noteworthy. Their voices highlight rights and trauma related experiences of not being fully heard or fairly treated, of being stigmatised or disproportionately criminalised and of the need to ensure access to legal representation. The Service is feeding in voice in a variety of ways to associated multi-agency governance and improvement work through its involvement in and support of the Corporate Parenting Improvement and Performance Group, The Champions Board, the Youth Justice Strategy, the 'Write Right About Me' Project and local Independent Advocacy provision under the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011.

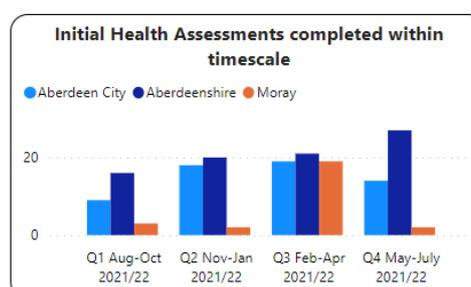
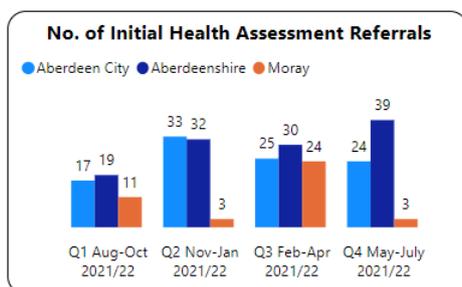
The 2 overarching priorities of the Rights Service Improvement Plan will continue over the next 3-year period:

1. Further develop use of inclusive ways of observing and communicating with, and/or on behalf of children, young people, and young adults which support their rights, participation, and voice. This particularly applies to those who may communicate their voice/views in alternative ways or are non-verbal through age/disability. (For example increased provision of non-instructed advocacy for babies, infants, and those children, young people, young adults with a disability.)
2. Further raise awareness and promote rights through the provision of direct workforce learning opportunities that translates rights into practice. (An example being the delivery, with children's social work colleagues, of learning workshops on inclusive communication. We also contribute to the Youth Justice Training Programme)

These priorities are mindful of the multi-agency work required in realising the cultural transformation required by the Promise, the welcome demands placed by UNCRRC, and other national legislative and policy drivers, e.g., the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill to ensure that planning for and with our children, young people, and young adults looks to give full effect to their rights, participation, and voice.

The timing and quality of our health assessments as well as tracking the health outcomes for looked after children was flagged as an area for improvement in our 2019 Joint Inspection. Our data highlights notable improvement in the number of initial health assessments completed in the expected timescale but also this is an area where continuing vigilance is required. NHS Grampian have a dedicated Looked After Nurse who provides a critical role coordinating initial reviews but additionally is a key point of contact for agencies to raise health related concerns for our care experienced young people.

We recognise that some of our looked after young people experience significant disruption to their care and education as well as access to health provision. This can result in them missing out on routine health provision such as HPV vaccination. To address this gap and further promote the healthy outcomes looked after children, we are keen to establish a health assessment process for our care leavers. This will help identify gaps in health provision as well as ensuring that care leavers returning to Aberdeen City continue to have access to primary health and dental care.



Source: NHS Grampian

There is a need for the Education Service to understand the low levels of satisfaction with local schools and undertake more focussed engagement with the 6 groups most likely to be impacted by poverty in order to learn from the lived experience of groups.

Education will review the school Anti-bullying policy and report progress to the Board.

There is a need to look again at our approaches to improving levels of dental health in primary 1 with a particular focus on areas of deprivation.

The increase in the number of children with additional support needs and declared disabled triggers a need to better understand the lived experiences of this large group and then consider our multi-agency continuum of provision more holistically across child and adult services. This work will be informed by an enhanced request for assistance process and aligning our work with the refreshed Autism and Carers Strategies.

There is a need to increase knowledge of neglect and harm in children with disabilities.

A mental health collaborative will be established and informed by a young person Taskforce. The Collaborative will consider the range of data available to help support positive mental and physical wellbeing. There is a need to ensure that bereavement is considered more fully when assessing wellbeing.

There is a need to improve attendance in schools, with a particular emphasis on care experienced young people, and this will require the support of the Children's Services Board. The Education Service are continuing to address levels of exclusion and will report progress through the Board to help inform any work by multi-agency partners.

Health and education will work to increase the uptake of the HPV vaccine in S3 girls.

Raising attainment and improving positive and sustained destinations continues to be a key focus for the education service. Increased focus now needs to be placed on closing the gap. Progress should be reported to the Children's Services Board so that multi-agency support can be sought to drive improvement.

There is a need to understand how our children feel in their communities and to work to reduce the number of children who experience domestic abuse. This will require close working across child and adult services.

There is a need to better understand and address the increase in referrals to the Reporter on offence grounds and review our models of support.

The Partnership will progress their plans to implement a Bairns Hoose model of support for those who have been harmed.

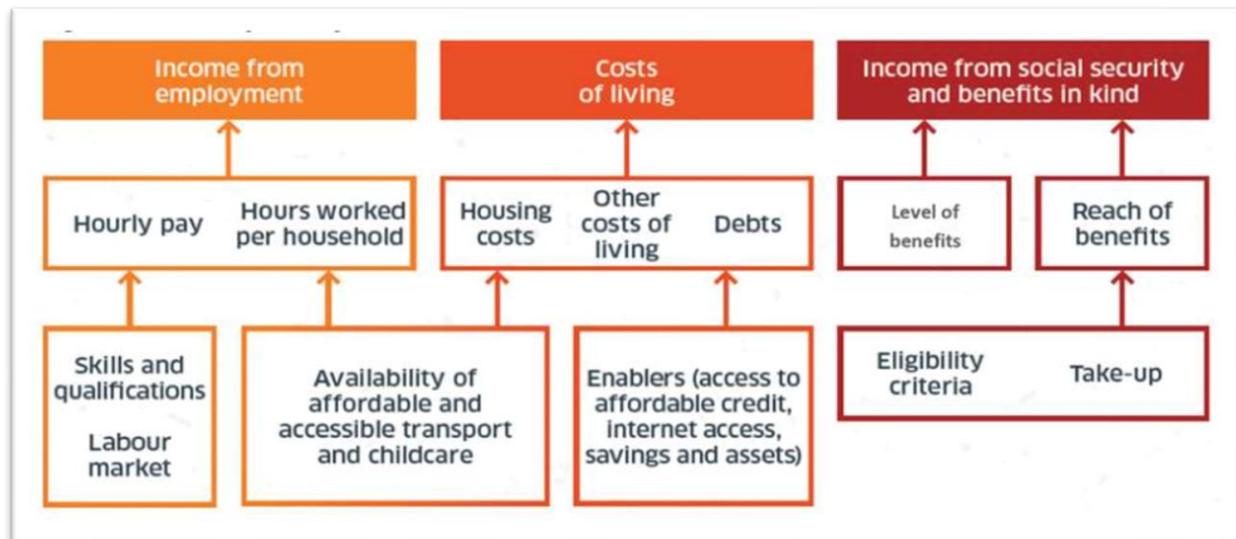
There is a need to develop a Family Support Model to offer earlier and preventative support and intervention with a particular focus on kinship carers and preventing children and young people from entering care. These areas will be including in the Children's Services Plan for 2023-26.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN THE CITY?



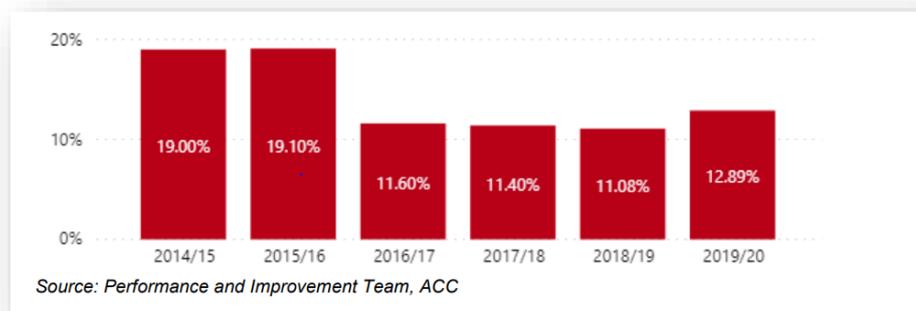
What does the research tell us?

Evidence 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 impact levels of child poverty and so will focus on them in keeping with, 'Best Start, Bright Futures', and recognise how interrelated they are. We are firmly committed to reducing child poverty and meeting the targets set in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017



Nearly 13% of our children, young people live in the most deprived data zones

Of Aberdeen City's 283 data zones 29 are in the 20% most deprived, which is 2.08% of the national share. 12.89% of children and young people across the city live in the most deprived data zones.

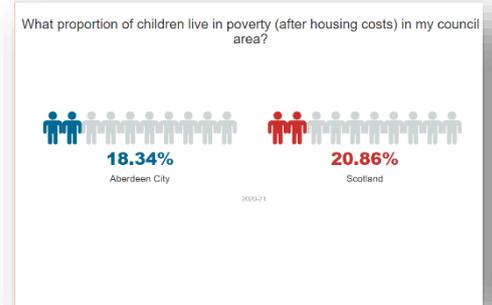


Around 22% of children are experiencing child poverty

The number of children identified as experiencing child poverty in Aberdeen was estimated to be 21.8% in 2021, or around 5500 children. The Poverty line is defined as 'below 60% median income after housing costs'. The current cost of living crisis has seen increased registrations for benefits at a greater rate than during the pandemic.

89% of young people who recently responded to an electronic survey felt that they had access to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment. 9% were unsure leaving 2% of children who responded saying that they didn't have access to these basics.

In real terms, the levels of child poverty varies considerably from community to community as demonstrated by the percentage of children (under 16) living in relative poverty by ward from the Department of Work and Pensions below.



