

14th November 2024
Agenda Item No. 7

2023-24 Chief Social Work Officers (CSWO) Report

Report by: James Ross, Head of Children & Families and Criminal Justice Services

Wards Affected: All Wards

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to share with members the CSWO report covering the period 2023-24.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) report.

Resource Implications

There are no specific resource implications.

Legal & Risk Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Impact Assessment

An equality (EqIA) Impact Assessment has not been completed for this report and is not necessary as no change or revision to existing policies or practices is proposed.

Consultation

None.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members of activity across Social Work services during 2023-24, as well as outline the associated challenges within the context of the current climate within public services. This reporting year has presented both ongoing opportunities and ongoing challenge.
- 1.2 The CSWO should assist local authorities and their partners in understanding the complexities and cross-cutting nature of social work service delivery - including particular issues such as corporate parenting, child and adult protection and the management of high-risk offenders. The CSWO also has a contribution to make in supporting overall performance improvement and management of corporate risk across the local authority.
- 1.3 Following presentation at Committee this report and the associated relevant material for inclusion will be posted on the Council website and will be shared with the Chief Social Work Advisor to the Scottish Government.

2.0 CSWO Report

- 2.1 The CSWO covers the following aspects: -
 - Governance & Accountability
 - Service Quality & Performance
 - Children and Families
 - Adult and Older Adult Social Work and Social Care
 - Justice Services
 - Quality Assurance & development
 - Training, Learning & development
 - Challenges & improvements
- 2.2 Further information about Fife Council Social Work Services is available on our websites [Home | Fife Council](#) and [HSCP Homepage | Fife HSCP](#)

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Across all of Fife Council Social Work, there have been many positive and encouraging developments during the last year and these have included: a focus on developing trauma informed service delivery and listening to the voices of those with lived experience

- 3.2 A key emphasis in the delivery of **Social Work Services** going forward into 2024/25 remains in line with those identified last year as we continue to recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and what is meant by a new normal - this will remain a significant piece of work over the few next years, which will require flexibility and close collaboration with our partners to address:
- 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.
 - The very real impact of poverty and increasing poverty in our communities
- 3.3 **Children and Families Services**, we will continue to manage our integration into a Communities Directorate maximising the opportunities created by this and developing a No Wrong Door approach to improve support at the earliest point for families.
- 3.4 **Justice Services** our priorities include:
- In the year ahead, we intend to implement our 3-year Outcome Improvement Plan, which will act as a 'roadmap' for overall Service improvement.
 - We will maximise the use of diversion as an early intervention strategy, while promoting its use as an appropriate response to offending behaviour.
 - There will be an increased focus on the availability of robust, communitybased interventions to ensure people are supported in the most appropriate and effective setting.
 - We will ensure that those given community sentences are supervised and supported through the provision of robust, high quality, trauma informed services and programmes.
 - There will be a focus on improved partnership working to strengthen the leadership, engagement and impact of local and community justice partners, both in respect of raising awareness of community justice and improving outcomes.
 - We will increase opportunities for Service User Involvement in the design, delivery and development of our Services. We intend to do this by creating a specific post which will be aligned to this work, and by utilising evidence, research and best practice in this area.
- 3.5 **Adult and older people social work and social care services** our priorities include:
- Workforce Resilience: Exploring further how we can support our workforce to show the value we place in their contribution to services and our community, embedding a supervision framework, recognising and promoting best practices, and creating spaces for colleagues to come together and reflect.
 - Transitions: Strengthening how we support people entering our services using a "team around the person" approach, GIRFE principles, and multi-agency meetings to enhance person centred support.
 - Professional Assurance Framework: Embedding tools and processes to gather meaningful data for improvement, with a focus on service user, carer, and workforce feedback through surveys and supervision.

- Prevention & Early Intervention: Enhancing collaboration with community-led services and ensuring staff confidence in having transparent, open conversations about meeting needs, and our eligibility criteria. 100 35
- Crisis Response and Mental Health: Taking action to ensure people requiring intervention through AWI are regularly reviewed and that those needing emergency detention under the MH Act have an MHO involved in their detention.
- Carer Support: Including quality assurance in our collection of the number of carer support plans offered so we know the impact of our interventions on the lives of carers.

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Chief Social Work Officer Report

2023 to 2024



Foreword

The requirement for each Council to have a Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) was initially set out in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and further supported by Section 45 of the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994. The role of the CSWO is to provide professional governance, leadership, and accountability for the delivery of social work services, not only those provided directly by the Council or from within the integrated Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), but also those commissioned or purchased from the voluntary and private sector. The CSWO should assist local authorities and their partners in understanding the complexities and cross-cutting nature of social work service delivery - including particular issues such as corporate parenting, child and adult protection and the management of high-risk offenders. There is also an obligation to ensure partnership understanding of the key role social work plays in contributing to the achievement of a wide range of national and local outcomes, for example the UNCRC.

The CSWO also has a contribution to make in supporting overall performance improvement and management of corporate risk across the local authority. Social work services are delivered within a framework of statutory duties and powers and are required to meet national standards and provide best value. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the statutory work undertaken on the Council's behalf during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 as well as outline the associated challenges within the context of the current climate within public services. This reporting year has presented both ongoing opportunities and ongoing challenge.

Over this last year we have continued to strengthen the established partnerships in Fife and pursue opportunities to develop our respective and collective contributions to effecting positive change within a reform agenda. Keeping connected was a key feature of the 'pandemic' and in many ways this has become more pronounced as we begin to better understand the longer-term impact on individuals and communities, exacerbated by the changing economic climate and the increasing visibility of the impact of poverty. Despite increasing challenges, the context, and the significant uncertainty facing the sector, our social work and social care workforce, our carers and other partners across all services have remained committed to providing services that empower, support and protect local people. As ever, my appreciation goes to everyone who works in social work and social care, and those who otherwise support this important work, for all that they have done in the last year for children, young people, adults, and families.

I would like to acknowledge all the colleagues who have supported the production of this report and the associated relevant material for inclusion.

This report will be posted on the Council website and will be shared with the Chief Social Work Advisor to the Scottish Government.

Introduction and Background

In Fife, the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) is responsible for monitoring Social Work activity across the Council and within the Fife Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to ensure that agreed targets are being met and that professional standards are maintained. As a Head of Service, the CSWO has direct operational responsibility for the management of the Children and Families and Justice Social Work Services, assuring quality of practice and adherence to national legislative and policy obligations. The role also has oversight of the practice and standards involved in the delivery of social work within Adult and Older People's Services.

The CSWO has a role to play in specific advisory bodies such as the Chief Officer Public Safety Group and in advising the Council in relation to matters affecting social work services arising from community planning and other partnership bodies. The CSWO also has access as required to the Council's Chief Executive and elected members.

The wide reach of the role of the CSWO across the entirety of the profession is nationally recognised as comprehensive and vital to the safe delivery of the social work and social care functions carried out on behalf of the local authority and across the Health and Social Care Partnership. To support the CSWO in Fife a Principal Social Work Officer (PSWO) was recruited in 2023 within the HSCP who holds delegated accountability for CSWO functions within Adult, Older Adult and social care services. The PSWO directly reports to the Director of Health and Social Care but critically provides clear accountability to the CSWO of the social work and social care functions carried out by the workforce in the Health and Social Care Partnership, identifying areas of good practice and any developing areas of concern.

Further information about Fife Council Social Work Services is available on our websites: www.fife.gov.uk and www.fifehealthandsocialcare.org.

