



CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN 2023-2026

Annual Report 2025/26



**Community
Planning
Aberdeen**

Foreword by Graeme Simpson

As we reflect on the final year of our 2023–26 Children’s Services Plan, I am proud to share this Annual Report, which captures the collective efforts of our Community Planning Partners to improve the lives of children, young people and families across Aberdeen.

This year’s report highlights the progress we’ve made—both in data and in the stories of real change. From record levels of youth participation and improved attainment, to strengthened family support and early intervention, our partnership continues to demonstrate what can be achieved when we work together with shared purpose and ambition.

We have seen the benefits of a whole-system approach, with services increasingly aligned around the needs of families. Our investment in youth work, family learning, employability, and mental health support is making a tangible difference. We’ve also deepened our commitment to listening to young people, ensuring their voices shape the services they use.

Yet we know there is more to do. Persistent inequalities remain, and the cost of living continues to place pressure on many families. As we look ahead to our new ten-year Local Outcome Improvement Plan and the 2026–31 Children’s Services Plan, we are determined to build on what works, challenge what doesn’t, and continue to evolve our approach.

I remain inspired by the dedication of our workforce, the resilience of our families, and the leadership shown by our young people. Together, we will continue to strive for a city where every child grows up loved, safe and respected, and where all families are supported to thrive.



Graeme Simpson

Children’s Services Board Chair,
Chief Social Work Officer, Aberdeen City Council

Our Achievements

Of our 32 multi-agency Improvement Projects established in the Children's Services Plan 2023-26 16 have now achieved their aims with the others continuing to improve against their aims or being used to inform the development of our new Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Children's Services Plan.

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

- Over 837 young people took part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme—more than ever before.
- Primary school attendance improved to 93.6%, with the gap between the most and least deprived areas narrowing.
- 70.9% of S6 pupils achieved five or more qualifications at Level 6, exceeding national comparators.
- The number of children living in poverty dropped from 21.8% (2022/23) to 19.1% (2023/24), now below the national average (End Child Poverty data)
- 76% of young people involved in youth work activities said their confidence had improved.
- The ABZ Campus programme expanded to offer 80 courses, helping more young people access vocational and academic pathways.
- The number of eligible 2-year-olds accessing early learning and childcare rose by 40% in one year.
- Care-experienced young people helped shape services through focus groups, recruitment panels, and national consultations.
- The number of young people achieving Dynamic Youth and Hi5 Awards increased, especially in priority areas.
- More families accessed financial support through Money Advisors, securing over £170,000 in gains.
- There has been a continued increase in the number of children and young people who report feeling that they are listened to and that their views are taken into account, 72% in 2025/26 reported feeling listened to all of the time, up from 70% in 2024/25 and 64% in 21/22.

Contents

Introduction	5
What does the data published since March 2025 tell us about:	
Our Babies?	8
Our Under 5s?	10
Our Primary School Pupils?	12
Our Secondary Pupils?	15
What does the data published since March 2025 tell us about child poverty and the needs of different communities?	31
Child Poverty Action 2025-2026 Best Start Bright Futures	35
Income from Employment	37
Cost of living	55
Income from social security and benefits in kind	63
How effectively is our shared work helping us deliver on The Promise?	67
Whole Family Wellbeing Funding	79
How is the Improvement work coordinated through the Children's Services Board improving outcomes for children, young people and families and what are our next steps?	
The Children's Services Board	82
Best Start in Life	86
Mental Health and Wellbeing Collaborative	88
Corporate Parenting	90
Attainment and Transitions	94
Youth Justice	95
Supporting Those with Additional Support Needs and Disabilities	98
What does Our Annual Report a mean for or Children's Services Plan 2026-31	100
Appendices	104
Improvement Project Case Studies	104
Improvement Project Index	107
Enabling Children and Young People to Claim Their Rights	109

Introduction

Purpose of This Annual Report

Our Annual Report presented here, brings together the collective work carried out across Aberdeen City by our Community Planning Partners across 2025/26 (financial year) to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. In developing this report, we have reviewed national datasets released since the publication of last year's Annual Report in March 2025. We have also considered a wide range of local intelligence gathered from partners, including detailed analysis of life stage data (from babies to young adults), the progress of our 32 multi agency improvement projects, and learning from frontline practice. We have listened to children and young people through established participation groups, youth voice structures, learning from the Bright Spots programme, the Aberdeen Youth Movement and engagement within schools and community settings and our public consultation, [Your Place, Your Plan's Your Future](#)

Children's Services in Aberdeen are delivered through a partnership approach. Local services such as education, social work, health, community planning, police, third-sector organisations, employability partners and national agencies. Over the past year, we have continued to strengthen, with increased co-ordination of improvement work, better alignment of local plans, and more integrated approaches to early intervention, family support, employability, youth work and community empowerment.

We have continued to act on major national policy expectations including those relating to child poverty, The Promise Scotland, GIRFEC, corporate parenting, whole-family support, employability, and early years reform and UNCRC Implementation. These national duties sit alongside local priorities agreed through the Children's Services Plan 2023–26, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) 2016-26, locality plans and our wider Community Planning commitments.

Together, this evidence offers a comprehensive picture of how children and young people are doing right now in Aberdeen. It helps us understand what is improving, where inequalities are persisting, and how life circumstances vary across different neighbourhoods and communities. It also provides an essential evidence base for what we need to do in the next cycle of Children's Services and Community Planning in our Children's Services Plan 2026-31 and Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2026-36.

Evaluating the Needs of our Population

Our Annual Report also describes the needs of children, young people and families in a local area, supported by robust evidence. It provides a shared understanding of the strengths and pressures within the system and highlights the areas where change is most needed, ensuring that the new Children's Services Plan 2026-31 is grounded in the realities facing families and is shaped by what the data and lived experience tell us.

Throughout this report, you will find analysis that highlights:

- where outcomes are improving,
- where inequalities remain,
- what pressures families are facing,
- what practitioners are observing, and
- what patterns of need are emerging across the city.

This analysis has been used to directly inform the development of the new Children's Services Plan 2026–31. This also considers the wider system conditions that impact children's outcomes such as links between services, data-sharing arrangements, family support pathways, workforce capacity, access to community-based support, and the stability of local funding environments.

How the Evidence Informs the Children's Services Plan 2026–31

Several themes recur throughout the report:

- **Persistent inequalities:** Despite improvements in some indicators, children in our most deprived neighbourhoods continue to experience poorer outcomes across health, education, safety, wellbeing and participation.
- **Early years variation:** Data on infant health, developmental milestones, breastfeeding, maternal health and early childhood development highlight areas where additional attention is needed, particularly given falling birth rates and the significant long-term impact of early childhood experiences.
- **Pressures on families during the cost of living crisis:** Rising costs, fuel poverty, food insecurity and financial instability continue to affect participation in learning and family wellbeing.
- **Growing diversity:** Shifts in school populations and increased diversity require services to adapt to different cultural, linguistic and support needs.
- **Mental health and wellbeing:** Across all age groups—children, young people and parents, mental health continues to be a key issue, with rising demand for support.
- **Youth transitions:** The evidence points to the importance of supporting young people into positive destinations, addressing barriers to employment and strengthening pathways for those who may be at greater risk of disengagement.
- **Complexity of need:** Demand across many services has increased, highlighting the need for more integrated, trauma-informed and family-centred approaches.
- **Variation between communities:** City-level data often masks deep variation at local level, underscoring the importance of place-based approaches.
- **Listening to children and young people:** Participation work, youth engagement and UNCRC implementation show that young people want to be involved in decisions that shape their lives.

A Whole-System Response

One of the clearest themes emerging from both the evidence and the experiences of practitioners is the need for a more connected, whole-system approach to supporting families. Families rarely experience individual issues in isolation. Financial pressure, housing instability, mental health, childcare availability, school attendance, developmental needs and wider wellbeing are all intertwined.

Throughout 2025/26, partners in Aberdeen have increasingly worked together to respond earlier, to support families holistically, and to reduce the barriers that make it difficult for people to access help. Examples include:

- stronger multi-agency working through the Children's Services Board
- improved data sharing to identify families needing support
- community-based family learning and youth work offers
- integrated employability and financial inclusion pathways
- targeted early years and early-help initiatives
- wider collaboration with schools, health visitors, libraries and community organisations
- ongoing work to deliver the whole-system expectations of The Promise

This joined-up approach is essential for tackling longstanding inequalities and for ensuring that families receive the right support at the right time.

A Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The evidence in the Annual Report considers some key themes we will commit to in the coming years. As we move into the next planning cycle, partners remain committed to:

- strengthening prevention and early intervention
- listening to children, young people and families
- reducing inequalities across neighbourhoods
- supporting families to overcome financial hardship
- improving health and wellbeing outcomes
- enabling positive learning and life experiences
- ensuring services are accessible, inclusive and trauma-informed
- working together across organisational boundaries
- keeping The Promise to care experienced children and young people
- using evidence to guide decision-making

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

What does the data published since March 2025 tell us?



Our latest data from between 2014 and 2024, identifies that the number of births annually has declined, and in 2024 was at the lowest level (1,923 births) against the more than 30-year timeline of comparable national data. Between 2004 and 2014, the standardised birth rate in Aberdeen remained relatively static, averaging 9.3 births per 1,000.

This shows that this rate has dropped in 2024 to 6.9 per 1000. Births to younger mothers have seen a significant fall. For mothers under 20 there has been a 42% drop from 2014 to 2024 in age specific fertility rates (and births), and for mothers from 20 to 25 a 35% drop in this measure. However, in contrast, age specific fertility for, and births to, mothers aged 40 and over is the only age group where both births and fertility rates have risen over the past ten years.

What is getting better?

The number of babies exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks has continued to increase 41.9% in the three years ending 2023 to 43% in the latest available data from 2024. Levels continue to be well above the national average.

A lower percentage of new mums are not of a healthy weight compared to the national average (25% compared to 27.6% nationally). However, there is evidence of a gradual rise since 2014.



82% of babies are born a healthy weight compared to 80.9% nationally to the three years ending 2024.



Aberdeen City offers universal infant feeding support to help all families improve breastfeeding initiation and duration. Alongside this, the targeted Infant Feeding and Beyond project works in specific communities, Sheddocksley, Summerhill, Mastrick and Northfield, to further increase breastfeeding rates and help women meet their feeding goals.

Early results are positive. Families involved in the project show higher breastfeeding initiation (60% vs 48%), higher exclusive breastfeeding at 10–14 days (43% vs 34%), and higher exclusive breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks (35% vs 30%) compared with families not in the project.

What has stayed the same?

Between 2022-24, 9.1% of women smoked during pregnancy in Aberdeen City. Rates were highest in the most deprived quintile at 24.2% compared to 2.4% in the least deprived area.



Only 16.5% of babies in Northfield were exclusively breastfed compared to a high of 73.6% in Cults, Bieldside & Milltimber East.

As of 31 July 2025, there were 126 children on Aberdeen City's Child Protection Register (CPR), an increase from 100 on 31 July 2024



Whilst there remains steady improvement in the number of mothers smoking during pregnancy and in overall breast feeding rates, there remains significant improvements to be made in these areas in our priority neighbourhoods. Our 2026-31 Children's Services Plan will have a key focus on supporting the health and wellbeing of parents in the early years in these communities.

What is worsening?

Infant mortality has been increasing since 2020 and stood at 4.7 deaths per 1000 live births for the five year period 2021-25. This is almost double the rate for 2016-20 (2.3) and was the highest rate since 2004-08.



The gap between the level of unhealthy weight in new mothers is increasing fourfold between the most and least deprived.



The proportion of child protection registrations in 2024 based on parental drug use has increased and is now higher (6.9 per 10,000) than the national average of 5.3 per 10,000 of population for the first time since 2021.

Within Aberdeen City it is recognised that early intervention that provides education and supports families with identifying concerns can help to manage risk. This has been proven in some areas where targeted support has happened. Working collaboratively to address disparity across deprived communities, whilst seeking improvements in early intervention across the City is key to improvement.

So, what next?

Work is underway with third sector partners to design a dedicated caseworker role to support vulnerable families with children under five. By engaging families from the antenatal stage, the link worker will be able to build early, trusted relationships and provide consistent, practical support at key points in a child's early development.

The case worker will help families navigate what can often be a complex health and social care system, working closely with Health Visitors and other local services to ensure families are aware of, and able to access, the full range of support available to them. This will include help with financial inclusion, early learning opportunities, parenting support, and wider wellbeing services.

This approach aims to strengthen family resilience through early intervention, reduce the need for crisis-stage responses, and increase engagement with preventative services. By having a single, trusted professional who understands their circumstances and can offer relationship-based support, families are more likely to remain connected to services and make informed choices that contribute to healthier outcomes.

Over time, this model is expected to contribute to measurable improvements in key indicators—such as child development, maternal wellbeing, and early years engagement—and support a sustained shift in the broader data trends for families living in our most vulnerable communities.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR UNDER 5s?

What does the data published since March 2025 tell us?



Applications for Early Learning and Childcare provision (ELC) continue to reduce. This can be attributed to a drop in birth rate and increase in the number of parents and carers choosing to defer their child's entry into Primary 1. The number of ELC applications reduced from 3033 in 2023/24 to 2807 in 2024/25 (-7.45%). The number of parent and carers who chose to defer their child's entry into Primary 1 increased from 411 in 2023/24 to 490 in 2024/25 (+19%).

What is getting better?

81% of respondents (ELC Parent and Carer Consultation 2025) secured their first choice of ELC provision (+0.4% from 2023)

Through our engagement with the Scottish Government Data Pipeline project and by implementing improved processes, we have realised a 40% increase in uptake of Early Learning and Childcare for eligible 2 year olds between 2023/24 and 2024/25, from 227 children to 317.



The number of children aged 0-17 who are looked after (per 1000 of population) by the Local Authority reduced in 2024 to slightly below the national average.



There is clear evidence that data linkage helps to increase the uptake of eligible 2 Early Learning and Childcare placements, our work to link data for additional uses must continue. We currently have 32 Modern Apprenticeships working across the city in ELC. 34 young people completed their training in 2023-2024 and 13 completed in 2024-2025.

In addition, there is also evidence of an increase in the number of Modern Apprentices (136 starts for Social Services (Children and Young People) in 2024/25) compared to 90 in the previous year

What has stayed the same?

Latest data published in April 2025 indicates percentage of children who have been identified as having developmental concerns at their 27-30 month review has increased from 12.6% in 2022 to 13.7% in 2024. This is still lower than the national average of 16.7%



The average score for Care Inspectorate gradings of Local Authority managed/funded ELC provision have risen slightly in 2025 from 3.9 to 4.1. This outcome now fully aligns the provision in Aberdeen with the minimum National Standard (grading of 4)



Considerable variation in the uptake of immunisations remains. 98.6% of families living in the Danestone ward benefited from the MMR at 24 months, compared to only 74.7% in the City Centre (west). Similar patterns are evident when looking at the 6 in 1.



Health Visitors continue to engage communities where uptake and engagement of 27-30 month assessments are most difficult. There are new approaches being taken that suit the community rather than the pathway, mainly by going to places of ease for those families. It is hoped this approach will see an increase in 27-30 month assessments across all communities.

We hope that the new whole family approaches proposed in the next cycle of LOIP and Children's Services Planning will help ensue targeted support to families most in need to reduce the number of children with developmental concerns at their 27-30 month assessment

What is worsening?

There has been a 4% drop in the number of children meeting developmental milestones. 85% met developmental milestones in 2024/25, slightly lower than the Family Group average but still above the national average (83.3%)



13–15 months review completion has dropped from 85% in FY 2019/20 to 57% in FY 2024/25; further; 4–5 year reviews, which fell from 84% in FY 2021/22 to 22% in FY 2024/25



The drop in uptake of the 6 in 1 at 24 months is greater than national averages. Only 95.1% of children were vaccinated from 2021-23 compared to 95.9% from 2020-22 (national 96.6%). There has been a 0.9% drop in MMR update over the same time period to 90.1%. This is less than the 93.8% uptake nationally.



Coverage of developmental reviews for children at key stages has remained relatively high but shows a gradual decline over time. At 13–15 months review completion dropped from 85% in FY 2019/20 to 57% in FY 2024/25, showing a slight reduction in early engagement. 27–30 month reviews have fluctuated but on average 79% of children have had a review since FY 2019/20. The most notable decline is seen in 4–5 year reviews, which fell from 84% in FY 2021/22 to 22% in FY 2024/25, highlighting a potential gap in pre-school developmental monitoring.

Health Visiting is now fully established from a workforce perspective, allowing for the full Universal pathway to be delivered. This presents an opportunity to consider how we can tailor our approach to communities using libraries, community centres and utilise opportunities for groups to come together.

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

So, what next?

As we transition into our new 2026-31 Children's Services Plan cycle, we will more intensively focus to providing more targeted support to our most vulnerable children and families. As noted above we will be working to establish a Caseworker program to assign support to new parents and support them through the first years of their child's life. A principal driver of this work will be to ensure that we help young children better meet their developmental milestones

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR PRIMARY AGED PUPILS?

What does the data published since March 2025 tell us?



The primary school population has reduced this year from 15,210 in academic year 2023/24 to 14,968 in academic year 2024/25. Despite this fall, the concentration in school applications at specific geographic levels means that a small number of families, particularly for in-term registrations, are unable to access their school of choice.

Whilst the number of children and young people in our schools who identify as being Polish has declined slightly from 918 in 2022/23 to 817 in 2024/25, the number of pupils of African descent has continued to increase significantly from 967 in 2019 to 1756 in 2022 at the start of the 2023/26 Children's Services Plan and further to 2,734 by Academic year 2024/25.

The number of children who identify as being 'white-other' remains high (1195) likely 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 and new challenges.

What is getting better?

The Numeracy attainment Gap (Primary 1, 4, 7) has reduced for the 4th year in a row although it remains above the national average.

There has been a decrease in the number of children living in poverty (after housing costs) from 21.8% in 2022/23 to 19.1% in 2023/24. Local levels are lower than the national average at 23%.

There has been an increase in attendance levels for primary schools from 92.9% to 93.6% in 2024/25. There are still variances between SIMD levels (and schools) although the gaps have been reducing



The percentage of primary 7s with no obvious dental decay increased in 2024/25 to 85% a significant increase from 2023/24 where the figures were reported at 75.9%.



Around three-quarters of P1, P4 and P7 pupils achieved their expected CfE literacy level, putting Aberdeen at roughly 75–76%, slightly above Scotland's overall 74%

Our Primary-age children in Aberdeen are seeing better results in school, wellbeing and attendance. Looked After Children have improved their attendance even faster than their peers, helping narrow the gap. Overall, Aberdeen's primary attendance now sits slightly above the national average, so more children are consistently learning.

Attainment is also strong. About three-quarters of primary pupils are achieving the expected levels in reading, writing, and maths by P1, P4 and P7 – than Scotland's 74% average. Most children are reaching key learning milestones, and results have improved or stayed above national levels.

Children's health and wellbeing have shown positive trends. Dental health has improved significantly reflecting better oral health habits. Mental wellbeing indicators are also better – surveys of P6/P7 pupils show fewer children feeling consistently low or lonely, and more reporting confidence and feeling supported by adults. Primary children generally feel safe, included, and healthy, and these figures have improved compared to previous years.

Inclusion and equity: Aberdeen has maintained a strong focus on supporting all pupils. For example, attendance of pupils who are looked after (in care) has increased, and fewer children are living in poverty.

What has stayed the same?

The percentage of primary 1 children with poor dental health has fallen slightly. In 2024 71.1.6% of children had good dental health. Outcomes are poorer than the national outcome of 73.9%



The percentage of primary school children registered for free school meals was largely unchanged in 2024/25 at 76.7% (77.1% in 2023/24)



The percentage primary school children reporting that they are happy with their body image has remained similar with a slight decrease from (85.9% in 2024/25 compared to 84.3% in 2023/24)

There are a number of indicators remain similar to previous year. This however masks underlying disparities among deprived and more affluent areas that show persistent gaps in outcomes.

What is worsening?

literacy in reading is lower for boys at 73% in compared to girls at 79.8%



Latest data suggests the exclusion rates in Primary School increased to 5 per 1000 in 2022/23 to 5.9 per 1000 in 2024/25



The cost per primary school pupil has risen in 2024/25 to £7,244 from £6,845. Despite this, the city remains in the upper quartile of Scottish local authorities



Although attendance remains higher than the national position, the city sees poorer school attendance at P1 (91%). This dip at Primary 1 is not seen nationally.



Whilst a number of improvements have been made among our primary age cohorts there remains some areas where we need to continue of focus. Attendance and exclusion in some cohorts remain higher than the average. In particular in our more deprived communities.

So, what next?

Our priorities in the coming years will focus on keeping children healthy, happy, and achieving their best. Key priorities include:

Early support for families: as indicated above giving vulnerable families a named support person (Case worker”) who can guide them to the right services from the start. By helping parents early – for example with parenting support or navigating health and social care – we can prevent small issues from becoming wider issues in primary school.

Health & wellbeing: We want all primary pupils to be healthy and confident. We will expand safe, nurturing spaces and activities for children, helping build their confidence and resilience. There will be a continued push on basics like good diet, dental health, and exercise (e.g. healthy weight programs and dental initiatives in schools) to keep improving children’s physical health. At the same time, we’ll strengthen mental wellbeing support – training staff in children’s mental health and ensuring pupils know who to turn to if they feel sad or worried.

Attainment & inclusion: Aberdeen will raise attainment while closing the gap between pupils. This means more targeted help in literacy and numeracy for children so that all can meet their learning targets regardless of background. We will also emphasize inclusion – making sure children with additional support needs or from disadvantaged areas get the right support to participate and succeed and prioritising smooth transitions (for example, from primary to secondary),

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR SECONDARY AGED PUPILS?

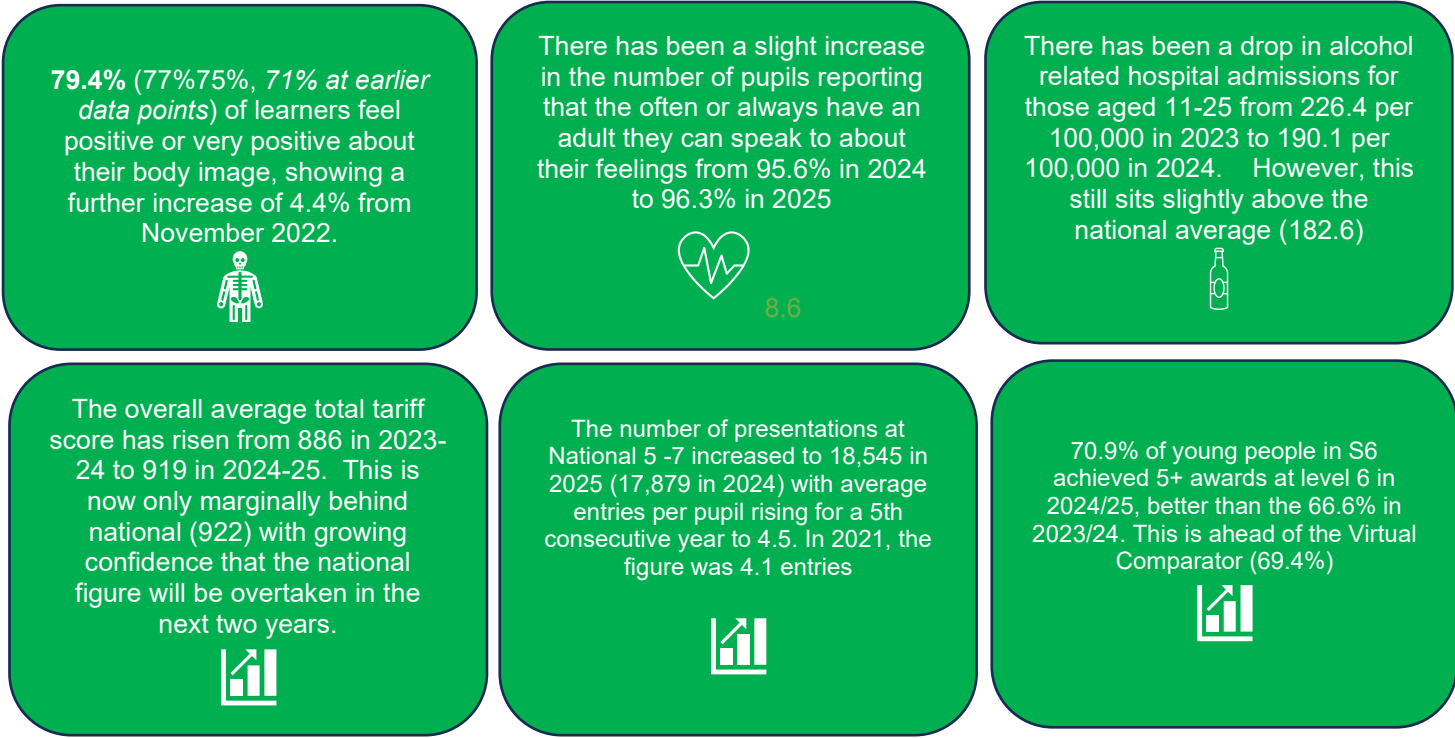
What does the data published since March 2025 tell us?



There has been a rise in secondary pupil numbers from 10,430 in September 2022 to 11,360 in September 2025. The pupil population has become increasingly diverse with an increased cognisance, and uptake of, supports offered to address pupil needs.

There were 4,964 young people in the senior phase of our secondary schools at the point of school census in September 2025. This is 499 more than at the time of the census of September 2022 (4,465).

What is getting better?



There are positive indications that we are making key improvements in attainment among secondary pupils. Likewise key Health and wellbeing indicators continue to show positive signs. Whilst these city-wide trends are positive there remain a number of communities and groups where outcome gaps remain

What has stayed the same?

Uptake of the HPV vaccine in S3 girls has increased slightly from 79.2% to 81.5 in the three years ending 2024. This remains marginally below the national level of 83.1%.



Achievement of SCQF Level 5 in English by S4 pupils in 2025 was 86.4% in comparison with 86.6% in 2024 and 86.7% in 2023. The outcomes for those with ASN and entitlement to FSM, along with pupils in SIMD 1 are improved closing of the gap to their peers.



The health and wellbeing survey indicates that 16% of children do not have breakfast on a school day



The proportion of initial school leavers seeking employment in 2024/25 was largely unchanged at 2.8% (3.1% in 2023/24). This was above the Scotland figure of 2.4%.



School exclusion rates per 1000 children have remained largely constant at 26.7 in 2024/25 from 25.7 in 2022/23. This is still higher than the national average of 15.2, although half the rate in 2018/19



The rate of Unauthorised Absence among secondary school pupils has remained the same as in 2023/24 at 3.2%. This is lower than the national figure of 5%, and most of our comparators



The percentage of pupils gaining a sustained positive destination on leaving school was 90.1% for the cohort that left in 2023/24 this is the same as it was for those leaving in 2022/23



Whilst a number of areas are improving there are areas where we could do more, certain attainment levels could be improved as can our sustained positive destinations that have remains fairly similar for the past few years

What has worsened?

There has been a decrease in the number of young people who report feeling safe in their community from 88.5% in 2024/25 to 83.5 in 2025/26



The number of school leavers achieving literacy and numeracy at level 4 or better has declined over the past 3 years from 88% to 85%, below the virtual comparator at 88%



The physical wellbeing survey highlighted an increase in the time spent on technology with 37 stating that they spend more than 6 hours on technology at the weekend. 931 of these are Primary stage learners.



58.8% (down from 61% last year and 68% the year before) of learners who completed the health and wellbeing survey have at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity a day



There is a need for a continued focus on health and wellbeing among our school age children, in terms of both mental and physical health. With the number of young people surveyed as reporting they are undertaking less than 60 minutes of exercise or the increased amount of time young people remain on screens, we will need to focus on encouraging young people to engage in healthy habits.

So, what next?

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

We need to continue to focus on closing the attainment gap. While overall attainment is improving, young people from deprived areas, care-experienced backgrounds, and those with additional support needs still face barriers. As we move into the new Children's Services Plan cycle we will prioritise tailored support for these groups, including a new work experience programmes and helping disengaged pupils build skills and confidence for life after school.

Improving mental health and wellbeing must also remain a priority. Many secondary pupils still experience low mood, especially those from less affluent backgrounds. We will need to focus on creating safe spaces and expanding trauma-informed support whole family support.