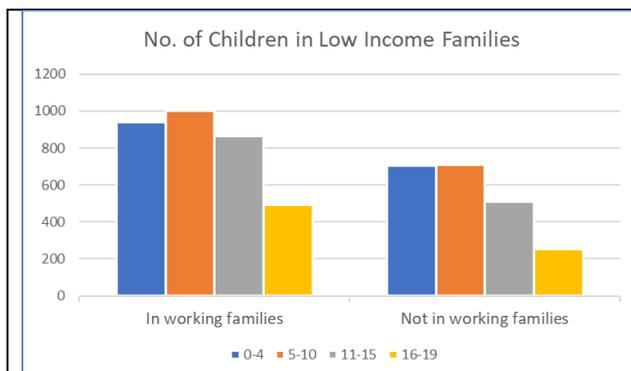
Percentage of children (under 16) living in Relative low income families

Ward	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Aberdeen City	11.1%	13.3%	15.2%	15.0%	15.1%	13.2%
Airyhall/Broomhill/Garthdee	5.5%	6.2%	9.0%	8.1%	8.5%	7.5%
Bridge of Don	5.0%	7.2%	7.4%	7.2%	7.7%	8.8%
Dyce/Bucksburn/Danestone	7.9%	9.7%	12.1%	12.3%	13.2%	13.7%
George St/Harbour	16.2%	21.1%	23.1%	23.8%	20.1%	18.8%
Hazlehead/Queens Cross/Countesswells	3.2%	3.8%	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%	3.9%
Hilton/Woodside/Stockethill	16.0%	20.5%	25.6%	25.3%	24.0%	20.5%
Kincorth/Nigg/Cove	10.2%	11.4%	11.7%	12.9%	12.8%	12.8%
Kingswells/Sheddocksley/Summerhill	10.6%	12.0%	14.2%	13.5%	13.6%	10.8%
Lower Deeside	4.1%	4.3%	4.5%	4.9%	5.4%	5.5%
Midstocket/Rosemount	8.3%	9.6%	11.0%	10.5%	9.9%	8.6%
Northfield/Mastrick North	17.7%	22.1%	26.1%	25.0%	26.0%	21.6%
Tillydrone/Seaton/Old Aberdeen	23.2%	25.9%	29.5%	31.4%	32.6%	26.3%
Torry/Ferryhill	16.9%	22.0%	22.9%	21.7%	22.3%	17.5%

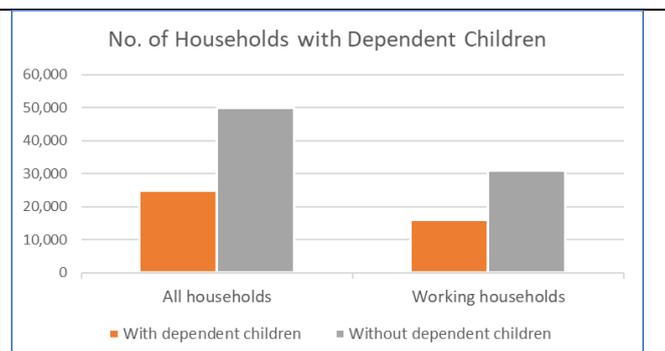
Source: [Department of Work & Pensions](#)

50% of households experiencing poverty have dependent children

Around 50% of households experiencing poverty have dependent children driving children and young people to be a key consideration as we work to combat poverty.



Source: Stat-Xplore Children in Low Income Families - Home (dwp.gov.uk) 2021



Source: Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics (nomisweb.co.uk). Annual population survey 2021 - households with dependent children and type.

The current cost of living crisis is having a significant impact on the finance available to families. It will be important to continue to maximise the family income wherever possible. A qualitative research study: Midwives', health visitors', family nurse practitioners' and women's experiences of the NHS Grampian's Financial Inclusion Pathway in practice, was completed in October 2022. A series of recommendations were co-produced focusing on organisational support, training needs for professionals and parent-focused recommendations. The link to the full report can be found [here](#).

78.5% of the population aged over 16 are employed which is slightly higher than the Scotland comparison (74.5%), with average gross weekly pay (by place of residence) being £599.40; slightly higher than the Scottish average of £577.70.



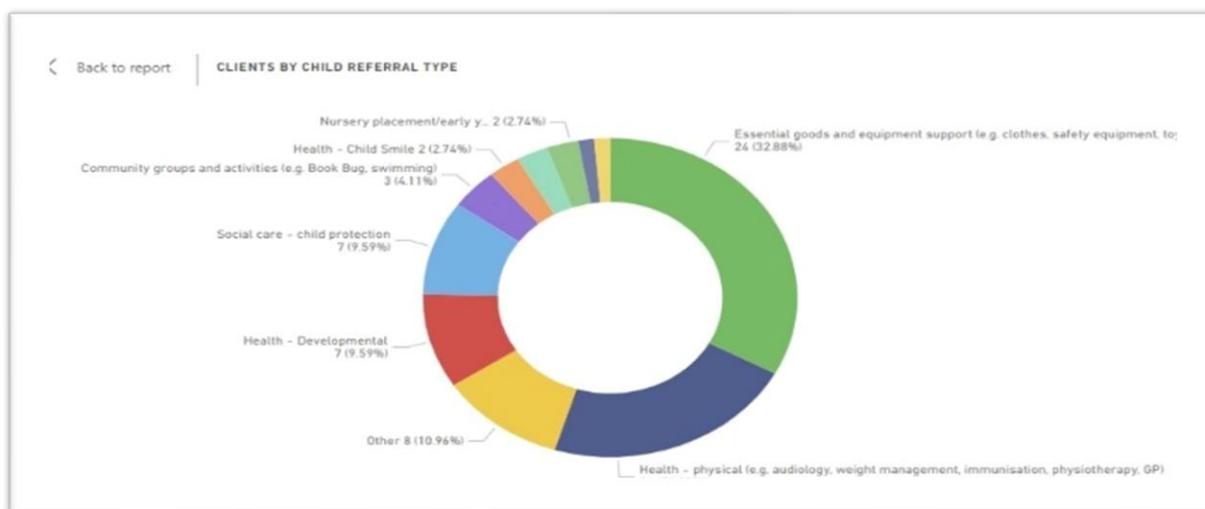
The groups most likely to be impacted by poverty face different challenges

In Aberdeen City there were 4,491 lone parent households on some form of Housing Benefits in August 2022, this is up from 3,442 in January 2019 and an increase of 30%, compared with an increase of 20% Scotland wide. There were 4,435 lone parent households on Universal Credit in August 2022.

Minority Ethnic Families are less likely to be employed with the rate of employment on average being 63% in 2022 compared with 74% for those who are white, in Aberdeen City. If you are white you are less likely to be economically inactive, (those out with the workforce, neither employed nor unemployed), than those who are not white, on average in 2022 at a rate of 23% for those who are white and 30% for those who are not, in Aberdeen City.

In Aug 2022, there were 3,148 households in Aberdeen City on Universal Credit who are entitled to Limited Capacity for Work Entitlement due to them being Families with a disabled adult or child. Of these, 643 had children and of these households 439 are also single parents households. At the same time period there were 482 households in Aberdeen City on Universal Credit who are entitled to Disabled Child Entitlement and of these households 70% or 337 are lone parent households.

Families with a younger mother (under 25) – as of January 2023 the Family Nurse Partnership had 68 mothers enrolled in Aberdeen City. The graph below shows referrals made for children of mothers enrolled in the FNP programme with 33% requiring additional support for essential goods and equipment.



Quote from a Family Nurse in Aberdeen City:

'One of my clients of polish nationality separated from her partner whom she was viewed as a dependant on his residency when she arrived in the UK. Quickly she was given her own tenancy and Universal Credits including housing benefit. Six months later she was notified she had failed the habitual residency test and all UC has been stopped, so sounds like she had been given this in error. Had she known this at the time it's unlikely she would have accepted her tenancy, as now she has no money to pay rent and is accruing rent arrears, which will continue. Her food all comes from CFine foodbank and I am dependant on seeking out nappies clothes etc. from Abernecessities. I've helped her apply to Scarf for a grant for help with heating costs. She is appealing the situation but this could take months for a decision, so she will be struggling financially for a while.'

In Aug 2022, there were 476 households in Aberdeen City on Universal Credit with a child under 1, with more than half (292) being lone parent families.

Around a third (34%) of families with a child under the age of 1 experience relative poverty compared to just less than a quarter (24%) of children overall. A holistic approach beginning in pregnancy (or even pre-pregnancy) is important to reduce the risk of having a baby becoming a trigger point for falling into poverty.

Health Visitors, Family Nurses and Midwives are well placed to make enquiry as to the social-economic factors impacting on families. Local research was undertaken last year; Midwives', health visitors', family nurse practitioners' and women's experiences of the NHS Grampian's Financial Inclusion Pathway in practice: A qualitative investigation of early implementation and impact.

Professional's expectations and practices, parent's willingness or openness to discuss money worries, and outwardly visible financial insecurity were all factors influencing how, when and if financial enquiry was made. Related to this, some Health Visitors described the challenges of having conversations with families who were living in more affluent areas compared to those living in more deprived areas, and about relying on their professional judgement to determine how and whether to broach the subject. Where someone lived in the city for example, seems to play a role in determining the likelihood of whether this issue is raised and how often it is, illustrated in this excerpt:

'A lot of it comes down to professional judgement as well, and I think, on reflecting, I probably have to adapt more, like adopt more of a, you know, asking, asking everyone approach. Erm, right now, my caseload is spread across various parts of, erm, Aberdeen. I have a pocket in the central city and then I have, erm, a larger area in the sort of x and y, area ... So, I have a mixed caseload.. so probably, you know, this is probably wrong, but, I think I'm less likely to ask financial questions depending on where my families are...(HV)

Most parent participants in the study described food insecurity experiences. Half of the participants were either current users of food banks or food pantries (either often or periodically) or had used those in the past. In cases where participants said they didn't use food banks some reported relying on family members for help with food costs. Care and concern to feed nutritious food to their children were also commonplace but with the admission that it was difficult to buy what they wished because healthy food cost too much to buy.

