

REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE INTEGRATION JOINT BOARD 24 AUGUST 2022

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2021/2022

1 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Integration Joint Board (IJB):

- 1.1 Consider and comment on the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report for the 2021/2022 financial year in relation to Children and Adult Social Work Services:
- 1.2 Acknowledge the level of investment in Adult Social Work Services for the residents of Aberdeenshire; and
- 1.3 Acknowledge the commitment of social work staff in the consistent delivery of high performing services.

2 Directions

- 2.1 No direction requires to be issued to Aberdeenshire Council or NHS Grampian as a result of this report.

3 Risk

- 3.1 IJB Risk 1589 (Risk of failure to deliver standards of care expected by the people of Aberdeenshire in the right place at the right time)

4 Background

- 4.1 Social Work and social care services span a wide range of responsibilities concerned with protecting, supporting, and caring for some of the most vulnerable people in the community. The service spans all ages from pre-birth to end of life and has a strong professional focus on diversity and equality.
- 4.2 Social Work and Social Care Services provide support and offer protection to some of the most vulnerable groups in society. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of day-to-day work, it is testament to the resilience of social work and social care staff that the needs of so many people across Aberdeenshire have been met during this pandemic.
- 4.3 The role of the Chief Social Work Officer covers all aspects of social work, however it predominately centres on the statutory responsibilities placed on Aberdeenshire Council and those involved in discharging duties laid out within a range of distinct legislation. However, oversight is not limited to these



specific functions and the role of the CSWO has a wider remit in terms of monitoring performance across all areas captured within the terms “social work” and “social care”.

- 4.4 The Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2021/22 describes services which are performing well with many areas evidencing innovative practice; both inspired by the creativity of teams with the aim of improving service delivery, or in direct response to existing or predicted challenges.
- 4.5 Social work and social care services are delivered by a substantial number of staff from statutory, third and independent sector organisations. Across all sectors involved in the delivery of social work and social care services, workforce remains a key focus, both in terms of recruitment and retention. In addition, the annual report highlights the challenges associated with maintaining sufficient investment of resources to allow for the proper discharge of statutory responsibilities and those more widely associated with supporting and caring for people.

5 Summary

- 5.1 The CSWO report describes services which are performing well in most of the key areas upon which the report is focussed.
- 5.2 In those areas where improvement was required, timely and effective remedial measures have been put in place.
- 5.3 Currently there are no specific areas that require additional scrutiny beyond that provided by existing processes.
- 5.4 The Chief Officer, along with the Chief Finance Officer and the Legal Monitoring Officers within Business Services of the Council have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated within the report.

6 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the annual report as its purpose is to report on social work and social care provision over the most recent financial year. There will be no differential impact, as a result of the report, on people with protected characteristics.

Leigh Jolly, Chief Social Work Officer

Report prepared by Leigh Jolly
Date 04 July, 2022



From mountain to sea



Annual Report by Aberdeenshire's Chief Social Work Officer 2021 - 2022

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.
— Helen Keller, U.S. author, educator, and disability rights advocate



Contents

1	Welcome, Summary & Reflections	3
2	Aberdeenshire Profile	5
3	Governance & Accountability	5
4	Resources	7
5	Workforce	8
5.1	Workforce Demographics	8
5.2	Training and Learning	10
6	Public Protection	13
6.1	Overview	13
6.2	Child Protection	14
6.3	Adult Support and Protection	17
6.4	Domestic Abuse	18
7	Service Quality & Performance	19
7.1	Partnership Working with Service Providers	19
7.2	Children's Services	20
7.3	Learning Disability Services (Adults)	23
7.4	Mental Health Services	25
7.5	Mental Health Officer (MHOs)	28
7.6	Care Homes and Very Sheltered Housing	30
7.7	Professional and Clinical Oversight Group for Care Homes	31
7.8	Internal Care at Home Service	32
7.9	Justice Social Work	33
7.10	Community Justice	35
7.11	Drug and Alcohol Service	36
7.12	Care Management – Older People and Physical Disability Service	38
8	Commissioned Services	40
9	Unpaid Carers	42
10	Looking Forward	45

Visit www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

1 Welcome, Summary & Reflections

It gives me great pleasure to present my second Annual Report as Chief Social Work Officer for Aberdeenshire, reflecting the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Over the past year our social work professionals in partnership with colleagues across the Health and Social Care Partnership and our communities have continued to deliver services in the most unprecedented and challenging times throughout the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Whilst restrictions have lessened across the country and as individuals, we may be experiencing greater freedom within our communities, the increase in demand for social work and social care has not lessened and in fact services have experienced not only an increase in demand but also an increase in need and complexity.

Nationally, the impact of the pandemic has been well documented. The Scottish Government published a [Strategic Framework Update](#) in February 2022 outlining an analysis of the impact of the pandemic on particular areas of society including:

- Personal wellbeing
- Work
- Workforce status
- Cost of Living
- Education
- Loneliness
- Social Connection
- Cultural engagement

The publication notes that 'the pandemic has disrupted social life in areas that are important for maintaining current and future wellbeing, personally, in neighbourhoods and communities, and in wider society.' It also noted that where a wide range of inequalities already existed across the Scottish population, many of these harms have been exacerbated.

[The Scottish Public Health Observatory](#) in September 2021, noted both direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic on health and health inequalities through a number of pathways including:

- Changes to employment and income.
- Access to education for children and adults.
- Social isolation, family violence and abuse.
- Changes in the accessibility and use of food, alcohol, drugs and gambling.
- Changes in physical activity and transport patterns.
- Changes in the availability and use of healthcare services.

The correlation between the impact on our communities and the impact on service demand is significant.

We are always proud of the contribution that social workers and social care workers make to our society and over the past few years more than ever with staff working hard to support vulnerable children, adults and families whilst dealing with the impact of

Coronavirus (Covid-19) in their own personal and family lives. However, by working collaboratively with partners in the NHS, Council and Third Sector they have risen to the challenge and have continued to deliver, high quality, direct, support to the people who need it across Aberdeenshire. Whilst there will always be opportunity for improvement, we are also immensely proud of our ambition to be person centred which involves seeking and listening to feedback from individuals and families with lived experience as only then will we truly be able to develop trauma informed services together.

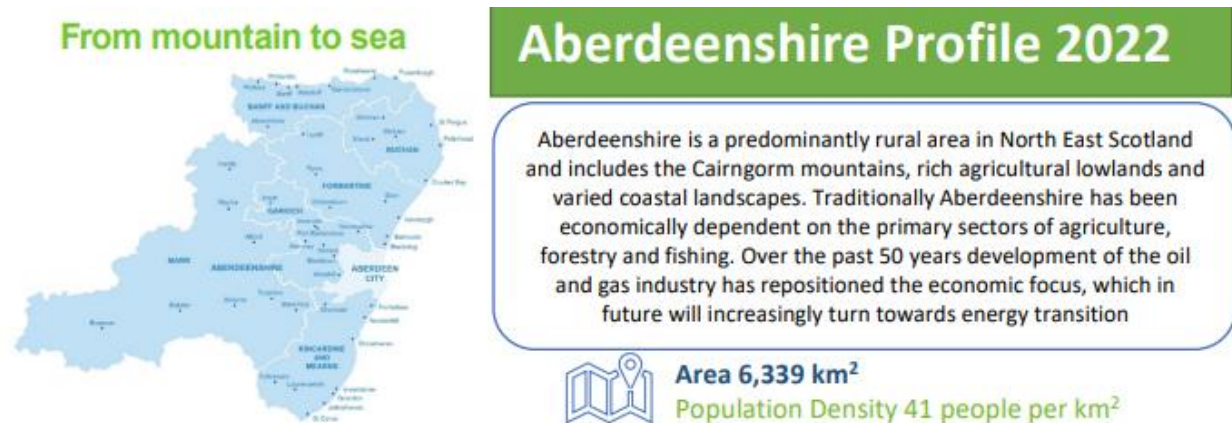
I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that social work and social care is delivered by a substantial number of staff from statutory, third and independent sector organisations and thank all those staff for their tremendous resilience and commitment throughout this period. It is vital that whilst driving high quality services that we remain committed to supporting and valuing our workforce. I would also wish to acknowledge and thank our unpaid carers who so often go unrecognised and yet undertake a crucial role in supporting vulnerable people within our communities.

Thank you also to partners and colleagues for their support over this period and, finally, I would like to thank all colleagues who have contributed to this report and to managers who deputise for me across the HSCP and Children's Services.

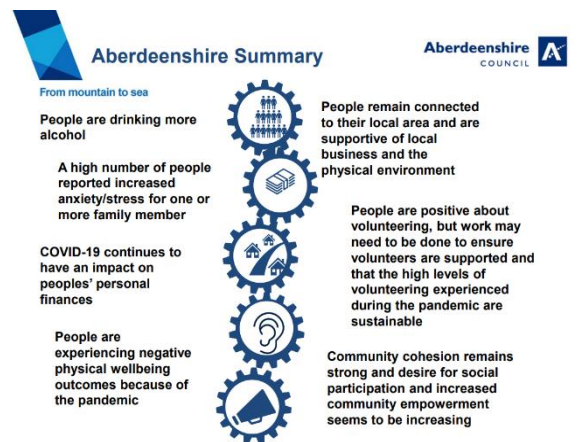
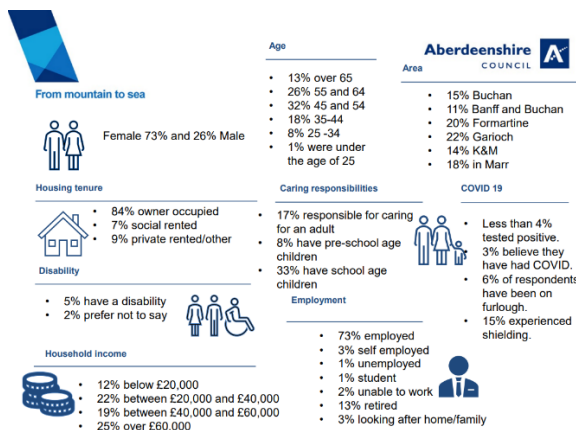
Leigh Jolly
Chief Social Work Officer
Aberdeenshire

July 2022

2 Aberdeenshire Profile



Aberdeenshire's [Community Impact Assessment](#) provides insight into the demography and a summarises key themes following community consultation in August 2021.



3 Governance & Accountability

The Role of the Chief Social Work Officer

There is a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities to appoint a professionally qualified Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) who is registered with the Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC). The overall role of the CSWO is focused on the provision of effective professional advice and guidance to Local Authorities, Elected Members, and Officers in the provision of Social Work Services, whether directly provided or commissioned. The CSWO also has a responsibility for overall performance improvement, and the identification and management of corporate risk in so far as these relate to Social Work Services. Further information is available on the [Role and Function of the CSWO](#) on the Scottish Government website.

This report has been requested by the Scottish Government’s Chief Social Work Advisor in order to assist with ensuring that, on a national basis key issues are highlighted, and information and learning is similarly shared. On receipt of 32 CSWO reports the Chief Social Work Advisor prepares a national overview.

The CSWO is a member of the Council’s Strategic Leadership Team and has direct access to Elected Members, the Chief Executive, managers, and frontline practitioners in relation to professional social work issues. The CSWO meets regularly with the Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council and the Chief Officer of the Integrated Joint Board which enables a wider understanding of social work matters that have traditionally been seen only within the realms of the local authority.

In addition, the CSWO has regular meetings with Aberdeenshire Council’s Chairs of Education & Children’s Services and Communities Committees who both have roles encompassing social work services.

The governance of social work services continues to be undertaken across two discreet structures. Children’s Social Work Services remain within Aberdeenshire Council and are part of the Education and Children’s Service’s (ECS) portfolio. All other Adult Social Work and Social Care Services, including Criminal Justice, are part of the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and are overseen by the Integration Joint Board (IJB).

Whilst the CSWO sits within Education & Children’s Services, a close working relationship has been developed with the HSCP Partnership Managers and the Lead Social Worker who often deputise for the CSWO.

The table below illustrates further the range of structures in which the CSWO participates to inform delivery of the role.

Structure	Role
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Leadership Team • Heads of Service meetings • Corporate Leadership Group • ECS Leadership Team • ECS Committee
Integration Joint Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing member of the IJB • Clinical and Adult Social Work Governance Committee
Children’s Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Services Management Team • Social Work Continuous Improvement Children’s Services Group
Public Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Group for Public Protection • Child Protection Committee • Adult Protection Committee

Duty of Candour Statement for 2020/21

All social work and social care services in Scotland have a duty of candour. This is a legal requirement which means that when unintended, or unexpected, events happen that result in death or harm as defined in **Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016**, the people affected understand what has happened, receive an apology, and that organisations learn from the experience and put in place improvements.

An important part of this duty is the requirement for organisations to provide an annual statement detailing how the duty of candour is implemented across services. This brief statement describes how Aberdeenshire Council has operated the duty of candour during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, there were no incidents where the duty of candour applied. (These are unintended or unexpected incidents that result in death or harm as defined in the Act, and do not relate directly to the natural course of someone's illness or underlying condition).

4 Resources

Social work services continue to be delivered within an increasingly challenging financial environment as the level of funding increases do not keep pace with the increasing demands on services. Aberdeenshire Council and the Integration Joint Board continue to invest in social work and social care services to meet current and anticipated increased levels of demand where many service users are living longer with increasingly complex needs. The gross expenditure on social work and social care services during 2021/22 was just under £40 million on children's services and just under £186 million on adult services.

