



**Annual Report by
Chief Social Work Officer
April 2022 – March 2023
Stuart C. Easingwood**

Introduction

I have pleasure in presenting the Scottish Borders Chief Social Work Officers Annual report for 2022/23. As with every year, this report is an opportunity to reflect on the past year, highlight the progress made against service priorities, to celebrate what has gone well, and to acknowledge the significant impact that the pandemic has continued to have on people, their families, staff, volunteers, and communities.

I think it would be fair to reflect that the level of need and pressure has never been higher, with everyone in our communities experiencing significant challenges. This is particularly evident with those who are already disadvantaged continuing to be disproportionately impacted. From an organisational perspective, we are still recovering from the impact of the Pandemic and colleagues in NHS (National Health Service), third sector and other partners are similarly facing these challenges. We recognise that significant challenges remain, and we continue to work together to mitigate the impact on the people of Scottish Borders.

Please note that the format of this report has changed this year and the following report conforms to the new format issued by the Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor to the Scottish Government.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the exceptional work and dedication of all Social Work and Social Care staff across Scottish Borders. Their relentless work over the past year, in what continues to be extraordinarily pressurised environment is inspiring. I remain incredibly proud and humbled by the efforts of all staff and hope that my words will in some way convey my gratitude to them, also recognising the massive contribution from carers and communities across the area who have continued to keep the needs of others at the forefront throughout these challenging times.

Governance, accountability, and statutory functions

Local authorities are required, under Section 3 (1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 as amended, to appoint a Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). The role of CSWO in Scottish Borders is fulfilled by the Director Social Work & Practice. The role of the CSWO is to ensure professional oversight of social work practice and service delivery; this includes professional governance, leadership, and accountability for the delivery of social work and social care services, whether provided by the local authority or commissioned through the third or independent sector.

Scottish Borders Social Work services have clear governance arrangements in place. The CSWO is a member of the Council Management Team and as such has direct access to Elected Members, the Chief Executive, and senior managers of other Council services. The governance of Social Work Services is undertaken through two separate but interconnected structures. Children and Families Social Work, Justice and Public Protection services are directly managed through internal Council structures and all other delegated services are managed through the Integration Joint Board (IJB). These arrangements are embedded and provide assurance that the social work function is being undertaken to the highest possible standards.

The CSWO is a non-voting member of the IJB and offers professional advice and guidance to the IJB on matters relating to Social Work service delivery. The CSWO is also a member of IJB Leadership Team and other senior leadership forums between NHS Borders and Scottish Borders Council, further strengthening the integration of services. In all Social Work services there are a range of multi-agency operational and strategic groups that add significant value to the work of Social Work. There continues to be a strong emphasis on partnership working in these forums and given the co-terminus nature of the Local Authority with the local NHS Board, this continues to be a crucial element of our ongoing improvement.

The CSWO has continued to monitor, review, and advise the Council on Social Work matters, whilst providing leadership for all staff in Social Work and Social Care to provide high quality and safe services for the Borders. The CSWO assures the quality of social workers and of social work practice by ensuring that we have robust auditing processes, quality and performance indicators and quality assurance/ improvement measures in place. In addition to this, the CSWO chairs a Performance Board and Programme Board. The former focusses on performance against designated indicators (including the National minimum dataset) and the Programme Board gives one governance route for all projects and activities related to Social Work services.

The CSWO has responsibilities in respect of statutory decision making. This includes statutory decision making in relation to public protection and/or the restriction of individual liberty and requires consideration of individual circumstances regarding rights, risks, needs and capacity. It also includes decision making related to the placement of children in secure accommodation, transfers of children and young people in cases of urgent necessity who are subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders, adoption, fostering, community payback orders, statutory interventions linked to the Mental Health Officer role, adults with incapacity

measures, and the protection of children and adults at risk. These considerations are often complex in nature and encompass a range of issues, including the risks to the wider community. The CSWO also has oversight of practice standards relating to services delivered by registered social workers.

Scottish Borders have actively engaged in multi-agency discussions promoting the development of service provision and staff training at both local and national levels. The CSWO, is the current depute chair for the Edinburgh, Lothian's and Borders MAPPA Strategic Oversight Group and the Justice Group Manager, chairs the Social Work Scotland Justice Standing Committee's Community Disposal subgroup.

With regard to the pressures on CSWO at a local level, it is apparent that the level of pressure on services remains significant. With an ageing population, coupled with significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of Social Work and Social Care staff, demand has never been higher for adult services. I think it would also be fair to reflect that the level of complexity being seen in the presenting needs of those requiring support is growing. This is throughout the lifespan, with a marked increase in complex needs cases in Children & Families, through to more complex packages of care being required for adults in our communities. Children and Families in particular is experiencing a significant increase in the demand for placements which is putting considerable pressure on already pressured resources.

During the year we have been subject to two external joint inspection processes. The first was in relation to Adult Support & Protection which was published on 18 October 2022 and the second (almost immediately after the publication) was focussed on Children at Risk of Harm. The outcome of the Adult Protection inspection was very positive with feedback that Adults at risk of harm were well supported and protected by highly effective initial inquiries, investigations, risk assessment, and protection planning. This outcome was extremely well received and is testament to the ongoing commitment of the multi-agency partners to work together to support adult at risk of harm. The Children at Risk of Harm Inspection was published on 23 May 2023 (out with the timeframe of this report), however the outcome of the inspection determined that the impact on children and young people was good. Again this outcome was well received locally.

On the back of these joint inspection processes, improvement plans have been devised and are being actively worked on to ensure that services remain focussed on improvement. The governance of the improvements is aligned to the Scottish Borders Public Protection Committee and the Children and Young Peoples Planning Partnership, of which the CSWO is a member of both.

As part of the Scottish Borders Council (SBC) Internal Audit Annual Plan 2022/23, an Internal Audit was completed in respect of Mental Health Services (Adults & Children) as part of internal controls assurance work. The purpose was to assess the governance arrangements in place to commission specialist mental health services and promote closer integration and partnership working to meet the requirements of people with mental health needs. The focus was on how the Council discharges its duties set out in relevant sections of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. The audit provided limited assurance in respect of the governance, roles and responsibilities, and management and

performance information of mental health service delivery (adults and children) within the Council's operations. The governance arrangements at the time of the Internal Audit review were not adequate and effective, and insufficient performance data is provided to the Chief Social Work Officer to ensure that the Council's statutory duties are being discharged. Two recommendations were made which ensured that future governance arrangements will cover the Council's role, contribution and performance going forward and both of these recommendations were immediately actioned and are now in place.

Internal audit also completed an audit of Public Protection; the purpose of which was to review the governance arrangements, including roles and responsibilities of partners, to ensure statutory obligations are met for both adults and children. The report concluded that internal audit was able to provide substantial assurance. No recommendations were made at the time, although suggestions for improvement actions were agreed, such as a review of the governance model; roles and responsibilities; further development of the risk register and communications strategy. All of these actions have been progressed in year.

As well as the above internal audits, Internal Audit also attended meetings of the Social Work Performance Board; Social Work Programme Board and Social Work Adult Assessment Review, to provide an independent review of these meetings and processes, thus ensuring an additional layer of scrutiny to existing governance and accountability. Follow up work regarding previous internal audits has also been carried out for Self-Directed Support and Learning Disability Service Financial Management. An Audit and Risk update is also a regular feature on the agenda for the CSWO Senior Leadership Team meetings, involving all senior leaders across Social Work services.

On the whole, the last reporting year has been extremely busy with not only internal processes to assure good governance and accountability in the delivery of statutory functions, but also significant external scrutiny as well. As we progress with the improvement plans, we remain well placed to ensure that we continue to apply rigour to our delivery of statutory functions.

Service Quality and Performance

Children and Families Social Work:

Delivery of Children and Families Social Work (C&FSW) in the Scottish Borders is based on a model of 2 Long Term Teams operating in the East (Duns and Hawick offices) and West (Galashiels and Peebles offices). A central Duty Team manages all duty and intake enquiries across the Scottish Borders. The Family Placement Team, Child Protection Unit, Youth Justice and Throughcare Aftercare also have an authority wide remit.

During the course of the reporting year, as in all parts of Scotland, services in the Scottish Borders have been delivered within the context and restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic. 2022 saw an incremental lifting of restrictions and a return to pre-pandemic practices, though the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on children, families and carers continued throughout.

Scottish Borders has seen a slight increase in the numbers of looked after children over 2022/23 from 175 to 184. This follows an increase in 2021 from 169 to 175. Of note is a 21% reduction in the numbers of children and young people in kinship care (56 to 44) and a 37% increase in the number in external residential (27 to 37).

Date	SBC Foster Care (LAC)*	Independent Foster Care	Residential Care	Kinship Care	Total**
31st December 2022	56	7	37	44	184
31 st December 2021	57	4	27	56	175
31 st December 2020	49	2	24	53	169
1 st January 2020	57	7	25	54	206
1 st January 2019	60	7	26	50	222

During the reporting period there has been a marked increase in the demand for C&FSW interventions, and whilst we recognise that for a significant period of the year that we have struggled with staff recruitment and retention, the volume of referrals has increased considerably also. The level of complexity and need being referred would indicate that from a systems perspective, we are not engaging with children, young people and their families early enough. There are specific pressures regarding the need for out of authority placements, far in excess of what we have seen before, particularly for Primary school age children.

It is undoubtable that there is a myriad of reasons for the increased need but what is clear is that neurodiversity and complex behaviour patterns are evident. The impact of the pandemic is also linked to this increase in need, with children, young people and families having experienced a significant period of increased pressure on family life, compounded by the cost-of-living crisis and all combining to make some situations untenable for families.

Children and young people requiring alternative care often have multiple disadvantages which can include trauma and associated behavioural issues, attachment difficulties, poor mental health, experience of poverty and conflict with the law. In every case the children and young people require support to access the curriculum most effectively and have a safe and nurturing environment to live in. Officers in the C&FSW service have observed, through the pattern of referrals received, that there has a significant negative impact on the wellbeing of children over recent years. It is considered that the pandemic and the impact of various restrictions are likely to have increased the vulnerability of some children.