I like to eat healthy...so, it's quite expensive to eat healthy...Like, chocolate's cheaper, and it shouldn't be. (Full-time parent of 10 month daughter)

Larger Families (3+ children) - In Aberdeen City there were 989 households with 3 or more children who were in receipt of some form^[1] of Housing Benefits in August 2022. This is an increase from 667 (48%) in January 2019 compared with an increase of 29% Scotland wide. There were 969 households with 3 or more children who were in receipt of Universal Credit in August 2022.

[\[1\]](#) Adding those on legacy Housing Benefits and those on Universal Credit with a Housing Entitlement in Aug 22 and Jan 2019.

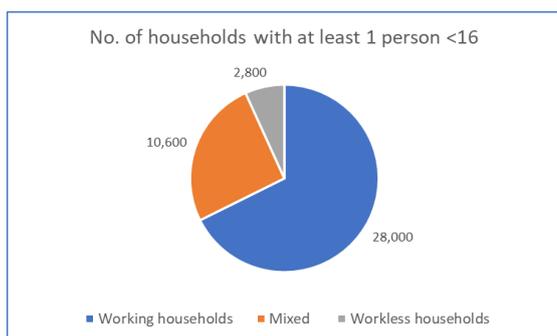
There is a need for us to better understand how our current system impacts of all 6 groups to better inform our design and delivery of services.

Nearly 20% of those over 16 are economically inactive

19.4% of those over age 16 in Aberdeen City are ‘economically inactive’. This includes students, those with long or short term illness, retired people, people looking after family or home, and those that may be discouraged from working. Of these, 24.6% want to be working and are actively seeking employment. There are 13,900 workless households in Aberdeen City, however the sample size is too small to give an accurate estimation as to the number of these households with a child (or children) up to the age of 16.

Redundancy notifications are high in the city

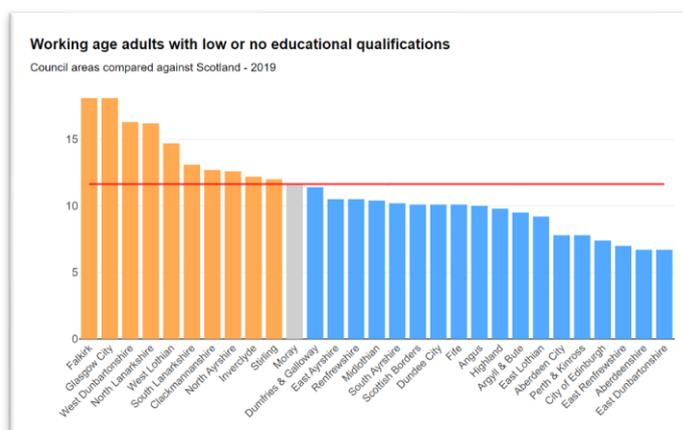
As we see the cost of living crisis impact businesses, we brace ourselves for an increase in redundancy notifications and companies going into administration. Across Scotland, Administrations are increasing and Aberdeen has recently seen one of the steepest increases in Administrations. It is of critical importance that we equip our young people with the skills they need to secure a positive destination immediately upon leaving school and to sustain that in the longer term by continuing to focus on the development of skills.



The impact of redundancy on families is considerable. There are currently 2,800 families without any form of employment and this will be placing families under considerable pressure.

Source: Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics (nomisweb.co.uk). Annual population survey 2021 - households by combined economic activity status.

The number of working age adults with low or no educational qualifications remains low.



We need to continue to transform our senior phase through ABZ Campus

The Attainment and Transitions to Adulthood Improvement Group has been established to provide operational oversight of partnership work to transform the Senior Phase curriculum to ensure that our young people enter positive and sustained destinations. It remains important that we ensure that our young people are well placed to secure a positive destination.

The group have been focusing on overtaking three aspects of work in this area; increasing the range of growth-sector related courses available to young people, piloting the introduction of *upstream* as a tool to identify young people at risk of homelessness and finally increasing the number of young people who leave school with baseline qualifications including literacy and numeracy. The first and last of these aspects have been successfully overtaken, with work continuing both on upstream and also with the introduction of a *Pathways Advocate* post in each school to support a future-focus for our most vulnerable young people.

Increase in Growth Sector Courses				
Year	Total	Growth	Percentage	Change
2019-20 (Baseline)	89	37	41.6	
2020-21	81	35	43.2	
2021-22	109	54	49.5	8.0

As outlined earlier, the attainment and sustained destinations of those living in lower quintiles will continue to be a key focus over the lifetime of this Children's Services Plan.

We need to improve educational outcomes through a focus on excellence and equity

The education service continues to work to improve the quality of leadership, learning and teaching, curriculum, wellbeing and access to financial inclusion expertise to support improvement in this area.

Quality improvement visits undertaken since September have evidenced an improvement in some evaluations against core Quality leadership Indicators. This is now leading to consideration of a proportionate model of support to enable all schools to demonstrate improvement. In many settings there is a clear need to continue to focus on high quality learning, teaching and assessment, planning for the individual and consideration of effective differentiation.

Middle Leaders are being offered the chance to engage with quality professional learning to support leadership development and ensure positive impact on a chosen area of school improvement. 10 more experienced Middle Leaders are undertaking a programme to prepare them for Into Headship. This will include undertaking leadership self-reflection to support their leadership development. The programme will focus on leading to make impact, managing change and delivering results.

The Attainment Advisor has been supporting primary schools to develop approaches to Learning, Teaching and Assessment. A Lead Teacher has been appointed and has developed materials to enable improvement in the quality of learning and teaching across secondary schools. This rights based approach will support our readiness for the implementation of the UNCRC.

The Lead Teacher is now working with secondary colleagues across the city to provide targeted support to a small number of schools in order to improve the quality of learning, teaching and

assessment after coordinating delivery of A Learning, Teaching and Assessment Conference for secondary colleagues. All schools across the city make use of an agreed Learning, teaching and assessment framework and use it to support Improvement locally. Local Government benchmarking data evidences that improvement is being realised but that our focus on this area should continue.

Early years pedagogy is being adapted and used to create a more active play based curriculum in P1 and P2 and more playful approaches are being introduced at other stages in the primary school. On-going work on ABZ campus will ensure that young people are able to make choices to support their chosen pathway and ABZ works ensures they are informed as to where the growth sectors are locally ensuring higher levels of positive and sustained destinations. We would anticipate seeing the impact of these changes in attainment data in June 2024.

New Pathways Advocate posts have been introduced across our eleven Secondary schools to support, monitor and track care experienced young people in pathways planning and achieving a positive and sustained destination. Pathways Advocates provide advice and support around choices, vocational pathways and future options and work closely with Principal Teachers of Guidance and Skills Development Scotland, Careers Advisors. The impact of this change will be closely monitored to inform next steps.

The Aberdeen Computing Collaborative launched in September 2022. The launch was attended by many of our children, young people and staff and will see work to develop computer science skills in children and staff progress at pace. This work will help ensure that our young people are well placed to benefit from growth sectors in the future.

Work to address mental health and wellbeing continues at pace as outlined earlier in this report. We know that financial concerns can be a significant factor in determining the mental health of parents and carers and know that children and young people are impacted by parental mental health. There is a need to look holistically at the need of families to effectively support our children and young people and to join up sources of information and support to improve access for groups.

A new tracking system has been put in place to monitor the impact of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF), to ensure that the allocation of funding directly closes attainment gap. After a period of testing, the system is now being rolled out across all city schools and will allow more granular analysis of the impact of resource.

We continue to focus on the removal of the costs of the school day

Schools have removed all curriculum costs to families. There is clear evidence that this has resulted in children taking decisions on courses which are not influenced by the associated costs. Updated guidance on school uniforms will be reviewed when published.

From August 2021 music tuition fees were removed. In order to meet the new demand and ensure equity of service instructors were aligned to localities. Data shows that this redistribution of instructor time has resulted in greater equity across the city with pupils from all schools now able to access the Service compared with access in 2020. The table below shows far better alignment between the total proportion of children and young people on the school roll across an Associated Schools Group and the percentage of children and young people accessing the Music Service.

ASG	FTE allocated to ASG by April 2022	Number of pupils in 2020	April 2022	% of total Music Service pupil nos in 2020	April 2022	School roll as % of city roll in 2020	April 2022	% of ASG roll receiving tuition in 2020	April 2022
Grammar	3.2fte	136	235	25%	14.3%	12%	13%	4%	8.1%
Harlaw	2.1fte	63	122	11%	6.9%	10%	9.8%	3%	5.2%
Lochside	1.9fte	17	100	3%	5.6%	12%	11.2%	1%	3.7%*
Cults	3fte	151	214	28%	12.1%	9%	9.8%	7%	8%
Dyce	1.1fte	4	70	1%	3.9%	4%	4.1%	0%	7.1%
Bucksburn	2.5fte	34	175	6%	9.9%	8%	7.5%	2%	9.7%
Bridge of Don	1.4fte	24	64	4%	3.6%	4%	4.7%	2%	5.6%
Oldmachar	2.1fte	40	177	7%	10%	8%	8.2%	2%	8.9%
Northfield*	2.8fte	7	187	1%	10.5%	10%	9.7%	0%	8%
St Machar	1.9fte	13	138	2%	7.8%	13%	12.6%	0%	4.5%
Hazlehead	3.2fte	60	274	11%	15.4%	9%	9.5%	2%	11.9%

*Actual music making happening in Lochside is higher as these numbers do not include tuition delivered by Big Noise in Tullos, Walker Road and Lochside Academy

Data will continue to be closely monitored as we continue to address the equity agenda.

Parents report that increased access to childcare is positively impacting them

The expansion of early learning and childcare has resulted in far greater uptake in places. The expansion focussed in part on making provision more accessible and the accessibility of services and broader range of delivery models have helped realise a significant rise in uptake.