Despite the continuing challenging financial climate, service users, carers, and staff continued to benefit from substantial financial investment in service delivery. In addition, both the Council and Integration Joint Board (IJB) have continued to support service redesign and re-provisioning in accordance with best practice. The ongoing development of Social Work Services and the associated achievements rely on the continued commitment to working in partnership with a wide range of external partners. The support and commitment of the Council's Elected Members across all groups is also recognised.

Social work and social care services commission resources from a wide range of independent, not for profit, and third sector providers. Services have access to independent care homes, including resources for older people and people with learning disabilities. They also have access to placements for children and young people across Scotland. Additionally, providers in Aberdeenshire operate across home care, day care, and supported living.

In terms of Children's Social Work Services, the main area of pressure for some time has been on externally provided residential education and care provision. This is largely generated by the need for externally procured placements to meet the complex and changing needs of a particular group of children and young people.

The Aberdeenshire Integration Joint Board (IJB) and associated services delivered through health and social care services have experienced financial challenges across a number of social work and social care functions, including older people's care management and learning disabilities services.

Whilst there is undoubtedly increasing demand on services across all user groups, the main reason is associated with increasing complexity of service users requiring support. This is particularly apparent when considering medical advances and the associated consequences of living with long-term conditions such as heart disease or respiratory illness. In addition, services are seeing a rapid increase in requests for mental health support for children and young adults.

In 2021/22 the IJB recorded an underspend of £28.497 million which was taken to Reserves. The underspend was partly due to additional funding of £19million being received from the Scottish Government to help deal with the pressures of Covid-19. The balance of this funding will be needed going into 22/23. The Scottish Government also provided additional winter pressure funding of £4.3 million to be used for recruitment of staff within care at home and other front-line services. Due to difficulties in recruitment most of this funding was taken to reserves to be utilised in 22/23. As part of the IJB Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), programmes of work are ongoing to deliver more sustainable models of service delivery. A strategic and medium-term view of resources is essential if social work and social care services are to deliver their strategic priorities.

5 Workforce

5.1 Workforce Demographics

The Social Work and Social Care sector in Aberdeenshire covers a variety of staff employed within the local authority (LA), independent providers, and voluntary organisations. Statutory duties under social work, across children's and adult services, continue to be undertaken by LA employed social workers, care managers, and Mental Health Officers (MHOs).

Services within the Local Authority are located between Education and Children Services and the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Adult social work is a delegated function of the HSCP.

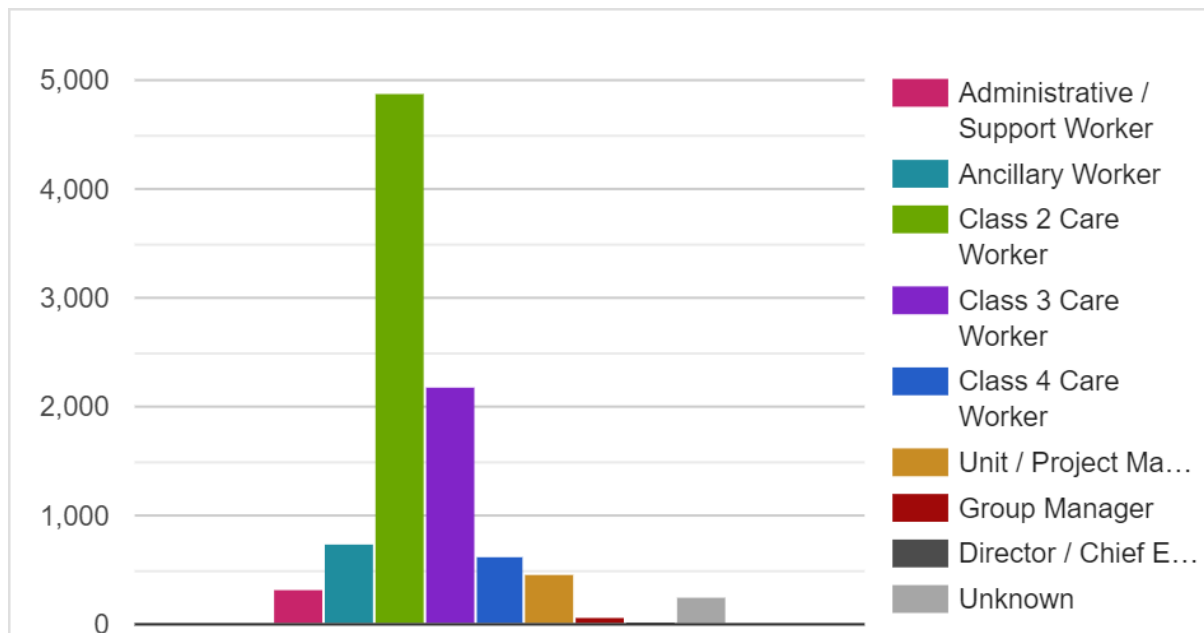
9590 people were employed in social work and social care, across the local authority, independent, and third sectors, in Aberdeenshire.

- 3700 were employed by Aberdeenshire Council, across Adult, Children, and Justice Services, undertaking statutory social work duties and providing social care and support, within 153 registered care services, operated by the LA.
 - Independent providers employ a further 4000 people across 411 registered care services.
 - There are 133 registered care services, employing 1840 people, in the third sector.
-

The largest part of the workforce remains employed in adult social care service provision, within a mixed economy of LA, independent, and third sector employers.

Most staff are employed in social care support, with over half of all staff employed in the sector, undertaking a direct caring role (as workers registered with SSSC under class 2). A further 2000 staff are employed in service provision in frontline supervisory roles (class 3).

Aberdeenshire Social Services Staff Roles (All sectors)

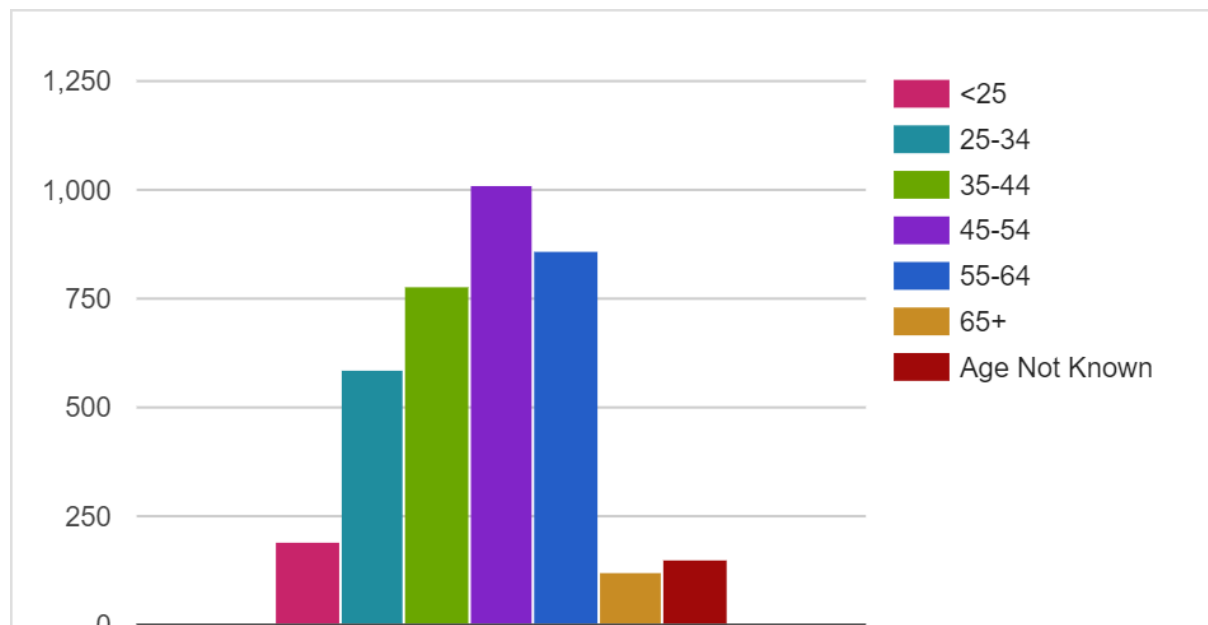


Frontline professional practitioners, engaged in assessment, case management, and protective work, remain a small proportion of the overall workforce (indicated under class 4 categorisation for social workers). However, they retain a crucial statutory role that keeps our most vulnerable and high-risk children and adults safe. Enabling services to continue to provide safe and appropriate support.

There is a continued commitment within Aberdeenshire to ensure sustainability of service, and both Education and Children's Services and the Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership regularly employ newly qualified social workers, many of whom have previously experienced social work placements in Aberdeenshire. As described in the Training section of this document, this reflects the importance placed on working alongside educational institutions to ensure social work services in Aberdeenshire are an attractive option for students and staff.

Evidence indicates that Aberdeenshire Council has a strong history of staff retention within social work and social care services. However, over the last few years, recruitment across all sectors of social work and social care has become more challenging.

Aberdeenshire Council Age of staff (Social Services)



There is a well-established programme of support for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Aberdeenshire. During the period covered in this report, 51 newly qualified workers joined the Local Authority, across Children and Adult Services and were supported through their first year of practice.

Increased demand and COVID outbreaks continued to put pressure on services throughout 2021/22. Staff absence continues to be monitored closely, particularly in the HSCP to ensure service capacity is directed at the most vulnerable. Staff, isolating, have been able to continue working from home where possible and the use of virtual meetings and appointments continues to be a feature of ongoing work. The impact of virtual working has proved challenging at times, however over time there has been a recognition that there is a place for some virtual communications within good social work practice.

5.2 Training and Learning

The Workforce Development Team located within the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) remains committed to supporting staff training and development across all of Aberdeenshire Council’s social work and social care workforce, including Children’s Services. Significant range professional development initiatives are delivered by practitioners and managers from within Children’s Services. This is supplemented where identified by the service in the provision of externally commissioned or joint training with HSCP colleagues.

The team, composed of three full time SVQ Assessor/Verifiers, two part-time SVQ Assessor/Verifiers for Unpaid Carers, three full time Practice Placement Development Officers, a Development Officer (training), an Employee Development Officer, two part-time admin support workers and a team manager; supports the delivery of an annual training plan which incorporates training needs specifically identified by Children’s

Services senior management team. This includes the provision of Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) assessments, social work student placements, face to face, online and blended courses focusing on policy and good practice agendas and regulatory requirements.

The assessment and verification of social care SVQs, and related qualifications has, in the face of very significant increases in the numbers of staff registered with the SSSC, and others requiring post related qualifications, been steadily moving forward. In the last year 114 colleagues have started their SVQ and related qualifications, approximately half having completed. Information on required processes and timeframes is routinely circulated across services. Work is ongoing to secure robust assessment and verification in the light of these increasing demands to improve capacity and drive workforce improvement.

Going forward it is anticipated that changes to post-registration support and validation will be increasingly undertaken by service managers as responsibility to employers. Over the last year, training has continued to be largely facilitated virtually and has become more embedded as accepted practice. It is anticipated that the Workforce Development Team will continue to build on this success and normalise blended methods of delivery.

Both Children's Services and the HSCP have also facilitated staff surveys to enable the workforce to identify skills, knowledge, and confidence levels as well as areas where additional support and training were required. This along with the Workforce Development Team Training Analysis enables Aberdeenshire to work collaboratively and responsively to equipping the workforce to be able to provide care and support with confidence, knowledge, and skill.

In 2021/22, there have been continued numbers of Foundation Apprenticeships being completed within our settings, with a further 22 Aberdeenshire pupils undertaking placements in health and social care services. It is hugely pleasing to see young people choosing to gain social work and social care experience whilst still at school. The relationship formed with local Higher Education Institutions (HEI) remains important in ensuring pupils and students have placement opportunities which are diverse and provide a true representation of work in this sector. All services view placements opportunities across Aberdeenshire as an important feature of workforce planning and future recruitment of staff.

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, fifty-one newly qualified professionals attended the one-year Social Work Professionals Support Programme (SWPSP). The programme, which was adapted to online delivery in the light of COVID-19 mitigation measures, provides an induction to, and familiarisation with, service expectations regarding good practice, and opportunities for reflection and discussion on challenging themes. The themes and approaches were reviewed and adapted for the programme which commenced in the autumn of 2021, reflecting feedback from participants and adaptive response by the programme delivery team.

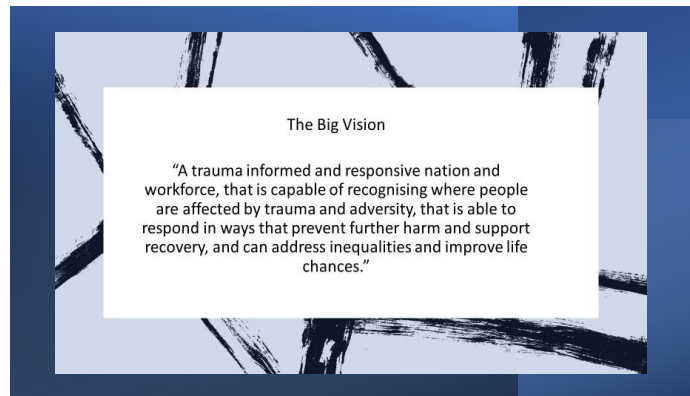
The provision of social work student placements which had been profoundly impacted by COVID-19 saw a significant improvement in 2021/2022 with a record number of placements being provided across Children's Services and HSCP; sixty in across the

academic year with an increasing number in Early Years and Community Learning and Development. Similarly, the lifting of covid mitigation measures has enabled the increasing resumption of face-to-face physical interventions training.