Services are now beginning to see the wider impact of the pandemic, and other factors, across the health and social care system with many families experiencing stress and pressure and young people exhibiting anxiety and associated mood disorders. Thus, the needs of children requiring accommodation who have been placed in external residential care are complex and multi-faceted. Officers noted a significant increase this year in the number of young people referred to social work for support with complex trauma, mental health conditions and suicidal ideation. Whilst each young person is unique, there is a complex interplay between trauma, neuro-developmental conditions, risk taking behaviour and mental health diagnosis.

To give a flavour of the increase in demand please find the following comparisons:

2020/21 – 2022/23

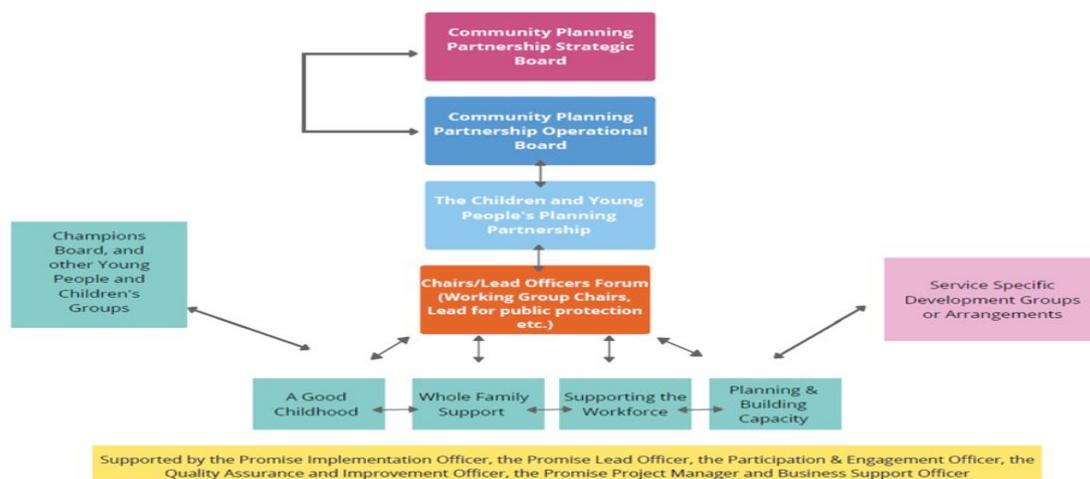
- 62% increase in new referrals (children and young people not previously known) to C&FSW
- 25% increase in Kinship placements
- 10% increase in the number of Looked After Children (LAC)
- LAC at home reduced from 44 to 26 – higher number of legal orders stipulating formal care
- 3x the number of external foster placements

Separately, the cost of externally commissioned placements is also subject to significant inflationary cost increases as a result of changes to the regulatory environment and the wider economic context. The average out of authority placement has risen by 29% in the last 5 years.

The growing need for external provision is deeply concerning, we all agree that Scottish Borders children belong in Scottish Borders where this is at all possible. The impact of children being placed out-with the area (in addition to the financial implications for the organisation) is that children are distant from connections with their friends, family, school, and local communities. It is also crucial that disruption to schooling is minimised to help provide the context for improved outcomes, including attainment.

Children and Young People’s Planning Partnership:

In the last year there has been significant progress in the development of a refreshed Children and Young People’s Planning Partnership (CYPPP) which has replaced the previous strategic planning process for all children, young people and family services locally. The following diagram gives a description of the configuration as well as governance arrangements:



Commissioning Review and Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

A short-term task and finish group has been established to develop a new commissioning strategy for the children and young people's planning partnership, to ensure a more streamlined approach to multi-agency spend. The group has also been tasked with progressing plans for the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

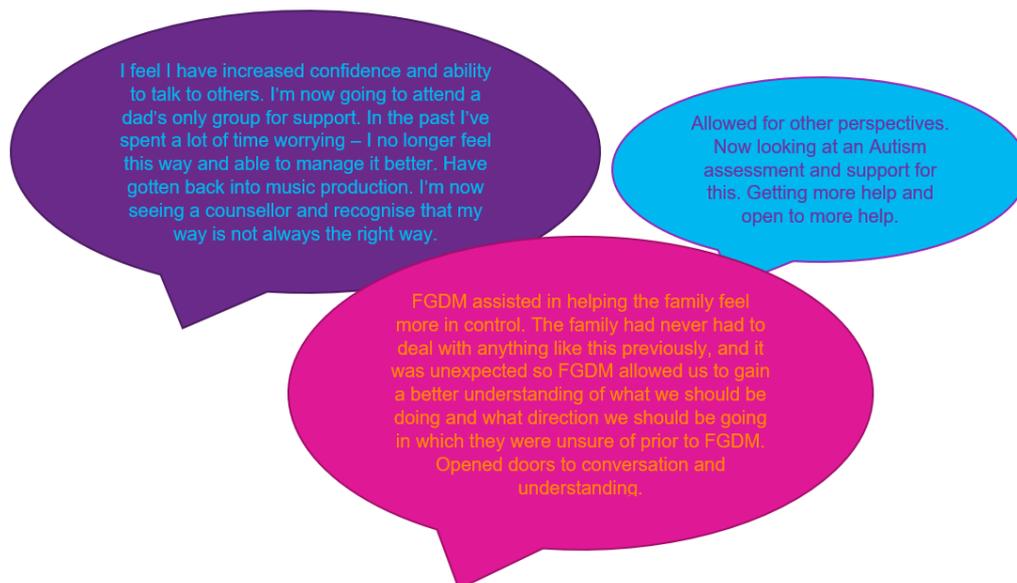
This fund has been introduced by Scottish Government to enable the system changes required to shift investment towards early intervention and prevention activities, to ensure families can access support before they reach crisis point. Funding is committed at least over the next 3 years with the ambition that by 2030, at least 5% of community-based health and social care spend should be going towards preventative whole family support measures.

- A multi-agency approach to embedding the National Trauma Training Programme is being developed by the Integrated Psychological Trauma Steering Group
- The Advocacy Planning Group is continuing to undertake the preparatory work for the development of a new children and young people's advocacy service
- Engagement and participation work with children and young people with quieter voices is being progressed through the development of our Champions Board approach and our Article 12 at the Heart Project
- The Promise Team continue to deliver Promise and Corporate Parenting awareness raising training for multi-agency partners

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM):

Our commission with Children 1st for the delivery of FGDM continues to provide positive outcomes for children, young people and families in Scottish Borders. The feedback from families is encouraging:

How have families felt after the FGDM process?



Aberlour Edge of Care service:

The service continues to prioritise work with children, young people and families whose children are on the edge of care. The demand for this service is growing, particularly given the level of complexity that is being seen in our local communities. This service is essential in mitigating the number of children that may require a care placement.

Complex Needs provision:

At the outset of the pandemic there was agreement from Council to progress with the planning of a residential facility for children and young people with complex needs, in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord and Aberlour Childcare Trust. Due to the pandemic, this project was effectively shelved and recently we have restarted the process of planning.

The development is linked to a wider plan being developed for a Care Village in the same vicinity. As this project is taking longer than anticipated to progress, we have agreed with our partners to explore other interim alternative options. This is partly in recognition of the increased need for both residential and respite / short breaks provision.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC):

There are ongoing challenges regarding the provision of suitable placements for UASC young people. With an already pressured system which is leading to children being placed out with the local authority area because of a lack of suitable placements locally, the addition of young people being placed as part of the National effort to care for UASC is placing the service in a very challenging position. We are always willing to play our part as part of this National effort for these young people, but it is apparent that more placements are being required from the UK Government for young people below the age of 16, meaning that a formal care placement is required. We are struggling to find any resources for these young people as well as young people originally from the area.

Children at Risk of Harm (CARH) Inspection:

During the reporting year, there was a joint inspection of services for children at risk of harm in the Scottish Borders' community planning partnership area. This took place between 7 November 2022 and 19 April 2023. It covered the range of partners in the area that have a role in meeting the needs of children and young people at risk of harm and their families.

The key messages from the inspection process include:

- Children, young people and families benefited from supportive and trusting relationships with staff across services.
- The recognition and initial response to risk and concern to children was a strength. Staff took timely and appropriate action to keep children safe.
- Well-established collaborative working across services ensured children and young people benefited from timely responses to identification of risks.
- Nurturing and trauma informed services provided a range of supports to help children and young people recover from abuse, neglect and trauma. Some of these services were not consistently available when children and young people needed them.
- The quality of chronologies and children's plans was variable.
- Children, young people and parents and carers were supported to meaningfully contribute to decisions about their lives by compassionate staff.
- The partnership was at an early stage of ensuring that the voice of children and families routinely and meaningfully influenced service planning and improvement.
- The partnership's approach to improvement and change was not supported by a shared and systematic approach to quality assurance and self-evaluation.

CARH inspection report - [Scottish Borders joint inspection children at risk of harm.pdf](https://www.careinspectorate.com/scottish-borders-joint-inspection-children-at-risk-of-harm.pdf) ([careinspectorate.com](https://www.careinspectorate.com))

On the back of the inspection process an improvement plan has been created and it being actively progressed. Of note is that where there is synergy between the outcome of this

inspection and the inspection of Adult Support & Protection, we will look to work collaboratively across the services i.e. chronologies.

Fostering & Adoption:

The Fostering Service, Adoption Service and Continuing Care Service were subject to inspections in June 2022. In addition to the direct care services provided by the Family Placement Team in Fostering, Adoption and Continuing Care, the inspections also take into consideration aspects of practice within the Children and Families Social Work Long Term Teams and Throughcare Aftercare Team.

The overall ratings for the Fostering Service were as follows:

How well do we support people's wellbeing? 3 - Adequate

How well is our care and support planned? 3 - Adequate

These ratings were disappointing and reflect to a degree the overall rating system used by the Care Inspectorate which includes areas of practice which are out with the auspices of the Family Placement Team.

Over 2022 only 2 new foster carers were recruited and approved (1 household). This is a decrease from 2021 of 2 households. 4 carers (3 households) were de-registered in 2022. This is a decrease from 2021 when 15 carers were de-registered. The reasons for de-registration included personal circumstances.

(1 carer) and retirement (3 carers – 2 households). The net loss of foster carers mirrors the national situation in terms of difficulties in recruitment, however it remains disappointing, and recruitment of foster carers will again be a focus of activity for the Family Placement Team in 2023.