Most parents and carers who responded to a recent survey could identify clear improvements to their child's development as a result of the expansion. We asked parents and carers what impact the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (from 600 hours to 1140 hours) has had on them and their family:

- 65.4% (nearly two-thirds of respondents) stated that they access an ELC setting to enable them to facilitate the working day.
- 10.3% required the service to support their further education or training.
- 51.2% of respondents stated that they had more time for other responsibilities as a result of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare.
- 38.7% of respondents indicated that they had more money/disposable income as a positive impact on their family.
- 26.1% stated improved wellbeing /respite as a positive impact from the expansion of ELC, with 24.3% of respondents finding they now have more time to themselves.
- 28.5% are now considering a return to work or study.

As well as improving outcomes for children, the expansion of ELC aims to support parents into work, study or training by making it more affordable. Over one quarter of respondents said they

were now considering a return to work or study and feedback from parents around the impact on families is positive.

“The extra hours have greatly improved our lifestyle and wellbeing as a family, I am able to contribute more financially as I have the option to work more during the week. A definite positive impact.”

“Childcare is very expensive and at one point it was over £2,000 a month this is obviously not sustainable for long periods. The funding will give us breathing space to pay of mortgage etc.”

“No disposable income but it will take a HUGE burden off me. Time to yourself/improved wellbeing/respite is only for non-working parents or parents with additional childcare such a family help etc. Most single parents do not have those privileges.”

Work will soon progress to better understand the long term impact of the expansion on families to help reshape the offer for maximum impact.

There are a number 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)

Nationally, there are planned developments to extend wrap around care for school age children and, in particular, to deliver this free for low-income families. Breakfast Club provision will be considered as part of this programme. We await further guidance and look forward to working with partners across the city to deliver this

Holiday programmes targeting the 6 groups have been well received by families

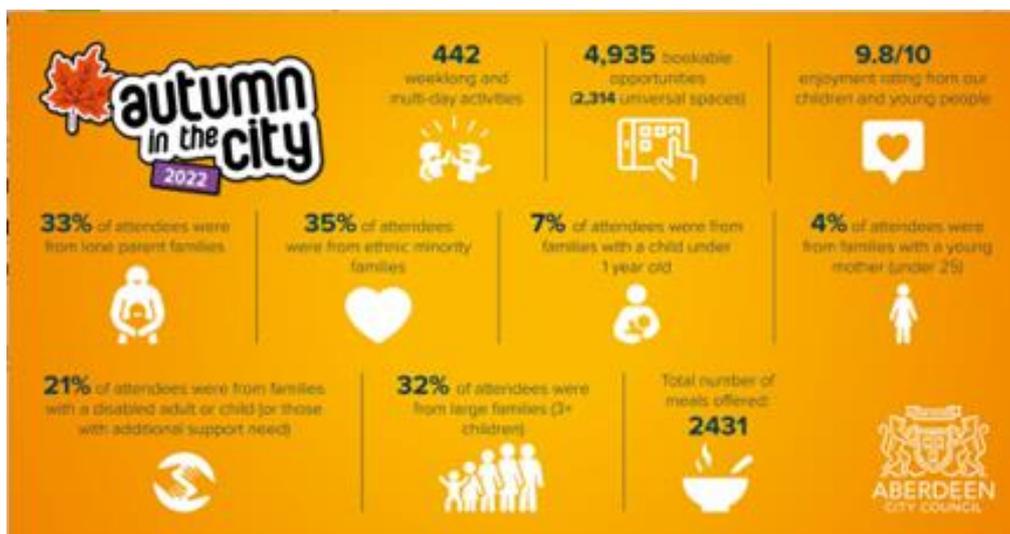
In an effort to combat negative effects of the extended period of isolation experienced by the young people of Aberdeen City during the Covid-19 pandemic, under the directive of and funded via a grant from the Scottish Government, Aberdeen City Council provided a programme of activities during the 2021 school summer holidays, aiming to engage with young people, in particular those who were deemed to be most vulnerable. Activities such as sports camps, ice skating, swimming, dance and art classes were provided for free to children and young people giving them the opportunity to (re)connect with friends, peers, their wider community, and the outdoors. The inaugural programme featured activities for children and young people, spanning across the city and engaging with both internal and external partners to provide the most varied and accessible programme possible. The summer 2021 programme provided 15,000 bookable opportunities for the young people and families of Aberdeen City, with an overall enjoyment rating of 9.5 out of 10.

Following the success of the Summer 2021 programme approval was granted by Full Council to utilise further council resources, as well as further grant allocation from the Scottish Government, to develop the programme into a full-scale school holiday programme ('In the City' programmes) which would span the easter, summer and October school holidays 2022, providing access to free activities for the young people of Aberdeen City, as well as the inclusion of a food provision ensuring that those young people attending applicable activities would also receive either a snack or a meal while attending the activity. This programme was directed to focus on the provision of childcare for those ages 5 – 14 years, with a further focus on engaging with children meeting the priority criteria set-out within the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

A universal programme was also developed to provided opportunities available to all children and young people, including those who did not meet the above criteria.

To date the programmes have provided more than 35,000 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 most recent programme (Autumn in the City, 2022) was 9.8 out of 10. More data from the last 'In the City' programme can be found on the below infographic.



Our young people want to respond positively to the cost of living crisis.

A small number of the 755 responses from a recent survey of children and young people indicated a desire for focussed learning opportunities around life skills and to develop knowledge that around areas such as personal finance. Similarly, amongst older respondents, there were some who felt that they would like greater support to prepare them for future employment,

“I think we could maybe get more information on employment opportunities and employable assets within the school to prepare us for the world we have to enter once we leave. Also maybe some life skills in general like how to pay bills etc so that the system of living and working alone doesn’t come as a massive shock (young person aged 17)

90% of children who experience care live in SIMD 1&2

There is often a multiplicity of reasons why children are accommodated out with parental care. This includes: structural inequality, poverty, poor social housing, homelessness; parental experience of

childhood trauma/being looked after. Current data evidences that vast majority of the children and young people who require care and protection experience wellbeing and welfare concerns due to vulnerabilities within the parents/primary care givers circumstances. . In addition, circa 90% of all Looked After Children (LAC) originate from SIMD 1 & 2 areas. It is important that we work proactively with adult services to address these triggers over the lifetime of this Children’s Services Plan.

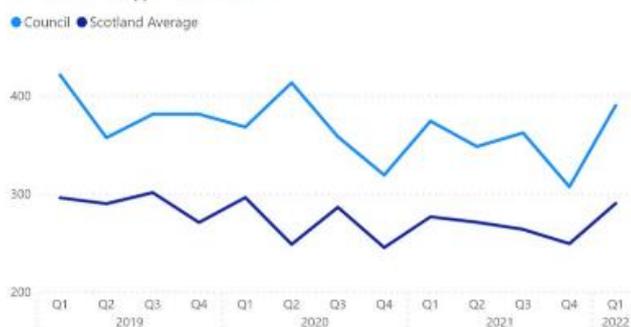
Positive trends in housing are emerging

There has been decrease in the use of temporary accommodation arrangements. As of 31st March 2022 there were 51 households in temporary accommodation with dependent children, a total of 83 children.

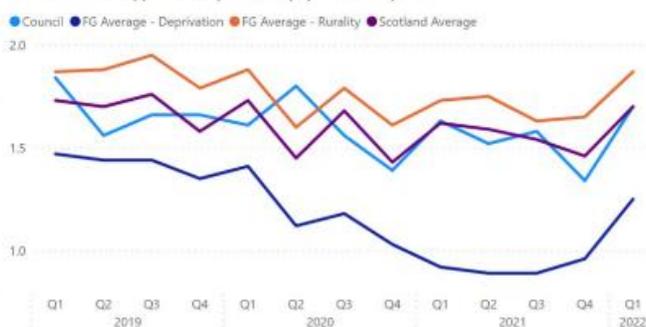
The [Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023](#) identifies six strategic outcomes including adequacy and improvement of housing supply; the prevention of homelessness; improvement in private sector renting, and reducing fuel poverty. These are supporting outcomes which create the right conditions for tackling child poverty through a focus on mitigation for all families.

In 2021/22 there were 692 affordable housing completions which is the highest number of affordable homes delivered in Aberdeen through the affordable housing supply programme which also includes part of the council’s ambitious plans to deliver 2,000 new social rented homes. 653 units are projected for completion in 2022/23.

Homelessness Applications Over Time



Homelessness Applications per 1,000 pop - FG Comparison



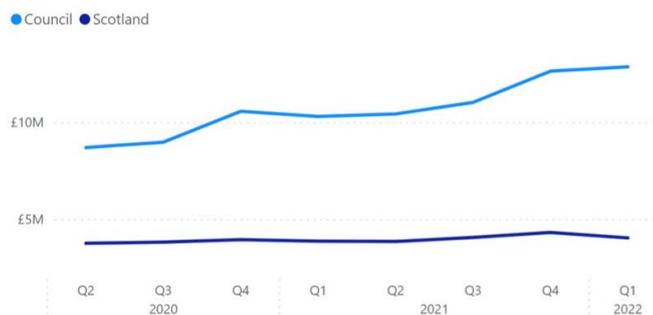
During 21/22 we implemented our new model of Housing & Support to help people sustain their tenancies in Aberdeen City Council housing. This role is specifically designed with a view to reducing risk escalating to child or adult protection status. Each Housing & Support Officer now has a smaller patch size to help them get to know households in the area better, and work in-coordination with other services to support families and children. During 2021/22 99.31% of anti-social behaviour cases resolved in the year.

Council approved the Housing Domestic Abuse Policy in 2021. This is a key policy to reflect the aims of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 that came into force in April 2019. This Act makes domestic abuse involving a partner or ex-partner, whether physical or emotional or coercive control a criminal offence. It reflects the aims of Aberdeen’s Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) as well as Aberdeen’s Violence Against Women Partnership action plan and strategy. The focus of early intervention in the policy aims to support and protect those fleeing or experiencing harm and also provide an avenue to remove the perpetrator from the tenancy, as opposed to the victim having to flee.

