

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S



# CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



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## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# INTRODUCTION

This report provides the statutory annual overview of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) role and the delivery of social work services in the Scottish Borders during 2024–2025. It reflects on key developments, challenges, and achievements, and outlines priorities for the year ahead. The CSWO continues to provide professional leadership, governance, and assurance across all social work functions, ensuring that services are safe, person-centred, and rights based.

During 2024–2025, services have continued to operate in a context of increasing complexity and demand. Despite these pressures, social work teams across the Borders have demonstrated resilience, innovation, and a strong commitment to improving outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

### **Key developments include:**

**Children & Families:** 96% success in preventing care placements through Aberlour Sustain; progress in permanence planning; Family Group Decision Making helped 22 families stay together.

**Adults:** 50% reduction in delayed discharges; over 2,500 people supported via What Matters Hubs; Shared Lives programme expanded.


**Public Protection:** Enhanced data reporting and updated protocols aligned with The Promise and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

**Justice:** Delivered statutory reports and expanded group programmes, strengthening MAPPA partnerships.

**Strategic:** Out of Authority and Coming Home projects to reduce out of area placements and provide best value and improved outcomes for children, young people and adults with a learning disability; digital transformation improving efficiency; workforce development through traineeships and leadership initiatives.

These achievements reflect a commitment to rights-based, person-centred practice and partnership working. Priorities for 2025/26 include locality development, digital innovation, financial sustainability, and embedding lived experience in service design.

We have also made progress in embedding co-production and lived experience into service design, with examples including the Self-Directed Support (SDS) Forum, the Y-PACS strategy group, and the Adult Protection Service User Engagement Officer role. These developments are helping to shape more inclusive and responsive services.



Workforce development remains a priority. The Social Work Traineeship Programme continues to support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff, and we have invested in leadership development, wellbeing, and digital innovation to support practice.

This report draws on contributions from across services including reflections that illustrate the breadth and depth of social work practice in the Borders. It also outlines the challenges we face and the priorities for the year ahead.

I would like to particularly thank the previous Acting Chief Social Work Officer, John Fyfe supported by Gwyneth Lennox, leading social work services during this reporting period. Both are highly committed to delivering excellent services for the people of the Borders.

I would also like to thank all staff, partners, carers and people with lived experience who have contributed to the delivery of social work services and improvements over the past year.

**Simon Burt**  
**Acting Chief Social Work Officer**



## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# 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 about 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 Integrated Joint Boards (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 Scottish Borders Council (SBC) 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 is overseen by the Council and Adult Social Work is overseen by 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 Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Joint Executive Team and other senior leadership forums between Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders, further strengthening the integration of services. The Director of Education and Children's Services and Director of Adult Social Work and Care have been integral in supporting these arrangements 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 have 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 MAPPA makes explicit reference to the role of the CSWO in responsibility for joint arrangements, in co-operation with other authorities. In addition, the CSWO is responsible for ensuring that Mental Health Officer 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 2024/25

# SERVICE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

### CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION

The Public Protection Committee and the Children and Young People's Planning Partnership have continued to progress and have oversight of the work identified from the Children at Risk of Harm (CARH) Inspection 2023. This includes work across: 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.

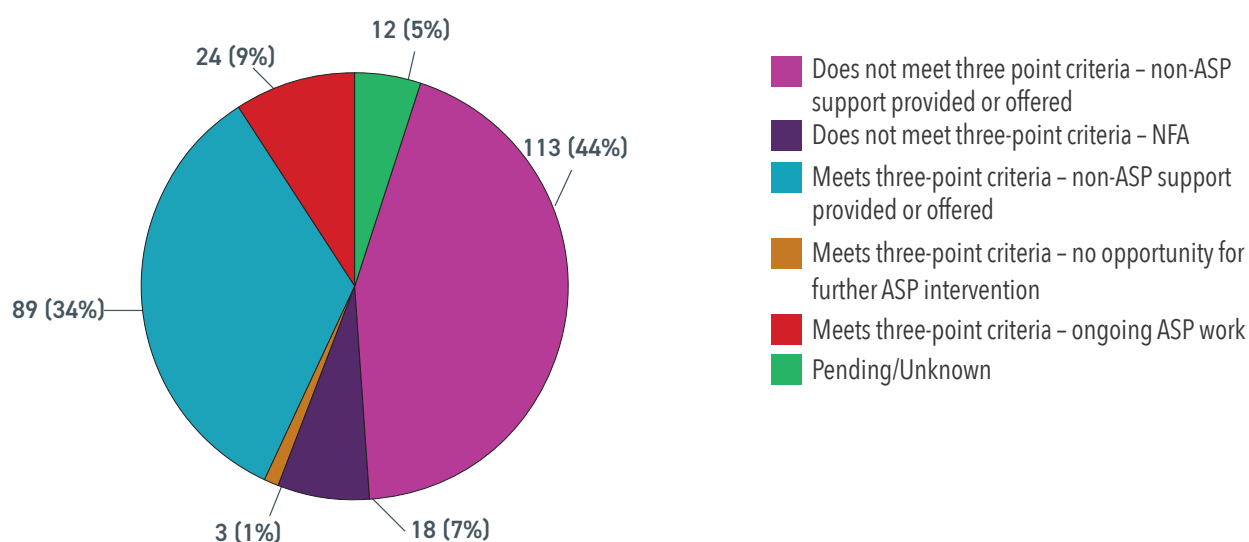
The process to review the language within the Vulnerable Young Persons Protocol (VYP) commenced in 2024 to ensure it reflects the Promise, UNCRC and trauma-informed practice. Following that the Child Protection Delivery Group will be leading a comprehensive review of the VYP process and our provision of support and protection for this age-group, particularly considering the Care and Justice Scotland Act.