The Family Placement Team also assess and support kinship carers. A specific support group for kinship carers is commissioned from Children 1st who continue to provide an independent Kinship Care Support Group on a monthly basis.

Fostering Panel Annual Report 2022:



Fostering Panel
Annual Report 2022

Adoption and Permanence Panel Annual Report 2022:



Adoption and
Permanence Panel A

Champions Board Annual Report and Re-framing our language:

The Champions Board aims to provide a platform for care-experienced young people to raise and discuss key issues that have affected them whilst being a looked after young person in the Scottish Borders, and to develop strong relationships with their corporate parents to ensure that together we can improve the care system by tackling and overcoming the issues discussed.

Since August 2021 a Champions Board approach has been implemented to enable care experienced children and young people to have a forum that is flexible, accessible and has young people's voice at the heart of its design and development. The Champions Board

approach has continued to be developed with care experienced children and young people over the past twelve months, and a school's pilot was established in two local secondary schools at the start of 2023. Setting up Champions Hubs in schools allows for getting to know children and young people in their communities, as well as working alongside school staff to support them to understand their Promise and Corporate Parenting responsibilities.



Champions Board The Scottish Borders
Annual Report Feb 20 Reframing Our Language



Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy:

The recent inspection again highlighted the need for a Children and Young People's Engagement and Participation Strategy to help us coordinate our youth voice work across Scottish Borders. A brief was written by one of our local MSYPs, in 2022, and an initial meeting was held with education colleagues early in 2023. Development of this strategy is ongoing.

Wheatlands Children's Home:

Wheatlands Children's Home continued to provide outstanding quality residential care for young people in the Scottish Borders over 2022-23. We were delighted that the service was recognised at the Scottish Social Services Awards as the outstanding residential care service for 2022.

This was a fantastic achievement, and their success evidences the ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. The judging panel were extremely impressed across the board for the quality care and outcomes being delivered at Wheatlands, not only over the past 12 months but also in the preceding 10 years.

Among the many strengths of the service, they found the staff team to be highly skilled and experienced, with the relationship-based approach utilised in their work with young people clearly having a positive impact on their wellbeing. The way in which young people were involved in the running of their home, including taking part in weekly participative meetings, was also noted as having resulted in a number of initiatives and changes to practice.

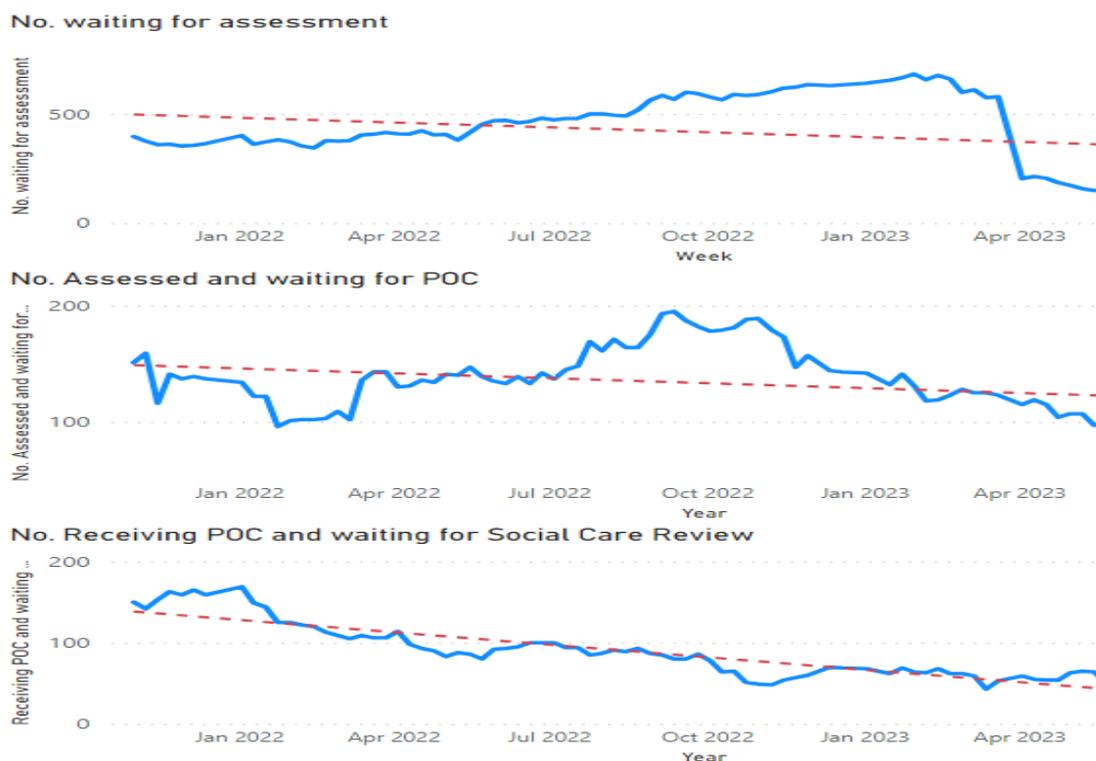
The loyalty of the team was another key highlight with two thirds of staff having been employed at the home for between 10 and 20 years. This was seen to have made a significant contribution to the stability of the setting and the way in which young people were able to build strong, long lasting and reliable relationships.

Adult Social Work:

Although Adult Social Work services are almost fully staffed, there remains a significant pressure in being able to meet need locally. Referral numbers to the five adult Social Work locality teams have continued to increase with a particularly marked increase in new service user need (opposed to recurring need) of between 33% to 45%. In Scottish Borders the continued increase in the age of the population continues to impact on the ability to deliver services and there are specific challenges which are replicated Nationally regarding the staff shortages in Social Care, essentially meaning that there are real challenges in being able to deliver care to meet assessed need.

To mitigate this there has been a focus on local initiatives around improving the screening and allocation of work which has led to a test of change in one locality where there is a more integrated approach across the locality social work team, NHS Borders Allied Health

Professionals and the NHS Home First Services. As part of this test of change, referrals are triaged and considered for their enablement/reablement potential and progressed by the Home First (Hospital discharge) and Allied Health Professionals team accordingly. Of particular note is that the teams have significantly reduced the waiting time for assessment as can be seen in the following graphs:



As part of a wider commissioning work stream adult social work have worked closely with partners to support a new Extra Care Housing development in Kelso. The former Kelso High school has been sensitively refurbished internally and externally to accommodate 37 apartments. The new facility is due to open in August 2023, and it is hoped that it will provide an alternative provision to keep people in their local community.

Community Led Support:

A significant driver for the service is to refresh our approach to Community Led Support (CLS). Following a CLS re-launch event in 2023, What Matters Hubs are going to be rolled out throughout all five localities with satellite hubs in more remote communities adding to this. A temporary CLS paraprofessional position was recruited to at the end of the reporting year and the post-holder will help each locality identify a suitable venue and support staff adapting to a different way of working. The development of CLS is being overseen by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI) and they are employed on a commissioned basis.

Digital Pathfinder Programme:

A working group has commenced to look at performance reporting and to align this to practice standards. The pathfinder project continues at pace with workflows being process re-engineered to achieve more efficiency as well as better reporting metrics. The intelligent-i dashboards will bring relevant data to the attention of managers and workers in a much more accessible way, and they will have access to data as a snapshot but also tracking across a number of years, aiding services to plan strategically. The use of total mobile will also result in efficiencies as technology will be portable for all front-line staff and crucially

allow them to be able to co-produce assessments, plans and reviews with the people we serve in an empowering manner.

A challenge of this work is in being able to maintain the personalisation of the assessment and support planning process for individuals whilst obtaining clear outcome focused data that will help service improvement planning in the future.

START:

In early 2023, our acute hospital based social work team were realigned with the Social Work and Practice directorate. Previously this team was line managed by Scottish Borders Council Adult Social care. The team is currently made up of NHS and SBC staff ensuring there is good skills mix across the hospital-based work force.

Working in partnership with NHS Borders, we are now in the process of creating an integrated discharge team. The current NHS Borders discharge pathway team will join the current social work and practice team to form one integrated discharge hub. This development will not come without its challenges, including the continued funding of temporary staff, the need to identify a suitable co-location on the NHS site, and use shared IT systems. However, all parties are invested in making changes which should create positive outcomes for those being discharged from hospital.

Community Equipment Service:

The community Equipment Service is managed jointly by Social Work and Practice and Adult Social Care. There has been a rapid increase in requests over the latter part of this reporting year and this is impacting on Refurbishment and cleaning of equipment to be re-used in the community. Additionally, short notice requests for emergency provision have increased, especially from hospital settings.

Reablement:

A reablement pilot project was undertaken at a local care home in 2022 and the findings are being incorporated into a new reablement approach to Occupational Therapy assessment and interventions. The principle is to work towards breaking dependency-creating relationships and maximising independence and recovery. This will be reflected in paperwork and effective screening, in addition to use of total mobile i-pads during assessments. There will be greater emphasis on face-to-face assessments and reviews.

Technology Enabled Care:

Another area of improvement identified in previous years has been increasing the use and effectiveness of Technology Enabled Care (TEC) and a new paraprofessional post for TEC has recently been piloted and will be evaluated over the next reporting year.

Care and Repair:

Care and Repair is staffed by two Occupational Therapists and two Occupational Therapy Assistants. Since the pandemic there have been challenges in securing and commissioning trades to undertake adaptations work across the Borders following OT assessment. This has resulted in waiting lists and delays which require the OT staff to risk assess and manage in the interim.

Sensory Services:

The service had an exemplary track record in respect of productivity and completion of assessments and provision of equipment, and the service user annual survey for this reporting period, once again concurs with a high percentage level of satisfaction and a range of positive feedback comments including - Did you feel involved and listened to during the interview? Yes: 100%, Did you think our recent visit/s was: Not very helpful: 1.5%, Helpful: 6.5% and Very Helpful: 92%.