We should continue to reduce exclusions and persistent absence, particularly among pupils in SIMD1 areas and those on Free School Meals. Strengthening inclusion and early intervention.

We must ensure that care-experienced young people are supported to achieve qualifications and positive destinations. Although there has been progress, their outcomes still lag behind their peers.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN THE CITY?



The cost of living crisis continues to drive population-level risk factors that impact on the resilience and mental health of families as their economic circumstances and ability to improve their outcomes. This is particularly event at a community level where families from our more deprived area are more acutely impacted by the confounding factors.

The number of children living in poverty

The number of children recorded as living in poverty can vary due to different methodologies between sources. Families living in Low-Income circumstances is a generic term used to describe relative poverty which is determined through a variety of these measures. The latest DWP data (updated May 2026 due a methodology change) estimated that for 2024/25 11.9%¹ of children in the city were living in households where the household income is below 60% of median income after housing costs (just over 1 in every 10 children). This data also shows that since 2021/22, there has been a 3.4% decrease (12.4% in 2021/22 to 9% in 2024/25) in the % of children (0-15 years) living in relative low income families before housing costs. Accounting for the methodology change, these figures show that that despite the interventions established through the LOIP 2016/26 and Children's Services Plan 2023/26, the number of children living in poverty in Aberdeen over the course of the Plan has remained relatively stable.

Data from 2023/24 shows that in some city communities, according to data from the Community Planning Outcomes Profile Tool, over 24% of children are living in relative poverty in the most deprived communities, compared to only 2.7% in the least deprived communities. This data refers to children living in households where the household income is below the current 60% of median income before housing costs.

The working age population

In the year from October 2024 – September 2025, 23.6% of Aberdeen's working age population (over the age of 16) were not in employment compared to 25.6% in Scotland. This remains the same as for the same time period in 2023/24 at 23.7%.

Of those who were economically inactive between October 2024 and September 2025, 39.1% were students, 12% were looking after family/home, 21.5% were long-term sick, and 11.0% were retired. Most (79.9%) of those who were economically inactive did not want a job. The rate for ethnic minorities (16-64 years) who were not in employment was higher than the overall rate at 25.1%.

Latest data published in July 2025 reporting on calendar year 2024 estimates that the proportion of workless households in Aberdeen was (16.0%) below the Scotland level (18.2%).

¹ Please note further in this document the community/ward statistics for child poverty are based on the previous methodology these figures are due to be revised in the Improvement Service Community Planning Outcomes Profile in October 2026, but remain most current at this time

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

According to the latest NOMIS data (from the Annual Population and Labour Force Surveys), between October 2024 and September 2025, around 65% of Aberdeen City residents aged 16–64 from a minority ethnic background were in employment. This is essentially unchanged from the previous year (64.9% in 2023/24), and it compares to an overall city employment rate of roughly 73–74% for the same period. The slight year-on-year stability in the minority ethnic employment rate, combined with a modest dip in the overall city rate, means the employment gap narrowed slightly to about 8–9 percentage points (from ~10 points the year before). Notably, Aberdeen’s minority ethnic employment rate remains higher than the Scotland-wide figure for minority ethnic employment, reflecting a relatively stronger position locally.

However, the unemployment rate for the city’s minority ethnic group continues to be elevated. In the Oct 2024 – Sep 2025 period it was roughly 15% (of the minority ethnic labour force) – down a touch from 15.7% in 2023/24 – and this was still the lowest among Scotland’s four major urban local authorities (where sample data allows comparison). Even so, it remained about 11 percentage points higher than the overall Aberdeen City unemployment rate (which is very low, around 4%). In short, while minority ethnic residents in Aberdeen are more likely to be employed than their counterparts elsewhere in Scotland, those active in the labour market still face unemployment at a rate several times higher than the city average. This contrast underlines a persistent inequality: women and men of minority ethnicity in Aberdeen experience higher unemployment relative to the city’s total working-age population, despite the generally positive employment picture.

Conversely, economic inactivity has risen among minority ethnic groups. Around 28% of Aberdeen’s minority ethnic 16–64 population were economically inactive in 2024/25 (neither working nor actively seeking work), up from 25% in 2023/24. With the exception of one local authority, this remains among the lowest minority ethnic inactivity rates of the 14 Scottish councils for which data is available (i.e. Aberdeen continues to perform comparatively well on this measure). Nonetheless, it is higher than the overall city inactivity rate, which was roughly 21–22% in the same period. (In other words, minority ethnic residents in Aberdeen are somewhat more likely to be outside the labour force than the average working-age person in the city.)

Aberdeen’s minority ethnic employment and unemployment outcomes remain better than those in most comparable local authorities. Nonetheless, the persistent gaps – higher joblessness and inactivity for minority communities – point to underlying systemic issues. Although Aberdeen’s minority ethnic residents fare relatively well in employment terms versus the national picture, there is clearly a need to better understand and address the barriers they face, especially given the city’s significant demographic shifts and increasing diversity.

Rise in homelessness

In 2024-25, there were 1,778 homelessness presentations to the council, an increase of 1.8% on the previous year (1,747).

In March 2025, 376 households were in temporary accommodation (down from 442 in March 2024), 80 of these households had either pregnant women or children in them.

492 young people (aged 16 - 24 years old) applied for homeless assistance in 2024/25, a slight increase of 1.9%, since 2021/22 there has been a more significant increase of 55% (from 318).

Work to address homelessness is being driven through our engagement with Homewards for

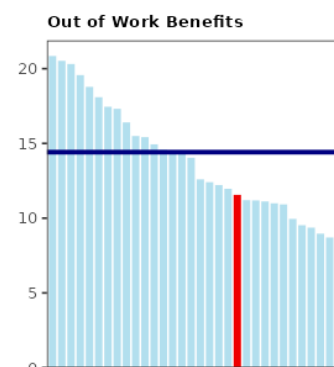
further details on the work of Homewards you can find extensive detail here in the: [Homewards Aberdeen Local Action Plan](#).

Claimant count

The city level claimant count has continued to rise this year, which rose from 4,840 in October 2024 to 5,190 in October 2025.

In October 2025, there were 2,415 Claimants in our priority localities, higher than in October 2024 (1,592). This represents 46.5% of all claimants in the city, a marginal reduction on the positions recorded at prior snapshot points as a consequence of the overall rise in the claimant count, and some shifts in claimant activity within other non-priority localities.

The claimant count continues to vary across the city by zone, with Tillydrone continuing to have the highest proportion of claimants at 380 (7.4%).



Universal Credit

Aberdeen City has seen a steady increase in Universal Credit caseload over the course of the Children's Services Plan. The total number of people on Universal Credit in the Aberdeen has risen from roughly 18,000 in September 2023 to about 21,000 in September 2024, and then to 23,881 by September 2025. This upward trend (approximately +15% year-on-year) reflects the ongoing transition of legacy benefit recipients onto Universal Credit and new claims during this time.

Spread of poverty across the city

Poverty is not spread equally across our city. The number of children living in relative low-income families, based on the official statistics at time of writing this report (Community Planning Outcomes Profile Tool October 2025 reporting on 2023/24), varies across the city by ward zones.

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

In 2023/24, Hazlehead/Queens Cross recorded the lowest number of children in relative low-income households (120/ 3.6%) and Northfield/Mastrick, the greatest number, (618) although this latter ward is improved from the previous year when it was 746.

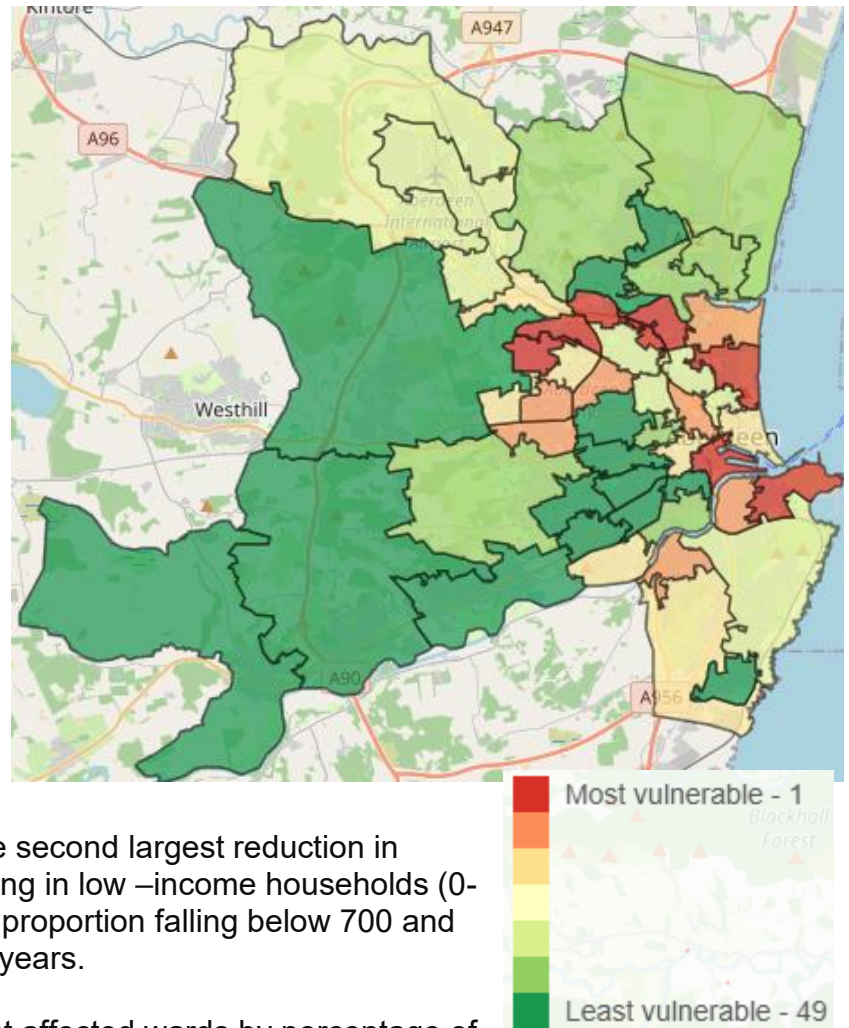
Proportionately, Tillydrone/Seaton ward recorded the highest % of children in low-income households at 25.9%, with Hilton/ Woodside/ Stockethill and George Street/ Harbour wards recording the second and third highest levels respectively at around 22%.

Each ward, and the city overall were experiencing reduced numbers and proportions of children in low-income families in comparison with 2022/23, with the largest positive change being recorded against the Dyce/Bucksburn/Danestone, which experienced an outlying data surge in the previous year.

Northfield/ Mastrick North recorded the second largest reduction in values and percentages of children living in low –income households (0-15 years) with the overall number and proportion falling below 700 and 20% respectively for the first time in 5 years.

The positions of the five most and least affected wards by percentage of children living in low-income households is unchanged. The distance between the most and least affected wards has reduced to 22.3 percentage points from 23.9 p.p. with the priority neighbourhoods largely experiencing the greater levels of improvement than the city average.

This is suggestive that the influence of intervention in these neighbourhoods is having the effect of levelling outcomes between ward child poverty characteristics, although with recognition that there is still some way to go in closing both these distances and improving ward level outcomes across the city landscape.



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

2023/24 (2022/23)	Average Highest Attainment - 2023/24	Child Poverty (%) - 2023/24	Crime Rate, per 10,000 - 2023/24	Depopul ation Index - 2023/24	Early Mortality, per 100,000 - 2023/24	Emergency admissions per 100,000	Out of work benefits (%)	Participation rate
Aberdeen city least deprived	6.0 (6.1)	2.4 (3.7)	504.1 (564.4)	94.9 (91.3)	214.9 (245.3)	18376.4 (19591.0)	3.1 (3.1)	97.2 (96.0)
Aberdeen city most deprived	4.9 (5)	24.1 (35.3)	1841.7 (1779.8)	104.8 (102.0)	747.9 (782.9)	25732.6 (25449.7)	25.8 (25.3)	83.2 (85.0)
Scotland least deprived	6.1 (6.1)	5.0 (6.1)	559.7 (500.9)	96.5 (94.2)	231.7 (244.8)	18282.1 (18280.9)	4.3 (3.9)	96.1 (96.4)
Scotland most deprived	5.1 (5.1)	29.1 (38.3)	1814.4 (1829.4)	100.2 (100.4)	774.8 (799.6)	32933.0 (31497.9)	32.0 (30.7)	87.8 (87.7)

Improvements noted include:

- a continued year on year reduction in the % of children experiencing child poverty in the least deprived communities (from 3.7 in 2022/23 to 2.4% in 2023/24).
- child poverty rate in the most deprived communities has fallen from 35.3 in 2022/23 to 24.1, and at a rate which is faster than the national landscape, improving the positive distance to Scotland levels.
- the least deprived communities experienced a fall in crime rate in Aberdeen, contrary to the national picture.
- a reduction in early mortality per 100,000, in both our most and least deprived communities.

Areas of concern include:

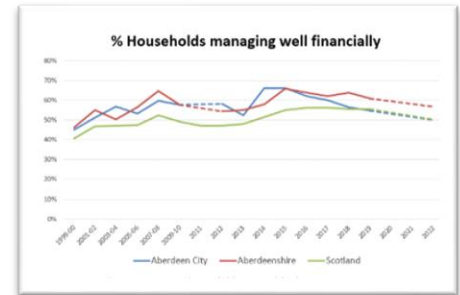
- A small increase in the crime rate per 10,000 in our most deprived communities, increasing from 1779.1 to 1841.7
- Emergency admissions have risen slightly for those in the most deprived communities
- Participation rates within the most deprived areas have fallen from 85.0% in 2022/23 to 83.5% in 2023/24 in contrast to a marginal rise in participation levels in the least deprived communities
- The referral rates for neurodevelopmental assessment are notably higher from secondary schools in SIMD 1 and 2 areas; in one school this is 32.7% of the total school roll (622 referrals per year).

Grant applications and Advice Services

There were 1,630 applications to the Best Start scheme in 2024/25, (1,675 in the previous annual period) with the Best Start Foods component representing the greatest demand source with 1,355 applications. This is similar to the levels (1,385) and the proportion of applications overall that were recorded in 2023/24.

In common with the 2024/25 national landscape the number of applications being received against each of the Best Start scheme grants has remained largely stable and consistent with the context of population change.

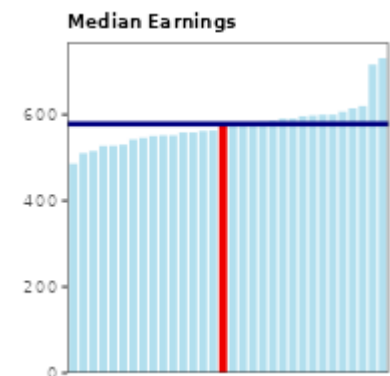
This represents a second year of reducing application levels but with an increased number, and value of, payments being made from these schemes. In 2024/25, there was a 10.3% rise in payments disbursed to just over £1.1m, with an increased value of £56,700 on 2023/24. The increase was entirely driven by disbursements against the Best Start Foods component which rose by 24 percent (+ £92,400) in 2024/25



Earnings from Employment/Self-Employment

The Improvement Service Community Planning Tool shows that the Local Authority area currently sits 16th (20th in 2022/23) out of 32 Local Authorities for Median Earnings, more or less in line with the national average. In 2023/24 Median Earnings for Aberdeen rose to £575 in line with the Scottish average (£578). This improvement has been a continued increase over the past 3 years.

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

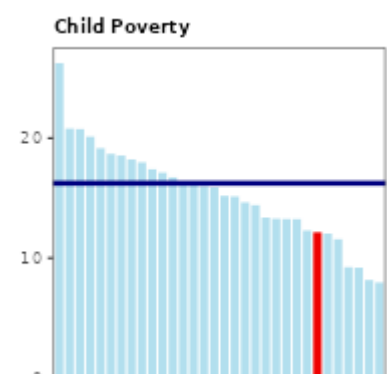


Please note that changes in Median Earning levels may have consequential effects on calculations of relative poverty that are not directly related to a fall or increase in household incomes of lower earners, although this may influence the number and percentage of households/individuals classed as being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

Benchmarking Child Poverty performance

The Improvement Service Community Planning Tool also shows that 90% of our communities are performing well compared to their comparator communities when looking at child poverty (after housing costs) in isolation. City Centre East, Old Aberdeen, Torry East and West, along with George Street are not keeping pace with their comparator communities and, as a result have either remained or moved into the lowest five comparator neighbourhoods in the city.

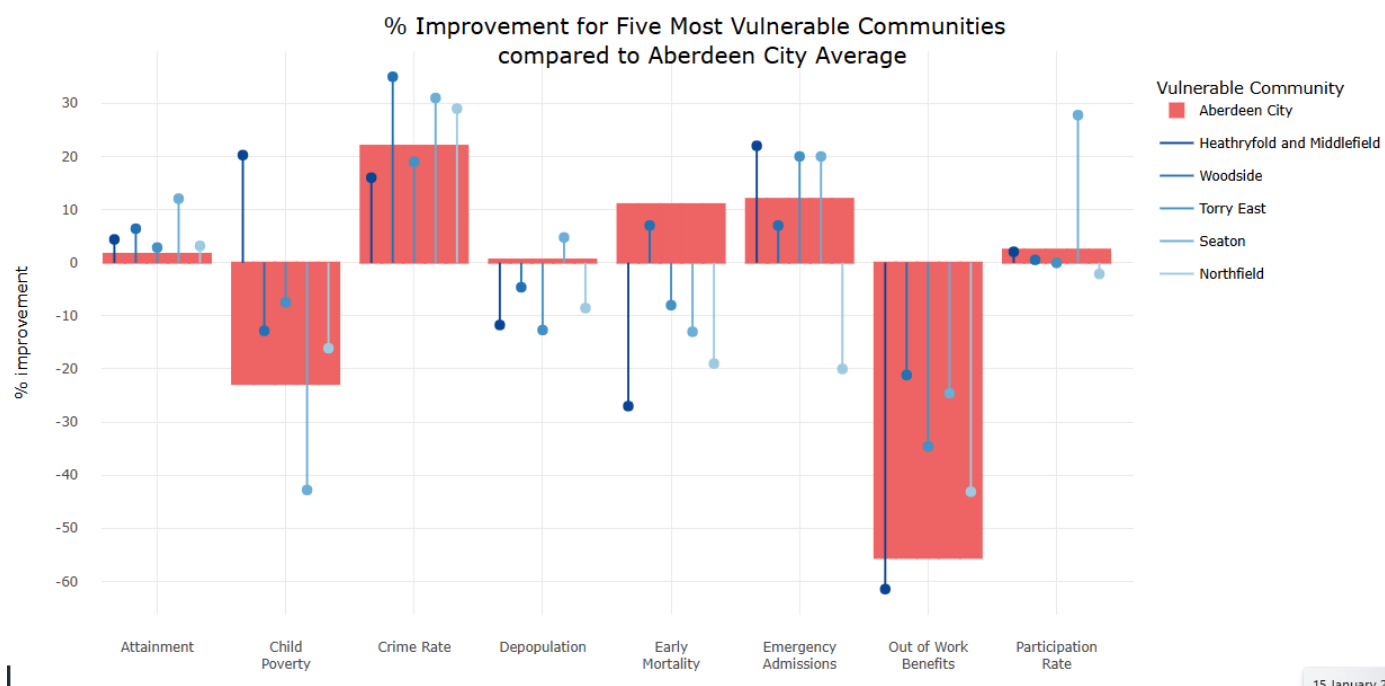
However, when looking at child poverty and associated measures of inequality, (attainment, participation and out-of-work benefits) this drops to only 57% of communities who are outperforming similar communities. This drop is most influenced by the effect of participation levels signalling a need to continue to prioritise activity against this theme.



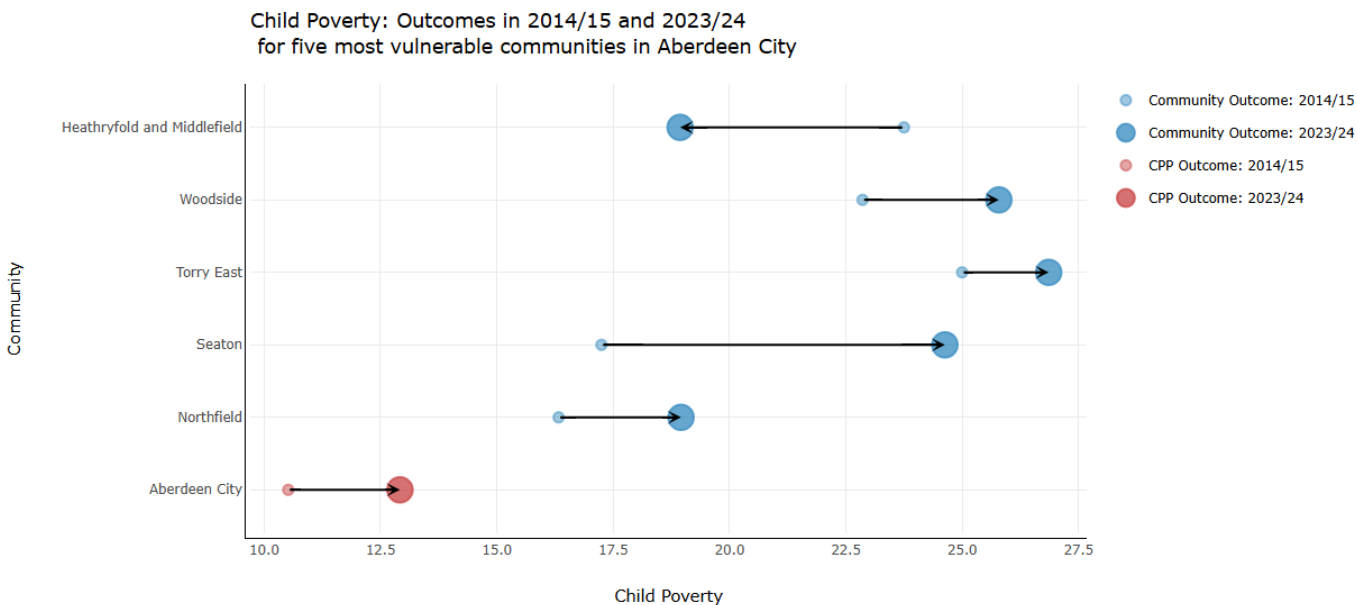
Levels of child poverty in the city are below the national average; Aberdeen remains second behind Perth and Kinross in levels of child poverty when comparing levels of poverty with our Family Group.

The Local Authority area currently sits 25th with (11.9%) out of 32 Local Authorities for levels of child poverty which is below the national average (15%). This is an improvement from last year where the city was placed 23rd.

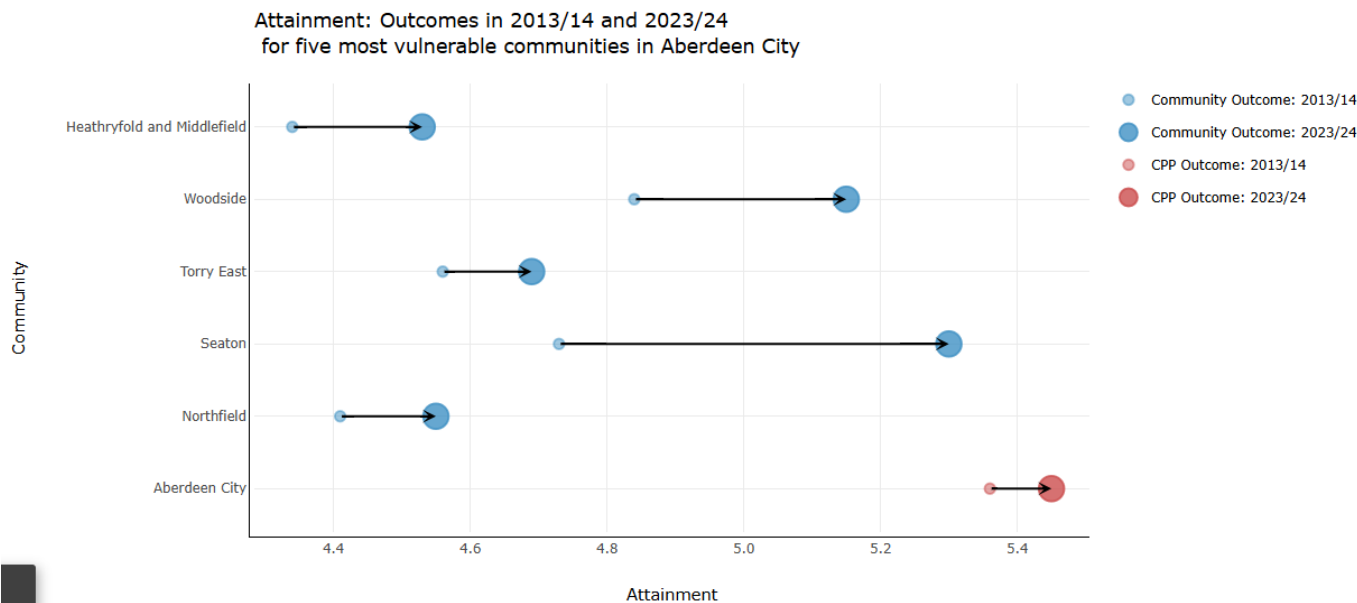
The Community Planning outcomes tool allows us to see the five most vulnerable communities in Aberdeen City compared to the Community Planning Partnership's average. And their percentage improvement is percentage change towards positive outcomes. For example, a 10% improvement in Child Poverty signifies a 10% reduction since reducing child poverty is the desired outcome. A 10% improvement in Attainment signifies a 10% increase in the average grade attained. This means that, in this graph, values above 0 indicate change towards positive outcomes for all indicators.



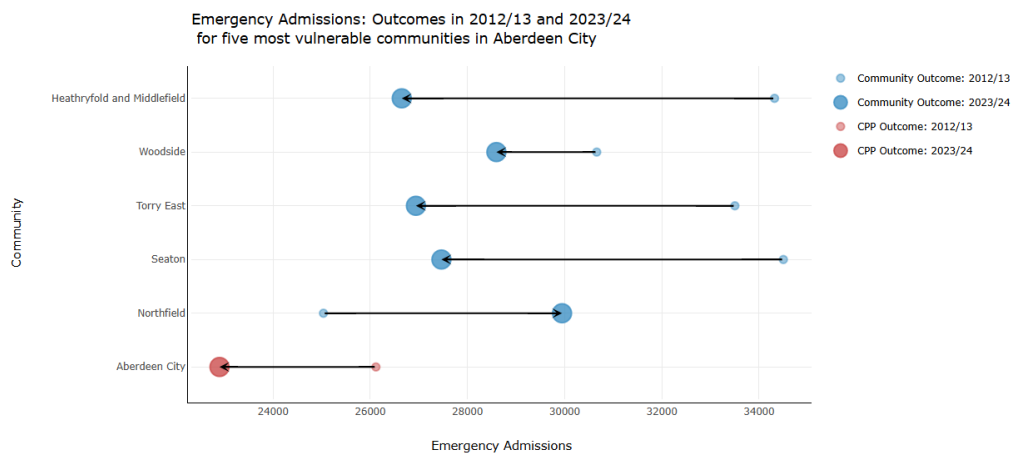
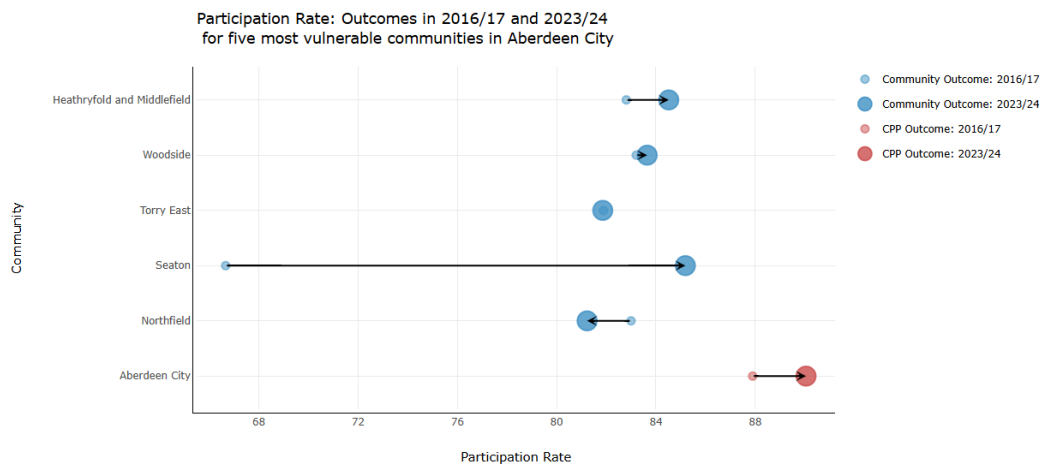
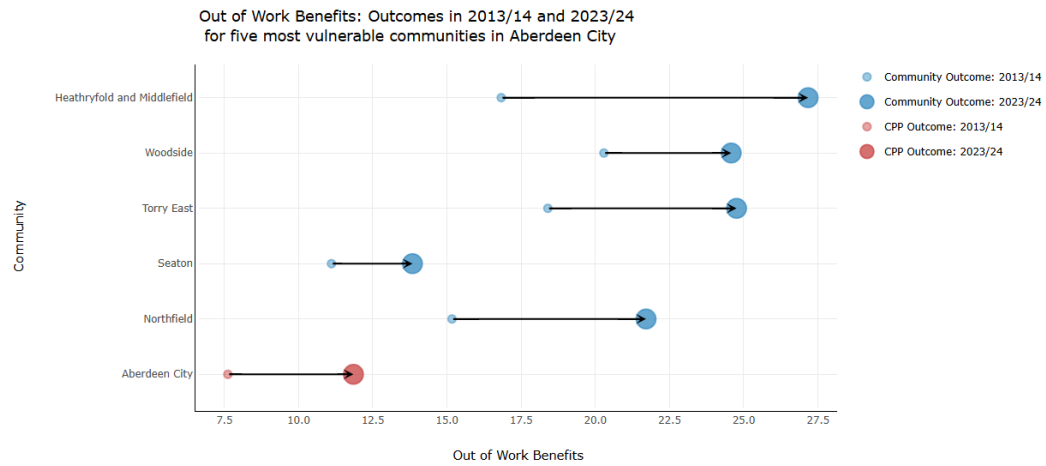
When looking at how these more vulnerable communities are faring against levels of child poverty, we can see that levels of child poverty continue to increase (against a baseline from 2014/15) at a faster rate than the city mean growth.



