

Aberdeen City's Children's Services Plan Annual Report 2025/26

Summary



**Community
Planning
Aberdeen**

Foreword

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. continue to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities for children and families in Aberdeen.

Thank you for the vital work you do every day, and for the positive difference you continue to make.

Graeme Simpson

Chief Social Work Officer – Aberdeen City Council (Chair of the Children’s Services Board)



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How are we supporting our under 5s and their parents?

Children's Services Plan Key Priority:

95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27–30-month review by 2026

The latest data shows that 86.3% of children who received their 27-30 month developmental review met all expected milestones in 2023/24, compared with 89.8% in 2022/23 and 91.8% in 2016/17. At the same time, the number of eligible children receiving a review increased significantly, rising from 68.4% in 2022/23 to 80.4% in 2023/24. This improvement is partly linked to increased Health Visitor capacity across the city, with staffing growing from 74 staff (61.9 whole-time equivalent) in 2024 to 79 staff (66.4 whole-time equivalent) in 2025. Although the proportion of children meeting all milestones has fallen, more children are now being assessed, giving services a fuller picture of children's development and helping ensure support can be provided where it is needed most.

Where have we made a difference?

- Early Learning and Childcare uptake for eligible 2 year olds increased by 40% in one year, supported by improved data linkage and engagement with families.
- Latest data shows that a higher proportion of new mums in Aberdeen are at a healthy weight compared with the national average, with 75% at a healthy weight locally compared to 72.4% nationally.
- 93.6% of babies were born at 37+ weeks gestation, slightly above the Scottish average 93.2%.
- 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.



Infant Feeding in a Crisis

Our Infant Feeding in a Crisis Pathway has expanded during the year further supporting families experiencing food insecurity. Ensuring new parents have ready access to infant formula. The pathway also links those families to income maximisation and wider services. Families receive practical help quickly, alongside financial advice and follow up support, helping stabilise early family life during periods of acute pressure.

Where could we improve?

- Fewer children are completing developmental reviews at some key stages, particularly at 13–15 months and 4–5 years.
- Immunisation uptake has fallen, with 6 in 1 and MMR vaccination rates now below national average.
- The proportion of children reaching all developmental milestones has declined, highlighting the need for stronger early intervention and family support.
- Persistent inequalities between neighbourhoods remain, with families in priority areas less likely to access or complete early health and wellbeing pathways.

What have we been doing to support our families?

Expanding our Peep offer

Through our targeted Peep programmes, we continue to support parents and carers to promote their children's early learning through play, reading and everyday interactions. Programmes include Antenatal Peep, Peep TALK, Intergenerational Peep, Healthier Families and support for families with additional needs.

In 2025, 213 Peep sessions were delivered across the city, a 2.4% increase on 2024 (208). Delivery has expanded through multi-agency working, with the number of organisations delivering Peep doubling since the project began.

Over the past two years, 164 practitioners have been trained to deliver Peep programmes, including staff from health, education, third sector organisations and community services. Practitioners report that the training has improved their engagement with families and supported a more strengths-based approach that builds on families' existing skills, relationships and aspirations.



What impact have we had?

The impact of the sessions is evident through the annual survey feedback:

- both parents and children rating their enjoyment of Peep at 4.8 out of 5.
- Since attending Peep, 44.6% of families reported sharing more books and stories, 69.6% singing more songs and nursery rhymes, 59.6% socialising more with others and 64.7% having more conversations together.
- 73.3% of parents reported feeling more confident as a parent
- 58.1% felt their relationship with their child had improved.
- 77.1% felt more confident in supporting their child's learning and development.



Improving the Dental Health of Primary 1s

The health of a young child's teeth can be a good indicator of overall health and our dental health project has been working to address signs of tooth decay for Primary 1 children in Torry, Tillydrone and Northfield. The project has undertaken a wide range of community-focused activities. These include 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. Data from 2023/24 to 2024/25 shows encouraging progress, with increases in the percentage of children displaying no obvious signs of tooth decay:

- Torry up 7% (47% to 54%),
- Tillydrone up 1% (50% to 51%), and
- Northfield up 2% (58% to 60%).