Through analysis of the data within the Public Protection Committee (PPC) Performance Report and a specific audit on Adult Support and Protection (ASP) referrals it was identified that work should be undertaken to review the referral process for all ASP referrals. This piece of work is halfway through with the establishment of a multi-agency working group progressing a clear work plan to implement the changes identified. All work proposed is overseen by the Adult Protection Delivery Group (APDG) and the Public Protection Committee.

The first year of the Adult Support and Protection National Minimum Dataset (NMD) concludes on 31.3.2025. The updated PPC Performance Report has meant that we are now able to report nationally and to carry out quarterly audits across the Adult Support and Protection indicators. The PPC Performance Report incorporates 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. In addition to the PPC Performance Report a multi-agency Adult Support and Protection audit programme continues with in-depth audits which consists of Police, Health, Social Work and the Adult Support and Protection Lead Officer. Two multi-agency audits in relation to Child Protection within Children Services context have also commenced.

#### *Adult's data*

Our data tells us that across the year following Inquires with the use of Investigatory Powers that over the whole year 42% of adults were offered or provided with support from non-adult support and protection services to manage risks and meet the needs of adults going forward. Over the reporting year physical harm was the most prevalent type of harm. Financial harm is the second most prevalent. Additionally, reports show that ASP involving domestic abuse has increased.



1.4.2024-31.1.2024

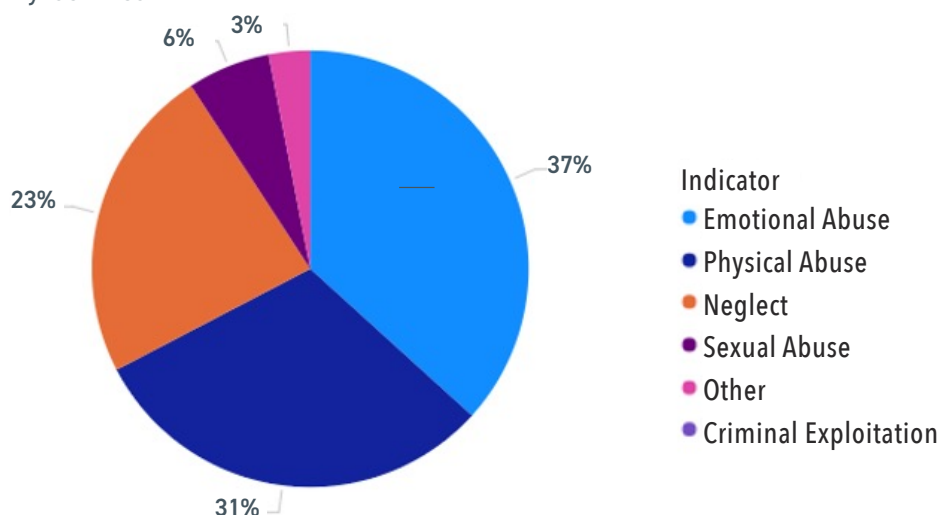
### Children's data

The number of children on the child protection register on 31 December 2024 was 40, the number of children on the register fluctuates over the year and is impacted by several factors including large sibling groups. This information is monitored by the Child Protection Delivery Group (CPDG).

Ref.	Performance Indicators	months	Q3 * 2023- 24	Q1 2024- 25	Q2 2024- 25	Q3 2024- 25
CP 9	Total number of children on the child protection register (No. of Children)		51	46	39	40

Due to changes in Child Protection reporting 2023-24 Q3 only includes data Feb/March 2024

The new PPC Performance Report enables CPDG to decide where further auditing and analysis should take place, one area that has been identified for 2025 is the Inter-agency Referral Discussion (IRD). This is also being looked at across the national context. The pattern of concerns within Scottish Borders for children placed on the child protection register at pre-birth or initial child protection planning meeting reflects the national picture, with Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse and Neglect being the most frequently identified.



Care and Justice Scotland Act 2024 is one of several national initiatives to progress Scotland's vision for keeping children out of the criminal justice system. The Act "makes important strides in Scotland's commitment to keeping the Promise, further improving support for victims and embedding UNCRC principles. Central to the Act is the recognition that all under 18s are children. It will raise the maximum age of referral to the Principal Reporter to 18 – for care and protection and offence cases alike – and importantly ends the use of Youth Offender Institutions for under 18s. Representatives from the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) will be attending a joint meeting of Child Protection (CPDG) and Adult Protection Delivery Group (APDG) to consider the implications of the Act for our policies and practices, particularly in relation to children aged 16 and 17 who may need protection.

This will be an important area of attention for the PPC over the coming year. CPDG and APDG members will support a planned pilot of the Care and Risk Management (CARM) Approach for young people who present a risk of serious harm to others.

## 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 2024 and 31 March 2025, there were no incidents in Scottish Borders where the duty of candour applied.

## INTERNAL AUDIT

As part of SBC's Internal Audit Annual Plan 2024/25, the following internal controls audit engagement specifically relevant to services within the statutory CSWO role and responsibilities was undertaken during the reporting period:

Foster and Kinship Care (review the framework for fostering and kinship care financial support). An Executive Summary of the audit objective, findings, good practice and level of assurance provided, was presented to the SBC Audit Committee on 18 November 2024 within the Internal Audit Work report.

The other Internal Audit engagements, covering themes of corporate governance, finance governance, ICT governance, internal controls, and asset management, relating to the Council's core systems are also relevant to services within the statutory CSWO role and responsibilities. The Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report 2024/25 which was presented to the SBC Audit Committee on 19 May 2025 includes the annual internal audit opinion, the summary of the audit work undertaken during the year, and statement on conformance with internal audit standards. The key recommendations focus on strengthening governance and risk management processes, ensuring consistent compliance with policies, and improving data quality and reporting mechanisms. Additional priorities include addressing resource and capacity challenges, enhancing cybersecurity and IT controls, and implementing agreed actions to close gaps in internal control design and adherence. These measures aim to safeguard strategic objectives and support the Council's resilience under ongoing financial pressures.