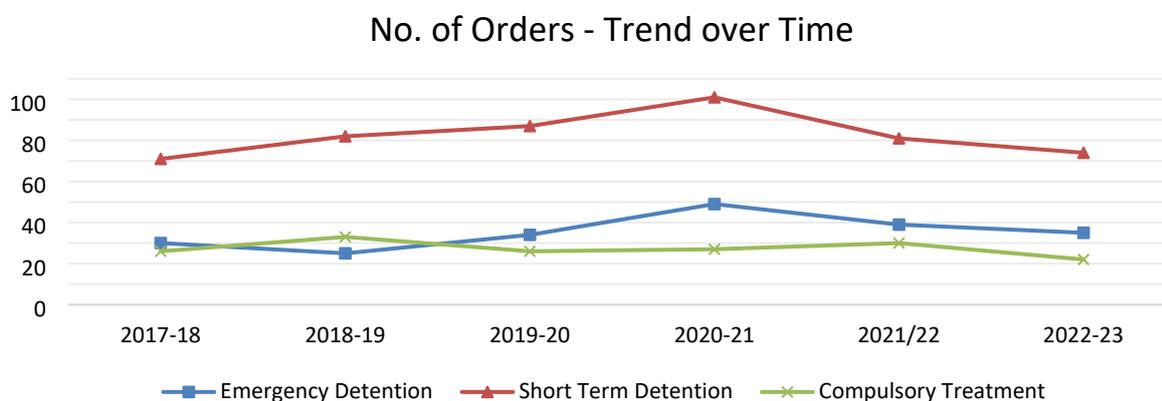
Mental Health Officer Service:

The Mental Health Officer (MHO) forum takes place 3 monthly and is now firmly established within the Borders. It is recognised by MHOs as an invaluable support opportunity for their continuous professional development. The forum invites guest speakers and looks at relevant case law. This provides an opportunity for our qualified MHOs and trainees to develop knowledge-based learning. Adopting a similar model in this reporting year, the MHO service has also introduced forums with the Councils legal department, and another with the Borders NHS consultant psychiatrists, Registered Medical Officers (RMO's). This provides the MHOs and trainee MHOs with another opportunity to learn from a range of disciplines and further enhance good multidisciplinary working relationships.

Due to Mental Health Recovery and Renewal funding, Scottish Borders Council offers newly qualified MHO's, and satellite (MHOs), a six-month secondment to work in the MHO service. Working alongside more experienced MHOs provides an opportunity for less experienced MHOs to consolidate their learning. To date, our newly qualified MHOs who have completed the post qualification opportunity, have confirmed that working alongside more experienced MHOs has enhanced their practice. Scottish Borders Council intend to support 2 new trainees through the MHO qualification this autumn at Edinburgh University.

In partnership with our policy and practice development officer, the MHO service is actively supporting the production of an updated Adult with Incapacity guidance. This will support social workers and care managers in their daily practice, in addition to which, ensure consistency in practice in the Council. At a recent integrated training event the MHO service provided information on capacity and the complex area of deprivation of liberty.

In this reporting year the MHO service has taken a more proactive approach to hospital discharges. We have created a dedicated MHO link worker role who supports Locality teams with any Adults with Incapacity related discharges from community hospitals and the Borders General acute hospital setting. This has already proven to be a successful approach with improved consistency, and more timely discharges from hospital settings. An example of the activity for the MHO team is as follows:



Appropriate adult service:

We continue to develop a sustainable Appropriate Adult service with national oversight to promote consistency. Our Appropriate Adult service provides communication support to vulnerable victims, witnesses, suspected and accused person, aged 16 and over, during police investigation. This reporting year, we have offered our existing Appropriate Adult's refresher training and commissioned a two-day training event in May 2023 for 14 new

appropriate adults. As a Council we now have 49 Appropriate Adults providing support throughout the Borders on a rota basis.

Policy and Practice Development Officer:

A Policy and Practice Development Officer (PPDO) role was established in June 2022 to lead on the development, review and implementation of social work policies and procedures in line with current legislation and National Policy requirements. This role also promotes knowledge, understanding and best practice in all aspects of Social Work policies and procedure. The PPDO has a close working relationship with the training team. As new policy and practice is agreed, training will be available to compliment the newly developed policies or procedures. The PPDO also ensures that any lessons learnt as a result of complaints are adopted into policy and practice.

Care Homes:

The Community Care Reviewing Team (CCRT) work closely with colleagues in Health taking a collaborative approach to supporting services with the aim of ensuring people living in care homes have their rights upheld and receive a good quality of care. Through the review process areas of good practice can be highlighted along with areas that require 'built upon' with the team playing a key part in supporting improvement when performance issues are identified; thus, ensuring positive outcomes for people living in the home, and also the staff group supporting them. By promoting a multi-agency approach and involving the right service at the right time, the health and well-being of the resident population can be improved as described in My Health, My Care, My Home - healthcare framework for adults living in care homes as published by Scottish Government in June 2022. Since inception of what was the Care Home Oversight Group in May 2020 (now Care Home Collaborative Group) adult social work and practice by way of CCRT has been a key player in contributing to improved standards across the care home sector. By identifying areas of concerns through the research based early indicators of concern tool, early intervention can be introduced as a means of pro-actively supporting improvement in the service. Where practice becomes harmful or potentially harmful, CCRT take a lead in both the Adult Support and Protection pre-Large-Scale Investigation and Large-Scale Investigation (LSI) stage, monitoring progress on the provider action plan. In the last 12 months there have been two care homes enter the pre-LSI process but have not progressed to full LSI due to multi-agency support provided.

There is a range of planning and commissioning being commenced around the purchase of interim and respite places across the care home sector which, although will not increase the number of placements, will aim to improve and match the type to placement required to a range of needs for short- and longer-term support.

Carers:

The formation of the Carers workstream (made up of Carers, Health and Social work representatives and third sector colleagues) has promoted a forum for unpaid Carers to have their voice heard and influence service design and delivery. This workstream along with the Carers' needs assessment survey has supported the Council to understand priorities for Carers. Having identified from these consultation exercises that respite is key to Carers being able to continue in their caring role, a range of opportunities are being progressed to enable Carers to have a short break. While existing services such as local area coordinators (LAC) and commissioned services such as RVS are already in place, work undertaken by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) in one locality reflects that Carers of people with complex needs lack appropriate services that can support positive outcomes.

In relation to complex needs, funding has been secured by way of Carers Act monies to commission four high dependency rooms in care homes for respite usage with the view this service is provided by the independent sector. 207 Carers were in receipt of an individual

budget from the Carers budget to support them to have a break from their caring role, with this number increasing weekly.

Self-Directed Support:

In keeping with duties outlined in Self-Directed Support (SDS) legislation, the Council offer 4 options for service delivery. To date option 1 and 3 have been most highly used with this relating to 20% and 67% respectively with a mixed package of carer of predominantly option 1 and 3 (Option 4) accounting for around 12%. Historically there has been a low uptake of Individual Service Funds (1%) with Scottish Borders Council being one of the lowest in Scotland. To understand this better and to focus on how numbers can be increased for people who choose SDs option 2, Scottish Borders Council took part in a research project facilitated by 'In Control Scotland' in conjunction with five other Local Authorities. Commonality in findings include about how option 2 is defined, how true choice can be limited through procurement methods, and how availability of services in particular areas lent to compromised SDS option choice as there was no other provision either suitable or available.

The SDS Lead Officer is a member SDS forum and chairs the SDS working group to promote a co-production approach in terms of self-directed support which involve service users, unpaid carers and provider of services, including third sector plus staff responsible for the social assessment. These discussion groups form the opportunity for 'bottom up' expression of view and opinion to influence policy development in the spirit of partnership working. Areas currently being addressed include Power of Attorney plus review of the direct payment rate. Training material has been designed in collaboration with the SDS forum and now forms part of Social Work's mandatory e-learning training plus on-line sessions with 'In Control Scotland' are in line to be delivered in 2023.

Community reviews:

The Community Care Reviewing Team (CCRT) continue to focus on freeing up capacity to enable the re-provision of resources to people in most need, and ensuring outcomes identified in the support plan are being met effectively. While the initial timeframe of two-yearly reviews was set the default is now being changed to that of an annual review which is in keeping with the Council's statutory duty to review service provision. Community workers in CCRT routinely undertake 'targeted' pieces of work which includes supporting locality teams, reviewing specific providers and care packages as part of a quality assurance process, and reviewing those in receipt of night support services.

Emergency Duty Team (Out of Hours):

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) continue to provide response to all situations requiring immediate, professional social work intervention when daytime services are closed. Priorities for the team continue to be Child Protection, Adult Support & Protection and Mental Health Officer assessments.

A full time Team Leader was appointed in August 2022, prior to this the Team Leader post was 17.5 hours per week. This change has allowed the Team Leader to attend additional meetings with service managers across adult and child services to provide continuity and a high-quality service out of hours.

All EDT workers are or will be trained as Council Officers and Appropriate Adults. All 6 permanent social workers are Child Protection trained, can undertake Joint Investigative Interviews of children with police and make decisions as to whether Child Protection thresholds have been reached. Six social workers are also qualified Mental Health Officers.

For the reporting period April 22 to March 23 EDT responded to **6619** calls, requests and situations, a reduction of **649** contacts from the year before. Below is a sample breakdown of some contacts the Emergency Duty Team Staff respond to:

Adult Protection:

This past year has been a very busy period for the Public Protection Unit and Adult Support & Protection (ASP) activity. In the previous reporting year (2021/22) a self-evaluation process regarding ASP was undertaken and resource was dedicated to this task. This encompassed a blended methodology using an action research model alongside a participative approach, which also had the benefit of engaging and motivating staff.

Multi-agency evaluation and evidence gathering groups worked to identify examples of good practice against the Care Inspectorate Practice Standards and Key Performance Indicators.

This was followed by a review of our recording workflows in 2022-23 and a revision of our performance indicators and data collection ensuring that the service user and carers are central to the process. This was implemented in the summer of 2022 and has strengthened the positive outcomes for individuals but has also provided greater analysis and insight into service delivery and improvement. We have worked hard to improve feedback from service users, unpaid carers and families at different stages of ASP intervention and have much better mechanisms in place for collating this information. We continue to work towards better engagement at a strategic level for people with lived and/or living experience of ASP interventions.

Performance and national reporting:

The work undertaken to improve our performance indicators has greatly assisted us to prepare for the Scottish Government national minimum data set for ASP and the work now required to provide this data is more achievable than before.