The Social Work Support Scheme which assists selected colleagues to complete their social work degree re-opened to new applicants in the autumn of 2021 with two new participants starting their social work degree.

Trauma Informed Practice

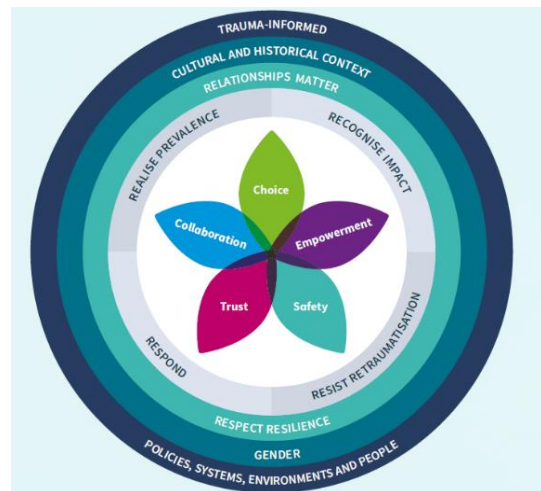
Aberdeenshire Council and key partners including NHS Grampian and Police Scotland are committed to the shared ambition of COSLA and the Scottish Government to developing a trauma informed and trauma responsive workforce. The aim of this work is to ensure we deliver services in ways which prevent further harm or re-traumatisation for those who have



experienced psychological trauma or adversity at any stage in their lives.

Education & Children's Services and the Health & Social Care have played an active role in bringing this to life and improving the way we deliver services and support our own staff and their wellbeing. This has been led by the GIRFEC Mental Health & Wellbeing Group.

A range of professional learning opportunities have been developed for the multi-agency workforce. This will be formally launched in June 2022. The trauma-informed training pathways will then be embedded within the multi-agency professional learning matrix as follows:



Informed level:

- Trauma-informed practice online learning module will be launched in June 2022

Skilled level:

- Trauma-informed practice module is under development
- Trauma-informed multi-agency training event aimed at middle leaders scheduled for June 2022
- Trauma-informed training event for school staff scheduled for November 2022

Enhanced level:

- Scoping underway. ECS and the HSCP aim to have all front-line social workers trained at an enhanced level.
-

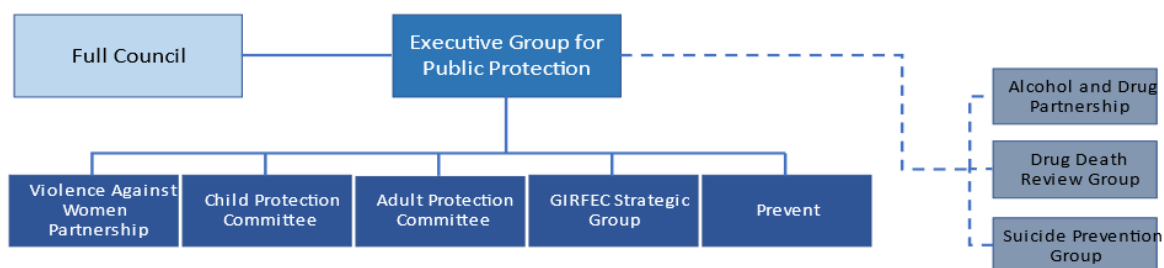
Colleagues from ECS & HSCP have in the past year also actively participated in the Northeast Trauma Informed Implementation Group through sharing learning and approaches, facilitated a North-East event: Developing Trauma Informed Child and Family Services across the North-East' attended by 300 practitioners, supported wider partners in developing their approach and supported the implementation of using a Trauma Informed lens to review service delivery.

6 Resources

6.1 Overview

Public Protection is a key aspect of the CSWO role. Statutory Social Work Teams are integral to the planning, delivery, and monitoring of public protection responses across children's and adult's services.

Governance Structure – Public Protection Arrangements



As a member of the Executive Group for Public Protection (EGPP), during 2021/22 and in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSWO has observed an effective forum for considering key aspects of public protection, including:

- Child Protection
- Adult Support and Protection
- Violence Against Women & Girls
- Alcohol and Drugs/Drug related deaths
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Suicide Prevention
- Prevent/PMAP

This group has also had a central role in monitoring the Public Protection response to COVID-19 and in seeking assurance on key aspects of Public Protection.

Well-established processes are in place to mitigate increased risk through Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), Child and Adult Protection arrangements, and, more generally, a multi-agency willingness to work collaboratively. All child and adult protection duties have remained in place during the pandemic and existing policies and procedures are continuing to be followed.

The Child Protection and Adult Protection Committees continue to meet virtually increasing frequency as and when need arises and both have live risk registers where are reviewed regularly. The Child and Adult Protection Committees continue to have the same independent Chairperson who attends the Executive Group for Public Protection to ensure identified risks and actions are shared and monitored on a multi-agency basis.

6.2 Child Protection



Child Protection work in Aberdeenshire is overseen by the multi-agency Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee (CPC). The CPC publishes an annual report, endorsed by the Chief Officers, which sets out the work undertaken by the Committee. The [Aberdeenshire CPC Annual Report](#) outlines the achievements that have occurred within the reporting period.

Quality Assurance and self-evaluation are central to continuous improvement and provide ongoing reflective processes to measure performance, improvement and outcomes. Whilst individual agencies have responsibility for the quality assurance of their own service, the Committee has responsibility for the development and implementation of inter-agency quality assurance mechanisms. To date, the Child Protection Committee have been reassured that partner services work well together to recognise risk and respond appropriately.

The Aberdeenshire shared [CPC Improvement Plan](#) is underpinned by our own multi-agency quality assurance activity and takes cognisance of existing and emerging Scottish Government child protection policy developments. In September 2021, the Scottish Government published the [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021](#) which has a strengthened focus on children's rights, engagement and collaboration with families, and on building on existing strengths. There is a stronger emphasis on the range of issues that impact on the wellbeing and safety of children.

Learning Reviews replaced Significant Case Reviews in 2021 as our methodology to support how we learn and improve child protection systems. Updated arrangements are in place in Aberdeenshire to bring a more proportionate, flexible and timely approach, to ensure that learning is relevant to the current practice context and is more systematic in approach.

To support our commitment to improving practice and outcomes for vulnerable children and families, the CPC has developed a shared [Quality Assurance Strategy](#) and a [Quality Assurance Activity Plan](#) which sits alongside the CPC Improvement Plan.

Data

The CPC has also implemented and embedded the national Child Protection Committee Data Set and reports regularly to the CPC on key trends and performance indicators comparing quantitative data with findings from our cycle of self-evaluation to bring a more robust and rounded approach.

The Initial Referral Discussion (IRD) is a joint process Social Work, Police, Health and Education staff must follow when they are responding to a Child Protection referral to

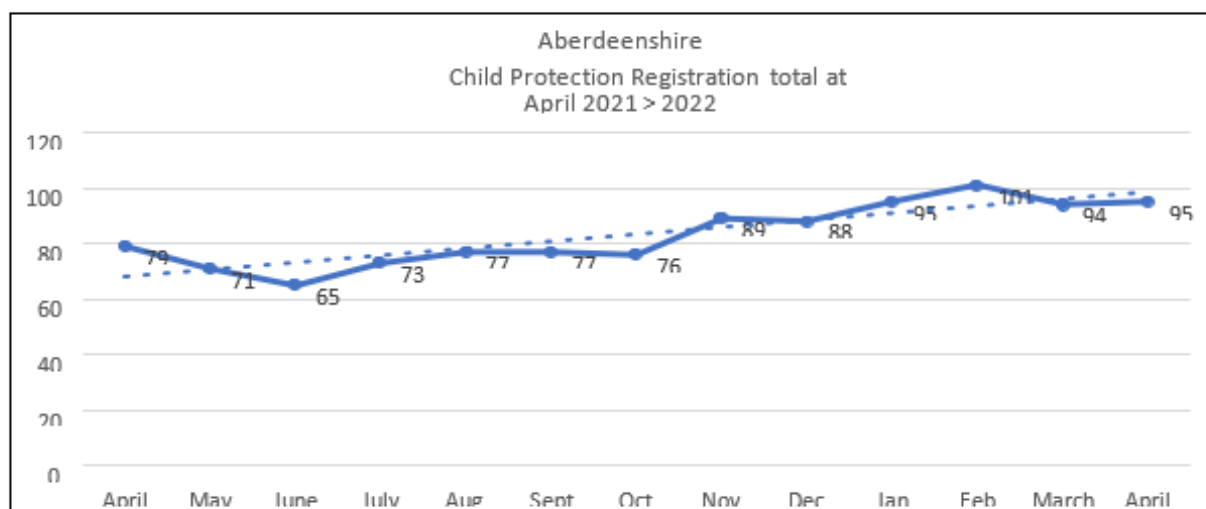
agree a plan for investigation. The purpose of an Initial Referral Discussion is to ensure all relevant information is shared and analysed to ensure that any Child Protection Investigations are based on a reasoned, informed and considered plan.

Numbers of Initial Referral Discussion													
Nos	2021									2022			Total
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
IRDs	22	26	38	19	22	22	14	29	28	31	29	23	303
Children	31	33	53	23	31	29	22	41	40	46	34	30	413

The level of referrals is relatively consistent, with the majority of referrals from police and education colleagues. School holidays can impact on the level of referrals, as can be seen in the slight reduction in numbers in the months when schools are closed.

Aberdeenshire's IRD quality assurance process provides reassurance to the CPC that partners are working together collaboratively and making the right decisions to protect and keep children safe.

The Child Protection Register is an administrative process for alerting workers to the fact that there is sufficient professional concern about a child to warrant a multi-agency child protection plan. Placing a child's name on the Register does not in itself guarantee a child's safety as it is the delivery of a coordinated multi-agency child protection plan that safeguards a child's safety and wellbeing.



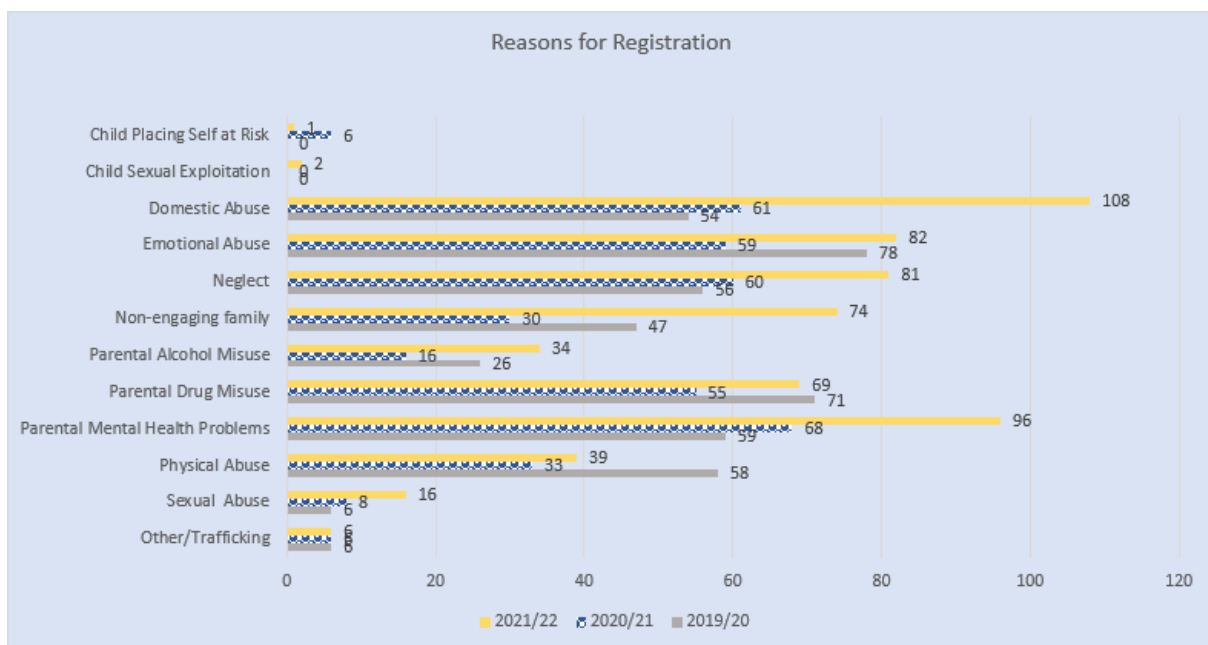
The number of children and young people on the Child Protection Register has remained constant with slight increases and decreases throughout the year, averaging at around 91 with the highest figure at 101 in February 2022 and the lowest in June 2021 at 65. Aberdeenshire continues to have a lower number of children on the Child Protection Register than the national average.

The most up to date Scottish Government statistics for Child Protection (2021) advises that the rate (per 1,000 pop 0-15) of children on the Child Protection Register in

Aberdeenshire was 1.5%. This is less than the comparator average rate and less than the Scotland average rate of 2.3%. It is believed that Aberdeenshire’s now well embedded GIRFEC Framework continues to have a positive impact in reducing the number of children’s names on the Child Protection Register through early multi-agency intervention.

As part of the Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee’s robust cycle of self-evaluation and audit activity, a child’s journey is considered from IRD to Child Protection Case Conference to deregistration. The CPC is reassured that partners work well together and recognise risk, share concerns and actively work with families to reduce those risk and increase safety and wellbeing.

When children’s names are placed on the child protection register there are a number of categories under which children can be registered.