## COMPLAINTS

This section provides a summary of complaints received and managed across children's and adult's services during the reporting period. The data includes both **Stage 1** and **Stage 2** complaints, with a focus on volume, outcomes, timeliness, and resolution trends.

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, ensure accountability, and help ensure we understand our services from the perspective of people accessing them. A total of **60** complaints were received: **50** at **Stage 1** and **10** at **Stage 2**. **3** **Stage 1** complaints remained open at the end of the reporting period.

**61** complaints were closed during the reporting period. Of these, **49** were closed at Stage 1 (including seven invalid complaints) and **12** were closed at Stage 2 .

By way of explanation, more complaints were closed than were received in the period due to a number of complaints received in the previous reporting period being closed in this reporting period.

### Summary of complaints outcomes:

Of the **54** valid complaints closed, outcomes were distributed as follows:

Outcome	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Upheld	13	3	16
Not Upheld	14	5	19
Partially Upheld	13	4	17
Resolved	2	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>54</b>

### Key observations:

- Stage 1 complaints are resolved more promptly and efficiently, with a higher proportion closed on time.
- Stage 2 complaints, while fewer, take significantly longer to resolve and have a lower rate of timely closure.
- The outcome distribution is balanced, with a notable proportion of complaints upheld or partially upheld.
- These trends highlight opportunities for service improvement, particularly in early resolution and responsiveness.



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REQUESTS

During the reporting year, Social Work and Practice received a high volume of Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information (EIR) requests, with the majority completed within statutory timescales. Requests predominantly focused on looked after children, homelessness and housing, adult social care provision, and financial transparency in commissioning and procurement. Additional themes included workforce capacity, training, and equality-related issues such as gender-based violence and inclusive communication. Emerging areas of interest involved refugee and migration support, community safety, and technology in social care systems.

These patterns reflect sustained public and media scrutiny of social care services and underline the importance of transparency, accountability, and proactive communication.

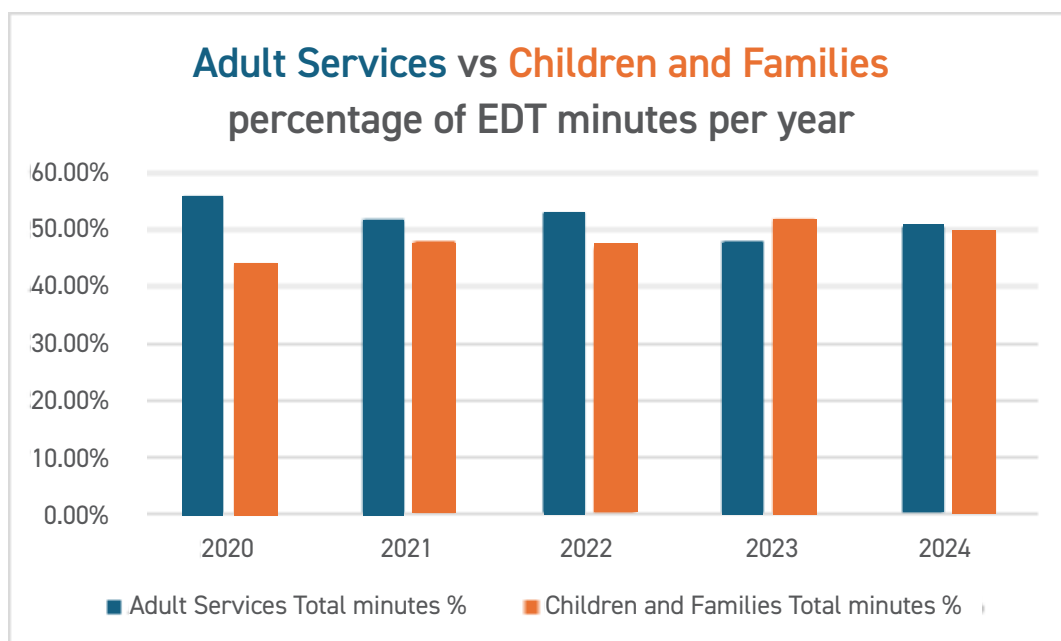
## EMERGENCY DUTY TEAM

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 and protection and child and adult welfare.

The Team Leader attends 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. Social workers are or will be child protection trained, some are able to undertake Joint Investigative Interviews of children with police and make decisions as to whether child protection thresholds have been reached.

For the reporting period April 24 to March 25 EDT responded to 5812 calls, requests and situations, a reduction of contacts from the year before. Over the last five years the table below highlights responses and requests across the whole service in minutes:



# CHILDRENS SERVICES

## Family Placement Team

### Fostering

The primary issue in the Scottish Borders Fostering Service over 2024-25 has continued to be 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 five years. Approaches to recruitment have been varied and have included an extensive local radio campaign, a poster campaign and attendance at various general local events and recruitment events. Despite this activity, only two new carers were registered in 2024-25. There are currently three fostering households undertaking the assessment process which is positive, and all are likely to be registered early in 2025-26.

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

- two new foster carers (one household) were registered at the Fostering Panel
- 11 carers (seven households) were deregistered at the Fostering Panel
- 28 carers were reviewed (15 households) at the Fostering Panel

The Fostering, Adoption and Continuing Care Services were inspected by the Care Inspectorate in October 2024. This was the first inspection since 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 good is our leadership?	3 – Adequate
How good is our staff team?	4 – Good
How well are our care and support planned?	3 – Adequate

The areas for improvement were around individualised planning for children foster care families that clearly outlines how carers are supporting their needs and managing any risk. This relates to the regular updating of Safer Caring and Risk Assessment for children in foster placements (repeat Requirements); review of Foster Care policies and procedures; and addressing aspects of management culture.

