



# Annual Report

by

**Aberdeenshire's Chief Social Work Officer**

**2022**

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**2023**

**'There is no greater joy nor greater reward than to make a fundamental difference in someone's life.'** Mary Rose McGeady.



**Leigh Jolly**  
**Chief Social Work Officer**

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## 1 Welcome, Summary & Reflections



It gives me great pleasure to present my third Annual Report as Chief Social Work Officer for Aberdeenshire, reflecting the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The last couple years have been, without a doubt, a most challenging, tumultuous, and eventful period unlike no other in my lifetime.

However, social work has always been at its best in dealing with uncertainty, ambiguity and crisis and we have never needed the expertise and insights of social workers more than we do now.

I am aware that the significant pressures social workers face from increasing workloads and the more complex needs of those they support continue to be exacerbated not just by the effects of Covid-19, but also the impact of economic instability and the cost-of-living crisis. All these factors have an impact on the demand for social work services and as a result there are more support needs to be met than ever before.

While the demands on the profession have only grown over recent years, the overall size of the profession particularly around children's services has not and in some situations has decreased as services have been required to absorb budget pressures which impacts morale and capacity. This has created serious difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Social Work teams are subsequently carrying vacancies for long periods with this deficit in numbers resulting in the remaining already stretched social workers holding additional cases, and the managers in the unenviable position of trying to "do more with less".

The publication of the [Setting the Bar Report](#) supports the position that Scotland needs to train and employ more social workers, provide better support throughout professional careers, and enable social workers to have a stronger voice at all levels of the systems they work in. To meaningfully achieve this, a solid commitment to investment in the profession is required.

However, in spite of these challenges, colleagues working in social work and social care have persistently risen to the challenge. They continue to respond with compassion, empathy, and dedication, in protecting and promoting people's opportunities to have the best possible lives and be the best they can be and for this I want to express my heartfelt gratitude.

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 third and independent sector organisations and thank all those staff for their tremendous resilience and commitment.

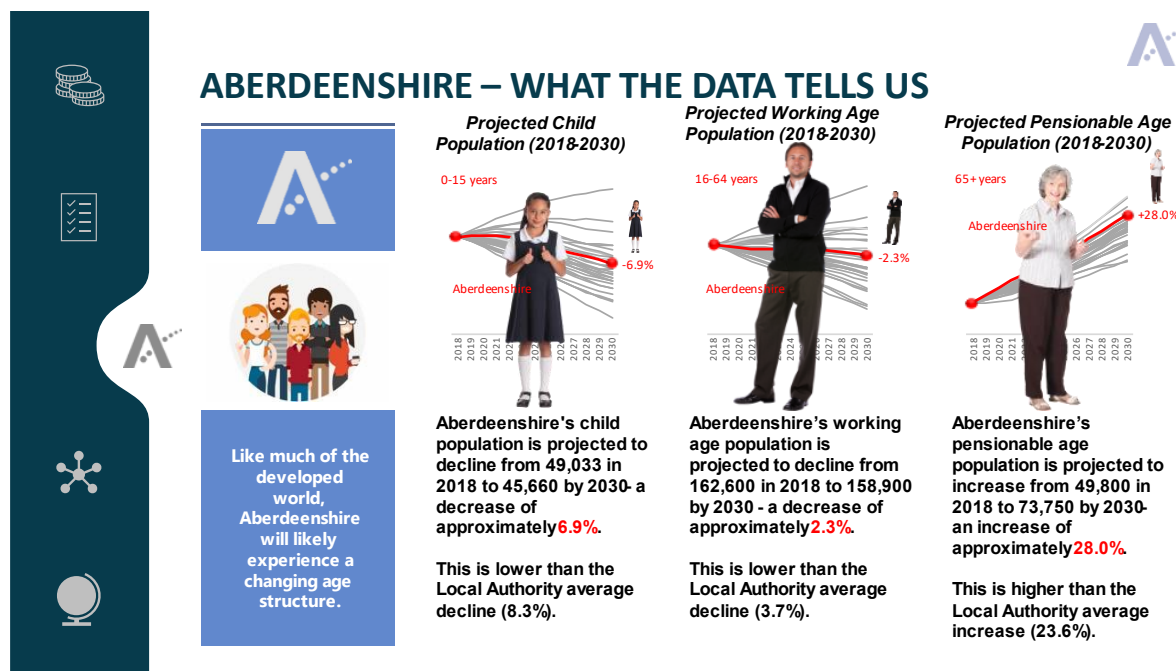
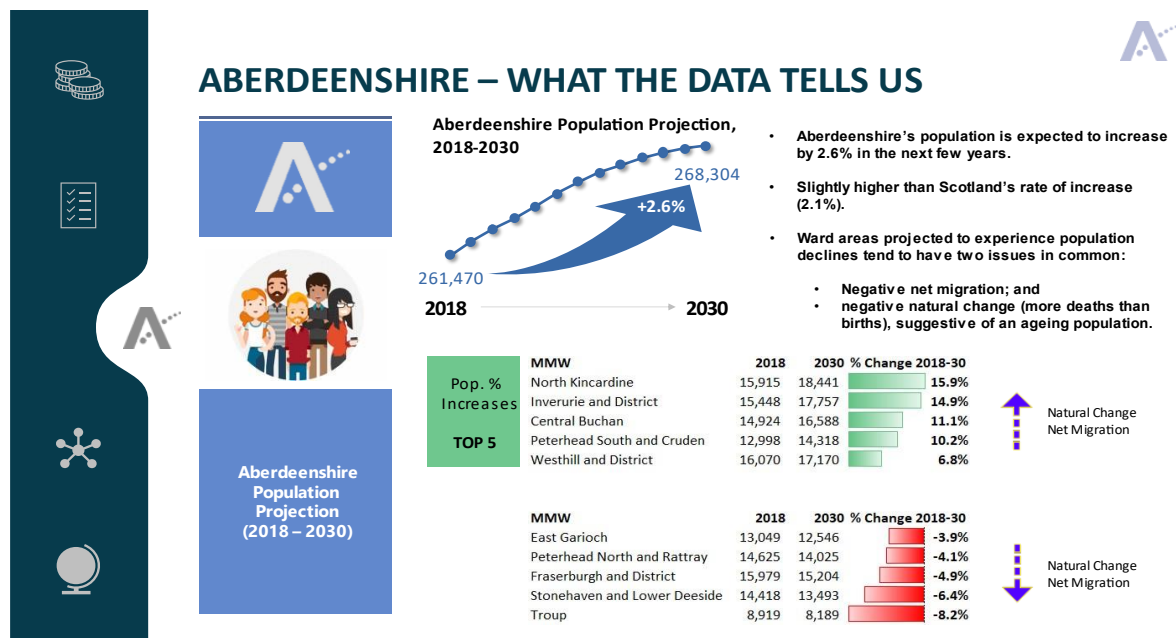
I would also wish to acknowledge and thank our unpaid carers who so often go unrecognised and yet undertake a crucial role in supporting vulnerable people within our communities.

Leigh Jolly  
Aberdeenshire Chief Social Work Officer, July 2023

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## 2 Aberdeenshire Profile

Aberdeenshire is a predominately rural area in the northeast of Scotland and includes the Cairngorm mountains, rich agricultural lowlands and varied coastal landscapes.



The implications of an ageing population alone include increased demand for health care services, rising costs of social care, workforce shortages, impact on pensions and social security, changes in family structures, housing, and transportation challenges and, increased isolation.

The successful and effective future delivery of social work and social care services depends on us being prepared and using the implications and pressures to create real transformational change in the way we deliver services.

### 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.

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 governance of social work services in Aberdeenshire 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. This integrated approach has strengthened collaborative working and Getting it Right for Every Child in Aberdeenshire. 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 Chief Officer, Partnership Managers and the Lead Social Worker who often deputise for the CSWO.

#### Duty of Candour Statement for 2022/23

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 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, 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).

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## 4 Resources / Finance

Aberdeenshire Council and the Integration Joint Board continue to invest in social work and social care services to meet current demand and anticipated increasing levels of demand recognising the complex needs as many people are living longer.

The gross expenditure on social work and social care services during 2023/23 was £146.9m on adult services and £40.3m on children's services.

Social work and social care services commission resources from independent, not for profit and third sector providers. Services access independent care homes, including resources for older people and adults with learning disabilities as well for children and young people across Scotland. Providers in Aberdeenshire also operate across home care, day care and supported living.

Significant improvement activity has continued to be embedded in an attempt to support children in their local communities and avoid the use of out of authority placements. Whilst the demand for out of authority provision remains consistent with previous years, increased scrutiny around process, admission and exit planning contributed towards an underspend in this area during 2022-23.

In 2022/23 the IJB recorded an overspend of £6.397 million after allocating Earmarked Reserves. The overspend was funded from IJB general reserves which was made up of previous year underspends. This is clearly not a sustainable solution going forward.

Budget scrutiny indicates pressures in care packages in both Older People and Adults with Learning Disabilities were evident again reflecting the complexity of need and increased demand will have contributed to the over budget position.

Home Care was underspent due to difficulties in recruitment especially in rural areas, but this doesn't reflect the increasing pressure on this service. The hours of unmet need are increasing as third-party providers also struggle to recruit and older people require additional and more complex care.