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



Those on Out of Work Benefits, the participation rate and emergency hospital admissions continue to show similar levels of variation.



Groups Most at Risk of Poverty

There are a number of key groups identified as being most at risk of poverty through the national priority plan that continue to face particular challenges locally. We continue to expand our knowledge of how poverty impacts individual groups. The detail below outlines the present data we have on these groups, offering some contextual detail on what has been impacting these figures and some examples of our current and planned activity to address this.

Younger Mothers: Over the past three years (2023–2025), Aberdeen City has witnessed a marked decline in the number of Housing Benefit (HB) claimants under 25 with dependent children. In August 2023, there were 13 such claimants, making up roughly 1.6% of all HB recipients (651 in total). By 2025, the number of young mothers in this category is estimated to have fallen to single figures, likely below 10 and trending towards zero. This dramatic reduction is part of a broader national pattern, reflecting the near-complete transition away from legacy benefits like Housing Benefit to Universal Credit (UC).

Several contextual factors have contributed to this trend. Nationally, the government's welfare reforms have prioritised the roll-out of Universal Credit, which consolidates multiple benefits—including HB—into a single payment. This policy aims to simplify the welfare system and improve work incentives but has also resulted in the near elimination of new HB claims for young parents. Locally, the demographic profile of Aberdeen is also shifting, with fewer young people overall and changes in family formation patterns further reducing the eligible pool. The small number of under-25 mothers still on HB are largely those unable to transition immediately to UC, often due to specific circumstances or transitional protections.

To further support this positive trend, we have been focusing on several key activities. Current initiatives include enhanced signposting and support for young parents to navigate the Universal Credit system, targeted outreach through children's services, and ongoing collaboration with local housing providers to ensure that vulnerable young families do not fall through the cracks during the benefits transition. Planned improvements involve strengthening early intervention programmes, expanding digital literacy support, and closely monitoring the impact of welfare reforms to quickly identify and address emerging issues. These actions are designed to ensure that young mothers continue to receive the help they need, while supporting the overall goal of reducing benefit dependency through improved employment and educational opportunities.

Single Parent Families: Over the three-year period from 2022 to 2025, single-parent (lone adult) households in Aberdeen have consistently represented a significant proportion of Universal Credit (UC) claimant households, hovering around 30%. In May 2025, approximately 5,891 single-parent households were receiving UC, accounting for 29.5% of the total caseload. This proportion has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 28.1% in early 2022 and peaking at 31.4% in 2024. However, the absolute number of single-parent UC households has increased markedly, rising from roughly 4,100 in 2022 to nearly 5,900 by 2025—a substantial 42% growth. As noted above this upward trend reflects the final phase of Universal Credit rollout and broader economic pressures, which together have brought more lone-parent families onto UC.

Contextual factors impacting this trend include the completion of Universal Credit implementation across Aberdeen, which expanded eligibility and coverage. Additionally, local and national economic challenges, such as rising living costs and inflation, have contributed to more families seeking UC support. These pressures are particularly acute for single-parent households, who often face greater financial vulnerability and limited access to employment opportunities, childcare, and affordable housing.

To address poverty among single parents, we have undertaken a range of activities. Existing initiatives include targeted financial advice and support services, access to affordable childcare schemes, and employment programmes aimed at improving job opportunities for single parents. Community organisations collaborate with the council to deliver food assistance, budgeting workshops, and mental health support, all tailored to the needs of lone-parent households. Looking ahead, we plan to expand these efforts by increasing outreach to single-parent families, developing new partnerships with local employers to promote flexible working arrangements, and advocating for policy changes at the national level to improve UC adequacy and accessibility. These combined actions are designed to mitigate poverty, foster resilience, and provide sustained support for single-parent families in the city.

Families with the Youngest Child Under 1: As of 2025, about one-third of Aberdeen families whose youngest child is under 1 were living in relative poverty, a rate substantially higher than the roughly one-fifth of families with children in poverty citywide. However, there are encouraging signs: this gap has edged downward since 2022, reflecting policy impacts like increased family benefits and our improved local interventions many of which are noted in the section below. The number of Universal Credit supported households with infants has stayed roughly constant (around 430–440) over the past few years, indicating that while the challenge is persistent, it is at least not growing.

Still, in Aberdeen as with national trends the first year of a child's life remains a period of elevated risk for falling into poverty. Many low-income families continue to struggle with the financial pressures of caring for an infant.

To close this gap, we are focusing on early intervention. Strategies such as improving access to childcare, enhancing employability for new parents, and ensuring comprehensive uptake of maternity and early-years benefits all part of our approach to support families with the youngest children. The data from 2022–2025 show the beginnings of that positive trajectory but also underscore the need for sustained commitment.

Larger Families (3+ children): Over the past three years (August 2023–August 2025), households in Aberdeen with three or more dependent children have undergone a significant transition from the legacy Housing Benefit system to Universal Credit (UC). The data shows a marked decline in the number of large families receiving Housing Benefit—from 156 in August 2023 to an estimated near-total migration to UC by August 2025. In contrast, UC claims for this group rose sharply, with approximately 1,800 families already supported by UC in August 2023, and this figure has continued to grow as benefit migration efforts intensify.

Our focus on this cohort reflective of our broader objectives to reduce child poverty and support household resilience. The transition is driven by both regulatory changes and local implementation, as well as ongoing annual reviews and targeted outreach. These efforts ensure that families are not left behind during the system change and that their needs are addressed in local policy planning.

In terms of current and planned support activities, we have implemented a range of initiatives designed to help larger families adjust to UC, including personalised guidance, financial advice,

and dedicated caseworkers. The council's Children's Services Annual Reports indicate ongoing monitoring and evaluation, with further support measures—such as expanded access to childcare, employment assistance, and supplementary benefits. These activities are shaped by continuous data analysis and stakeholder engagement, with the aim of creating a robust safety net for families with three or more children, ensuring their welfare and stability as the city adapts to new benefit structures.

Disability: Approximately 2,800 Child Disability Payment applications were submitted by Aberdeen residents in September 2025, compared to 2,125 in September 2024 and 1,260 in September 2023. This reflects both successful transfers from DLA and more new claims. About 3,100 children in Aberdeen were receiving Child Disability Payment in September 2025, up from 2,625 a year earlier and 2,090 in 2023.

For the Disabled Child Element of Universal Credit in Aberdeen, in August 2025: Roughly 1,300 households were receiving the disabled child element of UC, up from 1,082 in August 2024, a significant increase from 813 households in March 2024 and 688 in August 2023, illustrating steady growth in 2024–2025.

Both sets of figures have risen each year since 2022. The introduction of Scotland's own Child Disability Payment has had a significant impact: by consolidating existing DLA awards and adding new claimants, it markedly increased the number of children receiving support in Aberdeen. Concurrently, the Universal Credit rollout and enhancements have led to more families benefiting from the disabled child addition.

Scottish policy initiatives (devolved social security expansion, benefit uprating, increased promotions) and local anti-poverty efforts in Aberdeen have fostered greater uptake of these benefits. The period also coincided with economic challenges that likely prompted more families to secure financial support for which they qualify. Notably, no significant policy restrictions on eligibility occurred during 2022–2025 for these particular benefits; in fact, the trend was towards greater inclusivity and generosity (unlike some UK-wide measures such as the two-child limit, which the Scottish Government began mitigating for Child Payment recipients).

Overall, 2025 data show record-high support for Aberdeen families with disabled children. More children are receiving Child Disability Payment than ever before, and hundreds more families are benefitting from the Universal Credit disabled child element compared to just a couple of years before highlighting the impact of policy changes and proactive efforts to increase benefit uptake. The continued growth from 2022 to 2025 suggests that awareness and access to disability benefits have improved, helping to provide crucial financial support to families with disabled children in Aberdeen.

Minority Ethnic Families: It is difficult to establish the exact numbers of ethnic minority children living in poverty in Aberdeen as national statistics are not broken down to local authority level, so we use employment rates among ethnic minorities as a proxy to estimate the proportion of families most likely to be affected by poverty.

The economic outlook for Aberdeen's ethnic minority families has improved by 2025, with the employment gap between minorities and the white majority starting to close. Minority ethnic

adults are increasingly finding work, with employment rates rising from 63% in 2023 to around 75% by 2025, compared to the overall population of 72% in 2023 to 78% in 2025.

However, many remain more likely to be unemployed or in low-paid jobs than their white majority counterparts, contributing to higher poverty rates. Limited local statistics suggest minority communities face a higher risk of poverty due to lower earnings, increased worklessness, larger family sizes, and exclusion from support networks. Nationally, nearly half of Scotland's minority ethnic children live in poverty (35% post-COVID), a pattern likely reflected in Aberdeen.

Systemic issues are key drivers of poverty among ethnic minorities, including racial discrimination, unconscious bias, and barriers to accessing services. Skilled immigrants and refugees often face difficulties getting qualifications recognised and securing suitable jobs, leading to underemployment. Language and cultural differences can also isolate families from support, with low engagement in financial advice services. The pandemic and cost-of-living crisis deepened these challenges, with many minority families pushed further into hardship.

In response, we have launched targeted initiatives under the prioritising minority ethnic families. These include community outreach, such as Money Advisers in Schools and financial clinics with interpreters, which have helped families navigate welfare and access childcare. Employability programmes like ABZWorks offer mentorship, English courses, and reskilling, supporting minorities to find work or start businesses. Data collection has improved, with projects tracking minority access to services and campaigns like "Your City, Your Say" involving communities in policy discussions. These efforts aim to create culturally sensitive, effective support for all families.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD POVERTY IN THE CITY?



As noted elsewhere in this report, recent data from the Department for Work and Pensions shows that in 2024/25, an estimated 4,471 children in Aberdeen City (11.9% of 0–15-year-olds were living in relative low income families after housing costs). Many families, particularly those in working or lone-parent households, still face financial pressures, highlighting the need for continued local support and targeted action.

What is getting better?

The number of children living in relatively low-income families before housing costs has fallen, decreasing from 6,170 in 2022/23 to 5,473 in 2023/24.



Absolute child poverty in Aberdeen City has reduced from 10.2% to 9%, Scotland has moved from 13.8% to 12.3%.



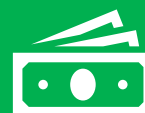
The proportion of Primary 1 pupils at risk of overweight or obesity has eased back from the pandemic spike, indicating more stable access to nutritious food and family routines.



Unemployment rates from October 2024- September 2025 were 2.6% a reduction of 2% from the previous year. The Employment Rate for Ethnic minorities has increased from 64.3% in 2023/24 to 74.9% in 2024/25.



The median weekly pay for full-time workers living in Aberdeen went up from £721.70 in 2024 to £781.70 in 2025, above the average of £775.60 for Scotland.



This data shows encouraging signs of improvement, with fewer children living in low-income households and more families benefiting from stabilising incomes, targeted support and stronger earnings. Rising employment and falling economic inactivity is helping to reduce the likelihood of children growing up in income restricted circumstances. However, these gains remain modest and fragile, and continued focus is needed to ensure they are sustained and reach families who are still experiencing significant hardship.

What has stayed the same?

Despite improvements in income measures, 66.7% of children in poverty remain in working families.



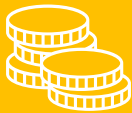
Lone-parent families continue to face significantly higher poverty risk, with 58.2% of low-income children living in these households.



Although not increasing, the number and % of workless households remains high at 13,700 (17.4%)



The claimant count, as a % of the working age population continues to remain stable at 5,105, 3.3% which is in line with Scotland.



The number of claimants in priority neighbourhoods remains steady, with the highest number residing in Tillydrone, Woodside, Torry and George Street.



Volunteering and civic participation remain lower than pre-pandemic levels. This limits the capacity of community networks to support vulnerable families.



Despite some improvements, many households continue to manage on low or uncertain incomes, and day-to-day costs still place strain on already tight budgets. Patterns of in-work poverty, the higher risks faced by lone-parent families, and the continued presence of workless households all point to underlying challenges that have not shifted. Community capacity has also remained limited, with volunteering and participation yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. Together, these trends suggest that while progress is emerging in some areas, the everyday reality for many families remains demanding, and continued support is needed to ensure improvements reach those who need them most.

What is getting worse?

Fuel poverty remains high, with Scottish Household Survey showing 26.1% of households affected and an even higher 46.2% in social housing.



City Voice data from May 2024 shows 24.6% of residents worried they couldn't heat their home and 27.3% missing out on activities due to heating costs.



Food insecurity indicators worsened in 2024, with 20.7% eating only a few kinds of food, 13.6% unable to eat nutritious food, 13.3% eating less than they should, and 9.4% worried about running out.



In 2024 an Aberdeen Gender Inequality and Poverty study highlighted the disproportionate impact of the cost of living on single mothers. Survey data shows 54% of single parents struggle to cover childcare costs, while high proportions also struggle with food (69%) and housing (66%).

50% of respondents to the gender inequality and poverty study said their financial situation has impacted on their mental health and 29% their physical health.



Homelessness continues to be a challenge with almost 2,082 people affected by homeless applications received in 2024/25, of which almost 556 were children.

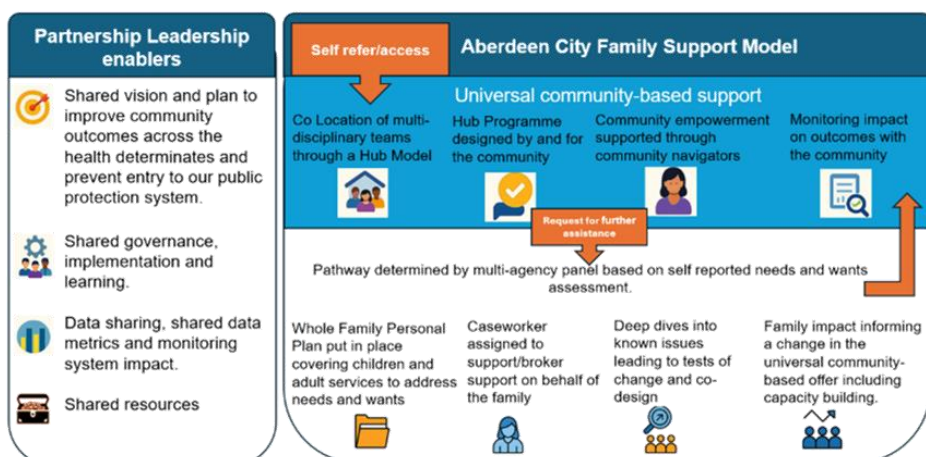


Alongside these ongoing challenges, the data shows that several pressures on households in Aberdeen are worsening. Fuel poverty remains a significant challenge, particularly for those in social housing, and more residents are struggling to heat their homes or participate in everyday activities due to rising costs. Food insecurity has deepened, with more people limiting what they eat or unable to afford nutritious food. The cost-of-living crisis continues to have a disproportionate impact on single parents and women, affecting both financial stability and mental health. Children in the highest-poverty wards experience higher rates of unplanned hospital admissions, early childhood developmental concerns, dental decay, long-term conditions and poorer maternal health outcomes. These health inequalities persist despite national improvements and continue to widen the gap in healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas of Aberdeen.

Homelessness also remains a growing concern, with rising numbers of households, many with children, seeking assistance. The data shows that financial strain is intensifying for many families, and that the impacts of poverty are becoming more acute across multiple aspects of daily life. Overall, this reinforces the need for sustained, targeted action to reduce pressures on households and prevent existing inequalities from widening.

So, what next?

Tackling child poverty remains a central priority for partners across Aberdeen. While there have been positive improvements in outcomes for many children and families, the evidence continues to show that poverty and inequality shape life chances in very different ways across the city. Families living in the most deprived communities (SIMD 1) are not yet experiencing the same level of progress, and in some areas the gap is widening, reflective of how different communities operate and the extent to which they engage with services as they are currently delivered. The message is clear, the current way of doing things is not shifting outcomes enough for those who need support most. This underlines the need for a more focused, locally driven response that brings together early identification of need, holistic engagement with families and coordinated community-based support.



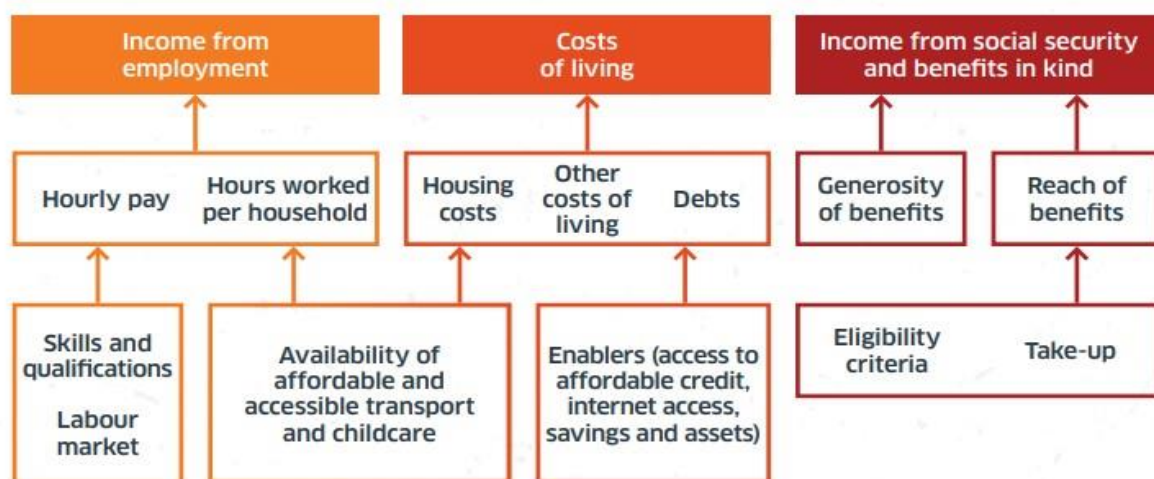


As Aberdeen moves forward with the new ten-year Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Locality Plans 2026-36, the direction of travel reflects a more mature, place-based way of working. This approach is reinforced through the new Children's Services Plan 2026-2031 and strengthened through the Fairer Futures Partnership Programme, where new methods are being tested with communities to better understand what local families need and how support can be delivered in ways that work for them.

Core to the future direction is the Aberdeen Family Support Model which sets out a whole-system approach in which families can access relational, coordinated and timely support, regardless of how or where they first make contact. It emphasises multi-agency pathways, shared data, community-based support, and a universal-plus-targeted offer that responds directly to local need. This aligns closely with the wider partnership aim to reduce poverty, lower public protection risks, and provide consistent support that adjusts as families' circumstances change.

Child Poverty Action 2025-2026: Best Start, Bright Futures

Best Start, Bright Futures tells us that the three drivers of poverty are income from employment, cost of living, and income from social security and benefits in kind.



Tackling child poverty is central to the work of Community Planning Aberdeen because poverty in childhood has long-term impacts on health, educational attainment, wellbeing and life chances, increasing demand on public services and entrenching inequality across communities. By placing child poverty at the heart of community planning, partners take coordinated, preventative action that supports families early, strengthens communities and improves outcomes for children and young people across Aberdeen.

Through the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Locality Plans and Children's Services Plan, Community Planning Aberdeen has agreed shared outcomes to reduce fragmentation, target resources where they are most needed and to ensure that activity across employment, service delivery and financial support is designed around families' lived experiences rather than organisational boundaries. Outcome Improvement Groups work together to ensure these commitments translate into coordinated action on the ground, sharing learning and using evidence to drive continuous improvement in how support is delivered across the city.

Anti-Poverty & Community Empowerment Group

Aberdeen Prospers Group

Children's Services Board

Homewards Aberdeen Coalition

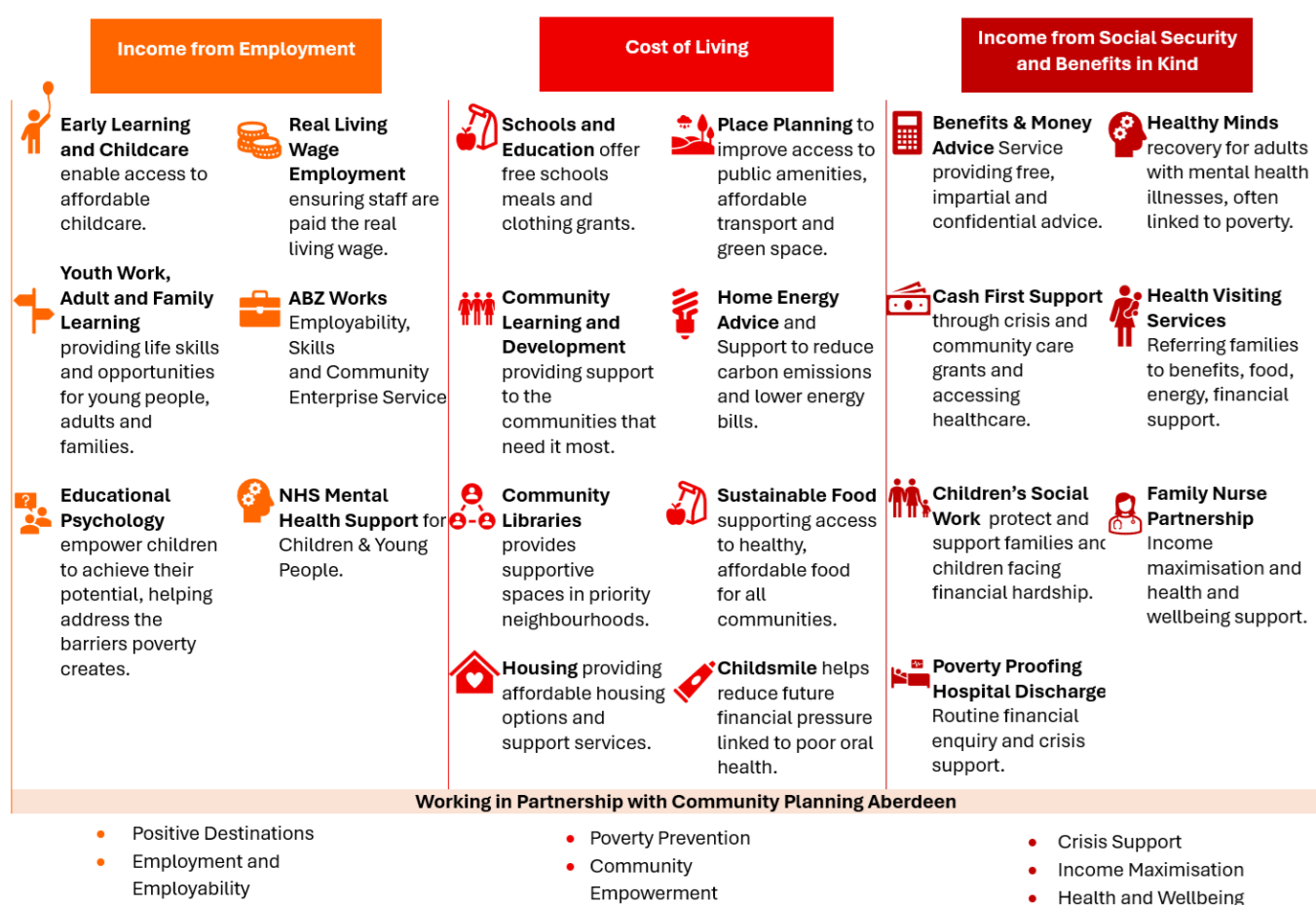
Income from employment – Community Planning Aberdeen's Aberdeen Prospers Group plays a key role in aligning employability services, childcare provision, skills development and employer engagement to reduce barriers faced by parents, particularly lone parents, families with disabled children and parents experiencing in-work poverty. Supporting parents into sustainable employment, while promoting fair work practices such as the real Living Wage and flexible working, is critical to lifting families out of poverty.

Cost of living – Through Community Planning Aberdeen's Anti-Poverty & Community Empowerment Group and Children's Services Board, partners work together to reduce the financial pressures on low-income families by improving access to affordable childcare, housing, transport, food and energy. Local action to tackle fuel poverty, expand access to free school

meals, provide school clothing grants and support community food initiatives helps families maximise their resources and protect children from the immediate impacts of financial hardship.

Income from social security and benefits in kind —Community Planning Aberdeen supports families to maximise their household income by improving access to advice services, reducing stigma around benefit uptake and ensuring families receive the financial support they are entitled to. Local delivery of Scottish Government benefits, crisis support and targeted financial advice plays a crucial role in mitigating poverty, particularly for families facing complex challenges or sudden changes in circumstances.

The diagram below includes just some of the key services provided across Community Planning Aberdeen to tackle child poverty.



The rest of this report provides further information on the activity and impacts seen across these three drivers of poverty over the last year.

Income from employment

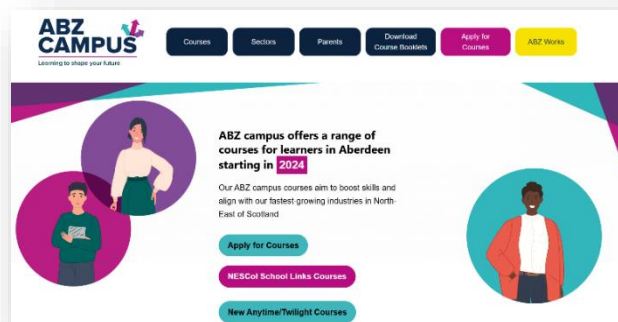
2024/25 – Aberdeen City’s employment rate has climbed back above the national average, reversing last year’s brief dip below it. As measured by the Annual Population Survey, Aberdeen’s rate is now around 76%, slightly higher than Scotland’s roughly 74%. The latest 12-month data (Oct 2024 – Sep 2025) shows Aberdeen at 76.4% versus 74.4% for Scotland. This continues the positive trend from the previous year – a notable rebound given that in 2023/24 Aberdeen had fallen just below the national rate (72.8% vs 73.5%). The pattern of improvement has persisted over consecutive data releases, though recent figures suggest a levelling off. Careful monitoring will be needed to ensure Aberdeen maintains its renewed lead and to watch for any renewed fluctuations

In 2024/25, those earning less than the Real Living Wage had risen by almost 1 percentage point from 2023/24 to 9.3% in Aberdeen (and was at a low of 6.9% in 2022/23) This is a strong outcome in terms of comparisons with benchmarks but suggests that the decline in RLW salaries in Aberdeen, as elsewhere, warrants monitoring.

