

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S



CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024





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CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

INTRODUCTION

I have pleasure in presenting the Scottish Borders Chief Social Work Officer's Annual report for 2023/24.

The reporting year has seen some significant change, with Stuart Easingwood, the previous Chief Social Work Officer, leaving the Council in October 2023. Since this time, I have been undertaking the role on a temporary basis as Acting Chief Social Work Officer.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Stuart for his support and guidance over many years as my Line Manager and also for his visible leadership and clear direction. Stuart's final act before his departure was to present the previous year's Chief Social Work Officer's Annual report, and his role as a powerful and passionate advocate of the value of social work was evident for all to see.


Social work services continue to face pressures, many of which stem from wider social, economic, and political factors. Over the last year there have been ongoing pressures in the Borders, including an ageing population, increasing demand for services, rising complexity of needs across the population, escalation of social care costs, workforce shortages, developments on policy and legislation, the continuing effects of the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis which disproportionately impacts the most disadvantaged individuals in our communities.

My report highlights that despite the significant challenges being faced, we continue to deliver high quality services through the dedication and hard work undertaken by our social work and social care workforce who demonstrate tremendous commitment to support and protect our citizens.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the essential contribution made by Gwyneth Lennox, Head of Service, Adult Social Work, in supporting me in this role, undertaking a wide range of delegated functions as well as offering wise counsel and advice. Her support has been invaluable.

Further, I would like to thank the great many colleagues from other departments, partner agencies and elected members for their support, and the adaptations that have been made to accommodate the on-going effects of COVID on my well-being; the level of compassion shown is truly appreciated.

I would also like to thank the wide range of staff across social work for their continued dedication and commitment to supporting people who access social work services; their daily role is sometimes under-appreciated or not fully understood, and I feel it is important to note the significant contribution they make. Whilst social work can at times be portrayed negatively, there are daily good news stories, and these are well represented in the local press



as well as internal communication channels. I encourage staff to share good news and create an understanding of how much “wee things” can make a huge difference in people’s lives.

Finally, I also want to note and recognise the massive contribution of carers, at times at significant personal challenge, and communities across the Borders who continue to keep the needs of others in their hearts.

John Fyfe
Acting Chief Social Work Officer

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND STATUTORY FUNCTIONS

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 requires local authorities to appoint a single Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO), a role which was established to ensure the provision of appropriate professional advice in the discharge of a local authority's statutory functions.

As a matter of good practice, it is expected that the CSWO will undertake the role across the full range of a local authority's social work functions to provide a focus for professional leadership and governance in regard to these functions.

The CSWO should assist local authorities and their partners in understanding the complexities and cross-cutting nature of social work service delivery - including in relation to issues such as corporate parenting, child protection, adult protection and the management of high-risk offenders - and the key role social work plays in contributing to the achievement of a wide range of national and local outcomes. The CSWO also has a contribution to make in supporting overall performance improvement and management of corporate risk.


The CSWO must produce and publish a summary annual report for local authorities and IJBs on the functions of the CSWO role and delivery of the local authority's social work services functions, and this report discharges this duty.

Scottish Borders Social Work services have clear governance arrangements in place. The CSWO has direct access to the Council Management Team, Elected Members, the Chief Executive, and senior managers of other Council services.

During the reporting period, the governance of Social Work Services was undertaken through two separate but interconnected structures. Children and Families Social Work and Justice Social Work 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 in the functions delegated to the Integration Joint Board. The CSWO is also a member of HSCP Joint Executive Team and other senior leadership forums between NHS Borders and Scottish Borders Council, further strengthening the integration of services. As noted earlier, the head of Adult Social Work has been integral in supporting these arrangements, attending meetings and liaising with the Acting Chief Social Work Officer to ensure awareness of relevant matters.



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 this continues to be a crucial element of our ongoing improvement.

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. The CSWO Senior Leadership Team comprises a range of senior social work managers and focuses on a range of key areas, including Social Work Legislation, Policy and Practice Developments; National and Local Priorities, Developments and Initiatives; Professional Standards and SSSC Registration; Quality Assurance and Improvement; Staffing, Staff Development, Learning and Good Practice.

There are a small number of areas of decision-making where legislation confers functions directly on the CSWO by name, most relate to the curtailment of individual freedom and the protection of both individuals and the public.

Such decisions must be made either by the CSWO or by a professionally qualified social worker, at an appropriate level of seniority, to whom the responsibility has been formally delegated and set out within local authority arrangements.

Even where responsibility has been delegated, the CSWO retains overall responsibility for ensuring quality and oversight of the decisions.

These areas include:

- deciding whether to implement a secure accommodation authorisation in relation to a child (with the consent of a head of the secure accommodation), reviewing such placements and removing a child from secure accommodation if appropriate
- the transfer of a child subject to a Supervision Order in cases of urgent necessity
- acting as guardian to an adult with incapacity where the guardianship functions relate to the personal welfare of the adult and no other suitable individual has consented to be appointed
- decisions associated with the management of drug treatment and testing orders
- carrying out functions as the appropriate authority in relation to a breach of a supervised release order, or to appoint someone to carry out these functions

In addition, the 2014 guidance on Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) makes explicit reference to the role of the CSWO in responsibility for joint arrangements, in co-operation with other authorities.

Although mental health services are delegated to the Integration Joint Board, some of these functions require to be carried out by local authority officers with a social work qualification (Mental Health Officers); the CSWO is responsible for ensuring that these functions are discharged in accordance with professional standards and statutory requirements.

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.

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

SERVICE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION

In May 2023 we welcomed the publication of the findings of the Joint Inspection of Services for Children at Risk of Harm (CARH). The inspectors found important strengths that had significant positive impacts on children and young people's experiences. Views and experiences of almost 200 children and young people and over 100 parents and carers were gathered and provide a rich source of information to guide future improvements to our service provision. Strengths highlighted in the report include:

- Children, young people and families benefitted 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 benefitted 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.
- Children, young people and parents and carers were supported to meaningfully contribute to decisions about their lives by compassionate staff.
- Evidence of strong partnership working, and staff and leaders demonstrating commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

The report also highlighted areas for improvement which include:

- Ensuring that the voice of children and families routinely and meaningfully influence service planning and improvement.
- Strengthening the partnership's approach to improvement and change to ensure a shared and systematic approach to quality assurance and self-evaluation.

The CARH Inspection Improvement Plan is being progressed by the Public Protection Committee and the Children and Young People's Planning Partnership: this includes actions in respect of Chronologies; Enhancing the voice of children young people and families in influencing service planning and improvement; improving Mental Health and Wellbeing with timely access to services and support that is Trauma informed; Quality Assurance and Self-Evaluation.

The co-located (Social Work, Health, Police) Public Protection Unit had the pleasure of hosting a visit from the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, Maree Todd MSP in April 2023. The visit followed the Scottish Borders Adult Support and Protection Inspection report which found that the Partnership had major strengths in strategic leadership and Adult Support and Protection processes, which in turn facilitated positive experiences and outcomes for adults at risk of harm. The Minister was interested to hear about the work the partnership had done to merge Child Protection and Adult Support and Protection into a Public Protection partnership approach which, through multi-agency working and co-location, had enabled a positive culture between senior leaders and staff.