4 highest reasons for registration				
2021-2022	Domestic Abuse	Parental Mental Health Problems	Emotional Abuse	Neglect
2020-2021	Parental Mental Health Problems	Domestic Abuse	Neglect	Emotional Abuse
2019-2020	Emotional Abuse	Parental Drug Misuse	Parental Mental Health Problems	Physical Abuse

The data for 2021/22 indicates that the most common 4 reasons for registration are domestic abuse, parental mental health problems, emotional abuse, and neglect. Although there are often small differences between the numbers, this is a significant change to the previous year. However, there are a number of factors which affect the data which we require to be mindful of. Such as, children can be registered under a number of categories. For example, neglect is sometimes caused by the impact of

parental alcohol abuse. Also, the numbers of children within the same family will also affect the numbers within the data.

What is significant in the 2021 to 2022 data, is that there is a significant rise in the number of registrations for domestic abuse and also for parental mental health problems. This would be seen as related to the pandemic and lockdown measures placing additional strains on families as well as restricting access to support and strategies adopted by families to manage difficult relationships.

6.3 Adult Support and Protection (ASP)



Adult Support and Protection (ASP) work in Aberdeenshire is overseen by the multi-agency Aberdeenshire Adult Protection Committee (APC).

In 2020 the [APC Biennial Report](#) was published which outlined the significant achievements that had occurred following the Joint Thematic Inspection in 2017. The Aberdeenshire APC also published its [Action Plan for 2020-22](#) outlining practice improvement that hoped to be achieved over the next 2 years. Good progress is being made in all areas of this action plan despite the impact of the pandemic on services and our communities.

There is significant evidence that in Aberdeenshire there are safe responses to protecting adults and that agencies work well together to do this effectively. Adults at risk of harm are supported using person centred principles where they are encouraged and supported to be involved in the ASP Assessment and protection planning.

The Adult Protection Network acts as a single point of contact for all Adult Support and Protection concerns. At the beginning of this reporting period all services and organisations were impacted by the effects of Covid-19. This year saw a significant increase in ASP referrals and an increase in ASP Investigation and Case Conferences including Large Scale Investigations. The tables below show the impact on this regarding initial contact to the Adult Protection Network and those that required additional input further to a duty service. (*In both graphs data has been shown from Oct 2018 due to a change in the recording process which will have impacted on the data.*)

Table 1

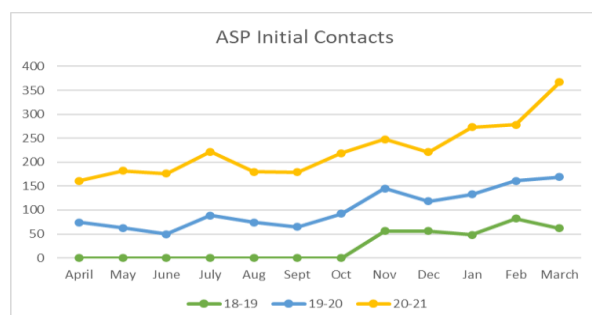
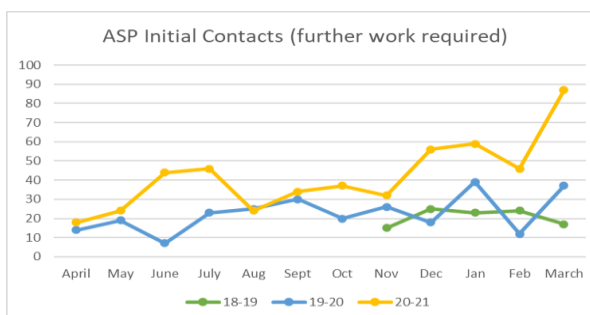


Table 2



Covid 19 funding allowed for additional staff capacity to be put in place enabling all ASP work to continue at a high standard. Operationally adult protection remains a key priority and all services to support and protect adults at risk of harm continued. The

APC identified all possible risks arising from Covid-19 and mitigating actions were taken to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. This included:

- Improved and frequent communication to adults at risk, carers, residents and staff.
- Putting in place increased capacity and resources to the Adult Protection Network.
- Introduction of a prioritisation tool to be used if necessary.
- Daily situation reporting for all HSCP services and Commissioned Services.
- All protection plans were reviewed taking account of changes to service and creating contingency protection if required.
- Aberdeenshire Trading Standards Webpage updated with Covid Scams and support.
- Strengthened links between APC, ACPC and VAWP and more frequent meetings of EGPP.
- All redeployed staff receiving ASP training.

6.4 Domestic Abuse



Colleagues from across ECS and the HSCP are key partners in the Aberdeenshire Violence Against Women Partnership (AVAWP). Domestic abuse is a key priority as highlighted in the [Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2021](#).

The Scottish Government publishes an annual report on [Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police](#) although cautions that recordings by the police does not reveal the incidence of all domestic abuse committed in Scotland, as not all incidents are reported to the police.

Taking the population of Scotland as at mid-year 2020 (most recent data available), there were 119 recorded incidents of domestic abuse per 10,000 population in 2020-21. Aberdeenshire recorded a rate of 65 per 10,000 population which is significantly lower than the Scotland average.

It is well documented that women enduring domestic abuse in rural areas are half as likely as urban victims to report the abuse and abuse in rural communities can last on average 25% longer than in urban areas (National Rural [Crime](#) Network). This is a particular challenge for Aberdeenshire, and it would be naïve to assume that the lower number of recorded incidents reflects that domestic abuse is less of an issue us.

Summary of Achievements

- Successful development of an [Aberdeenshire VAWP webpage](#) signposting viewers to support and raising awareness of domestic abuse.
 - Production and publication of a [Guide to Domestic Abuse Assistance in Aberdeenshire](#)
 - Multi agency Training calendar developed alongside successful development of an ALDO training course which links to regular live Q&A sessions.
 - Strong promotion of national campaigns to raise awareness including 16 Days of activism and support for #thatguy campaign.
-

- Development and delivery of [a video clip](#) shared across social media to raise awareness of the Violence against women stems from gender inequality.
- Delivery of Caledonian Programme and Respect for male perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- Commissioning of a multi-agency audit of child protection plans where domestic abuse was present to gather an understanding of how well practitioners recognise and support women who experience abuse, their children and how perpetrators are held to account. The outcome of the audit will then be used on a multi-agency basis to support good practice and identify and respond to training needs.

7 Service Quality and Performance

The CSWO also has a role to play in overall performance improvement and the identification and management of corporate risk insofar as they relate to social work services.

Social work services in Aberdeenshire utilise regular performance reporting to inform delivery against strategic objectives, highlighting areas of progress and subsequent approaches to continuous improvement. This also includes participation in both adult and child protection committees and scrutiny of their performance and improvement activities.

The Care Inspectorate (CI) plays a key role by regulating and inspecting all registered services (local authority, independent, and third sector providers) across Aberdeenshire and undertakes planned and unannounced inspections. There continues to be regular meetings with our Link Inspector who provides support, advice and guidance.

During 2021/22, planned inspections across social work and social care have begun and they continue to play a vital role mainly in terms of advice and guidance across Services.

Detailed inspection reports for all services can be viewed online here: [Care Inspectorate](#).

7.1 Partnership Working with Service Providers

The independent and third sectors are critically important in the delivery of social work, social care, and criminal justice services to many thousands of people across Aberdeenshire and beyond. In all areas of provision there is a “mixed economy” of providers which offer care and support to service users with a range of needs. The majority of services are commissioned through flexible spot purchase arrangements, or pre-set contracts which set out the specific care and support required. Whilst these services are commissioned on a formal basis with the necessary legal and contractual stipulations, there is strong emphasis on collaboration and partnership working.

The CSWO recognises that the needs of all service users and people in receipt of services are enhanced if agencies work in partnership and maintain a person-centred

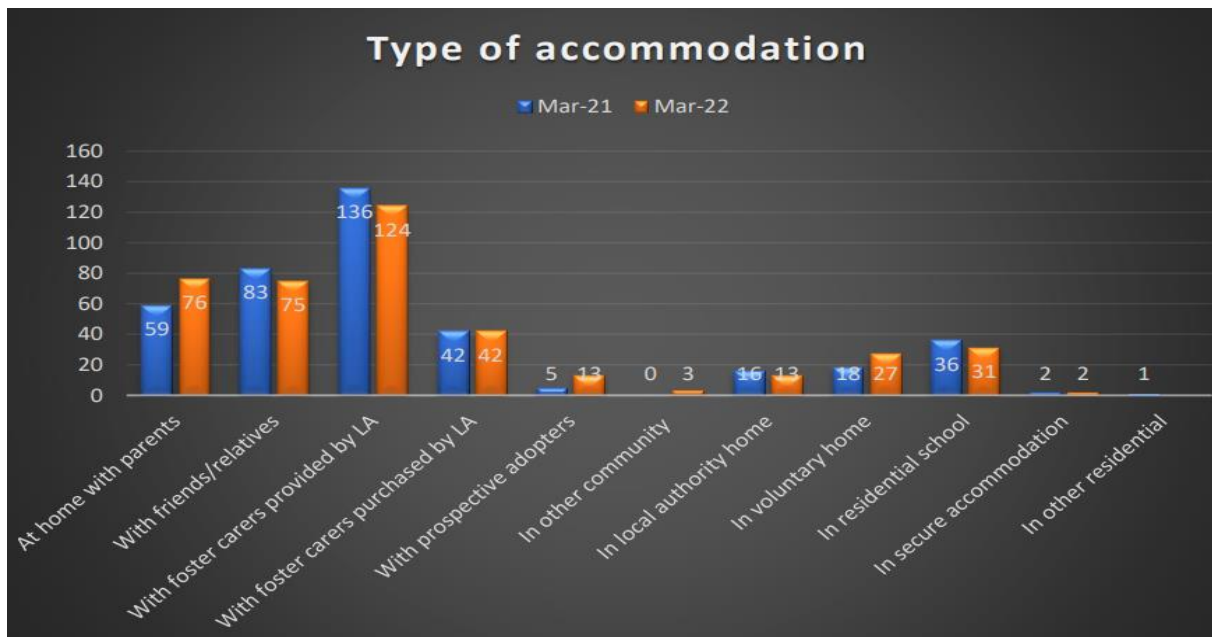
approach. All providers of social work and social care services are profoundly important: the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of whole-system working which is built on a sense of collective responsibility.

7.2 Children’s Services

Children’s Services social work support around 2000 children in need and their families every year. **Of those**, 406 are looked after children (as of 31 March 2022). This includes children who are looked after at home via a Compulsory Supervision Order as well as in local authority care. Our [Corporate Parenting Plan](#) and Promise to Aberdeenshire children reflects our commitment to support children to remain within their local communities where possible.



Breakdown of placement type



Referrals to Children’s Social Work

Referrals to children’s social work have continued to rise over 2021/22 with community teams reporting on the impact of financial hardship becoming increasingly common. In partnership with services, including welfare rights benefit teams there has been a drive to ensure early intervention to support families.

Families are increasingly seeking support directly to our service whilst Education and Police colleagues continue to make most referrals. Childcare concerns i.e. worry or concern for a child’s wellbeing continue to be the most common reason and correlates with Police data on child protection and wellbeing concerns.

Our family centres opened to the public on 28 March 2022 following easing of restrictions. Whilst referral data reflects that we were able to continue to meet with families virtually and in alternative locations, the reopening also provides further support and greater flexibility in delivery of our services.

The Promise

Work continues at pace with support from the Aberdeenshire's Promise Implementation Board to keep our promise to our care experienced young people. Specific work continues with holistic family support and supporting local families with projects underway.

"I like that the support is for all of us"

(Parent from supporting local families project)

Utilising improvement methodology and supported by the Children's Young People Collaborative (CYPIC), feedback from families has informed continuous development of these projects.

Children's services have also focused on the voice of Children and young people and this has led to changes in key areas of practice, including recording, assessment and planning. For example, in our Pathway Reviews for care experienced young people, minutes are now written directly to the young person in the form of a young person friendly letter.

"It brings back lots of memories, not bad ones, good ones. It is good and shows me how far I have come. It made me feel like people get me."

(Young person in receipt of pathway)

Good News Story – Aberdeenshire Welcomes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People

Over the last nine months, Aberdeenshire Children's Services have welcomed and supported 8 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people into our communities with numbers due to increase every month. Strong partnership working has been instrumental in providing support and the service has been overwhelmed by the willingness of partners and local communities to go that extra mile to help to make the transition to Aberdeenshire as positive experience. A number of our young men have been supported to join a local cricket team which has supported inclusion, reduced isolation and loneliness and increased a sense of identity in the northeast. The cricket team have also noticed an increase in the number of matches they are now winning!

Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges has been around the risk/potential for trafficking where two of our young people have been tracked down by traffickers who have taken them to England to pay off the family debt. Close working with colleagues

in Police Scotland has enabled both young people to be returned safely to Aberdeenshire.

Workforce Development and Wellbeing

Focus continues on relationship-based practice, informed by a trauma informed approach. Individual teams have facilitated a 'trauma informed walk' through their settings/building and listened to those with lived experience to improve how and where services are delivered. The whole service 'Time for Talking' events held regularly throughout the year has provided an opportunity to reflect on positive practice by sharing learning and development. Focus has included children's rights, communicating with children and young people, use of language direct work and an opportunity to share and celebrate some remarkable examples of supporting children and young people to reach their full potential.

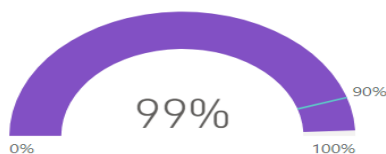
Continuous Service Improvement

The launch of the new National Child Protection Guidance and Children (Sc) Act 2020 has provided welcome opportunities to reflect on current practice. The development of a 'Bairns hoose' and the Scottish Child Interview Model will be some of the key workstreams over the next year and our service will be integral to the development and delivery of these.