ABZ Campus

Our education service continues to ensure that a wider range of courses are available in growth and volume sectors, in part through delivery of ABZ Campus, to ensure that our young people are well placed to be economically active post school. In academic year 2025/26 ABZ Campus has continued to expand its course delivery with over 1500 applications for the now 80 courses offered across a range of providers in schools, NESCOL and other partners.

Partnership working across the Northern Alliance has strengthened, supporting shared delivery, particularly in high-demand areas such as `construction-related Foundation Apprenticeships. Virtual, twilight and “anytime” options have also expanded, increasing flexibility for learners with complex timetables or additional needs.



ABZ Campus is also enhancing support for young people with additional support needs through the **#WHATif (Inspiring Futures)** employability pathway, enabling progression from classroom learning into supported work experience and volunteering.

Evidence from attainment data shows the programme is successfully improving breadth and depth in the senior phase, contributing to more ambitious presentation policies and increased SQA entries. Looking ahead, Phase 3 will deepen regional collaboration, while Phase 4 (26/27) will introduce structured work-placement pathways to further strengthen positive destinations.

Pathway Advocates

There has been a 20% increase in the number of vulnerable young people supported through the Pathways Advocates programme between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years, rising from 250 to 300 individuals. In both years, approximately one fifth of those supported required regular or intensive intervention. Now in the second year of delivery of this role, there is increased confidence that intensive support is being more effectively targeted towards those young people with the highest levels of need.

Current data for the 2025/26 academic year (as at April 2026) indicates that 336 young people have been supported during the year to date. This represents a 34% increase compared to 2023/24 and a 12% increase from 2024/25. Where a young person's level of need reduces, the intensity of support provided by the Pathways Advocate is correspondingly stepped down. This reduction in intensity is viewed positively, as it evidences progress and increased resilience. As at April 2026, 13% of young people currently receiving support are accessing regular or intensive interventions.

Digital And Technology

Northern Lights Digital Transformation Programme: the Northern Lights programme has continued its system-wide rollout, modernising digital infrastructure and significantly strengthening the digital learning environment in schools. By 2024/25, 37 primary schools and 9 secondary schools had transitioned to the new digital identity, upgraded connectivity, and modern devices. Secondary schools now have full installation of interactive touch panels, with 38 primary schools completed and remaining installations due by late 2025. This investment provides a more resilient, future-ready digital ecosystem that supports both teaching and administration. A major strand of the programme is workforce development. A new professional learning pathway for digital champions, delivered in partnership with the Digital Schools Award and HP, will run from September to December 2025. Training includes tools such as Minecraft for Education and key Microsoft 365 learning features. Additionally, a partnership with SMART Technologies is expanding training on interactive panel use through in-person and online CLPL, ensuring staff confidence in using newly deployed hardware.

The programme has introduced improvements to migration processes and guidance based on pilot school feedback, making onboarding smoother. Schools now have designated digital champions supporting local implementation. Upcoming work includes completing onboarding across remaining schools, resolving technical challenges with Digital & Technology colleagues, progressing federated identity, and expanding Teams Telephony ahead of full digital communications adoption.

Aberdeen Computing Collaborative: the Aberdeen Computing Collaborative continues to mature as a strategic regional partnership designed to strengthen computing science education across the Northeast. This year saw Aberdeenshire Council formally join the collaborative, creating better alignment of computing science practice and pathways across the region.

Professional learning remains a central feature, with targeted support delivered via STACS (Scottish Teachers Advancing Computing Science) and active contribution to the national Curriculum Review of Computing Science. This collaboration ensures that Aberdeen's computing curriculum reflects current industry and academic expectations.

Although a major investment bid to the Northeast Investment Zone was unsuccessful, a further proposal has been submitted to the Just Transition Capital Fund to enhance computing science capacity. Alongside this, work is progressing on establishing a dedicated computing outreach hub at OneTech Hub, planned to open in August 2025, providing a regional centre for school engagement, training, and industry collaboration.

Digital Technology in Curriculum and Learning:

Digital development is closely integrated with curriculum expansion, including ABZ Campus programmes and pathways linked to computing science. The ABZ Campus continues to broaden opportunities through virtual courses and digital learning models, with a notable increase in applications for digitally-enabled courses.



Across all settings, computing science is positioned as a growth area—aligned with the Logan Review recommendations—ensuring learners are equipped with industry-relevant digital skills. The document emphasises that digital infrastructure, professional learning, and cross-authority collaboration are essential enablers in meeting this ambition.

Supporting Young People Less Likely to Sustain a Positive Destination

To support our system's wide ambition for sustained positive destinations, a multi-agency Participation Group has been established and meets regularly. This partnership includes Skills Development Scotland, Aberdeen City Council Education and Lifelong Learning, North East Scotland College (NESCol), Aberdeen City Council's Employability and Skills service ABZWorks, Aberdeen City Council Social Work, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Developing the Young Workforce North East (DYW NE), and a representative from the Employability Training Providers Forum (ETPF).

The 16+ Data Hub, previously used by partners to track young people's post-school participation, has now been fully replaced by the modern 16+ Participation Portal, a secure, cloud-based national system operated by Skills Development Scotland and relaunched in 2025. The new portal provides real-time, multi-agency access to participation data for young people, enhancing data quality, reporting and collaboration across local authorities, colleges, DWP and wider partners. It offers a significantly more user-friendly interface, improved import functions, and Power BI reporting dashboards to support early identification, targeted intervention and improved outcomes for young people. Skills Development Scotland continues to work with HMRC to resolve data sharing arrangements for young people who are in work. This will enable us to better identify and understand the needs of those who have not yet achieved longer term outcomes, and to target preventative support more effectively.

There is an ongoing need to monitor the increasing number of young people who are economically inactive. While this occurs for a range of reasons, a growing proportion is linked to anxiety and wider mental health needs. In addition, as of December 2025, the number of Aberdeen City 16–17-year-olds in receipt of out of work benefits has risen to 40 young people, representing 0.9% of the cohort—slightly higher than the Scotland figure (0.7%) and significantly above the Great Britain rate (0.2%).

ABZWorks

ABZWorks, Aberdeen City Council's Employability and Skills service, supports people of working age who are resident in the city and who are not in education, employment or training, as well as parents experiencing in-work poverty and underemployed people who meet the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind criteria.

The Council is the lead accountable body and managing authority for No One Left Behind employability funding, which is received annually, and works with the Local Employability Partnership to agree the strategic approach to employability activity and the use of these monies. The primary focus of No One Left Behind is to ensure that those furthest from the labour market are supported to progress along the employability pipeline and ultimately into a positive destination, recognising that this can take years, and are not "left behind".

We continue to see high demand for services, with ongoing increases in the number of referrals from an ever-widening pool. This year to date has seen an 11% increase in the number of people registered for support; 1,019 between 1 April 2025 and 27 February 2026 compared to 920 in the same period the previous year.

The Department for Work and Pensions remains, as expected, the largest source of referrals for employability support, with referrals also received from organisations including Skills Development Scotland, commissioned training providers, health agencies, third sector organisations, HMP Grampian, Partnership Action for Continuing Employment, and we are seeing growing numbers of self-referrals.

Contracts worth a total value of £2 million were let in the 2025/26 financial year for delivery of a range of services, providing 1,599 commissioned training places across the [employability pipeline](#), including provision specifically for parents and specifically for young people alongside the broader all-age, all-stage offer. At the time of writing, 1,196 places have been filled – of these 188 were taken by parents with dependent children, and 255 by young people. Of those, at the time of writing 54 young people and 31 parents have secured a positive destination through commissioned training provision while others continue to receive support. This is in addition to those parents and young people receiving support from ABZWorks employability keyworkers.

The contracts were let on a one year, +1 +1 basis, subject to funding and performance, with a view to ensuring as far as practicably possible that individuals can receive sustained support to progress, in recognition of the fact that many people require longer-term interventions.

This year to date we have seen increases in the numbers of people securing positive destinations: 214 into employment, including self-employment and apprenticeships, compared to 138 in the same period last year; 24 into further training, 37 into further or higher education, and 89 volunteering.

Seventy-six people have participated in work experience placements at the time of writing. The majority these have been paid placements using No One Left Behind and United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund monies. Placements vary in length between three and six months, subject to individual need. A guaranteed interview must be provided at the end of every paid placement.

Paid work experience placements, which are paid at real living wage rate, have included placements to support parents into early learning and childcare roles within Aberdeen City Council early learning and childcare settings. Paid work experience placements are designed with the needs of the individual at the heart, offering opportunities which fit around the needs of the participant, including caring responsibilities. [Ilhem](#), [Omar](#), and [Jade](#) are just three examples of the benefits of this scheme for parents, while [Katrina's](#) placement with Instant Neighbour demonstrates the benefits for her as a young person.

Our Seed Fund, delivered in partnership with Business Gateway, continues to be an in-demand offer to support city residents into employment via a start-up grant. Carrie's [story](#) is just one example of the successes secured.

Parental Focus

ABZWorks' senior project officer for child poverty is co-designing a Child Poverty Employability Plan, which will sit alongside the refreshed Local Employability Partnership Delivery and Action Plan, which is in early development.

It has become evident in the process of work to develop the Child Poverty Employability Plan that there is no comprehensive and easily accessible directory of services for parents, the agencies offering support and advice to them, or employers. Parents have told us that they do not know where to go to find information about services and support available to them, or that they do not know what support they are entitled to.

ABZWorks is seeking to work collaboratively with other Council services and external partners to develop this, recognising that it will be a moving feast and will require multi-partner input to not only develop but also maintain this resource. Work has begun on this, linked to the Plan, but is at an early stage and will require significant resource.

We are in the process of revising the '[Parents](#)' section of the ABZWorks website to create an area which is more focused on parents and their employability needs than on advice for parents of young people, which is covered elsewhere on the site. The refreshed Parents section is being developed in partnership with parents, taking account of what they want, and feel is needed and would be useful to have on the website.

Informal outreach sessions linking parents with ABZWorks have taken place across the city, with a primary focus on the priority areas. A series of sessions has just launched in the Job Centre, and further community sessions are planned.

These parental engagement sessions take the format of a drop-in for a cuppa and cake, children welcome, with two ABZWorks staff attending each and training providers invited to join. As a direct result of this, one provider has recognised the benefits of getting into the community and has pledged to follow our lead in this to reach more parents.

By the end of December, of the 20 parents who had attended, 19 had expressed an interest in getting involved in employability activity as soon as possible, including seven on-the-day sign-ups.

Work has progressed on strengthening relationships with established parent groups across the city.

Engagement sessions have been successfully delivered with Quarriers and Four Pillars, gathering insight from parent carers, parents supporting children, and young people within the LGBT community. These sessions were highly positive, with participants highlighting the value of being heard, with one commenting:

“It is nice to be listened to,” and sharing the impact of support received: “I was feeling lost but now feel motivated to get back on track.”

This work has also helped staff to understand referral pathways and the breadth of employability support available.

Engagement with city schools has begun to test parent-focused approaches in city school settings, with sessions taking place at Lochside Academy, Skene Square School, and Dyce School, with plans to expand this approach to test the value and demand of it.

A workshop for Aberdeen City Council staff was held in September, during which we shared information about the ABZWorks service and its offer.

A session for external partners was also held that month and was similar in approach to the internal session. While turnout was low, the information and ideas shared was invaluable. We intend to repeat this exercise to gather more input and share information about employability support more widely.

A parent-specific presentation and workshop formed part of the agenda for the Local Employability Partnership’s Growing the Granite City Workforce conference in November. A similar approach was taken at the Local Employability Partnership’s employability conference in January and a report on the outputs will be taken to the LEP in March.

As we reported to Aberdeen Prospers, the parents we support include young parents. Since September 2024, 43 young parents (aged 25 or under) have registered with ABZWorks. Of those, 19 have completed a commissioned training course, two have secured seed fund monies to set up their own business (one of whom has won a national award), six have secured employment, two have completed paid work experience placements in the Council’s Early Learning and Childcare settings, with more awaiting a start date to be set once Disclosure Scotland checks have been completed.

Child Poverty Accelerator Fund monies secured from Scottish Government were used to pay for a Low-Income Family Tracker, managed by the Financial Inclusion Team and which can be used to identify low-income families to enable targeted support. As part of this funding, Rocket Science was commissioned to do some research with young parents. We will report a final report to Scottish Government on the project in early summer. Meantime the team continues to work to engage with and support the parents involved in this project.

Using Multiply monies from the UK Government, ABZWorks co-designed the Grow, Save, Multiply project to city parents. All participants who signed up were mums: 17 were referred, three were unable to engage for personal reasons. All of the remaining 14 stayed the course of the nine-week programme and all have secured a positive destination: four into work, two onto further training; one into volunteering, seven into paid work experience, one exploring starting her own business, and one underemployed parent has been able to increase her hours. A young single parent (Jade, mentioned above) who was offered a paid work experience placement within the team to support development and delivery of the project has secured full time work with the Council as an ABZWorks employability keyworker.

Care Experienced Young People

Care Experienced Young People are one of the key target groups identified by the Local Employability Partnership. At the time of writing, 61 care experienced young people had registered with the service this year, participating in a range of activities including the RiteWorks project delivered by Working Rite specifically for care experienced young people, and paid work experience placements.

We funded an intern within the social work youth team and as a direct result of the benefits seen of that placement, a graduate internship was created, with the young person playing an integral role in developing a range of activities, including an employability hub at Westburn.

“This internship has shown me that my experience as a care experienced person is a strength not a weakness. It has helped me realise that I can help shape services with my experience and views, because I can see things from other care experienced young people’s perspective. Changes don’t happen overnight, but consistent small actions all make a difference too.

“It has helped me reflect on how care experience can lead to resilience, empathy, and the ability to support others in meaningful ways.”

Employability work to support unaccompanied young asylum seekers is at an early stage and we will share more information on this in due course.

We contracted Who Care’s Scotland to deliver 100 training places to Aberdeen City Council staff, employability training providers, and employers across the city, to raise awareness of the challenges faced by care experienced young people and how employers and providers can best support them. Feedback from these sessions has been overwhelmingly positive.

To mitigate the risk of having to return unspent funds to Government as a result of contractors being unable to fill the number of places they bid and were subsequently awarded contracts for, we have cut some contracts and diverted the funds into other activities, including [ABZWorks Development Grants](#), seed-funded businesses, and paid work experience placements.

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

Young People

ABZWorks has been striving to increase the number of young people who are not in a positive destination engaging with employability support.

All 16-and-17-year-olds who are not in receipt of welfare benefits who are registered with ABZWorks and engaging with the service are entitled to payment of a training allowance. The Local Employability Partnership agreed that this should be raised from £55 per week to £60 per week late in 2024/25 in recognition of the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on young people and their families.

Multiple activities have been undertaken in an attempt increase the numbers of young people engaging with employability services, beyond the work for care experienced young people, and commissioned services detailed above.

In partnership with Skills Development Scotland, we held outreach sessions in Tillydrone, Middlefield, and the city centre and were pleased to be joined by some of the city's training providers. These sessions resulted in eight young people who had been classified as 'unknown' or in a 'negative destination' signing up for employability support. Further outreach sessions are planned as we move towards the end of the academic term.

Referrals from schools remain low and so we are taking several approaches to remedy this. We are working with senior education colleagues to ensure that pathway planning meetings are established and taking place regularly in all cities secondary schools to identify at an early stage those young people at risk of not securing a positive destination.

We are piloting a number of approaches with Lochside Academy to encourage referrals and sign-up. This has included attending drop-in sessions for pupils and, when they wish, their parents (aligning with parental activity detailed above), attending careers information nights and parents nights at the school. ABZWorks is now featured on Lochside Academy's website. We will learn from these activities and, where appropriate and subject to resource, including funding, seek to expand these to other secondary schools.

We are advertising the availability of the training allowance on the ABZWorks social media pages to encourage young people who are not in a positive destination to sign up with the service, and to share the information about it with their parents and wider families. This has seen a significant increase in the number of enquiries about training allowance, and subsequent sign-ups from young people, but we recognise that more needs to be done by all partners to increase the number of young people engaging in employability activity and sustaining that engagement.

The chair of the Local Employability Partnership called a special meeting to discuss a potential joint bid for SSEN regional funds, to support employability and skills activity in the city. With the LEP's support, a range of training providers and partners were brought together to develop a consortium bid, led by the third sector and informed by employability and education colleagues.

A bid was developed to deliver targeted employability support to school pupils identified as being at-risk of disengaging from education, taking a whole family approach to ensure that the families of those children are aware of supports available to them, including employability support.

Who Care's Scotland also developed a bid, focused on care experienced young people and training for the adults, including education staff, in their lives, which linked to employability. LEP members negotiated with both parties to ensure that the bids were complementary rather than competitive. The LEP Chair and Vice-Chair submitted letters of support for both bids, and the outcomes are expected imminently.

Unfortunately both bids were unsuccessful, however the training provider bid appears to have stimulated an interest in third sector organisations forming consortiums for delivery of employability activity, not only that funded via No One Left Behind monies and we are hopeful that this may prompt greater collaborative working to attract employability monies which are not accessible to the public sector, into the city and expand the reach and impact of third sector services.

Business

As detailed above, the Local Employability Partnership held its Growing the Granite Workforce conference for employers in October. This was very well received by employers who expressed a desire for an annual event, and many expressed strong interest in joining an employer sub-group of the Local Employability Partnership.

We continue to harness community benefits clauses attached to major council contracts to secure opportunities for people in the city. This has resulted in interview skills workshops, mock interviews, work placements, participation in events, support to the third sector, and jobs. Community benefits contractors are not required to clear activities with the authority before delivering and it has become apparent this year that while some exceptional activity is taking place, it is not always joined up and therefore not providing the best opportunity for individuals.

With that in mind, we are in early discussions with contractors with a view to ensuring that when they deliver employability sessions and activities to individuals and groups of individuals that they are also linking the participants with employability services to provide wraparound support, further build on what they have learned, and support them to secure and sustain employment or other positive destination.

We continue to deliver employer engagement sessions to promote inclusive employment, not only to increase employer confidence and the number of opportunities for groups including parents, young people, displaced people and refugees, disabled people, and people with convictions, but also raise awareness of the broader support available from Aberdeen City Council via ABZWorks, as well as partner agencies including the Department for Work and Pensions, and Skills Development Scotland.

The service continues to host large scale jobs fairs at the Beach Ballroom, and to date continues to receive positive feedback from employers about the events, requests for stands and every event to date has seen us operate an employer reserve list. The events help to attract new participants to No One Left Behind provision as well as supporting people directly into work, without registering with the service.

December saw us hold the first of our 'Get Into' events. Get Into Construction was open to city residents interested in a career in the construction sector, including senior phase school pupils, unemployed people, students, graduates, career returners, and people interested in other roles in the sector. The focus was on jobs across the sector, from entry level to professional roles.

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

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

The Employability and Skills service continues to lead the Fair Work stream of the Council's Community Wealth Building Action Plan and has done so via promoting fair work practices, employer engagement activity, paid work experience placements at Real Living Wage rate, ABZWorks Development Grants, and seed funding start-up businesses.

Workwise Project

The Employability and Skills service secured £250,000 from Voctech to deliver an innovative digital project to boost skills across the region. In our role of lead accountable body and delivery partner, we are working with Aberdeenshire Council and NESCol to develop the Workwise project, a three-pronged online learning resource focusing on adults who wish to return to the workplace.

The city element is to oversee the collaboration of these bodies to ensure the aim of increasing individuals understanding of the work environment and will help them feel prepared and ready to return to it. The approach uses technology and digital innovation to enhance their employment choices and opportunities. By developing virtual work experience videos to help returners navigate and understand requirements needed for getting back into work

NESCol's work has seen the delivery of an online confidence building course for adult returners, helping them by combining digital learning with in-person experience, the programme addresses key barriers to employment, helping people build the confidence and skills needed to thrive in today's workforce. The course will be an interactive programme covering personal development, personal organisation and time management, study skills, digital skills, finance options for students and progression pathways.

Aberdeenshire Council is producing a library of videos focusing on jobs in growth and volume sectors, helping viewers to understand the opportunities available in the region and the routes into them, to build confidence and raise understanding in the local labour market and to strengthen the regional economy.

The funding for this ends in April, and we are collectively exploring funding opportunities to enable the continuation of the work beyond the test phase.

Planning for the future

Employability funds will be under greater pressure in the coming year, with the demise of United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Funds and no replacement of these monies. The Local Employability Partnership will determine how the 2026/27 No One Left Behind monies should be spent, based on data and information from partners, training providers, and individuals bringing the lived experience perspective.

We will work more closely with NESTRANS in the coming year to deliver activity which will help to mitigate transport-related barriers to employment for parents, as two new funds are announced by Scottish Government. The first will be channelled through local authorities to Local Employability Partnerships, and the other to regional transport partnerships across the country

The Local Employability Partnership is in the process of refreshing its Delivery and Action Plan, which will set out the LEP's strategy for the next five years and the Child Poverty Employability Action Plan will sit alongside that.

A new case conferencing process is in the early stages of development, to bring together operational staff from contracted providers, partners such as Skills Development Scotland and the Department for Work and Pensions with ABZWorks staff to ensure that the appropriate employability support offered to individuals is in place, with participant voice, aspirations and needs at the centre, and to ensure appropriate progression routes are available to them and understood by all partners. This will also ensure that individuals are being linked with the appropriate services, in line with the No One Left Behind strategy, to ensure multiple needs are addressed.

To support that and further build relationships, trust, and knowledge of services at operational level, ABZWorks is programming quarterly networking events for operational staff across contracted and non-contracted employability provision, including grass-roots organisations who can better reach those people furthest from the labour market and support them to engage with employability services.

The Department for Work and Pensions has launched its Youth Guarantee and, while it is being trialled in Central Scotland for a year, we will keep a close eye on progress with a view to ensuring that if and when it comes to Aberdeen that we are well placed to engage with it, ensuring a collaborative approach rather than duplication of services.

We will continue working with the Homewards team to develop and inform approaches to prevent youth homelessness and support the activity from an employability lens.

The team will continue to support the development of the emerging new Local Outcome Improvement Plan and play an active role, particularly in the Aberdeen Prospers outcome improvement group, but also in other areas of the LOIP. The team will also continue to support delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy Skills Action Plan, any updates to that, and advocate for inclusive economic growth to be at the heart of it, including any updates to the Plan or projects within it.

We will continue working alongside the Scottish Prison Service and other partners, including justice social work and employers, to support individuals leaving custody into employment, education or training, including jobs within the authority.

We are stepping up our employer engagement activity to ensure that our activity matches and meets local employment opportunities and that the individuals we are supporting have the necessary skills to secure and sustain work in the region. The service will continue to keep a close eye on the local economy, particularly in light of what at this stage appears to be a growing number of business failures and redundancies, and will respond to these as an active member of the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) partnership, with a view to getting people back into employment as quickly as possible.

The Employability and Skills service is in early talks with the Talent team about a collaboration to use ABZWorks to support recruitment into and sustained employment in entry-level hard-to-fill positions within the authority.

Scottish Attainment Challenge supporting pupil and family wellbeing.

Each Associated School Group (Secondary School Catchment Area) (ASG) in the city has an allocation of Strategic Equity Fund (SEF)-funded youth workers to support the needs of children and young people as identified by school staff. The needs vary across ASG's with some prioritising 121 support to help young people improve their readiness to learn and improve school engagement. Some ASG's value the youth work offer of targeted support for young people who are about to make the transition from primary to secondary school. The offer to schools also includes access to accredited awards such as Hi5, Dynamic Youth Award and the Youth Achievement Award. Youth Workers are trained to deliver these awards and are helping partners to deliver them too. There was an increased focus on offering these awards to young people in priority areas during 2025/26. In the Lochside ASG 151 pupils achieved a Hi5 or DYA.

For 2025/26 there were 597 registered youth work activities funded by SEF with 1516 young people registered for a youth work activity. From the evaluations that were completed 76% said that they had improved their confidence, and 80% reported an improvement in their skills and knowledge. 75.8% said that they had achieved their learning goals.

Youth Workers at Hazlehead academy, funded by SEF, were recognised at the 2025 Star Awards by winning the Innovation and Bright Sparks category for their work with the Dementia cafe. The Dementia Cafe is an intergenerational project between the youth work team at Hazlehead and a local care home.

Family Learning city-wide provision has allocated SEF-funded Family Learning Development Workers to each ASG, with delivery tailored to the needs of each area as identified through school referrals and learner engagement. SEF-funded staff continue to have a positive impact on attainment, achievement and engagement for children and families across all ASGs. All workers have the skills and knowledge to deliver learner-centred, trauma-informed and responsive support.

Emerging priorities highlight three key areas of need: financial instability, poor mental health, and complexities linked to additional support needs (ASN). Our targeted 1:1 support, group work, open access sessions and holiday provision are designed to meet these needs.

In 2024/25 we expanded our course menu to include Supper & Science in partnership with Aberdeen Science Centre, increased the number of ASN Parent Support Groups to cover every ASG, and introduced Managing My Money and Self-Care in the Outdoors courses. We also developed an SQA accreditation pathway to support family achievement and increase motivation to learn.

In 2024/25, SEF-funded Family Learning delivery provided 239 activities, engaging 554 participants and generating a total of 12,837 learner hours across the city. From participant evaluations, 90% of parents and carers stated their confidence had improved and 96% reported an improvement in their skills and knowledge.

Families may be signposted or self-refer to the Financial Inclusion Team. Engagement with this service continues to lead to significant financial gains for families across the city and has helped remove some of the barriers to school attendance experienced by families living in poverty such as access to suitable clothing. A Support for Families booklet detailing sources of support is

updated regularly and issued electronically to all families with children in city schools three times each year. Hard copies are also available in all city schools.

Youth Work

The current city-wide early-intervention Youth Work offer continues to provide a holistic model of support aligned with *The Promise*, focusing on improving wellbeing, readiness to learn and positive engagement for children and young people. Youth Workers play a central role in relationship-based practice within schools and communities, offering flexible, trauma-informed support that strengthens protective factors, encourages participation, builds confidence and promotes personal and social development.

In 2025/26, Scottish Attainment Challenge, Strategic Equity Funding continued to resource Youth Workers across every ASG. The allocation of staff is based on needs identified by school partners, with delivery tailored to local priorities. This has enabled a broad range of targeted and universal youth work opportunities, including:

- 1:1 support aimed at improving readiness to learn, school engagement and wellbeing
- Transition support for P7-S1 learners
- Group work programmes focused on confidence, resilience and social skills
- Accredited awards including Hi5, Dynamic Youth Awards and Youth Achievement Awards
- Holiday and open activity programmes
- Partnership delivery within multi-agency teams

These approaches are informed by ongoing evaluation and pupil voice. School wellbeing survey data indicates that youth work interventions continue to have a significant and positive impact, with the majority of local outcomes now exceeding national averages.

In 2025/26, 597 SEF-funded youth work activities engaged 1,516 young people across the city. Evaluations showed that:

- 76% improved their confidence
- 80% improved their skills and knowledge
- 75.8% achieved their learning goals
- Accreditation continues to be a priority, particularly within priority ASGs. In Lochside ASG, 151 young people achieved a Hi5 or Dynamic Youth Award in 2024/25.
- Youth Workers funded through SEF at Hazlehead Academy were recognised nationally at the 2025 Star Awards, winning the Innovation and Bright Sparks category for an intergenerational Dementia Café project developed in partnership with a local care home.
- The expansion of support was further strengthened in 2025 with the introduction of two UKSPF-funded Community Learning Youth Workers in the city centre. Their visible presence and engagement approach have already shown early positive impact, with young people reporting increased feelings of safety and improved relationships with trusted adults
- The City Centre Youth Partnership (CCYP) continues to co-ordinate Youth Horizons, offering free holiday programmes for 12–25-year-olds. In 2025, 44 sessions were delivered across Easter, Summer and October offering creative arts, sport, digital skills,

cooking, music and drop-ins. Young participants reported benefits including new skills, improved social connections and having safe and positive activities during holiday periods.

- Youth participation remains a key priority. The Youth Activities Grant (YAG), managed by Youth Work staff along with members of Aberdeen Youth Movement, allocated £49,809 to 38 organisations in 2025/26, supporting 862 young people. This youth-led grant making model ensures that decision-making reflects young people's priorities and supports opportunities for wellbeing, skills development and active citizenship.
- Aberdeen Youth Movement also supported citywide consultation work, engaging:
 - 390 pupils for the *Your Place, Your Plans, Your Future* programme
 - 849 pupils aged 12–17 in the 2026/27 budget consultations

The increased engagement highlights growing trust in youth work approaches to enabling meaningful participation and amplifying young people's voices in strategic planning.