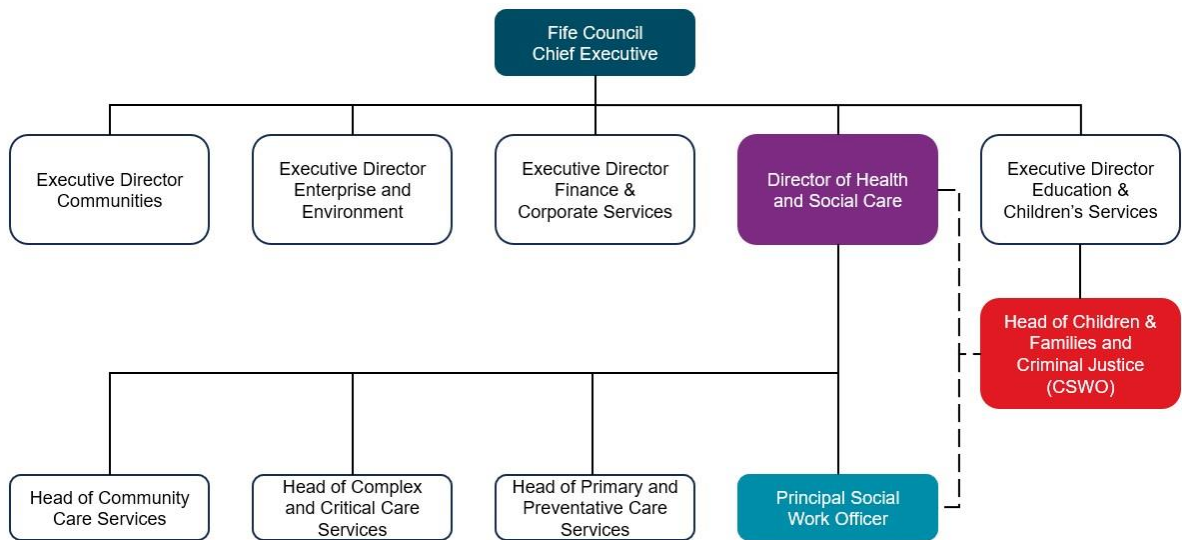
Governance and Accountability

Fife Council Political Structure

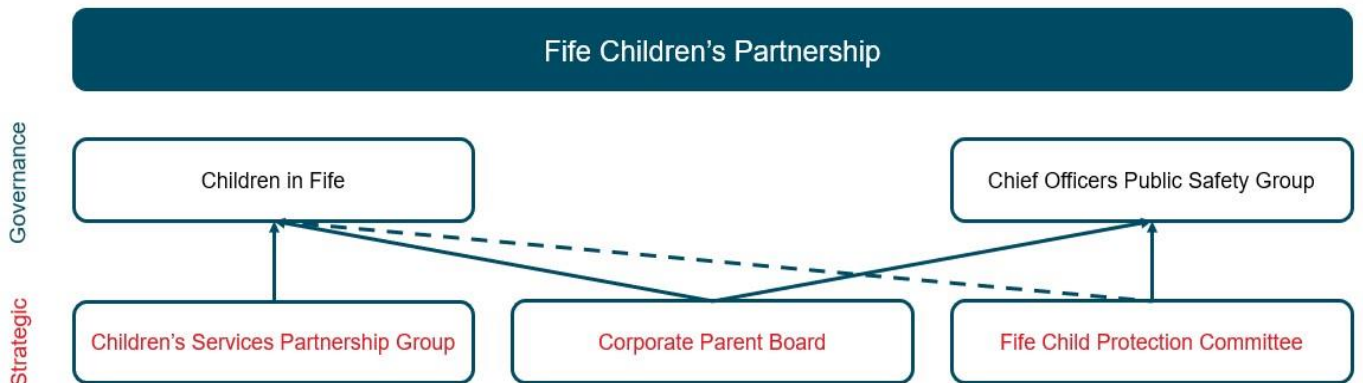
There are 22 electoral wards in Fife and each ward has three or four councillors who have been elected by the people of that ward to represent them. In total, there are 75 councillors. They are responsible for setting policy for the Council and may sit on various committees where they can vote on a range of matters from local planning to decisions on welfare or education.

Breakdown by political groups	
Scottish National Party	34
Scottish Labour Party	19
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party	8
Scottish Liberal Democrat Party	13
Independent	1
Total	75

Fife Council Strategic Governance and Accountability



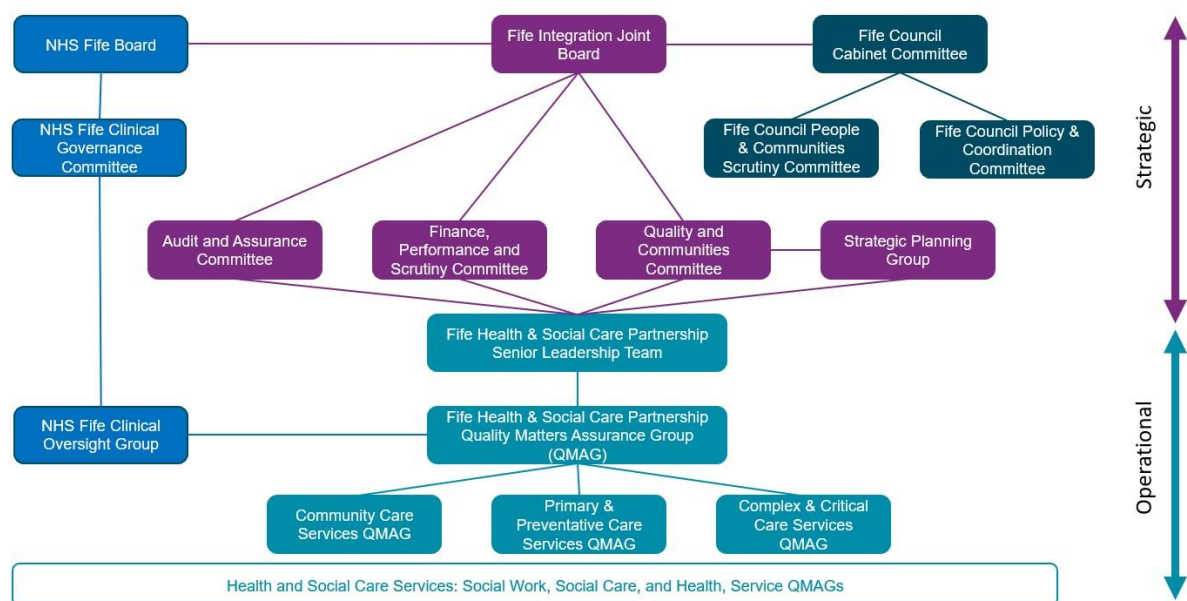
In November 2023 it was agreed that the Children and Family and Justice Social Work Service would move to the Communities Directorate and the 2024 – 2025 CSWO report will contain that diagram.



The partnership between services for Children in Fife is well established at both a strategic level and across local areas. The responsibility for the Children's Services Plan (2023-2024) is held by the Fife Partnership, represented by the Children in Fife Group. This partnership binds Fife Council, the voluntary sector, Police Scotland, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, NHS Fife, and the Health and Social Care Partnership in common purpose. The Children in Fife Group reports to the Fife Partnership. There are four main areas of improvement:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Supporting Families
- Engagement of our Children, Young People and Families
- Equity and Equality

Fife Council Social Work Governance Arrangements: Health and Social Care



In accordance with the Public Bodies (Joint Working) Scotland Act 2014 and the agreed Scheme of Delegation, Fife’s Adult and Older Adult Social Work Services, along with the provision of social care through Care at Home, Care Homes, and Adult Residential and Community Services, are delegated to Fife Health and Social Care Partnership. The above diagram reflects the governance arrangements for Fife Council functions and details how the Chief Social Work Officer aligns to this to enable the role to continue to retain oversight and accountability in the social work and social care practices within the H&SC partnership.

Service Quality and Performance

Children and Families

The following pages provide an overview of the primary functions of the Children and Families service delivery in Fife. Key challenges in service delivery across all teams in Fife has been the increasing volume and complexity of referrals into social work – likely impacted by local, national and global poverty related challenges as well as ongoing understanding of the impact of Covid on children and their families. In addition to this there are concerning trends relating to recruitment of qualified social workers, retention, and significant budget challenges. Resources remain scarce with national shortages of placements for children requiring alternative care. Staff in Fife remain hugely committed to the Promise and value-based policies, but the number of new policies and changing legislation have been a challenge on our teams. While commitment to core social work values and legislative duties are central to all the work undertaken across Fife, creativity and flexibility are required to meet the needs presented when engaging with individuals and their families.

Belonging to Fife

The Belonging to Fife strategy continues to provide the vision, governance, and direction for our work with children and their families. The strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Reflecting the principles of GIRFEC and The Promise – what will it take, from the whole of the team around the child, to keep this child safely at home, additional supports, scaffolding, family strengths etc.
- Keeping the needs of children at the centre of all planning.
- Whole partnership understanding that children have a right to live within their own communities, with their siblings and where possible within their own family.
- Outcomes Focused/Strength based planning reflecting the strengths and capacities of the young person and their family while recognising and managing any risk.
- A whole system approach is required as Keeping The Promise necessitates a commitment from all services: Education, Health, Police Scotland and third sector providers.

The strategy effectively directs all the practice within the Children and Family Social Work service and 2023 – 2024 has seen a further embedding of a strong focus on earlier and more effective intervention utilising whole family strengths and whole family support through a developing ‘no wrong door’ approach.

Early Intervention

The Children and Families Contact Centre operates as the “front door” for the service and continues to manage all initial referrals from partners and families. The MultiAgency Improvement Team (MAIT) using Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, supported earlier and more effective screening of referrals received from Health and Education colleagues. This was captured in partnership work supporting a refresh of GIRFEC allowed for agreement of a new process for referring into the social work service by confirming the need for consistency in referral information, assessment and the use of chronologies across the partnership. This new development is part of a range of initiatives to support transformational change in respect to systems, processes and practice. The focus on earlier intervention within communities was piloted through a ‘Community Social Work’ approach in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath and the learning from this work is contributing to wider whole system change, as part of Fife Council reform, in respect of a No Wrong Door approach to supporting people and their families with a focus on People and Place.

Family Support Service

Open Involvements	FSS Central	FSS East	FSS West	Total
April 2021	153	117	154	424
April 2022	186	115	193	494
April 2023	154	114	172	440
April 2024	136	97	162	395

The Scottish Government's focus on Whole Family Support has provided the opportunity to further develop and enhance family support services, considering areas of improvement through self-assessment using the "How Good is Our Family Support" Framework. In Fife we have enhanced our offer to further develop and enhance family support services, with the intent to shift resources to support prevention and earlier intervention.

The service has benefited from opportunities to test out different ways of working and offering intervention at an earlier stage: senior practitioners based in schools, reintroducing parenting programmes, clear focus on co-production as well as developing capacity to consider data more efficiently to inform improvement activity.

In terms of the work of the family support service we identified that:

- Education is the highest referring agency followed by Health and Social Work which is broadly the same as the previous year.
- The highest number of referrals relate to primary aged children which is the same as previous year.
- Emotional wellbeing and behaviour are the main areas indicating an improvement in outcomes delivered by a whole family strength-based approach. Parenting skills and family relationships are in the main the key areas for support in terms of referrals to the service.
- Tools used to evaluate the impact of the service for example the outcome star are more embedded but timescales for reviewing progress is an area for improvement.
- Feedback on communication with the service and referral processes was **Very Good or Good** and was the case for the previous year of reporting. However further effort will be required across services to increase the number of respondents to surveys supporting continuous improvement.
- The workforce is equipped to deliver flexible and adaptable services which is making a difference to children, young people, and families.