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.

Whilst Children's Services came in on budget, this in many ways masks the reality of stretched teams. Whilst vacancy management will have contributed to the overall budget picture, even without vacancies, the demand would still be greater than the service capacity.

## 5 Workforce

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,

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continue to be undertaken by LA employed Social Workers, Care Managers, and Mental Health Officers (MHOs).

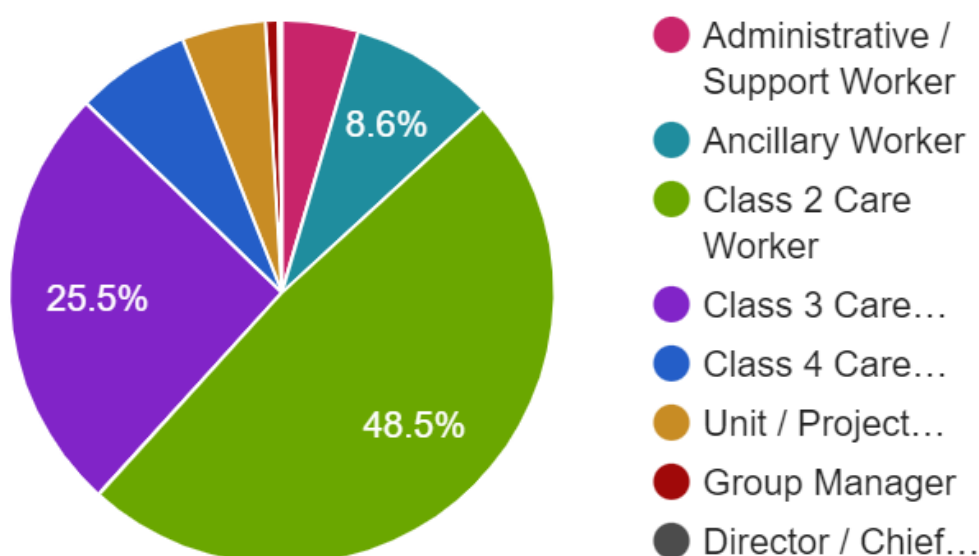
Services within the Local Authority are located between Education and Children Services and the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Adult social work is a delegated function of the HSCP.

**9500** people were employed in social work and social care, across the local authority, independent, and third sectors, in Aberdeenshire.

- 3770 were employed by Aberdeenshire Council, across Adult, Children, and Justice Services, undertaking statutory social work duties and providing social care and support, within the 146 registered care services, operated by the LA.
- Independent providers employed a further 4040 people across 395 registered care services.
- There are 130 registered care services, employing 1840 people, in the third sector.

The largest part of the workforce remains employed in adult social care, within a mixed economy of Local Authority (LA), independent and third sector employers employing over 5500 staff in care homes and to provide support for people within their own homes.

#### **Aberdeenshire Social Services Staff Roles (All sectors)**



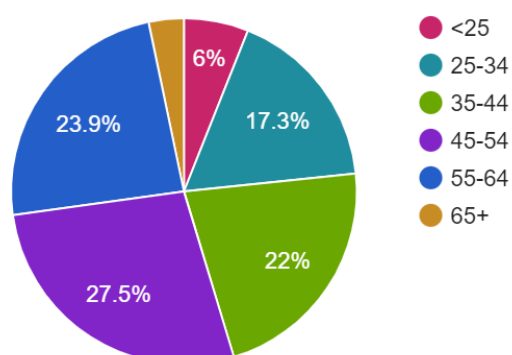
Most staff are employed in direct care and support, with over half of all staff employed continuing to undertake a direct caring role (as workers registered with SSSC under class 2 and 3).

Frontline Social Workers, engaged in assessment, care management, and protective work, remain a small proportion of the overall workforce (less than 7%, as indicated under class 4). However, they retain a crucial statutory role that keeps our most vulnerable and at risk children and adults safe. Ensuring services continue to provide safe and appropriate support.

There is a continued commitment within Aberdeenshire to ensure sustainability of service, and, as noted within the Training Section of this document, 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.

Evidence indicates that Aberdeenshire Council has had a strong history of staff retention within social work and social care services. However, the demography of our staffing, means there are always a number of staff retiring and a need to train and develop new recruits.

### Aberdeenshire Council Age of staff (Social Services)



Although the overall demographic within the sector remains broadly similar to previous reports, with over half of workers aged between 45 and 65, there have been slight increases in the number of younger workers, which reflects our effective links with education establishments and targeted recruitment drives.

Recruitment into Social Care, particularly within Adult Services, can be difficult with a limited recruitment pool locally. In response, there been a number of recruitment initiatives, both locally and nationally, the sector has engaged in. These have included social media, face to face and promotional events and marketing to encourage interest in working in social care. This is in addition to ongoing links with schools, colleges and universities to encourage recruits into the sector.

Increased demand and COVID outbreaks continued to put pressure on services throughout the winter months of 2022/23. Staff absence levels continue to be monitored closely, and health and wellbeing promoted. Winter planning ensured service capacity was directed at the most vulnerable.

## 5.1 Training and Learning

Our Workforce Development Team (WDT) remains committed to supporting staff training and development across all of Aberdeenshire Council's social work and social care workforce. This includes a range of professional development initiatives which is supplemented, where identified by the service, in the provision of externally commissioned training. Trauma informed practice is at the heart of all training and service delivery.

The team supports the delivery of an annual training plan which incorporates training needs specifically identified by Children's Services and HSCP Teams. 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.

Both Children's Services and the HSCP have both 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 with the confidence, knowledge, and skill required for their roles.

In 2022/23, we have continued to see a steady number of Foundation Apprenticeships being completed within our social care settings and it is tremendous that so many young people are keen to gain social work and social care experience whilst still at school.

The provision of professional social work student placements, which had been profoundly impacted by COVID-19 has also continued, with 59 students undertaking a Social Work practice placement in Aberdeenshire over the period. Temporary funding by Aberdeenshire Council, in collaboration with Robert Gordon's University and the Social Work Education Partnership, has also allowed us to employ a Practice Development Worker from January 2023. This post will enable us to increase the number of placements we provide and develop a Return to Practice Teaching course to maintain and develop staff who have not recently supported a student. There are currently at least 6 candidates keen to undertake the training, planned for 2023/24.

The Social Work Support Scheme which assists selected colleagues to complete their social work degree continued in 2022/23 with two new participants starting their social work degree in the 2022/23 Academic Year and funding agreed to offer up to 4 new places annually to existing council staff across Children's Services and the HSCP. This is an area we are keen to expand in order to mitigate risks around staff recruitment.

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, fifty-one newly qualified professionals attended the one-year Social Work Professionals Support Programme (SWPSP). The programme continues to provide a valuable induction to, and familiarisation with, service expectations of good practice and opportunities for reflection and discussion on challenging themes. The themes and approaches to this programme continue to be reviewed and adapted annually to reflect feedback from participants.

Aberdeenshire also continues to support social workers in post qualifying study, enabling a small number of staff to access relevant Social Work PQ Awards via the Open, Robert Gordon, Stirling, and Dundee Universities.

Looking forward, Career progression across the service is an area we need to address. Whilst workload and work life balance issues feature in exit interviews, lack of career progression opportunities is another factor. Our ambition would be to roll out an Advanced Practitioner scheme which recognises and rewards length of service, skills, and knowledge. However, without additional funding, this is not possible.

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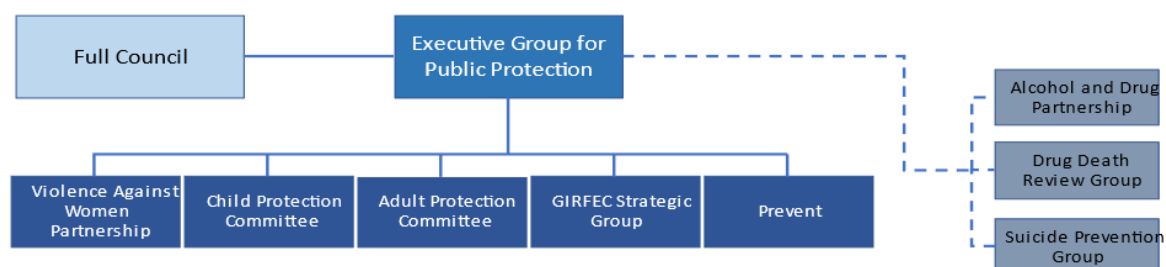
## 6 Public Protection

### 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 social work services.

Public Protection is a term used to encompass the many different strategic approaches and responses to keeping children and adults safe in our communities and involves working with both victims and perpetrators. The main areas of public protection are Adult Support and Protection, Child Protection, Domestic Abuse, MAPP, Prevent, Alcohol and Drug Partnership and Suicide Prevention.

Governance Structure – Public Protection Arrangements



Public Protection activity and oversight is undertaken 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).

Continuous improvement in our Child Protection practice, resulting in improving outcomes for children and their families remains the focus of the work of the CPC.

The CPC routinely review and update multi-agency policies, procedures and guidance and continue to support practitioners and managers across the multi-agency workforce to carry out best practice in child protection work including learning from Case Reviews.

Our consistent approach to high level self-evaluation activity assists us to identify areas for improvement ensuring key outcomes are met or further developed. We continue to develop the use of qualitative and quantitative data from the National CPC Data Set.