Quality Assurance Activities

The service undertakes a 3-year cycle of self-evaluation as part of our quality assurance activities. This peer review of case work and duty processes undertaken by Team Managers, provides scrutiny of current processes. It provides performance information, feedback on good practice to individual practitioners and improvement activities for teams and/or the wider service.

% of referrals completed/allocated und...



Duty Audits – 10 cases are randomly selected and peer reviewed and we have seen a continued strength in our timeous response to need.

This table shows the performance measure of duty referrals completed/allocated under 12 weeks. We continue to pass our stretch aim of 90%.

Case file peer audits

5 cases are randomly selected and peer reviewed across 4 teams every year and learning shared across all teams. Over the calendar of audits undertaken all reflect the consistent performance achievements of:

80% of observations are rated 'good' or above.

75% of assessments are rated 'good' or above.

Summary of Achievements

- Development and improvement of the Children & Young Person's Assessment to include photographs, plain language and with a real focus on keeping the child at the centre of the report and including their voice and views – with positive feedback from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), children, young people and their families.
- Audit activity undertaken around current practice in supporting brothers and sisters who require to be accommodated and cannot be placed together. This highlighted areas of good practice, as well as opportunity for improvement which led to new guidance which has been recognised nationally.
- Following review of kinship care practice, brand new assessment framework implemented to include photographs, simple language with a real focus of keeping the child at the centre of assessments. Strong move towards support being offered for the duration of childhood to scaffold families to able to continue caring for the children placed with them.

Key Challenges

- Staff resilience
- Recruitment and retention following a challenging few years
- Increased demand and increased complexity
- Capacity to prioritise strategic work and self-evaluation
- Continuing to reduce the need for out of authority placements and therefore reduce pressure on the budget.

7.3 Learning Disability Services (Adults)

There are estimated to be 1,233 adults with learning disabilities in Aberdeenshire; of whom 998 receive support from Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Of those in receipt of support, 362 are living in residential care, or supported living settings. 14.6% of adults with a learning disability in Aberdeenshire have an autistic spectrum diagnosis compared with the Scottish average of 13%.

The key focus of learning disability services during 2021-22 was in maintaining services and supporting our population as we continued to navigate the pandemic. Some services such as Day Opportunities were altered to provide individualised home-based day support but were re-started in small groups and within bubbles in our day service buildings when it was safe to do so and have continued to move towards more normality as restrictions have eased.

People with a learning disability are three times more likely to experience difficulties with respiratory illness than others. This makes responding to the COVID-19 pandemic particularly challenging for this group. Our social work and Day Opportunities teams provided support when it came to administering booster shots to individuals, supporting where possible a person-centred model re vaccination. We worked with health

colleagues to ensure that all information relating to Covid, and vaccinations was shared in an accessible format to ensure service users rights were upheld.

We continue to increase the provision of all our services as restrictions allow. An area of growth for our services was increased communication and support to and from our third sector partners. Sharing information, intelligence, staff resource and ideas to maintain social support and friendships during period of restrictions was an area we are proud of. These are key areas we aim to continue to develop and grow.

Social work teams, working closely with health colleagues, continue to provide valuable assessment and support to adults with a learning disability and their families. The creative use of SDS has been stifled during the last period but teams are keen to return to supporting innovative solutions of support as we return to more face-to-face assessments. The role of the social worker is key to ensuring a holistic approach to support ensuring that human rights are at the forefront of every interaction. During the period of transition of our day services away from a building-based model and into a community-based model, it is key that the social work role is embedded in reviewing and supporting this change.

Good Practice Examples - 'Be All You Can Be' – Learning Disability Strategy

Health Inequalities – As part looking at the health needs of our LD population, a palliative and end of life care pathway has now been completed with discussions ongoing with palliative care nurses on how to support people with a learning disability. We are currently developing personal health passports to assist in communication about care needs and working with Scottish Government to roll out Annual Health Checks in Grampian.

Accommodation – Extra Care Housing Provision workstream is exploring local need and developing plans for this type of Housing. Following the successful opening of a supported living development in Fraserburgh, further options are being explored in partnership with service providers, service users, families, and housing partners to provision alternative housing that is fit for purpose. We are also looking at telecare solutions for new and existing developments to try and promote choice and control and independent living, where possible.

Day Services – Each area has introduced a new model of delivering Day Opportunities with particular focus on community integration and outreach. Examples of initiatives to strengthen these community links, such as Shopping Buddies and Books on Legs are indicative of a strategic shift away from building based day services.



“Walking out of Loneliness” an event the Ladies Group from Ellon Day Opportunities organised as part of the Health and Wellbeing week. There were two planned walks followed by an afternoon tea all facilitated by service users with staff support.

7.4 Mental Health Services

There are three Community Mental Health Teams in Aberdeenshire, covering North, South and Central Aberdeenshire respectively broadly aligned to the HSCP six defined localities. The teams consist of Social Workers, Mental Health Officers (MHOs), Senior Community Coordinators, and Local Care Coordinators. The referrals to the teams are increasing and the complexity of referrals rising. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the service anticipated, and is now witnessing, an increase in demand for mental health services. both in the adult and older adult population. The service is working creatively with increased use of technology to meet demand, however the impact of COVID-19 and the associated impact on employment and relationships will undoubtedly lead to a sustained growth in demand across all ages as mental health and mental well-being is adversely affected.

Over the reporting period, Aberdeenshire Mental Health Services continued to provide care and support to adults living with mental health. Whilst much of the support transitioned to telephone and other virtual ways of working, face to face home visits continued were prioritised where necessary and appropriate with comprehensive risk assessment and social distancing put in place during restrictions. A strong collaborative approach with all partners facilitated and strengthened the multi-agency approach to care and support enabling adults in Aberdeenshire communities to get the help they required.

The increase in referrals needs to be understood in terms of several competing factors. These include Royal Cornhill Hospital running at 'over capacity' for significant periods of time over this last year. This factor placed additional pressure on community-based resources to support adults who were more likely in 'pre Covid-19 times', to have been treated as an inpatient. Therefore, the risk and complexity of casework increased for community-based services in addition demand became greater and more people sought help for psychological therapy interventions. Some of this additional demand was met via the Grampian Psychological Resilience Hub and some has translated into additional workload for local services and teams. It ought not be underestimated that community-based teams will continue to receive new referrals pertaining to the impact the pandemic is having on wellbeing and the continuing impact on psychological resilience within our communities as we move forward.

Aberdeenshire's Mental Health Services, over this reporting period, has continued to experience difficulties in recruitment and the challenges to recruit the right people with the right skills to current vacancies particularly across the northeast. During winter 2021, additional funding was made available to fill posts but many of these posts have not been recruited too. Workforce planning continues however to find new and innovative ways to mitigate against these risks and under consideration is apprenticeship opportunities and the use of other qualified post holders in creative and innovative ways.

The Pandemic has made us consider how we deliver services to our clients across Aberdeenshire and we have seen an increased use of technology, both by our teams and our clients. Virtual groups have become a good way of keeping in contact and increasing confidence.

Good News Story

The Lockdown did not stop Senior Community Co-ordinators and Local Area Coordinator, from reaching out to help clients in their area. All the clients in our area are vulnerable and isolated and we quickly set up Skype groups in both areas. Meetings took place twice a week we were able to continue the group work we would have been doing with clients. This included introducing them to other services in the area (virtually) and preparing them to move on as part of their Pathway Plan. Clients commented in their evaluation of the groups, 'That the groups were a lifeline,' their contact with the outside world' and that they had something to look forward to. Even in the restrictions we were able to support clients into mainstream services.

As the restrictions were lifted, we were able to support clients to join locally run groups as they started up.

Kooth and Togetherall continue to be funded between Aberdeenshire HSCP and Education and Children's Services - Kooth for those aged between 10-18 and Togetherall for anyone aged 16 years and over.

I don't know how I would have coped without your support throughout the lock down and I wouldn't have been able to join a group by myself. I have been able to do this because of you. (Feedback from an individual supported by a local Community Mental Health Team)

The [Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019 to 2024 \(pdf 866KB\)](#) sets out our priorities for mental health and wellbeing for the next 5 years. These priorities have been shaped by the views and opinions of a wide range of people, including those living with mental health problems, unpaid carers, our third sector partners and mental health professionals. The strategy is for all adults living in Aberdeenshire who currently access mental health services, as well as those who may need support in the future.

The following mental health and wellbeing priorities have been identified:

- **Prevention & Self-Management:** People are supported to maintain and improve their mental health
- **Access:** People have access to the right treatment, care and support at the right time
- **Person Centred:** We deliver person-centred, recovery focussed services, that promote choice and control
- **Mental Health Inequalities:** We reduce the negative effects of mental health inequalities

Over this reporting period there has been the establishment of the North Crisis Intervention Team, they have been funded through the additional funding provided by Action 15, part of the Mental Health Strategy, this team are a multi-disciplinary team, who take referrals for individuals who present in crisis or distress and come in to contact with various partners including Police Scotland, Custody Centre in Fraserburgh, Minor Injury Units and Scottish Ambulance Service. The team were

visited by Kevin Stewart, MSP, in December 2021. This Team went live for referrals in July 2021, so will be preparing to evaluate the service in July 2022.

Action 15 also gave us the Community Link Worker Service; this team are available to all GP Surgeries, and it is hoped that soon will be able to accept self-referrals. This can do direct practical support, advice and information or even a warm handover to existing community projects and services. The team can support with financial advice, budgeting support and information, housing support advice and information but most importantly holistically supporting and facilitating positive life changes.

Sadly, we have seen an increase in the number of completed suicides in the Aberdeenshire area over the past year, we are working closely with SAMH to try and reduce these figures, we have commissioned them for 1 year to establish community relationship with companies who can advertise and deliver suicide prevention materials. Along with SAMH we will look to develop and maintain a service directory, which will hold information and resources for those people considering suicide and families who have lost people to suicide.

Celebrating Success – Aberdeenshire Mental Health Team



Over 200 service users and members of the public attended the Haddo Conversation café event. HSCP colleagues organised the event as well as running several recovery workshops that were offered throughout the day. During the event, two of our ex-service users volunteered and took part in a new promotional video on what helped aid their recovery. These service users told staff they would never have thought they could have done this without previous support from our team.

7.5 Mental Health Officers (MHOs)

Mental Health Act

The Data

- Aberdeenshire has a **68%** response rate to **69** Assessments for S.36 Emergency Detentions which is a significant contrast to the Mental Welfare Commission's reported national average of **43.5%**.
- **164** Assessments for Short Term Detention Certificates were completed by Aberdeenshire MHOs in 2021.
- It total **91%** of all **244** Mental Health Act Assessments were completed by MHOs in 2021.
- Aberdeenshire were in the **top 3** for completion rate of Social Circumstances Reports in Scotland.
- Aberdeenshire's MHOs attained a **100%** daytime duty rota coverage throughout 2021.
- Aberdeenshire's MHOs also attained a **100%** OOHES MHO Stand-by coverage throughout 2021 which required **69** assessments for detention with an **83%** MHO assessment rate. **7** requests for MHO Assessment for Detention were after 11pm. **12** OOHES S.36s were without MHO consent. **31%** of all assessments for detention took place OOHES between January and December 2021.

Adults With Incapacity Act

- On 01 November 2021 Aberdeenshire had **685** People afforded the benefit of Guardianship which is a 5% increase on 2019 figures.
- **516** Adults require a Local Authority Supervising Officer and **135** require a Local Authority Day-to-Day Welfare Guardian.

Service Initiatives and Developments

- National MHO Workforce Development – Aberdeenshire Council was successful in securing a further Scottish Government Grant for the MHO Award.
 - National MHO Workforce Development – Aberdeenshire Council was successful in securing a £149,000 Scottish Government Grant to enable the creation of 2 Older Adult Peripatetic Priority Discharge MHOs and 1 Peripatetic Learning Disability MHO to enable fulfilment of duties in the face of two years of persistent high levels of service demands across the Mental Health and Adults with Incapacity Acts.
-

- Aberdeenshire Wide Mental Health Officers Fora maintained quarterly.
- Older Adults Mental Health Officers Group Supervision maintained tri-annually.
- Learning Disability Mental Health Officers Group Supervision maintained tri-annually.
- CJSW Mental Health Officers Group Supervision maintained tri-annually.
- Creation of Grampian Psychiatric Emergency Plan Action Cards.

Partnership Working

- Forensic Network Social Work Group Quarterly
- Social Work Scotland Mental Health Sub-Group Monthly
- Scott Mental Health Law Review Practitioners Group Monthly
- Blair Unit Operational Group Monthly
- Blair Unit Security Group Monthly
- Maintenance of People in Criminal Proceedings: Statutory Secure Mental Health Care and Treatment Training <https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/52378/> which is being utilised by a number of Universities and Local Authorities.
- Review and implementation of Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership's Action Plan to the Mental Welfare Commission's Authority to Discharge Report.