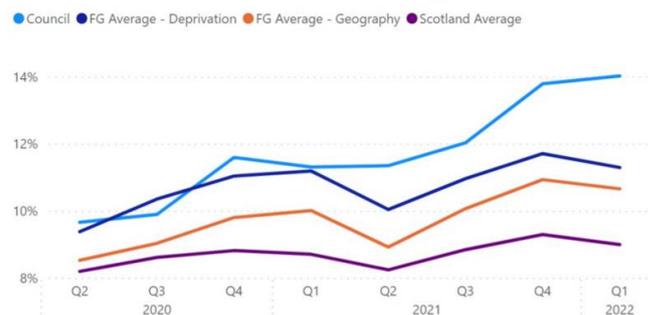
The Council spent £22.6M on meeting Scottish Housing Quality Standards in 2021/22. Over the course of 2021/22 we fully rewired 599 properties, installed 3852 hard wired smoke detectors, 1739 heating systems and 1222 crime check doors. We also replaced 61 windows and 163 kitchens. The national council average for homelessness applications sits at 290 with the Aberdeen City average considerably above this level (390 as of early 2022). This equates to around 1.7 applications per 1000 citizens which is aligned to the national average.

Nationally 9% of families are in rent arrears. The level was considerably higher in Aberdeen (14%) in early 2022. There is evidence of a steady increase in rent arrears of the course of the last 2 years.

Total Gross Rent Arrears over time - Scotland Comparison



Gross Rent Arrears as % of Rent Due - Family Group Comparison



Children have access to good provision of IT and community connectivity

There has been considerable investment in community connectivity over recent years alongside investment in Chromebooks. 500 data connections have been provided to families in need and over 14,000 Chromebooks have been purchased to support learning in school and at home. In addition, the Connecting Scotland programme provided a further 461 Chromebooks and iPads with mobile connectivity to vulnerable families in our communities. More recently, 200 Chromebooks with data connections have been provided, through Connecting Scotland, to support our Ukrainian families. This investment has ensured that almost all children and young people from P6 – S6 have access to a digital device now.

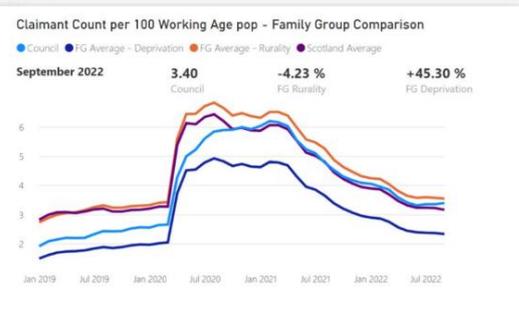
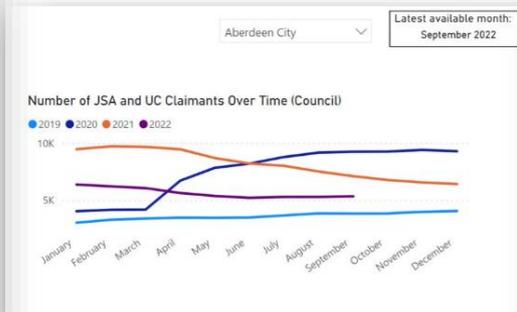
The Scottish Government commitment to a device for every child will help increase the number of children and young people who have access to a suitable device from the 41% of the school population to 100%.

86% of young people recently reported that they are supported to know how to feel safe on line with 10% stating that they didn't know.

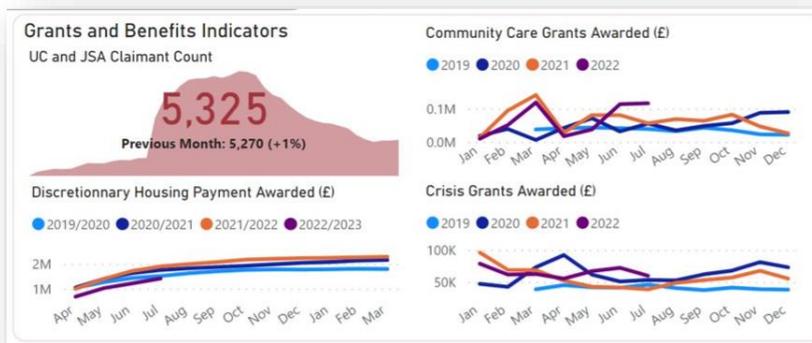
We continue to work on maximising the uptake of benefits

There has been a proactive promotion of new benefit entitlements including promotion of the increased child payment through the universal services and through social media channels. We continue to monitor update to help determine the effectiveness of approaches.

At the end of 2020/2021 there were 13,583 household on Universal Credit in Aberdeen City. Of these, 3350 were single with children, and 1470 were a couple with children.



There has been an increase in the number of discretionary housing payments awarded and effective systems are in place to allocate community care and crisis grants to those who need them.



The provision of free buses 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 both locally and nationally and through schools to increase awareness of the benefits of free bus travel and to maximise uptake. As of January 2023, over 22,500 young people have applied for an obtained a National Entitlement Card with free bus travel and are benefiting from this service. Bus fares in Aberdeen are relatively comparable to those in other Scottish Cities, with the following fares as of January 2023:

	Adult Single Fare	Child Single Fare	Adult Day Ticket	Child Day Ticket
Aberdeen (First Aberdeen)	£1.80 - £2.85	£1.30	£4.45* / £4.70	£2.75
Dundee (Xplore Dundee)	£1.90 - £2.45	£1.15 - £1.50	£3.85* / £4.00	£2.60* / £2.90
Edinburgh (Lothian Buses)	£1.80	£0.90	£4.40** / £4.50	£2.20
Glasgow (First Glasgow)	£1.80 - £2.65	£1.10	£4.90* / £5.00	£2.10

*Purchased off bus (online / app)

**Tap and cap using same contactless card

The most recent fare increases in Aberdeen (May 2022) saw fare increases of between 5-7% compared to 2021, and across Scotland, bus fares have increased between 6-9% overall, over the last 5 years ([Chapter 2: Bus and Coach Travel | Transport Scotland](#)).

The Scottish Government are currently undertaking a 'Fair Fares Review' to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares. The review includes consideration of increasing inflationary pressures and the cost-of-living crisis, impacting both the costs of operating public transport and the affordability of using public transport. The Fair Fares Review is considering both the cost and availability of services and the range of discounts and concessionary schemes which are available on all modes including bus, rail and ferry. It will develop and assess options to create a fairer, more transparent system of fares across all modes that maintain and increase affordability for those who need it most, with regard to the relative changes to the overall cost of travel. The review is expected to conclude in early 2023.

The Scottish Child Payment Bridging Payments were previously known as the COVID Hardship Grants. Families with children in receipt of free school meals due to reasons of low income are eligible for the Scottish Child Payment Bridging Payment. The number of children eligible for this grant has increased significantly since winter 2020.

Season	Number awarded
Winter 2020	2872
Spring 2021	3633
Summer 2021	2882
Autumn 2021	4552
Winter 2021	4398
Spring 2022	4683
Summer 2022	4676
Autumn 2022	4548

We are now looking to provide more targeted information for particular groups to ensure that families are aware of all of the potential benefits that may be available to them as shown by this targeted communication for those supporting children with a disability or caring responsibilities.

The Council has attached Money Advisors to schools to help support families within their own communities through the use of £136,497.12 Education Recovery and then Scottish Attainment Challenge funding. As the Advisors have become established they are become more familiar with the scenarios facing families and as awareness of the service has grown the added value has increased. This has been a targeted approach by life stage.

Over the last year the 4 Money Advisors who are attached to the Financial Inclusion Services have helped families achieve:

- Financial Gains of £891,877.57
- Assisted/Assisting 209 households with debt issues
- Helping with total debts of £1,180,326.78
- 408 households given full benefit checks
- Assisted 78 households to claim benefits
- Assisting 23 household to challenge being turned down for benefits

CHILD DISABILITY/CARER BENEFITS

If a member of your family has a disability or long term health condition, or is an unpaid carer for someone, you may be able to get some extra help – for example parents of disabled children can get disability benefits without taking into account their income.

CHILD DISABILITY PAYMENT
 Child Disability Payment (CDP) provides support for the extra costs that a child with a disability might have:

- You can apply for Child Disability Payment for a child under 16 with mental or physical disabilities.
- You can also apply for Child Disability Payment if the child's disability has not yet been diagnosed.

In both cases, you can still claim benefits if you feel about any symptoms that have and how they've affected you.

The CDP rates between £24.65 per week and £136.90 a week and depends on the level of help your child needs.

CHILD WINTER HEATING ASSISTANCE
 It's a payment for individual children and young people and their families with increased heating costs over winter. It's paid once a year. The payment for carers is £107.10 per year or £214.10 for children and young people in Scotland can get the assistance if they're under 18 years old and in receipt of a qualifying benefit. www.nrg.gov.scot/child-winter-heating-assistance

CARERS ALLOWANCE
 You may be eligible for Carers Allowance if you, the person you care for and the type of care you provide meets certain criteria. www.gov.uk/carers-allowance

- You could get £69.70 a week if you:
 - Care for someone on at least 35 hours a week
 - Get certain benefits
 - Are less than £128 per week

CARER'S ALLOWANCE SUPPLEMENT
 Carer's Allowance Supplement is an extra payment for people in Scotland who get Carer's Allowance on a particular date.

2022 PAYMENTS

- The first payment was on 10 Jan. It was £245.70. You'll have got it if you were getting Carer's Allowance on 11 April 2022.
- The second payment is in December and will be £245.70. You'll get this if you get Carer's Allowance on 10 October 2022. The reason it's double the amount of the first payment is in recognition of the increase in cost of living because of the pandemic.