Neglect, domestic abuse, and parental mental health are the top three reasons children are placed on the Child Protection Register and is consistent with the Scotland wide picture.

Data gathering has informed the CPC priorities for 2022/23 which have enabled partners to focus on collaborative work around Neglect, Pre-birth Practice, Child and Family Participation and Domestic Abuse.

The Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) went live in Aberdeenshire in November 2022 with an initial aim of carrying out 60% of all Joint Investigative Interviews (JII) of children across the Northeast Partnership area. Although the SCIM team comprises 14 police officers/social workers, Aberdeenshire has two dedicated social workers/officers for Aberdeenshire, albeit with there being “soft boundaries” across the Northeast to enable additional resilience in meeting need. This initial aim has been exceeded with the initial SCIM quarterly report identifying that 91 % of all JII’s which have occurred in Aberdeenshire have been undertaken by this cohort of specialist interviewers, with positive feedback being given by children and their parents/carers.

January 2023 saw the publication of our **Joint Inspection of Services for Children and Young People at Risk of Harm. The key messages highlighted in the Joint Inspection report include:**

- Children and young people are safer because risks have been identified early and responded to effectively.
- Children and young people’s lives improve with high quality planning and support, ensuring they experience sustained loving and nurturing relationships to keep them safe from harm.
- Children, young people, and their families are meaningfully and appropriately involved in decisions about their lives. They influence service planning, delivery, and improvement.
- Collaborative strategic leadership, planning and operational management ensure high standards of service delivery.

Examples of good practice included recognition of:

- Effective joint working between services/agencies that directly influenced improvement in a child or young person’s safety.
- Well embedded Getting it Right for Every Child ‘GIRFEC’ processes.
- Strong investment in effective staff training and the GIRFEC website
- Staff skills, knowledge, and confidence
- Almost all children experienced trusting and respectful relationships
- Use of strength-based approaches and creative support to enable families to make and maintain changes.
- Children and families felt listened to and heard.
- Strong leadership with effective governance structures and clear vision
- Robust multi agency self-evaluation activities that highlighted how well we know ourselves in terms of what works well and areas for ongoing improvement.

Overall grade Evaluation **of quality indicator 2.1: Very good**

Areas for improvement from the Inspection reflected work in our own improvement plan, particularly around reducing the risks for our older children, our use of outcome data to evidence impact and development of our trauma informed approaches.

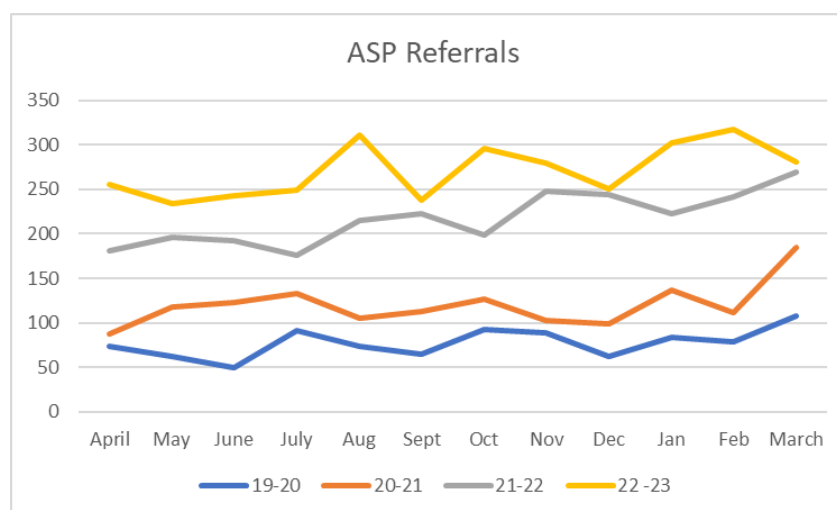
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### 6.3 Adult Support and Protection (ASP)

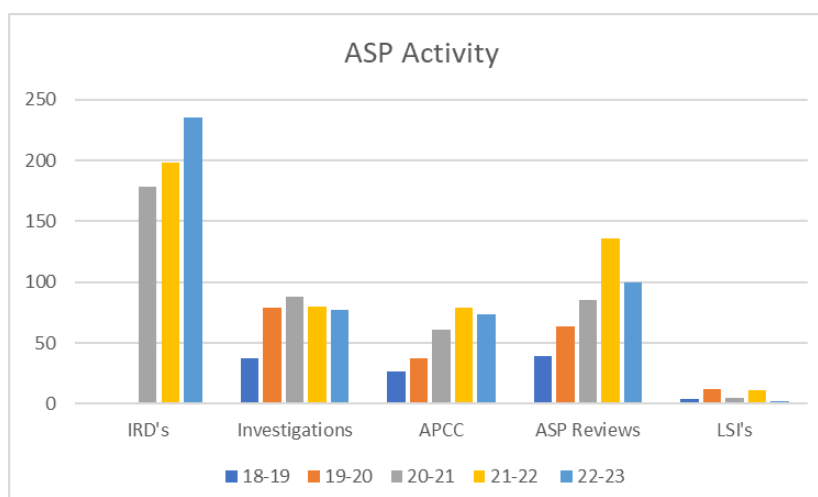
Adult Support and Protection (ASP) work in Aberdeenshire is overseen by the multi-agency Aberdeenshire Adult Protection Committee (APC). The HSCP is consistently represented and engaged in the work of the Adult Protection Committee and its subgroups.

In October 2022 the APC published their [Biennial Report](#) outlining progress that had occurred between 2020- 2022 and setting out priorities over the next reporting period.

Aberdeenshire Council, through Social Work, is the lead agency for Adult Support and Protection. The Adult Protection Network acts as a single point of contact for all Adult Support and Protection concerns. There was a significant increase in referrals during the pandemic and this increase has not reduced in the last year. Recognising the increase in demand HSCP funded additional staffing to which enable the service to continue to meet the needs of adults at risk of harm. The graph below illustrates the impact on referrals to the Adult Protection Network.



This increase in activity is further reflected in ASP activity data on numbers of Initial Referral Discussions, Case Conferences and ASP reviews. Despite this increase in activity, operationally ASP remains a key priority, and all services to support and protect adults at risk of harm continue.



## 6.4 Domestic Abuse

Strategy and Action Planning for domestic abuse sits with the Aberdeenshire Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership (VAWP). Social Work practitioners actively engage with VAWP and its subgroups which focus on delivery and evaluation of the following priorities:

- Safe & Together Training across front line services.
- Equally Safe in School
- Equally Safe in the Workplace

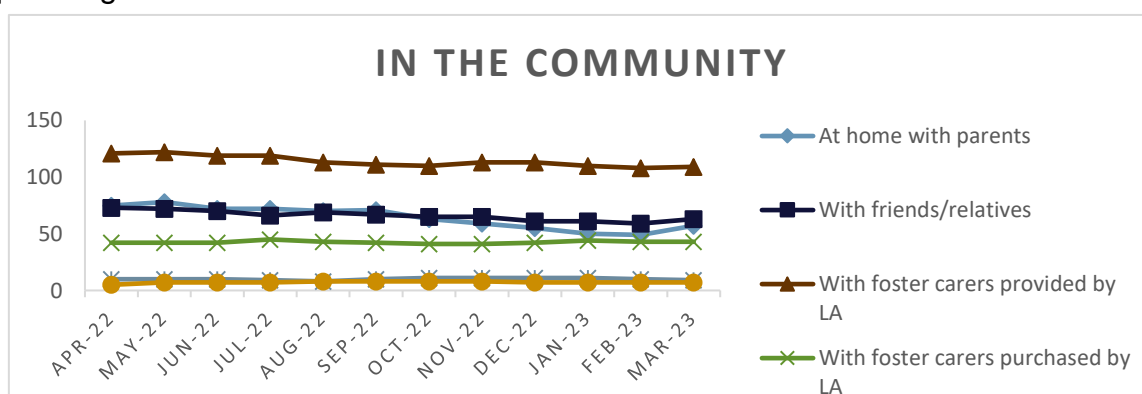
In 2022 the HSCP and Aberdeenshire Council Housing jointly commissioned Grampian's Women's Aid to provide outreach support to women and children that had been affected by domestic abuse. The outreach support provides practical and emotional support, advice, and advocacy on matters such as housing, tenancy sustainment, resettlement, safety planning, risks and management of risks, emotional support, welfare benefits, legal options, health, education, training, and childcare.