What does this mean for our Workforce?

- Early years services remain central to tackling inequality and improving life chances.
- Relationship based, community delivered support works.
- Earlier identification and intervention must be strengthened.
- Workforce capacity, collaboration and data use are key enablers.

Enhancing Multiagency Working

In 2025/26, the Early Intervention for Parenting and Family Support project strengthened help for families with children aged 0–4 affected by parental mental health, substance misuse, and domestic abuse. Early identification increased by 250%, with Support with the number of children reaching social work thresholds fell by 64%. Targeted support has improved parental confidence, wellbeing, and family relationships.

How are we supporting our primary school age children?



Children's Services Plan Key Priority:

90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026.

Aberdeen's primary-aged children continue to show positive outcomes in learning, wellbeing and attendance. Attendance has improved and is now slightly above the national average, with attendance among Looked After Children improving faster than their peers, helping to narrow the gap.

Attainment remains strong, with around three-quarters of pupils achieving expected levels in reading, writing and math's by Primary 1, 4 and 7, compared with the Scotland average of 74%. Most children are reaching key learning milestones, with results remaining above or similar to national levels.

Children's health and wellbeing has also improved, including better dental health and more positive wellbeing indicators. Fewer children report feeling lonely or consistently low, while more say they feel supported, included, safe and healthy.

Where have we made a difference?

- The numeracy attainment gap (Primary 1, 4, 7) has reduced for the 4th year in a row although it remains above the national average.
- Around three-quarters of Primary 1, 4, 7 pupils achieved their expected Curriculum for Excellence literacy level, putting Aberdeen at roughly 75–76%, slightly above Scotland overall at 74%.
- 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%.

Our Primary School Population

The primary school population fell from 15,210 in 2023/24 to 14,968 in 2024/25. Despite this, demand remains high in some areas, meaning a small number of families are unable to access their preferred school, particularly during the school year.

Aberdeen's school population continues to become more diverse. The number of pupils identifying as Polish decreased from 918 in 2022/23 to 817 in 2024/25. In contrast, the number of pupils of African descent increased from 967 in 2019 to 2,734 in 2024/25. The number identifying as 'White Other' also remains high at 1,195, reflecting Aberdeen's role in supporting families arriving from areas affected by conflict.

Where could we improve?

- Literacy in reading is lower for boys at 73% compared to girls at 79.8%.
- Latest data suggests the exclusion rates in Primary School increased from 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 Primary 1 (91%). This dip at Primary 1 is not seen nationally.



What have we been doing to support our Primary School Pupils?

Targeted youth work and wellbeing support in schools: Youth workers funded through Scottish Attainment Challenge and Strategic Equity Funding continue to work across all Associated School Groups. Their work focuses on confidence, resilience, relationships and readiness to learn, particularly for children facing barriers linked to poverty or wellbeing. Evaluations show improvements in confidence, skills and engagement, with outcomes frequently better than national averages.

Family learning to support children and parents together: Family Learning programmes remain a key early-intervention approach in primary schools, helping families build skills, confidence and positive relationships with learning. Activities include 1:1 support, group sessions, school-based programmes and holiday provision. Parents report increased confidence and improved ability to support their child's learning, helping prevent difficulties escalating later.

Improving children's health through practical, local action: Work to improve children's health has delivered strong improvements in dental health, reflecting sustained engagement through schools, early years pathways and community programmes. At the same time, targeted initiatives are addressing emerging concerns around asthma, physical activity and emotional wellbeing.

Reducing the cost of the school day: We have continued to remove financial barriers to learning by eliminating charges for core curriculum activities and ensuring children can access learning materials, trips and activities without stigma. This work supports attendance, participation and equity, particularly for families affected by poverty.

What Does this mean for the workforce?

- Everyday practice in schools, youth work and family services is making a measurable difference.
- We know that attendance, attainment and wellbeing are closely linked and we are working closely with our partners to address this where it is most needed.
- The evidence is showing that our early, joined up intervention works, something we intend to expand significantly as we enter the roll out of the new Children's Services Plan and Local Outcome Improvement Plan.
- Poverty and inequality continue to shape educational outcomes this will also be a key driver for our improvement work in the years to come.