WHO CAN HELP?
 Money Advisers don't get all the financial assistance and benefits they are entitled to. This may be because they are unaware of how to claim them, the rules are complex or because they have some unmet needs. If you are on a low income, you may be able to get some help even if you haven't claimed before or if you think you aren't equal.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION TEAM
 Advice line: 01224 522709 Email: Moneyadvice@abdnacity.gov.uk
www.abdnacity.gov.uk/benefitadvice

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

- Financial Gains - £291,858.05
- Assisted/assisting 83 household with debt issues
- Helping with debts of £724,042.61
- 196 household given full benefit checks
- Assisted 26 household to claim benefits
- Assisted 19 household to challenge being turned down for benefits.

Data from the online benefits calculator shows that families have been assisted to help claim an additional £263,710.90** per week of new benefits

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

Over the last year, 2,919 free school clothing grants have been approved. This equates to grants for 2,890 Primary pupils and 1,634 secondary pupils.

Despite the proactive approach taken, there is evidence that SIMD quintile still has a disproportionate impact on health and educational outcomes and promotion could continue to be targeted to each of the 6 groups most likely to be impacted and by life stage to maximise uptake.

Free school meal registrations have increased but uptake is too low

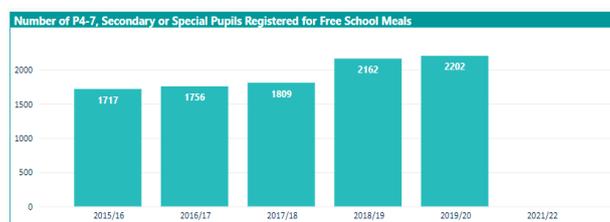
Schools encouraged families to register for free school meals and the number of registrations has increased. The universal roll out of free school meals has made close tracking of uptake for direct comparison challenging.

Scottish Government have committed to completing the roll out of universal free school meals to all Primary School pupils within the current parliamentary term. Enabling works in school kitchens and dining spaces are required to ensure schools are suitably equipped to deliver the expected increase in meal numbers. Some capital funding has been allocated by Scottish Government in 2022/23 with further funding to follow in 2023/24. The funding that has been identified will be used to take forward the most pressing priority projects identified by those officers.



Pupils eligible and registered for Free School Meals (before 2021/22)

Pupils eligible and registered for Free School Meals, (after 2021/22)



When looking at the number of children (including those who are now automatically entitled in P1-P5), the number of children registered for free school meals has increased from 4281 to 4678 over the year 2021/22, an increase of just over 9%. While there has been increases at schools in priority

neighbourhoods, increases have been seen across schools in the city, including those in areas out with priority neighbourhoods.

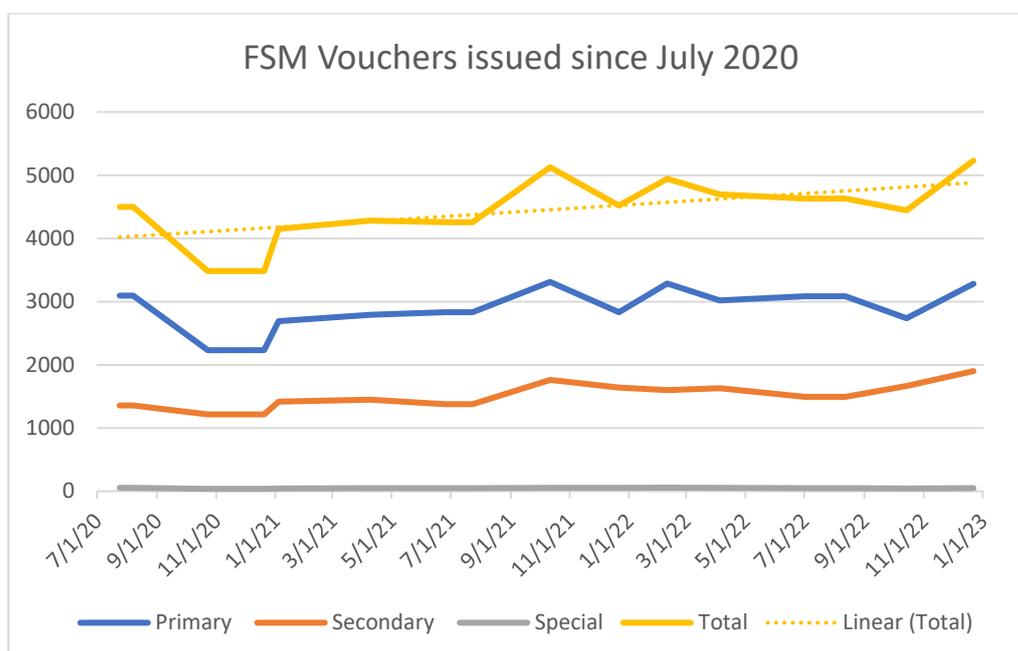
Improvement in registrations has been realised through changes to benefits awarding systems. Claimants of housing benefit and council tax reduction are now automatically awarded the free school meal benefit.

Uptake of free school meals varies considerably from school to school and the school catering service are working with local schools to better understand the factors guiding children and young people to not take up their entitlement. According to the most recent data from the Healthy Living Survey, the percentage uptake in Primary schools currently sits at 69.6% and only 47.7% in secondary schools.

Work is in progress to establish a food hub at either St Machar Academy or Northfield Academy to test an alternative approach. The food hub will be outwith the main school building and provide 'grab and go' food provision, allowing pupils to be outwith school to meet their friends but still uptake their free school meal entitlement. Learning from this trial will be used to determine next steps.

Vouchers have been distributed to families who are eligible due to low income during holiday periods and these continue to be welcomed by families.

Free school meal vouchers issued to families on low incomes during holiday periods



Access to Free sanitary products has improved

On 15th August 2022 Scotland became the first country in the world to make the provision of Free Period Products (FPP) a legal requirement of schools and public venues. Aberdeen City Council have produced a statement of provision to explain how they would meet the legislation which can be found here: [ACC FPP Statement](#) and provides expectations of schools so that equity of provision is available across the city.

A consultation undertaken in July in advance of the statement being issued provided results for both primary and secondary schools and they raise several issues which we continue to address.

A significant number of pupils were still unaware that Free period Products (FPP) were available in school to anyone who needs them. Around 50% pupils requested re-usable products in various forms. Overwhelmingly, pupils wanted products to be available in a toilet or designated place where they didn't have to ask for them. The law says there is no limit on how many products

someone can have, and they do not have to provide a reason. Since launch in August there have been a number of activities undertaken by the Education service to increase support for children and young people by increasing the understanding of menstruation, its impact and providing increased awareness of how to access resources. These include:

- Free period products distributed to all probationer teachers
- Free period products distributed to School Health leads
- Launch of FPP posters in schools
- Health & Wellbeing network input from Hannah Miley focusing on Demystifying Menstruation
- Draft letter to all schools to support increased signposting to resources
- Parent Newsletter update provided for parents about how and where to access resources



In the latest 6 monthly period, 157 boxes of period products were delivered to schools.

Families welcomed the use of the Aberdeen Gift card

Aberdeen City Council was awarded £2.85M from the Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery Fund, administered by the Scottish Government. In July 2022 the City Growth and Resources Committee agreed that £1.9M of these funds would be allocated towards the Aberdeen Gift Card Scheme, to relieve hardship and to boost the local economy. This project was designed to support low-income households by circulating pre-paid gift cards to be spent at participating businesses within Aberdeen City (including local and national retailers, entertainment and leisure venues, cafes and restaurants), to provide immediate financial relief.

Households entitled to Council Tax Reduction (CTR) as of 21 June 2022, were identified as eligible to receive the Scotland Loves Local Aberdeen Gift Card. By December 2022 14,172 gift cards were issued to eligible households, with £125 of credit on each card. In mid-January 2023 further gift cards will be distributed to those households eligible for CTR since the initial extraction of the data in June to date.

The cards must be activated within 3 months of receipt and customers have 12 months from activation to spend their credit. A support line was implemented to assist customers, the majority of calls relate to customers asking for help with activation or general digital literacy support and / or access to the internet. As at 9 January 2023, 8819 (62.2%) of gift cards had been activated by customers, with £606K spent locally.

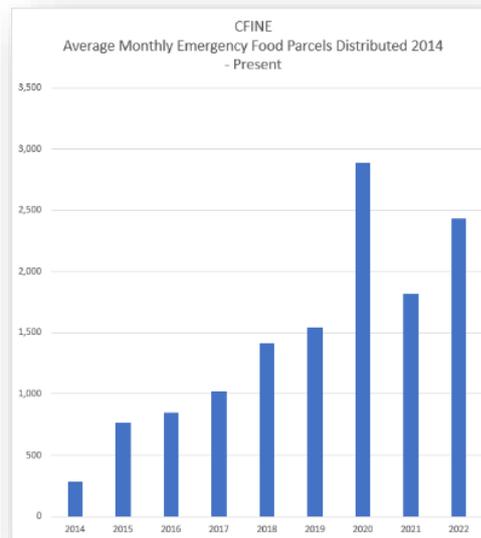
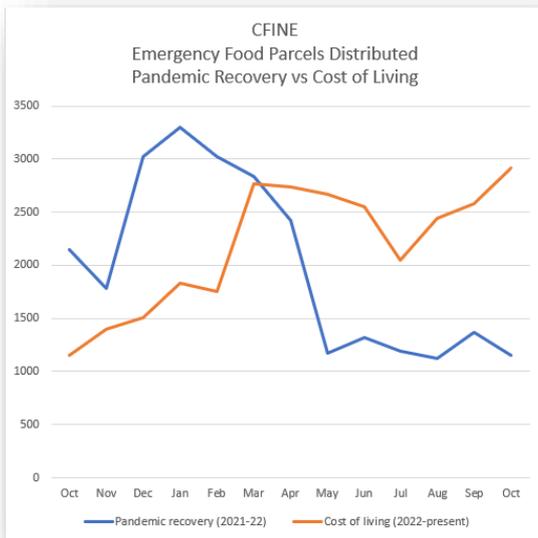
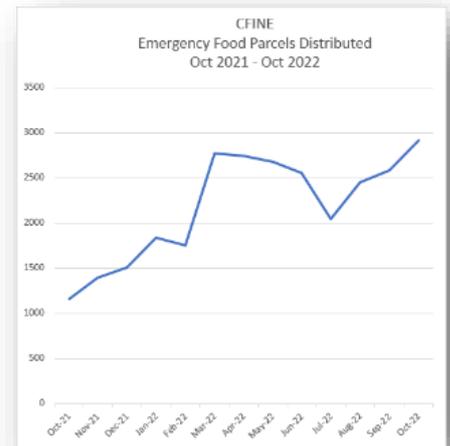
The intention had been to provide the gift cards in time for them to be used over the Christmas period but due to Royal Mail strikes in December some cards or activation codes were not delivered in time. This was the only major issue encountered in the roll out of the project and its impact is low as the cards are valid for 12 months from activation.