Whole Family Wellbeing

The partnership as a whole has continued to benefit from additional funds from the Scottish Government and the social work service has particularly found value from a focus on the workforce through multi -agency practice development sessions; early intervention in Schools involving Social Work Senior Practitioners; additional post within our Emergency Support Team; creation of specialist home maker posts, embedding of a range of evidence based group work, for example, Incredible Years and Mellow programmes; and further development of commissioned services evidencing impact though an earlier intervention approach to supporting families.

Children and Families Area Teams

	Total Open Involvements	S. 22 (vol)	Number of LAC	CPR	Pending Cases: Initial Assessment	Total
31/03/2021	3093	2096	847	150	278	3371
31/03/2022	3172	2268	778	126	477	3649
31/03/2023	3004	2172	742	90	512	3516
31/03/2024	3102	2321	742	139	448	3550

During the reporting period, we have recorded an ongoing stabilisation in the number of open cases within our Area Teams since the impact of Covid noted in the 2020 data. The last year has evidenced an ongoing commitment and ability to respond to the Setting the Bar report and average caseloads within our 13 front line teams have been significantly reduced and this number sustained at between 12 and 17 children per worker. The development of two permanence teams has allowed staff to focus on both earlier and crisis intervention for children at the edge of care.

Relationship based, trauma-informed practice is central to how we engage with children and their families, and the partnership appointment of a Promise Lead has allowed these principles to be better shared and developed across the partnership. In addition to our Area Teams, we have several Fife-Wide and specialist Teams, and these include:

- Children affected by Disability Team
- Child Protection Team
- Close Support Team
- Emergency Support Team
- Multi-systemic Therapy Team
- 2 x Permanence Teams
- Young People's Team
- Reviewing Service
- Corporate Parenting/Quality Assurance Team
- Residential Services
- 2 x Fostering/adoption Teams
- Kinship Team
- 3 family Support Teams

Child Protection

	CPR
31/03/2021	150
31/03/2022	126
31/03/2023	90
31/03/2024	139

The number of children and young people subject to child protection registration in Fife has increased in the last year and evaluation of this indicated that there was a whole system 'reset' after Covid which took time to become apparent. The impact of the New National Child Protection Guidance continues to be evaluated and it may be that further work around new processes (in Fife) for IRD is also impacting overall numbers of children registered.

The Child Protection team have completed SCIM training during the reporting period and data shared mid 2023 stated that all child interviews now follow this new methodology. Reports considering the quality of SCIM interviews, the difference between this methodology and JII and the impact on children have been shared within the Social Work Service and with the Child Protection Committee ensuring we are keeping children and their needs at the centre of our improvement activity.

The council was accepted as a pathfinder for Bairns Hoose and work continues across the partnership to ensure that together we continue to reflect on our intervention and keep the needs and risks to children at the centre of planning.

Looked After Children

	residential	CSO at home	Foster Care	Kinship
31/03/2021	63	143	388	724
31/03/2022	38	148	352	746
31/03/2023	49	160	340	730
31/03/2024	63	157	306	746

As of March 31st, 2024, there were 742 looked after children in Fife. The overall size of our Looked After population has remained at or below the Scottish average. The graph above provides a breakdown of the placement type and balance of care. Many of our children in kinship placements are no longer looked after. The service is rightly proud of being able to shift the balance of care - reduce residential and foster care and increase Kinship care - and maintain this for the last 5 years. Our self-evaluation activity evidences that this reflects a change in culture across the service, the impact of a highly motivated and well-resourced Kinship Service and a commitment to the Belonging to Fife Strategy and the Promise.

Residential Care

The number of children and young people in high-cost residential placements (HCRP) have increased during the reporting period. Analysis indicates that this reflects a number of areas of change. Firstly, an internal children's house was closed for refurbishment reducing internal placement numbers, secondly the service responded to Care Inspectorate concerns relating to matching processes resulting in a further reduction in the use of internal resources whilst effective improvement work was undertaken and thirdly there was a re-evaluation of the use of internal resources to respond to identified changing need, for example the need to be able to provide a singleton placement.

We are aware that 2024-2025 will be a year of additional challenge as nationally there is a recognition that there are fewer available placements and there is an impact on capacity relating both to cross border placements and our commitment to supporting unaccompanied children and young people (UASC). Added into this will be the potential impact of the Care and Justice Bill and changes to the age of 'children' who may need to access secure care.

All of our children's homes have improvement planning at the centre of their team plans and opportunities for specialist training has been enhanced over the last year alongside additional staffing being agreed and additional senior practitioners in post to support reflective and child centred practice.

Fostering

Despite our ongoing strenuous efforts to recruit, we have seen an overall decline in our number of foster carers. Nevertheless, our data does evidence a declining trend in the use of foster care which can be explained by the increasing use of kinship care but also by effective family strength-based intervention and flexible and immediate support to families at the time of the crisis.

Our scope to further reduce the number of purchased fostering placements is limited by the reality that approximately 89% of those placements are permanent care arrangements for children and young people. There has been a reduction from our 2021 data which reflects, children 'aging out' of the system but also reflects some placement breakdowns and changing birth family circumstances which have supported positive rehabilitation.

The Fostering Team continues to be ambitious and ensure that carers and supervising social workers are trauma informed and able to support and sustain foster care placements. Fife is unique in that it has a dedicated therapeutic service (Springfield) for looked after children providing direct support and assistance to foster carers, the child and the professional network. This service offers expertise from social work practitioners, psychotherapy, clinical psychology and play therapy. The reach of this service has recently extended to supporting kinship families and family relationships.

Kinship Care

The drive to increase the number of kinship carers has been central to our Belonging to Fife strategy and reflects the national commitment to valuing family-based care which is supported both by policy and legislation.

The increase in kinship care arrangements coupled with legislative and financial changes has led to a significant reduction in unpaid kinship care arrangements and a reduction in the use of family support arrangements.

Fife were successful in a funding bid from CORRA which was centred on understanding 'the system' and partners attitudes to Kinship Care and everyone's contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people in Kinship Care arrangements. Findings from an independent review of Kinship Care in 2022-2023

suggested a number of partnership improvements which are being taken forward across the partnership, led and reviewed by the multi-agency Kinship Steering Group.

Home-Based Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs)

Our Belonging to Fife strategy promotes the use of home-based CSOs. However, likely as a consequence of our Child Wellbeing Pathway and the use of a Child’s Plan, we have not seen an increase in the number of children ‘looked after’ at home. It is difficult to benchmark this data against other local authorities due to the specific local nature of the Child Wellbeing Pathway in Fife.

We continue to monitor our rates of referral to the Children’s Reporter, ensuring that our Social Workers are referring in a timely manner when compulsory measures of care need to be considered. However, this needs to be carefully balanced through professional assessment and judgement in line with the minimum intervention principle.

Fife’s Children’s Hearing Improvement Partnership, CHIP, continues to consider referral rates from all services and offers challenge to partners relating to early and effective intervention and the appropriate use of legislative powers.

Aftercare

	Supported Lodgings Carers	Supported Lodgings Placements	Continuing Care Placements	Supported Lodgings UASC	House Project
March 2021	55	43	59	6	8
March 2022	55	51	56	10	10
March 2023	53	53	48	17	8
March 2024	57	44	54	19	7

There has been an ongoing increase in the number of carers recruited to offer a supported lodgings provision and staff in this part of the service continue to be highly active in recruiting more carers. The Government’s ambition to support UASC is having a significant impact on placement availability as these vulnerable and displaced young people become looked after by supported lodgings carers to ensure they have a family and community care setting personalised to meet their needs.

However, the impact on capacity affects both children moving on from care in Fife and children coming into care in Fife as additional demand is exceeding placement availability.

In common with colleagues across Scotland, the social work service works hard to provide care and homes for UASC. The challenges of this work are well known but in the last year Fife has been able to maintain a commitment to home these displaced and vulnerable young people largely within supported lodgings care although we had

a number, we were able to secure within Kinship arrangements and 2 younger children in fostering arrangements. The service successfully recruited 2 additional workers based in the Young People's Team whose work will primarily be to support this cohort of young people, building expertise in relation to their specific needs.

The service has benefited from the recruitment of a senior mental health nurse who is also based in the Young People's Team which has allowed easier and more timely access to support for some of our young people whose mental health needs or experience of trauma requires support. This post is funded through our partners in Health and is a joint initiative from Adult Mental Health and CAMHs with the worker being supervised in a matrix manner with Social Work and health participation.

Fostering, Permanence, Kinship and Supported Lodgings Panel

A full-time Panel Chair was appointed in September 2021 and a second in January 2024. The Panel Chairs provides consistency across all four panels and have oversight on all matters relating to: recruitment, training and appraisal of panel members. In the last year, a total of 144 Panels were arranged, this included: 68 Fostering Panels; 31 Permanence Panels; 34 Kinship Panels and 11 Supported Lodgings Panels.

Strategic Commissioning

Fife families continue to benefit from a wide range of third sector provision both at an early intervention and intensive level from the numerous partners providing support across the council. As such, the Third sector remain key partners in terms of the delivery of family support and there has been a review of the strategic commissioning model to take account of changes in Directorate arrangements undertaken towards the end of the reporting period and currently embedding. The focus going forward will be to develop a more integrated community-based approach aligned to redesign activity across Children & Families and the wider Council. The main drivers for change relate to the need for services to be local, accessible, evidence based, coordinated and co-produced. A whole system approach to commissioning has been informed by whole family wellbeing and the How Good is Our Family Support framework, as well as consideration of national developments to ensure best practice underpins the current commissioning strategy in Fife.