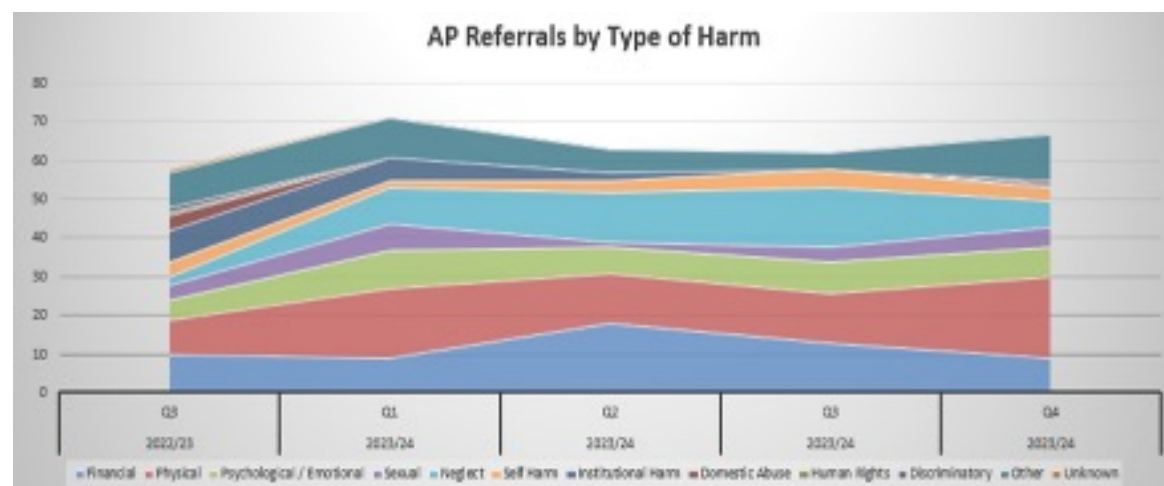
The ministerial visit included meeting with service users who had been involved in the Adult Support and Protection process, staff; senior managers; frontline managers and members of the Critical Services Oversight Group.

Throughout 2023 work continued on updating of the Scottish Border multi-agency Child Protection Procedures in line with the national guidance. Multi-agency user testing took place in January 2024 with positive feedback and the updated procedures were launched on 1st April 2024.

Child Protection

- The number of children on the child protection register on 31st March 2024 was 55, an increase of 20 from the previous year; the number of children on the register fluctuates over the year and is impacted by several factors including large sibling groups
- The average time children remained on the child protection register remained the same as the previous year, at 26 weeks
- The number of children registered during the year was 67, an increase of 6 on the previous year
- The number of children deregistered fell from 76 in the previous year to 47
- The % of children re-registered within 2 years fell from 20% in the previous year to 4%
- The number of child protection orders granted fell from 24 in the previous year to 21

Adult Protection



Most harm continues to take place in the adult's own home; there have been several referrals concerning adults in care homes and good early intervention processes with the Community Care Reviewing Team have maintained the low number of Large-Scale Investigations, with 2 commenced during the reporting period, consistent with previous years.

One area of strength has been the establishment of the Public Protection Learning Review Delivery Group in response to the new National Guidance for Learning Reviews for Child Protection and Adult Support and Protection.

The Learning Review Delivery Group enables a multi-agency approach to reflection and discussion as a way to learn and improve the services that are delivered. Learning Reviews form part of Scottish Borders quality assurance framework and provide staff with an opportunity to consider practice and promote service developments. Systems have been put in place to ensure that any learning is shared with individual staff and managers involved prior to any wider learning being shared. Two learning reviews were commenced within the reporting period.

Scottish Borders implemented the new Adult Support and Protection National Minimum Dataset and over the reporting year work has progressed to update the Public Protection Performance Report to incorporate both the Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection National Minimum Datasets. This will make the reporting more streamlined and assist with improved data analysis and self-evaluation going forward.

A multi-agency audit programme has been established to look at cases that have been in the Adult Support and Protection process for over 9 months or who have been re-referred more than 3 times over an 18-month period. The multi-agency audit consists of Police, Health, Social Work and the Adult Support and Protection Lead Officer. Findings from the audits are compiled into a report based on themes for the Adult Protection Delivery Group in addition to smaller action plans to pick up any immediate learning.

DUTY OF CANDOUR

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

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, there were no incidents in Scottish Borders where the duty of candour applied.


INTERNAL AUDIT

As part of the Scottish Borders Council (SBC) Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/24, the following internal control audits were undertaken during the reporting period:

- Looked After Children (Assess the adequacy of controls in place to ensure sound budgetary control and meet the demand on service delivery for Looked After Children.)
- Refugee and Asylum Seekers Funding (Review the controls in place to ensure efficient and effective use of Home Office Refugee Money and Asylum Distribution Money.)
- Residential Care Homes Administration Processes (Ensure the internal financial controls and business administrative processes are in place to ensure the efficient and effective use of resources in residential care homes.)

COMPLAINTS

Complaints form an important part of feedback in social work and are an important source of information to help understand and improve services, promote empowerment, and ensure accountability, and help ensure we understand our services from the perspective of people accessing them.



The total number of complaints closed during the reporting period across all social work services was 94, and of these 71 were resolved at level one, and 14 at level two, and 9 were invalid.

The outcomes of closed complaints were 19 Upheld, 19 Partially Upheld, 42 Not Upheld and 5 were resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant without making a determination of fault.

As a result of reviewing themes emerging from complaints, action was progressed to create more subject-focussed communication material for the public and improve our internal systems and processes.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORK

As part of the Children and Families Quality Assurance Framework a systematic approach to case file auditing has been established across the service.

During the reporting period, audits have included secure care, planning, kinship care, carer assessment and chronologies.

Particular strengths were identified in respect of:

- The quality of planning and support for young people in secure care was very positive.
- Very positive approach taken by staff to involving young people in key processes, including seeking and recording their views, in secure care cases.
- Child Plans all had SMART Plans which set out the desired outcomes for the child.
- In all cases it was assessed that there was an appropriate level of partnership working in implementing the child/young person's plan and, that the child/young person had regular contact with key staff and services.
- Good quality assessment of foster carers and adopters

Areas identified for improvement include:

- Recording of information in respect of kinship carers and a 7-minute briefing was delivered and issued to all staff.
- Chronologies are often of good quality but not up to date, and changes of case worker often affect the continuity and quality of Chronologies; Chronology training is now mandatory for all social workers and scrutiny of chronologies continues on an on-going basis.
- Carer Assessments are infrequently completed within agreed timescales; it was noted that delays may be out with service control including medical issues and carer availability, however there were a number of service matters such as limited resource or social workers leaving the service mid-way through assessments.

CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

The number of children or young people who have complex needs and an enduring disability and/or chronic health/life limiting condition moving into a residential provision has increased although not significantly. The cost of placements is often significantly higher than other residential provisions due to the complex needs including physical and medical need, and the long-term nature of conditions.

As a result of service development, Children and Families Social Work established a specific team to work with children with a disability, to ensure consistency in approach and robust responses, in recognition of the challenges encountered by families when caring for, which has a substantial impact on the child or young person and their family's wellbeing.

The development of the team was also in recognition of the need to reduce caseloads, to reduce those families on the waiting list and reduce the time between referral and assessment, supporting families to stay together longer; and assisting families prior to crisis intervention with a greater focus on earlier intervention.

Scottish Borders Council commission Aberlour Options to provide a range of services to our young people who are affected by disabilities, and they provide short break care which offers overnight care for young people either mid-week or weekends, as well as a Weekend Activity Club and Holiday Activity Club.

During the reporting period Aberlour trialled the offer of after school short break support, allowing young people to access a shorter session where they or their families may not want overnight support but would benefit from this time away from home. Additionally, the Weekend Activity Club was expanded to family centre venues which takes the activities into the community rather than requiring the young person to travel to Aberlour.

Aberlour have introduced a Picture Exchange Communication System to provide young people greater ability to communicate what they like and do not like for their time at Aberlour. These have been well received by the young people and their families.