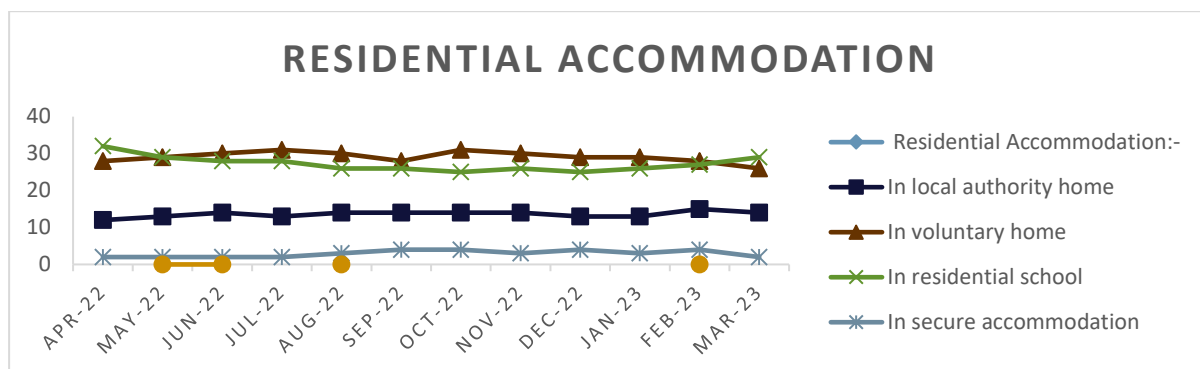
## 7 Service Quality and Performance

### 7.1 Children's Services

Taking cognisance of the impact of recovery from the Pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, children's social work continues to engage with over 2,500 families in need of targeted support. Our focus on whole family wellbeing is reflected in our children's services planning and in our daily interactions with the families we support. Relationships and the language we use have been our golden thread across all our service delivery and interaction with families and partner services. We continue to drive improvement around recording and writing to the child/young person in case recording and pathway minutes. We have created a supported approach to Subject Access Requests for care experienced young people, improved practice around supporting connections between siblings who can't be placed together and worked with Aberdeen City to create an 'alternative to custody' accommodation for young people who are victims of county lines activity.

Whilst national statistics correlate with our decline in children being looked after, the table below shows our numbers of children looked after in the community and in residential settings. We continue to monitor the trend data with our partners and reflect on the impact across all services in supporting our care experienced young people and upholding our Promise.





### Best Practice Example

Some exciting innovative work has included the recruitment of a Family Group Decision Making Social Worker based in in our Kinship Service to support more families to consider caring for and/or supporting a child in their family who requires support or to become looked after. The service has also recruited a Transitions Worker focussing on children transitioning from foster care to their forever family to enable us to better develop best practice and ensure all parties hold the child at the centre.

Further detail pertaining to our work on delivering The Promise can be found in our [Corporate Parenting Annual Report](#).

### Workforce Development and Wellbeing

Children's Services in Aberdeenshire face many of the same difficulties experienced across all local authorities in the recruitment and retention of our workforce. Staff vacancies have continued to be a challenge during 2022/23 and called on existing team members and colleagues from across the service to support continued delivery of services. Despite these difficulties however, there has been a great deal of positivity to reflect on.

Our service priorities for our workforce are:

- A Strong and Stable Workforce
- Skilled and Knowledgeable Workforce
- Inspiring, Empowering and Effective Leadership and Management
- Creating the Conditions for Good Social Work to Flourish

Our 'Time for Talking' events across the whole service has been one of the ways of engaging our workforce to share good practice and identify areas for improvement. One important area has been staff wellbeing and supporting our trauma-informed practice. This has led to the refresh of our supervision policy and individual wellbeing plans for all workers at all levels to support staff wellbeing. We also refreshed our exit interviews to inform our continuous improvement listen to what is important to staff. Feedback from the exit interview process has included reflections on what was positive about the role and what could be improved.

We also had a successful world café event at Robert Gordon University, sharing experiences from across our service with third- and fourth-year BA Social Work

students. This has led to the recruitment to posts and raised the profile of both the diversity of children's services and Aberdeenshire as a place of work and contributed to overcoming some of our recruitment challenges.

### **Children's Services Plan 2020 - 2023**

The final annual report for the 2020-2023 Children's Services Plan and the development of our new 2023 – 2026 plan has highlighted the importance of mental health and wellbeing and was the most important issue raised in feedback from children, families, and the wider workforce. Children's services continue to be well represented in the thematic groups and have been integral to the development of strategic delivery, including chairing the Co-ordination and support hub that oversees GIRFEC practice development.

Participation and engagement with our young people are at the heart of our work and includes building on the positive work from our Bright Spots work last year with our care experienced young people. We have also led via our Children's Rights Service, a new advocacy project for children and young people who experience our child protection processes. Co-produced with young people who have had experience, feedback has been very positive, and children have felt supported and understand the process. This also highlighted the importance of relationships with their children's rights worker.

### **Children's Service Priorities 2023-26**

The service is, in line with The Promise committed to:

- Developing ongoing innovative and creative ways of recruiting foster carers across Aberdeenshire.
  - Reviewing the delivery of fostering to support retainment of carers and continue to improve outcomes for care experienced young people.
  - Promoting Kinship Care as a positive option for children, young people and families and developing innovative approaches including piloting the Family Group Decision Making approach.
  - Developing support to Aberdeenshire's Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People recognising the particular challenges they face through an evolving service provision.
  - Reviewing the provision of Self-Directed Support and expanding the current provision of respite care for children and young people with disabilities.
  - Reviewing the delivery model of residential children's home care across Aberdeenshire with a view to expanding provision to enable the service to retain more young people in Aberdeenshire and reduce break down of current provision.
  - Continuing to facilitate robust scrutiny and regular review of all funding requests by Joint External Placement Group by the Head of Service.
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## 7.2 Learning Disability Services (Adults)

Aberdeenshire HSCP currently support 882 adults with a learning disability. Of those in receipt of support, 402 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 Community Learning Disability Teams provide support to adults with a learning disability, their families, and carers. The service also helps people with learning disabilities and complex needs to cope independently, understand information, and learn new skills. The teams are made up of a range of disciplines across Health and Social Care.

The Partnership have six Adult Day Services for people over 16 with learning disabilities and additional support needs who are eligible for Social Work services. These community-based Day Services in Banff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Inverurie, Ellon and South Aberdeenshire each offer a different selection of community-based activities depending on local demand and opportunity. In 2022-23, 227 users were supported across the six Day Services.

The creative use of SDS continues to be an important part of service delivery as we advocate for service users to have active, healthy, and independent lives. 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.

The Partnership continues to value the support from our Third Sector partners and our Provider Forum run by ARC Scotland is vital in sharing information and learning.

### 'Be All You Can Be' – Learning Disability Strategy

We continue to deliver our 5-year Learning Disability strategy 'Be All You Can Be'. Our 4 priorities from the Strategy are that people with learning disabilities in Aberdeenshire feel:

- Well
- Involved
- Valued
- Supported



Some notable highlights from the year include:

- To reduce **health inequalities** for people with a learning disability, a number of pathways including a palliative and end of life care pathway and a dementia pathway have been completed and are being embedded in practice. The Partnership are also currently looking at the roll-out of Annual Health Checks as part of a wider Grampian-wide roll-out.

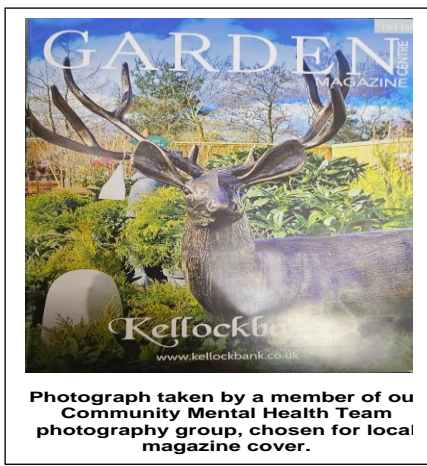


- In support of the '**Coming Home Implementation**,' the HSCP are looking at developing suitable accommodation options for adults who have complex support and behavioural needs enabling them to live in their local communities with appropriate levels of support. Ten people have initially been identified as priority for the new service provision.
- The HSCP continues to embrace 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, where service users collect shopping for people who are unable to leave their home and Books on Legs, delivering library books to older or disabled people, are indicative of a strategic shift away from building based day services.

### Best Practice Examples

One of our young men has become a valued part of the Garioch rugby club through walking rugby. He recently attended the annual award dinner where he had a brilliant time, enjoyed the dinner, the speeches and danced the night away until midnight, including fast and furious Scottish country dancing. This was possible due to the flexibility of hours using the new weekly budget funding model and commissioning of a supported living service.

## 7.3 Mental Health Services



There are three Community Mental Health Teams in Aberdeenshire consisting 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. Within Aberdeenshire Adult Mental Health and Older Adult Mental Health Teams we saw a 21% referral increase from 2019 to 2022 which is likely to correlate with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whilst creative use of technology to meet demand is being embedded, it is anticipated that demand will continue to grow given amongst many factors the current cost of living crises.

Royal Cornhill Psychiatric Hospital has continued to be 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 and in addition demand became greater and more people sought help for psychological therapy interventions.

Similar to other part of the social work service recruitment continues to be a challenge. In an attempt to overcome this challenge, a Project Manager has been employed for 18 months to review the way both Older Adult and Adult Mental health Teams are set up with the aim of creating a more sustainable model which will meet the needs and demands in years to come.

We have been working with Penumbra to deliver 'Well Aberdeenshire' since April 2022, who offer one to one sessions, small group sessions and now are looking to set up a Peer Network across Aberdeenshire.