Key Challenges

- Second year of persistent high levels of service demands across the Mental Health and Adults with Incapacity Acts.
 - One third of all MHO Assessments for Detention were out of hours.
 - At times access to GPs for Mental Health and Adults with Incapacity Act assessments. Which includes access to Schedule 1 Medical Report Assessments in Guardianship Applications.
 - Continuing lack of Legal Aid Solicitor Services across Aberdeenshire which has now extended to Criminal Defence.
 - Integration of the MHO Role into Children's Services to enable readiness for the New National CAMHS Forensic Service commencing in November 2022.
 - Impact on Adult MHO Services upon implementation of the [UNCRC into Scots Law](#) and the [legal challenges](#) that will likely arise from Adult Service MHOs being involved in CAMHS assessment for detention.
-

7.6 Care Homes & Very Sheltered Housing

Aberdeenshire is an area with a high proportion of Older People. Last year's CSWO report reflected upon progress in promoting an enabling approach to supporting people in their own homes, including residential and supported living resources. For many older people a Care Home or Very Sheltered Housing (VSH) placement is the right option to ensure they are well supported. These facilities support people with high level needs and often complex conditions, including those living with dementia.

Aberdeenshire has care homes across a wide geographical area which meet the needs of the local population. There are 8 local authority care homes and a further 6 Very Sheltered Housing (VSH) establishments within the HSCP. There are a further 35 independently owned care homes commissioned under the National Care Home Contract (NCHC).

Care homes operated by the HSCP reported a stable position in relation to Care Inspectorate grades.

Across the private sector, the picture at times has been more challenging. There have been ten care homes who have changed manager in the past year which has been observed to potentially have had an impact on the outcome of their Care Inspectorate inspections.

Four care homes for older adults have had Care Inspectorate inspections with awards of 2 or below. This has put them into non-compliance with their contract and a suspension on admissions until there is noted improvements.

There have been a number of Adult Support and Protection (ASP) referrals made by a range of people who have concerns regarding the care and support being delivered this has led to a number of large-scale investigations around the alleged incidences of harm.

However, the HSCP has continued to work closely with private providers to offer advice and at times hands on practical support from within our own workforce. The HSCP have also worked closely with the private care and home and families to ensure communication is clear and they are reassured about the care and safety of loved ones.

Good News Story – Felt Fine



Felt Fine Film

Facebook: <https://bit.ly/3QAClzn>

“At first I wasn’t that into it, but by the end I really enjoyed it and was getting into it. I am looking forward to seeing what it looks like when she’s put it all together and to see the film as well. It was brilliant.”
(Dawson Court Tenant)

Over 25 tenants & 10 staff in Turriff's Dawson Court VSH complex worked with a textile artist and Poppycock Films to explore creativity as a tool for self-expression. Called 'Felt Fine', tenants were encouraged to use the tactile material of unspun wool to weave landscapes inspired by living in rural Aberdeenshire. This project saw often non-verbal dementia participants talking animatedly, a participant with mental health issues become unusually fully engaged in activity and all participants continued to return to each session.

7.7 Care Homes & Very Sheltered Housing

During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been substantial scrutiny of the care and support provided to Care Home and Very Sheltered Housing (VSH) residents and tenants. The response to the pandemic raised a number of questions regarding the care home sector, and in particular the use of protective equipment and infection, prevention, and control procedures.

From 18 May 2020 each area was directed to put in place a multi-disciplinary team (Oversight Group) comprised of nursing, public health, social work, and clinical representatives. The Oversight Group's remit include discussions about the quality of care in each Aberdeenshire Care Home and VSH, with the particular focus on resident welfare, infection prevention and control measures, support for COVID outbreaks within staff and resident population, management and leadership matters, workforce challenges and promoting positive outcomes for people experiencing care.

As part of the direction from Scottish Government care homes and as a local arrangement VSH have regular, scheduled assurance and support visits which are held every 16 weeks as a maximum. The oversight operational assurance team also support the providers with any specific training needs as well as support during any significant events including COVID outbreaks.

The role of the CSWO in this group has been important in ensuring residents and tenants' human rights have been considered throughout the pandemic.

To date, there has rightly been a focus on preventing COVID-19 entering care homes and, where it is present, taking action to avoid its spread. This has ultimately changed the focus towards a more clinical environment with far greater emphasis on the wearing of PPE, and infection prevention and control processes. Visiting has been restricted to minimise the opportunity of infection, however, this has caused significant stress and anxiety for both residents and families. This continues to be an area of much ethical and moral debate in which the CSWO continues to offer advice.

Care homes have worked tirelessly to support family and visitors to support the people experiencing care in the safest way possible. The homes have embraced the implementation and development of the Open with Care guidance and Annes' Law to facilitate visiting even through an outbreak. All care homes have been supported to offer multiple visiting and only brief pauses in visiting has been applied if absolutely necessary in line with Health Protection Scotland's guidance and advice.

As part of Annes Law there has been an addition of two descriptive statements into the Health and Social Care Standards the Aberdeenshire providers have been supported locally through the Providers forum meetings to look at how to ensure people experiencing care are supported to meet the new additions through staff, family/ loved one and people experiencing care engagement sessions.

Recruitment and sustaining the workforce remains an ongoing challenge nationally and across Aberdeenshire.

7.8 Internal Care at Home Service

The service has reshaped the care and support provided by introducing a four pillars model: complex care; end of life care; rehabilitation and enablement; and rapid response.

The implementation of the model has encountered some challenges, particularly in rural areas where there are limited alternatives to the internal home care service. However, there has been significant progress and benefits in terms of integrated working and achieving positive outcomes for people. Home carers have become more integrated within multi-disciplinary teams and benefit from working alongside local district nursing teams to provide palliative and end of life care. This integrated model has proved crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic where teams have worked together in different ways to meet the needs of service users.

However, recruiting to and sustaining the delivery of care at home services and Care Homes as noted above remains a real challenge nationally and for Aberdeenshire. The pandemic has also impacted private providers, some of whom have found it really challenging to deliver on contracted hours for Aberdeenshire residents which at times has had to be absorbed by an already overstretched in house Home Care Service.

Operationally, all partners have worked together with families and communities to mitigate risk and prioritise need but there is a real concern about the impact of winter

months and long-term sustainability. To address this, the HSCP have set up a number of strategic groups to lead on improving sustainability across social care which will feed into a Sustainability Board chaired by the CSWO with clear governance around reporting to the Strategic Planning Group and ultimately the IJB.

7.9 Justice Social Work

During year 2021/22, the Justice Social Work Service continued to deliver an essential statutory service integrating adapted approaches and intervention methods as the impact of the pandemic became an accepted feature of the working environment. Hybrid working across the workforce became established with increased face to face contacts between practitioners contributing to workforce wellbeing and supportive safe practice.

As other parts of the justice system reopened, direct and indirect consequences for Justice Social Work presented ongoing challenges. Increased requests for Criminal Justice Social Work Court Reports to be undertaken was a direct consequence of how the Court system has had to address the significant backlog of pending cases. Priority to process high risk casework increased assessments for domestic abuse related and sexual offending related work. This created workforce pressure as only those practitioners accredited to undertake those assessments could carry out this work and hold these Orders. Limited access to national training to increase these competencies across the workforce has been difficult.

As measures to manage the pandemic changed so too did the ability to deliver groupwork for domestic abuse related offending and sexual offending. Intermittent delivery of groupwork for Caledonian System and Moving Forward: Making Changes Programme Requirements was possible but interrupted by the changing response to managing the pandemic. New ways of working virtually when safe to do so had become embedded in delivery, so change from face-to-face groupwork delivery to virtual one to one delivery was experienced by both workers and service users as having less of an impact. The effectiveness of face-to-face group work as an approach remains key to effective service delivery.

Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) remained a robust mechanism for responsible authorities to collaborate in the management of risk of serious harm. The established nature of virtual MAPPA meetings continued to increase participation across relevant agencies which increased the defensibility of risk management planning to mitigate risk.

The impact of increased demand on the Justice Service was reduced by the continued allocation of Covid Recovery funding awarded directly to address the impact of the backlog within the Court system. The recruitment and support of temporary social work and support staff has featured again in year 21/22. This has positively impacted on meeting demand and has increased support worker and employability worker capacity to respond to wider practical, social and emotional wellbeing needs.

Trauma training has been available through the Community Justice Scotland since year 2020. Aberdeenshire Justice Social Work Service has engaged in every opportunity to support staff to participate across all tiers of training. During 2021,

practitioner attendance at further trauma training has increased practice skills and has led to work being undertaken to review through a trauma lens, all of the literature which the service holds in relation to HR processes and service delivery.

Pressures on the prison system with the increasing remand and sentenced prison population has influenced the investment both nationally and locally in pre-disposal support and intervention. Assessment for Bail Supervision and Structured Deferred Sentence are undertaken by an enhanced Court Support Social Work Service ensuring that people who are appearing from police custody have opportunity to engage in support at the earliest opportunity to prevent the escalation of underlying need. The enhancement of Court Support has contributed to the readiness of Aberdeenshire to deliver assessment suitability for electronic monitoring as part of the consideration of bail conditions.

During the previous reporting year 20/21, Schedule 4 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 provided Scottish Ministers with the power to release people in prison who fell within specified categories. Multi agency partners were activated to adopt a much more collaborative response to support people released from prison. This practice was established as core delivery throughout year 21/22. Risk of drug related harm identified through the partner Drug and Alcohol Service initiated early identification people released from prison as being at high risk of fatal harm due to drug overdose. This collaboration also represents one of Aberdeenshire's responses to the delivery of the new Medication Assisted Treatment standards. Equity of access to services for people in the justice system a core feature of these new practice standards.

The prison based social work team based within HMP & YOI Grampian continued to work a hybrid model of delivery, responding to the critical periods of lockdown during year 21/22 due to infection rates across the prison estate. The statutory responsibilities of the team to contribute to the management of release arrangements for statutory prisoners through delivery of direct therapeutic interventions and assessment of risk of serious harm increased as the prison population through remand and sentenced custodies also increased. This is directly related to the backlog of Court business which impacts on the volume of casework across all parts of the justice system. This will be an enduring feature of the justice landscape in the coming years.

Throughout the reporting period, as was the position during 2020/21, the service was unable to provide unpaid work opportunities in the way that it normally would. One-to-one outdoor placements which increased to one-to-three when safe to do so, still presented a challenge in terms of ensuring that individuals were offered sufficient opportunity to complete unpaid work hours. Locality based community placements remotely supervised, home working tasks, individual placements in community projects supported through grant funded "Covid Recovery" investment were adapted ways to meet demand.

The use of the 'Any Other Activity' component of an Unpaid Work Requirement within a Community Payback Order remained crucial in the completion of unpaid work hours. Virtual employability programmes, as well as one-to-one programmes delivered to meet individual needs, have contributed towards the completion of Any Other Activity hours.

The Higher Support Needs Team has also supported individuals in activities such as cycling and walking as part of improving mental health and confidence through fitness. This approach creates opportunity for effective engagement in an informal and safe environment, contributing to improving trust in the working relationship which in turn has led to increased engagement and the completion of Unpaid Work and Any Other Activity Hours. The outcomes which have been seen as a result of this engagement has been significant – during the period, the team have maintained contact with individuals who have been previously unable to engage with services due to the complexity of their needs. Breach of Order due to “non-compliance” very often resulting in cyclical short custodial sentences.

7.10 Community Justice

The Aberdeenshire Community Justice Partnership (ACJP) continued to meet online during 2021/22. As in 2020/21, much of the work of the Partnership, as set out in the Action Plan, had to be put on hold due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. However, in spite of this, the ACJP has still been able to deliver a number of collaborative projects over the reporting year.

Drug supply through “County Lines” and associated “cuckooing” activity continue to impact on Aberdeenshire communities, most notably within the Buchan Corner. The joint work in relation to county lines and cuckooing which began in 2018 has continued, through the Joint

Cuckooing Initiative - Following on from the four successful joint Days of Action in December 2020, a further four Days of Action were delivered during 2021/22 (two in December 2021, two in February 2022) to address the harms caused by Serious and Organised Crime, and to provide support to vulnerable people who are being exploited and at risk of drug harm.

The Days of Action involved Criminal Justice Social Work, Substance Use Services, Housing and Children & Families and Community Safety alongside Police colleagues, including Community Policing Teams, CID and specialist units who carried out a combination of enforcement and outreach support work to demonstrate a multiagency approach to safeguard communities and individuals following enforcement activity.

The National Strategy for Community Justice and National Outcomes, Performance and Improvement Framework for Community Justice are currently under review, with refreshed and revised documents due for publication during 2022/23. Once these national documents are published, the Aberdeenshire Community Justice Outcomes Improvement Plan will require to be reviewed. A position statement on the current CJOIP was agreed by Community Justice Partners and the Community Planning Partnership in January 2022 and is available to view on the Community Justice webpage ([ACJP-Position-Statement-12.11.21.pdf \(ouraberdeenshire.org.uk\)](#))

Good Practice Examples of Integrated Working

During the February 2022 Days of Action, 61 visits were undertaken, with 24 successful contacts and 37 calling cards left when visits were unsuccessful. This provided increased visibility of Police, Criminal Justice Social Work, Community Safety and Drug and Alcohol services within communities.

The presence of the Police pod (leading to 30 interactions with members of the community) and Community Safety Visits to households (96 in total) generated further intelligence, while the joint visits engaged and re-engaged people at risk, offered fast track into treatment as required, provided access to other support services whilst the enforcement activity itself served as a disruption to those responsible for activities relating to drug supply.

During December 2021, teams from Police Scotland and Aberdeenshire Criminal Justice Social Work and the Community Substance Use Service took part in the joint 'Festive Safer Streets Initiative' within the towns of Fraserburgh, Inverurie and Peterhead. The initiative took place across 2 weekends and involved a mix of high visibility patrols within the town centres, licensed premises checks (where COVID restrictions allowed), welfare checks to existing CJSW / SMS clients, and bail compliance checks.