Practice developments within the Fostering Service have included responses to the recommendations made in the Care Inspectorate Report and other areas of development: development of a new referral process, improvements in the matching processes and updating policies and procedures. An anonymous survey of Family Placement Team focusing on culture and inclusion has been completed and recommendations put in place; and improvements are being made to the training and recruitment of Fostering Panel members.

## ***Kinship Care***

The numbers of children and young people in Kinship Care continued to increase in 2024-25 from 64 to 69 (60 Looked After Children and nine in Continuing care). 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 has been the responsibility of the Family Placement Team, but a proposal was put to Council in October 2024 (as part of the Out of Authority Project) to create a new Kinship Care team and increase the staffing resource required to enable this.

This was agreed and the team was in the process of being set up at the end of 2024-25. Once fully operational it will greatly improve the support available for kinship carers and provide them with the same level of supervision and support as that received by foster carers. 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 post has now been made permanent in 2024-25 and £131,321 was identified for kinship carers in the Scottish Borders.

## ***Adoption and Permanence***

Over 2024-25 there has been a great deal of activity in adoption and permanence in the Scottish Borders:

- 14 children were recommended for Permanence Orders by the Adoption and Permanence Panel
  - eight Permanence Orders (PO)
  - six Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt (POA)
- four children were matched with adopters (three households)

Achieving permanence for children is a complex, multi-agency process often subject to drift and delay. Compared to 2023-24 there has been little change in the timescale to achieve permanence, though there has been a slight improvement. It is of note that there has been a significant increase in the overall volume of permanence planning over this reporting period. A suite of permanence training was carried out in 2023 and 2024, and selected permanence planning training events continue on an on-going basis.


Scottish Borders is performing similarly to the national picture facing the same structural delays and striving toward the same improvement goals. While smaller scale offers opportunities for more agile practice, systemic barriers remain the key constraint.

## **Family Group Decision Making**

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is a collaborative process that brings a child's wider family together to make decisions about their future, particularly when there are concerns about the child's safety or well-being. It's a strengths-based approach that focuses on empowering families to develop a plan that supports the child. FGDM aims to ensure that children's voices and perspectives are heard, and that their rights are upheld.

Throughout 2024/25 SBC has continued to commission with Children First for the delivery of FGDM, and this continues to provide positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The commissioned service has remained the same as previous years however the service has become further embedded into social work practice, with social workers in long term teams particularly seeing the benefits of using FGDM for exploration of wider family relationships. In addition, the service is being utilised more for families involved in the Child Protection process and the future aim would be to analyse whether this is having an impact on the length of time children are registered for.



FGDM continues to be utilised well as a support for helping families remain together or be reunited following a care arrangement being put in place. In this period 51 connections were completed with 22 family meetings held and 22 plans created.

As a result of FGDM involvement over this past year:

- 22 families have remained together, preventing the need for an alternative care arrangement
- five families have remained together in kinship care
- three families have had children move from parental care to kinship care
- four families have had children return home from being accommodated elsewhere
- one child moved from kinship care to foster care

FGDM has demonstrated a transformative impact on families and professionals by fostering collaboration, empowerment, and sustainable solutions. In one case, parents who previously had children placed in care were able to create a coordinated plan with family and professionals, enabling them to successfully care for their new baby. They expressed that “every family should have this opportunity,” highlighting the value of shared responsibility and practical support.

In another instance, a young person returned home after 20 months in care because the family felt confident to challenge processes and develop their own plan. The social worker involved noted that the clarity and ownership of the family's plan strengthened parental resilience and ensured supports were identified. Professionals valued the impartial facilitation that allowed families to lead decision-making.

Overall, FGDM empowers families, strengthens relationships, and improves outcomes by placing decision-making at the heart of family life.

## **Scottish Child Improvement Model and "Bairns Hoose"**

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) is a trauma informed approach to joint investigative interviews (JII) used as the preferred method to interview children jointly with police. It's a trauma informed model designed to improve the forensic interviewing experience and contribute to better care and justice outcomes.

Within Scottish Borders we have three SCIM trained workers, two social workers and one police officer. The workers are based within our co located Child Protection Unit. They have undertaken 87 SCIM Interviews from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. Most of the interviews take place in a trauma informed interview suite with child and family friendly, discreet access and welcoming /waiting areas based within Eildon View.

The interview suite was established through a joint application for funding by SBC and Children First to the Bairns Hoose.

The Bairns' Hoose is based on the Icelandic “Barnahus” model. It's a multi- agency approach that provides comprehensive support to children and young people who have been victims or a witness of abuse. The goal is to offer holistic, child centred support under one roof, reducing the needs for the children to report their story multiple times.

Further applications to the fund have allowed us to develop routine access to support for families by contracting Children First to provide two Rights, Advocacy and Trauma Recovery Workers. They are routinely based in the interview suite to support families at interview and post interview and have also offered pre interview support to enable a child and young person to feel ready to share their experience.



We are looking to further improve services by:

- Child Voice - we would like to evaluate the support being offered and want to be able to get feedback from the children and young people and their families about the experience so we can make improvements to service.
- Resilient workforce - a plan for trauma specific supervision and a training day around wellness and resilience.

## Transitions Services

The Transitions Service continues to provide a rights-based service to young people in conflict with the law, young people in receipt of Throughcare Aftercare and to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children (UASC).

Whilst the team have developed specific expertise in each area of practice staff also are able to flex across each service area to promote continuity and reduce double-doing. Staffing the transitions service has remained consistent throughout the reporting period.