### **Ben's Story**

*During his first 'Time, Space & Compassion' session, Ben shared that he has been suffering from anxiety for over a year which had increased following a car accident.*

*By giving Ben space to open up about what caused him distressed, he naturally began talking about things he enjoyed doing including creating music which he identified might help ease his mind, especially in the evenings when his anxiety grew. As employment was another concern, we shared some resources for a job searching website. Finally, when we explored the support Ben had already around him, he mentioned that his GP had referred him for counselling sessions, however he had not yet followed up on this.*

*Ben attended his second session a week later and excitedly shared that he had submitted a job application via the website we looked at and had been offered a trial shift. He had also been creating music which he found to have improved his sleep. Ben had also been in contact with the counselling service, hoping this would provide an opportunity to work through what has happened.*

Kooth and Together All continue to be available across Aberdeenshire HSCP and Children & Education Services.

\*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 informed 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.

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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

Going forward, it is important services adapt to reflect the changing needs of communities, to do so, there must be a willingness to work beyond current service boundaries and move to a truly holistic approach to supporting people.

### **Best Practice Examples**

As part of Action 15 of the *Scottish Government Mental Health Strategy*, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Improvement Service was developed and has now been fully operational for 12 months. The service is available from every GP practice across Aberdeenshire to support people with their mental wellbeing. The service receives referrals from GPs, other mental health professionals and individuals can now self-refer. Between 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the service has received 577 referrals.

The Crisis Intervention Team have also been operational since April 2021 and have undergone a test of change since October 2022 trialling different working days to ensure the greatest uptake of their service. This has been successful, and they are now moving to 7 days working, 9am-5pm from Fraserburgh Custody Suite.

### **ADHD Clinics**

Social work colleagues have begun working on the pilot for ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) assessment clinics. Due to the growing waitlists for Adult ADHD assessment requests, health and social care staff are contributing to creation of an ADHD assessment clinic to meet demand and reduce pressure on other parts of the HSCP and NHS.

Involvement in setting up these clinics is hugely positive for social work staff, as it demonstrates the variety of skills and abilities social workers have to offer, and the range of ways that these skills can be utilised for the benefit of the public and the wider mental health team.

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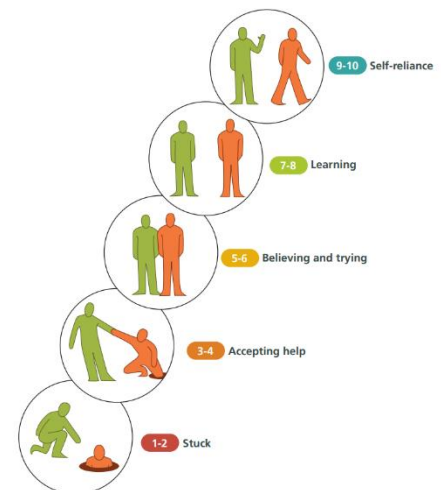
## Outcome Star

Over the last few months, the CMHT's has been trained up in using 'Outcome Stars.' Each star looks at different areas of the service user's life, such as relationships, identity, addictions, and living skills, to name a few.

The outcome stars aim to improve active participation in care and treatment plans, identifying of priorities, and working together to create goals and action plans. The response has been positive as it also provides a visual marker of progress for individuals.

Feedback –

"I found it really useful, it helped me get a bit more insight into my mental health and I struggled a lot with knowing how to start working on improving my mental health and where to even start but it helped me realise what areas needed the most work and helped me identify ways to start getting better and it was really beneficial. It was very easy to understand as well, which made it even better".



## Suicide Prevention Strategy

Creating Hope Together: 'Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022 – 2032' Launched in September 2022. The aim of the strategy is to reduce the number of suicide deaths in Scotland, whilst tackling the inequalities which contribute to suicide.

Whilst continuing to contribute and engage with the work undertaken on a North-East basis, we have also started to develop a local delivery plan for the Suicide Prevention Strategy. Benefit mapping exercises took place on a multi-agency basis. A local delivery plan is in development for Year 1. During Year 1 we will develop the plans for years 2 and onwards, incorporating views of people with lived experience. Partners will continue to work closely together including with children and education partners.

SAMH have been commissioned to work with partners for 1 year with a possible second year, to deliver suicide prevention work across Grampian. They will work with us in Aberdeenshire to design and deliver our local priorities. SAMH will work across Grampian to set up subgroups for five priority areas: Building Community Capacity, Children and Young People, Lived Experience and Knowledge, Suicide Bereavement and Data, Analysis & Risk.

## 7.4 Mental Health Officers (MHOs)

The performance of Mental Health Officer and Adults with Incapacity Services has seen both positive achievements and ongoing challenges. The demand for MHO Assessment requests has significantly increased while the number of MHOs have decreased, with eight MHOs retiring or leaving our services. The number of Assessments for Detention rose to 270 in 2022, a 62% increase from 2017 levels. One-third of all Assessment for Detention requests came from Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. Under the Adults with Incapacity Act, the number of people benefiting from Guardianship rose significantly from 7 in 2001 to 697 by November 2022. There has been a growing demand for Adult Support & Protection and Adults with Incapacity Services and an associated significant increase in case conferences and orders.

We achieved a 44% response rate to 66 Assessments for S.36 Emergency Detentions, which is close to the national average of 40.5% reported by the Mental Welfare Commission. This has been our lowest rate on record and is a notable deviation from previous years. Aberdeenshire MHOs completed 189 Assessments for Short Term Detention Certificates and 91% of all 270 Mental Health Act Assessments. Aberdeenshire MHOs ranked in the top 3 for completion rate of Social Circumstances Reports in Scotland with a rate of 70% compared to the national average of 43%. There were 95 assessments for detention with an 83% MHO assessment rate, and 35% of all assessments for detention took place outside of normal working hours.

Qualitative evidence highlights positive outcomes, such as increased independence and improved quality of life, resulting from long-term working relationships and supported recovery. Scrutiny of Guardianship renewals promotes autonomy and independence in decision-making. MHOs have played important roles in protecting individuals' rights, including dual applications of MHO and GIRFEC duties.

## 7.5 Care Homes & Very Sheltered Housing

The breakdown of care homes and very sheltered housing across Aberdeenshire is as follows:

- 41 care homes registered to provide services to people over aged 65 (8 are owned by Aberdeenshire Council and the others are operated by private providers).
- 17 care homes registered to provide services to people with a learning disability (2 of these are respite services).
- 1 care home registered to provide services to people with Mental Health issues.
- 6 Very Sheltered Housing complexes, all owned by Aberdeenshire Council.

The care home sector continues to experience difficulties recruiting and retaining staff as well as the effects of the cost-of-living crisis particularly the increase in utilities and food costs.

Capacity within the sector has become a particular issue this year in care homes for Older People with the system operating frequently at near full capacity. This has a knock-on effect on delayed discharges from hospitals and puts pressure on other parts of the system e.g., care at home, local District Nurse teams as people from the

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community are unable to access a care home of their choice when they need to move from their own home into a care home.

The HSCP are also aware that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to find suitable care home places for people with a more complex diagnosis of dementia. Care homes are often unable to take people as they do not have the appropriate skills mix within their staffing compliment to meet their needs. On a practical level the HSCP continue to offer support through training opportunities to address this and are also looking at strategic options available.

Care Inspectorate grades across the Aberdeenshire care homes and very sheltered housing complexes has been mixed throughout the year with increased support being offered when required. The staffing challenges around the management and leadership of care homes has been a contributing factor in many cases. The HSCP have recently temporarily taken over a care home from a private provider due to the lack of stable management and leadership within the care home for a number of years, ultimately leading to it being unable to improve and eventually having to cancel its registration with the Care Inspectorate. This is the first time that the HSCP have ever had to step-in to this extent however the lack of capacity within the sector was a contributing factor in the decision to take this course of action. Full-time management support from an experienced care home manager was also provided on a temporary basis to assist a care home to stabilise following an Improvement Notice from the Care Inspectorate. This proved to be effective as the new management team took on board the requirements to be met and managed to meet all requirements within the timescales set by the Care Inspectorate.

The HSCP will continue to work closely with all multi-disciplinary teams in order to support the current situation while looking at how to build capacity for the future. However, should this present as a recurring theme, the HSCP capacity to take over a struggling Care Home will be questionable.

### **Celebrating Success – Workforce Wellbeing**

Edenholme Care Home in Stonehaven were successful in securing a grant to support staff wellbeing. Through this grant the care home have been supported by a local nutrition, training and wellness-based company who have visited the care home on a weekly basis to provide staff with 1:1 support, team building, yoga, and massage. This has proved to be a real triumph and has boosted staff morale, overall wellbeing, and health throughout the care home.

### **Celebrating Success – Felt Fine Project**

“Feeling Fine” is a joint initiative developed by Live Life Aberdeenshire’s Arts Team in partnership with Aberdeenshire’s Health & Social Care Partnership. Its aim is to celebrate and embed creative activity in Very Sheltered Housing and Care Homes to support and promote wellbeing.

Building on the award-winning pilot “Felt Fine” which was reported in the CSWO Annual Report 2021-22 and led by fibre artist Frieda Strachan and film company Poppycock Films, the Feeling Fine team reunited following its success at Dawson Court to engage

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with residents, their families, and staff at Westbank Care Home, Oldmeldrum and Ythanvale Care Home in Ellon.

[Felt Fine and Feeling Fine - Live, Life Aberdeenshire \(umbraco.io\)](https://umbraco.io)

## 7.6 Collaborative Care Home Support Team

Following direction from the Scottish Government in December 2022, the Collaborative Care Home Support Team have continued to move away from being assurance based to being more supportive and adopting collaborative improvement which has been recognised by our providers through their feedback.