Youth Workers and Family Learning staff also contribute to multi-agency Edge of Care pilots, offering bespoke early-help support to families experiencing escalating levels of need and risk. Feedback from young people, families and professionals highlights the value of this joint approach. Education Scotland and Aberdeen City's Youth Work and Family Learning teams have collaborated to develop an adapted version of the national Promise Award, now being used across Scotland.

Family Learning

As an early intervention, city-wide provision, Family Learning continues to offer a holistic approach with the primary focus of encouraging families to learn together and improve overall wellbeing. Working with this method of engagement fosters positive attitudes towards lifelong learning, promoting personal and socio-economic resilience, whilst challenging educational disadvantage. Educational interventions involving the whole family are making a significant difference, not only to the aspirations and attainment of children, but also to the skills, confidence and ambition of their parents.

In 2024/25, Family Learning maintained the following offer:

- 1:1 targeted support for parent/carers and their families
- Short courses (face to face/online) in family homes, community spaces and schools
- Open access drop-in groups accessible to all parents/carers across the city
- Holiday activities throughout the year

Opportunities are designed to improve knowledge around specific themes, encourage peer connections, reduce isolation, develop skills and confidence, as well as provide support during challenging times. All provision offered is enhanced by taking a multiagency partnership approach ensuring we provide the right support, in the right way, at the right time for the city's families.

In 2024/25, including all funded delivery (GRF/Strategic Equity Funding/Pupil Equity Funding /UK Shared Prosperity Funding/Whole Family Wellbeing Funding/ Kinship/Edge of Care Pilot) we proved 401 activities to 742 participants with a total of 22,555 learner hours. We also created an SQA pathway to offer accreditation in areas including Using Number Money Level 2, Using Number Money Level 3, Using Number Measuring Level 3 and Working Together Level 4 resulting in 51 qualifications for our learners.

In collaboration with Education Scotland, the team developed a nation-wide training resource to provide a foundational knowledge on the background and current delivery approaches of Family Learning in Scotland and how they align with #KeepingThePromise. It was designed in collaboration with Education Scotland and The Promise Scotland. The resource has supported both Family Learning practitioners and GIRFEC Strategic Leaders who have responsibility for the delivery and governance of both areas.

Family Learning were also a key partner in Education Scotland's ITE placement programme. This Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Placement Programme Evaluation Report was the culmination of a joint programme of work between Education Scotland, ITE providers and local authorities across Scotland. Its success highlighted the willingness of sectors to come together to support the workforce and provide transformational change with longitudinal impact. Providing student teachers with the skills, knowledge, experiences and confidence to engage with parents and families at the earliest of stages creates meaningful, effective and trusting relationship which positively impact children and young people.

Progress against the Community Learning and Development Plan within which both Youth Work and Family Learning sit are regularly reported to Committee and exemplified through case studies.

Removal of the costs of the school day

We have taken a GIRFEC-aligned approach to reducing the cost of the school day, recognising that financial barriers can negatively affect children's wellbeing, participation and ability to benefit fully from education. We have removed all charges for participation in core curriculum activities across primary and secondary schools, ensuring that children and young people can access learning without cost being a barrier. This includes the provision of essential materials and resources for learning, such as ingredients and materials for practical subjects, scientific calculators, musical instruments required for class-based learning, and specialist equipment to support inclusive curriculum delivery. Clear guidance has been provided to schools to embed Cost of the School Day principles within local policies and practice, with a strong emphasis on dignity, reducing stigma and supporting participation in trips and wider learning experiences. The reported impact of this work has been increased equity of access to the curriculum, improved participation and engagement, and reduced anxiety for children and families, particularly those affected by poverty, ensuring that learners can take part fully in school life without cost being a barrier.

Request for Assistance

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

The work done on the Educational Psychology Service system and the new Initial point of contact and single point of contact systems developed for Adult Social Work are supporting the development of the new request for assistance. The new RFA will provide the opportunity to track interventions offered and provide richer outcome data as well as ensuring families and professionals can access the support they require timeously

Workshops have been held to design the scope of Version 2 as the RFA process remains critical in supporting children and young people by streamlining service access and enabling data-driven decisions. Version 2 will address current challenges, enhance the system's value for all stakeholders and be a central component of the escalation routes within our emerging family support model.

Wider achievement in schools

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

There is increased demand for P6 and P7 residentials due to the closure of many outdoor centres over recent years. In order to keep costs to parents and carers at a minimum, schools have been thinking more creatively about P7 activity weeks. Kittybrewster primary pioneered an activity week where the staff and pupils camped using some of the equipment we hold centrally for our Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions and this is an approach being considered by others too.

Aberdeen city has a well-established Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) program, with 15 Centres operating under our local authority licence. We have strong DofE presence with our ASN pupils with DofE groups operating from Orchard Brae School, Bucksburn ASN wing and the Virtual School.

In 2026 there are 837 Young people currently active in the Aberdeen City DofE programme, who are trained and supported by 111 members of staff who volunteer their time to facilitate the awards in our schools.

Aberdeen City has always had strong numbers of young people undertaking the John Muir Awards having the 3rd highest level of pupils in Scotland achieving the award before it stopped in 2023. The John Muir trust is currently seeking proposals for the redesign of the award, once in place Aberdeen City will certainly continue to deliver the award and inspire young people to help conserve, preserve, and restore wild places.

Other awards being undertaken in the city are: JASS (Junior award Scheme Scotland), Saltire awards, Dynamic youth awards, and Youth achievement awards.

The Amped project (an automotive project) based at Northfield and Hazlehead Academies is an after-school programme delivered to pupils interested in a career in the automotive sector. Due to the nature of the workshop training, groups sizes are limited to 4 with up to 20 young people enrolled in the course each term.

The Evolve system for the approval and management of educational visits, sports fixtures, and extracurricular activities has been running for 3 years and is widely praised by staff who prefer the simplicity and speed of the system. For the 24/25 school year, statistics from Evolve show:

- 2740 staff actively using the platform
- 3784 Visits recorded
- 70,414 participant days

During session 25/26 the service supported the **Tall Ships** with 48 primary schools adopting a Tall Ship and following the journey to Aberdeen, communicating with the crew and learning about life on the ship. Each primary school received a treasure box of resources to support learning around a seaside theme. Dory the Dolphin has visited schools ensuring he brings smiles to all he meets. There were 2490 entries for the Art competition from 34 primary and 5 secondary schools.

Access to Health Services

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

The delivery of the full Universal Health Visiting Pathway (UHVP) comprising 11 core home visits, ensures that all families receive timely, relationship-based support in the earliest years. This universal, home-based offer enables Health Visitors to identify financial vulnerability and wider parental needs early—such as challenges linked to mental health, childcare, transport, and access to services—and to connect families swiftly with appropriate supports, thereby helping parents to enter, sustain, or return to employment.

As the national framework for pre-birth to pre-school support, the UHVP embeds a preventative, proportionate model that targets families most at risk while maintaining universal access, directly aligning with the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act duties to reduce child poverty through early intervention, income maximisation, and support for priority family groups.

The refocused School Nursing service, which is structured around ten national priority areas including emotional health and wellbeing, homelessness, looked-after children, domestic abuse, substance misuse, youth justice, young carers and other vulnerabilities, provides targeted, early intervention for school-age children most affected by poverty-related risks. By identifying and responding to these issues—many of which disproportionately impact families experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage—School Nurses help reduce barriers to learning, prevent escalation of crisis, and stabilise the home environment, thereby mitigating disruptions in education and supporting family stability, both of which are critical precursors to long-term employability and improved life chances.

So, what next?

Looking ahead, employment and skills development will continue to be central to tackling child poverty in Aberdeen and remain the most powerful route for individuals and families to secure long-term financial stability. Building on the city's improving employment rate and expanding programmes such as ABZ Campus, the Aberdeen Computing Collaborative and ABZWorks, the focus will be on further strengthening pathways into fair work. Ensuring that parents, carers and young people can access high quality, locally available jobs, training and reskilling opportunities will be essential to improving outcomes for children.

A key priority across the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Locality Plans, the Children's Services Plan, and the Fairer Futures Partnership Programme is to embed ABZ Works employability support within local communities, strengthening engagement and reducing barriers to participation. Community Hubs will play a central role in delivering this ambition, providing welcoming and accessible neighbourhood spaces where people can connect with a wide range of support, services, and opportunities available within their own communities.



Partnership-driven initiatives, including investment in digital skills, paid work experience schemes, targeted parental support, youth work, family learning and the continued removal of financial barriers in education, will continue to promote equity, strengthen resilience and enable families to thrive. Health services and partners also have a vital role in supporting people to move towards and into employment. By addressing physical and mental health needs, promoting wellbeing and providing early, joined-up support, health partners can help reduce barriers to work and sustain positive outcomes.

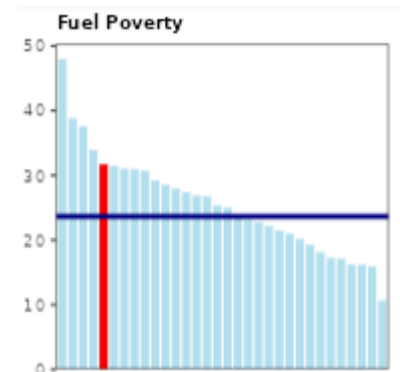
Together, these next steps will support Aberdeen to reduce child poverty by empowering residents with the skills, confidence, wellbeing and opportunities needed to participate fully in the city's evolving economy.

Costs of Living

Costs of living

We continue to be impacted by the challenges created by the Cost-of-Living crisis around fuel costs and high levels of inflation create a greater risk of families falling into poverty. Levels of fuel poverty in the city remain higher than the national average with the Local Authority ranked 5th out of 32 Local Authorities in this measure.

20.4% of City Voice respondents surveyed in 2025 reported they were worried they would not be able to heat their home, a decrease from the last survey in 2024 at 24.6% and a further decrease from 32.0% in December 2022. A significant improvement over the course of the Children's Services Plan 2023-26



The total number of children claiming free school meals across locality settings (P6-P7 & S1-S6) fell from 2859 in 2023 to 2557 in 2024.

Free period products

In 2025 we expanded our range of disposable products in response to recommendations from the Scottish Women's Budget Group. Whilst we have promoted and provided several sustainable options, disposable products are still preferred. The council continues to work with CFINE who deliver the products upon request by each school and community venue. 8,486 boxes of product were delivered to schools and community venues across the city between January 2025 and December 2025. We have been working towards a '20-minute neighbourhood' model in our priority areas to improve access. We have also expanded the range of products to better support the needs of young people with ASN or medical needs. This work must continue.



Addressing food insecurity

Over 2024-25 the Fairer Aberdeen Fund supported the distribution of 562 tonnes of free food (the equivalent of 1.34m meals), and 1251 food bank users were referred to other support services. There were 3,527 shops at community pantries, providing a more dignified and sustainable approach to food insecurity.

In addition, the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee's Cost of Living Support funded an additional 159 tonnes of free food (Equivalent to 378,480 meals) distributed to 85 organisations across the City and 500 weekly pantry shops were provided. Through this funding, 61 people received income maximization support and advice.



Access to free Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

More than 93% parents and carers who responded to the last Parent and Carer Consultation (May/June 2025) identified ELC as having a positive impact on their child's development. The service continues to review demand for provision on an annual basis to ensure that the delivery models are designed around the needs of children and families.

The Scottish Government continues to deliver pilot projects to determine how best to further roll out School Age Childcare. The Authority has previously reported to Education and Children's Services Committee on the National Delivery Framework for School Age Childcare and remains well positioned to react positively when more detailed delivery plans are developed. We await more information on what a targeted School Age Childcare offer will look like for families within communities and a clear timescale for delivery. Meanwhile we are delivering targeted free breakfast provision as part of the Bright Start Breakfasts Fund.

Community support

Funded Community Projects (Aberdeen Lads Club, Fersands Community Project, Fersands Family Centre, and Middlefield Community Project,) provide a range of support include Early Learning, After School Clubs, Family Support, Adult Learning, Youth Work, Community Capacity building and access to free food. Funded Projects also provide direct support to help families facing issues such as fuel poverty, welfare reform, and social exclusion.

Over 2024/25 they supported 865 families, 456 children (0-9 years) and 567 young people (10-18 years). 772 young people took part in diversionary activities, and 944 were involved in activities that reduce social isolation and increase confidence and resilience. 899 young people reported that their confidence had increased, and 893 reported improved mental health and wellbeing. 135 young people moved on to positive destinations (education, employment, training or volunteering).

Fairer Aberdeen Fund

Over 2024/25 the Fairer Aberdeen Programme funded 36 initiatives designed to tackle poverty and a total of 52,120 people benefitted, including 5,602 children and young people. 96% of people supported by the Fund were affected by poverty, living in the most deprived neighbourhoods or in low-income households. The Programme supported 752 volunteers, providing 137,210 hours of volunteering time, with a value of £2.3m.

Funded initiatives provide support for employment and training, income maximisation, families and communities, health and wellbeing, tackling food insecurity, and early intervention programmes to support young people into positive destinations.

Funding was allocated to Community Flats in Cummings Park, Printfield, Tillydrone and Seaton, and a Youth Hub in Middlefield, to increase community capacity, support people with a range of issues, and reduce social isolation and loneliness. They provided a venue for a range of organisations that support employability, welfare reform issues, health and wellbeing activities, family support, and activities for young people.

The Fairer Aberdeen Programme supported 166 parents and families with complex needs, with

group work and home visits to vulnerable and hard to reach families, working to prevent further crisis and family breakdown. Youth clubs were provided for children who experience difficulties at home and are socially isolated, and 230 young people accessed 1,692 counselling sessions.

124 older people were supported to develop digital skills to help them keep in touch with their families and to access online services, and 1,088 households of older people and people with disabilities were supported with income maximisation and sourcing charitable funding, achieving a financial gain of over £585,000.

5,018 people saved with a credit union which provided £1.9m affordable loans, helping people avoid pay day loans and doorstep lenders. 5,566 people received money advice and income maximisation advice, with £2m client financial gain, an average of £1,350 per person.

806 people were involved in employability programmes, with 227 people moving into work. 91 young people moved on to employment, education or training.

Cost of Living Fund

Supporting People with the Cost of Living provides £1m to mitigate against the ongoing cost of living increases. While all households will be affected by increases in the cost of living, national and local data shows it is those with lower incomes and little to no savings who will be most impacted as they spend a higher proportion than average on energy and food and therefore have less flexibility in their budget to cope with price rises.

The Fund supports people who are in crisis to ensure people experiencing food insecurity are able to access good, nutritious food to meet their needs; and fuel, to ensure people are able to heat their homes over winter. Funding was also allocated to provide additional Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grants, and essentials for children and families.

Taking early intervention action, funding was allocated to support food pantries and provide financial advice, to support people on benefits who can't afford their housing costs, to provide winter clothing to ensure children have the clothing they need during cold weather, and provision for low-income families to attend a pantomime at Christmas.

With a prevention approach, funding was allocated to support elderly and disabled people to live independently and safely at home, to reduce delayed discharges for people ready to go home, to provide childcare costs for parents to get back into work, and to raise awareness of poverty to help people understand the effects on individuals and communities.

During 2024-25 over 21,000 people were supported. 159 tonnes of free food was distributed to 85 partners across the city. 696 households received payments to help with fuel bills and 82 households were removed from fuel poverty. 61 people received financial advice with £232,490 financial gain. 1,108 people received a crisis grant, and 146 households were helped with housing costs.

80 pregnant women received maternity clothes and hospital bags to support them and their babies. 4,381 children received winter clothing packs, including warm jackets and shoes. 300 families and children were provided with a Christmas panto package.

During 2025-26 the same amount was allocated to continue to support people with access to food and fuel, income maximisation, supporting families and young people, and addressing financial hardship.

Bright Start Breakfasts Fund

The Scottish Government Bright Start Breakfasts Fund was launched this year as part of the Tackling Child Poverty agenda. The aim of the Fund is to build on existing levels of breakfast provision and expand access to breakfast clubs across Scotland to primary school children. Funding supports existing breakfast clubs to expand their provision, as well as support the establishment of new breakfast clubs. Funding is prioritised towards families who need it most based on income or risk of living in poverty. It is also focused in areas where access to a breakfast club is most needed. The funding was allocated by application, rather than by Local Authority.

Our registered childcare services are less about providing food and more about facilitating the working day, with parents and carers paying to access these services. The majority of registered childcare services in Aberdeen have little or no room to expand. And variations with Care Inspectorate can take time to assess and process. Therefore, we felt that the most effective way to fill existing gaps in breakfast provision and to implement an expanded offer in a relatively short timescale, which supports national and local outcome objectives, is for the school catering service to provide food in-house, in our priority ASGs, and for the pupils arriving early to be supervised by Breakfast Club Workers.

We were delighted that our application was successful for the following Schools:

St Machar ASG

Riverbank (expand)
Seaton (expand)
Woodside (expand)

Lochside

Greyhope (expand)
Tullos (expand)

Northfield ASG

Heathryburn (expand)
Manor Park (expand)
Muirfield (new)
Quarryhill (new)
Westpark (expand)

In partnership with schools and facilities colleagues, 40 free places / breakfasts per school per day have been delivered since Monday 25 August 2025. It is anticipated this will be continued into the 2026/27 school session.

Aberdeen City Libraries

Aberdeen City Libraries play a critical role in tackling poverty and inequality across a network of 11 libraries offering a range of free physical and digital resources, services, activities and support to improve children and young people's health and economic wellbeing. New services in 2025-2026 include enabling children and young people to join the library without barriers due to the removal of the need for a guarantor; the launch of our Scottish Library and Information Council Funded "Innovation Station", a robotics and coding project which now includes the ability for families to borrow shelf ready kits to take home. Already the impact of these innovative initiatives are producing amazing results.

Aberdeen City Libraries have strengthened partnerships with local schools and community partners, ensuring that all children and young people have access to educational opportunities regardless of their background. Partnerships have included provision of Continuous Professional Development to Early Years Practitioners, support to Home Educators, offering sessions to support Youth Horizons, Young Carers sculpture session, attendance at outreach events to enable the service to speak with non-users about what libraries can offer, offering events with, for example, TechFest, Edinburgh Book Festival, SBT Book Week Scotland and Doric Books. Work with schools has seen the service offer guidance and support to develop school libraries, providing schools with opportunities to take part in author events to encourage a love of reading for pleasure and the continuing support from CRIS (Curriculum Resources & Information Service) with the provision of high-quality resources to support learning and enhance children's educational experience. This inclusive approach has fostered a welcoming environment, encouraging lifelong learning and empowering families and practitioners to engage with technology and literacy in meaningful ways.

Embedding the youth voice in response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Library Service has made headway on ensuring young people are engaged in our work and have opportunities to inform planning and development of library services for them. Developments have included Library Champions reviewing library spaces and, with the support of the Service, saw the introduction of soft seatings into 7 of our settings.

Further work saw young people actively engaged in creating a child-friendly version – infographic and video - of the library membership privacy notice. The easy to understand and accessible information is the first step in ensuring library information/reports can be understood by our young people.

The Library Champions have also been supported Aberdeen Youth Movement (AYM) to help participate in commenting on the Scottish Government's draft climate action plan. AYM supported the Library Champions to explore what climate change means to them and their communities. This year, the Service has been an active member of the Aberdeen City Centre Youth Partnership (ACCYP) and delivered several activities as part of the Youth Horizons programme. The Service will continue to support the partnership to identify Safe Spaces in the city centre for our young people.

Warm Spaces

Warm Spaces continue to provide families and young people with access to safe, welcoming and heated environments across the city through a network of Council, community, faith and third-sector venues. Over 30 locations, including libraries, community and learning centres and cultural venues, offer family-friendly spaces with opportunities for play, study, social connection and access to information and support.



The Warm Spaces approach is supported by youth street workers operating in the city centre through Community Learning and Youth Work. Youth workers engage directly with young people, building trusted relationships and promoting libraries and other Warm Spaces as safe places to spend time, keep warm and access support. This includes joint working to encourage positive use of city-centre spaces and signposting young people to appropriate services. This model is informing a more responsive use of community facilities during periods of severe weather to ensure continued access for families and young people.

Fuel Support

Fuel poverty can have a significant impact on people's mental and physical health, particularly over winter. During 2024-25 the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee's Supporting People with the Cost-of-Living fund provided 696 households with payments towards their fuel bills as well as tailored energy efficiency advice via home visits. 82 households were removed from fuel poverty. Families have been able to heat their homes over winter to help ensure their general wellbeing, contributing to improvement in health outcomes in the long term.

In 2025-26 the fund continues to address fuel poverty and fuel debt. To the end of September 2025, 276 people have been supported. 4,896 of fuel vouchers have been issued, £3,940 in non-prepayment meters payments, and £8,070 of fuel debt write off, Smart meter support and supply caps removed. Demand over the winter months is expected to increase.

Aberdeen City Council works in partnership with Scarf, a Scottish social enterprise, that helps elevate fuel poverty throughout the city, working to help households from all tenures who are facing the issues of not being able to afford to heat their homes sufficiently. Members of the public can access the services through a variety of means, with the option of home visits often being the most useful. This allows face to face discussions where help for a variety of issues, from the more complex of fuel debt through to home insulation, help with heating controls, and general energy efficiency, can be addressed. Scarf are also able to access national and local funding to help those facing immediate issues of having no heating in their home.

Emergency formula

The Best Start in Life Group continues to oversee the implementation of a local Infant Feeding in a Crisis Pathway to that appropriate infant formula is available for new parents. The pathway supports both formula feeding and breastfeeding families, supporting with food insecurity and financial health checks. Where a family continue to experience crisis, CFINE deliver ongoing support. Since April 2024 a total of 117 vouchers issued to 91 families through the pathway.

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

This pathway has expanded to Community Partners for them to direct refer to CFINE to support families in Crisis. The pathway was amended so that CFINE can inform health professionals of the crisis support required for the family.

Moving into the next phase of the work, the group continues to look for ways to extend the reach services likely to come into contact with those who may need to use the Pathway. Work will also include the development and sharing of promotional materials in key settings (such as Libraries and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings to increase the scope of self-referral from families themselves)

Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods Support

The number of Best Start grant and Best Start Foods applications received from city residents has seen a declining trend over recent years. In 2022/2023, there were 3,065 applications, while in 2024/2025, the number decreased to 1,630. This equates to a reduction in applications of 46.8%,

This trend aligns with the Scotland-wide data, where applications decreased from 85,830 in 2022/2023 to 47,745 in 2024/2025, representing a 44.3% reduction. The city's share of Scotland-level applications also dropped slightly from 3.6% in 2022/2023 to 3.2% in 2024/2025.

As at the year-to-date (September 2025) there have been 670 applications in total, in contrast to 935 at the same point in 2024/25.

Kit For All Initiative

The Kit for All initiative by Active Schools Aberdeen aims to ensure that children and young people don't miss out on opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity because they don't have the right clothing or equipment. By collecting and redistributing good-quality pre-loved sports kit and an 'open to all' approach, the programme removes financial barriers and stigma, supporting families and partners to access the kit they need, when needed. This allows children and young people to take part in PE, extracurricular clubs and community activities with confidence and promotes equality across the city.



Access to School Age Childcare (SAC)

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

In our most recent Early Learning and Childcare Consultation with Parents and Carers (2025), 55% of respondents anticipated that they would require wraparound care once their child(ren) starts Primary School (+10% from 2023). It is therefore important that we also look ahead and consider future coverage. We will continue to facilitate communication between parents and carers currently accessing Early Learning and Childcare / Nursery provisions as part of our statutory duties to engage with parents and carers every 2 years, as well as SAC providers regarding future supply and demand.

Affordability continues to be a concern for many families with just over 17% (same as 2023) saying they do not access SAC due to cost. We are also increasingly aware that cost can be an ongoing concern for many families who are currently in work but facing cost of living challenges. 54% (+6% from 2023) of respondents to our recent School Age Childcare Parent and Carer consultation said they were unaware of any available financial support available towards SAC costs. Only 28% of respondents (-1% from 2023) stated that they currently receiving support. Of those, 64% are accessing Tax Free Childcare. Therefore, it is essential that this information is made more readily available.

We will continue to work with the Financial Inclusion Team and all SAC providers to ensure that all parents and carers are made aware of what financial support is potentially available to assist with the costs of SAC. We will also continue to link with the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) to ensure that all information shared is current and in line with their ongoing drive to promote potentially available childcare financial support and benefits.

Childsmile & Public Dental Services

The provision of universal, free dental prevention and treatment, alongside routine distribution of oral-health packs such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, ensures that all children—regardless of household income—can access high-quality oral healthcare without financial barriers. By minimising the number of required appointments and delivering care within community settings, the service reduces indirect costs for families, including travel, childcare, and lost earnings, which disproportionately impact households experiencing poverty.

So, what next?

The wide-ranging programme of support to help families navigate the cost of living crisis, maximise income and strengthen community-based provision will continue to evolve and expand.

Through the Aberdeen Family Support Model, partners will ensure families can access a universal offer of advice and practical assistance within their local communities. Enhanced data sharing coordinated referral pathways, and collaborative commissioning will create a seamless experience, while community hubs provide welcoming spaces for families to connect with support, services, and opportunities.

This approach equips families with practical tools and information to manage day-to-day expenses, strengthen resilience, and build long-term wellbeing.

Income from social security

Money Advisors

The Council provided money advice support to families across the city through the Financial Inclusion Team, funded in part through Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC). While support is available to school communities, advisers are not directly attached to individual schools. Instead, families can access services through a range of routes, including referrals from schools and other partners, as well as through central access points.

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

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

- Financial Gains of £170,459.46
- Assisted/Assisting 56 households with debt issues.
- Helping with total debts of £411,713.37
- 103 households were given full benefit checks.
- Assisted 47 households to claim benefits.
- Assisting 3 households to challenge being turned down for benefits.

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

- Financial Gains - £447,327.68
- Assisted/assisting 148 household with debt issues
- Helping with debts of £924,165.05
- 205 households given full benefit checks.
- Assisted 61 households to claim benefits.
- Assisted 4 households to challenge being turned down for benefits.

Data from the online benefits calculator shows that 2170 families have used the online benefit calculator. Of the completed calculation, 1722 families had £442,827.77** per week of new benefits identified.

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

Maximising the uptake of benefits

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

Resources and support booklets are available electronically through schools and in hard copies, covering various stages of a child's development to support parents. These booklets are shared thrice yearly via school communication channels. Data available indicates a substantial increase in online benefit calculator accessed following booklet distribution (from £38,448.64/week to £120,759.40/week) following January 2026 distribution.

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

The implementation of the Policy in Practice LIFT Dashboard has further enabled the Local Authority to identify households most in need, allowing for targeted support and effective resource prioritisation. Since March 2025, Aberdeen City Council has used data led targeting via the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) to proactively identify households likely to be entitled to support but not currently receiving it.

This has resulted in an additional:

- 768 households contacted
- £497,660.37 in additional household income secured

These interventions include benefits such as:

- Free School Meals
- Education Maintenance Allowance
- School Clothing Grants
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Rent Assistance Fund

The June 2025 redesign of the Early Years Financial Inclusion Pathway (EYFIP) strengthened NHS Grampian's statutory duties under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act by integrating **direct income-maximisation referrals into the Morse system**, enabling Health Visitors and Family Nurses to refer families instantly to Healthpoint in Aberdeen City for specialist financial support. This redesign also improved data-sharing processes, allowing clearer monitoring of need, uptake, and outcomes. Between June 2025 and January 2026, 52 families were supported through this enhanced pathway, demonstrating meaningful impact for families at risk of or experiencing poverty. In addition, work is underway to extend direct referral capability to Midwifery teams via BadgerNet, with further planned expansion to Allied Health Professionals (AHPs), ensuring that all early-years practitioners can provide timely, equitable access to income-maximisation support. Collectively, these actions embed early intervention, reduce financial stressors, and strengthen access to social security

Scottish Child Payment

Latest Social Security Scotland data shows that in 2024/25; there were an additional 1,555 applications from city residents to the Scottish Child Payment fund. This represented a reduction on the 1,720 applications received in the same period in the previous year.

In 2025/26, a total of 990 applications from Aberdeen City had been processed up to 31 December 2025. While monthly application volumes continue to fluctuate, this in-year position indicates that total applications in 2025/26 are likely to remain similar to, or lower than, those recorded in 2024/25, and below the levels seen in 2023/24.