Additional/Enhanced Resources and Improvement Work 2023/2024

- Partnership working with The House Project has provided supported tenancies for 8 young people in cohort 1, 10 YP in cohort 2 and 8 YP in cohort 3. There are 7 YP in cohort 4 currently awaiting a tenancy.
- Creation of additional social worker and social work assistant capacity to support children in crisis either in our residential homes or edge of care, through outreach support, enhanced close support and social workers within the residential estate.
- Review of the residential service to respond to identified need for a singleton house to support more vulnerable young people

- Change of use of residential homes to dynamically respond to changes in profile of need to ensure we are utilising our physical resources for their best purpose
- Creation of additional posts for the Emergency Support Team and Close Support Team through Whole Family Wellbeing fund to enhance capacity to creatively support children to remain at home or in their local community
- Positive evaluation of the impact of school social worker posts utilising an earlier intervention model and enhancing understanding within Education of the Social Work role
- Positive evaluation of the impact of new home maker posts in supporting young parents and consideration of expanding their offer through additional capacity
- Review of the Quality Assurance team to allow effective and timely evaluation and audit activity to support and improve practice
- Creation of a partnership post to lead both The Promise and Corporate Parenting, supported by additional social work funded posts, has allowed the service to dedicate resources to progressing and prioritising these strategic responsibilities
- Permanence Teams becoming established allowing a focus on improving support for children who will not return to family care
- Creation of a children affected by disability transitions worker post to improve family experience of transition between C&F service to adults
- Additional posts funded by partners to enhance the offer from the kinship team with a focus on supporting school attendance and promoting health and wellbeing
- Completion of consultation and evaluation of kinship care in Fife and families lived experience with an action plan developed and implemented 2023-2024
- Review and sharing of the positive impact of the additional CAMHS nursing post recruited for the Young People's team to specifically support care leavers access to this type of support for their emotional wellbeing
- Evaluation and learning from 'This is Us' groupwork with mothers who have had their children removed from their care, to support understanding of this trauma and enable learning from conversations around change

Adult and Older Adult Social Work and Social Care

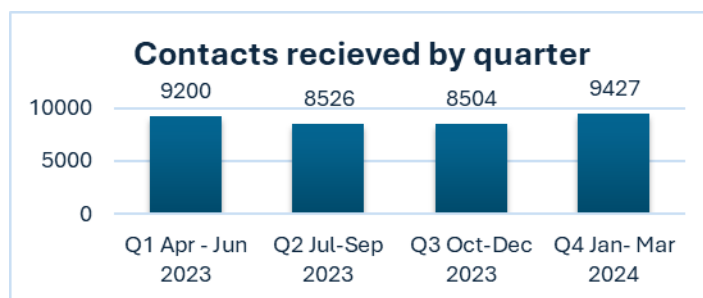
Over the past year, the PSWO has been working with services to embed care governance across the existing Clinical and Care Governance process in the HSCP. This has culminated in the Social Work and Social Care Professional Assurance Framework, supporting services to develop quality assurance processes that enable them to evidence their practices in alignment with legislative requirements and supporting continuous improvement activities.

Throughout this report there are clear examples of effective collaboration and partnership working, creating positive outcomes for those who use our services. Some highlights include; streamlining hospital discharge processes; enhancing our approach to reablement; strengthening our approach to Early Intervention and prevention by supporting the development of the Wells, the initiation of the Social Work Compass

Team; Improving pathways for support for individuals leaving prison with health and care needs, and using SDS to facilitate creative and cost effective breaks.

Early Intervention

The Adult and Older People Social Work Contact Centre (SWCC) provides a single point of access for new Social Work Service inquiries from both service users and professionals. From April 2023-March 2024, **35,657** referrals were made to the Social Work Contact Centre, the vast majority relating to referrals for assessment of need with significant and increasing contacts relating to Adult Support & Protection (ASP).



The Contact Centre plays a key role in promoting early intervention and supporting independence through collaboration with The Well, which offers light-touch support and information to help people connect with local resources. The Wells are staffed by a range of Health & Social Care workers including Social Work staff. In 2023-24, The Well saw:

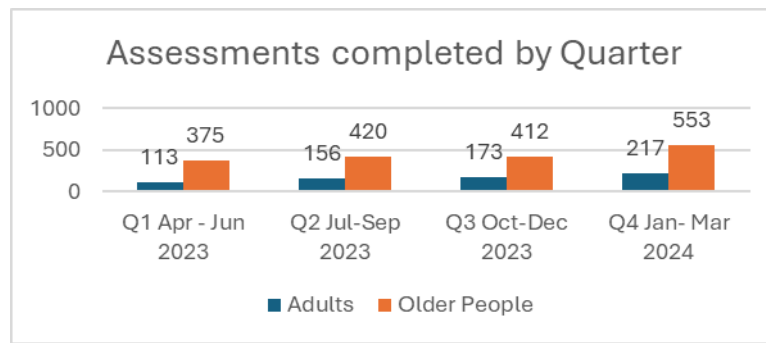
- **1,654 referrals** (a 38% increase from the previous year), mainly related to community support, mental health, and financial support.
- 2,037 Good Conversations (referrals/drop-ins), a 43% increase. - 99% of referrals were contacted within 3 days.

Most referrals (67%) came from Social Work, with **950** from the Social Work Contact Centre (22% increase) and **157** from other social work teams. Over the next year the SWCC will be developing a bespoke audit tool and service user engagement approach to assist us in understanding the impact of our interventions at the front door to social work services.

Adult and Older Adult Social Work Locality Teams

Services are provided across twelve teams, six covering Older Adults (over 65) and six covering Adults (from 16 – 65). Each of the teams are led by a social work qualified Team Manager and consist of senior practitioners, social workers, and social work assistants. There are 3 social work qualified Service Managers that lead locality teams. The Principal Social Work Officer provides professional advice and guidance to the teams and professional supervision to all Service Managers.

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, **659** Personal Outcomes Support Assessments (POSAs) were completed by the Adults Service and **1760** by the Older People Service (total 2419). The average caseload in Adult Social Work Teams ranges between 30-40 with Older People's Teams averaging 20-30 cases.



In 2023-24 the Adults Service supervised 176 Local Authority Welfare Guardianship orders and 537 private welfare guardianships. To ensure good practice is embedded the service has updated Fife Council Supervision of Proxy Guidance to reflect MWC’s best practice guidance and is developing a governance and oversight group to ensure effective and ongoing monitoring.

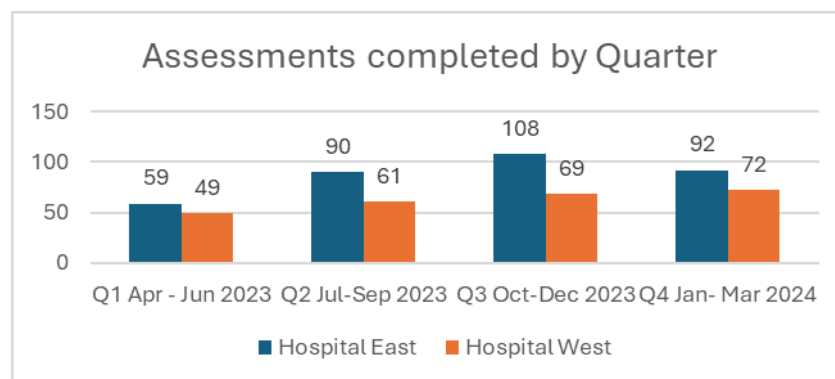
Feedback from service users on our use of “Just Checking” and “Near Me” to support increased independence has been positive.

Key challenges experienced by the service include managing transitions between services and securing appropriate resources for individuals with complex needs. An ongoing commitment to collaboration between Children and Families and Adult Services aims to address this through a "team around the person" approach, building on learning from the national GIRFE pathfinder work. Improving service user and carer feedback will be central to all practice developments and this is a priority for all services in the coming year.

Social Work Hospital Discharge Team

The Hospital Social Work Team has grown over the year and is responsible for facilitating safe and effective transitions from hospital, ensuring that individuals receive the necessary support to live independently.

The team have completed **600 assessments** over the reporting period, with an observed increase in complexity of need and requirement for nursing care.



The team utilise Assessment Beds within care homes as interim arrangements for individuals who require additional support to return home, or who may require a move

into a care home, from hospital. Fife have 100 assessment beds which are routinely full of individuals awaiting long term support assessments. The team have 2 Mental Health Officers and a solicitor in place to support situations involving individuals lacking capacity to consent to discharge plan discussions and this has enhanced the team's ability to expedite medical report requests, contributing to more efficient discharge planning. Hospital discharges are overseen by a multi professional group that meets weekly to oversee the timely approach to discharge. Going forward, the Hospital Team are developing an audit tool and performance indicators to monitor practices, such as service user and carer feedback, and adherence to legislative functions.

Mental Health Officer Team

The dedicated Mental Health Officer (MHO) Team take forward MHO functions in line with AWI and MH Acts. The demand for MHO services is significant and rising, with increasing requests for assessments and a notable rise in Emergency and Short-Term Detentions and out of hours detentions where MHOs are not present, all of which pose challenges to the service. Fife have experienced an increase in private AWI Guardianships, with the resulting increased requirement for MHO services placing demand on the team.

The MHO team are strengthening relationships with other social work teams, offering shadowing opportunities, and engagement with new staff to enhance understanding of MHO role and to encourage training.