Whilst improvement continues to be embedded, the team will continue to arrange appropriate and proportionate support from the multi agencies involved around the risks to:

- resident welfare,
- infection prevention and control including PPE supplies,
- current outbreak and staff cases,
- management and leadership matters
- workforce challenges
- Positive outcomes for people experiencing care and staff.

Assistance and support continue to be offered through approaches including outbreak management, Support visits, Improvement meetings, the Provider Forum and creation of a vacancies list.

This collaborative approach has mitigated a number of risks that we have been tackling and ultimately improved relationships and outcomes for people using the services.

## 7.7 Internal Care at Home Service

The service continues to reshape the care and support provided by continuing to work on the four pillars model: complex care; end of life care; rehabilitation and enablement; and rapid response.

The implementation of the model has encountered some challenges, especially 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. this is particularly evident in rural areas.

To address this, the HSCP continue to support 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.

One of these groups is looking at recruitment and retention. They have been attending career fairs at schools and county shows. Photos are below from a recent event in

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Oldmeldrum. The group has also looked at the career structure within home care to encourage workers to stay within the service when looking to progress their career. There has been a project to look at work pattern to allow as much flexibility within the service as possible.

Progress and benefits in terms of integrated working and achieving positive outcomes for people continue to be made. Home carers are seen as an integral part of the multi-disciplinary teams and all benefit from working alongside all the members of the team such as physiotherapist, the MacMillan team and community nurses.

Between 2022 – 23 there were 38 recruitment events held across Aberdeenshire and in Aberdeen City.

7 events in 2023 were in schools/education promoting the service.

From 21 Candidates over the year, 15 were successful. Not every event had data available.

## 7.8 Justice Social Work

During the reporting period, additional funding from the Scottish Government to support justice system recovery from the pandemic has enabled the Criminal Justice Social Work Service to increase capacity to deliver services and respond to the demands from the Courts. This has included the continuation of the Bail Supervision service as an alternative to remand, and the offer of Structured Deferred Sentences as an alternative to other community-based disposals or custody. This represents greater investment in early intervention which is also evolving as a national priority. Increasing capacity in Court Social Work provision has enabled these alternatives to remand to take place building in the offer of support at the pre-disposal stage of the justice pathway. The increase in capacity allowed the Service to be **one of the first areas in Scotland** to introduce the opportunity for assessment of Electronic Monitoring of Bail which has led to a small number of instances where electronic monitoring of bail has been imposed.

Towards the end of the reporting period, work was underway with the Procurator Fiscal Service and Police Scotland to establish a process to obtain earlier access to those who are due to appear in Court on an undertaking. This has increased the opportunity for assessment of potential suitability for Diversion from Prosecution. A pilot project at Kittybrewster Custody Suite in Aberdeen also commenced which allows earlier (Sunday) access to those being held in Police Custody to appear in Court, allowing earlier access to Court Support Services opportunity to assess for potential suitability for Bail Supervision and/or Electronic Monitoring of Bail. Expansion is planned to cover Fraserburgh Custody Suite following review.

In relation to Unpaid Work, two members of the Unpaid Work Service participated in training for trainers, to support the delivery of a new national training programme. This training, covering topics such as values, trauma informed practice, pro-social modelling, diversity and coaching and mentoring, will be rolled out to all areas across Scotland, from June 2023. This training will enhance skills and knowledge to most

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effectively respond to the increasing complexity of need presented in people who are undertaking unpaid work.

Many of the adaptations that were introduced to the Unpaid Work Service as part of the COVID-recovery phase have been retained, with the creation of inventive outdoor spaces as outdoor meeting spaces such as poly tunnels and garden rooms. Outdoor / community placements are undertaken where possible to reduce travel and maintain a locality focus, home working increases opportunity to complete unpaid hours and with support through increase access to technology gives increased opportunity for learning.

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, and virtual employability programmes, as well as one-to-one programmes tailored to meet individual needs, have continued to help people to complete these hours. During 2022/23, collaboration continued with the Creative Change Collective (formerly 'Street Cones'), to deliver a series of online creative writing workshops, engagement with which could again count towards completion of Any Other Activity hours. Each of the three modules completed during the period led to the production of a script which was then performed to an online audience – the recordings of which are all available to view online ([Creative Change Collective - YouTube](#)).

During 2022/23, the continued investment by Scottish Government in additional funding to support the interface with third sector has enabled the Justice Service to work more collaboratively with third sector to offer a more holistic approach in meeting the needs of people who are in the justice system. Examples being the Apex Labyrinth Programme delivered to provide employability support to people who had been convicted of sexual and/or violent offences and who often struggle to remain in or return to the job market following conviction. Action for Children provide support to families of people who are serving a sentence or a period of remand at HMP & YOI Grampian. This takes place through the Family Centre and Help Hub located at the prison. As a result of the additional funding made available, Action for Children have been able also deliver of outreach services to families experiencing the impact of imprisonment. Increasing the resilience of the wider family system to manage the impact of imprisonment promotes the continuation of family relationships which is a crucial component of desistance.

The Higher Support Needs Team (HSNT) continues to support individuals who have previously found it difficult to complete the Unpaid Work aspect of their community order(s) due to challenges in relation to their mental health including anxiety, alcohol and drug issues and general ill health. Subsequently, short custodial sentences as a result of breach of community-based orders are significantly reduced and people previously considered to be in the "revolving door" into custody have successfully completed Orders through engagement with the HSNT. The approach has an outreach component to initial engagement and the method of working is entirely relationship based. The team, work from an outdoor allotment site which has been built together with people attending the project. The work takes place alongside the opportunity to be listened to and talk through present, past, or future worries. Practical support can also be offered in various ways including attending Job Centre interviews, medical appointments, Court appearances, writing CV's, attending Social Work, Housing and Drug and Alcohol appointments. The positive impact on wellbeing, stability and routine

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has led to the offer of “after-care” following completion of an Order. Eventual transition into other services can take place but for some the HSNT has established as a feature of their support network, maintaining positive engagement, and contributing to the reduction in their risk of reoffending.

Two social workers from the Justice Service have progressed as national trainers through representation on national groups. This relates to the roll out of new risk assessment tools for men convicted of domestic abuse related offending and for sexual offending. Another impact of the Court backlog has been the increase in new assessments and new casework relating to high-risk domestic abuse and sexual offending convictions, therefore, access to this expertise is invaluable. The workforce is the resource which delivers the statutory justice service, therefore, the wellbeing of the workforce from newly qualified, temporary workers, social workers in training and those experienced and longstanding in the service continues to be of paramount importance at the same time as delivering effective and progressive interventions.

Enhancing the workforce to meet increasing demand has taken place through employment of additional temporary social work staff, support workers, other professionals (Employability Officers, Occupational Therapist) as well as supporting safe additional hours working across the workforce. Access to psychological support in place for workers within the Programmes Team (who deliver group work to men convicted of domestic abuse and sexual offences) has been extended to the wider workforce where the nature and intensity of the content of casework is such that the impact may have been experienced as traumatic for the worker.

Beyond the challenges created by demand, there have been a number of issues relating to systems and processes which have had an impact on service delivery. This includes the Throughcare Assessment for Release on Licence -TARL and the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) system both of which impact progression and planning which places additional pressure on workloads.

<sup>1</sup> [LS/CMI - RMA - Risk Management Authority](#)

## 7.9 Community Justice

The Aberdeenshire Community Justice Partnership has continued to meet on a quarterly basis, with engagement from partners remaining high. Most of the established collaborations which had to be put on hold during the pandemic have now been able to recommence, including our partnership approach to Bail Supervision, Court Support, Custody Support, Joint Cuckooing Initiative, Safer Streets, the Women’s Service, Groupwork and Unpaid Work.

As in previous reporting periods, drug supply through “County Lines” and associated “cuckooing” activity continue to impact on Aberdeenshire communities, most notably within the Buchan Corner. Community Justice Partners began to work together in 2018 in a multi-agency response to address the impact of drug related harm. This work has continued through the Joint Cuckooing Initiative.

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Following on from the four successful joint Days of Action in 2021/22, a further ten Days of Action and a smaller 'Day of Reaction' took place at various locations across Aberdeenshire throughout the course of the year.

The Days of Action are targeted interventions designed 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-related harm.

The Days of Action continue to involve a range of partners - including Justice Social Work, Health and Social Care Partnership Drug and Alcohol Services, Housing, Children & Families Social Work and Community Safety, alongside Police colleagues from Community Policing Teams and specialist units - who carry out a combination of enforcement and outreach to offer a multiagency approach to safeguard communities and individuals following enforcement activity. This provides increased visibility of Police, Justice Social Work, Community Safety and Drug and Alcohol services within communities.

The presence of the Police Pod and Community Safety visits to households provide reassurance, while the joint visits engage and re-engage people at risk, offer fast track into treatment as required, and provide access to other support services - whilst the enforcement activity itself serves as a disruption to those responsible for activities relating to drug supply. Whilst led by Adult Services, there is also strong collaboration with Children's Services delivering on Children's Services Plan priorities.