What Next?

Over the coming years, our focus will be on helping children stay healthy, happy and achieve their full potential.

Early support for families will remain a priority, including providing vulnerable families with a named support worker who can help them access the right services at the right time. Earlier support can help prevent challenges from escalating and improve outcomes for children.

We will continue to promote children's health and wellbeing through safe, nurturing environments, healthy weight and dental health initiatives, and opportunities to build confidence and resilience. Alongside this, we will strengthen support for children's mental wellbeing by developing staff knowledge and ensuring children know where to access help when needed.



How are we supporting our secondary school age children?



Children's Services Plan Key Priorities:

90% of children and young people report they feel listened to all of the time by 2026.

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

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

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

The number of young people entering education, employment or training remains a key priority for our partnership. While sustained positive destinations across the city have fallen from 92.1% in 2020/21 to 90.1% in 2023/24, remaining 3 percentage points below the Scotland figure, there are encouraging signs of progress in our priority communities.

Sustained positive destinations increased from 82.9% to 84.5% for young people living in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintile 1 (SIMD 1) areas and from 83.6% to 84.4% in SIMD 2 between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Initial positive destinations also improved in 2024/25, rising from 89.4% to 91.3% in SIMD 1 and from 90.0% to 90.6% in SIMD 2. These improvements suggest that targeted support is helping more young people move into positive and sustained destinations.

72% of young people reported that they feel listened to all the time.

Where have we made a difference?

- The overall average total tariff score has risen from 886 in 2023-24 to 919 in 2024-25. This is now only marginally behind national figures (922) with growing confidence that this figure will be overtaken in the next two years.
- The number of presentations at National 5 -7 increased to 18,545 in 2025 (17,879 in 2024) with average entries per pupil rising for a 5th consecutive year to 4.5. In 2021, the figure was 4.1 entries
- There has been a 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).

Where could we improve?



- Mental health pressures remain significant, including anxiety, low mood and rising concern around self-harm and suicide.
- Physical activity levels have fallen, with fewer young people meeting recommended activity levels.
- Some young people feel less safe in their communities, compared to previous years.
- Attainment gaps persist for young people in deprived areas, and for those with ASN.
- Sustaining positive destinations remains more challenging for some young people once they leave school.

How are we working to improve the positive destinations of our young people?

Supporting Young People to feel safe in their communities

A range of initiatives has helped improve how safe young people feel and reduce anti-social behaviour across Aberdeen. These include joint holiday breakfast clubs with Scottish Fire and Rescue and City Wardens, expanded Youth Horizons activities, targeted Streetsport programmes, and a new Youth Café at Aberdeen Foyer designed with young people.

Between 2023 and 2025, youth anti-social behaviour calls fell by 10.4%, from 3,536 to 3,170. Significant reductions were seen in Torry (65%, from 208 to 73 incidents) and Mastrick (52%, from 271 to 130), supported by the Denis Law Legacy Trust Streetsport Programme, which delivered over 450 free sessions and recorded 28,969 participations in 2025.

Youth Horizons engaged 376 young people during the October 2025 school holiday and achieved an average satisfaction score of 4.7 out of 5, while the Foyer Youth Café has established a core group of 30 young people. Citywide, the proportion of pupils reporting they often or always feel safe increased from 86.2% in 2021/22 to 90.0% in 2025/26, with particularly strong improvements in Lochside (87.5% to 93.0%).



Supporting young people into positive destinations

Multi agency work continues to improve access to learning, training and employment opportunities through initiatives such as ABZ Campus, which offers a wider range of vocational, academic and blended courses. These pathways help young people develop skills aligned to growing sectors, while also supporting those who may struggle in traditional school settings.

Integrated Healthcare courses

A key sector which offers opportunities for young people to achieve employment is in Healthcare. Through our Integrated Healthcare Courses project, 149 young people completed integrated health and care courses in 2024/25, 43% over the improvement aim of 104 young people and a 176% increase since the baseline (54 in 2022/23).