We previously launched a Council Officers monthly Gazette providing information on developments within ASP, providing an easy way for Council Officers at the centre of the ASP process to keep up to date. This circulation received positive feedback from Council Officers who liked having a monthly update of communication that was contained within one place, so we listened to that feedback and this circulation has now evolved to a multi-agency whole family public protection newsletter.

Following a joint Inspection of Adult Support & Protection between June and November 2022 undertaken by the Care Inspectorate and its scrutiny partners Healthcare Improvement Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, all of this work was highlighted as excellent practice in producing methodical and sustainable outcomes.

Scottish Borders partnership was measured as 'Very effective in both operational Key Processes' and in 'Strategic Leadership' for ASP. Although this was a very positive outcome, the partnership continued an improvement plan on the areas that could improve, even though these areas had already been identified as part of our self-evaluation.

The report from last year's inspection can be found at:

[Joint inspection of adult support protection in the Scottish Borders partnership \(careinspectorate.com\)](https://careinspectorate.com)

Strengths highlighted in the report include:

- Improved outcomes for adults at risk of harm through the provision of effective adult support and protection practice by knowledgeable, competent, and confident staff
- High quality and effective risk assessment and management of risks
- Collaborative, cohesive and decisive strategic leadership for adult support and protection

- Impressive and effective multi-agency working.

This service improvement work as well as our very positive Joint Inspection report culminated in a Ministerial visit in April, Maree Todd, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sports visited our co-located unit in Langlee, Central Borders where she met with staff from the Public Support and Protection Services team, Third Sector colleagues and services users.

Service User engagement:

As part of our pre-existing improvement plan for Adult Social Work, Scottish Borders Council had identified the need for a Service User engagement role. This had also been identified as a need across ASP and included in the ASP improvement plan. This was fully endorsed in principle by the Public Protection multi agency partners.

Community Mental Health:

The Community Mental Health Social Work service has undergone some changes with each member now having professional supervision by a registered social worker in the form of the Team Leader (TL) and Assistant Team Leader (ATL). We have developed an operational document which ensures each member of the team and other professionals within the service are clear about how a social work service is provided. The team is in a much more resilient position with the addition of the ATL role, with the TL and ATL now allocating all work across the team to ensure allocations are appropriate, prioritised and timely.

As the service undertakes hospital discharges in addition to community-based work it is vital cases are allocated promptly. We are working towards the development of new standards as a council to ensure those with priority needs are allocated and assessed promptly. We currently aim to complete assessments of those individuals who are fit to be discharged from hospital within 5 working days. The work of the team is often reactive and requires an urgent response, be that due to the need for hospital discharge (although we do try to allocate wherever possible before the person is fit for discharge) adult protection or high-risk cases. By applying robust caseload management across the team, we are ensuring the responsiveness of the team and the appropriate turnover of caseload.

Learning Disability Service:

The Learning Disability Service continue to deliver all statutory functions, although capacity and pressure within the Social Work team is high. Carrying out reviews of serviced cases in line with statutory requirements remains a significant challenge within the service. This is due to high referral rates, complexity of work, operational pressures in other areas of the team and staff capacity. The service has recruited 2 new permanent staff into the Review Team over the past year and the manager has developed new processes to improve the turnover of reviews. A test of change is underway in respect of these changes to process.

Following a review on adult learning disability day services, based on engagement with service users and families, a paper was considered by the Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board in June 2022 outlining a set of recommendations. These recommendations noted that there was an opportunity to continue to shift towards meeting people's outcomes in a variety of settings within models that can respond flexibly. Following a period of 'market testing', the Integration Joint Board supported the recommendations and commissioned this work. A procurement process commenced in September 2022. It became clear that the wider national economic situation had affected all providers, and that this in turn reduced the level of service that could be offered by providers within the available budget. As a result, the process was extended to enable further consideration to levels of service that could be provided.

There is a significant need to make efficiencies going forward and at the same time ensure that support for people with the most complex of needs is provided within Scottish Borders in line with the 'Coming Home Report'. To support this we have established a multi-agency "Coming Home Programme Board" which coordinates a range of projects to ensure that we have cost effective and resilient services in place for those with complex needs going forward. The projects are:

1. Tweedbank Supported Living (TSL) - 8 individual supported tenancies in a cluster arrangement with intensive support packages.
2. Lives Through Friends – an innovative and person-centred model focusing on supporting each person to have a Good Life.
3. Kelso Supported Housing (KSL)

The Shared Lives service continues to progress assessing and matching individuals into long term live-in, short breaks, and day support placements. By the end of March 2023 there were 22 matches in place to support 15 individuals and 3 matches in progress for 3 supported people. In addition, 5 additional supported people were identified to find appropriate matches.

Justice Social Work:

During 2022/23 Justice Social Work changed by adapting and developing styles of hybrid delivery, initially implemented during Covid 19, utilising lessons learned at both local and national levels. Running in parallel to these adaptations has been the implementation of new and enhanced delivery systems for Bail Supervision and Electronic Monitoring following the issue of new National Guidance May 2022.

Community Payback Orders:

Over the course of the year, while sitting considerably lower than pre covid, Community Payback Order (CPO) numbers have increased slightly, **197 (+8)** on the previous year-2021/22. The service saw the greatest increase for orders including Supervision Requirements **(+7)**, followed by Unpaid Work and or Other Activity Requirements **(+1)**. While there is an overall increase in the number of CPO's with UPW and or Other Activity, the average number of hours per order has decreased from **113.5** hours (21-22) to **106.5** hours. The reduction, while unwelcome, has facilitated the services ability to address the backlog of hours accumulated as a result of covid restrictions. The service closed the year in a position where all those subject to UPW were able to be accommodated either within group work community projects, commissioned workshop tasks or individual placements, with many service users taking up the offer of additional sessions. It is anticipated that CPO numbers will continue to progressively increase throughout 2023/24.

As the service moved on from the pandemic, there was continued emphasis on the development of ancillary services with a focus on promoting wellbeing and community reintegration. Activities delivered included the facilitation of an evening golf group, ongoing delivery of an established walking group and the provision of driving lessons, as a part of the services drive to tackle transport barriers experienced by many who reside in rural locations. Both the walking and golf group are delivered by social work staff who have an established personal interest in these activities. The groups have been well received and contribute to a reduction in social isolation for service users, in addition to improving health and wellbeing.

Bail Supervision and Electronic Monitoring:

Since the launch of the new National Guidance for Bail Supervision in May 2022, The Borders Bail Supervision service has successfully developed, and is primarily providing delivery across the 2 Borders courts. Following a period of trial and error, a request model

for assessment was implemented. Facilitated by 2 dedicated part-time Justice Officers, requests are received from Court, Procurator Fiscals and solicitors. In addition to court requests for new assessments, the service also considers, the undertaking of assessments for open social work cases presenting at court on other matters. Bail supervision appointments take place 4 days a week, avoiding Mondays when Bail Supervision staff are primarily required to be available to the Court for assessment purposes. Since May '22: 109 assessments have been completed with 46 Bail Supervision Orders being imposed.

Following a year of discussion and negotiations, the service signed a lease agreement, March 2023 with registered social landlord, Waverly Housing. The property; a 1 bedroom flat will be used to provide accommodation for those subject to bail where a lack of accommodation might otherwise result in remand or where additional support is required. Support arrangements will be delivered in partnership with Homelessness Services and will include daily visits (Monday – Friday) as part of an intensive support plan or to identify suitable ongoing accommodation options. The service will be launched in the Spring of 2023.

During the reporting year 01April – 31st March the Borders continues, as in previous years, to manage a disproportionately higher number of Registered Sex Offenders, per head of population, than partner MAPPA authorities. For further detail of the MAPPA information, please refer to the following link:



A randomised audit of MAPPA level 2 cases was completed during the year. 2 cases from each of the Justice Social Work and the Sex Offender Policing Unit were randomly selected. The audit focused on 6 areas, Assessment, Plans, Multi - Agency Arrangements, Intervention, Statutory Responsibilities and Impact and Outcomes. The audit concluded that cases audited were managed at the appropriate level and that actions and interventions were commensurate with the assessed level of risk. Information sharing was proportionate, collaborative and defensible and MAPPA templates were utilised, providing consistent and informed information across both services. While a small dip sample, some measure of reassurance as to the integrity and delivery of MAPPA in the Borders can be taken.

VISOR:

The VISOR system is not utilised in the Borders, however senior management including the Service Group Manager and Chief Social Work Officer have played an active role in contributing to solution focused discussions Nationally. The introduction of MAPPS looks promising. Amended security system functions allowing appropriate access out with the current VISOR locked secure premises; is welcome. However, vetting level issues for social work staff accessing the system remain, and present as the primary obstacle to moving forward. This issue will undoubtedly prolong discussions to achieve a resolution Nationally.

Unpaid Work Service:

As we entered the reporting year the UPW service was experiencing staffing and delivery issues. Work undertaken throughout the year including a file review, and amendments made to the recording and team sheet systems, in addition to a tightening up of the adherence to CPO: UPW delivery guidance, has placed the service in a positive position with some exciting project opportunities ahead.

Christmas Markets:

November and December 2022 saw the UPW service work on the production of Christmas themed decorations and items for sale at 2 local Christmas markets in Galashiels and Kelso. The events were used to promote the UPW service, and a range of community project work delivered across the Borders. Profits from the sale of decorations were shared between 3 charities selected by service users, the Lavender Touch, Cash for Kids and Heads Together. Carly Mackenzie, Charity Manager for Cash for Kids, said: *“A huge thank you the Scottish Borders Justice Service for their support. In today’s current climate it’s heart breaking to think that up to 20 percent of children in the Borders live in poverty; that’s one in five potentially living without the most basic essentials. Support like this allows us to continue doing what we can to make sure these children have access to essentials such as food, clothes and toiletries.”*

Elected Members Presentation:

A presentation to Elected Members providing an overview of Community Payback Order: Unpaid Work Requirement was very well received. Aimed at increasing knowledge of what a CPO; UPW is in addition to enhancing an understanding of how elected members can promote, to their constituent communities, the benefits of restorative work. Contact information was shared and a suggested request for contact post cards to be produced, is being taken forward. The event has gone onto generate several project work enquiries.