Despite pressures, the MHO team demonstrates key strengths in performance and professionalism, consistently meeting statutory timescales and handling high demand with a skilled and dedicated workforce. The introduction of Social Work Assistants (SWAs) has enhanced the team's capacity by supporting practical tasks, enabling MHOs to focus on statutory duties and improving discharge planning. Strong partnerships with NHS Mental Health Services and increased collaboration with other teams have further strengthened service delivery and communication.

Compass Team

Compass is a holistic, intensive care management social work service for individuals affected by long-term alcohol and drug use. The service launched in September 2023 and has received **86** referrals, with most cases currently allocated and active. Despite full staffing, the service is at capacity with a waiting list. The team is co-located with the NHS Addictions Service, and works closely with the hospital liaison teams, third sector, housing and health colleagues. The focus on collaboration supports a "team around the person" approach which helps to deliver more personalised experiences and improve outcomes for people supported by the service.

The Compass Team are regular attenders at local support groups for people who use substances across Fife and have received multiple messages of positive feedback for adults with lived experience and their families over the past 11 months. Going forward, the team will incorporate critical information from substance use risk assessments, formulation, and information based on the SURE (Substance Use Recovery

Evaluation) structured assessment tool and develop a programme of audit activity to support quality assurance oversight.

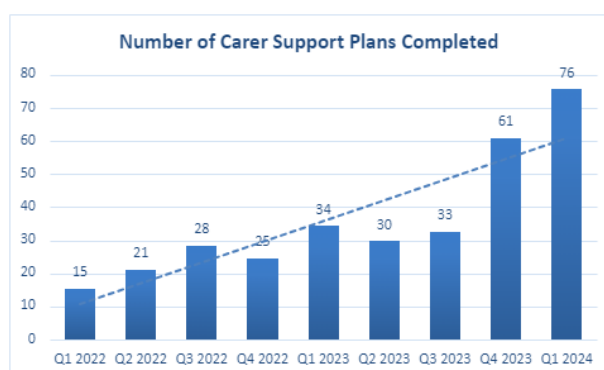
Self Directed Support Team

The Self-Directed Support Team (SDS Team) have a critical role in ensuring that people experience high quality social care in line with the duties, principles and values of the SDS Act. They offer a creative Short Breaks Service to maximise use of budget to purchase respite and also serve as a support to locality teams for information and guidance. All social work assessments are carried forward in line with SDS statutory requirements and are quality assured through our Social Work Annual Audit.

In 2023-24, the Self-Directed Support team introduced prepaid cards for Option 1, reducing administrative burdens for service users and improving financial monitoring. The team offers effective induction and 1:1 support sessions for new staff, which have received positive feedback, and collaborate with organisations like SDS Options (Fife) and ENABLE to ensure clear and consistent access to independent information for service users. The team are also leading our drive in supporting people to access the Independent Living Fund (ILF) to maximise funding available to support independence.

Carers Support

Fife HSCP work in partnership with a wide range of third sector commissioned partners to identify and support carers in line with the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. It is because of this wide range of accessible points for a carer that the HSCP is unable at present to report on the total number of carers supported or the number of Carers Support Plans completed. We are developing ways to collect this information across the wide range of third sector commissioned partners to better understand the impact and quality of our support to carers. The graph below shows the number of Adult Carer Support Plans completed within the HSCP reflecting an increase in Support Plans completed which we attribute to the introduction of 10 Social Work Assistants whose role it is to identify and reach out to unpaid carers.



Adult Support & Protection

Locality Social Work Services lead the coordination and response to all adult support and protection (ASP) activities. During 2023/24, ASP referrals in Fife rose by 57% (from 2,816 to 4,435). These referrals involved 3,371 adults.



Multiple factors could contribute to the increase in referrals, including economic challenges, the impact of COVID-19, social care sector issues, awareness campaigns, and improved identification of harm.

Partnership working under ASP remains a strength, with awareness raising activity, and shared learning from significant events. Fife took a multi-agency approach to enhancing our ability to consider system learning by commissioning training from SCiE for key partners in our ASPC. This work has resulted in improved mutual understanding of role and responsibility, shared decision-making platforms, and reflects the values of all partners in the ASP process.

Accommodation with Care & Housing Support Service

The Accommodation with Care and Housing Support Service provides support to **259** adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and to adults with other support needs. All services are regulated and maintain quality assurance processes that reflect adherence to the Health and Social Care, and the My Health, My Care, My Home Standards, and contribute to National Wellbeing Outcomes. The service undertakes regular self-evaluation activity which includes feedback from people using services.

Shared Lives Fife team are effectively gathering feedback through surveys and a consultation group, leading to improvements like updates to the carer handbook and efforts to raise awareness of the service. The whole service actively supports recruitment, hosting apprenticeships, with three young people being offered permanent positions at the conclusion of their placements with the service this year.

Fife Community Support Service (Adult Resources Day Services)

The service aims to progress people's life skills, develop, and maintain friendships, enhance confidence and promote independence through the provision of a range of activities which promote physical and mental wellbeing, both within the wider community and from four hubs located in Kirkcaldy, Cowdenbeath, Leven and Cupar. In 2023-2024 the service supported **199** adults to access day activities.

The service promotes careers in care, providing opportunities to two school students to shadow social care workers through the Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) in Social Services and Health care scheme, and in hosting two four-week placements through the Princes Trust Scheme.

Care at Home

The Care at Home service supports individuals in the community to maintain their independence. The service consistently supports around **950** individuals across Fife with a staff team of approximately 800. The service works within a finite budget which requires a tight adherence to the critical eligibility criteria is applied to direct the resource available.

The service faces significant challenges, including increased demand, persistent sickness levels and staff retention issues, like other areas in the country. Developments are underway to consistently capture and systematically analyse feedback from service users to drive service improvements.

Reablement (START)

The Short-Term Assessment & Review Team (START) take forward a reablement approach to Care at Home support and during the reporting period they received **2655 referrals**. Referrals are primarily from hospital settings and instigated at discharge, however the ability for those in the community to be referred into START commenced in early 2024 which is a welcome addition to the support we can offer to people requiring care at home services. The reablement approach allowing the workforce to build people's independence to its maximum ability, giving satisfaction to the service user and the workforce as they see this ongoing progress.

Fife's Care Homes

Older People's Service provides **338** residences across eight residential facilities with 229 staff. These Care Homes offer residential, respite, and STAR (reablement) care service. Each care home is committed to continuous improvement, and all homes have improvement planning in place based on Care Inspectorate and rights based standards. The service is aligning their quality improvement practices with the Professional Assurance Framework and the care governance programme in place. The service demonstrates strong performance, with high levels of satisfaction from service users and families received, supported by effective feedback systems and oversight from a quality assurance team.

Future plans include leading the development of the care home replacement program, reviewing staffing structures to align skill levels with care needs, and enhancing the service training plan for social care staff. A newly appointed Business Change Manager will help develop a Quality Improvement and Involvement Plan, with regular reviews and stakeholder feedback driving continuous improvements.

Community Alarms

The Community Alarm Service is a key service in supporting people to remain independent in the community. The service currently supports approximately **8500** service users and 33 sheltered housing complexes. The service embraces technology in care and have installed 3000 digital alarms during the reporting period to support the change over from analogue to digital. Waiting times for the installation of a community alarm were significant in April 2023, with a 20 week waiting list for an alarm. By the end of March 2024 this wait time has been reduced to 5 days through targeted actions by the team and the service have put in place mechanisms to review service user feedback which will be reported on annually.

The service is also involved in a Dunfermline falls prevention test for change that is seeking to reduce falls for service users and are actively working to reduce their waiting list for Nightlink overnight support service.

Deaf Communication Service

The Deaf Communication Service (DCS) supports Fife's Deaf and hard-of-hearing community through various activities including:

Translation Services: Provides weekly BSL translations of Fife Council news and key documents (including Adult Protection), making information accessible for Deaf staff and service users.

Assessments: Collaborates with NHS Fife to run specialist clinics and conducts workplace, home, and care home assessments for those with hearing loss. **BSL**

Classes & Training: Delivers Deaf Awareness sessions, along with tailored Level 1 and 2 BSL classes for Fife Council employees and the public. Developed bespoke one-on-one sessions, including in languages like Ukrainian Sign Language. **Support**

& Advice: Offers communication support, specialised social work, and one-on-one assistance, with almost 2,000 BSL interpreter jobs in 2023/24. Additionally, DCS advises on equipment loans and accessibility for BSL users.

The team comprise of one senior development worker and three development workers and this group are the lead team for carrying forward Fife's BSL Local Plan and the See Hear Strategy. Accessible meetings will be setup twice yearly to enable people who are users of BSL to give feedback on how the implementation of the plan is impacting on their lives and discuss areas where further improvement is required in Fife. Progression reports will be produced and presented to relevant governance groups of all Stakeholders, including the Health and Social Care Partnership's Clinical and Care Governance Committee.

Justice Services

The strategic landscape for community justice social work over this period has continued to be influenced by the national 'Vision for Justice', and the revised 'National Strategy for Community Justice'.

At a local level, Fife's Justice Service Annual Performance and Improvement Plan 2023-24 identifies areas for priority in the Service over a 12 month period. The areas detailed below provide an overview of these priorities, whilst showcasing the range of

creative and innovative practice taking place in Fife Justice Service. All of these services continue to be delivered against a backdrop of challenges including financial pressures and recruitment of qualified staff to manage increasing complex casework.