These Safer Streets activities provide an opportunity for Criminal Justice and Substance Use Services to see and offer support and assistance to vulnerable individuals out with normal working hours, as well as providing a visible presence within communities through interaction with the night-time economy, allowing opportunities to engage and diffuse potential situations before they escalate, leading to increased feelings of safety and wellbeing.

7.11 Drug and Alcohol Service

The Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Drug and Alcohol Service has continued to develop as a strong statutory service which delivers treatment, intervention and support to people who have drug or alcohol problems. Year 21/22 featured increased collaboration with other statutory partners to meet increasing demand for services and to respond to increased complexity of risk and need in the presentation of people already supported in service and people newly referred into service.

During the year, there was as much as a 50% increase in referrals into the social work team compared to the previous year's figures. This is likely to have related to the pandemic with people experiencing increased periods of isolation and lack of support from day-to-day services normally available in communities. Changes in drug trends were also a notable feature and have had a detrimental impact on individuals including young people.

The Service continued to remain open as an essential service, prioritising risk and vulnerability to determine where face to face contacts were required. Although the experience of virtual contacts has been advantageous for some, the limitations of this are very clear when it relates to the ability to undertake clinical reviews inclusive of an assessment of physical wellbeing. Self-report is often unreliable for a range of different reasons, therefore, the Service required to be agile in the constant review of treatment and support plans to ensure that everyone who was open to services had the opportunity to gain the benefits of an interaction which reviewed their whole circumstances and not only what could be partially seen or self-reported.

Aberdeenshire has not been untouched by the harm which drugs and alcohol can have on individuals, families and communities. There was sadly a further increase in the number of people who died as a result of drug related harm in the reporting period. The continued national response to the public health crisis related to increasing drug related harm and drug related deaths was, therefore, very much experienced at a local level and combines the influence to practice and service developments throughout the year.

During 2021, "National Drugs Mission" additional funding was received by the Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership which initiated the Drug and Alcohol Service, alongside partners to plan a response to meet the recommendations of the National Mission and implement the new standards of delivery of drug and alcohol services.

The aim of the National Mission is to improve and save lives of people who use drugs and their loved ones. The delivery of the ten new Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards is at the centre of the National Mission aims with the first five standards expected to be in place by 31/03/23. These are:

- Standard 1 – Same day treatment
- Standard 2 – Choice of treatment
- Standard 3 – Outreach for those at highest risk of drug related harm
- Standard 4 – Harm Reduction at point of MAT.
- Standard 5 – All people receive support to remain in treatment for as long as requested.

The planning and preparation for the resign of services to deliver on these new standards has been at the centre of the work of the service. A brief overview of the projects in development:

- Locality Access Points in five areas in Aberdeenshire.
 - Establish a small residential stabilisation/respice facility in Peterhead.
 - Enhance the existing Aberdeenshire Responsive Intervention Engagement Service (ARIES) team as the outreach response and Near Fatal Overdose pathway. Integrate Police Scotland, Scottish Prison Service and Justice Social Work within this outreach response.
 - Implementation of The Framework for Improving Holistic Family Support: Towards a Whole Family Approach and Family Inclusive Practice in Drug and
-

Alcohol Services which will establish a small social work team joining Adult and Children's Services together in one delivery system.

- Test of Change within Fraserburgh GP which will embed practitioners within the GP practice to ensure that the best opportunity for people to recover within the GP surgery environment is available.
- A Drug and Alcohol Practitioner integrated within community mental health to develop opportunities for the development of joint working in the truest sense with dual diagnosis and where people have mental health/wellbeing difficulties underlying drug and alcohol issues.
- "Safer in Service" Partnership Days of Action is a partnership response which combines Community Safety, Justice Social Work, Drug and Alcohol Service, Housing, Children's Services and Police Scotland to carry out engagement and enforcement to demonstrate the whole system and a multi-agency approach to tackling the issues associated with drug related harm in communities. The approach focuses around bringing support to those most vulnerable and at risk through outreach visits offering the support of services designed to keep them safer and reduce the risk of exploitation and drug related overdoses and deaths.

This approach is developing as an established response to drug harm and is informed by a cross section of evidence based strategic recommendations.

The increased resource allocation within the Service to establish this extensive Project work and service redesign has represented loss of familiarity and initiated change in practice. Supporting change in process and practice, introducing new projects, new staffing profiles and constantly adapting to what the pandemic presented in the working environment at the same as responding to ever increasing referrals and sometimes new and more complex casework scenarios has been challenging for the workforce.

The access to training and well-being support has been essential but has at times added another expectation on an already fatigued workforce. The addition of Psychology and Occupational Therapy within the Service has been positive and well received, however, still required energy to embed new ways of working into practice routines.

7.12 Care Management – Older People & Physical Disabilities Service

The Care Management Service (Older People and Physical Disabilities) consists of 6 teams across Aberdeenshire that align to the Health and Social Care Partnership (H&SCP) localities. Each team is led by a Team Manager and consists of Senior Practitioners, Care Managers and Enablement and Support Co-ordinators.

The Service's strategic direction is governed by the Integration Joint Board and multi-disciplinary and whole system working is a core feature in providing a holistic service as a member of the community health and social care locality teams. Maintaining and developing Third Sector and commissioned services relationships is vital to ensure a

wide spectrum of resources are available to support service users depending on their personal choice and abilities.

Aberdeenshire has an estimated 52,108 people over the age of 65, 19.6% of the population. The focus for the teams in 2021-22 has been continuing to deliver a quality service and minimising risk, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teams have utilised new technology to carry out assessments virtually, such as 'Near Me' and the extensive use of Microsoft Teams has allowed essential meetings to progress. Local forums facilitated by Care Management Team Managers with commissioned care providers and our in-house Care at Home Service enabled improved communication and cross sector working to ensure service users continued to receive support during periods of high staff absence.

The practitioners continued to use outcome focused assessment and to promote the option of personalised budgets, while undertaking self-directed support assessments. However, choice of service provision was limited and continues to be so due to restrictions on respite, day services, lack of availability of personal assistants and restrictions on community activities. The use of innovative support packages under SDS option 1 and 2 reduced throughout 2021-22, however option 2 support packages increased by 19.1% by March 2022. Perhaps reflecting the easing of Covid restrictions and the wider availability of more creative options.

The effective functioning of the Care Management Service is a vital in delivering flow throughout the health and social care system. Care Managers, the majority of whom are social work qualified in Aberdeenshire, provide a role to meet statutory duties in the provision of assessments, adult protection interventions and under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. During 2021-22, the demand on this service has increased due to whole system pressures particularly in the NHS Grampian Acute Sector, a continued increase in complexity of the needs of older people, and challenges in recruiting to care at home resulting in an increase in service users' unmet care needs. As the operational pressures lessen, strategic work has commenced to support social care sustainability.

An example of an initiative to streamline pathways, alleviate pressures on the system and improve service user outcomes is below:

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary - Care Management Hub Development

The initial aim of the project was to facilitate more effective information sharing between the community Care Management Teams and the ward staff in the Acute Sector to facilitate effective discharges. A 'light touch' assessment was created and a 1.0FTE Care Manager post to support the Hub. This was increased to 5 Care Managers and 1 Enablement Support Coordinator who now support all new referrals, complete a 'light touch' assessment and arrange a care package for discharge; providing support until the service user has been discharged home and a full assessment completed by the community team. Since this team was created, there has been an increase in assessments under The Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, which has consequently identified the need for a Mental Health Officer (MHO) who is now in post, funded by the Mental Welfare Commission.

Future expansion of the team is planned to undertake complex assessments, including adult support and protection referrals, which will assist to ease pressures on the community team, further streamline the pathway and provide better outcomes for service users.

8 Commissioned Services

Social Care procurement of services is driven by strategic commissioning intentions for services listed under Schedule 3 – Social and Other Specific Services, of the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015.

Together with Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire' Health and Social Care Partnerships, Children's services and Housing services, the shared service social care team has established Commissioning and Procurement boards to create a clearer link between the programmes of work, the associated budgets, and the procurement work plan, in line with the Commissioning Cycle.

Collaboration is central to the work of the social care team. As a shared service, we are able not only to work collaboratively, but also to learn from each part of the service, share experience, and learn together resulting in better value to each Council as well as our customers.

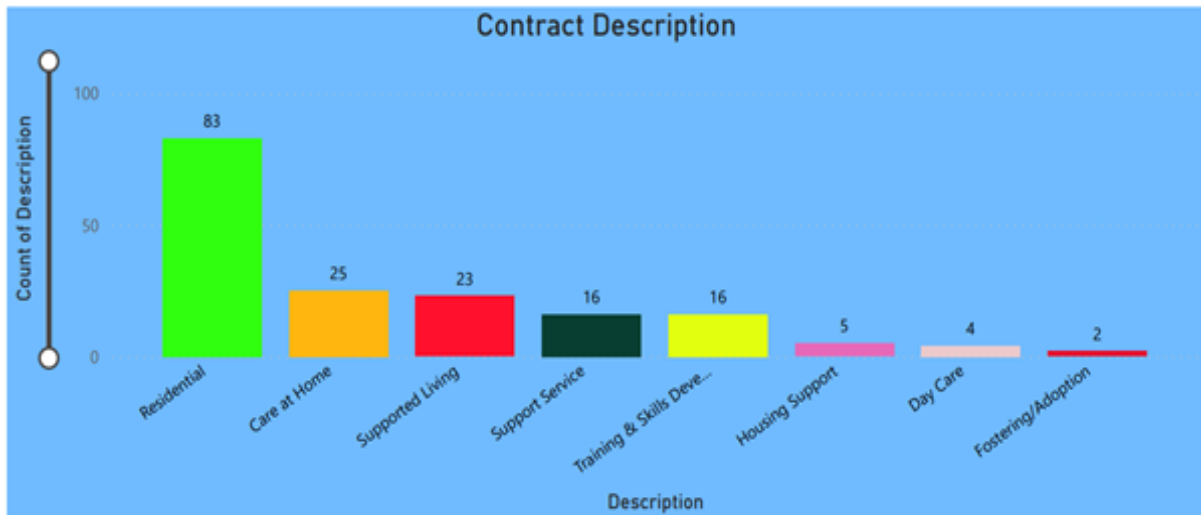
Throughout 2021/22, the strategic commissioning of services has continued, and our commissioning team has continued to monitor, support, and contribute to the strategic direction of commissioning in relation to the delivery of social work and social care.

The following provides an overview of some of the highlights:

- Advice to providers in relation to national and local guidance.
 - Activity linked to the operation and renewal of the Complex Care framework.
 - Participation in assurance and oversight groups including locality specific groups.
 - Establishment of the "Support at Home" framework that include thirty-one providers. Services will be commissioned under flexible and responsive, co-produced contractual arrangements that are outcome focused.
 - Participation in National Care Home Contract Reference Group and involvement in work pertaining to developments in the NCHC.
 - Participation in local Provider Forums.
 - Development of the new Residential/Education/Short-Breaks Framework working with Scotland Excel.
 - Establishment of Outreach Support Services for adults and young people with Housing colleagues.
 - Publication of the tender for Domestic Abuse.
 - Development of an internal Quality Assurance system for the social care contract team.
 - Managing the non-compliance process across all services.
-

Contract Management Framework

The visualization below is a breakdown of the current social care contract portfolio. In total, 174 Aberdeenshire contracts were included in this year's monitoring cycle. Contracts with zero spend in 2021/2022 were not included. The breakdown into service description is as follows:



NB The total of 174 does not include contracts managed by Scotland Excel (mainly children's services).

Real Living Wage (RLW) being paid to all staff delivering care and support

Over the last couple of years, there has been a huge push to encourage providers to pay care staff at least the Living Wage. Although not legally enforceable, the push has been successful.



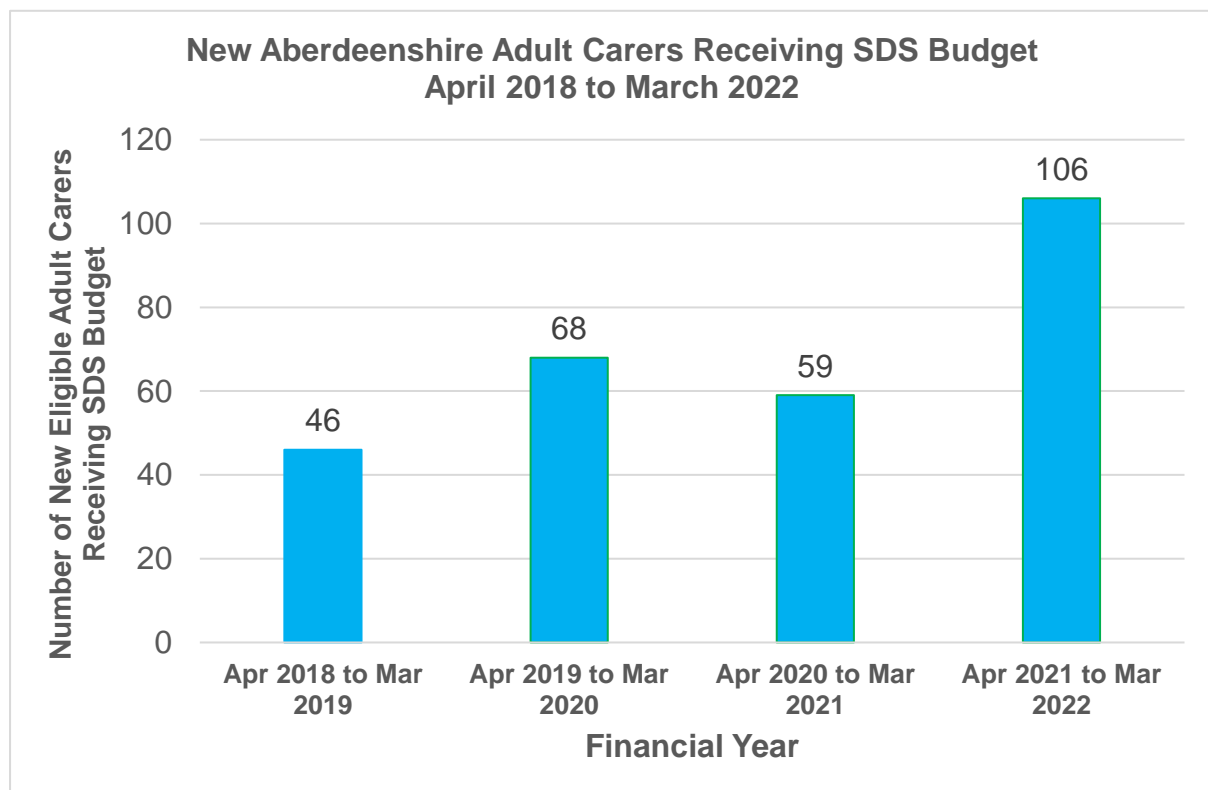
- In 2020/2021, the reporting showed the "yes" figure to be 75% so 98% is a positive trend.