Through pathfinder projects and work directly with schools, the project has continued the development and promotion of the availability of jobs and career progressions associated with healthcare professions. We also delighted to report that 197 young people were enrolled in healthcare courses in 2025/26 we await the competition rate figures.

What Next?

Closing the attainment gap remains a key priority. While overall attainment is improving, young people from deprived communities, care-experienced backgrounds and those with additional support needs continue to face barriers. The new Children's Services Plan 2026-31 is intended to provide targeted support, including work experience opportunities and programmes that help disengaged pupils build confidence and skills for life after school.

Improving mental health and wellbeing will also remain a focus through safe spaces, trauma-informed practice and whole-family support. We will continue to reduce exclusions and persistent absence, particularly among pupils living in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintile 1 areas and those entitled to Free School Meals, while ensuring care-experienced young people receive the support needed to achieve qualifications and positive destinations.

How are we tackling child poverty?



Latest data estimates that for 2024/25 11.9% 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). 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. These figures indicate that despite our ongoing interventions, the number of children living in poverty in Aberdeen over the course of the 2023-26 Children's Services Plan has remained relatively stable.

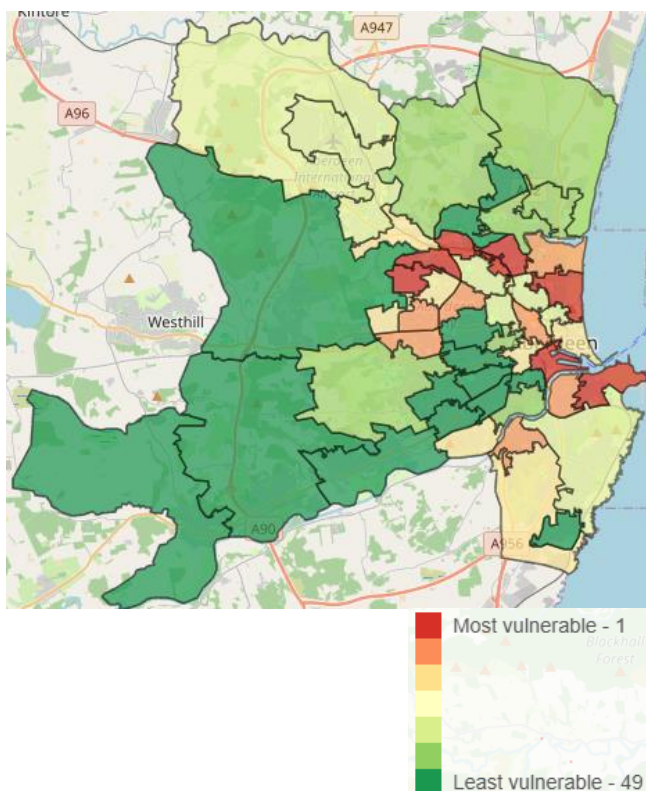
Children's Services Plan Key Priority:

Address the disparity in outcomes for the 6 groups identified as being at higher risk of poverty: (lone parent families, minority ethnic families, families with a disabled adult or child, families with a younger mother (under 25), families with a child under one, and larger families (three or more children).

Where have we made a difference?

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

The Scottish Government Child Poverty Map – Aberdeen City (Improvement Service, based on Official Statistics) shows the spread of relative child poverty across the city. (2023/24)



Where could we improve?

- 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.
- Homelessness continues to be a challenge. 2,082 homeless applications were received in 2024/25, of which almost 556 involved children.

What have we been doing to support those families who need us most?

Cash-first and financial inclusion approaches

Partners continue to prioritise cash-first responses, ensuring families receive financial support, advice and benefit checks alongside emergency help. This approach helps address the root causes of poverty while reducing stigma and reliance on food aid alone. Through this work households have secured improved income, helping families meet essential costs and support children's wellbeing.



Tackling the cost of living

City wide work continues to reduce the impact of rising living costs by supporting access to food, fuel and essential household items, alongside advice on energy efficiency, budgeting and income maximisation. These actions help protect families from the most immediate impacts of poverty.