Our priorities during this year have been:

- Maximisation of diversion as an early intervention strategy
- Development of robust community based disposals
- Ensuring those involved in services are supported in a trauma informed way
- Developing the leadership and engagement with Community Justice partners
- Improving service user involvement in the design and delivery of services

Early Intervention Service

Our Bail Supervision service continues to operate in the Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy Sheriff Courts. The service offers the Court a robust and credible alternative to remand, whilst supporting the early identification of risk and needs. Our bail supervision service is deeply welfare orientated and the team takes a proactive, community-based approach to deliver holistic support. Integral to our bail supervision service is recognising the critical role of stable accommodation, and the service works in close collaboration with housing services to ensure that from the point of assessment, individuals have access to safe and secure housing. The service has also been pioneering a range of therapeutic interventions designed to address emotional regulation and negative thinking patterns. From traditional psychological approaches to a variety of holistic therapies, the service offers a broad spectrum of support aimed at fostering mental and emotional well-being.

Historically, facilitating bail supervision assessments for external Courts (including Dundee Court where many individuals from Northeast Fife appear) have proved more of a challenge, due to the disparity of bail supervision services nationally. However, with the new National Guidance for Bail Supervision, alongside bail incentivisation monies, it is hoped this will result in greater consistency of service provision nationally.

The Early Intervention Service also encompass other early interventions such as Diversion and Structured Deferred Sentence for all males open to Fife Justice. This has proven to be a very successful model which has resulted in the team working in a pro-active, welfare-oriented way with those who are deemed to require lower-level intervention and supervision by Justice Social Work. Developing and delivering on offence focused work for such short timescale interventions such as Structured Deferred Sentences and Diversions has also been a primary focus for our service.

Linking in with our Safer Communities Service a 12-week Road Traffic Safety Programme was developed which can delivered on one-to-one basis. The programme combines education with practical interactions such as road safety videos and discussions to promote responsible driving behaviour. The service is acutely aware with ascending prison numbers, the demand for bail supervision workstreams is ever increasing, and the workload of the team will require to be monitored to ensure we have the correct resources in place.

Community Payback Orders

Offence focused intervention continues to be integral to the delivery of Justice Social Work services, regardless of whether that engagement is mandated through Community Payback Order, Statutory Licence, Structured Deferment or Diversion from Prosecution. Specific offence focussed work occurs on a one-to-one basis and often involves work around understanding and controlling strong feelings, handling conflict, improving relationships, and managing impulsive behaviour. Service users are supported to collaboratively develop individual plans, informed by structured assessment tools, to identify priority areas of need which are then reviewed dependant on progress and outcomes.

In order to promote rehabilitation, it is essential that Justice services are personcentred, and trauma informed. Nearly all our social workers (and many social work assistants) have completed Enhanced Trauma Level training or are registered to do so in 2024. Our staff employ a trauma informed approach, considering wellbeing and individual responsivity to support others to recognise the links between wellbeing and risk. Employment, leisure, and community connections are key elements of this and remain an important component of ongoing assessment and intervention.

Over this reporting period, the Service has collaborated with Fife Leisure Trust to offer Justice Service Users the opportunity to attend a block of supported gym sessions, with a 6-month gym pass provided after the sessions have ended. This initiative promotes exercise and wellbeing for all, with an emphasis on the physical, emotional, psychological, and social benefits of exercise. As this project moves into its next phase, we intend to measure and evaluate the impact of this initiative via quantitative and qualitative data.

Unpaid Work

During the COVID 19 Pandemic, individuals made subject to Court mandated Unpaid Work Requirements had the timescale for completion extended by 12 months. As of October 2022, the extended timeframe ceased, however our experience was that sentencers continued to impose Orders with the extended timescales, which was in turn having a detrimental impact on the motivation of individuals to complete their Court Order and having a negative impact on service delivery. Communication between local Sheriffs and community justice partners is critical in decision making and the ability to effectively deliver community sentences.

We provided structured inputs to both Courts in Fife to develop a shared understanding of service availability and delivery processes, in addition to new UPW initiatives, which has hopefully led to greater confidence in community sentencing and better outcomes for individuals.

We have a successful social media page which we regularly use to raise awareness of local unpaid work projects of particular interest to the community. These posts receive positive feedback and help to increase public knowledge around the benefits of community sentences. We also work closely with the Council's communication team to further raise awareness both internally and externally regarding unpaid work projects and the positive impact of the work undertaken.

Groupwork Services

Our Groupwork Services team continue to deliver the Moving Forward: Making Changes (MF:MC) programme for men over the age of 18 who have committed sexual offences. The MF:MC programme has recently been redesigned to reflect a developing evidence base, advice from SAPOR, and evaluation recommendations and the revised programme will be called MF:2C. Four members of staff from our Groupwork team attended MF2C training in March 2024, with other staff attending the training throughout 2024. The service plans to deliver our first MF2C programme in October 2024.

Fife Justice Social Work continue to deliver the Caledonian Programmes for men who commit domestic abuse offences. The programme is delivered through effective collaboration between supervising social workers and staff in our Groupwork team. These are intense and demanding interventions which require a high level of commitment and reflection from participants as they are supported to better understand the connection between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and to develop safer, more effective strategies in complex and challenging situations. We are in the process of improving how we gather feedback from men who attend the Caledonian Programme and their partners, and this has already outlined some very positive case studies.

The Groupwork team have also developed a Healthy Relationships Workbook which can be used to undertake focused work with perpetrators on a 1:1 basis. The workbook can be used as part of any community-based sentence (including Diversion and Structured Deferred Sentence) where there are concerns around the development of healthy relationships. Service wide training is being provided by the Groupwork team and the initiative increases the reach of our early intervention and preventative work.

Our Groupwork Services Team were delighted to be shortlisted as finalists in the 2023 Scottish Social Service Awards under the 'Excellence in Justice' category.

Women's Services

Many of our female service users have experienced complex trauma and associated mental health issues. Our Women's Justice Teams have a dedicated NHS Team comprising of a Mental Health Nurse, Clinical Psychologist and Assistant Psychologist. The benefits of this holistic approach have been significant in addressing underlying needs for women involved in the justice system. The NHS team provides direct service user support, consultation, and training for the wider team. The team are in the midst of an evaluation of their partnership -using both quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the multidisciplinary and multi-agency support the team provides. The result from this evaluation, including feedback from those who use our services, will support our continued commitment to learning and development.

As well as clinical work, the NHS Team also supports our Women's Justice Teams with Service improvement. The teams have recently taken part in a Trauma Informed Practice Audit, using the Quality Standards for Fife, developed by Fife Trauma Training Collaborative. It has been a rewarding process to reflect on our achievements as a Service around the work we are doing to provide trauma-informed service delivery and support. It has also been helpful to understand where there might be scope for

improvement and further development across the Service. Following on from the audit, the team aims to implement an action plan which will support the continued development towards having a trauma informed Service, as well as sharing the process of completing the audit with the wider Service and beyond.

There have been several new initiatives regarding unpaid work for women - the focus of which is to provide unpaid work opportunities which are community based, person-centred, and trauma informed. This includes a weekly sewing group which is based in Greener Kirkcaldy, which is a local community resource. At present, the group is making bonding hearts for babies in the local neonatal unit. The team have also created an excellent partnership with the Scottish Deer Centre based in the East of Fife, and Lochore Meadows Country Park based in the West of Fife. Every week the women alternate between these two locations to undertake UPW tasks at the projects.

Throughcare Pre and Post Release Support Service

The challenges faced by people leaving custody have long been recognised, and these have been exacerbated in recent times by the impact of the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Our Throughcare teams have always offered guidance and support to service users (in addition to statutory supervision of licences). However, it was determined that this required to be bolstered to ensure people were consistently receiving focused and individualised welfare support, which would hopefully increase the likelihood of positive engagement whilst reducing overall levels of risk. Two additional Social Work Assistants were recruited to support delivery of the service, which was officially launched in April 2023.

Since April 2023, 80 men have received or are receiving support across the two Throughcare teams. The support offered covers a range of issues relating to the individual's welfare needs under six main areas including accommodation, finances, health, substance use, support networks and education / employment. Our recent review of the Service has informed us that 12 men have required support beyond the first review stage at 12 weeks post release, and that support has lasted between 5 weeks and 8 months, depending on individual needs.

The teams are continually measuring progress by recording levels of need in the 6 key areas at the outset of support, and again when the intensive post release support comes to an end. Finances and accommodation are among the needs most frequently identified and also where greatest improvements have been seen (improvements in 69% and 65% of cases respectively). The team are aiming to refine outcome tools in the second year of the service to make it more sensitive to improvements which may be more incremental than are reflected by the current tool.

Resources

With a 'flatline' budget for Justice Social Work Services nationally, the challenge is how we continue to deliver high quality services as staffing costs steadily increase. As a Service, actions were taken to reduce costs wherever possible, however how the Service manages capacity, demand and pressures within budget constraints remains a significant challenge.

Over this reporting period, we have continued to utilise the COVID 19 consequential funding to recruit staff, however the recruitment of experienced staff and retention of staff generally, remains a challenge. Increasing the duration of fixed term contracts to 2027 has supported with this to some degree, however, the temporary nature of the funding is inevitably linked to higher staff turnover as staff seek the security of permanent posts.

As a Service, we have continued to drive forward with a number of new initiatives, which evidences our commitment to improving performance, the quality of our services, and outcomes for those who use our services. In the previous reporting period, we had created a dedicated Service Manager post which has responsibility for Performance, Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement. In February 2024, we created a third Service Manager post which has responsibility for operations, including unpaid work delivery. This structure change reflects our renewed commitment to service improvement, and improving outcomes for those who use our services.