9 Unpaid Carers

Previous reports described the significant work which had taken place to implement the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 which came into force in 2018. The Service continued to develop support to carers in 2021/22. During 2021/22 the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic continued to prove challenging for carers and services delivering support to them, with many carers continuing to have increased caring responsibilities as we move towards living with Covid.

Since implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 in April 2018, we continue to see increases in the number of unpaid carers registering with Quarriers Carer Support Service and those eligible for a Self-directed Support (SDS) budget. By having three permanent Carer Practitioners from HSCP supporting unpaid carers in Aberdeenshire to plan the use of their individual budget, has provided a consistent approach to the provision of support to carers across the area.

During 2021 to 2022, Carer Practitioners supported a huge increase in the number of unpaid adult carers, with 106 new SDS budgets being set up for carers during this period, as shown in the graph below. This means a total of 242 carers were in receipt of a SDS budget as at 31 March 2022. This increase can be attributed to a greater awareness amongst carers, resulting in an increase in the number of referrals to both Quarriers and the Carer Practitioner team.



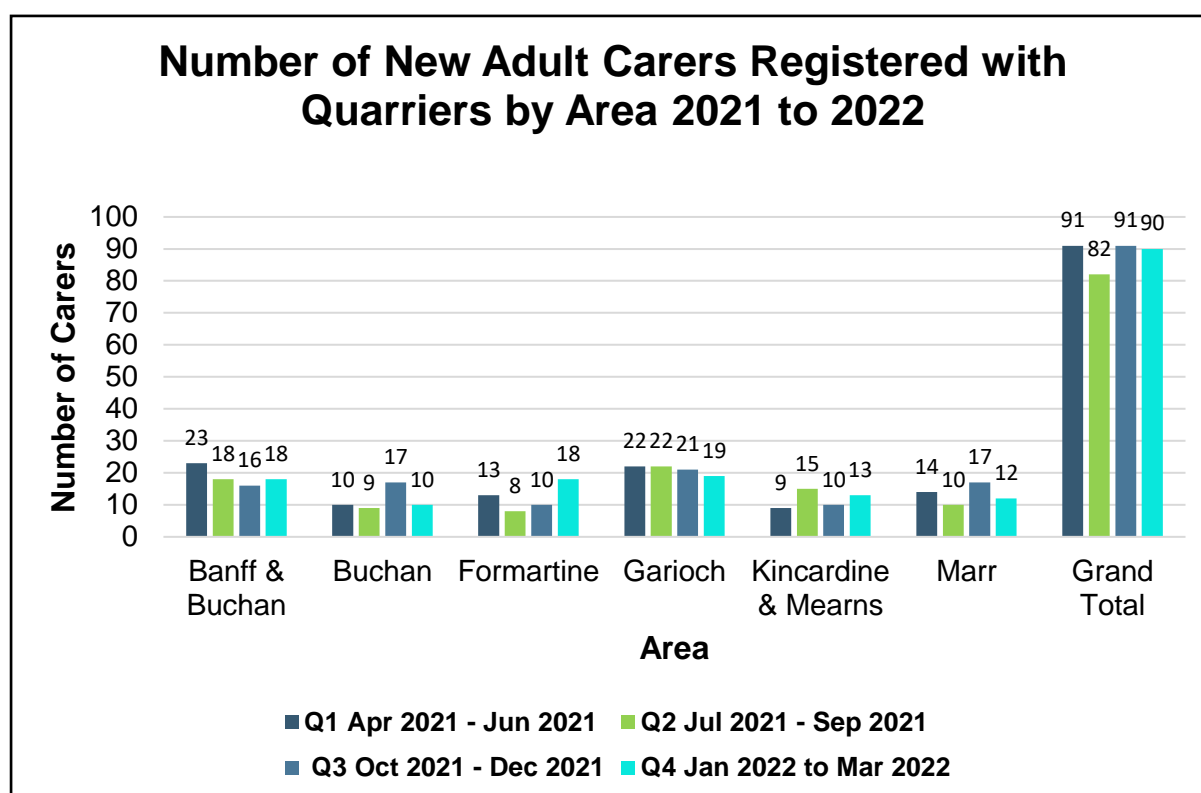
Carer Practitioners support eligible carers to make an informed decision on which of the four options of SDS to use. Carers are encouraged to use their SDS budget creatively to meet their identified outcomes. During Covid restrictions many carers used their SDS budgets to purchase support they could use at home. Examples of these included home gym equipment, massage equipment, aromatherapy oils, digital

devices, streaming services and garden equipment which supported carers to access breaks from caring. Carer Practitioners have continued in their role providing access to support for carers that is needed for them to continue in their caring roles.

Face to Face visits and support continued throughout the period, dependant on the carers needs and preferences. This will continue. here continue to be increases both in number of carers using the service and in the number of carers choosing non-traditional means of support such as the purchase of holistic treatments or gardening equipment, which allows them to maintain their wellbeing at home. We are currently assessing the needs of the service going forward in relation to staff capacity with a plan to increase staffing, as necessary to support Aberdeenshire Carers.

The increased use of replacement care at home as an alternative to more traditional forms of respite care continues. For much of the period planned respite breaks in care homes or traditional respite units were unavailable. However, many carers have chosen not to return to traditional forms of respite and are continuing with supports put place as a result of restrictions, using their SDS budget flexibly to do this.

Aberdeenshire also commissions a carers support service from Quarriers which provides support to young and adult carers. The graphs below shows the number of new adult and young carers registered with Quarriers Aberdeenshire Carer Support Service during 2021 to 2022. The figures show a continuation of the increased number of referrals from 2021. This increase could be attributed in part to the roll out of the Covid vaccine for carers and an increase in enquiries to the service.



The figures show a continuation of the increased number of referrals from 2021. This increase could be attributed in part to the roll out of the Covid vaccine for carers and an increase in enquiries to the service.

Throughout the period Quarriers also continued to receive new referrals and undertake Young Carers Statements, working with a total of **62** new Young Carers in 2021. This is again an increase in numbers to previous years.

In addition to progressing Adult Carer Support Plan and Young Carer Statements staff have continued to receive Creative Break applications which are being fulfilled with alternative types of breaks for carers. Although the service was unable to operate the normal face to face events and support groups for much of the period, face to face sessions and support have been taking place since January of 2022. Staff continued to support Carers across Aberdeenshire by Phone, Messenger, WhatsApp, and Email with no break in Service Delivery. Going forward there is an intention to continue with virtual support and events to carers who prefer that method.

During the period, Adult Carer Support Plan and Young Carer Statements continued to be progressed. Staff are also continuing to receive Creative Break applications which are being fulfilled with alternative types of breaks for carers. Although the service was unable to operate the normal face to face events and support groups for much of the period, face to face sessions and support have been taking place since January of 2022. Staff continued to support Carers across Aberdeenshire by Phone, Messenger, WhatsApp, and Email with no break in Service Delivery. Going forward there is an intention to continue with virtual support and events to carers who prefer that method.

Creative Breaks and the Scot Spirit Holiday Vouchers have continued to be available from Quarriers, supporting Adult and Young carers who are not eligible for SDS funding. Feedback to Quarriers illustrates the value of this.

“Managed a fantastic trip to St Andrews on Saturday and a night in a hotel. Weather amazing and just being able to spend some time with my husband was amazing. Being able to spend a night away has really helped to recharge my batteries. The benefits of spending time with my husband have also been great. I can't remember the last time we spent time together being able to chill out and relax. Thanks to Quarriers I feel I have benefitted from the opportunity to take a creative break.”

“It has shown that I can have fun and enjoyment outside of my caring role. I have been so relaxed since coming home and my husband will benefit from that.”

- I really appreciate the support that Quarriers has offered me through the creative break funding. So, thank you so much! - young carer.

The Young Carers Health and Wellbeing Grant has also become well established and can be used meet the needs of young Carers who do not meet eligibility criteria for an individual budget via SDS. There is also ongoing work with Quarriers, Aberdeenshire Carers Team and young carers to develop the Young Carers Statement into a more suitable format for them.

Looking forward to 2022 to 2023, we will continue to monitor the impact of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, including our support for unpaid carers, through Quarriers, Self-

Directed Support budgets, short breaks and more traditional respite and day care options. Both the HSCP/Council Carers Team and Quarriers remain involved in National work around carers and will continue to progress this locally for Aberdeenshire.

10 Looking Forward

During the 2020/21 period the CSWO was pleased to witness many positive developments across all social work and social care services including a focus on developing trauma informed service delivery, effective engagement and listening to the voices of those with lived experience. Increased digitalisation has provided opportunities for working more creatively with service users, unpaid carers and partners.

A key emphasis in the delivery of social work services going forward into 2022/23 will be continuing to focus on recovery and renewal from the wide-ranging impact of COVID-19. Working towards recovery will be a significant piece of work over the few next years, which will require dedicated learning, flexibility, and close collaboration with partners.

The context of need in our communities continues to be challenging:

- Higher than average referrals for social work services including Adult Protection, Mental Health, Justice Services, Substance Misuse, Care at Home, Child Protection and Older People's services.
- Increased complexity in need and demand for specialist services.
- Overall increase in psychological and social support needs across all areas of society impacted by loneliness, wellbeing, and mental health as well as physical health and poverty.
- Increased unpaid carer stress and requests for support.

These challenges are in the context of current pressures including:

- Staff resilience, recruitment and retention of staff particularly around social care.
 - Managing capacity, demand and pressures across services.
 - Continuing to identify and meet current unmet need. Over the pandemic, we saw a reduction in some of the support provided through SDS packages, but this demand and need has again increased and Children's and Adult Services will need to continue to work closely together to be able to provide that vital support which is often a life line to informal and unpaid carers.
 - The Coming Home Implementation which deals with complex care and delayed discharge linked mainly to those affected by a Learning Disability. By March 2024,
-

we anticipate to see real change with out-of-area residential placements and inappropriate hospital stays greatly reduced. To achieve this vision we will require a transformational change. Preliminary work has commenced and will be ongoing into the future.

- Demographic and socio-economic pressures including food and fuel poverty and loss of income.
- Service transformation and the implementation of new legislation and policy including the National Care Service.

In acknowledging a number of uncertainties around the future delivery of social work services the approach to planning for the coming year and beyond will need to be agile and flexible but with a keen focus to continue to meet local needs in our communities by engaging with individuals and families to drive forward improvement.

In doing so, we will continue to take forward the key priorities identified across Children's Services and the HSCP. For Children's Services, this is established in our [Children's Services Plan 2021-2024](#) which sets out our local long term aspirations, ambitions and priorities for children and young people in our communities. This includes:

- Our approach to implementing The Promise and embed the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) approach across all our services and persisting in our commitment to tackling poverty.
- Continued and reinvigorated focus on Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC).
- Increased focus on preventative and whole family support service design and delivery.
- Embedding a relationship based and trauma informed approach.

In terms of Adult Services, we will continue to take forward the key priorities identified in our [Health & Social Care Partnership Strategic Plan 2020-25](#). This includes:

- Prevention & Early intervention
- Reshaping Care
- Engagement
- Tackling Inequalities and Public Prevention
- Effective use of resources

Social work has for many years become fragmented into "specialist" areas with the majority of work undertaken within teams with a functional identity. As society has changed and social work's response to an ever complex legislative and regulatory framework has developed, social work has responded by moving away from generic practice in preference for functional teams.

Social work has always been identified with viewing service users holistically and not in terms of diagnosis or age, however, there exists a continuing tension between delivering a truly holistic approach when working in functions defined by pre-determined categories. COVID-19 has changed so many aspects of society and there is subsequently a need to consider how social work and social care services maintain a truly person-centred approach. In addition, it is more important than ever to reflect on the principles and intent of GIRFEC and Self-Directed Support. In summary, social work and social care in Aberdeenshire must maintain a focus on the individual, and consider their outcomes, rather than focus on service provision.

With this in mind however, this report does describe services which are adept at evolving to meet the changing needs of society, therefore social work and social care services in Aberdeenshire continue to be well positioned to respond with professionalism, empathy and kindness.

Report prepared by Leigh Jolly, Aberdeenshire Chief Social Work Officer

July 2022