Following the lifting of all remaining COVID restrictions in April 2022, Community Justice Partners were able to re-establish the Aberdeenshire Safer Streets Initiative.

The initiative provides an opportunity for Community Justice Partners (Justice Social Work, H&SCP Drug and Alcohol Service, Licencing Officers and Police Scotland) to deliver high visibility joint patrols, licensed premises checks, welfare checks to existing service users and also bail compliance checks, specifically in relation to domestic abuse related situations. This activity takes place at key times of the year where intelligence has indicated that there is a rise in incidents of violence and drug and alcohol related harm.

The Safer Streets activities provide an opportunity for Justice and Drug and Alcohol Services to offer support and assistance to vulnerable individuals out with normal working hours, and to also provide a visible presence within communities through interaction with the night-time economy. This creates opportunities for early engagement where there may be problematic issues with drugs and alcohol also giving opportunity to diffuse potential volatile situations before they escalate and result in involvement with the justice system. Bail compliance checks is linked to early intervention and arrest referral processes which are a feature of Justice Social work activity.

Continued on from 2021/22, this year Aberdeenshire Criminal Justice Social Work and Drug and Alcohol Services secured further provision of Level Three Safety and Stabilisation trauma training for a range of staff including Team Managers, Project Managers, Social Workers, Care Managers, Community Mental Health Nurses, Support Workers, Local Area Coordinators and Health Care Support Workers.

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Since May 2021, one hundred and thirty five workers from across these services have taken part in the two-day training, delivered by Epione Training and Consultancy, with a further course planned for July 2023. The training is delivered through a Justice lens so places the context for participants in their own working environment. This will help ensure that Aberdeenshire is able to meet the requirements of National Community Justice Strategy Aim 2 and Priority Action 5 as well as the Medication Assisted Treatment Standard 10, requiring the workforce to be trauma-informed and that practitioners are appropriately trained to provide trauma responsive support.

As part of the initial response to the pandemic in early 2020, Community Justice Partners were required to work together more closely to plan and prepare for people being released from custody at an earlier stage than would normally have been the case (Emergency Release from custody). Although Emergency Early Release has now come to an end, we have continued the model bringing together partners including Criminal Justice Social Work, Aberdeenshire Housing Service, Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership Alcohol and Drug Services and the national throughcare SHINE Mentoring Service. Moving forward, the group will provide a mechanism for ensuring that the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards are applied within all relevant community justice settings.

2022/23 has seen the publication of a new [National Strategy for Community Justice](#) which sets out four new national aims and thirteen priority actions for community justice partners to consider going forward. This includes optimising the use of diversion and intervention at the earliest opportunity, ensuring that robust and high-quality community interventions and public protection arrangements are consistently available, ensuring that services are accessible and available to address the needs of individuals convicted of an offence, and strengthening the leadership, engagement and partnership working of local and national community justice partners.

The National Strategy is accompanied by a Delivery Plan for National Community Justice Partners, however it is anticipated that additional resources and investment will be required to support implementation of this, and as yet it is unclear what this investment will look like at either a local or national level.

Throughout 2022/23, Community Justice Partners have been working to produce a Strategic Needs and Strengths Assessment of Community Justice in Aberdeenshire, which will provide an evidence base of the justice population's needs and the services and interventions that are in place locally to support them. This, along with the National Strategy, Delivery Plan and a new Performance Framework, will inform the development of Aberdeenshire's next Community Justice Outcomes Improvement Plan. This overarching strategic plan will set the direction for Community Justice in Aberdeenshire over the course of the next five-year period.

## 7.10 Drug & Alcohol Service

The focus of the Drug and Alcohol Service throughout the reporting year has been continued work to implement The Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards ([Introduction - Medication Assisted Treatment \(MAT\) standards: access, choice,](#)

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[support - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://support.gov.scot)). The first five Standards expected to be in place by 31/03/23 with full implementation of all ten Standards by 31/03/24.

The implementation of the MAT Standards brings significant change to the way services are delivered. Multi Agency Project Groups have progressed all aspects of what is essentially, a redesign of service delivery.

Earlier engagement, equity of access, choice, harm reduction, outreach and retention are the themes across the first five standards and should be interwoven across all partners response to people who are at risk due to drug related harm. The approach taken in respect of the redesign process takes into account people and their families who are affected by alcohol harms. National Guidance directing the implementation of new standards of practice in relation to tackling alcohol harm are awaited and likely to invoke further service development work.

At the end of March 23, the Aberdeenshire Medication Assisted Treatment Standards Implementation Plan produced by the Health and Social Care Partnership Drug and Alcohol Service in collaboration with partners was submitted to the Scottish Government. Provisional green RAG status has been awarded indicating that MAT 1-5 has been implemented and work requires to be ongoing to embed these standards as established and sustainable practice and service delivery throughout the coming year.

The following gives a short summary of the implementation work undertaken by the Drug and Alcohol in collaboration with partners.

Multi-disciplinary team structures have been introduced as a step beyond the integration of clinical and social work teams which has taken place over recent years. The implementation of MAT Standard One has led to five multi-disciplinary “Step-In” teams forming in each larger locality and comprise nurses, health care support workers, social workers, support workers and third sector workers. Step-In provides assessment and engagement following all referral pathways, addressing the presenting need on an immediate basis with ongoing assessment before transitioning the person into the most appropriate service. Step-In also provides easier access to partners in Advocacy, Housing, Welfare Benefits who provide a regular presence at Step-In locations.

Established working practices with pharmacy have been enhanced through the development of ways to increase choice of treatment for people who come into service so meeting a wider range of needs, developing inclusion and increasing participation. Pharmacy and public health practitioners have worked with the clinical and social work teams to extend the reach of harm reduction beyond a person’s attendance at clinical spaces. This takes social workers and support workers into new areas of practice which increases skills and develops wider pathways for people to receive safe harm reduction support.

Practitioners from professions not previously linked to drug and alcohol delivery have also joined the Service so increasing the choice around what components of support are most effective for the individual. Occupational Therapy, Physician Associates and Psychology are examples of how the service is developing towards a much more

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holistic delivery system almost negating the “referral on” experience which previously may have resulted in delays, barriers and at its worse exclusion.

Equal access to universal services, however, remains a priority and test of change projects with primary care and mental health are progressing to ensure that people who have drug and alcohol problems are not siloed into to only drug and alcohol specific services. The work commencing in relation to MAT Implementation in Justice settings will ensure equity of access to drug and alcohol services and partner support and is being led through the Community Justice Partnership. The continued collaborative work with the drug and alcohol Service will ensure that differences do not exist in the recovery pathway for people who are involved in the justice setting.

Throughout the reporting period, there has been a further increase in referrals and noted increase in complexity of risk and need. The impact of Covid is ongoing. Easy online access to new illicit substances, chronic presence of out of area drug dealing activity and increase in levels of violence associated with drug related offending impacts on levels of vulnerability and risk. The Aberdeenshire Responsive Intervention and Engagement Service (ARIES) is the outreach service responding to people who have experienced near fatal overdose and who are considered to be at the highest risk of drug related death. The two ARIES teams combine a social worker, nurse, health care support worker, support worker and dedicated police officer. The multi disciplinary nature of the team which works out of hours represents a progressive practice responsive to not just the national directive of the MAT Implementation but is responsive to local need.

The National Mission also makes recommendations which relate to the enhancement of opportunities for people to access Residential Rehabilitation and directed the implementation in local authority areas of the policy “*Framework for Improving Holistic Family Support : Towards a Whole Family Approach and Family Inclusive Practice in Drug and Alcohol Services*” ([Families Affected by Drug and Alcohol Use in Scotland : A Framework for Holistic Whole Family Approaches and Family Inclusive Practice \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/families-affected-by-drug-and-alcohol-use-in-scotland-a-framework-for-holistic-whole-family-approaches-and-family-inclusive-practice/pages/1-10.aspx)).

In relation to Residential Rehabilitation, a practice guidance has been produced which shifts the singular assessment process away from a social work only action and now reflects the multi-disciplinary nature of other parts of service delivery.

The development of whole family approach and family inclusive practice is represented by the establishment of the Libra Team. Adult Services Social Work and Children’s Services Social Work come together in one team, working as one delivery system with families and young people who are or have been significantly affected by drug and alcohol harm. Targeted intervention with families referred through social work with follow through support provided by support workers is being delivered. The provision of support and consultation by the Team to the wider adult and children’s services will develop as part of the implementation of family inclusive approach across services who support families affected by drug and alcohol related harm.

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## 7.11 Care Management – Older People & Physical Disabilities Service

Care Management continue to experience high levels of pressure across all 7 teams which can be attributed to a number of factors including increased demand, greater complexity of need and a reduction in provider support. Despite additional staff being recruited through Winter Pressures Funding, this has not resulted in a consistent decrease in either delayed discharge figures or people waiting for assessment. Anecdotally staff report feeling overwhelmed and pressurised and are crisis managing on a regular basis due to care providers handing back care packages, care home closures and the lack of resources such as respite availability. This carries a significant level of risk.

Challenges continue in commissioning of care and support services, both residential and non-residential for the Care Management service. As of week, beginning 12<sup>th</sup> June, there were 207 clients awaiting a care at home package or an increase in care: totalling 2058 hours. This level of unmet need is a concerning risk. Private care homes have moved in their business model and are now insisting on a higher quota of self-funding residents which makes for challenges to commissioning of a placement. Delayed discharges are increasing at a significant level, and this can be attributed to the lack of care at home and care home resources available.