Across all years, applications from Aberdeen City account for around 3% of all Scottish Child Payment applications nationally. This proportion has remained broadly consistent over time, is below the population-adjusted average for Scotland's urban local authorities, and is comparable with the City of Edinburgh, Aberdeen's closest matching authority.

As of 31 December 2025, there were 10,170 children in Aberdeen City actively benefitting from Scottish Child Payment. This compares with 10,335 children at the same point in 2023, indicating a modest reduction over time. When considered alongside recent population projections and earlier estimates of the eligible child population, these figures suggest that the proportion of Aberdeen's children benefitting from the payment has continued to decline year-on-year.

The most recent Scottish Government uptake estimates, covering 2023/24, indicate that uptake of Scottish Child Payment in Aberdeen City was 89.0%. This is in line with the national average and marginally higher than the average across the city's benchmarked family groups for which comparative data is available.

Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund

Funding secured from the Scottish Government through the Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund (Round 3, 2025/2026) has supported the continued development and embedding of the Low-Income Family Tracker. This includes a specific focus on improving the identification of low-income families with children who have additional support needs (ASN), who are at heightened risk of financial pressure.

The tracker enables Aberdeen City Council to identify families who are in crisis, or at risk of falling into crisis, and who would benefit financially from targeted, proactive engagement.

Free school meals

Aberdeen City is part of a test of change project to extend entitlement to free school meals to learners in S1 to S3 where families receive the Scottish Child Payment. This test of change began in August 2025 running to the end of the academic year. This has increased the number of learners recorded as entitled to receive free school meals, in S1 to S3, from 1178 in February 2025 (18.3% of S1 to S3 learners) to 2038 in February 2026 (31.75%).

Of those receiving free school meals due to being in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment (and not entitled due to low income) uptake in February 2026 was 617 of 874 (70.59% received at

least one free school meal in February). Uptake for the group of learners in S1 to S3, receiving free school meals due to low income, for the same period was 827 of 1815 learners (45.56%).

Combined uptake for S1 to S3 is 1444 of 2689 entitled (53.70%). This demonstrates that the test of change is being positively received by qualifying learners/families and uptake is significantly higher than that of the low-income group.

With the introduction of free school meals for P6 to P7 learners with families in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment and the current S1 to S3 test of change, the overall percentage of learners qualifying for free school meals due to low income or the Scottish Child Payment has risen from 16.26% in 2024/25 to 25.46% in 2025/26.

Update of Early Learning and Childcare for Eligible 2s

317 Eligible 2 year old children were placed in Early Learning and Childcare in 2024/25 (+90 from 2023/24) and representing approximately 39.6% of the eligible population (+2.2% from 2023/24). The introduction of a new Data Pipeline Project with the DWP has helped to increase uptake through better targeting of those who are eligible. The team have also implemented improved processes to increase uptake further and we expected to see higher numbers in 2024/25 as a result of these. Work to continue to expand uptake will be included in our refreshed Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan published in June 2026.

So, what next?

Maximising household income remains a vital component of tackling child poverty. The Money Advisor model will expand beyond schools into community hubs, providing families with targeted support to access benefits, debt advice, and financial planning.

Tools such as the online benefits calculator, the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard, and proactive engagement with families affected by the benefit cap will continue to improve financial outcomes. Integration with wider supports including the Scottish Welfare Fund, free school meal initiatives, and early learning and childcare uptake will ensure families receive the full range of entitlements available to them.

By combining targeted financial support with broader cost of living initiatives, families will be better equipped to achieve stability, prevent crises, and improve the long-term life chances of children.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROMISE



As a partnership we continue to align our local priorities with Plan 24–30 from The Promise Scotland. Ensuring that our local changes continues to build on progress previously achieved. This year we have undergone major structural changes, service improvements, workforce development, increased youth participation, and strengthened planning and governance.

Strategic Alignment and Governance

This year we have worked to ensure that our refreshed Corporate Parenting Plan (2026-2029) aligns with the new Children's Services Plan 2026-31 and wider LOIP 2026-36 priorities to create a unified, whole-family approach. The new Aberdeen City Promise Board has been established to ensure accountability and consistent cross-cluster oversight of all Promise-related work.

There has been increasing demand on services, alongside the need for strong professional leadership and governance, ensuring we continue to promote social work standards, handling statutory duties, and ensuring oversight of Corporate Parenting, child protection and wider social work services across complex partnership structures.

Our Children's Services Board remains a key vehicle for driving Promise-related improvement, with ongoing monitoring of our Improvement projects across mental health, care leavers' housing, youth justice, family support, early years, and participation.

This chapter of the report provides extensive detail on the work we are undertaking to support our Care Experienced children, young people and their families

Delivering the Five Foundations of *The Promise*

Family – Supporting Families Early

Services such as **Includem** and the **Craigielea Intensive Support Service** have continued to provide intensive wraparound support to help prevent family breakdown and reduce the need for children to enter care. Multiagency pilot projects within secondary schools support whole family engagement and aim to reduce escalation of need. Adult learning programmes like **Peep** have further strengthen early family support, contributing to improved parental confidence and connection.

Care – Improving the Experience of Being Looked After

Work continues to strengthen care placements, support kinship, foster, and adoptive families, and improve Family Time arrangements. A trauma informed Family Time Hub continues to support meaningful relationships and positive transitions. The Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Service provides training and wraparound support to ensure carers feel confident, valued, and well supported in their role, reducing placement breakdown and improving stability for young people.

We also continue to respond to findings from The Promise Scotland's thematic work on transitions to adulthood. Local work is linked with the Royal Foundation Homewards programme to help prevent youth homelessness, reflecting commitments around housing stability for care experienced young people.

People – Developing a Skilled and Compassionate Workforce

Workforce development has been a major area of activity. Training programmes for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs), teachers, and multiagency partners help build a system where everyone understands their Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Updated Corporate Parenting Training modules — including eLearning and in person sessions — aim to ensure 80% of the required workforce completes training aligned to The Promise by 2025. New content incorporates trauma-informed practice, routinely updated guidance on The Promise and the UNCRC, and learning drawn from the lived experience of care experienced young people.

Performance in staff supervision, training uptake—including Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) training—and participation in workforce wellbeing initiatives continues to strengthen our professional capacity. DDP further enhances this by equipping staff with relationship-based, trauma-responsive approaches that help build safety, trust and emotional connection with children, young people and families. For example, in our residential services, the embedding of DDP principles has led to more consistent, attuned responses that help young people feel safer, reduce incidents of distress, and strengthen their ability to form trusting relationships with key staff.

Multi-agency staff conferences, collaboration with Robert Gordon University, and leadership development opportunities are further contributing to an increasingly skilled and confident workforce equipped to support vulnerable children and families.

Scaffolding – Building Structures that Support Change

We have begun to develop the **Promise Progress Framework** as a core approach to monitoring change, enabling better analysis and national benchmarking. This framework will support stronger understanding of outcomes and areas where more support is needed. It also complements the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding programme, which provides further opportunity to scale preventive family support across the partnership.

Voice – Listening to Children and Young People

Our **Bright Spots programme**, delivered in partnership with CELCIS and Coram Voice and reported in detail in our last Annual Report, achieved a **72% response rate for children and young people in care and 69% of care leavers** —the highest in Scotland. The survey was completed by care experienced children and young people across a range of settings, including those in foster care, kinship care, residential care, and care leavers. This provided robust insights into their wellbeing, relationships, sense of safety, support, rights, and areas where improvement is required. These findings have been integrated into the High-Level Promise Plan and increasingly guide Corporate Parenting improvement activity, helping us align practice with the UNCRC and ensure children's rights are consistently upheld.

Building on feedback from Care Experienced Children and Young People through Bright Spots we have continued to increase the influence they have on the ways in which our services are delivered. Below is a short summary of the activities that have been undertaken to better involve our children and young people in the strategic work and have a say on the support they receive:

Using the Voice of Young People and Upholding the UNCRC

Throughout the year, Aberdeen's Corporate Parents have worked to ensure that the voices of care experienced young people are heard, valued, and acted upon. The following examples highlight key engagement activities where young people influenced decisions and services, demonstrating a clear feedback loop and alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly Article 12 (the right to be heard) and Article 3 (best interests of the child).

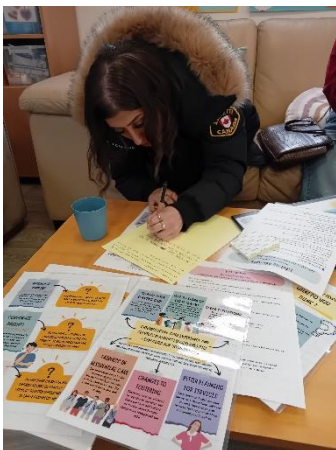
Soup and Sweet: Employability and Training

Monthly 'Soup and Sweet' sessions provide a relaxed space where young people can enjoy home cooked food and feel a sense of connection and belonging. In June, 19 young people attended a Soup and Sweet session themed around employability and training and shared what support they felt would help them move towards employment. ABZ Works joined the session to speak with young people about the support and training opportunities available to them. As a direct result, ABZ Works were able to respond on the night, with young people signing up for support and training opportunities. Feedback from the session has been shared with partners to shape future employability engagement, ensuring support reflects what young people have said they need



Employability Focus Group

Findings from our Bright Spots survey, highlighted that nearly half (47%) of care leavers in Aberdeen were not in education, employment, or training, compared to just 13% of 16-24 year-olds in the general population. Following this, a focus group was held by our Graduate Researcher with care experienced young people to understand barriers they face in accessing education, employment, and training, and to identify practical solutions. Using interactive activities, young people discussed challenges they face and shared ideas for improvement. Their ideas and suggested solutions were shared with partners, including ABZ Works, to inform how employability and training support is delivered. This ensures services are shaped by lived experience and respond directly to what young people have told us.



Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill Focus Group

A focus group was held to gather young people's views on legislative changes through a youth-friendly version of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill. The session encouraged open discussion, questions, and honest feedback, enabling young people to engage meaningfully with complex policy proposals that affect their lives. Their views were shared directly with the Scottish Government and their lived experience helped highlight key concerns and priorities, ensuring that national decision-makers heard directly from Aberdeen's care experienced young people when considering

proposed changes.

Ongoing from 2024 – Recruitment with Real Impact

Young people have been actively involved in interviewing candidates for a range of roles, including social work, residential care, and disability services. Young people engage in a variety of creative activities and playful games with candidates, which enable genuine conversations and connections to occur between young people and candidates. Young people's feedback is taken into account as part of recruitment decision-making, ensuring candidates understand the importance of listening to and respecting young people. This ongoing approach helps shape services by influencing who is recruited into roles working directly with children and young people.



Independent Reviewing Officer Focus Group

Care leavers in Aberdeen took part in a focus group with a Lead Independent Reviewing Officer to review draft national guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers. All feedback from the session was shared with the national team responsible for developing the guidance and young people's suggestions were used to inform revisions, helping ensure the final guidance better reflects what young people need from the review process.



Corporate Parenting Plan Focus Group

As part of Care Experienced Week, care experienced young people and corporate parents came together to explore key themes such as housing, health, education, employment, and training through creative activities and discussion. Feedback from young people has been used to inform the development and refresh of the Corporate Parenting Plan. Their priorities and experiences are shaping the actions corporate parents commit to, ensuring the plan reflects what matters most to young people and place young people's voices at the heart of updating Aberdeen's Corporate Parenting Plan.



Young Person's Rights Service Focus Group

Young people worked alongside staff in the Right's Service to redesign how information about the Young Person's Rights Service is presented. Activities included brainstorming, sketching ideas, and providing feedback on design concepts. Young people's ideas directly informed the development of new promotional materials, including a refreshed logo and flyer. Feedback gathered through both group sessions and one-to-one conversations ensured the service is promoted in a way that young people said would work best for them



Improving Transitions and Outcomes for Care-Experienced Young People

Significant work has focused on improving transitions, housing, education, and preparation for adulthood:

- The Care Leavers Housing Protocol is being reviewed to include updated legal changes and strengthen referral pathways, with the aim of reducing tenancy breakdowns and increasing safety and stability for young people leaving care.
- The Northeast Scotland College After Care Support Forum is helping care experienced students access financial support, pathways into learning or work, and supportive relationships, reducing barriers that can lead to poor long term outcomes.
- We continue to develop better means to ensure Care Experienced Children and Young People receive high quality mental health support, particularly earlier intervention, improving referral systems and the quality and consistency of health assessments.

Challenges

Several challenges continue to influence our progress:

- Rising complexity of need and increased pressures on staff workloads
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced social workers
- Ongoing budget constraints
- Need for more local placements and specialist supports for complex cases
- Ensuring consistent data sharing and improved evaluation of outcomes

Ongoing Areas for Improvement

We continue to strengthen our collective approach as Corporate Parents, supported by improved governance, strong leadership, and closer alignment of services. As we move into the next Children's Services Plan cycle, sustained partnership working and early intervention remain essential to Keeping The Promise.

Our work is guided by the Corporate Parenting Action Plan (2026–2029) and shaped by the lived experience of children, young people and care leavers. Improvement activity remains focused on the following priority areas:

Participation and Voice

We will embed meaningful participation in planning and service delivery, ensuring young people influence decisions and hold us accountable.

Rights and Advocacy

We will uphold children's rights in line with the UNCRC and The Promise, ensuring that every care experienced young person is treated with dignity, respect and fairness and supported to understand their rights, express their views and influence the decisions that affect them

Health and Wellbeing

We will ensure that care experienced children and young people have access to timely, high quality physical and mental health support, promote emotional wellbeing, reduce health inequalities, and embed trauma-informed approaches across all services.

Relationships and Belonging

Prioritise stable, nurturing relationships and a sense of belonging, supporting family connections and trusted adult relationships.

Education, Attainment and (Positive)Transitions

Improve attendance and achievement while expanding pathways into further and higher education, training, and employment through personalised support that removes barriers to learning and employability.

Housing and Transitions

Strengthen support for young people moving into adulthood, ensuring safe, stable housing and smooth transitions from care, reducing homelessness risk.

These areas remain central to improving outcomes, reducing inequalities and upholding the rights of care experienced children, young people and care leavers as we continue to build on progress made.

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
Where children are in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way	The rate of children entering care decreases. For those that do need to enter care, a higher proportion are able to stay living at home with parents, or in a family setting in kinship care or foster care	Number and rate of children in the 'care system' during the year	446 (31 July 2025)
		2. Number of children (0-17 years) entering the 'care system' during the year	120 (between 1 August and 31st July 2024/25)
		3. Number and percentage of children in the 'care system' who are living at home with parents	60 (13.45%) (31 July 2025)
		4. Number and percentage of children in the 'care system' living in the community	32 (7%) (31 July 2025)
		5. Number and percentage of children who are living in kinship	95 (21%) (31 July 2025)
		6. Number and percentage of children who are living in foster care	200 (45%) (31 July 2025)
		7. Number and percentage of children who are living in residential care each year	59 (13%) (31 July 2025)

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
	The underlying universal support system must support all families and identify those who need more support.	1. Rate of registrations to the child protection register from initial and pre-birth Case Conferences during the year per 1,000 0-15 year olds	3.3 per 1000 (between 1 August and 31st July 2024/25)
		2. Percentage of child death reviews which identified modifiable factors in a child's death	Not currently held.
		3. Percentage of children with a developmental concern recorded at their 13-15 months, 27-30 months, and 4-5 year reviews.	13-15mnth: Aberdeen – 8.4% Scotland – 12.5% 27-30 mnth: Aberdeen – 10.2% Scotland: 17.9% 4-5 yr: Aberdeen – 17.2% Scotland – 16.6%
		4. Number and percentage of children living in temporary accommodation.	376 households in temp 50 (13.3%) with children or pregnant mothers (2025)
		5. Two year averaged estimate of the number and proportion of children living in relative poverty after housing costs.	7,825/19.1% (2023/24)
		6. Two-year averaged estimate of the number and proportion of children living in absolute poverty after housing costs.	6,011/15.4% (2023/24)
		7. Number and rate of children on the Child Protection Register, with domestic abuse listed as a concern identified.	46 (31 July 2025)
Scotland must limit the number of moves that children experience and support carers to continue to care.	The average number of homes a child experiences each year decreases.	1. Percentage of children who have experienced 3 or more homes within the last year.	4% over 2024/25
	For children for whom it is safest to live away from their family, there must be sufficient availability of carers who can provide stable loving environments	1. Number of registered foster care households per 1,000 0–17-year-olds, and relative to number of children in the 'care system'.	69 households 1.9 1000 children
		2. Number of foster carer deregistration's in the last year.	10 De-registration in the last year.
		3. Care Homes for children and young people and residential special schools workforce: - Size of WTE (Whole-time equivalent) workforce, rounded to the nearest 10	

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
		- Vacancy rate in Care Homes for children and young people - Vacancy rate in residential special schools	50 Vacancies – 8.7% Not Known
		4. The Secure care workforce, in terms of: - Size of WTE workforce, rounded to the nearest 10 - Vacancy rate	Data not available
	There must be sufficient capacity within children's social services to recruit loving, attentive carers and support them to continue to care, and provide children and young people with stability when moves need to happen	1. Staff working in children's fieldwork services, including qualified social workers: - WTE (rounded to nearest 10) - Rate per 100,000 0-17 year olds - Stability index	170 1 member of staff to 247 children.
Schools in Scotland must be ambitious for care experienced children and ensure they have all they need to thrive, recognising that they may experience difficulties associated with their life story.	Care experienced young people spend more time in school.	1. Rate of attendance for pupils who experienced care at some point within the school year.	2024/25 -88.28%
		2. Cases of exclusions per 1,000 pupils who experienced care at some point within the school year.	Number of pupils excluded: 2022/23 -316.09 per 1000 2023/24 - 554.88 per 1000 2024/25 - 659.86 per 1000
	The average attainment of care experienced young people increases.	1. Proportion of pupils who experienced care at some point within the school year at stages P1, P4, P7 and S3 achieving the curriculum for excellence level relevant to their stage.	P1 (24/25) Reading – 37.5% Writing – 50% L&T – 62.5% Numeracy – 62.5% P4 (24/25) Reading –55.56% Writing –44.44 % L&T –55.56 % Numeracy –44.44 %

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
			P7 (24/25) Reading –58.82 % Writing –29.41 % L&T –70.59% Numeracy –41.18 % S3 – Level 3 (24/25) Reading – 33.33% Writing –41.67 % L&T – 41.67% Numeracy –30.77 % S3 – Level 4 (24/25) Reading –0 % Writing –0 % L&T – 8.33% Numeracy –7.69%
		2. Proportion of pupils who experienced care during their last year at school achieving at least one SCQF level 5 qualification (or better).	2023/24 – 35% 2024 /25 – 27.78%
		3. Proportion of pupils who experienced care during their last year at school achieving at least 1 SCQF level 6 qualification (or better).	2024 /25 – 11.11%
		4. Proportion of pupils who experienced care during their last year at school in a positive destination 9 months after leaving school.	60% (2023/24)
Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.	The number of brother and sisters staying together in the 'care system' increases.	1. Proportion of family groups living in foster families who have been separated.	33.82% (As of 02/01/2025 – from D365)
		2. Number and proportion of new foster care households approved for family groups of 2 children, and 3 or more children.	4 knew fostering households approved to take a family group of 2 or above.
Scotland must strive to	The use of physical	1. Number of incidences of physical restraint reported between 1st	Aberdeen City does not utilise physical restraint as a

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
become a nation that does not restrain its children.	restraint in residential care should be reduced, and where possible eliminated.	January and 31st December in care homes for children and young people.	means of managing children's behaviour within our care homes. We are aware that we commission care from external providers who do utilise this approach. It is the duty of the care provider to such instances.
		2. Number of incidences of seclusion reported between 1st January and 31st December in care homes for children and young people.	Aberdeen City does not utilise seclusion as a means of managing children's behaviour within our care homes. We are aware that we commission care from external providers who do utilise this approach. It is the duty of the care provider to such instances.
		3. Number of incidences of Physical restraint reported between 1st January and 31st December in secure care.	Nil
		4. Number of incidences of seclusion reported between 1st January and 31st December in secure care.	Nil
		5. Number of incidences of physical restraint reported between 1st January and 31st December in school accommodation services.	
		6. Number of incidences of seclusion reported between 1st January and 31st December in school accommodation services.	
Scotland must seek to uphold the wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people and ensure that there is timely access to, mental health support before crisis	The number of staff employed in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is proportionate to demand.	1. Number of staff employed in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	130 FTE (June 2024) NHSG

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
point so that children can avoid hospitalisation.			
Care experienced children and young people have access to support ensuring that their health needs are fully met.	Health outcomes, and access to health services improve for care experienced children and young people.	No Indicator Identified	
Scotland must stop locking up children who have often experienced the failures of the state in the provision of their care.	The number of young people entering young offenders' institutions decreases.	1. Number of under 21s in custody.	
		2. Average number of children in secure care on a given day throughout the year.	<5 (2025/26)
		3. Number of referrals to the children's reporter on offence grounds.	01/04/2025 – 31/03/2025 287 offence referrals for 125 children
Young adults for whom Scotland has taken on parenting responsibility must have a right to return to care and have access to services and supportive people to nurture them.	The number of young care experienced people receiving support increases.	1. Proportion of young people who are eligible for aftercare services who are receiving services.	76% (2025)
		2. Number and proportion of eligible young people who are going on to continuing care.	44 (4.9%)
Care experienced adults must have a right to access to supportive, caring services for as long as they require them. Those services and the people who	The number of households experiencing homelessness decreases.	1. Number and rate of people of working age living in poverty.	The number of working age adults living in relative poverty from the most recent data was approximately 27,000, 18% of the work age population
		2. Number of households living in temporary accommodation.	458 Households (September 2025)
		3. Number of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness.	455 Households (September 2025)

Promise Vision Statement	Outcome	Core Indicators (2025/26)	Data
work in them must have a primary focus on the development and maintenance of supportive relationships that help people access what they need to thrive.	Support for people who use drugs or alcohol increases.	1. Number and proportion of people receiving help for problematic drug and alcohol use within waiting times standard.	Alcohol: 20 (Dec 25) 90% started treatments within 21 days Drugs: 35 (Dec 25) 100% started treatments within 21 days
	Support for adult mental health increases.	1. Number and proportion of people receiving psychological therapy within referral guidelines	Data not available

Whole Family Wellbeing Funding

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) is a long term investment fund distributed on an annual basis to support delivery of The Promise. The funding channelled through local authorities is to support Children's Services Planning Partnerships across Scotland to scale up and drive the delivery of whole family support services in their areas and build capacity for transformational change. We have to date extensively considered the development of our Family Support Model. In the year ahead we envisage this to move into delivery and will see significant developments in how we delivery preventative support to families in our City, particularly those living in our most deprived communities.

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

Scaling up Youth and Family Support

Investment in work of Youth Workers, Family Learning and Financial Inclusion (early prevention work) aligned to Family Support Model.

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

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

Request for Assistance

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

This has proved more challenging than anticipated due to technical challenges, but progress is being made and this will form part of the Family Support Model being developed as part of our Fairer Futures Partnership. The updated Request for Assistance Model will:

- reduce bureaucracy enabling more timely support to be provided:
- enhance our insight into changing patterns of demand, which in turn will allow us to flex the family support offer to meet that demand
- it will also enable consideration to be given to potential ways in which universal support could be adapted to stem demand.

Over time it is envisaged that further development of the Request for Assistance system will enable connection to a far wider range of Teir 2, early help support, across the partnership. Discussion with local partners evidence strong appetite for this.

Co-Located Multidisciplinary Teams

We have continued to develop our multi-disciplinary approaches to supporting young people on the edges of care and school in Northfield, Lochside and St. Machar Academies. This is ensuring more effective and holistic planning for the children and families most in need of our support.

The multi-disciplinary teams provide wrap around support in all three Academies. There is a base within Northfield and St Machar Academies providing onsite support which is accessible to the young people who have been identified as requiring extra support individually and as a family.

Going forward we will continue to evaluate the impact of this work and its connection to other activity that supports some of our most vulnerable children and young people who struggle to meaningfully engage in education.

Supporting Kinship Carers

Building the capacity of kinship carers to enable them to feel supported and have their own needs recognised more effectively has continued. ([Kinship Whole Family Wellbeing Fund Project Report](#)). Evidence from this activity demonstrates increased stability for children and young people in kinship placements preventing a number from having to be moved to care out with their family network. Feedback from kinship carers continues to identify the value of preventive and responsive support.

The Scottish Government have recently consulted on the “Vision for Kinship Care”. Evaluating our practice against this vision has supported the strength of our current offer but also a recognition that we need to continue to develop this offer to respond the complex needs of children living within a kinship placement.

Support to kinship carers continues to be offered by a variety of multi agencies. Support groups have been established including a Kinship/ASN group. Two Information Events have taken place, linking kinship families with relevant organisations and a Support Guide has been given to all carers.

Bairns Hoose/Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM)

SCIM continues to be at the head of our Bairns Hoose - ensuring every child who has experienced abuse or neglect has access to a Bairn's Hoose model of support including access to a trauma recovery service.

Our Bairns Hoose opened in August 2025 and offers a multi-agency and co-located service. This service will be rights focused and ensure 'recovery' is core to our intervention. The recovery element will be fully aligned to our wider family support offer.

The Bairns Hoose has been designed in collaboration with young people to create a trauma informed environment in which children, young people and their families feel safe when accessing child protection supports.



Parent Support – Children with ASN/Neurodiversity

Building on a test of change which focused on how we support families pre and post a neurodiverse diagnosis we intend to scale this test up using WFWF. This will ensure holistic family support, building parental capacity, to understand and respond to the needs of their child. It will also support professionals wrapped around the child to understand their needs and how support should be targeted. This change will be led by Improving health colleagues but will have a multi-disciplinary approach to the support offer.

SPACE Programme

Sport Aberdeen remains committed to its role as a corporate parent and supporting the implementation of The Promise. This includes designing sport and physical activity programmes that actively include care experienced children and young people and providing opportunities for their voices to be heard. The SPACE programme continues to work closely with Virtual School Aberdeen to deliver bespoke 1-2-1 sport and physical activity sessions across Aberdeen. The programme takes a whole-family approach to wellbeing, with free memberships provided to care experienced young people and a member of their support network

OUR CHILDREN'S SERVICES BOARD



Over 2025 and into early 2026, The Children's Services Board has worked together as a broad partnership to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families. We have continued to coordinate our efforts to supporting children and families in Aberdeen

During 2025/26, our Board has overseen and supported a wide range of improvement activities aimed at making life better for children, young people and their families. We concentrated on delivering the commitments of our 2023–26 Children's Services Plan while also responding to emerging needs and opportunities. Here are the main areas of work and what we achieved:

In 2023 we initiated an ambitious programme of 32 multi-agency improvement projects spanning early years, health, education, and youth justice. 16 of these projects have now achieved their aims. These projects, led by various partners, tackled issues from infant nutrition to youth employability, all aligned to our strategic outcomes. Further details of each of the areas covered by our projects can be found below as well as in our Local Outcome Improvement Plan Annual Report 2025/26

Whole-Family Support and Early Intervention

A major development this year has been the initiation of the Fairer Futures partnership. With this support, we developed a high-level implementation plan and appointed dedicated leadership to drive forward a new family support model. This model focuses on early intervention for families who are struggling, aiming to prevent problems from escalating. In practical terms, it means our services (across social work, health, and community sectors) are working more closely together to identify families in need early – for instance, families affected by parental mental health issues or financial hardship – and provide coordinated help. This has helped shape the design and development of a new pilot Case Worker model: working with third-sector partners, we are creating dedicated link worker roles to support vulnerable families with children under five, starting from pregnancy through the early years. By engaging families as early as the antenatal stage, a case worker will build trusted relationships and help parents navigate the system – making sure they know where to get advice on health, find parenting support, access childcare or food support, and so on. Our aim is that *by providing one consistent point of contact ("a single, trusted professional") and practical help at the right time, families will feel more supported and connected*, reducing the need for crisis interventions later. This whole-family, preventative approach is a direct result of our partnership's commitment to early help, and we're excited to carry it forward.