Food insecurity remains

CFINE, an Aberdeen based charity, is the delivery partner operating FareShare Scotland regionally with 7 local authority areas across the north of Scotland supplying over 300 charity and community groups with surplus and donated food. The number of food parcels being distributed is steadily rising. (Figures include food distributed across Fareshare and Food Poverty Action Aberdeen partners).

The impact of the cost of living crisis on the provision and affordability of food is more acute than the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chart below compares the period of recovery from the pandemic, and the impact of the subsequent cost-of-living crisis.

The number of food emergency food parcels being issues continues to cause concern and has led to the establishment of community pantries and community growing gardens. There is a need to better understand and mitigate the impact of food insecurity on child nutrition to do what we can to address the likely and long term impact on child wellbeing.



Participatory Budgeting approach has been used to support local organisations to deliver support to local communities through the £1.6m [Fairer Aberdeen Fund](#)

The current cost of living crisis has escalated need which was already heightened following the COVID-19 pandemic, this is leading to increased demand across the whole system as resource is reducing. There is a need to think very carefully about our use of collective resource and continue to integrate and co-deliver to enable Community Planning Partners to effectively mitigate risk.

We recognise that addressing child poverty is everyone's responsibility and poverty is the key driver in our Local Outcome Improvement Plan. We have embedded work to address child poverty in all Action Plans designed to support the delivery of this Plan. We hope that simplifying the strategic planning landscape will support more effective and aligned service delivery arrangements and enable more holistic reporting of our work.

During 2022/23 there has been a very strong focus on mitigating the impacts of the Cost of Living across the City, with high profile examples being the creation and disbursement of the Lord Provost's Charitable Fund; the distribution of Crisis Grants, delivery of free food packages; support for Cost of Living including fuel poverty.

There is a need now for us to carefully consider how the needs of the 6 groups identified as most at risk differ in need so that we can respond proactively and proactive engagement will be important to shape how we respond next. We have had considerable success in increasing the uptake of benefits but need to maintain this, with a particular focus on our those with the youngest children and those most at risk of poverty.

We need to continue to develop a broader range of qualifications and pathways for young people which are aligned to growth sectors to enable them to secure employment in the longer term. There is also a need to continue to work to close the gap between the attainment levels of those living in poverty from those who do not. This will require very close monitoring of the impact of resources at school and community level.

There is a need to continue to remove costs for services where possible including the cost of the school day and access to wrap around supports in keeping with the Scottish Government programme for Government.

There is a need to understand and address the low levels of uptake of Free School Meals and monitor the uptake of free sanitary products.

We need to continue to ensure that families facing redundancy are well supported to help mitigate the impacts of redundancy on the wellbeing of children and young people.

We need to continue to address food insecurity including maternal and infant food insecurity to help families through the current cost of living crisis and ensure that poor child nutrition do not impact on child wellbeing in the longer term.

We need to mainstream our approaches to addressing child poverty where possible and work closely with the Health Determinants Research Collaborative to enable us to take decisions driven by local research.

POLICY CHANGES WHICH WILL BE IMPLEMENTED OVER THE NEXT PLANNING CYCLE



The National Care Service (NCS), the implementation of a Bairns' Hoose, the anticipated Children's Care and Justice Bill, the vision for children's services outlined in The Promise, ongoing education reform and the pending incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are known and will heavily influence how we deliver services. These policy changes may change the shape of local government and influence relationships across the partnership. Change brings the opportunity to transform how partners work together to improve outcomes for children and families.

The establishment of the NCS aims to deliver health and social care services which are co-designed with communities to tackle inequality and remove artificial transitions and overreliance on eligibility criteria. It will be really important to ensure that our partnership Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) Operational Guidance is clearly aligned with Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE) to ensure we can take a whole family approach. An Aberdeen City Programme Board has been established with multi-agency representation to ensure that Aberdeen is prepared to maximise the potential whilst mitigating risks associated with the transition to the National Care Service. Our Programme Plan will be reviewed following publication of Professor Daniels report later this year.

The implementation of a Bairns' House provides an opportunity to extend integration beyond that already in place across the universal services and in our Fit Like Hubs. This, as part of our Family Support Model, could realise a more child centred approach to delivering a trauma informed service for children and young people who have experienced abused and harm as well as those young people under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour gives cause for significant concern.

This will build on the existing co-located Police Scotland and Children's Social work staff who undertake specialist interviews of children as part of child protection investigations. There is tangible evidence that co-location and integration builds multi-disciplinary teams more keenly focussed on prevention and early intervention and that those teams move past organisational boundaries and improve outcomes for children and families. Driving the co-location and integration of multi-disciplinary teams will help unleash the capacity of a wider range of professionals and community assets and reduce demand for specialist services.

The publication of the OECD report has triggered a national conversation on the purpose of education, approaches to assessment are currently being considered and there will be considerable changes made to the national agencies. The education service continues to work with Further and Higher Education partners to aid our readiness for change.

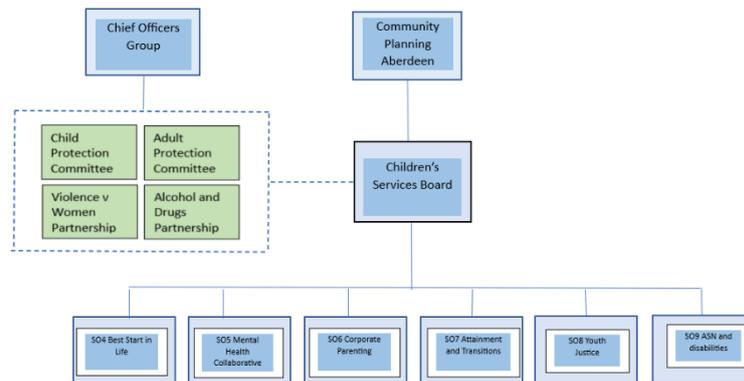
The changes in the local economy have accelerated our work on the senior phase curriculum. ABZ Campus, which is due for launch in June 2023, presents a unique opportunity to harness resource from schools, further and higher education institutions and wider partners to support young people to secure positive long term outcomes. ABZ Campus will see a wider range of vocational and higher level courses being delivered, with associated matriculation routes for some and guaranteed

interview and employment opportunities for others. Our senior phase is becoming far better aligned with local growth sectors and will help maximise post school opportunities for young people whilst supporting the prosperity of the region in the longer term. It will be important to remain open to new thinking and benefit from the insight of industry partners.

GOVERNANCE



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



It is the statutory duty of the Children's Services Board to ensure that the requirements of the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (CYP Act) are met throughout the Local Authority area of Aberdeen City and that current legislation is adhered to. The Board is responsible for ensuring that Aberdeen City is fully compliant with Statutory Guidance (Section 3) relating to Children's Services Planning.

The Group has responsibility for:

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

In developing this Plan we have sought to show the alignment of our multi-agency improvement projects with single system improvements. It is hoped that this approach will provide the Children's Services Board with a wider range of data to help monitor the strength of the system and help us to improve accountability and scrutiny of our whole system and improve analysis of wellbeing in real time.

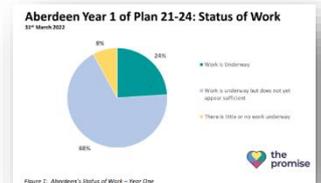
Actions to address child poverty and delivery of The Promise are embedded within all Action Plans. As a result, our yearly report on progress against this Children's Services Plan will include reporting on the impact of our work to address child poverty and our progress in delivering The Promise. We believe this approach will help us work across organisational boundaries.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROMISE



This Children's Services Plan has been shaped by The Promise. The partnership continues to prioritise prevention and early intervention and improved data is helping us to challenge ourselves as we work together to Keep the Promise.

The Children's Services Board routinely reviews progress against Plan 21-24 and has sought to include priorities for improvement across all of the sub groups supporting the delivery of this Children's Services Plan in order to make the cultural shift required a reality.



Work to develop a more effective model of Family Support Model over 2022 identified 4 groups we need to consider carefully:

- those in conflict with the law
- those with disabilities
- those impacted by trauma
- those on the edge of care

Tests of change established over to support the development of the Family Support Model in 2022 have been embedded in this Children's Services Plan. The impact of these changes will be monitored through our yearly reporting of progress. This yearly review will provide an opportunity to refocus our attention if our approaches cannot demonstrate the positive changes we seek.

As a result, this integrated Children's Services Plan will drive our work to deliver The Promise together.

ENABLING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS



Children's rights feature in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and are central to this Children's Services Plan. Community Planning Partners recognise the importance and value of incorporating children's rights and views in decision making and this approach of co-design with children and families will now feature in all of our improvement work.

The Child Protection Committee and Chief Officers Group provide highly effective oversight of children and young people in need of care and protection and regularly review data and scrutinise performance.