Quality Assurance and Development

Children and Family Social Work

Throughout the reporting period we continued to evaluate how best to utilise our Quality Assurance and Development officers to maximise value and dynamically respond to areas of improvement identified to ensure we were supporting our improvement agenda. The work included:

- Undertaking audit activity to monitor compliance with policy, legislation and practice standards.
- Supporting improvement activity through joint working and ongoing review of action plans in partnership with the Senior Management Team.
- Supporting and developing the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and The Promise – working with the Promise Lead and the Children’s Services Partnership and Corporate Parenting Board.
- Leading the work relating to our people with Lived Experience Groups: Embrace.
- Supporting the use of MOMO to ensure we are hearing from children.

The Quality Assurance and Development Officers work closely with our Reviewing Team and Panel chairs and there is a circularity of learning from practice embedded across these three key areas.

The service continues to commit to quarterly performance and data reporting using a self-evaluation improvement agenda to support continuous improvement. This has been impacted by the new electronic management system which has created a data gap of several months, but this is being addressed as a priority within the council.

Training, learning and development

During 2023-24, HR Workforce Development Team continued to work collaboratively with Children's, Justice and Adults' Social Work and Social Care Services, and multiagency partners, to provide effective and meaningful workforce development opportunities to all workforce colleagues. Respective Training Needs Analysis took place across Children's Justice and Adult services, whereby specific workforce development plans have been developed – this link to Fife Council 'Learning Lounge' gives an overview of the range of Learning & Development plans that are in place and include ongoing activity from 2023 onwards.

This work is underpinned by discussions with workforce / service providers, related stakeholders, and informed by national and local strategic priorities, including Fife Health and Social Care Partnership's Strategy and Action Plan, Childrens Services and Justice Services Plan and correlates with a number of national developments, including the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019, the Trauma Informed Practice agenda, national H&SCP agenda, The Promise and Whole Family Wellbeing, Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) supported year activity and SSSC registration changes.

There is an annual budget from the CSWO which provides consistent investment for the provision of workforce development and training. This allows for structured development activity and attendance at relevant conferences and national events. The funding available is used innovatively to ensure priorities are met with the acknowledgement that there is an increasing demand on budgets given the national development and legislative expectations at play. Specifically, resource provision to support future NQSW SY, Whole Family Wellbeing, Trauma Informed Practice and provision for SSSC Registration requirements across services will result in added financial pressures.

The development opportunities provided comprise of a range of e-learning, webinars and 'in person' training. It is booked via our Oracle system which is a council wide system.

Alongside the 'business as usual' training provision, which is significant across services, specific training priorities emerged and have been action during this period. This is not an exhaustive list but looks to reflect national priorities:

- The provision of Trauma Informed Practice training, which is provided via elearning for levels 1 & 2 and 'in person' commissioned training for level 3 for social workers across all services.
- NQSW Supported Year activity has now been further developed and embedded within operational teams, with focussed support and planning from the workforce development team.
- A range of SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) activity is in place to ensure registration needs are met across services, in line with the revised SSSC registration requirements and CPL requirements.

- Multi Agency Practice Development sessions, related to Whole family Wellbeing approach and areas of process and practice linked to social work.
- Leadership agenda: Availability of a range of leadership and management opportunities, including access to Coach Approach workshops Solihull approach to reflective supervision, SVQ Level 4 leadership and management awards, Post grad supervision and management modules, in house First Line Managers programme
Specific offering for H&SCP social work – provision of leadership course in adult services - Leading, Managing and Caring – in collaboration with Fife College Care Academy.
- Social work pathways- the work began in 2023-24 and continues in terms of supporting social work assistants across the service to undertake the Advanced SW Degree, with a view to transitioning to a Graduate Apprenticeship programme in the future.
- Specific training provided for Justice Services underpinned by emerging practice issues: Gambling Awareness courses, Court skills,

We have used course evaluations, stakeholder feedback, and in some cases, financial records to assess the impact, value for money and potential outcomes of the training and development opportunities that have taken place. In essence, we would look for the training which takes place to ensure that the workforce become competent and confident in their respective areas of practice. The feedback we receive indicates that participants in a variety of development activities feel more confident and competent in undertaking their respective roles

Children and Families

We have worked alongside our colleagues in Workforce Development to create a 'People Plan' for the Service. There are key areas within the plan which prioritises the recruitment and retention of staff, investment in our Senior Practitioner cohort, and the growth of our management team by identifying a range of training and development opportunities.

We also offer a range of practitioner groups which are invaluable at highlighting and addressing key issues impacting on the workforce. Through shared decision-making forums such as the practitioner groups, staff can raise issues which the management team may not have been aware of. Being part of creative and effective problem solving also ensures that staff feel part of the decision-making process for the service and that their voices are heard.

The service has been committed to developing opportunities for social work assistants to train as social workers and have funded 8 staff to undertake their social work degree. We continue to be highly committed to offering post qualifying opportunities as practice educators, MHOs as well as qualifications in permanence planning and child protection.

Adult and older adult Social Work and Social Care

The HSCP is committed to continuous learning and development across all services. For example, the Adults and Older People Social Work teams hold monthly protected learning days for staff. This year, 20 social work staff completed post-qualifying courses such as ASP, Dementia Postgraduate, Leadership and Management, MHO, Practice Educator, and Advanced Social Work courses. The introduction of a new supervision approach, which prioritises learning and development, has been wellreceived. Additionally, the service provided placements for 18 social work students in 2022-23, many of whom joined the workforce in permanent roles.

Various apprenticeships and internship programs—such as the Princes Trust, Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services and Healthcare scheme, and the Life Chances scheme—offer prospective employees hands-on experience and help grow the social care workforce. Within our Accommodation with Care and Support Service, three young people were offered permanent positions following their placements.

Our Self-Directed Support Team, Adult Protection Team, and Deaf Communications Team also provide a range of learning and development opportunities for both new and existing staff through webinars, courses, and learning materials, including induction packs.

Justice

Ongoing professional development has been an area of priority for the Service over this reporting period. Ensuring staff have the appropriate learning and experience to support service users is an ongoing priority for the Service. Working in conjunction with HR Workforce Development and Strategy, a training plan was created, including core training required as a baseline for those working in Justice Services.

We have supported staff to work towards their Diploma in Higher Education Social Care (Scotland) via the Open University, staff to work towards their social work degree via the Advanced Degree pathway and to undertake their Mental Health Officer training.

We have continued to have worked closely with colleagues in Workforce Development and University establishments to offer high quality social work placements for students on a regular basis. We have supported Social Workers to embark on their Professional Development Award in Practice Learning. As a Service, we value the many contributions that social work students can bring and see this approach as being a valuable recruitment strategy, with many students applying for qualified social worker posts with the Service upon completion of their course.

In respect of training, we provide a bespoke package of training and learning which is renewed on an annual basis in consultation with staff across the Service. We also deliver a 'New to Justice' Forum, themed learning sessions and have a dedicated Justice Learning Platform for the Service.

Challenges and Improvements

Workforce

The temporary CSWO 2023/2024 undertook a listening tour across all areas of social work to hear directly from workers about what was going well and areas of concern within the work force. Whilst there were some service specific issues there were key professional messages which spanned the workforce:

Areas for improvement

- A need for better connections and collaboration across all areas of the profession
- Concerns relating to recruitment difficulties and the impact on teams of vacancies
- Concerns regarding the new electronic recording system and lack of training available
- Workspace availability

Strengths

- Quality supervision and good support from managers
- Strong supportive teams who value their passionate and committed members
- A commitment to being allowed to be creative in intervention and practice
- Manageable caseloads was raised by staff in Children and Families social work front line teams who reported average caseloads of around 15 as a maximum

Staff overwhelmingly shared their appreciation about being given an opportunity to speak directly to the CSWO and to be 'heard'. The CSWO being appointed for 2024 onwards will be repeating this exercise and ensuring that staff are given real opportunities for views to be shared and responded to. It appears that Covid interrupted established forums for meeting staff, and it was positive to reestablish these during 2023-24.

Children and Families and Justice

Within Children and Families, our highest priority is to protect children who have suffered harm or may be at risk of suffering harm. When those children cannot live at home safely, our focus is on providing the best quality of care away from home. To achieve this goal, we work in partnership with other agencies, ensuring that families receive an integrated and co-ordinated response that seeks to meet the range of complex needs that families experience.

Ensuring the views, wishes and contributions of children, young people and their families are reflected in service development, design and delivery is a key priority for us in the forthcoming 12 months.

The challenges facing the Children and Families workforce have been well-documented and subject to national coverage – those challenges remain very relevant in Fife and include:

- The legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic for vulnerable and disadvantaged families.
- Poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.
- Retaining and recruiting qualified and experienced social workers.
- Austerity measures facing local authorities.
- The shortage of resource relating to residential and foster care placements.
- Responding to and implementing the, at times, overwhelming tide of new policy and legislation.
- The impact of increasing numbers of UASC requiring care.

Despite the context described above, we continue to report:

- A reduction in the number of children and young people subject to statutory measures of care.
- A reduction in the number of children and young people being placed in highcost residential placements and.
- An increase in the number of children living in Kinship arrangements.