FAMILY PLACEMENT TEAM

The primary issue in the Scottish Borders Fostering Service over 2023-24 has been recruitment and retention. As with other areas of Scotland, recruitment of new carers has been particularly difficult with a net loss of carers on an annual basis over the last 5 years. Approaches to recruitment have been reviewed and in the first part of 2024 there was an increase in both enquiries and applications to foster. There are currently 6 fostering households undertaking the assessment process which is a considerable improvement on previous years. The involvement of foster carers in recruitment and preparation groups and a local radio campaign have both helped in improving recruitment.

Practice developments within Fostering and the Family Placement Team included the review and updating of the Child's Matching / Risk Assessment form, review of Safer Caring Plans and their use, annual foster carer reviews, promoting the dignity of children and young people by reviewing use of language and reviewing policy and procedure.

Co-production with foster carers in service development has improved over the reporting period with the Family Placement Team operating a Service Development Meeting which includes both team staff and 4 foster carers. In 2023-24 the group covered a variety of areas of development including mileage payments, the Fostering Conference, a draft Framework for Short Breaks Carers (developed by foster carers), Friends and Family checks and a carer 'Buddy System'.

The Family Placement Team hosted the annual Fostering Conference in April 2023. The theme of the event was 'Happy Minds Happy Homes' and focused on The Promise, its implications for care experienced young people and foster carers and, how aspects of the Promise are being implemented and addressed in the Scottish Borders.



As in previous years the event ended with a short ceremony to mark Scottish Borders Council's appreciation for foster carers' years of service and dedication to the young people they look after. The event was well attended by foster carers, related professionals and young people and feedback about the event was positive.

Over the reporting period there has been the following activity in fostering:

- 2 new foster carers (1 household) were registered at the Fostering Panel
- 6 carers (3 households) were deregistered at the Fostering Panel
- 41 carers were reviewed (22 households) at the Fostering Panel

The numbers of children and young people in Kinship Care continued to increase in 2023-24 from 57 to 64. In Scottish Borders, all children in Kinship Care are looked after children and the case responsibility lies with the Long-Term Teams. As such, all children and young people are reviewed on a statutory basis and are eligible for Continuing Care and Aftercare. Support of Kinship Carers is the responsibility of the Family Placement Team. Each Kinship Carer has a named Supervising Social Worker and support is provided on a needs led basis. This is an area for development as currently there is not sufficient resource to provide kinship carers with the same level of supervision and support as that received by foster carers. All Kinship Carers are also able to access a Kinship Carer Support Group commissioned from Children 1st. Over 2023-24 a part-time temporary post was set up to provide specific, professional Welfare Benefits advice to kinship carers to maximise their income and ensure that both over and underpayments are avoided. This has been successful from both a carer and agency perspective and a proposal has been submitted to continue this post into the next reporting period.

Following a successful funding bid to the Corra Foundation, Scottish Borders Council Commissioned Children 1st to undertake a project to improve and re-establish contacts between care experienced brothers and sisters, focusing on practical solutions to improve family time that meets their needs and ensures that the relationships between brothers and sisters who do not live together can be supported and flourish. Work over 2023-24 focused on developing approaches to establishing, improving and maintaining relationships in sensitive and complex situations and, linking with other services, including kinship care, FGDM, early intervention services and key partner agencies, building on their expertise and promoting a model of trauma recovery focussed support in relation to brothers and sisters.

Though not always straightforward, supporting Brothers and Sisters relationships can give those with care experience some emotional and physical safety, continuity, and familiarity, and support positive child development, promote reparative care and provide lifelong benefits to care experienced children and young people. Scottish Borders Council and Children 1st have worked collaboratively to input into social work sibling assessments and joint reflective practice space for colleagues involved in complex sibling arrangements. The project has resulted in a significant shift in practice around considerations for placing Brothers and Sisters and their ongoing relationship when they are separated. Practice has included learning new ways to maintain connections for Brothers and Sisters who are separated through cards, letters, photos, gifts, facetime, etc. There is more thought around planning for reconnecting, making this manageable and paced and considering how this will be maintained and made sustainable by carers / family.

The project has been extended by a year and work is ongoing to actively address the factors and systems pressures which contribute to brothers and sisters' complex relationships.


TRANSITIONS

During the reporting period, the Youth Justice Team and Throughcare Aftercare team amalgamated to form the Transitions Team and cemented their role in supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

The teams had been managed jointly for many years and joining them together reflected the increasing sharing of tasks across the disciplines. The new team works well, and it has created flexibility around staff roles, ensuring where possible young people don't need to re-tell their story or make unnecessary transitions (e.g. when moving from Continuing Care into Aftercare or where Diversion from Prosecution assessment was done by Pathway Co-ordinator). The flexibility of the new Transitions Team has also meant they have been able to manage the significant increase in UASC referrals which would have been more challenging in the previous structure.

Like all other local authorities in Scotland, Scottish Borders Council saw an increase in arrivals in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People. In 2023-24, the number of arrivals to Scottish Borders was 8 young people, which increased the number from 13 to 21, a 62% increase, which includes with children and young people from Gambia, Sudan, Syria, Iran, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. The ages at arrival are predominantly over 16, but 2023-24 saw an increase in the number of under 16s.

The rapid increase in this group of young people arriving in the Scottish Borders has caused issues regarding care and accommodation. Over 2023-24, the variety of accommodation used included foster care, external residential care, student accommodation, Registered Social Landlord tenancies, private lets and young people securing their own, independent tenancies.



Further service developments over the reporting period included a new group work provision for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People, the 'New Roots' group which provides both social support and ensures their voices are heard in terms of service development; improvements in enrolment and access to education (both school and further education); developments in health provision, including a general health guidance pack which has been provided by public health to assist transitions staff and carers with identifying early signs that medical assessment may be required; and, the development of a Welcome Pack for all children and young people arriving in the Borders.

Challenges remain in the increasing numbers, these include the rurality of the Scottish Borders and access to cultural and religious support; access to local youth services that meet the specific needs of this group; limited local access to English for Speakers of Other Languages provision; language barriers and the ability to effectively access services, particularly out of hours services. All of these areas are being addressed on a multi-agency basis and capacity and resources are being constantly monitored.

WHEATLANDS CARE HOME

Wheatlands has continued to be the only Scottish Borders Council residential children's home over this reporting period. It is registered to care for a maximum of 7 children and young people in the following premises: 5 children and young people in Wheatlands House itself, and 2 young people in a nearby 'satellite' flat (aged 16+ who are preparing for independence). Over the last year the age profile of residents within Wheatlands has reduced to reflect those assessed of requiring local residential care.