Families and Community Support Model

It will be both a core priority of both our Children's Services Plan 2026-31 and Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2026-36 to develop a place-based system of hubs, personal casework, integrated pathways and outreach support. We will do this with a view to providing a single co-ordinated experience of access to financial empowerment, housing support and pathways to safe and affordable homes, food sharing, health, employability and family support.

This system change aims to ensure people receive the right support at the right time, and seeks to reduce health inequalities and the risk of poverty and homelessness, while preventing avoidable harms such as poor mental wellbeing, domestic abuse and substance use.

What Next?

Reducing child poverty will continue to be a key priority across Aberdeen. Our focus will be on helping more parents, carers and young people access fair work, training and skills development opportunities through initiatives such as ABZWorks, ABZ Campus and the Aberdeen Computing Collaborative. Community Hubs will play an important role by bringing employability, family support and community services together in accessible local settings.

We will continue to invest in family learning, youth work, digital skills, paid work experience and support that removes financial barriers to education. Through the Aberdeen Families and Communities Support Model, families will be able to access advice, practical help and coordinated support within their own communities.

Maximising household income will remain a priority. Money Advice services will expand into community hubs, helping families access benefits, debt advice and financial support locally. Alongside wider cost of living assistance, these actions will help families improve financial stability, build resilience and create better outcomes and opportunities for children and young people.

How are we Keeping the Promise?

Children's Services Plan Key Priority:

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.



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 Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2026-36 priorities to create a unified, whole-family approach. This has helped in the development of our new [Corporate Parenting Plan 2026-29](#)

What have we been doing to support our care experience children and young people?



Family

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

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.

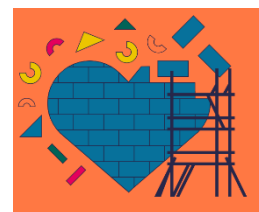


People

We are continuing to strengthen our workforce through Corporate Parenting training, trauma-informed practice and Dyadic Developmental Practice. Multi-agency learning, leadership development and partnerships with Robert Gordon University are helping to build a skilled, confident workforce better equipped to support vulnerable children, young people and families.

Scaffolding

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

Using feedback from care experienced children and young people, we have continued to strengthen their influence on how services are designed and delivered. Corporate Parents are committed to ensuring their views are heard, valued and acted upon, helping shape improvement activity and uphold children's rights, participation and wellbeing in line with the United Nations Cvention on the Rights of the Child.

Where are we making a difference?

Supporting Positive Destinations

ABZ Works continues to provide a range of initiatives to help remove barriers and provide support and opportunities to help care experienced young people feel confident and ready for education, training or employment. Ongoing engagement with ABZ Works has both helped the service to tailor its support to those young people, as well as better to promote to them the opportunities available. Across the course of 2025/26 ABZ Works worked directly with 69 care experienced young people 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.

Supporting Care Experienced Young Parents

The Family Nurse Partnership has expanded support for care experienced young people up to age 25 who are pregnant, providing whole-system support through a single point of contact. Currently, 38 care experienced parents are receiving support. Data shows preparedness for parenthood increased from 68% at 16 weeks of pregnancy to 87% at 36 weeks, while 60% of participants reported feeling “very confident” about becoming parents. Support for care experienced young people is now fully embedded within the wider Family Nurse Partnership Programme. Work also continues to strengthen referral pathways and partnership links to identify and support more eligible young people.



Supporting Our Staff

As part of delivering The Promise, we continue to strengthen the understanding of Corporate Parenting across the workforce, helping staff recognise their role in improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people. Through the Corporate Parent Training project, access to learning has expanded through a new online multi-agency training module designed using Promise resources and co-developed with care experienced young people. To date, 54% of the 11,842 staff identified as supporting care experienced children and young people have completed training. A short learning video has also been developed to share key messages and support engagement across frontline services.

What Next?

As Corporate Parents, we will continue to build on progress through strong leadership, effective partnership working and early intervention. Guided by the Corporate Parenting Plan (2026–2029) and informed by the lived experience of children, young people and care leavers, our focus remains on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities.