### *Youth Justice*

This reporting year has seen the formation of the Children in Conflict with the Law delivery group. This multi-agency strategic group aims to support the local delivery of the National Youth Justice Standards which focus heavily on children's rights and participation, prevention, and early intervention.

This year also saw the beginning of the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024 with all under 18's at risk of custody now recognised as children with the expectation they are placed in secure care instead of prison. To ensure there are robust local procedures in place for 16- or 17-year-olds who are required to be remanded, work on procedures to support this change were commenced and are almost complete.

During the reporting period work has continued with plans to implement Care and Risk Management (CARM) a national protocol for those aged 12-18 who pose a risk of harm to others. Training has been identified to support local implementation with the aim that CARM will be operational later in 2025.


### *Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People (UASC)*

Scottish Borders continues to see an increase to the number of UASC when young people move to continuing care and more new arrivals are received.

In the reporting period, 2024-25, there have been nine UASC received into the Scottish Borders via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which increased the numbers from 22 to 31 since the beginning of the NTS in September 2021. Countries of origin have included Gambia, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan and Vietnam. The young people are mainly age 16 and over, with a minority number under age 16.

These increasing numbers bring additional challenges in obtaining suitable accommodation. Commissioning plans are being developed to identify tenancy support and efforts are focusing on expanding accommodation options which currently include foster care, Registered Social Landlord (RSL) tenancies, private lets, and external residential care.

The 'New Roots' group continues to provide social support and opportunities for young people's participation and feedback. The Transitions Team with support from partners including The Promise Team, Community Learning & Development, and Action for Children ran a football tournament for UASC. Volunteer coaches from Gala Fairydean Rovers supported our young people with training sessions prior to the tournament. Due to the success of the event, plans are being developed to run a tournament again this coming year.



The service continues to promote access to education and health provision and is planning to update the Welcome Pack for UASC and develop an information video. This reporting year a multi-agency UASC project group was formed to support the continued development of a universal service for UASC, taking into account specific needs relating to education, training, and health.

### ***Throughcare and Aftercare***

This reporting year the team have taken part in the National Promise Team's blueprinting work, supporting our young people to share their views on the services provided to them, what works well and what they feel should change. Further work is planned nationally in which Scottish Borders has agreed to be involved.

Following the completion of the Bright Spots survey, 'Your Life Beyond Care', for care leavers by the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) Scottish Borders plan to review the outcomes of the survey and the service will be compiling an action plan to take forward any areas for development.

This year Albert Place Supported Accommodation project has recorded full occupancy for the full 12-month period in terms of tenancy sustainment of those care leavers living in their own tenancies. All care leavers who accessed the Housing Options Protocol in the previous 12 months have sustained their tenancies.

## **Children with a Disability**

Children Affected by Disability (CHAD) is a Borders wide team supporting our children and their carers. Our CHAD team have experienced staffing challenges over the last 12 months, with unfilled vacancies and staff sickness. They are currently working with a larger wait list due to these challenges. However, following successful recruitment, we are approaching a fully staffed team as we move into the next financial year.

In the last 12 months there has been a significant increase in the cost of residential care provisions for our young people who require to be accommodated away from home. We are supporting an increasingly complex number of young people where a care provision is more likely meaning additional pressures on budgets. We are in the final negotiation stages with Aberlour, our commissioned service, to look at extending the scope of this service to support more young people and in different ways including in their own homes. Whilst this will not prevent the need for residential provisions it is hoped it will allow young people to remain at home for longer and will allow more planned moves rather than crisis support and intervention. This will promote better outcomes for the children and their families.

### ***Aberlour Options***

Scottish Borders Council commissions Aberlour Options to provide a range of services to our young people who are affected by disabilities.

Aberlour Options services are allocated via our CHAD Team panel. A social work assessment is completed which provides an analysis of need using the needs and assessment tool. This recommendation is then taken to a multi-agency panel for an allocation of service to be agreed. Where a young person requires a very large package of support at a higher cost, this request is brought into the Children's Services Resource Panel; a multi-agency senior manager panel where decisions around resource and budget allocation is made.

Aberlour provide short break care which offers overnight care for young people either mid-week or weekends. Weekends are very popular, and we are looking at the opportunity to extend the number of weekends offered to meet the demand.

Aberlour also provide a Weekend Activity club (WAC) - a range of activities and trips over a weekend and a Holiday Activity Club - a range of activities during the summer holidays at several venues across the Borders. WAC has successfully integrated into community settings using our family centres which allows families to access support closer to home meaning less travel for the young person.

A trial approach to after-school provision was implemented during the reporting period and was well received by families and young people. This has offered an introduction to Aberlour and respite for these families who do not wish to access full overnight support. Further development around the after-school approach will be considered in 2025/26.

## Sustain

The Council commissions Aberlour's Sustain service to help families on the 'edge of care' to stay together, by giving them the help and support they need to prevent a child from being taken into care.

The primary role of the service is to keep families together; to achieve this, and in recognition of the fact that families need support at all times of the day, the service is responsive to the needs of families and provides support out with normal office hours. The service is flexible in its intensity and aims to encourage the building of family routines, resilience and to improve parental confidence.

Sustain works with young people aged 5-18 years although could support work with a younger age group in emergency situations if required. Sustain work to understand the challenges families face such as poor emotional health and wellbeing, domestic abuse, poverty and drug and alcohol use, and aim to work with the children, young people, parents and carers to develop specific achievable goals so the family can learn to thrive again, without the need for such intensive support.

Sustain complete detailed plans with young people using wellbeing indicators to track outcomes and progress. This allows the families and young people to set their own goals.