Caledonian Men’s Service:

It is 2 years since delivery of the Caledonian Programme was brought in-house and 1 year since delivery of the group-work programme was implemented. Delivered on a rolling programme, the service has consistently maintained numbers to ensure meaningful delivery and learning experiences for participants. All men convicted of a domestic abuse offence are considered for assessment. Group numbers are managed flexibly, as the service seeks to avoid the build-up of a “waiting list” and delay for those subject to the programme. Staff numbers are small, 2 x 17.5-hour group-workers, result in the need for delivery support from trained Social Workers and the Team Leader, to facilitate group delivery resulting from annual leave and any unexpected staff absence. This can at times, be challenging.

The decision to bring the programme in-house has proven to be successful, as while there have been a small number of breaches due to non-compliance, the original barriers: lack of public transport to and from Edinburgh and lack of flexibility in programme availability to accommodate those with employment and other inflexible responsibilities, have successfully been overcome. It is notable that no men have been breached while at the group work stage, with 12 men made subject to a Caledonian Programme Requirement during 22/23. Consideration of a daytime programme found that given the majority of men attending the programme were in employment, numbers available during the day to attend were low. This situation will be monitored on an ongoing basis and responded to as required.

At the close of the reporting period, a total of 55 survivors of domestic abuse had been offered support from the Caledonian Women’s service. 4 corresponded with out with the Court route. Support offered ranged from personal safety planning to emotional support-signposting and assisting women to increase their own and their children’s safety. The Children’s service worker is working with children indirectly, through fathering classes and support to mothers, due to a lack of child referrals. This is an area of work that will be promoted in the coming year.

Challenges and improvements

There are a number of challenges and improvements that are present within the reporting year. These range from financial pressures and increased demand to specific areas of

practice improvement to ensure that we remain on a trajectory of improved outcomes. The identification of these have been part of our ongoing commitment to self-evaluation and have been aided by the findings of the two joint inspection processes that took place during the reporting year. Most pleasing was that areas for improvement from the inspection processes had already been identified by the services and were already being actioned at the time of the inspections.

Finance:

It goes without saying that financial resources are incredibly challenging at the moment with significant increases in demand and reducing resource to address this. The pressure on services to operate within a smaller financial envelope is difficult and has necessitated a clear focus on efficiency across the delivery landscape.

The Social Work Pathfinder:

The four Social Work pathfinder workstreams of:

1. The Council Information Hub
2. Process design and simplification / process re-engineering
3. Enterprise Mobility
4. Data governance, maturity and culture

are progressing well.

Council Information Hub (CIH):

Within the Council Information Hub (CIH) work stream, development of the 15 analytics dashboards is progressing well. Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders from Social Work and beyond has been critical in supporting this work to move forward. This will provide accurate information about the services we deliver, giving up to date data on performance, trends and need across the services.

The dashboards will be rolled out to social work managers by at the end of the project. To support this, there are currently discussions underway to finalise the training approach to ensure we maximise the potential of this.

Process design and simplification /Process Reengineering:

- Adult Assessment Form - The new form has been agreed with the service and has therefore been built and tested in Mosaic.
- Adult Review Form – The new form has been agreed with the service allowing the build to shortly commence.
- Adult Support Plan Form – Work in developing this new form continues with service input.
- Demonstrations from Social Work on the following three forms has occurred, thereby allowing the current processes to be drawn up and approved by the service:
 - Child Assessment
 - Child and Young Peoples Protection Plan
 - Child Review

Enterprise Mobility:

The Enterprise Mobility workstream is currently progressing with background work, which is ongoing to build the test environment which will allow test data to flow between the Total Mobile forms and Mosaic. Once forms have been agreed and tested by the Business Process redesign workstream, these will then be passed to the supplier to allow them to build the forms. At this stage we have reached an agreement for the mobile devices, and this will see all staff whose work is in scope for the pathfinder receive the devices to enable them to fully utilise the changes.

Data governance, maturity and culture:

As part of the pathfinder, we are ensuring that with the changes that are being implemented, we review our arrangements for data governance, maturity and culture.

The pathfinder will bring significant benefits to the way in which Social Work services operate locally. From the streamlined processes, improved reportable data, improved dashboards detailing performance and activity, access to fit for purpose digital technology for front line staff and improving our governance and use of data, this pathfinder will deliver a new way of working in Scottish Borders. A significant aspect of this will be to free up front line practitioners to carry out the work they are trained to do i.e., engage with people by building meaningful relationships and working co-productively to improve outcomes.

An important aspect of the pathfinder has been the direct involvement of the service as part of the wider team developing the changes. It is apparent that digital technology tools introduced during the pandemic have continued to be embraced by many staff and expanded by the Council. We recognise that whilst this is welcome and something that we are embracing, there is a fine balance to be maintained, ensuring these tools assist staff with the delivery of social work services, without unintentionally weakening the social work role and the professional skills required by those employed across services to communicate and engage with those who present as requiring social work support.

Chronologies:

One common area for improvement which was identified by our own self-evaluation methods but also recommended in both our ASP and Children at risk inspections was to improve our use and quality of chronologies. A multi-agency working group is being set up to look at chronologies within Scottish Borders Council but also across the multi-agency landscape. There is national recognition that this is an area most partnership areas struggle to get completely right and so in Borders we are looking at an innovative approach to improvement in this area of practice and undertaking this work in the context of analytical writing and professional curiosity.

Advocacy:

The issue of advocacy has been challenging in the Borders for a number of years. Work was already underway to scope an advocacy service to meet the ongoing need of our communities. This has been supported by the feedback from the two inspection processes that identified a need for a more holistic advocacy provision. Since this feedback, a business case for an enhanced advocacy provision has been presented to strategic planning forums to take forward the provision of this vital service.

Staffing & Recruitment:

Staff recruitment and retention issues have persisted throughout the year and there have been challenges across the service landscape. Because of some of the challenges we have had to take an innovative approach to recruitment, for example having been unable to recruit to a protected characteristics female UPW supervisor post, creative thinking and covid recovery funding has facilitated the commissioning of a 1-year bespoke post to work with women; to deliver UPW in our Women's Hub therapeutic and wellbeing garden. More detail of workforce issues is contained later in this paper.

Caledonian Women's and Children's Service:

Funding for delivery of this element of service sits out with Section 27 grant and within the Equalities Grant Fund. There has been no year-on-year uplift in this grant and as such it is recognised that this will weaken future delivery of service, negatively impacting on Public Protection, as monies from other available budget streams are redirected to support delivery.

In addition, the annual allocation of this funding presents challenges in the services ability to plan long term delivery and intervention.

Duty of Candour:

All Health and Social Care Services in Scotland have a duty of candour. This is a legal requirement which means that when unintended or unexpected events happen, that result in death or harm as defined in the Act, the people affected understand what has happened, receive an apology, and that organisations learn how to improve for the future. There have been no Duty of Candour incidents in the reporting year for Scottish Borders Council.

Resources

There are significant financial / budgetary / resource challenges across all services. It has been well documented at earlier points in this paper that with the rising level of need being seen in our communities, coupled with the aftereffects of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and challenges in recruitment / retention, have all led to a very challenging landscape for service delivery.

This has led to a variety of different financial models and approaches being considered as well as modifying our service delivery to meet need as effectively as possible. A significant factor for Scottish Borders in the future will be the delivery and realisation of our digital transformation and how this can create capacity as well as improve efficiency in the way that we deliver services.

It is difficult at this point to identify the scale of any efficiency savings on the back of the digital transformation, simply because we have not yet moved to full implementation.

Children and Families Social Work:

In particular, it is noted that the higher level of the need for out of authority care placements for children and young people is putting a significant pressure on the whole organisation's financial stability. Having reached out to various colleagues across Scotland, this is not a phenomenon that is just being experienced in Scottish Borders. Indeed having researched this pressure, it is apparent that this is a wider United Kingdom issue being experienced throughout the country.

In relation to children and families social work, a significant gap that has been identified is in relation to early and effective intervention. To address this the Children and Young People's Planning Partnership (CYPPP) are looking to develop an innovative early intervention approach to address this need by providing resource in the communities where the need is. It is recognised that this approach needs to address need at as early a point as possible which will help promote improved outcomes, as well as being financially appropriate to meet need.

The biggest concern that is present at the moment is how do we continue to deliver quality services when the resource available does not meet the need to shift the balance of care. We welcome the resource that has been freed up in relation to delivering The Promise at a local level and that this will be taken forward in a true multi agency partnership manner via the CYPPP. However, we recognise this resource is temporary in nature and when looked at in the context of the wider multi agency landscape, is unlikely to fundamentally address the need for earlier intervention without the wider partnership being able to free up resource from existing commitments. In the context of statutory services this is an incredibly challenging proposition when dealing with existing acute level need relating to people in our communities.

Across the service landscape, there have been significant levels of risk analysis undertaken to ensure that we are able to look at any mitigation that can be put in place to reduce risk. This includes working across the corporate landscape and across the wider multi-agency partnership.

Adult Social Work:

Savings from Community Care Reviewing Team Reviews:

In the reporting year 530 community reviews were carried out by the Community Care Reviewing Team, which have included both community reviews and initial hospital discharge reviews. For the financial period of 2022 – 2023 the team secured efficiencies of £385,360 thus releasing resources back into the service to be used by those having been assessed as requiring a resource funded by a Social Work budget.

Commissioning:

With the appointment of a Chief Officer for Commissioning within the Council, we are also undertaking a review of all commissioned services to identify efficiencies and ensuring best value for the organisation and the public pound.

Learning Disability Service (LDS):

The LDS commissions *circa* 300 packages of support. In 2022-23 the service (Social Work) budget was *circa* £21,000,000. The service is on an ongoing journey of improvement and with further ongoing focus, the service will be able to continue to manage the financial risk, provide an enabling approach, and improving outcomes.

Expenditure and volume of hours provided have been positively impacted by a range of measures implemented by the service during the last 2 years. From 2021 to 2023 the service has made recurring efficiencies. These measures are now built into the routine management processes in place going forward. However, although the net downward trend in the above areas of service is positive, it is still anticipated that financial pressures in 2023-24 will be reported throughout the year.