National Pathfinder Initiatives (Innovation and Best Practice)

We have actively contributed to innovative national initiatives to bring best practices to Aberdeen. Notably, as part of the Scottish Government's GIRFE (Getting It Right for Everyone) pathfinder, we helped develop a national "Team Around the Person" toolkit. This toolkit is about improving how agencies work together around each child or young person, ensuring holistic support (building on the GIRFEC principles). Our involvement in its development means we are well-placed to adopt these practices locally, making support plans more child-centred and coordinated. In addition, we continued preparations for the opening of our first "Bairnshoose" our child-friendly justice and care centre. Aberdeen was selected as one of Scotland's pathfinder sites for the "Barnahus" model (locally called Bairn's Hoose), which brings together justice, health, and recovery services under one roof for children who have experienced trauma or abuse^{2 3}. Over 2025 our Board members (including Police, social work and health representatives) have been planning how to integrate services in the new Bairnshoose, so that children only have to tell their story once in a safe, supportive environment. We are proud to be at the forefront of this trauma-informed approach, and by the end of 2025 we are nearly ready to launch the centre.

Health and Wellbeing Focus – Tackling Emerging Issues

This year we have been responsive to data and trends identified through our annual needs assessments. One example is how we have reacted to concerns about healthy weight and nutrition among children. Evidence from last year's report showed a rise in unhealthy weight and related risks in some communities. In response, in 2025 the whole-system approach to healthy weight was initiated. Convening a range of partners – from public health specialists in NHS Grampian to schools, community groups and sport/leisure services – to develop a coordinated plan encouraging healthier lifestyles for children. This includes actions such as improving food education in schools, supporting active play and exercise (with help from Sport Aberdeen), and extending programmes that provide affordable healthy food to families. By the end of 2025, we have secured broad partner buy-in to this approach, ensuring that improving children's healthy weight is now a shared priority across our services.

Another health-area success has been in early years nutrition and care – our targeted projects (like the Infant Feeding and Beyond project in priority neighbourhoods) have shown very positive results, with higher breastfeeding rates in the areas where additional support was offered. We have used these findings to inform our new plan. We have also sustained our focus on mental health and wellbeing: for example, partners in NHS and Education jointly ran initiatives to improve children's mental health support in schools (as part of a "Fit Like" collaborative), and we expanded community-based counselling and youth work programmes to reach those struggling. Through this work we have seen encouraging signs – such as an increase in the uptake of free Early Learning and Childcare by eligible 2-year-olds (after we improved outreach and data-sharing, 40% more two-year-olds took up their Early Learning and Childcare places in 2024/25 than the year before), and a rise in primary school attendance rates, with attendance improving fastest for children who are looked after, narrowing the gap with their peers. We also noted a drop in the number of young people admitted to hospital due to assault injuries, suggesting our early intervention and community safety efforts are making an impact.

Youth and Family Participation in Planning

Throughout 2025/26, we have made it a priority to *listen to the voices of children, young people, and parents*. Early in the year we shared emerging data findings with groups like our Young Ambassadors and the Aberdeen Youth Movement, inviting their validation and challenge of our insights. Their feedback has helped shape our understanding of what matters most to young people. We also engaged with community consultations (the “Your Place, Your Plans, Your Future” citywide survey included input from over 587 children and young people) to ensure community voices informed the development of our priorities Children’s Services Plan 2026-31 and LOIP 2026-36.

Recognising that young people should have a role in governance, we have begun establishing a *Children’s Services Shadow Board* comprised of young people from various backgrounds. Once formed, this Shadow Board will sit alongside us to influence decisions and keep us accountable to the needs of the youth. By the end of 2025, partners in our Board have developed a plan for recruiting youth representatives – from school pupil councils, care-experienced youth forums, young carers, etc. – to launch the Shadow Board later in 2026. In the meantime, we continue to involve young people directly: for instance, youth representatives helped co-design parts of the new Children’s Services Plan and weighed in on how we communicate our progress. Parents and carers have also been active contributors – through workshops and surveys, they’ve told us what support is most helpful and how services could be more accessible.

This culture of participation is now firmly embedded in how we operate: we approach planning *with* children and families, not just *for* them. It’s evidenced by initiatives like our Youth Activity Grants programme, where young people themselves allocate funding to youth-led projects, and by the way every major report or plan (including this Annual Report) is now shared in draft with youth ambassadors for comment before finalising. We believe these efforts have strengthened trust and made our strategies more responsive to real needs on the ground.

Aligned Strategy and Policy Integration

In 2025/26 we have also continued to take important steps to streamline and integrate our myriad plans and statutory duties. We continued our practice of “plan integration” – aligning the Children’s Services Plan reporting with other frameworks like the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), the Child Poverty Action Plan, Corporate Parenting Plan, and “The Promise” commitments. By doing this, we hope to further reduce duplication and ensure all partners are pulling in the same direction. For example, our Board’s quarterly progress updates will simultaneously inform the Community Planning Partnership about how we are addressing child poverty and delivering The Promise, as well as our own Children’s Services outcomes. In the past year, we’ve reported on key national policy areas through one coherent annual review – showing how our local projects contribute to tackling child poverty, improving care experience (“Keeping The Promise”), and fulfilling our corporate parenting responsibilities. This joined-up reporting highlights that *we view these not as separate checkboxes, but as interlinked goals under a single vision*.

Moreover, the Board remain aware and responsive to upcoming legislative changes that will affect our services. Monitoring the ongoing developments of the new Children’s Care & Justice Act and preparing for the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law.

Community Support

We are actively engaged in the development of the Future Libraries Model, recognising libraries as a key component of preventative Family Support. This has been further informed by the work of the Library Implementation Group, which has placed a strong emphasis on listening to the voices of library users, with a particular focus on children and young people through the Re-Imagining Central Library Artist in Residence programme.

Engagement has included targeted activity to hear from both current and non-library users, using creative approaches through the *Creative Autumn in the City* programmes to broaden participation and challenge perceptions of what libraries are and who they are for. In parallel, Library Champions have been instrumental in generating practical ideas to make library spaces more welcoming and child-friendly, ensuring they better meet the needs of families and young people.

Opportunities to support youth participation have also been embedded within wider cultural activity. As part of *Spectra*, the Youth Participation Group, *The Young Ambassadors*, designed and delivered a shop-based installation that re-imagined a library space, providing a visible and accessible example of how young people want to use and experience libraries in the city.

These insights provide a strong and shared foundation to inform tests of change being taken forward in partnership with the Fairer Futures Partnership at Greyhope School and Community Hub in Torry and as work continues to Re-imagine Central Library. This work reinforces the role of libraries as welcoming, inclusive and preventative spaces, supporting children, young people and families as part of an integrated model of Family Support.

As a Children's Services Board, we are delighted to have been selected as a Fairer Futures Pathfinder. We have commissioned CELCIS as our evaluation partner and, over the past year, have made significant progress in developing our model of Family Support. Six dedicated workstreams have been established, and two Officers have been appointed to provide shared oversight of this important area of development. Governance arrangements for our Fairer Futures work are now in place.

Building on the achievements to date, we are now moving into a focused phase of implementation, working collaboratively across services and partners to deliver the activity agreed through our partnership with Scottish Government. All ongoing 'business as usual' work will continue to be overseen by the Children's Services Board

The targeted work of our Children's Services Board Subgroups to deliver improvement.

Our Children's Services Board is supported by 6 thematic subgroups, established at the start of our 2023-26 Children Services Planning Cycle, these subgroups have led on the implementation of our targeted improvement projects linked to our six 2016-2026 Stretch Outcomes. The groups are also responsible for leading on our local responses to the key national agendas that relate to their theme. Below is a summary of highlights of the work of our subgroups across 2025/26:

Best Start in life Group Projects

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

86.3% of children assessed at their 27-30 month review met their developmental milestones in 2023/24 down from 89.8% (2022/23), and from 91.8% in 16/17. **80.4%** of eligible children were assessed in 2023/24 up from 68.4% (22/23)

Over the course of our Children's Services Plan 2023-2026, our Best Start in Life subgroup has tested and embedded a range of changes aimed at supporting families with young children, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. The successful testing of our change ideas and feedback gathered by our stakeholders has meant we have been able to roll out improvements in several areas:

Enhanced Multi-Agency Working

In 2025/26, the Early Intervention for Parenting and Family Support project enhanced early support for families with children aged 0–4 facing parental mental health, substance misuse, and domestic abuse concerns. There was a 250% increase in early identification via Support and Management Plans (from 4 in 2024 to 14 in 2025), with a 64% reduction in children reaching social work thresholds (39 in 2022 to 14 in 2025). Referrals by health visitors and family nurses rose for neglect linked to parental mental health (44%), substance misuse (71%), and domestic abuse (49%), while the number of young children needing intervention for neglect dropped by 25%. Targeted infant massage and expanded antenatal Peep and peer support, reaching 38 families and training 25 professionals, improved parental confidence, attachment, and wellbeing, helping families avoid crisis and statutory involvement.

Financial Inclusion and Crisis Support

Since the project's completion in 2025 the Financial Inclusion and Infant Feeding in A Crisis pathways, continue to allow health professionals and emergency food providers to access urgent support for families, including formula milk, nutritional help, and income maximisation. In 2025, 89 families were referred and 100% were supported and offered a benefit check. 57 referrals were from midwifery/ health visiting and 32 from community partners. This is a 117% increase in referrals compared to 2024 (41 to 89). Key activity this year has been refreshing the referral pathway and expanding it to community partners.

There has been a sustained positive impact on income maximisation through increased use of the benefit calculator. The number of benefit calculations completed rose from 778 in 2022 to 992 in 2025, representing a 27.5% increase. Weekly financial gains generated through the calculator also increased over the period, rising from £192,321.60 in 2022 to a peak of £261,665.60 in 2024, a 33.5% increase compared to 2023 (£195,965.08). Although weekly financial gains reduced in 2025 to £217,507.90, this coincided with the highest level of benefit calculator usage to date, indicating continued high demand and ongoing financial gains for households supported.

Oral Health Improvement

Regular engagement with families through dental practices, nurseries, schools, and community groups has increased dental registration and awareness of oral health. Engagement has included regular sessions at the new Bumps and Babies group, integration of dental health into the Peep 'Healthier Families' programme, widespread distribution of hundreds of toothbrushing packs, and targeted support to help families register with dental practices. Schools and nurseries have embedded twice-yearly varnish applications, daily supervised toothbrushing, and incentivised brushing challenges, with Greyhope now fully embracing whole-school brushing.

The percentage of children with no obvious tooth decay citywide has risen from 70% in 2021/22 to 75% in 2024/25. In Torry, a priority area, the figure improved from 35% in 2021/22 to 54% in 2024/25.

Over 30 families have been supported into dental registration through targeted outreach, and regular fluoride varnish applications and risk assessments are in place.

Peep Programme

Our Peep project has continued to expand opportunities for families to take part in Peep, (Peep is not an acronym but when first established what referred to as Parents and Early Educators Programme). In 2025, a total of 213 Peep sessions were delivered, marking a 2.4% increase from 2024 (208 sessions). The programme has expanded to offer more targeted support, including Intergenerational Peep, Healthier Families, Antenatal Peep, Peep TALK, Empowering Families, and additional support groups such as English as an Additional Language and Outdoor groups. The number of multi-agency partners delivering Peep has doubled since the project began, enabling greater family participation. Over the past two years, 164 practitioners—including resettlement workers, NHS staff, childminders, parents, and third sector workers—have been trained to deliver Peep. Many report adopting a more strength-based approach to working with families, i.e building on the existing strengths of parents to support their children. The project also tested new models, such as co-delivery across localities and enhanced support for practitioners, to improve sustainability and reach.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Collaborative

Stretch Outcome 4: 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026:

72% of children and young people in 2025/26 reported feeling listened to all of the time, up from 70% in 2024/25 and **64%** in 21/22.

The Mental Health Improvement Collaborative, has had a number of successes with its projects over the life course of the Children's Services Plan 2023-26 for children and young people's mental health support:

Key Successes

Improved Pathways and Data Collection

The group has developed and tested a single pathway for referring children and young people to existing Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Baseline data has been collated across these services, significantly enhancing understanding of demand and capacity. This data is vital for tracking service usage and individual progress and creating a robust foundation for ongoing improvement. Efforts to use the Aberdeen City Request for Assistance Platform are ongoing, with baseline information ready to assess future impacts once the platform is live.

Greater Access and Signposting

We have also made progress in making mental health support more accessible. With our Pathways to Support document being adapted for wider availability via the Parent Learning Hub website, improving signposting for professionals, parents, and young people. Additionally, a digital version of the Parent Led CBT group is being developed for universal access.

Expanded Support in Schools and the Community

Delivery of Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (LIAM) support has increased, both in group and 1-to-1 formats within schools and communities. Early results from pilot projects in Bucksburn have seen a reduction in young people's self-reported anxiety and improved general mood. The Fit Like team, working with CAMHS trainees and school nursing staff, have widened LIAM's reach. Evaluation forms for parents, young people, and teachers have been developed to measure group impact.

All parents of children involved in LIAM groups are offered information sessions, Family Learning Anxiety Groups, and Parent Led CBT groups. The digital CBT version aims to remove barriers for parents unable to attend in person.

Positive Practitioner Development

Pilots involving Penumbra working with practitioners have shown early signs of increased knowledge and confidence in referring for Distress Brief Intervention (DBI). Baseline and intervention data are being used to assess the benefits of these partnerships.

Care-Experienced Young People Support

Workshops and stakeholder engagement have helped map health and wellbeing support for care leavers. Immediate actions include improving annual health assessment data sharing, enhancing

referral pathways into adult services, and involving young people in planning Community Appointment Days. There is strong emphasis on lived experience, with care-experienced young people contributing directly to service improvements.

Key data points:

- Initial health assessments for children in care are done within four weeks, with regular follow-ups based on age.
- Efforts are underway to monitor health needs more consistently, especially during transitions out of care.

School and Community Programmes

Projects such as the 'Stronger Family Series' and refreshed Health & Wellbeing curriculum have improved parental engagement and knowledge. In Northfield, S1-S6 pupils reporting confidence increased by 5% (from 30% in March 2022 to 35% in November 2023). Citywide, confidence rose by 10% (from 35% to 45% in the same period).

Community youth work has seen positive engagement, with the Beacon youth group and Youth Horizons programmes proving popular. The average enjoyment rating for Youth Horizons activities was 4.7/5. The percentage of S1-S6 pupils feeling safe increased citywide by 2.3% (from 86.2% in 2021/22 to 88.5% in 2024/25), with targeted improvements in deprived areas.

Areas for Future Work and Improvement

Platform Implementation and Data Integration: The Request for Assistance Platform has not yet gone live. Its successful launch and ongoing data integration will be crucial for tracking service demand and outcomes.

Consistency and Coverage of Support: Gaps remain in accessing health information for care-experienced young people, especially those transitioning out of care or moving between local authorities. There is a need for improved communication, more formal information sharing, and better monitoring of health needs after leaving care—particularly for those with complex needs up to age 25.

Workforce Training and Engagement Further development of training programmes is needed to boost workforce understanding of domestic abuse, coercive control, and trauma-informed practice. Ensuring staff feel equipped before engaging with young people remains a priority.

Digital and Community-Based Initiatives Uptake of digital tools, such as the Keep Scotland Safe app, is currently low. Increased promotion and adaptation may be needed to boost engagement. There is ongoing work to expand digital toolkits and mental health resources for young people.

Sustained Funding and Resource Allocation Programmes such as Bucksburn drop-in and Youth Horizons have secured resources for the next two years, but sustained and increased funding will be necessary to maintain momentum and expand offerings.

Targeted Improvement in Priority Areas While citywide safety and confidence have improved, targeted areas—particularly those facing deprivation—require further work to meet ambitious goals (e.g., a 10% increase in young people feeling safe). South locality has seen a slight reduction in safety perception, marking it as a priority for initial testing and focused interventions.

Evaluation and Community Involvement Ongoing evaluation, feedback collection, and active involvement of young people, parents, and community stakeholders are highlighted as essential for adapting and improving services. Continued co-production and engagement in local forums and improvement groups will drive meaningful change.

Looking to the Future

The Mental Health Group's projects have demonstrated measurable successes in improving pathways, access, and outcomes for children and young people's mental health in Aberdeen City. Robust data collection, expanded interventions, and strong community engagement underpin these achievements. However, further work is needed to fully implement digital platforms, close gaps in care transitions, strengthen workforce training, and ensure sustained funding. With continued collaborative effort and targeted improvements, the projects are well placed to build on current successes and address remaining challenges.

Corporate Parenting Improvement Group

Stretch Outcome 5: By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026:

30.1% gap between the % of care experienced young people (60%) and all young people (90.1%) achieving a positive and sustained destination in 22/23. **21.3%** decrease in % of experienced young people achieved a positive and sustained destination in 23/24 (60%), down from 81.3% in 2022/23 and 73.9% in 16/17.

The Corporate Parenting Improvement Group continued to progress their workplan making significant contribution to services and support for Care Experienced children and Young People and their families, since 2023 3 out of 5 of improvement themes have achieved their 3 year aims;

Timely Identification of Family Network Care Options

One of our projects focused on improving how quickly adults within a child's family network are identified as potential alternative carers when a Child Protection Planning Meeting (CPPM)

decides to refer a child to the Scottish Children's Reporter Authority (SCRA). A process map and new procedures were implemented to ensure this happens within ten weeks. Benchmarking with other local authorities has helped inform these changes, and practitioners were supported with new guidance, resources, and training sessions. This targeted approach continues its aim to provide children with safe and familiar care alternatives more quickly, reducing uncertainty and improving outcomes.

When kinship placements show signs of strain, the project introduced a commitment for agencies to meet and agree on a multi-agency support plan within five days. Single and multi-agency guidance is being reviewed, and improved data capture structures have been put in place to ensure timely interventions. This will continue to help maintain stable placements and prevent breakdowns in care arrangements.

Further work is needed to strengthen multi-agency collaboration and ensure rapid support for vulnerable kinship placements. Updated guidance and process maps are anticipated, but ongoing monitoring and improvement are required to maintain placement stability.

Family Nurse Partnership Programme for Care Experienced Young Parents

The Family Nurse Programme has been tested for care experienced young people up to age 25 who are pregnant, offering whole-system support via a single point of contact. Currently, 38 care experienced parents are being supported. Data shows that, on average, parents' preparedness for parenthood increased from 68% at 16 weeks of pregnancy to 87% by 36 weeks. Snap Survey results indicate that 60% of young people feel 'Very Confident' about becoming parents, suggesting the programme is having a tangible positive effect. The project has now embedded its support for Care Experienced Young People into the wider Family Nurse Partnership Programme, ensuring all care experienced young people identified, receive the support. Furthermore, the project continues to improve links and referral processes with service to increase the number of young people identified as eligible for the support.

Although the Family Nurse Programme shows promising results, the data is still in its infancy. Continued evaluation, including follow-up surveys when children reach one year old and programme graduation, will be important to fully understand long-term impacts.

Improved Workforce Training and Awareness

A new eLearning module was developed for ongoing multi-agency corporate parenting training, incorporating the voices of care experienced individuals. As of January 2026, 62% of overall Aberdeen City Council (ACC) staff have completed the training module, with the completion rate in the cluster working directly with care experienced individuals rising to 72%. Completion rates in Children's Social Work Services increased from 75.6% to 83%, and in Education and Lifelong Learning from 67.8% to 72%. These improvements reflect increased staff knowledge and responsiveness.

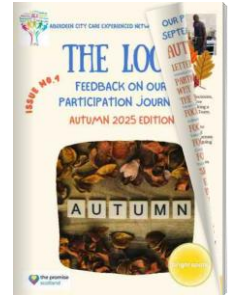
While training uptake is improving, there are inconsistencies in data collection, especially from partner and third sector organisations. Ensuring consistent and comprehensive data across all sectors remains a challenge, and reliable workforce data is still required to meet our outcome targets.

Corporate parenting training needs to remain accessible and relevant, accommodating different learning styles and service areas. Continued promotion and updates to the eLearning module are

necessary to maintain progress toward the goal of 80% workforce completion by 2025, and now, into 2026.

Participation and Engagement

Care experienced children, young people and families are meaningfully involved in the co-design and development of services. Their participation influences decision-making and helps ensure services respond to what matters most to them. The ongoing engagement ensures that the voices of those most affected remain central to our improvement efforts. The Participation and Engagement Officer for care experienced young people plays a key role in promoting meaningful participation, rights-based practice and co-production across Children's Services. The role also supports young people to co-produce a digital magazine that highlights their voices, experiences and views, and provides clear feedback on how their participation is influencing change. [The Loop Participation Magazine Autumn 2025](#)



Looking to the Future

The Corporate Parenting Improvement Group has continued to strengthen outcomes for care experienced children, young people and young adults. This is reflected in reductions in the number of children who are looked after, increased aftercare support, and the development of a more skilled, trauma-informed and rights-focused workforce. We are also continuing to increase the number of young people engaging with our Aftercare Service, with engagement levels consistently higher than the national average, reflecting growing trust in the support available and the increasing impact of our approach.

As we enter the next Children's Services Plan cycle, our focus is on consolidating this progress by embedding and scaling the approaches that make the greatest difference. This includes strengthening multi-agency collaboration, expanding workforce development across all partner organisations, and improving the consistency and accessibility of support pathways for care leavers and young people transitioning into adulthood.

A key part of our forward work will involve considering how we scale and spread successful initiatives, such as the Guaranteed Interview Scheme and the Family Nurse Programme so that more care experienced children, young people and young adults benefit from approaches that have already demonstrated impact. Alongside this, we will continue to extend workforce development opportunities and strengthen pathways that support young people as they grow into adulthood.

Sustained improvement will rely on continued commitment to meaningful participation, data-driven decision-making and the consistent application of evidence-informed practice across all Corporate Parents. Updating our Corporate Parenting Plan to align with the new planning cycle will ensure our priorities remain clear, purposeful and responsive to the evolving needs of children, young people and families.

Children and young people have been clear about what matters most to them, and their voices will continue to guide our improvement journey. Through Bright Spots and wider engagement, they consistently emphasised the importance of:

- Stability and fewer changes
- Trusted adults and strong, lasting relationships
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing support
- Safe, secure and appropriate housing
- Financial stability and practical support
- Support into adulthood and beyond
- Feeling included, connected and valued

These messages align directly with the six priorities in the revised Corporate Parenting Plan, which will underpin our shared action:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Education, Attainment and (Positive) Transitions
- Housing and Transitions
- Participation and Voice
- Relationships and Belonging
- Rights and Advocacy

Delivering these priorities will require strong, sustained collaboration across all partner agencies. No single organisation can meet the full range of needs experienced by care experienced children and young people. Progress relies on coordinated multi-agency planning, shared accountability and a collective commitment to removing barriers, reducing duplication and aligning systems to support better outcomes.

Our direction is also shaped by Scotland's commitment to **Keep The Promise** and the long-term ambitions set out in **Plan 24–30**, both of which place relationships, rights, belonging and support into adulthood at the centre of improvement. These principles are embedded throughout our local Corporate Parenting Plan 2026-2029 and will continue to guide our decisions and actions in the years ahead.

As we take these priorities forward, our shared ambition remains clear: to ensure that every care experienced child, young person and young adult in Aberdeen experiences safety, stability, love, belonging and opportunity and that our actions, individually and collectively, continue to reflect the responsibilities and values of good corporate parenting.

Attainment and Transitions to Adulthood Subgroup

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

1.9% increase in % of Young People from Quintile 1 achieving a sustained positive destination (91.3% in 24/25 compared to 89.4% in 23/24 and higher than 2016/17 at 84.5%)

0.6% increase in % of Young People from Quintile 2 achieving a sustained positive destination (90.6% in 24/25 compared to 90% in 23/24, and higher than in 2016/17 at 87.9%).

This year the Attainment and Transitions Subgroup of the Children's Services Board has continued its focus on widening opportunities, strengthening support, and improving positive destinations. This work has involved schools, colleges, health services, community organisations, and families.

Supporting Young People Into Positive Destinations

A major area of progress has been the expansion of support for young people leaving school. Every secondary school now has a Pathways Advocate, who works closely with pupils who may need extra help planning their next steps. Schools are also taking part in regular Pathway Planning meetings to ensure pupils receive timely guidance.

These efforts are showing results: the percentage of young people from the most disadvantaged communities entering a positive destination increased to 84.5% in SIMD Quintile 1 and 84.4% in Quintile 2 in 2024.

Broadening Course Options and Strengthening the Senior Phase

The city-wide work on expanding the breadth of courses available to young people has led to major improvements. Staff across schools took part in new professional learning programmes to strengthen curriculum planning, course choice, timetabling, and tracking. Young people have also helped shape improved induction and support for ABZ Campus courses.

Course completion rates have risen sharply. Wider SCQF completions increased from 1,005 in academic year 2022/23 to 3,165 in 2024/25, a 166% increase. Foundation Apprenticeship completions rose by 43%, increasing from 127 to 173 over the same period.

Digital and Technology Pathways

To support the growing digital and technology sector, partners have worked to develop new qualifications and improve access to digital learning. Most recent data indicates that the number of young people completing digital and tech courses increased from 942 in 2021/22 to 1,349 in 2024/25, representing a 43% increase. This has included courses in Games Design, Esports and Cybersecurity. The ABZ Campus programme continues to broaden opportunities through virtual courses and digital learning models, with a notable increase in applications for digitally-enabled courses.

Health and Social Care Pathways

Completion of integrated Health and Social Care courses has increased from 46 in 2021/22 to 149 in 2024/25, a 223% increase. NESCol introduced new full-time integrated courses at SCQF Level 4 with 62 students enrolled.

Looking to the future

The Attainment and Transitions to Adulthood subgroup has successfully broadened course choices for all young people in the senior phase at individual school level and across the city through the staged implementation of ABZ Campus. Staff have engaged in curriculum development professional learning supporting the expansion of the curriculum offer. All young people benefit however there has been a significant increase in attainment young people in SIMD 1. This work will continue with ABZ campus phase 4 and the introduction of increased work experience opportunities.

Working in partnership with the digital technology sector has seen an increase in the number of courses and the qualifications attained in this growth sector. The establishment of the Aberdeen Computing collaborative and the shared learning space in the ONE Hub will see this continue to develop through providing young people with the opportunity to learn alongside industry partners.

Work on colocation of services showed that adopting a relational solution focused approach where community members can be supported to access immediate support makes a real difference to families. Learning across all projects will be further developed to involve a wider range of partners reducing duplication and creating a relational approach from all services to reduce the risk of escalation to more targeted services as we transition into our next LOIP.

Youth Justice

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

46% decrease in number of young people being charged with an offence (518 in 24/25 compared to 965 in 15/16, and a 14% decrease since 23/24 (602 to 518).

The Youth Justice Subgroup has led on the delivery of a number of improvement projects over the course of the Children's Services Plan 2023-26. We have made some significant and positive changes with and for Children in Conflict with the Law to realise their rights. The projects have focused on multi-agency collaboration, trauma-informed practice, improved police relationships, and enhanced diversionary and participatory opportunities for young people. Some of our achievements include:

Reduction in Charges and Missing Person Reports

One of the most impactful outcomes is the reduction in the average number of CEYP charged per month, dropping from 7.39 in 2022 to just 2.75 in 2025—a decrease of 62.8% (data from Police Scotland). Similarly, the number of young people on CSOs charged fell from 3.4 per month to less than 1. This sustained reduction suggests that interventions, such as trauma-informed training and improved police engagement, have made a real difference.

The “Not at Home” policy introduced to manage absences of CEYP from children’s homes, treating these absences more like those of non-care experienced young people. The number of reported missing CEYP dropped sharply from 39 in 2022 to 7 in 2025. Feedback from the young people themselves indicated that this change reduced feelings of being “hunted” by the police and encouraged earlier voluntary returns.

Trauma-Informed Practice and Police Engagement

Multi-agency trauma-informed training has been delivered locally, with 40 officers now trained and serving as champions. This includes the entire Northeast Children and Young People Team. These efforts have promoted better relationships between police and CEYP, particularly in children’s homes, enabling the resolution of incidents without criminalising the young people involved. Staff at children’s homes now feel more empowered to contact police for assistance without fear of legal repercussions for the children.

Expanded Partnerships and Referral Pathways

We have worked with MCR Pathways, Includem, and the Dennis Law Legacy Trust. A new referral pathway allows police to refer CEYP or young people on CSOs to MCR Pathways for mentoring, without the need for school involvement or additional funding.

Police Scotland and Includem have worked with StreetSports to create a sports engagement programme for young people not fully engaging in education, with priority for CEYP. In the first pilot cohort, 40% of participants were care experienced.