Sustain have noticed a rise in reported Child Protection Safeguarding referrals, a rise in referrals in relation to supporting young people who are neurodivergent, with parents seeking respite, and a rise in the number of young people absconding. Parental resilience is identified as a key factor in the requirement of support and one of the most consistent personal goals for children and young people is to have improved relationships with family and friends.

During this period, 51 families and have been referred and worked with the service; of these families only two have resulted in a short-term care arrangement being required giving the service a 96% success rate of preventing children and young people becoming accommodated. It is further notable that of the two who required a care arrangement, these were very short term, and the young people returned to the family home within four weeks.

### Feedback from young people and families is positive:

"..... listened to me and helped me work things out, she calmed me down and helped with things and stuff at home".

Young person

"Keeping me out of crime - giving me confidence - makes me feel normal and not bad and not being judged. I am not allowed out in the community just now, or go to school much, so it's good .... can take me out places."

Young person

"Having someone to take the time to explain things to us, .... can talk X round, representing us at meetings and helping me to get our thoughts and views over".

Parent

"Someone who understands our family and gives advice that works for us, things can be difficult but a call to .... l for support is great".

Parent

## ADULT SERVICES

### Locality Performance and Developments

Locality Social Work Teams provide support to all adults in need of assessment and support out with those eligible for the Learning Disability Service (LDS) and Mental Health (MH) service.

Across all localities, significant progress has been made in reducing waiting lists and strengthening integrated working with health and community partners. Key highlights include:

- **Berwickshire:** Maintained a zero-waiting list for social work assessments. Strong collaboration through Locality Huddles and well-established What Matters Hubs in Duns and Eyemouth. Increased occupational therapy capacity (three full-time posts) has improved support for adaptations and independence. Trusted Assessor training commissioned to enhance staff capability. Extra Care Housing and step-up/step-down flats continue to support prevention and timely discharge.
- **Cheviot:** Achieved a consistent reduction in waiting lists and introduced Total Mobile to improve efficiency. Kelso Hub remains a cornerstone of early intervention; new hubs in Coldstream and planned for Jedburgh aim to expand community engagement. Integrated working through Cheviot Huddle has strengthened hospital discharge planning and risk reduction. Challenges persist around homecare availability, respite provision, and dementia care access.
- **Central:** Implemented a team restructure to improve leadership and specialisation. Waiting lists reduced from 251 (Jan 2024) to 54 (May 2025), with a target of fewer than 10 by late summer 2025. Recruitment and retention remain priorities, alongside managing high volumes of Adult Protection referrals.
- **Teviot (Hawick):** Sustained zero waiting list status for assessments and discharges. Strong performance supported by digital tools (Total Mobile), streamlined processes, and proactive discharge planning. Piloting Technology Enabled Care (TEC) at Hawick Community Hospital and Upper Deanfield demonstrates commitment to preventative, rights-based practice. Risks include rising demand and staff wellbeing, mitigated through audits and training.
- **Tweeddale:** Faced staffing challenges, particularly in occupational therapy (OT), with 57 of 85 waiting for OT assessment. The innovative young person's hub in partnership with Police Scotland and Peebles High School gained national recognition. Performance was impacted by absences with locality review planned for autumn 2025.

#### Overall themes:

- Continued focus on early intervention, community-led support, and integrated working.
- Significant progress in waiting list reduction, though pressures remain in some areas.
- Persistent challenges include staffing shortages, homecare capacity, and specialist dementia provision.
- Focus on improving timelines for those on assessment waiting lists from the Locality teams and wider Directorate supported by the Lead Localities Performance Manager
- Increased adoption of digital tools and TEC to enhance efficiency and independence.



## Community Mental Health Service

The core function of Mental Health (MH) Social Work Services within the Borders is to provide a social work service to those people with mental illness who are at the greatest risk. This continues to be delivered via an integrated model, a combination of health and local authority professionals. The expansion in role of our Learning Disability Service (LDS) Group Manager to also cover MH Social Work has now been made permanent following a successful trial period. This has been received positively within the MH integrated services providing enhanced governance, professional leadership and ensuring links for the relatively small MH social work workforce are improved and embedded.

As the service emerged from the pandemic it experienced a significant level of staff turnover. The staff team is now stable, the age profile is balanced, and turnover is low. Team development days have been established to ensure and maintain a healthy team dynamic, work on service developments and promote the Social Work voice within the integrated service.

Work is underway to improve the therapeutic skills of Social Work professionals within the specialist service, such as developing skills in Distress Brief Intervention, Safety and Stabilisation and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy.

Waiting list times have been reduced significantly despite an increase of 53.5% in new referrals and 36.8% increase in requests for action in the past year over the previous year. Almost all referrals are being allocated within target timescales. Referrals are allocated according to waiting list priority which is determined by level of risk.

Whilst new work is allocated promptly, there are continuing challenges for the team in reviewing care packages for people who do not have an allocated worker. The Team Manager is working to develop a process to resolve this.

Improvement work continues following the review last year of services commissioned by the Community Mental Health Team. The strong theme from the review is that people with lived experience are finding that they aren't always accessing the right service at the right time. Involving commissioned providers in the single point of access into mental health services is being trialled. Following a gap due to the retirement of a key member of staff, regular contract monitoring has resumed.