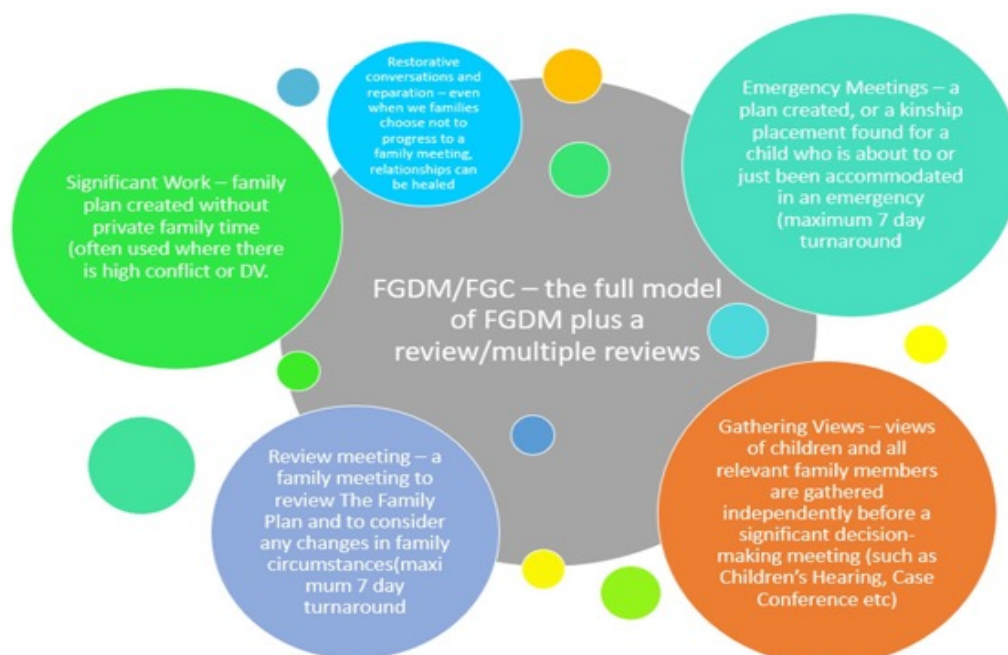
FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING

Family Group Conferencing is an example of an empowerment model of practice that supports a fundamental shift from doing things to children and their families to supporting families to do the right things for their children.

Our commission with Children 1st for the delivery of Family Group Decision making (FGDM) continues to provide positive outcomes for children, young people and families in Scottish Borders. All 24 families who completed the FGDM process were supported to have their children remain within the family home (19), remain in kinship care (4) or move from the family home to kinship care (1).

One family member noted that "FGDM assisted in helping the family feel more in control. The family had never had to deal with anything like this previously, and it was unexpected so FGDM allowed us to gain a better understanding of what we should be doing and what direction we should be going in. It opened doors to conversation and understanding." A social worker who had been working with a family commented that "The plan addressed concerns and it really helped empower both the child and the parents to share their views safely. This family now make their own plans with the child without professionals supporting them."

There have also been several developments during the reporting period to further enhance the service.



SUSTAIN

Aberlour are commissioned by Scottish Borders Council to provide support to those families where there is a risk of the young person becoming accommodated. Sustain's primary role is to support families to safely continue to live together, preventing the need for children to be accommodated and to support families to lead healthy happy lives. Over the past 6 years 89% of children supported by sustain have remained at home.

Sustain will work with an average of 26 families at any one time, often providing support to multiple family members with several visits per week to each family as well as taking young people out of the family home as part of direct work.

Sustain will work with young people aged between 5 and 18, although in an emergency crisis situation have also provided support for families with younger children including babies; this was with view to preventing the child being accommodated.

Sustain complete detailed "about me" plans with young people using wellbeing indicators to track outcomes and progress. This allows the families and young people to set their own goals; own goals, and highlight what is important to them.

Feedback from families: "I thought we'd just be up against a dead end if I'm being honest, that's the way I felt with everything but the fact that they've managed to get her talking. She's opening up to [support worker]. Even just that hour, 1 hour a week it seems to have made a massive difference so far as it is."

Feedback from young person: "I was punching walls and holes in the door when I got in an argument, he (support worker) really calmed me down...Things are getting on a lot better now."



ADULT SERVICES

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

During the reporting period, the Learning Disability Group Manager extended his remit to include Mental Health Social Work, and this has been received positively within the Mental Health integrated services, providing enhanced professional leadership and ensuring links for the relatively small Mental Health social work workforce are improved.

Demand into services remains stable and waiting lists have decreased significantly and are now settled in single figures.

A further significant development during the reporting period was the reprovision of our Mental Health supported living service providing accommodation to adults open to our Mental Health Rehabilitation Service. The new accommodation, providing 13 tenancies, is located within Darnick and includes the additional provision of enhanced clinical support to tenants. The service is provided across 4 partners, NHS Borders, Scottish Borders Council, Eildon Housing Association and Carr Gomm.

Mental Health services also completed a review of all commissioned services, with a focus on ensuring that people getting the right service at the right time. Improvement work is underway to enhance the involvement of commissioned providers moving towards a single point of access into mental health services. Key to these developments are people with lived experience who are and will remain integral to service redesign.

LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES

Learning Disability Services continue to be delivered via an integrated model, and demand remains high with a key theme being that of a steady increase in the complexity of support required by adults with a learning disability. Our waiting lists remain high despite continual efforts to look for new ways of working.

Following the review of adult day support services, a new contract was introduced with an increased focus upon community engagement, reserving building based services for those with the most complex needs.

A review of the Local Area Coordination service also took place during the reporting period, with the feedback from service users and stakeholder indication over 90% satisfaction ratings. Further work in respect of consulting with service users will focus upon community capacity building whilst also continuing with individual support for those who may need additional help to engage within their communities.

The Coming Home Programme is the predominant national and local focus. Recognising the significant challenges in supporting those with the most complex needs, Lives Through Friends were engaged to support developing and delivering a more individualised approach to service design.

SELF-DIRECTED SUPPORT

Self-Directed Support is an example of an empowerment model, people take responsibility for managing their own support arrangements.

Within Scottish Borders, of service users who accessed Self Directed Support during the reporting period:

- 19.4% chose a Direct Payment
- 0.6% chose an Individual Service Fund
- 69.4% chose Social Work Managed support
- 10.5% chose a Mixed Package

Scottish Borders remains one of the highest users of Direct Payments in Scotland, however Social Work Managed support remains the most common choice of support in the Borders.

In June 2023, the Scottish Self-Directed Support Improvement Plan 2023-2027 was published, proposing a whole system approach to improving service delivery and the Self-Directed Support Lead Officer for Scottish Borders is actively involved in national groups.

Locally, a direct payment workstream was developed, and Direct Payment Guidance for service users has been co-produced for Adults and Children's Services.


The Carers Workstream (which includes Carers, Carer representatives, Health professionals, Social Work professionals and third sector colleagues), continued to be consulted regarding policy and planning in relation to unpaid Carers. The group supported the design of a Vision and Aims statement and an Implementation Plan, supporting the development of the Carers Strategy 2024-2028 which was approved by the Integrated Joint Board at the end of this reporting period.

During the reporting period a total of 283 carers received individual Carer budgets to support them to take breaks from their caring role. Work continued on the commissioning of high dependency beds for respite purposes. The Borders Carers Centre continue to be commissioned to complete Carer Support Plans, the Scottish Borders Council Community Care Reviewing Team being responsible for assessing and reviewing carers who are eligible for, and in receipt of, budgets for replacement care. Borders Carers Centre received 562 referrals.

CARE HOMES

There are 22 registered care homes for older adults in the Scottish Borders, with 525 placements commissioned within the region, and 115 places out with.

The Community Care Reviewing Team form part of the care home collaborative operation group, working closely with colleagues in Health with the aim of ensuring people living in care homes have their rights upheld and receive a good quality of care. 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 better supported as underpinned in Scottish Government's My Health, My Care, My Home healthcare framework for adults living in care homes.



The Community Care Reviewing Team (CCRT) are integral to the assurance of safe and effective care in the Care Homes, taking the lead in providing a quality assurance response to services commissioned by the Health and Social Care Partnership. Through individual resident reviews carried out on a cluster basis, areas of good practice can be highlighted along with 'themes' in standards of care which may require further development. The team play a key part in supporting improvement when performance issues are identified; thus, ensuring positive outcomes for people living in the home, their relatives and the staff group supporting them.

Where it is identified that practice is or may be 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.

A review of the teams supporting Care Homes across the Borders was commissioned by NHS Borders in January 2024. This presented the opportunity to consider the effectiveness, roles and responsibilities of all the teams supporting Care Homes with a view to streamlining and aligning the roles and functions of the teams to avoid duplication. The findings of this review will inform the future delivery model.