One example of how resources are being managed within the LDS is the development of the Resource Panel Process. The Resource Panel is in place to ensure consistency in allocating resources in line with local eligibility criteria. Social Work staff carry out assessments, identifying outcomes and needs, they calculate a budget to meet these outcomes and needs, having first considered non-cost options to meet outcomes, such as family and community support. Findings from the assessment are presented to the Resource Panel for a decision to allocate a budget. Improvements to the Resource Panel process include the development of clear Standard Operating Procedures and a revised checklist for staff to support their submission and presentation to panel.

A further example of an improvement project is the Positive Risk-Taking Panel. This has been developed to consider positive risk taking for individuals where it is believed that significant levels of 1:1 and 2:1 support are required to manage risk. An initial pilot involving 2 service users has resulted in greater levels of independence for both individuals an annual cost avoidance of approximately £63,655.

Community Mental Health:

The service has delivered services within the allocated budget 22/23. Robust assessment, care management and governance arrangements are in place with the further development of the Mental Health Resource Panel, incorporating all the improvements developed through the LD services financial efficiencies work. Resource panels are chaired by the General manager with administrative support and outcomes recorded for each individual on Mosaic.

There are some financial pressures within the budgets for the provision of care although much of this has been addressed as a result of the review process, with a number of cases being identified as incorrectly being charged to the mental health budget. We have also significantly reduced a number of high-cost care packages by robust application of the eligibility criteria within local guidance.

We have experienced some challenges around the application of our charging policy for our clients with one commissioned service. As a result, we are currently reviewing that service and the application of the charging policy. The current impact is that some clients are declining a service that has the potential to maintain their wellbeing and prevent hospital admission due to concerns over charges. At present where the resource panel believes the clients decision to decline the service is not in their interest, we are making application to waive the charges as in these circumstances the longer-term cost implications are significantly higher.

We are reviewing the commissioned services within MH at present part of which includes value for money, affordability and if services could be provided in another way. This process will inform financial spend moving forward. Previous reviews of commissioned services has resulted in disinvestment and reinvestment in improved models of support such as the introduction of the Local Area Coordinator Service (LACS). We have also looked at ending contracts where duplication occurs and replacing provision through recommissioning with alternatives that provide improved outcomes i.e. new services such as the Recovery college, DBI and the expansion of the Mental Health Supported Living Service.

Justice:

Funding Section 27:

The static Section 27 grant funding has inevitably resulted in real terms cut in funding across the justice service. It is intimated that there may not be an increase in the grant through to fiscal year 2026. The impact of the current cost of living crisis and 22/23 pay settlement, have placed substantial pressure across all service delivery.

The allocation of Pandemic Recovery and Transformation Work grant funding has been welcomed and utilised to support the recovery of service provision, in particular the employment of temporary staff, ongoing commissioning of 3rd sector and the provision of wellbeing opportunities for service users. In addition to the development of the Bail Supervision Service. Much of which would not have been possible from the allocated Section 27 grant funding alone. The financial challenges faced by the service are anticipated to increase, as we move into 23/24.

Third Sector

Families Outside:

During the year the service reinitiated links with Families Outside by assisting in the promotion of their service within the two Sheriff Courts and across the 3 Justice Service bases. The Families Outside Borders representative attend a team meeting and provided publicity literature which is now embedded within the Justice Service web page.

Works+

Commissioned local third sector organisation, Works+ continue to provide enhanced employability and training opportunities to justice service users. The service dovetails with supports offered by the Community Learning Support Service. In the reporting year **63** people were referred into the service, with **34** engaging following the initial interview. **23** failed to attend for interview despite repeated invitations. 17 people have achieved their

identified goal with 12 gaining employment: 3 engaging in volunteering and 2 taking up college places. The Works+ contract has been extended for another 12 months.

Service user quote: 'I really liked coming to see the ladies at the Focus Centre they helped me a lot with my mental health, just having someone to talk too was good. They also got me a volunteering role at Floors Castle in Kelso which I am really, really enjoying as it gets me out the house and has focused me on learning other things and being outdoors and around new people is a big help with my mental health, so thank you both I am really happy.'

Adult Learning Support:

The justice service has extended its Delivery Agreement with Community Learning and Development Support Services for a further 2 years, in addition to increasing service delivery hours from 4 to 7 per week. Established in 2021, the service delivers bespoke learning opportunities to a small number of service users, aged 18 years and above, to access sustained engagement in learning and achieve self-identified goals through an Individual Learning Plan, gaining SQA accreditation and progressing to other learning opportunities. In the reporting year 6 out of the 7 people referred, engaged with a further 2 continuing their learning from last year. Learners report that they feel supported to gain skills that match their interests and build confidence to achieve.

An SQA evaluation in March 2022 highlighted, "Lesley Anne's work with a disengaged individual represents an exemplary model of engagement strategies in action. Her ability to create a positive learning experience, by personalising the interaction and material and using interactive delivery methods, had a significant impact on the individuals' level of engagement and attitude towards learning." Martin Timoney, Curriculum and Quality Leader, Essential Skills and Centre of Meta Performance, West College Scotland

Workforce

A key element of supporting the Social Work workforce has been the continuation of the fortnightly CSWO Senior Leadership Team meetings. This forum was initially established as a weekly meeting during Covid, however we have continued this to ensure that there is a strong emphasis of senior leaders across Social Work to come together to share information, provide mutual support, identify areas where we can work across services to improve outcomes etc.

Strategic people and succession planning processes were reviewed and relaunched in Scottish Borders Council (SBC), moving to an online process in Summer/Autumn 2022. Social work services have strategic people plans in place and succession plans continue to be developed to ensure our social work services are resilient and fit for the future as well as having the right people, in the right place, at the right time. All People and succession plans have strategic ties to the Council and Financial Plan with succession plans also being informed by the training matrix and appraisal/supervision processes.

Recruiting qualified social workers continues to be challenging, however we are seeing the benefits of the Social Worker traineeship scheme with staffing levels for social workers improving. Recruitment and retention of Occupational Therapists (OTs) is also challenging, and we are looking at the potential of replicating the success of our trainee social worker scheme and creating a career pathway for OTs.

In terms of supporting the workplace we have reviewed and continued to develop our mentally healthy workplace policies advising on the symptoms of stress; proactive measures that individuals can take to help reduce stress as well as advice and support for line managers. We have recently re-launched our employee assistance programme with 'vivup' to provide support to members of staff with any mental, physical, financial or personal issues. This includes ad-hoc and counselling support. In addition, we have launched the Aviva digicare+ workplace app for members of staff, this gives staff access to a digital GP; mental health consultations; nutritional consultations; health checks and second medical opinions.

SBC also provide a number of well-being and resilience-based resources, including e-learning and online workshops, such as developing personal resilience; managing your mental health while working from home; mental health awareness: training for line managers.

SBC have continued to seek the views and opinions of the whole workforce with the employee survey, crucially developing action plans on the back of staff feedback. Senior Management online meetings / briefings are taking place to ensure that there is improved communication across the organisation.

Staffing and retention:

There has been a mixed picture of staff recruitment and retention across adult social work services.

Some teams have had a reduced Occupational Therapy service and other teams have found it difficult to recruit to social worker roles. Non-registered posts such as paraprofessionals, Community Care Assessors and OT assistants have had much more success. This has impacted on waiting times for assessment. Where possible teams have assisted each other and the refresh of Community Led Support and continued roll out of the 'What Matters' hubs has helped optimise turnover of work.

In order to ensure that Adult Support & Protection work remains a key priority for the department, a back-up rota for 'Council Officers' approved under the Act, has been in place for some time should any team be unable to provide a Council Officer for investigation. The improvements made around Council Officer training, accreditation and re-accreditation have assisted the availability and skill set of those staff.

Scottish Government workforce well-being fund:

In the reporting year Scottish Borders successfully applied for Scottish Government workforce well-being funding with £7,500 being awarded. A staff survey was conducted with results supporting that staff were interested in engaging in a diverse range of activities. To make the most of the money a voucher scheme was set up with staff getting to choose two activities to engage in. Based on survey results 100 massage sessions were offered, 10 e-bike vouchers for half a day's peddling, 6 yoga classes held over 3 sessions, 50 Indian cookery demonstrations with a meal at the end, 3 stained glass classes held over 3 days, 54 escape room experiences, and 34 paddleboarding and kayaking sessions. In total 257 well-being sessions were provided over the course of 3 months.

Feedback from staff indicated that they had enjoyed the activities immensely with an example of direct quotes as below:

"I went for a massage in Galashiels which was lovely and very much appreciated! Nice to be reminded how important and beneficial it is to have some self-care time." (RG)

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to have a go at Yoga and I am going to continue with this activity. Thank you." (MS)

"I had a facial last week. This is the first facial I have had in years, and it was absolutely brilliant. What a treat to be given this through work. Some of the Peebles team used paddleboard vouchers and have some great photos from a superb afternoon. Great team bonding experience." (KH)

"I made use of the vouchers, as did some of my colleagues. Massage and kayaking at St Mary's loch. Thoroughly enjoyed both of them and felt very fortunate to have been given these lovely experiences/opportunities for self-care by the council. It did make you feel like a valued member of staff. Just wanted to say thank you." (KD)

The Learning Disability Service prioritise 4 days each year for the whole integrated service to come together for development opportunities. Two days are committed to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and two days are committed to Service Development. These days are organised, run and facilitated by team members. The last CPD themes were on Trauma Informed Practice and Wellbeing; the last two Service Development Days focussed on team roles and service improvement regarding team meetings.

The Community Mental Health Team have had a number of development sessions and continue to focus on developing as a team as well as generating a consistency in approach not only internally but with our colleagues in localities. They have been working on an operational document which brings together how they integrate within the wider mental health service and where they fit within the wider social work / care landscape. The development of this document has enabled them to build clarity in their role and function and as they implement this, they will be working collaboratively to ensure they are supported both professionally and personally with some of the challenges with a move towards being a more statutory orientated service. Of significance is the desire to be able to share their expertise in mental health with their locality-based colleagues.

We have appointed to an assistant team leader post in the last year to ensure we have some resilience within the service in the absence of the team leader, in addition we have been awarded additional funding of 3 hours from NHS for the appointment of a social worker to undertake specialist services in respect of peri-natal mental health, this post is filled.