## Mental Health Officer

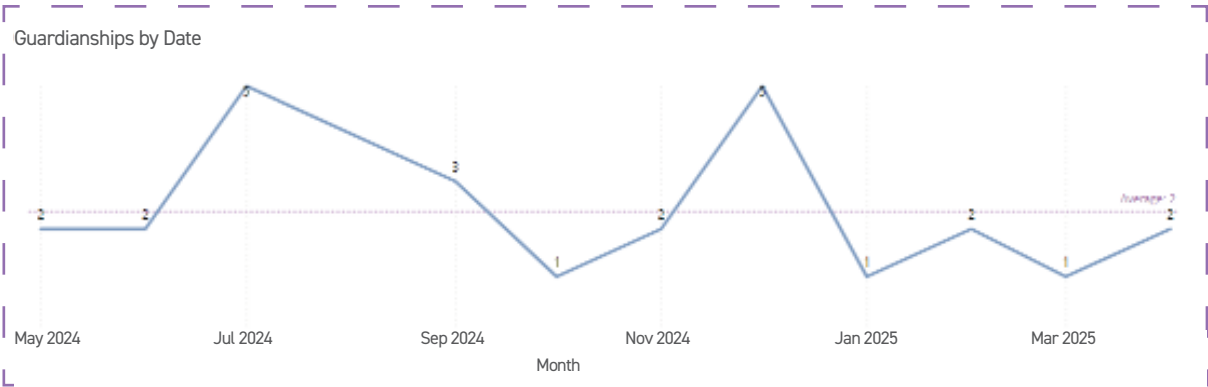
Mental Health Officers (MHOs) have responsibility to work with people who are being assessed or treated in respect of several orders, including short-term detention certificates, compulsory treatment orders, and compulsion orders. MHOs also have a responsibility to work with adults with incapacity. MHOs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

Within the reporting period the service has been working with SBC's policy officer to update Adults with Incapacity (AWI) policy and practice, this will clarify roles and responsibilities and facilitate a more robust AWI procedure.

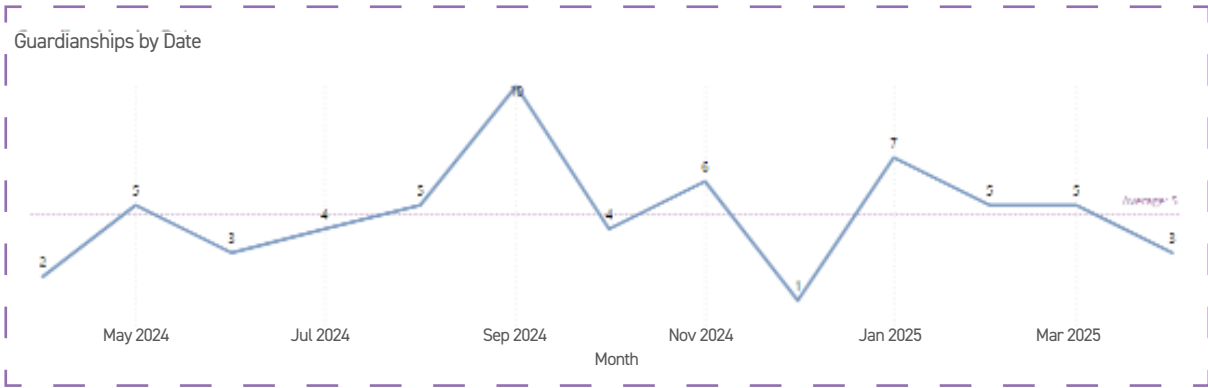
The service has had two students who have successfully completed their MHO award placements, and we have one student in the process of completing their accreditation for the 2024-2025 term.

In addition, over the time period the MHO service has provided reports for 26 CSWO guardianship applications, 60 private guardianship applications, attended and consented to 73 short term detentions, resulting in 58 Compulsory Treatment Orders (CTO) applications.

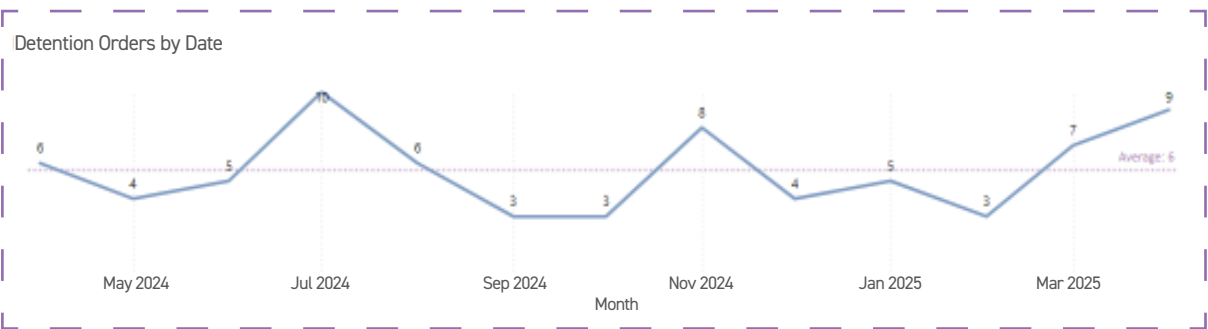
Chief Social Work Officer Guardianships completed 26



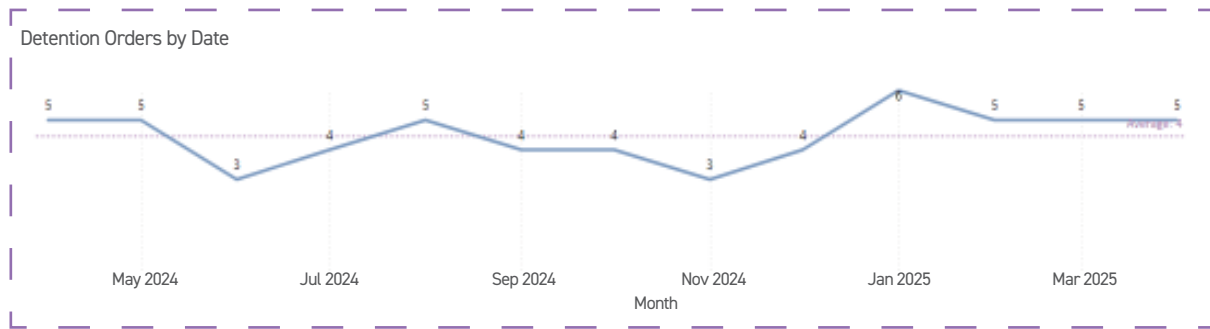
Private welfare guardianships completed 60



Short term detention orders consented to 73



## Compulsory Treatment Orders (CTO) applications 58



## Learning Disability Services

Learning Disability Services within the Borders continue to be delivered via an integrated model. 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 efficiencies in process.