A range of planning and commissioning work has been carried out around the continuation of block purchase permanent and respite places across the care home sector which, although will not increase the number of placements, has been successful in diversifying placement type to suit a range of needs for short- and longer-term support. A key focus of this being the avoidance of hospital admission and the smooth facilitation of discharges. Work is on-going in this area through strategic and operational planning with both the independent sector and in-house Council provision.

CARE AT HOME

The remit of the Community Care Reviewing Team (CCRT) is to robustly review existing packages of care to ensure resources being delivered equate to positive outcomes for those in receipt of services provided by Social Work. A key focus of the team is the recirculation of resources to service users in line with the Council's eligibility criteria. As per previous years the team have exceeded efficiency targets.

In July 2023, the community team undertook 154 reviews in relation to replacement care in order to identify efficiencies. In future, all reviews will be undertaken annually, a change in practice from every 2 years.

2023-2024 saw the decommissioning of the care at home organisation Support Services 1st Choice with care being transferred to Adult Social Care under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) with the transfer date agreed for 1st May 2024.

DAY OPPORTUNITIES

A review of day support was commenced in Teviot and Liddesdale area in 2023 with the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI) carrying out consultation events. A gap in support for people with high dependency and more advanced needs, including dementia, was identified with the Teviot and Liddesdale task and finish group choosing a building-based service as the best option for the people of Hawick and the surrounding villages/area.

Hawick Community Hospital was selected as a suitable building and following a tendering exercise Adult Social Care were chosen to deliver the service with the doors opening to service users on 19th April 2024, just outwith the reporting period.

Additionally three-month test of change was initiated by the Newcastleton District Community Trust (NDCT) and local care at home service Holmcare. Based on a warm and well approach, Welcome Holm was created to support people with higher needs (including help with personal care), to attend Buccleuch House to engage in activities, have their lunch and to ultimately promote social inclusion for all.

HOSPITAL DISCHARGE

In late 2023 the social work team responsible for supporting the NHS with hospital discharges from the acute setting, were joined by NHS nurses from the Discharge Pathway coordination team.

The two teams joined to become known as the Discharge Team and are responsible for ensuring efficient patient flow between acute care and a wide range of downstream and community services. The team also ensure that patients returning home, or to a homely setting, is not delayed, however there continued to be a shortage of suitable community resources to discharge to.

The commitment of the team should be acknowledged for embracing the merger despite the challenges encountered.

LOCALITY SOCIAL WORK

Locality practice continues to be delivered to adults from age 16 upwards and to a wide range of service user groups across five locality areas.

Focused work through Community Led Support 'What Matters' hubs, and other targeted work on reducing waiting lists for assessment has continued to have significant success and the goal to reduce waiting lists to single figures remains on target.

This has been a significant achievement considering recruitment challenges for registered posts such as Social Workers and Occupational Therapists.

As part of locality working models, community based professional huddles have also supported partnership working across community and hospital settings and have involved NHS, Third sector and service providers.



COMMUNITY-LED SUPPORT

Community Led Support utilises a strengths-based approach to Social Work and Occupational Therapy that focusses in on what a person can do and wants to do as much as what they can't do or achieve.

Early intervention is fundamental to Community Led Support and in addition to frontline contact the What Matters Hubs teams (comprised of local staff and the Red Cross) have been able to significantly impact on waiting lists and, crucially, waiting times for assessment.

MENTAL HEALTH OFFICERS

Mental Health Officers (MHOs) have responsibility to work with people who are being assessed or treated in respect of a number of orders, including short-term detention certificates, compulsory treatment orders, and compulsion orders. MHOs also have a responsibility to work with adults with incapacity.

MHOs are responsible for advising people of their rights, including their right to independent advocacy, legal representation and the right to have a named person to look after their interests.

The MHO role extends to 24 hours per day, every day of the year.

During the reporting period two social workers completed their MHO award, and we will be looking to have a further two students during 2024-2025.

We continue to have a dedicated MHO working with the Borders General Hospital discharge team, and this has successfully streamlined discharges.

During the reporting period the service worked closely with colleagues in Adult Support and Protection to streamline the adult protection process when incapacity is a significant issue. MHOs are now involved at an earlier stage to prevent the duplication of meetings and reduce the stress for adults at risk and their families.

The MHO service has responsibility for the Appropriate Adult service within the Scottish Borders ensuring we meet our statutory duties to provide appropriate adults on request, and to ensure training is delivered for all new and existing appropriate adults. Over the reporting period there were 40 requests for an Appropriate Adult.

In addition, the MHO service has provided reports for 18 Chief Social Work Officer guardianship applications and 78 private guardianship applications.

The service also attended or consented to 68 short term detentions, resulting in 31 Compulsory Treatment Order applications. See graphs below.

Chief Social Work Officer Guardianships applications

Guardianships by Date



Chief Social Work Officer Guardianships applications

Guardianships by Date



Short Term Detentions consented to

Detention Orders by Date



CORPORATE APPOINTEESHIP

The Chief Social Work Officer, appointed by the Department of Work and Pensions, acts on behalf of Scottish Borders Council to manage benefits and safeguard the interests of vulnerable individuals who are unable to do so themselves due to a lack of capacity or physical disability. This role ensures the proper management of finances to prevent significant risk to the individual's well-being. The operational management of these accounts is delegated to care managers within Adult Social Work, supported by business support staff.

Scottish Borders Council have 109 Corporate Appointee Clients under the following service areas:

- Adult at risk: 5
- Adults with a Learning Disability: 41
- Mental Health: 27
- Older People: 13
- Older People with Dementia: 2
- Other Functional Impairment: 1
- People with a Physical Disability: 6
- Substance Use: 2
- Residential Care: 7
- Unknown: 11

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Ensuring that there is sufficient cover provided by qualified Occupational Therapists and recruitment in general has been a major challenge in 2023-24. Staff recruitment and retention has resulted in increased numbers of people on waiting lists and waiting times in some areas requiring the need for agency OT staff to help manage demand and service user risk of people waiting.

Referral rates continue to increase as the population ages and this is also observed in Sensory Services, which also has new duties and responsibilities within the National Plan 2023-29 following the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

There is a brighter picture at Paraprofessional and Assistant Occupational Therapy grades with staff retention and recruitment. There are also plans in progress to look at potential in-house training of SBC's own qualified Occupational Therapists from within our non-OT registered staff cohort.

EQUIPMENT SERVICE

The overall trend in 2023-24 was for a rising demand for services and equipment. Moreover, there has been an increase in requests for complex pieces of equipment in the fields of paediatric and bariatric care. Some staff recruitment challenges have impacted the delivery of the service over the reporting period but more recently there have been improvements in delivery and collection of equipment using a new provider who undertakes infection control tasks, meaning the previous arrangements of having large volumes of equipment sitting at the refurbishment stage has been improved.

CARE AND REPAIR

Within the service there have been challenges related to staff sickness. Assessments are being completed more rapidly than previously now that a vacant Technical Officer post with the service provider for adaptations, Eildon Housing, has been filled after a long gap.

There is faster turnaround in complex cases with resulting reduction on waiting list numbers and times. Additionally, the Technical Officer being in post significantly reduces the pressure at a locality level and results in fewer complaints and disruptions to other demands on frontline staff core activities.

SENSORY SERVICES

Work and provision of equipment is on time and assessment and plans completed to a high standard. Service user surveys communicated clear praise for the service.

REABLEMENT

Reablement is an approach at either post diagnostic or early intervention stages to reduce or replace the reliance and dependence upon formal care services. Over the past year reablement has been located at a Scottish Borders Council care home, Upper Deanfield, for people leaving hospital but not sufficiently well enough or cannot fully mobilise to return home safely. Additionally, a step-down facility at Garden View in Central Borders has used reablement approaches to ensure that people are discharged home from hospital without recourse to formal support plans using carers.