Terms of reference for Council, its committees and sub-committees include a commitment to hear the voices of children when taking decisions across the Council. The phrase, '*in accordance with UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities and Communities Programme, ensures that children are allowed a voice in decisions which affect both them and their city*' is included in all Committee Terms of Reference. This ensures that the decision-making forums of the Council take into account the voices of children and young people when making decisions which directly or indirectly affect them. As we move forwards, Committee effectiveness reports will review the extent to which these commitments have been realised.

On 7th March 2022, Council agreed the Council Delivery Plan which encompasses the Service Standards around the engagement and participation of young people. Performance against these standards will be monitored and reported to Council.

All Elected Members have been given the opportunity to engage with UNICEF to explore the UNCRC in detail as part of their induction programme. Training has also been provided to all of those working directly with children and young people as well as to the Extended Corporate Management Team and our cross Council Leadership Forum. This has increased awareness of children's rights and is impacting positively on the recommendations being put forward to various Council Committees. Leaders now more confidently talk about the importance of children's rights.

A new 'Integrated Impact Assessment' forms part of Council committee reporting processes. All Council decisions which impact children and young people are now taken following consideration of the impact of such decisions on children and young people.

New and refreshed partnership policies and strategies now explicitly reference children's rights and these extend beyond those traditionally impacting on children to include those on Net Zero and Master planning for example. The Council Strategy Board comprising members of the Corporate Management Team and Extended Corporate Management Team, check that children's rights are reflected in draft policies and strategies prior to them being presented to Council Committees for approval. The Council Strategy Board will continue to play a significant role in the Local Authorities preparation for the incorporation of the UNCRC and regularly reviews progress.



Officers report that both direct engagement with young people and consideration of their rights is helping them to be bolder in recommendations to Council and its Committees. There is a need to ensure that a participatory approach is consistently applied now and in doing so consider a wider variety of approaches to avoid the overuse of some mechanisms such as surveys.

All improvement plans relating to children and families contain actions related to the incorporation of the UNCRC and many child friendly versions of these Plans are in place.



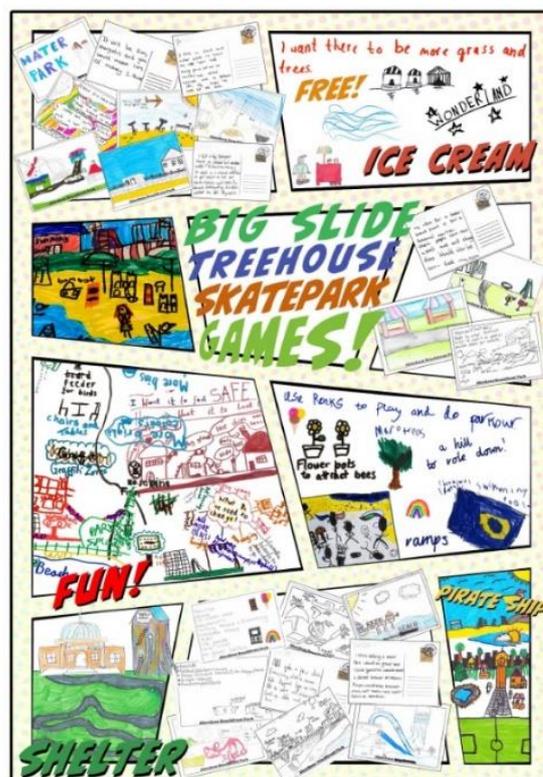
The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to reset how we engage with children and families. Approaches to participation are becoming more varied and dynamic and nearly 70% of our children and young people tell us that they more actively participate in decision making now. This is a 10% reduction from when the survey was last completed 3 years ago and this reduction is thought to reflect the increased expectation of participation by our children and young people.

A positive example of participation beyond traditional children’s services is the work undertaken with city planners in the development and delivery of the Aberdeen City Centre and Beach Masterplan. This work began in 2021 and has included creative workshops designed to elicit views in an age appropriate way to enable young people to feel confident, valued and respected contributors to the master planning processes. Starting with the question “should seagulls be granted freedom of the city centre and beach?” the workshops equipped young people with a lens to discuss openly topics concerning their futures. This creative approach enabled young people to critically assess ideas and to foster a deeper understanding of topics connected to climate change, environment, space and place.

During October 2022, 500 pupils from 6 primary schools and 2 secondary schools were visited by the Beach Campervan to ask them for their thoughts and ideas around the future of the Beach. Pupils designed, planned and built models to reimagine the space, and these models were presented to the public for discussion at a special event in the Beach Ballroom.

During the summer and October holidays in 2022, young people aged between 10-17 years from across the city also chose to engage with discussion about play, space and place within the city centre and beach areas. Short films were created by these young people which explored these geographic locations and depicted what these spaces could be transformed into in the future.

The views of children and young people in these sessions have gone on to directly inform the recommendations on the future of the City Centre and Beach areas being made to Elected Members at Full Council meetings.



Our children and young people have been encouraged to engage with a provisional school estate plan on a newly developed young people page of the city website.

This approach will help inform the shape of the proposals to be formally consulted upon and will also help us determine how we can best use the Council website to provide opportunities for young people to have their say.

As children and young people have been more able to claim their rights they are starting to hold the decision makers to account. Our Pupil Climate Change Group, presided over by a young person as Climate Change President, has a budget of £150,000 to help progress the areas identified by our children and young people. This power in the hands of our children and young people will help ensure that that our future leaders influence and inform our work in this critical area.

The Children's Services Board will be held to account for the extent to which they prioritise the participation of children and young people by the Community Empowerment Group who oversee Stretch Outcome 16 of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan:

'100% of decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026'



BUDGETS



Statement in here about the MTFS and information being compiled by finance.

HIGH LEVEL PLAN ON A PAGE



The priorities identified for development and improvement take full account of our population needs assessment, the direction of travel outlined in The Promise, the cultural transformation required to deliver against the UNCRC and anticipated legislation such as the anticipated Care and Justice Bill and education reform agenda.

As an Integrated Children's Board we will work together to ensure that:

- 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
- 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.
- 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026
- 30% fewer young people (under 18) will be charged with an offence by 2026
- 95% of our children with additional support needs/disabilities will experience a positive transition to adult services by 2026

This work will be enabled through:

- *Simplifying access to services*
- *Increasing integration*
- *Reducing risks by understanding what actually makes a difference and decommissioning where appropriate*
- *Improving the alignment of our commissioning*
- *Improving the alignment of our data*
- *Building the capacity and capability of our workforce*

The delivery of this Plan will be supported through a partnership with Health Determinates Research Collaborative.

A summary of the Plan can be viewed [here](#)

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 SCRA 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 	<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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a Bairsns Hoose • Delivery 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 	<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 Computing 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					
Simplify 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 	<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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aligned to the 10 principles of family support ➤ Jointly respond to the needs of those displaced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve knowledge of the 6 groups by co-designing with service users and children ➤ Improve data matching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase knowledge poverty agenda and of benefits ➤ Increase knowledge of trauma and risk

APPENDIX - IMPROVEMENT PLAN



Our Improvement Plan

Our data indicates 6 key priorities, known as our Stretch Outcomes, that require our focus over the next three years. For each Stretch Outcome, we have an improvement plan which lists the improvements and actions we plan to take over the three years to deliver on our priorities. The Plan provides detail on the single agency programmes of work (shaded in grey on the plan), as well as the multi agency improvement projects to be undertaken in relation to each priority. The Plan also shows who will be responsible for delivery, the timescale within which it will be delivered and the key measures which will tell us if we are improving. These measures are a mixture of local and national indicators, qualitative and quantitative data. The Stretch Outcomes and multi-agency improvement projects aims will be the Children and Young People's section of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26.

The Improvement Plan is based on what we know now. It will be reviewed annually with any additional actions which are subsequently deemed to be essential to the delivery of the Plan added in years two and three following agreement from the Community Planning Aberdeen Board. Progress on the Plan will be monitored on an ongoing basis using our existing programme management and governance arrangements through Community Planning. A Sub Group of the Children's Services Board is responsible for a key priority (Stretch Outcome) and the Chair of that Sub Group is responsible for reporting to every meeting of the Children's Services Board. Additional quarterly reporting will be undertaken via the CPA Management Group and CPA Board. Our annual report will be approved and published by the CPA Board.

See the full Improvement Plan at [Appendix A](#).



We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential



We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society



We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination



We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment



We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally



We are healthy and active



We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy

ACRONYMS



ACHSCP:	Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership
ACEs:	Adverse Childhood Experience(s)
ACR:	Age of criminal responsibility
ADPs:	Alcohol and Drug Partnership(s)
ASN:	Additional Support Needs
BSIL:	Best Start in Life Group
CAMHS:	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CCE:	Child criminal exploitation
CEYP:	Care Experienced Young People
CHS:	Children's Hearings Scotland
COG:	Chief Officers Group
CPA	Community Planning Aberdeen
CPG:	Corporate Parenting Group
CPPM:	Child Protection Planning Meetings
CPO:	Child protection order
CPC:	Child Protection Committee
CPR:	Child Protection Register
COPFS:	Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
CSB:	Children's Services Board
CSO:	Compulsory Supervision Order
CSW:	Children's Social Work
CSWO:	Chief Social Work Officer
CYP:	Children and young people
ELC:	Early Learning and Childcare
GIRFE	Getting It Right For Everyone
GIRFEC	Getting It Right For Every Child
HDRC:	Health Research Determinants Collaborative

ICR:	Independent Care Review
IFA:	Independent Fostering Agencies
PEPAS:	Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport
PRR:	Parental responsibilities and rights
LAC:	Looked after child
LAAC:	Looked after and accommodated child
MAPPA:	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MHC:	Mental Health and Wellbeing Collaborative
MMR:	Measles, mumps and rubella
OOA:	Out of Authority
SCRA:	Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
SEMHN:	Social, Emotional, Mental Health Need ("SEMHN").
SHANARRI:	Getting it right for every child wellbeing indicators – safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible, included.
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WFA:	Whole Family Approach
YJG:	Youth Justice Group