Key priorities include strengthening participation so young people influence decisions and hold services to account; upholding rights in line with the UNCRC and The Promise; improving access to high-quality physical and mental health support; and promoting stable, nurturing relationships and a sense of belonging.

We will also continue to improve educational attainment, attendance and progression into further education, training and employment through personalised support. Alongside this, we will strengthen housing and transition support to help young people move successfully into adulthood, reducing the risk of homelessness and ensuring they have safe, stable homes and positive futures.

Children's Right's and Participation: How are we embedding UNCRC?



The incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places a clear responsibility on all services to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights. Across Aberdeen, progress continues to be made to embed children's rights into planning, service delivery and decision making.

Children and young people are increasingly involved in shaping reports, improvement work and community planning activity. While staff confidence in engaging with children and young people has grown, more work is can still be done to ensure children's rights are embedded across all services and settings.

Where have we made a difference?

- Children and young people have been significantly involved in our development of the new Children's Services Plan 2026-31, 587 children and young people were consulted in the development of our plan and have helped to create the easy read version.
- We are supporting our governance groups to ensure that the voice of young people and lived experience will be embedded throughout their work and that they are able to demonstrate how they have been involved.
- Further work is also being undertaken to engage with harder to reach children and young people.



What is working well?

- Children and young people are shaping more and more of our reports and decisions.
- Participation activity is growing across services and partners.
- Staff confidence in rights-based engagement is improving
- New ways of involving children are reaching a wider range of voices.

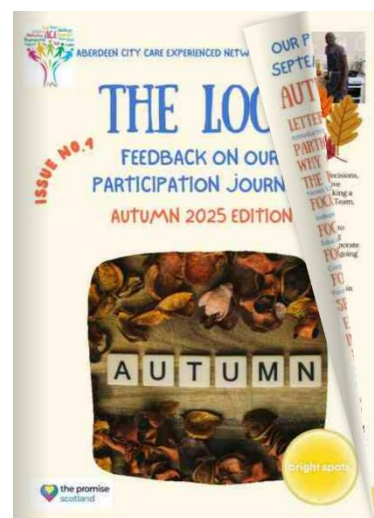


Where could we Improve?

- Children's participation is not yet systematic or consistent across all services.
- Some children and young people face barriers to being heard, including vulnerability, disability or inequality.
- Participation is sometimes seen as an add-on, rather than core practice.
- Evidence of how children's views influence outcomes is not always clear.
- Staff need clearer tools, support and time to embed rights-based practice.

Participation and engagement with Care Experienced Children and young people

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](#)



What Next?

Our Children's Services Children and Young People Shadow Board (The Children's Services Board, Young People's CO:LAB) will go live this year, led by our Young Ambassadors and Aberdeen Youth Movement. This group will help shape our agendas and provide input to key developments of our Children's Services Plan themes as they progress.

We will share our agendas and priorities with our young people so that they can have an opportunity to influence how we develop and carry out the actions within our Children's Services Plan. They will also help us to ensure that we have child and young person centred reports, plans and strategies going forward so that we can communicate more meaningfully with children young people and families in future.

Our Children's Services Plan Easy Read

Our Children's Services Plan Easy Read has been developed in collaboration with children and young people.

This is an example of how we intend to shape more person friendly documents in future, maximising our opportunities to engage with more young people and the wider public in our work.

You can find a copy of the easy read here:

[Children's Services Plan 2026-31 easy read](#)



So, what next?

Our priorities for 20256-31

Delivering the Children's Services Plan 2026–31

This Annual Report shows positive progress for children and young people in Aberdeen, while highlighting ongoing inequalities and the need for earlier, more joined-up and rights-based support. The new Children's Services Plan 2026–31 has been shaped by the evidence in this report and focuses on prevention, early intervention, whole-family support, reducing poverty-related inequalities and embedding children's rights in everyday practice.



Over the lifetime of the new Children's Services Plan we will:

1. Act earlier and prevent crisis

Strengthen early years and primary-stage support, improve uptake of developmental reviews, and help families access support before difficulties escalate.