Technology Enabled Care (TEC) has been developed with a Technical Officer now currently employed on a permanent basis. The officer is managed by Adult Social Care, the Council's internal service provider for social care.

EMERGENCY DUTY TEAM

Whilst managed within the structure of Adult Social Work, 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 Child and Adult welfare.

All EDT workers are Council Officers and Appropriate Adults, are Child Protection trained and can undertake Joint Investigative Interviews of children with police and make decisions as to whether Child Protection thresholds have been reached.

During the reporting period the Emergency Duty Team responded to 6619 calls.

JUSTICE SOCIAL WORK

Within the current reporting period:

- 438 Criminal Justice Social Work Reports were completed, a 33% increase on the previous year
- 222 Community Payback Orders were imposed, a 14% increase on the previous year
- 52 Diversion from Prosecution cases commenced, a 73% increase on the previous year
- 8 Drug Testing and Treatment Orders were in effect on the last day of the reporting period, 1 more than the previous year
- 37 Voluntary Throughcare cases were offered, a 16% increase on the previous year
- 24 Statutory Throughcare cases were in effect on the last day of the reporting period, a 20% increase on the previous year
- Assessment for bail reports reduced by 20% from the previous year to 78 assessments
- Structured Deferred Sentences cases imposed decreased from 15 individuals to 12 in the reporting period
- The number of fiscal work orders imposed remained low, with 3 orders imposed

Justice Social Work deliver a number of group programmes. These include offence-specific programmes for sexual offenders, domestic abuse perpetrators, and domestic abuse survivors; there is also a group work programme which looks at improving emotional regulation, consequential thinking and victim awareness; and a women-specific programme which focuses on building resilience, emotional regulation and better self-management.

Not all service users are suitable for the group programmes and one to one work is undertaken, adapted according to presenting risk and need.

There is close working with Police partners in the management of registered sex offenders, sharing information to formulate risk management plans in line with the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) process.

The service continued to foster links with local addiction services, including Borders Addiction Service and With You.

Anyone presenting with mental health or other health issues are offered support from the in-house Wellbeing Officer who delivers sessions such as counselling, self-esteem and provides support to access other health and support services.

Unpaid work continues to be the most visible aspect of Justice social work.

In collaboration with Just Cycle, the service collects discarded bikes and undertake restoration; service users learn how to build, repair, restore and maintain bicycles. They are then delivered to the charity workshop where they are sold.

We have to our advantage a skilled Supervisor who is a joiner to trade and delivers a woodwork workshop; service users gain valuable experience how to carve and cut wood, use of various tools and machinery, measuring up, repair and restoration and use of different materials. They are taught how to build benches, picnic tables, planters, raised beds, outside shelving, gazebos, etc, with the knowledge these items will be used by their local community.

The Green House Project is available for service users requiring light duty Unpaid Work placements; produce is grown and harvested and provided to Action for Children, Community Learning Development, Early Years Centre and local Foodbanks to ensure families can access fresh and nutritious foods. Service users learn horticulture skills such as harvesting, pruning, seed germination, plant identification, soil testing, irrigation, fertilisation and greenhouse management.

A Home Maintenance course was developed, which equips individuals with the skills and knowledge in maintaining their home, covering areas such as Health and Safety, Water, Gas & Drainage, Electrics, Decorating, and Wall fixings and picture hanging. Courses were popular and well attended.

Additionally, a cooking programme was developed which provides service users with an opportunity to gain a qualification recognised by employers in the food and hospitality industry. Skills gained include health and safety/food hygiene, use of kitchen appliances, food preparation, nutrition and basic cooking skills. The Unpaid Work Greenhouse team provide the fruit and vegetables for the project.

The Women's Hub continued to deliver weekly sessions, including craft making, health walks, basic cooking, light physical activity, games, and garden maintenance within the therapeutic garden. Whilst this promotes constructive use of time and offers peer support, it also creates opportunity for our women to switch off from life events and engross themselves in creative thinking.

Feedback from service users included:

- "My workers saved my life. I appreciated the space to talk and the interest by staff in my life. They asked me how my week had been. Working with the peer mentor has been brilliant, they understand my situation."
- "My social worker listens to me, I like coming to talk to her, she helps me see things differently".
- "I'm making the most of all the opportunities available, I've done my CSCS card and am linked with Adult Learning. I think I'm now more employable."
- "I feel more in control of my emotions, ReConnect has helped me see other ways of dealing with things, I'm not so stressed now."
- "I'm so glad to have made a positive contribution to the community and I learned new skills also. I am self-employed at the moment but I'm considering looking for a job working outdoors which benefits the community in some way."

During the reporting period, Justice SW commenced a pilot Recovery Peer Mentor which provided people with addictions the opportunity to work on a holistic recovery pathway, tailored to their needs supported by someone with 'lived experience'. Feedback was positive and the plan is to continue this approach on a more long-term basis.



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CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

OUT OF AUTHORITY PLACEMENTS

Scottish Borders continues to see an increase in the number of looked after children, and as a result of the concerns regarding the growing number of children and young people entering external residential care an Out of Authority Project was established and work progressed to better understand the position and seek solutions.

Of particular concern was the rise in the number of children aged under 11 years of age looked after in Out of Authority placements, and audits were undertaken during the reporting period to ensure practice and decision-making was robust.

In all cases it was assessed by the auditors that there was both appropriate partnership collaboration to meet needs and all relevant stakeholders were involved in the cases and decision making. In addition, the child and family were sufficiently involved in the cases and decision making in all cases but one, where their level of involvement was unclear.


Although looking after children at a distance from their families and communities is not ideal, the audits suggested that in all cases there was evidence of improvement in the children's wellbeing, with 60% showing evidence of considerable improvement.

As a result of the work undertaken during the reporting period, a plan has been developed which will be progressed during 2024, based on the principles that:

- Young people will live, learn and be looked after in Scottish Borders.
- Support will be provided within locality or cluster areas taking a preventative, early intervention approach to service planning and provision.
- Supports to families will be delivered through a multi-agency partnership approach.
- Resource management and allocation will be determined to maximise outcomes for young people and their families while delivering best value.

FOSTER CARERS

The reduction in the recruitment of foster carers over the last 5 years has been a challenge locally and nationally, and there are more people leaving foster care than there are becoming foster carers. Scotland's annual social work statistics as well as the Care Inspectorate bulletin show a decrease in the number of foster carers in Scotland year on year.



To ensure that foster carer recruitment remains a priority, the Foster Carer Action Plan is updated on an on-going basis. It is hoped that ultimately this will lead to a steady and sustainable increase in the number of local foster care placements available. The focus of the Foster Carer Action Plan 2024 is to:

- Raise the profile of fostering, highlight the urgent need for more foster families and encourage potential foster carers to come forward for more information.
- Ensure regular activity is undertaken through the year, with at least one key recruitment related activity delivered each month.

In terms of recruitment there are 2 particular approaches to advertising which are being taken forward:

1. A local foster carer recruitment radio campaign: a 26-week radio campaign started in March 2024 on Greatest Hits Radio (Radio Borders) utilising a series of regular, short call to action messages. The aim is to generate brand awareness through frequent name check mentions, supported by a brief positioning statement.
2. A poster campaign focused on the Borders Railway.

The Family Placement Team have developed a participative approach to service development in partnership with foster carers. During the reporting period the topics covered included planning and delivering the Scottish Borders Fostering Conference, developing a Framework for Short Breaks Carers (developed by foster carers), and developing a carer 'Buddy System'.

NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM FIRST RESPONDERS

During the reporting period, Children and Families Social Work and Adult Social Work have been involved in the Scottish Borders pilot of the National Referral Mechanism in respect of Human Trafficking.

First Responders are agencies and organisations with specific responsibilities and duties for responding to trafficking, and in Scottish Borders the first responder team is based within the Public Protection Unit and consists of Adult Support and Protection Officers, Child Protection Reviewing Officers and Police Scotland.

DIGITAL PATHFINDER

Throughout the reporting period of 2023-24 Scottish Borders Council has been undertaking a digital pathfinder that has covered two developments to support the function social work. A suite of live dashboards has been developed across the range of social work practice which have strengthened our ability to interrogate activity in real time. These dashboards are still being developed at the time of reporting but already are demonstrating our ability to quality assure and better plan service delivery in the future. They will provide the ability to cross reference information in a way that was previously clunky or timed delayed.

In addition to this, process engineering has taken place with adult services to update our assessment, support planning and reviewing stages of care management. These new methods will allow for the collation of hard data as part of the quality assurance and future planning but retaining the ability to collect and analyse qualitative and personalised information on service user needs and risks. These changes are not long implemented and will need ongoing monitoring and review to ensure the right balance between process, performance data and high-quality personalisation has been achieved.

YOUNG ADULTS

In late 2023 a multi-agency workstream was developed to focus on the needs of young adults.

The overall purpose of the group is to co-ordinate information, develop priorities and oversee the strategic response to the needs of young adults across Scottish Borders. This includes:

- Identifying, supporting and linking with priorities identified in a range of other relevant working groups thereby improving communication.
- Providing information on and increasing the quality and diversity of operational practice to enhance the lives of young adults through access to existing research, benchmarking and identifying best practice.
- Establishing robust mechanisms for recommending and evaluating a strategic and commissioning plan for young adults.
- Producing and presenting highlight and/or business reports to other relevant working groups.
- Considering the case for developing a dedicated young adult's service/operational practice teams within the target age group.
- Developing a Vision statement appropriate to the strategic and commissioning needs of young adults.
- Considering the need to implement a Care and Risk Management (CARM) model and revised Vulnerable Young Persons Protocols (VYP).

Within the reporting period work was progressed in relation to benchmarking and auditing of practice as the first stage of a potential step change to have a wider and better co-ordinated young adults' workforce.

CHRONOLOGIES AND PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

Improving chronologies is a national challenge. Following the Scottish Borders Inspections for Adult Support and Protection in 2022 and for Children at Risk of Harm in 2023, improved chronologies have been prioritised as an area of local focus.

During 2023 a multi-agency group was established to review and develop understanding and practice around the importance and use of Chronologies including the role of Analysis and Professional Curiosity which will look to develop new standards and revising current guidance in the practices of chronology and analytical writing and developing audit and quality assurance functions.

TRAUMA RESPONSIVE SOCIAL WORK SERVICES PILOT

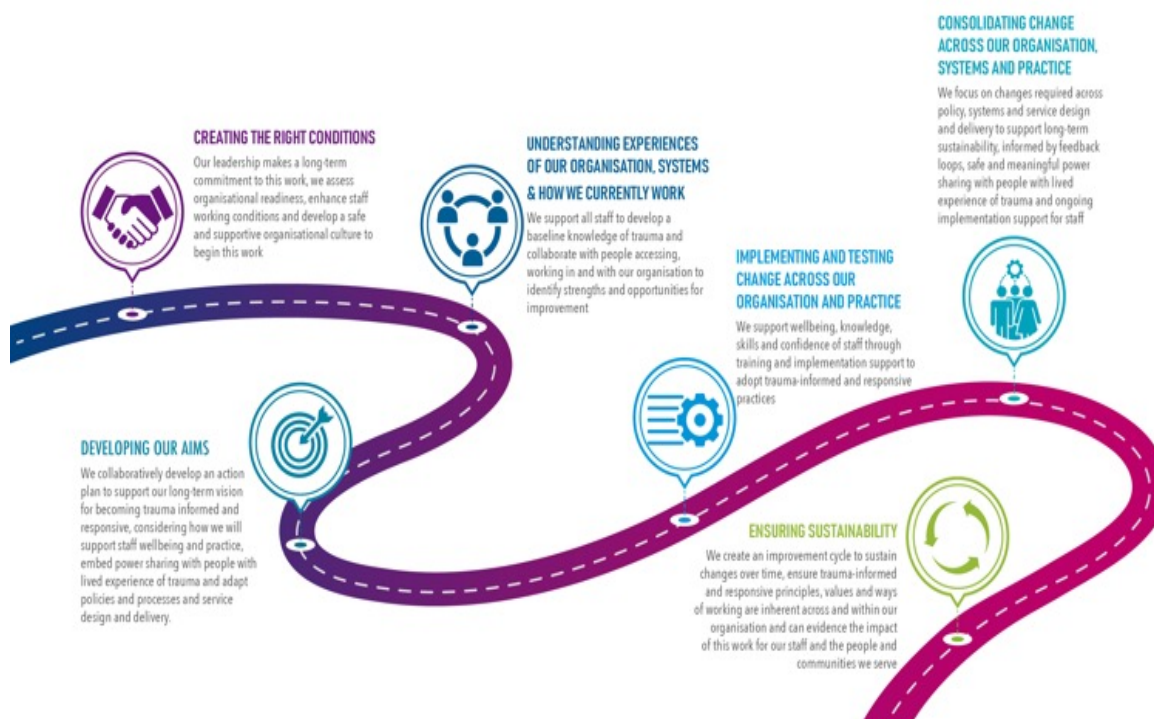
During the reporting period, Scottish Borders Children and Families Social Work were selected as one of 4 pilot areas in Scotland to progress the Trauma Responsive Social Work Services programme, which will be a transformational change involving a systems wide approach with social work teams.

The scale of the programme extends to:

- Supporting trauma-informed leadership, recognising their role in creating trauma responsive cultures and environments
- Strengthening staff care, support and wellbeing - including the use of reflective supervision and coaching that supports development of enhanced trauma knowledge and skills into practice

- Creating opportunities for power sharing with people with lived experience of trauma
- Taking a trauma-informed lens to policies and processes, and service design and delivery
- Supporting development of staff knowledge, skills and confidence

The programme supports accumulative learning across trauma skilled and enhanced practice levels, intended to be delivered over approximately 12-18 months with on-going implementation support for up to 2 years. Initial mapping has taken place, and the programme will commence in the next reporting year. Learning will be shared across all social work services and partners as the programme progresses.



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RESOURCES

Throughout the report, numerous challenges in respect of resources, both financial and staffing, have been noted, and the challenge for social work cannot be underestimated. The emerging and continuing pressures across social work and social care, as well as partner organisations, impacts on what services are delivered and how they are delivered.

On-going reviews of delivery models across services can have unintended consequences, and close partnership working is required to ensure benefits in one service or agency do not have negative impacts elsewhere.

Additional funding was provided by the Scottish Government for Justice Social Work, in recognition of the increased workload as a result of the justice system emerging from the pandemic, and capacity within the service was enhanced to ensure the growth was appropriately managed.

The challenges of Out Authority Placements were noted and the financial impact of these is considerable; new ways of working and potential investment in earlier intervention services have been developed over the reporting period, however any solutions are likely to take time to impact.

The on-going implementation of digitalisation offers scope to reduce expenditure in some areas and is an area which social work services are keen to embrace, whilst ensuring that relationship-based practice is maintained; digitalisation should complement rather than replace person-centred approaches.

On-going vacancies and the use of agency staff continues to add pressure to budgets, and it is a difficult balance to ensure that there are sufficient staff to support service users and deliver safe, quality services whilst ensuring “best value”.