Within the team we have developed the team as a whole now having 5 Council Officers within the service, with one pending in addition to 3 Mental Health Officer qualified members of the team. One of the team is about to undertake a 6-month secondment to the MHO team to further develop their skills and develop closer working relationships between the team and the MHO Team.

The team recently hosted the Chief Social Work Officer and General Manager, both attending and providing information on strategic development of the services as a whole.

Training, learning and development

Training and Development Priorities:

1. Overview of legislation, Outcomes/values/principles etc – For new staff and Care Managers
2. Good conversations – Train the trainer approach for this with the National Development Team for inclusion (NDTi) as part of Community Led Support.
3. Risk management and risk assessment – a priority for across the Adult social work services
4. Chronology and case recording –working group set-up to look at chronologies/analytical writing/professional curiosity and training needs will emerge from this group. This will apply across adult and child services.
5. SDS – Training is in place from 'In-Control'
6. PAMS – Changes to the platform and training due to closure of sole provider. Required as essential training for C&FSW – ongoing annual program.

Other priorities would be.

1. Trauma informed Practice – A tiered approach needed– more detailed for SW staff given the levels of trauma they support people with.
2. Elm's training and single handed moving and handling training for OTs
3. AWI training
4. Chairing of case conferences for CP/ASP and AWI –aimed at Team Leaders, CPRO's and APO's to do common training on managing meetings and Chairing conferences.
5. Mosaic related training –it is expected that we create superusers across Social Work to deal with both the technical training and the professional practice in relation to Mosaic, particularly given the changes in the Pathfinder.

Multi-agency Trauma Training:

Scottish Borders Council received funding to develop a more trauma aware workforce. To this end we have engaged with NHS and 3rd sector colleagues to create an offer of a wider joined-up training programme which will be available to all services and agencies in Scottish Borders. The ambition being to create a trauma informed region. We have been privileged to be joined on this process by a number of people with lived experience, ensuring that as we progress with this ambition, we do so with a clear focus on how this will impact and improve outcomes for those who have experienced trauma.

E-learning completions by SW staff:

Year	No of SW Users	Total Completions
Apr 2022 – Mar 2023	354	6835

Central Training Budget 2022/2023:

Social Work & Practice £158,046.09

SW Traineeship Scheme spend £227,331.51

The training and development budget is under pressure as new initiatives and/or strategies are requested to be implemented by government and registration organisations in addition to already prescribed planned training and budget allocation. Changes to qualification requirements are another aspect of the demand on these resources.

Adult Social Work:

Over the last reporting year, we have been working closely with our Corporate training and development team to produce a matrix of learning needs and agree priorities for staff. This is in place and ready for progressing now that training and development staff for Social Work & Practice have been permanently recruited to the corporate training team.

As well as continuing to support staff to undertake a range of formal funded training through Universities and colleges courses, there will be a focus on internal training around key care management and statutory processes, including Self-directed support, risk assessment and management, effective conversations to name a few.

Public Protection:

The Public Protection Committee Joint Learning & Development Framework is now fully embedded with core Child Protection and Adult Support and Protection training being delivered throughout the year. This is multi-agency training that is delivered by multi-agency partners to Scottish Borders workforce across the third sectors, Police Scotland, NHS Borders, Scottish Fire Service and Scottish Borders Council.

- Introduction to Public Protection (PP2)
- Thinking About Risk (PP3)
- Adult Support & Protection Contributing to the Process (ASP3),
- Child Protection Contributing to the Process (CP3),
- Council Officer Training (ASP4)
- Council Officer Refresher (ASP4)
- Fire Risk Recognition Training (PP1)
- Neglect Toolkit ((CP3),
- Train the Trainer (Social Care Workforce)

A trial period of joining up with Midlothian and East Lothian to train Council Officers was an excellent exercise to undertake and provided good cross authority sharing, however following analysis, a decision was taken for the training of Council Officers to come back in house. This was mainly due to the difference in how the workforces are established across the three local authorities and provides more flexibility to Scottish Borders to be able to train Council Officers at times that suits the Locality Teams, which means we can be more needs led. We have also launched the new Council Officer Accreditation and Re-accreditation learning plans. Once the relevant Council Officer training has been completed the Council Officer will then continue their learning throughout their daily work, thereby ensure ongoing learning and improved knowledge in relation to Adult Support & Protection. The reasons behind this is to make sure that staff undertaking this role feel supported whilst carrying out

complex work and so Adults and their families / carers receive the best support at such a critical time in their lives.

Quote from one Council Officer –

‘Good to go over the ASP Act and updated procedures and processes. I appreciated the space to think about how they underpin the day-to-day ASP work for all of us. I personally valued the refresher on the distinction between the ASP Act, AWI and MHCT Act. I welcome the annual refresher; it is good to keep it fresh in my mind’.

As part of our aspirations for continuous learning we developed and recruited a specific Adult Protection officer role focusing on supporting staff with their learning and also quality assuring the skill set of staff working in ASP. This officer set up monthly small group based reflective practice sessions, offering Council Officer’s protected time for peer discussion on topics such as complex case work, legal and ethical dilemmas and balancing of rights.

Quote from one Council officer – ‘

‘I got a lot out of the reflective practice. It is like peer-to-peer supervision, with oversight - so it doesn’t head off on a tangent in one particular direction and remains informative and relevant to all our work’.

A small working group, which includes SBC and NHS, and public protection staff, has been formed to ensure the recommendations reached at the training event are put into practice, this will support our ASP and wider Improvement planning.

Capacity training:

Fifty-eight staff from the Health and Social Care Partnership, including staff from public protection services, attended a workshop in May to discuss the development of a Capacity Pathway. This followed work undertaken to review and update the partnership’s existing Capacity Assessment Tool (CAT).

The aim of the workshop was to develop a Capacity Pathway across NHS and SBC and to jointly agree a flowchart and improved system of progressing Capacity-related situations in hospital, at home and in situations which require intervention under formal Adult Support & Protection.

A small working group, which includes SBC and NHS, and public protection staff, has been formed to ensure the recommendations reached at the training event are put into practice, this will support our ASP and wider Improvement planning.

Looking ahead

The obvious barrier to mention at this stage will be the significant resource challenges across all services. Most acutely in the Children and Families Social Work service and as we approach winter, for the wider Social Care & Health perspective.

There are however some really exciting developments which will be progressing in the coming year:

Progress will be made on the improvement plans following the two joint inspection processes during the last reporting year.

The Digital Pathfinder will be activating the use of dashboards, mobilisation and data leading to Autonomous working for frontline staff. This coupled with a review of the scheme of delegation to foster an environment of empowerment to the wider workforce will be critical going forward. It is also of note that given the level of investment from Scottish Borders Council, we will need to realise efficiencies as a result of this.

We will progress on the journey of the Social Work traineeship to ensure that we continue to offer a career trajectory for people to become qualified Social Workers. This will hopefully go a significant part of the way to ensure that Scottish Borders has the ability to recruit Social Workers in the short and medium term. We will also be focussing on the recruitment of Occupational Therapists and consider a possible inhouse trainee scheme in partnership with Sunderland University. This is about ensuring that our services have the ability to be able to meet the needs of our communities going forward and contributes to our desire to progress reablement.

Due to the increasing demand for services locally, the ongoing development and expansion of a Community Led Support approach is of vital significance. By utilising the roll out of What Matters Hub's, the advice, guidance and assistance being available for communities, in communities is hugely important.

We will be building on our use of a more systematic self-evaluation process across Adult Social Work to produce a self-evaluation and quality assurance framework that will be applied across the whole service.

We are looking to progress work on the transition for children / young people to adult services. This not only pertains to formal transition processes (for example Children Affected by Disability to Adult Learning Disability Service) but also young people who find themselves sitting between child and adult services because of their age. There are some exciting ideas about how we can make this a more joined up process for these young people and very much adopting a more holistic approach to meeting need.

The work of the CYPPP will continue at pace, with the four designated network groups progressing their workplans to improve outcomes for all children, young people and families in Scottish Borders. In particular, the work on engaging with people with lived experience to ensure that their voice is not only heard, but that they have a seat at the table when determining how services are designed to meet local need. Added to this is the re-commissioning of services to be more aligned to the newly refreshed strategic Children and Young Peoples Plan, ensuring that we continue in our progress to deliver 'The Promise' locally.

Work will progress on the development of an Advocacy service to ensure that we provide dependable support to children and young people in Scottish Borders.

We will develop a strategy for increasing early and effective intervention in our communities to address need as early as possible.

We will be continuing to apply a significant level of scrutiny to out of authority placements for children and young people by involving wider Council services to see what other mitigations we can put in place to reduce this need.

Specific to C&FSW:

- We are exploring (at pace) alternative building options to increase local capacity e.g. working with partners to identify an interim provision for complex needs in lieu of the Tweedbank development
- Exploring additional children's services provision locally
- Exploring a model for increased capacity to support Kinship & Foster Carers
- Exploring the expansion of FGDM and Abuse and Trauma recovery work
- Reviewing if we can do more to recruit foster carers.

Conclusion:

In conclusion to this year's annual report, as the Chief Social Work Officer I am once again privileged to lead the Social Work services in Scottish Borders. This has been a particularly challenging year with significantly increasing and changing need across the service landscape. We are seeing significantly more complex presentations and stress within family settings, leading to additional pressure in our communities.

I am mindful that during this reporting year, we have had two separate joint inspection processes from external bodies. Both of these inspection processes have validated the amazing work that our staff do on behalf of the organisation with the most vulnerable people in our communities. By working in partnership, we are doing everything we can to make Scottish Borders a great place to be.

I am confident that we remain reasonably well placed to keep improving our services but similarly recognise that it is becoming more and more challenging because of the extent of need and the financial position. There is no doubt that the coming years will continue to be challenging for everyone, but by engaging in meaningful discussion with staff, people who use our services, their families and carers, and our communities, we will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that we achieve the best possible outcomes for all.

I would finally like to convey my sincere thanks to each and every member of staff for the amazing work they do, often under very difficult and challenging circumstances. All staff should be proud of the work they do in making a difference to the people and communities we serve.