The lack of suitable foster or residential placements for children or young people who require to be looked after away from home is a significant challenge and is worthy of further description. This challenge is particularly evident relating to children aged 10-14 years – the pool of foster carers offering a home to children within this age range is diminishing and this has resulted in several children being placed in residential care. We have employed a range of strategies in attempt to attract carers willing to care for older children – to date, these have been met with limited success. A new recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers is written and will be implemented later in 2023/24 with an increased focus around offering fostering for teenagers requiring care. This will predominantly be centred around advertising on Facebook as local evidence tells us this has yielded the most success. There is an increased offering of training and support to foster carers who do or would offer care within the older age group. An increased focus on scaffolding foster placements for the older age group with intensive support being offered from our Emergency Support Team and the Springfield Service who continue to offer consultation for carers.

With Children and Families Social Work, Fife mirrors the national picture as set out in the “Setting the Bar” report (Social Work Scotland 2022). This report identifies a challenge with social work retention and recruitment, an increase in the complexity and volume of referrals and an ever-changing policy and legislative landscape. Workload pressure is further impacted by changing demographics, the geography of Fife, the hybrid working environment, pressures/capacity issues in partner resources and poverty, this all reflects the national picture.

Practitioner groups are invaluable at highlighting and addressing key issues impacting on the workforce. Through shared decision-making forums such as the practitioner groups, staff can raise issues which the management team may not have been aware

of. Being part of creative and effective problem solving also ensures that staff feel part of the decision-making process for the service and that their voices are heard.

We have responded to these challenges by:

- reconfiguring the staffing structure
- reducing caseloads within front line teams and reviewing these regularly
- front loading services to deal with initial referral demands
- developing a social work qualification pathway for social work assistants
- introducing quality assurance posts
- reviewing and updating supervision and personal development planning
- training and development around leadership
- creating additional permanent posts across teams using re-investment money sufficient to staff 2 permanence teams
- utilising whole family wellbeing money to enhance support at both an early intervention level but also increased posts to offer intensive wrap around support
- ensuring our recruitment campaigns highlight the ability to work flexibly

Within Justice specifically, priorities continue to be clearly focussed on a social justice, rights-based approach, valuing individuals whilst ensuring public protection at the acute end in relation to managing individuals who present significant risk.

Fife Justice Service continues to utilise the COVID-19 consequential funding in terms of additional staffing to meet the increasing demands as a result of COVID-19 related court closures. Despite there not being the backlog of cases originally forecast by the Scottish Government, there has been a steady increase of business, moving back to pre-COVID levels. Increasing the duration of fixed term contracts to 2027 has supported the recruitment and retention of staff in the service.

With a 'flatline' budget for Justice Social Work Services nationally, the challenge to continue delivering good quality services is significant as staffing costs increase. As a Service, actions have already been enacted to reduce any costs wherever possible, however it is a concerning position as we move forward.

Adult and older adult Social Work and Social Care

The service is committed to continuous learning and development, with monthly protected learning days, and strong participation in post-qualifying courses such as MHO, ASP, and Practice Educator. The teams provided placements for 18 social work students in 2022-2023, many of whom have joined the service, linking closely with our preparations for supporting the NQSW year. A new supervision approach, focusing on learning and staff wellbeing, has been tested and positively received and will be formally adopted soon.

Like other areas nationwide, our HSCP continues to face recruitment and retention challenges. Services, particularly Care at Home, have been affected by high vacancy and sickness absence rates. In response, the service has introduced changes to work patterns, revised its induction process, and launched various recruitment initiatives.

Recruiting and training Mental Health Officers (MHOs) also remains a challenge. Locally, we have responded by offering shadowing opportunities, engaging new staff to enhance understanding of the MHO role, and encouraging participation in training programs. This year, two staff members completed the MHO PGD course and a further 2 are enrolled for 2024-25.

Staff wellbeing remains a central focus. This year, we have enhanced the social work supervision policy to prioritise wellbeing and development, conducted wellbeing assessments in care homes, and addressed workload pressures by reviewing capacity in line with the Health and Care Staffing Act. Wellbeing has been promoted in weekly staff briefings, and resources such as Access Therapies Fife have been highlighted. Additionally, we launched Menopause Cafes to support staff. Leadership development courses have helped foster positive working environments, and collaboration among teams ensures staff feel valued and supported. Many teams use SWAY to celebrate successes and share learning. Feedback indicates that while challenges remain, the belief that their work makes a difference is a key motivator for staff. Next year, we will focus on developing processes to capture feedback through staff supervision and exit surveys.

In 2023-24, EDISG launched webinars and events supporting the “What Kind of Fife do you want to Live in?” discussions, which helped Fife achieve Bronze status in the Equality Award scheme. The group is also advancing toward Silver and Gold awards and will take forward anti-racism actions as part of future work.

The service has been equally challenged and across all teams in Fife there has been an increasing volume and complexity of referrals. Workforce capacity to meet demand has been a challenge with demand continuing to stretch our resources. This has placed significant pressure on finances, and while the budget for services has not reduced this complexity has required services to strictly adhere to eligibility criteria, increasing the threshold for accessing resources, making creativity and flexibility a requirement when seeking to meet the needs presented by the people we engage with. This has in turn impacted on social work professionals who have to balance these organisational demands alongside the professional values requirement to be person centred and rights focussed.

Social Care Service provision within the HSCP and with voluntary, third and independent sector colleagues enables the delivery of high quality and supportive services to the people we work with. Fife’s Care at Home Teams, Care Homes, and Adult Resources, provide support and short breaks to those individuals and families living at home or in one of our Care or Residential Homes. Feedback received from people accessing the short breaks service is consistently positive.

It is however recognised that demand outweighs capacity and there are waiting lists within our services for young people transitioning from childcare or school provision and for adults awaiting care services following hospital discharge. Our Adult social work services have experienced an increasing demand to assess and provide packages of care to enable hospital discharge and the capacity of the social workers in teams has been stretched to its limit to meet this need. The ability to recruit and retain the necessary care at home and care home support required for individuals has

been increasingly challenging, with resources stretched and not able to cover all the need identified.

Looking Ahead

Across all of Fife Council Social Work, there have been many positive and encouraging developments during the last year and these have included: a focus on developing trauma informed service delivery and listening to the voices of those with lived experience.

A key emphasis in the delivery of Social Work Services going forward into 2024/25 remains in line with those identified last year as we continue to recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and what is meant by a new normal - this will remain a significant piece of work over the few next years, which will require flexibility and close collaboration with our partners to address:

- 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.
- The very real impact of poverty and increasing poverty in our communities These challenges must be considered against a backdrop of:
 - Staff resilience.
 - Recruitment and retention of staff.
 - Managing capacity, demand and pressures across services within increasing budget constraints.
 - 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.
 - National lack of capacity in resources to meet the needs of those with complex and challenging behaviours

The uncertainty relating to the future delivery of social work requires our workforce to be agile, flexible and resilient whilst always retaining a focus on meeting local needs in our communities by engaging with individuals and families to drive forward improvement.

We will continue to take forward the key priorities identified across Justice and Children's Services and the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Children and Families Services, we will continue to manage our integration into a Communities Directorate maximising the opportunities created by this and developing a No Wrong Door approach to improve support at the earliest point for families. Our children's specific priorities are established in the Children's Services Plan, Child Protection Committee and Corporate Parenting Plans which set out long-term aspirations and priorities for children, young people and their families. These include:

- Our approach to implementing The Promise
- Hearing and responding to the voices of our children and their families.

- An increased focus on preventative and whole family support through whole service redesign
- Continuing to address the balance of care and ensure families are supported and scaffolded early and effective use of kinship as a support
- Continue to engage with staff applying visible and compassionate leadership support which is underpinned by a revised workforce development strategy aimed at upskilling, succession planning and paying diligence to the emotional needs of the workforce
- Ongoing investment in developing internal residential resources to ensure a home in Fife for all children and young people
- Developing a Youth Intervention Service to ensure Fife is creative and innovative in realising the ambition of the Care and Justice Act.

Justice Services our priorities include:

- In the year ahead, we intend to implement our 3-year Outcome Improvement Plan, which will act as a ‘roadmap’ for overall Service improvement.
- We will maximise the use of diversion as an early intervention strategy, while promoting its use as an appropriate response to offending behaviour.
- There will be an increased focus on the availability of robust, communitybased interventions to ensure people are supported in the most appropriate and effective setting.
- We will ensure that those given community sentences are supervised and supported through the provision of robust, high quality, trauma informed services and programmes.
- There will be a focus on improved partnership working to strengthen the leadership, engagement and impact of local and community justice partners, both in respect of raising awareness of community justice and improving outcomes.
- We will increase opportunities for Service User Involvement in the design, delivery and development of our Services. We intend to do this by creating a specific post which will be aligned to this work, and by utilising evidence, research and best practice in this area.

Adult and older people social work and social care services our priorities include:

- Workforce Resilience: Exploring further how we can support our workforce to show the value we place in their contribution to services and our community, embedding a supervision framework, recognising and promoting best practices, and creating spaces for colleagues to come together and reflect.
- Transitions: Strengthening how we support people entering our services using a “team around the person” approach, GIRFE principles, and multi-agency meetings to enhance person centred support.
- Professional Assurance Framework: Embedding tools and processes to gather meaningful data for improvement, with a focus on service user, carer, and workforce feedback through surveys and supervision.
- Prevention & Early Intervention: Enhancing collaboration with community-led services and ensuring staff confidence in having transparent, open conversations about meeting needs, and our eligibility criteria.

- Crisis Response and Mental Health: Taking action to ensure people requiring intervention through AWI are regularly reviewed and that those needing emergency detention under the MH Act have an MHO involved in their detention.
- Carer Support: Including quality assurance in our collection of the number of carer support plans offered so we know the impact of our interventions on the lives of carers.