Helping to Improve Court Processes and Diversion from Prosecution

Revised guidance has been implemented to ensure the developmental needs of 16/17-year-olds appearing in court are assessed in a trauma-informed and age-appropriate manner. In 2023/24, 65.2% of those needing assessment were met by the court-based team, rising to 86.11% in 2024/25. The guidance and support tools have led to an increase in the diversion of looked after children from prosecution, surpassing the target of a 15% increase (from 75 to 95).

Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024

The 2024 Act is expected to be fully implemented by April 2027 and planning for this has been ongoing for some time. From August 2024 the detention of young people in Youth Offenders Institutes (YOI) ended. This step has realised an element of The Promise. Where children are remanded or sentenced to custody in court, they are now placed in the more developmentally appropriate setting of secure accommodation. Operationally this was a significant change and robust processes and guidance for practitioners are in place to ensure that for any child placed in secure accommodation the process is as smooth as possible.

We have worked closely with CYCJ (Child and Young people Centre for Justice) in preparation for the 2024 Act. Children and Young People participated with Child and Young people's Centre for Justice looking at the new Movement Restriction Conditions (MRCs) national guidelines. Our young people with experience of secure care and police custody were keen to share their views and help to shape future guidance to ensure use of MRCs is informed by lived experience.

Community Participation and Youth Engagement

CEYP have been actively involved in co-designing our change ideas and informing our project’s direction. Their feedback continues to be used to adapt services and practices. Community

initiatives such as the Youth Horizon programme provided engaging activities (arts, crafts, music technology, and more) during school holidays, with positive feedback from both partners and participants.

To date the work has achieved a 12.1% reduction of Youth Anti-Social Behaviour Calls between 2023-2025 (3536 to 3170). There has also been significant reductions in anti-social behaviour over 2025 in areas where youth activities had been targeted at: Torry (65% reduction), Mastrick (52% reduction) both areas benefiting from targeted delivery of the Denis Law Legacy Trust Streetsport Programme, which provided over 450 free sessions in 2025 and resulting in 28,969 participations

Criminal Exploitation of Children (CEC)

Considerable work has been undertaken to develop understanding of Criminal Exploitation of Children (CEC) and the scope and scale of the issue locally. Scoping exercises undertaken resulted in the development and adoption with partner agencies of a Framework and Screening Tool which has been endorsed by the Child Protection Committee. This pilot included 4 multi agency workforce development sessions being delivered locally by CYCJ and Action for Children to over 200 workers.

Key Areas for Future Work and Improvement

Data Collection and Group Definition Challenges

As part of the groups work on updating the action plan data gathering and analysis has been explored with positive steps in ensuring we collate relevant data from Police Scotland and other agencies.

As of June 2025, Police Scotland can no longer provide data regarding care experienced young people due to challenges in defining the group. Sustainable monitoring and evaluation will require new approaches and potentially revised definitions.

Feedback and Participation

We will continue to seek voice and views of our children and young people in conflict with the law in the following ways:

- Engagement sessions with Child and Young Peoples Centre for Justice
- Support to engage with national consultations
- Focus groups to understand children's experience of local justice systems and services
- Encourage workers to share views of children and young people contact with justice systems
- Analysis of feedback forms and Mind of My Own statements

Consistency Across Agencies

The group continues to meet on a 5 weekly pattern and are in the process of renewing their strategy and action plan with expectation that this will be ready for publication in late Spring/early Summer 2026.

Additional Support Needs and Disabilities Subgroup

Stretch Outcome 8: 100% of our children with Additional Support Needs/disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026.

4.4% increase in number of children with Additional Support Needs/disabilities experiencing a positive destination (89.4% in 2023/24 compared to 85% in 17/18). However, a 2.2% decrease since 22/23 (91.6%) 24/25 data not yet published

Over the past 3 years the ASN & Disabilities Subgroup has continued to focus on improving the opportunities for those young people with ASN/Disabilities and their families. Our projects focus on providing community and school-based services, as well as providing support for families awaiting diagnosis spanning early years, primary, and secondary education, involving multi-agency collaboration and targeted interventions.

Implementation of the Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum Learning and Education (CIRCLE Framework and Associated Materials)

Our pilot project using the CIRCLE framework, child participation scale, and associated materials has been successfully launched in the South Locality. The dissemination of Circle Framework and “Up and Away” resources to schools and early learning centres (ELC) was achieved through partnerships with Speech and Language Therapy and Education. Specific Circle events for both ELC/Primary and Secondary staff have been delivered across 2023/24 and 2024/25, led by a multiagency team, enhancing staff training and collaboration. The Education Psychology Service (EPS) introduced the Spotlight programme, further supporting staff dealing with complex needs in early education.

Circle materials have been adapted for local schools, and a Padlet resource hub was developed, enabling rapid access to key strategies. Notably, feedback from schools and ELC staff shows that the framework and training have prompted rethinking of class organisation, universal supports, and collaboration. Staff found the training practical and manageable, with positive impact on pupil engagement and environmental assessment.

Further work is required to fully embed initiatives such as the EPS Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) and Emotion Coaching programmes. The next phase will focus on the SCERTS approach to support learners with complex needs, and expansion of partnerships, including with health visitors and other allied health professionals.

Attendance and Positive Destinations

Regular monitoring and discussion of attendance with a particular focus on flexible learning pathways and the transition of P1 learners as well as parent engagement events on attendance have helped to inform our future planning, particularly for children with disability and ASN. Updated assessment guidance issued in March 2025 aiming to improve tracking and intervention.

Key data highlights include:

- Attendance for learners with ASN has shown improvement: in 2022, 83.95% had attendance above 80%; in 2023 this rose to 84.98%, and the latest figures for 2024/25 suggest 87.1% for ASN learners and 89% for disabled learners.
- A decline in attendance for pupils with disabilities from 97.69% in 2022/23 to 94.80% in 2023/24, though some secondary schools in the Dee locality achieved attendance rates above the national average (90.2%). Unverified initial 2024/25 data suggests some fluctuations due to individual circumstances.
- The number of learners with ASN/disability and attendance below 80% fell from 1,757 in 2022 to 1,686 in 2025, reflecting increased engagement (a 5.65% improvement).
- Qualitative feedback suggests the interventions are reshaping practice, improving environmental assessments, supporting transitions, and fostering stronger child participation.

A major positive destination programme delivered through ABZCampus and ABZWorks. Providers across key sectors: sport, hospitality, retail and creative industries have been recruited, and a targeted training programme has been developed, including individualised risk assessment guidance. Young people have been identified by schools, and a new profile tool capturing needs, motivators and environmental considerations has been piloted. Early qualitative feedback from pupils, staff and employers is described as “extremely positive,” with data currently being gathered to shape the next phase.

Positive Destination Projects

A targeted pilot project through ABZCampus and ABZWorks has provided specific opportunities for young people with ASN/disabilities in areas such as sport, hospitality, creative industries, and retail. In 2023/24, 89% of school leavers with ASN/disabilities gained a positive destination, down from 92% in 2022/23. Aberdeen schools performed above the national average, with young people more likely to enter further or higher education than the national average (37.54% further education in Aberdeen vs 35% nationally; 29.16% higher education vs 27.45% nationally).

Support for Young Carers

Since last year work to support young carers has had continued success, having increased the number of young carers accessing support by 9% from 151 in 2024 to 165 in 2025. Since the project started this is a 31% increase (165 in 2025 from 126 in June 2023)

Looking to the Future

The ASN projects in Aberdeen have delivered substantial improvements in attendance, positive destinations, family engagement, and multi-agency collaboration. Our data trends are generally positive, but there remain challenges in data accuracy, consistent implementation, and resource capacity. Our future work will focus on embedding successful programmes, expanding partnerships, and ensuring accessible, user-centred support for all learners with ASN and disabilities.

What does Our Annual Report mean for our Children's Services Plan 2026-31?

As is evident across this report, we have taken considerable time this year to look closely at what the latest evidence tells us about the lives of our children, young people, and families. It also brings together comprehensive data, local intelligence, lived experience, and staff insight to provide a clear picture of where we are making progress and where we can do more.

We have made steady progress over the past 3 years of our Children's Services Plan 2023-26; however, many outcomes remain shaped by circumstance, postcode, and persistent barriers that services alone cannot remove.

Across our services, we continue to see positive signs of improvement. More children are taking up their early learning entitlement, breastfeeding rates remain above national averages, primary school attendance continues to outperform national trends, and families tell us they feel increasingly able to have their voices heard in decisions.

Yet, as we look across the full breadth of the evidence, it's clear that this progress has not been experienced equally. Poverty remains the single greatest factor shaping life chances in Aberdeen. While citywide child poverty has reduced to around one in five children, this average masks the deep disparities that remain between communities. In some neighbourhoods, almost a third of children live in low-income households; in others, the rate is almost zero.

We see this pattern repeated across many of our measures. Mothers in our most deprived areas are significantly more likely to smoke during pregnancy, less likely to breastfeed, and more likely to experience poor mental or physical health during the early years of their child's life. Developmental concerns vary sharply between neighbourhoods, and infant mortality has risen over recent years.

While many children are thriving, too many others are entering early childhood with unequal foundations that shape their lifelong outcomes.

School Age and Adolescence: Emerging Needs and Increased Complexity

As children grow, these inequalities become more visible. Although Aberdeen's overall attendance remains strong, persistent absence is increasing, particularly in secondary schools. Exclusion rates have risen, and the attainment gap between our most and least deprived communities continues to be one of the most significant challenges we face.

We are proud that so many of our young people continue to achieve positive destinations. However, the data tells us that care-experienced young people, those with ASN or disabilities, those living in SIMD1 communities, and those experiencing poor mental health continue to be less likely to sustain engagement in education or employment.

Our young people themselves have been clear with us. Many feel the weight of anxiety, financial pressure, and social isolation. They want safe places to go, trusted adults to connect with, and more confidence that their voices genuinely shape the services around them.

Families Under Pressure: Poverty, Cost of Living and Wellbeing

The cost-of-living crisis continues to deepen the pressures facing many families. While employment levels have improved, in-work poverty remains high, and lone parents, larger families, minority ethnic communities, and families with young children continue to experience some of the most acute financial challenges in our city.

Fuel and food insecurity are rising concerns. Many parents tell us they are struggling to heat their homes or provide the food they want for their children. Foodbank use remains high. The number of young people applying for homelessness assistance has also increased significantly over recent years,

These pressures affect every area of children's lives—from their diet and development to their mental health, school attendance, friendships, and access to opportunities. So, to improve outcomes, we must support families earlier and more holistically, making sure help is accessible, coordinated, and based on dignity and trust.

What This Evaluation Tell Us: Themes Across the System

Across the full breadth of the data and community voice, several consistent themes emerge:

Early help must start earlier: Evidence suggest that support often arrives too late to address those with acute needs, at the point of crisis. More work can be done to ensure early and preventative measures are put in place to support vulnerable families before these needs escalate. This will help to support families and close the gap in health and development between children in different parts of the city, and to help parents with things like healthy living, accessing benefits, and getting linked in with their community.

Inequalities are deep-rooted and intersecting: Poverty, health, housing insecurity, trauma, and exclusion often reinforce one another. Improving single issues in isolation will not shift outcomes meaningfully.

Young people need support that reflects their lived reality: Many want safe spaces, peer connection, mental health support, and the chance to co-design programmes that speak directly to their experience.

Transitions are critical points: From early years to school, school to work, and care to independence—many of our poorest outcomes occur during transition periods, where coordination between services matters most.

Families value relational, consistent support: Where trusted relationships exist—whether with a health visitor, teacher, youth worker or social worker—families engage more fully and outcomes improve.

Our communities hold insight that our systems must act upon: Young people and families have been generous in sharing what matters to them. We must honour that by embedding participation and rights throughout our work.

Why We Must Change: The Case for System Transformation

The evidence in this report reinforces that while our services continue to strive hard, the system as a whole has many areas that can improve. Families still experience services as fragmented, confusing, or difficult to access. Many young people fall through gaps that no single service can close. And outcomes remain dependent on where a child lives.

It is with this in mind that we have established the system changes proposed in the Children's Services Plan 2026–31:

Personal case workers for vulnerable families

The early years evidence clearly shows that a single trusted relationship can make the difference between a family engaging with support or struggling alone.

Co-designed safe spaces and early intervention for adolescents

Young people at risk of harm or exploitation need accessible, stigma-free places to go as well as be able to have immediate access to wrap-around support.

Tailored pathways to re-engage learners

Disengagement can start early and can escalate quickly. We will ensure that young people are given curriculum options, work experience, and transitions support that reflect their strengths and aspirations.

Strengthening our whole-family approach to poverty

Employability, benefits access, financial inclusion, childcare, and early years support must work together in a whole system way.

Embedding children's rights and participation

Young people have told us clearly that they want to shape their world. Our commitment is to make that real and meaningful across all parts of the system.

Keeping The Promise

Care-experienced children deserve the same love, safety, and stability any parent would provide. This means we need to continue to adapt our support around relationships, belonging, voice, and long-term transitions.

Our Shared Commitment

As a partnership, we recognise that the challenges highlighted in this report are significant. But we also recognise the strengths within our system—our committed workforce, our engaged communities, our improving data, and our desire to improve outcomes for every child.

The system changes we have committed to represent a shared ambition to think and work differently—to be earlier, more relational, more joined-up, and more attuned to the realities of family life.

Through the system changes set out in our new Children's Services Plan, and through the shared commitment of all partners, we hope to build a system that is easier to navigate, quicker to respond, grounded in rights, and shaped by the voices of those it exists to support.

Appendix 1. Supporting Our Under 5s: Improving Dental Health of Primary 1s

What are we trying to achieve?

The aim of the project is to help improve the dental health outcomes for young children in Torry. Working intensively with partners and the community to increase the percentage of P1s that show no signs of tooth decay

How are we doing this?

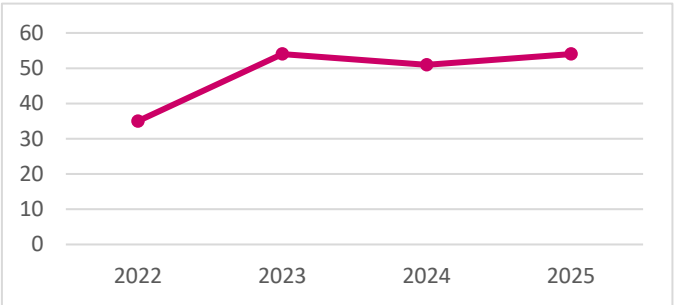
Through our Multi Agency Project we have:

- Engaged with dental practices, (health visitors, nurseries, schools, community centres, and multi-agency groups.
- Regular sessions at 'Bumps and Babies', Bookbug, and various toddler groups have facilitated dissemination of oral health messages and resources.
- Distributed Toothbrushing packs and key oral health information to children and families at community events, schools, and nurseries,
- Providing Active assistance to families for registering with dental practices, including direct support at school and nursery level, as well as through targeted calls and group outreach.
- Twice yearly Fluoride Varnish Applications and daily supervised toothbrushing initiatives in primary schools, with risk assessments identifying children needing urgent or immediate dental treatment.

What have we achieved?

There has been a **19%** increase in the number of children in Torry identified as having no obvious signs of tooth decay between 2022 and 2025

Percentage of P1 Children Showing No Obvious Signs of Tooth Decay in Torry



Sign up for Fluoride Varnish Application among Torry Primary School Children has increased from 82% and 80% to **90% and 93%** respectively between 2024 and 2025

Directly engaged with over **100 families**

What impact have we had?

Over the course of the project, we have received positive feedback from both parents and staff:

- Parents have reported feeling well supported to register with the dentist
- Nursery and school staff have reported feeling more knowledgeable about how and who to raise concerns regarding

What do we plan to do next?

- Re-engaging with our Health Visitors to highlight their pivotal role in identifying families dental registration and oral health needs
- Childsmile will shift towards earlier intervention, especially in the SIMD 1. All babies born in SIMD1 will be referred to Childsmile for advice, support, home visits, and dental registration within their first year.
- We will expand our data collection and reporting processes to better record and track dental health improvements in the community

Appendix 2. Supporting Our Care Experienced Young People: Care Experienced Mums

What are we trying to achieve?

Our Project aims to ensure that 80% of care-experienced parents report feeling sufficiently prepared for parenthood by 2026. The project forms part of our broader commitment to provide holistic, whole-system support for young parents who have experienced care, through a single, reliable point of contact through our Family Nurse Partnership.

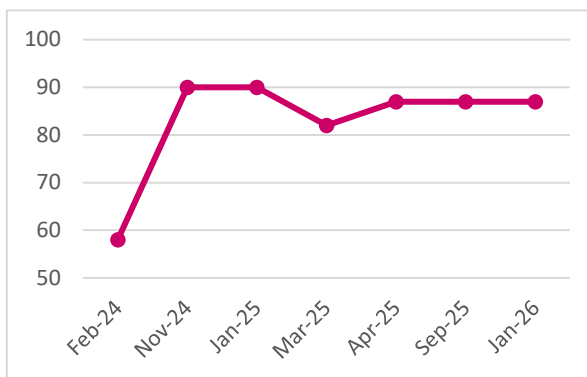
How are we doing this?

- We have tested the Family Nurse Programme with Care experienced young people up to the age of 26 who are pregnant to ensure that they have whole system support through one point of contact. This has included testing provision of Health Supports such as:
 - Breastfeeding Programmes; smoking and immunisation awareness;
 - Providing counselling and referral for Domestic Abuse, Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health;
 - As well as accessing money advice services.
- Providing Advocacy Support for CEYP at risk of their child being removed from their care.
- Promotion of use of contraception among CEYP
- Providing Parenting classes for CE fathers

What have we achieved?

Participants in the Programme have shown a 20% increase in their levels of confidence as a result with **87%** report that they feel confident to be parents

Proportion of Care Experienced Young Parents that report feeling prepared for parenthood at 36 weeks



A total of **72** young women have graduated from the programme

100% of the babies who have been involved in the work have been assessed as meeting their developmental milestones

What impact have we had?

Feedback from those involved in the programme has been very positive:

'I found it really helpful to have a family nurse. It helped me prepare myself for having a child and when I was scared or lost or unsure, my family nurse was always there to keep me right.'

'I'm so grateful to have been given the option to have a family nurse and to have connected with her so well. I would take the option again in a heartbeat to have met such an incredible person.'

What do we plan to do next?

- We will continue to work with partners and services to recruit more care experienced parents into other programmes
- We will improve our data sharing and reporting to better identify potential clients and record the impact of our work
- Continue to gather client feedback to develop services

Appendix 3. Supporting Young People at Risk: Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour

What are we trying to achieve?

The Project seeks to achieve an overall reduction in the number of youth anti- social behaviour calls by 15%, by providing increased opportunities for young people to participate in activities in their community

How are we doing this?

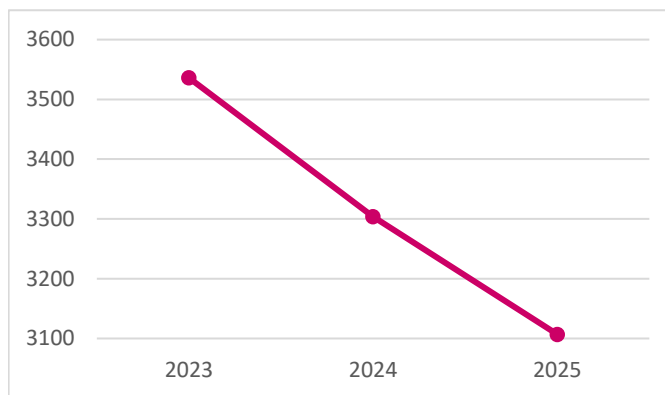
Here are some key activities the project has undertaken:

- Joint patrols between Police Scotland officers and Aberdeen City Wardens to increase presence and engagement in hotspot areas.
- Collaboration with Scottish Fire and Rescue on joint breakfast clubs during the holidays, with participation from City Wardens.
- Delivery of the Youth Horizons programme, offering structured activities to engage young people and divert them from risky behaviours.
- Streetsport Programme by Denis Law Legacy Trust, providing over 450 free-to-access sport and creative sessions, including targeted initiatives for girls and disengaged youth.
- Establishment and ongoing operation of the Youth Café at the Foyer, co-designed with young people to create a safe, inclusive space for socialising and support.

What have we achieved?

An overall reduction of **429** Youth Anti-Social Behaviour Calls between 2023-2025

Number of youth anti-social behaviour calls by year



Over **450** free Streetsport sessions delivered in 2025, resulting in **28,969 participations**.

Youth Horizons: there were 376 attendees across all sessions (not counting repeat attendees); activities scored **4.7 out of 5** by participants.

There were significant areas specific reductions in anti-social behaviour over 2025: Torry (**65%** reduction), Mastrick (**52%** reduction), both areas with active Streetsport sessions.

What impact have we had?

- Youth Café attendees reported enjoying meeting new people, having a place to relax, and not feeling "cooped up in the house".
- Youth Horizons sessions were well received, with high engagement and eagerness to learn. Participants took on leadership roles and showed pride in their achievements.
- Parents observed positive changes in motivation and communication at home following programme participation.
- Feedback from young people and partners consistently valued the safe, inclusive, and engaging environments created by the project's interventions.

What do we plan to do next?

- Continued monitoring of areas with increased calls.
- Sustained focus on partnership-led, preventative, and enforcement-based responses to youth antisocial behaviour.
- Continue Streetsport sessions, Youth Café, and the Youth Horizons programme.
- Further engagement and early intervention work by Community Learning Youth Workers in the city centre.

Our LOIP Projects 2023-2026

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

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

Increase by 40% the number of Peep programmes delivered by multi-agency partners by 2025.

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

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

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

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

Reduce demand on Tier 3 services by 5% by 2026.

Reduce waiting time for interventions starting, by each tier 2/3 service by 5% by 2026.

100% of children leaving care are referred to services that can meet assessed mental health needs within 4 weeks of the health assessment being completed by 2024.

Increase by 5% the number of S1-S6 pupils who report that they feel confident by 2025.

Increase by 10% the % of children living in areas of deprivation who feel safe in their communities by 2025.

Stretch Outcome 5: By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026

Reduce by 5% the number of children entering the care system by 2024.

100% of children and young people leaving care are offered a health assessment to identify gaps in their health provision and needs by 2024.

Increase the number of care experienced young people by 10% receiving multiagency throughcare/aftercare support by 2024.

80% of care experienced parents will report that they believed they were sufficiently prepared for parenthood by 2026.

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

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

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

Increase to 3 the delivery of co-located and delivered services by health and education by 2024.

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

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

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

Increase to 50 the no. of people completing more integrated health and care courses by 2025.

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

Reduce by 20% the number of care experienced young people charged with an offence by 2025.

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

ENABLING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS



This section provides a summary of the key pieces of work we have undertaken and this year and have planned for the coming years in line with the articles of the United Nations Convention of the rights of the Child and the Implementation Act 2025.

What has improved this year

Across the report, there is clear evidence of progress in key areas:

Children are being listened to more: Children and young people have had more opportunities to share their views and shape services. Most now report that they feel listened to, and their ideas are influencing real decisions.

Support for families is becoming more joined-up: A new approach is being developed to make services work together better. The aim is to make it easier for families to get help without having to navigate lots of different systems.

Earlier help is making a difference: Services are increasingly identifying challenges earlier—especially in the early years—so that families can get support before problems become more serious.

Children are achieving and developing: Most children are doing well in school and are gaining qualifications and skills that will support their future. There are now more options for learning, including vocational and practical pathways.

More support for health and wellbeing: There has been continued investment in both physical and mental health services, including support in schools and communities.

Focused action on poverty: Work to reduce child poverty has helped many families increase their income, access support, and reduce financial pressure.

Improving support for care experienced children: There is strong progress in how services support children who cannot live at home, with a focus on relationships, stability, and long-term outcomes.

A fairer approach for young people in the justice system: Fewer young people are entering the justice system, and those who do are being supported in more appropriate and caring ways.

What we have learned

Our Annual Report also shows that while progress is being made, challenges remain:

- Not all children experience the same outcomes
- Poverty continues to affect many families
- Some children still face barriers to learning, health, and opportunity
- Services can sometimes feel complex or difficult to navigate

Children and young people have been clear about what matters most to them:

- Feeling safe and supported
- Having trusted adults in their lives
- Being listened to and taken seriously
- Having opportunities to succeed

What will happen next?

Looking ahead, our new Children's Services Plan and other linked strategic plans will focus on:

- Providing earlier and more preventative support
- Strengthening whole-family approaches
- Continuing to reduce inequalities between communities
- Expanding participation and co-design with children and families
- Improving how services work together so they feel simpler and more connected

A key priority will be making sure children's rights are not just understood, but are visible in everyday practice across all services.

Addressing Children's Rights -The Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The tables below provide a high level summary index of example activity described within this Annual Report which aligns with the articles,(the Children's Services Plan 2026-31 provides further activity on the actions planned to take further affect of Children's Rights in the coming years):

General Principles (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12)

UNCRC Article	Activity 2025-26
Article 2 – Non-discrimination	Targeted support for priority groups experiencing inequality (e.g. minority ethnic families, disabled children, care experienced young people, SIMD areas)
Article 3 – Best interests of the child	Whole-family support model and early intervention design to prevent crisis and improve outcomes
	Multi-agency caseworker model supporting families from antenatal stage
	Integrated planning through Children's Services Board and improvement projects
Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development	Early years interventions including breastfeeding support, developmental assessments and infant feeding projects
	Investment in early learning, youth work, and attainment improvements
Article 12 – Right to be heard	Youth participation structures including Aberdeen Youth Movement and taking forward to address children and young people's views from the Bright Spots programme
	72% of children report feeling listened to (increased over time)
	Young people influencing recruitment, policy, and service design (e.g. Corporate Parenting, focus groups)

Civil Rights and Freedoms (Articles 13, 17)

UNCRC Article	Activity 2025-26
Article 13 – Freedom of expression	Youth consultations (e.g. "Your Place, Your Plan, Your Future") involving hundreds of children and young people
	Focus groups informing legislation and services
Article 17 – Access to information	Development of child-friendly communications (e.g. library privacy notice redesign by young people)
	Access to information via schools, online tools, and family support materials

Violence, Protection and Care (Articles 19, 20, 25, 39)

UNCRC Article	Activity 2025-26
Article 19 – Protection from harm	Child protection systems including Child Protection Register monitoring and early intervention
	Multi-agency early identification of neglect, domestic abuse, and parental substance misuse
Article 20 – Children unable to live with family	Strengthening kinship, foster care and adoption support
	Focus on placement stability and reducing breakdown
Article 25 – Review of care placements	Independent Reviewing Officer processes and young people contributing to guidance
Article 39 – Recovery and reintegration	Bairns Hoose model providing trauma-informed recovery support
	Trauma-informed approaches across youth justice and social work

Health and Welfare (Articles 23, 24, 26)

UNCRC Article	Activity 2025-26
Article 23 – Disability rights	Increased uptake of Child Disability Payment and targeted support for ASN children
	Tailored education and transition pathways for ASN young people
Article 24 – Health and health services	Universal Health Visiting Pathway and early years health interventions
	Mental health support expansion (LIAM, CBT, youth work programmes)
	Dental health improvement programmes and preventative services
Article 26 – Social security	Expanded access to benefits (Scottish Child Payment, UC, grants)
	Low Income Family Tracker enabling targeted support

Education, Leisure and Culture (Articles 28, 29, 31)

UNCRC Article	Activity 2025-26
Article 28 – Right to education	Improved attendance and attainment outcomes, narrowing poverty-related gaps
	Expansion of ABZ Campus and vocational pathways
Article 29 – Aims of education	Focus on skills, confidence, wellbeing and employability outcomes
	Digital transformation programmes supporting future-ready learning
Article 31 – Rest, play and leisure	Youth work, Youth Horizons programmes and community activity provision
	Access to sport through Kit for All and SPACE programmes

Special Protection Measures (Articles 32, 34, 37, 40)

UNCRC Article	Activity 2025-26
Article 32 – Protection from economic exploitation	Employability programmes supporting fair work and preventing exploitation
Article 37 – Deprivation of liberty	Reduction in use of custody and shift to secure care (Children (Care and Justice) Act 2024)
Article 40 – Youth justice	Diversion from prosecution, trauma-informed policing, reduced youth offending



**Community
Planning
Aberdeen**