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WORKFORCE


A key element of supporting the Social Work workforce has been the engagement of our workforce. 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. Our 2023 survey showed our teams engagement is improving. Actions from our 2023 survey include continuing to develop ways of enhancing engagement with our workforce and providing more opportunities to have open communication and provide feedback. Key parts of this include the fortnightly CSWO Senior Leadership Team meetings, CSWO engagement meetings with staff and team days for teams to come together, share information, best practice and network.

Strategic people and succession planning processes continue to be a focus, and all social work services have strategic people plans and succession plans in place; these continue to be developed and updated 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 refreshed 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 continue to see the benefits of the Social Worker Traineeship Scheme with staffing levels for social workers continuing to improve.

SBC has been delivering a successful Social Work Traineeship program since 2019. The Social Work Traineeship is delivered in partnership with the Open University to offer a flexible approach to workplace learning for students. To date, Scottish Borders Council has supported the qualification of 12 Social Workers who have been allocated roles within the Social Work service upon completion of their degree. The Social Work traineeship is delivered in three tiers:

- Tier 1 - These modules are designed to offer those with limited previous qualifications an opportunity to develop and gain the knowledge necessary to progress onto the Social Work Traineeship program on completion. This stage consists of 4 modules and at present there are 12 active learners undertaking these modules.
- Tier 2 Undergraduate Program - The Social Work Undergraduate program is most frequently a progression for those who have undertaken the 'Off Program Modules'. Learners are required to go through an application/interview process before being offered a place on the Social Work Traineeship. At present there are 5 learners undertaking this route of study.
- Tier 3 Postgraduate Program - Postgraduate study routes are available to staff who are not qualified social workers but do hold an alternative degree. This fast-track route allows learners to undertake their Social Work training in two years, rather than four. Learners are required to go through an application/interview process before being offered a place on the Social Work Traineeship. At present there are 6 learners undertaking the Social Work Postgraduate programme.



The recruitment and retention of Occupational Therapists has also been challenging in recent years. One of the avenues being explored to mitigate this pressure is introducing an Occupational Therapy Traineeship similar to the Social Work Traineeship. However, it has not been possible yet to identify a suitable degree programme that offers the flexibility to deliver a workplace traineeship programme. Discussions continue with Education providers to scope out a model that may be effective in the future.

There are specific challenges in respect of the recruitment of Mental Health Officers and Emergency Duty Team social workers and plans to develop a focus on these areas were developed during the reporting period.

We continue to offer Paraprofessionals and Social Work Assistants the opportunity to develop their skills through relevant HNC/D qualifications in the Social Care sector. A particularly popular program is the HNC in Social Services which utilises a flexible work-and-learn model.

In addition, the following Social Work Postgraduate qualifications are offered to support professional development and provide “added value”:

- Adult Support and Protection - University of Stirling
- Child Support and Protection - University of Stirling
- Leadership and Management in Social Work - University of Stirling
- Advanced Occupational Therapy - Queen Margaret University
- Social Work Practice Education - Edinburgh Napier University

We also continue to encourage and enable our staff to seek out development opportunities, including additional training and research through supervision/appraisal and succession planning.

In terms of supporting the workplace we have reviewed and continued to develop our mentally healthy workplace policies advising on the symptoms of stress, promoting proactive measures that individuals can take to help reduce stress as well as advice and support for line managers and peers. We continue to offer 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 also continue to promote our 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.

Work continued towards the implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) Scotland Act from 1st April 2024. The aims of the Act are to enable safe and high-quality care and improved outcomes for those experiencing healthcare or care services through the provision of appropriate staffing. This means having the right people, in the right place, with the right skills at the right time.

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TRAINING, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Social Work department completed 2,427 e-learning modules in 2023. Modules ranged from mandatory learning such as Child Protection modules, to developmental learning like Coaching Essentials.

E-learning has become a core method of training delivery at Scottish Borders Council following the pandemic. Its flexibility is appealing to the workforce as home working becomes more popular and workloads are ever-increasing.

The Social Work department identified a variety of learning needs for 2023/24 including Self-Directed Support training, working with adults and children with autism, multi-disciplinary chair meeting training, Solihull training, Trusted Assessor Training, and Court Skills training. These along with several other learning initiatives are ongoing. In addition, Social Work staff have the opportunity to attend a variety of conferences throughout the calendar year including the British Association of Social Work UK Conference and the Mental Health & Wellbeing Conference.

Staff, foster carers and kinship carers have been involved in a range of training courses and events. These have included:

- Trauma Skilled Practice Training
- Toolkit for Working with Children
- Online Webinar Caring through Trauma
- Re-framing Allegations and Safer Caring Online Course
- Kinship Tool Kit Training
- 3 monthly Kinship Forums
- Adoption Breakdown Workshop
- Paediatric First Aid Face to Face
- Emergency First Aid Face to Face
- Safer Carer Fostering Network

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 the Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection Training and Quality Assurance Team with multi-agency partners from NHS Borders and third sector. The training is open to the Scottish Borders workforce. Booking is through a central online booking system and the courses are delivered on a rolling basis throughout the year:

- Introduction to Public Protection
- Thinking About Risk
- Adult Support & Protection Contributing to the Process
- Child Protection Contributing to the Process
- Council Officer training
- Fire Risk Recognition Training
- Neglect Toolkit
- Train the Trainer (Social Care Workforce)
- Child Sexual Exploitation

An e-learning training programme was developed for staff and the independent organization “In Control” was contracted to run a series of online face to face sessions for staff in relation to Self-Directed Support.

Another area of success is the development of Hoarding and Self-Neglect Surgeries which are now embedded with 8 weekly meetings. These meetings are well attended by all partners. Individual cases are anonymised for discussion to agree person centred action plans. A hoarding and self-neglect tool kit has been developed with housing associations, NHS staff, Welfare Fund staff, third Sector, Fire and Rescue Service and Police can join to discuss issues around hoarding.

Council Officer Forums support continuous learning and links with the Council Officer re/accreditation process. A timetable of Forums that had the ethos of multi-agency working and incorporates learning from local and national learning reviews was undertaken. All forums include a discussion element to them and to date Council Officer Forums have been held on the following topics:

- October 2023 - The role of Police in the Public Protection Unit and Adult Support and Protection
- December 2023 - Coercive Control
- February 2024 - Sextortion, in line with the National Adult Support and Protection Day topic

The Forums have been well attended and Council Officers are attending more than the pre-requisite attendance for re-accreditation of two per year.

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LOOKING AHEAD

Nationally there are a number of areas of change on the horizon; these include the next phase of The Promise, implementation of The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, implementation and the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act, changes to SSSC Newly Qualified Social Worker Supported Year and the development of the National Care Service.

Legislation to create a National Care Service for Scotland was first introduced to parliament in June 2022, and stage 1 reading of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill was completed in January 2024. Any development in respect of the National care Service will change the way social work and social care services are delivered, and it remains to be seen how this will impact.

Over the next year, a number of factors will influence how services improve, develop and grow locally to have greater impact and improve outcomes for our local communities.

As of April 2024, the Director of Social Work and Practice no longer exists, with Adult Social Work forming part of the Adult Services Directorate, and Children and Families (and, for the time-being Justice) Social Work becoming part of the Education and Children's Directorate. Whilst there will be challenges, there will also be opportunities in the new model of delivery.

It is important that focus remains on strengthening social work governance, oversight and leadership, and a permanent solution to the role of Chief Social Work Officer will be central to this, including the need to ensure the necessary capacity to undertake the role to effectively support the Chief Executive, elected members, and partnerships, including the Integration Joint Board.

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