Teams continue to work closely with all members of the multi-disciplinary team to balance risk and ensure appropriate allocation of resources to the most in need. It is also worth noting that the focus on delayed discharge can at times overshadow unmet need in the community which again presents risk and in fact consists of a very a high proportion of the care management role.

Despite the challenges upon teams at present, creative pieces have evolved to mitigate risk. For example, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary has seen the expansion of the Care Management team representing Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership. Based in ARI Discharge Hub the team support timely and safe discharge from ARI across all of Aberdeenshire, working as part of the Multi-Disciplinary Team. A significant focus has been placed upon implementing Rehab and Enablement as the ethos for discharge planning, to promote and support recovery following illness or injury to maximise independence and confidence following discharge.

The Marr Care Management team undertook a Test of Change in Deeside to make alternative use of a staffing resource. An Enablement & Support Coordinator undertakes all initial contact screening for all referrals in the Banchory & Aboyne area and responds to duty work. This has supported a timely response to all referrals and a consistent application of eligibility criteria. Outcomes for clients have improved as the waiting time for an assessment has reduced. A practitioner survey found the implementation of this role to be well received and supported by all. The most positive improvement being around staff and team morale. Practitioners feel able to focus on their own caseload and know where their accountability and responsibilities lie.

Care Management saw the introduction of an Interim Bed Project over Winter of 2022/2023 which greatly aided and supported discharge planning when faced with a lack of suitable care resources. 21 beds were block booked from both the private sector and in-house care home provision across Aberdeenshire from December 2022- May 2023. This saw a positive impact on hospital flow and a reduction in delayed discharges

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during the winter period again mitigating some of the risk associated with delayed discharge and unmet need.

Recruitment within Care Management remains a challenge, however, there have been positive links built with Robert Gordons University of recent with a number of invites being extended to front-line teams to spend time in RGU talking and meeting with students. Presentations have been given on a variety of topics such as Integration, Self-Directed Support in Practice and The Role of Care Management. This presence and building of relationships have seen a number of newly qualified Social Workers move into employment within Care Management referencing presentations received as the reason for their interest in Care Management.

## 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.

Examples of activity include:

- Commissioning activity to support the development of additional supported accommodation for adults with learning disabilities in Peterhead, Inverurie, Fraserburgh and Macduff.
  - Re-commissioning of an independent Self-Directed Support Advice and Information and an ISF Management Service in support of Option 2.
  - Commissioning of a local independent advocacy service with an increased scope that responds to forecast additional demand.
  - Commissioning of Interim Beds in Older Peoples Care Homes to ensure continuous flow of patients from hospital and into appropriate care settings to mitigate delayed discharge and meet the needs of service users for a short period of time.
  - Commissioning of Substance Misuse Residential Rehabilitation Services to enable service users to be supported in their recovery from addictions in a residential setting.
  - Recommissioning of Holistic Service for service users with Dementia. The opportunity was taken to revise the current service being provided and adjust considering the changes brought about by the Covid19 pandemic.
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The Procurement and Commissioning Service also play a key role in assisting us with monitoring of contracts bringing additional scrutiny and support to provider provision.

### **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 from the Scottish Government, the local authority, the IJB, to encourage providers to pay care staff at least the Real Living Wage. Although not legally enforceable, the push has worked and currently 98% of providers pay the Real Living Wage. A further factor aimed at valuing our workforce and supporting staff retention to be able to deliver key services.

## **9 Unpaid Carers**

Whilst unpaid carers are often unseen and our unsung heroes, social work services continue to proactively raise awareness of the support available to unpaid carers recognising both the value and challenge of their role. Since the implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 we have continued to see increases in the number of new carers registered with the Aberdeenshire Carers Support Service (Quarriers) as well as substantial increases in the number of Adult Carers eligible for support to meet identified needs which are substantial or critical.

Over the last year, 90 new adult carers were supported with SDS budgets, and 149 existing carers were supported to maintain ongoing SDS budgets. The increased demand has unfortunately led to waiting times increasing however, the HSCP has been working towards increasing the capacity of the Carer Practitioners over the next financial year which is envisaged to have a substantial impact on the current waiting list, ensuring that all unpaid carers identified as requiring this support will do so more timeously.

Carers continue to be encouraged to use their SDS budgets creatively to meet their identified outcomes both at home and in the community. Examples include home gym equipment, online exercise classes, streaming services, and garden equipment and/or Live Life Aberdeenshire Memberships, short breaks accommodation, holistic therapies such as massage or relaxing pamper sessions.

Carers are supported to identify which SDS Option would work best for themselves. 182 have chosen to use SDS Option 1 to access short breaks activities and support, using an Aberdeenshire Council Payment Card, whilst 66 carers have used SDS Option 1 to access replacement care via a personal assistant, with lower numbers having chosen SDS Option 2 or 3 to access replacement care via agencies. Carers are one of the fastest growing user groups of SDS Option 2 within Aberdeenshire.

First-hand experience of Self-directed Support, told by carers, is available via this link: [The Storytelling Sessions \(Issue 01\) \(readymag.com\)](#)

Throughout the period Quarriers have received 116 new referrals, which is again an increase in numbers to previous years. Thirty young carers have been supported to access support via self-directed support budgets, which has enabled them to

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participate in activities such as Innoflate and Trampolining, ice skating and football training camps, provided funding to purchase equipment such as bicycles, helmets and lights, boxing equipment or safety equipment for horse riding.

In addition to progressing Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements staff at Quarriers have continued to receive Creative Break applications and the Scot Spirit Holiday Vouchers were also available from Quarriers, continuing to support Adult and Young carers who are not eligible for SDS funding.

## 10 Looking Forward

Looking forward, there are a range of legislative and policy changes on the horizon: The establishment of a National Care Service being the most significant. Whilst offering many new opportunities, it also has the potential to change the social work and social care landscape significantly and it is vital that Chief Social Work Officers and the social work workforce have a clear voice in helping shape this. Potential change however also brings uncertainty including whether or not children's social work and justice services will sit within the National Care Service remit.

The Scottish Government has intimated that it is committed to improving conditions for social workers, to grow the workforce, to provide greater opportunities for learning and development, and to give social workers more autonomy. To do this well, real investment is required in the service and a move away from non-recurring funding offers or applications to funding sources which select a finite number of initiatives to fund leaving others to struggle. This is particularly challenging when it pertains to legislative delivery on for example implementation of The Promise. A disparity in additional funding streams being provided to HSCP as part of the winter pressures funding has been felt keenly by children's services social work who have also been impacted by increased demand, complexity and capacity issues but have not had the opportunity to increase the workforce to mitigate the risk this brings.

The creation of a national social work agency provides opportunities to promote the role of social work and consider what kind of social work we want for Scotland. It too offers us a chance to redesign our approach to care and support, helping us to deliver on our many commitments including, GIRFE, Coming Home, Keeping the Promise, UNCRC, GIRFEC and the Bairns' Hoose, and still react swiftly to sudden crises including the supporting of refugees.

However, the biggest challenge currently and going forward is undoubtedly workforce recruitment, retention, and wellbeing and it is vital that we continue to support our profession with ring fenced time for training and continuous professional development and regular and consistent professional trauma informed supervision. Our workforce planning strategies require to be SMART, effective and sustainable, and we need to strongly promote Aberdeenshire as an amazing place to live and work.

We also need to listen to our workforce and shape wellbeing support in a way that is deemed helpful to them ensuring our colleagues feel supported, valued, and have a work life balance.

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Waiting lists for services and increased delays in hospital discharges will continue to have a serious impact over the forthcoming years and we require consistent improvement activity to do things differently and creatively to reduce risk and meet demand. It is vital however that we also recognise the length and breadth of social work service provision across Aberdeenshire as outlined in this report. Social work services support people in our communities to live well at home which often prevents crises and potentially admission to hospital or other alternative residential type resources. This task equates to 99% of service delivery. The remaining 1 % pertains to situations where individuals do require to be admitted to hospital, and the role we play collaboratively to support those individuals to return home and as quickly as possible. Support and resource therefore must be in place across the whole range of social work activity to support people to live well in their communities which is likely to reduce the need for crises intervention including on occasions hospital admissions.

With the complexity of care and need increasing, budget pressures are likely to escalate compounded by an increasing deficit in local government funding. Whilst there is no easy fix, I am assured that IJB Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) programmes of work are ongoing to deliver more sustainable models of service delivery. However, a strategic and medium-term view of resources is essential if all social work and social care services are to deliver their strategic priorities within budget.

Throughout this report there are numerous examples of effective, innovative, and creative new models and approaches which are down to the determination of colleagues delivering social work and social care despite the challenges facing them on a day-to-day basis. It is this tenacity and drive to 'get it right' for our communities which both humbles and inspires me as Chief Social Work Officer, and I pledge to continue to raise the profile of social work services, be their voice locally and nationally and represent the voice of our communities whilst continuing to provide professional advice and scrutiny.

**Report prepared by Leigh Jolly, Aberdeenshire Chief Social Work Officer  
June 2023**

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