2. Deliver a whole family, joined-up system

Reduce fragmentation across services so families receive coordinated support, regardless of where they first seek help.

3. Reduce inequality and focus on priority communities

Target resources and support towards communities experiencing the greatest impact of poverty, poor health and disadvantage.

4. Improve wellbeing, mental health and readiness to learn

Expand preventative and community-based support to help children and young people feel safe, supported and ready to learn.

5. Support positive transitions and future pathways

Improve transitions into school, between educational stages and into adulthood, with additional focus on care-experienced children and those with additional support needs.

6. Keep the Promise to care-experienced children and young people

Improve stability, relationships and support while continuing to reduce outcome gaps.

7. Embed children's rights in everything we do

Ensure children and young people are meaningfully involved in decisions, with participation, equity and dignity at the centre of service delivery.

8. Support and enable the workforce

Invest in workforce development, shared learning and partnership working to support continued improvement.

What this means for our Partnership?

Every role contributes to improving outcomes for children, young people and families. By working together, we will deliver earlier support, reduce inequalities, strengthen relationships and ensure children's rights remain at the heart of everything we do.

Our Children's Services Plan 2026-31 Plan On a Page

Ten Year Outcomes		
Positive Destinations		Poverty
90% of young people in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 1 and vulnerable groups achieve a positive destination on leaving school by 2031. - Co-design and deliver a joined-up system of safe, supportive spaces and approaches - Develop targeted interventions and personalised progression pathways that identifies and supports young people at risk of harm young people at risk of harm, disengagement from education, substance use or child criminal exploitation		Reduce the proportion of people in relative poverty and homelessness by 3% by 2031 Develop a place-based system of hubs, personal casework, integrated pathways and outreach support providing a single co-ordinated experience of access to financial empowerment, housing support and pathways to safe and affordable homes, food sharing, health, employability and family support.
Helping Children, Young People and Families		
Best Start in Life	Empowered & Resilient	Attainment & Transitions
Associated Strategic Plans		
Vaccination Action Plan Healthy Weight Strategy	Population Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Youth Justice Strategy	National Improvement Framework Action Plan Community Learning and Development Plan
Summary of High Level Actions		
Provide early, preventative health and family support from pregnancy onwards. Identify and respond early to developmental needs, including speech and language. Support parents' health, wellbeing and confidence in the early years. Reduce health inequalities in the most disadvantaged communities. Remove financial and practical barriers to giving every child the best start.	Create safe, trusted spaces where children and young people feel supported and belonging. Identify vulnerability early and provide timely, trauma-informed support. Protect children from exploitation, harm and criminalisation through early intervention. Strengthen mental health, wellbeing and resilience for children and families. Ensure children and young people are heard, supported and involved in decisions.	Improve attendance, engagement and wellbeing to support learning. Close the attainment gap for children facing disadvantage or additional needs. Provide early and coordinated support for additional support needs. Expand flexible learning, vocational and employability pathways. Support young people to progress into and sustain positive post-school destinations.
Our National Drivers		
Children's Rights	Keeping the Promise	Child Poverty
Associated Strategic Plans		
Children's Rights Reporting	Corporate Parenting Plan	Local Child Poverty Action Report
Summary of High Level Actions		
Place children's rights and best interests at the centre of all decisions. Ensure children of all ages can express their views and influence change. Embed participation as routine practice across services and partnerships. Make information accessible, child-friendly and easy to understand. Strengthen workforce confidence in rights-based practice and duties relating to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.	Provide stable, loving and trauma-informed care for care-experienced children. Strengthen early family support to prevent unnecessary entry into care. Support care-experienced children to achieve and thrive in education. Improve transitions to adulthood, including housing, employment and support. Ensure care-experienced young people shape decisions as corporate parenting partners.	Identify families facing financial hardship early and provide joined-up support. Increase household income through financial inclusion and advice. Reduce the cost of living pressures on families with children. Support parents into fair, sustainable employment. Use lived experience to shape poverty-proofed services and decisions.



**Community
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