There have been 101 referrals and requests for action into the team over the past year, this is an increase of 8.6% over the previous year.

Team development days have been established to develop and maintain a healthy team dynamic, work on service developments and assert the Social Work voice within the integrated service. To tackle the waiting list pressures, the team is planning a test of change whereby initial referrals into the team will be assessed using the Community Led Support approach, linking into the What Matters Hubs. It is hoped that this test of change will have commenced by September 2025. Referrals of high complexity will be responded directly by Social Work.

Transitions for young people coming into the service remains a significant challenge due to the increasing complexity of need as mentioned earlier.

## Shared Lives

The Shared Lives programme offers a community-based, person-centred alternative to traditional residential or day care. It matches adults or young people needing support with trained, self-employed carers who share their homes and lives, providing day support, overnight breaks, or long-term placements. The initiative has demonstrated significant benefits, including enhanced personal development, increased social connections, and improved well-being for participants. It also supports family carers and promotes independence and inclusion within local communities.

Since its inception in 2020, the programme has shown strong performance, achieving or exceeding its annual targets in most years. By August 2024, 37 matches had been made, with a notable increase in short break placements. Financially, the programme has delivered a return on investment of 4:1, generating substantial cost avoidance and savings for the Council and wider Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Despite successes, challenges remain, particularly in recruiting and retaining carers in key localities. Future plans include expanding the programme into years six and seven, mapping demand, and participating in national initiatives such as the Care Leavers Project.

## Hospital Social Work Team

The Borders General Hospital Social Work Team plays a vital role in delivering safe, person-centred discharges in line with statutory responsibilities and the principles of Discharge without Delay. Despite ongoing workforce pressures, the team has achieved significant progress, helping to reduce delayed discharges by around 50% through improved processes, technology adoption (Total Mobile and STRATA), enhanced use of reablement, and stronger engagement with third-sector partners. A revised Hospital Discharge Process Action Plan has been implemented, alongside clearer referral pathways and active participation in national Discharge without Delay (DwD) workstreams, including Frailty at the Front Door and Discharge to Assess. Challenges remain around workforce capacity, inconsistent involvement in ward huddles, and role clarity among health partners. Future priorities include developing improved pathways, expanding third-sector involvement, and establishing an Acute Discharge Liaison Team and Flow Hub to improve coordination. The team remains committed to sustaining progress through collaboration, innovation, and investment in integrated approaches.

## Community Led Support

Community Led Support (CLS) via What Matters Hubs was introduced across the Borders in 2024-25, coordinated by the CLS co-ordinator with all five locality teams and the Red Cross. Initiatives with Health and Housing partners included hosting a mobility clinic and a mental health drop-in service. The service has assisted over 2,500 people in 2024-25, effectively diverting numerous people from requiring formal assessments by statutory services, while ensuring their needs are adequately met. Consequently, locality teams can focus their resources on more complex situations than before. The CLS post is now based in the Central Locality and in 2025 will begin collaborating with health services to minimise extended hospital admissions. This will begin at Borders General hospital and then develop in respective community hospitals in Duns (when the Knoll re-opens) Kelso, Hawick and at Hay Lodge in Peebles.

The CLS approach continues to benefit from support provided by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi), which has recently developed an algorithm for data capturing that underscores the importance of early intervention strategies in preventing unnecessary hospital admissions or creating dependency relationships with service users/patients.

## Carers

In May 2024, the Living Well Plan for Adult Unpaid Carers 2024-2028 was approved by the Integrated Joint Board (IJB). The Implementation Plan was supported by an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment and outlined the priorities and vision of carers, expressed through the Carers Workstream. The workstream, which includes Carers, Carer representatives, Health professionals, Social Work professionals and third sector colleagues, is a forum which continues to meet on a quarterly basis to support Carer oversight and consultation, regarding planning and policy development in relation to unpaid Carers.

The Carers plan is currently in progress and there are several developments to report, which include the creation of a Parent Carer Workstream and the delivery of Carer awareness training to new staff in hospital and health care teams in NHS Borders. One high dependency bed was commissioned for respite purposes, two others being available in Local Authority Care Homes. Work is also ongoing to improve the referral rate to support services with Primary Care.

The Borders Carers Centre continue to be commissioned to complete Carer Support Plans, SBC's Community Care Reviewing Team being responsible for assessing and reviewing carers who are eligible for, and in receipt of, Carers budgets. During the reporting period a total of 679 referrals were received by Borders Carers Centre. Following referral to the Community Care Reviewing Team, 45 new budgets were awarded to support Carers to take breaks from their caring role. There are currently 160 packages of support in place to support breaks for Carers.

For the year 2025-26, improvements to MOSAIC (our electronic service user record) processes are being planned to support Carer assessments, support plans and reviews. Local guidance is also being reviewed, particularly in relation to Short Breaks and Respite.

## Appropriate Adult

The Appropriate Adult role supports vulnerable individuals (victims, witnesses, or suspects) in understanding and communicating during police processes. This became a statutory duty for Local Authorities in 2019.

In the reporting year, there were 40 requests for Appropriate Adult support. The service is coordinated by the Assistant Team Leader for the Mental Health Officer team, with staff drawn from across local teams. Mandatory two-day training is required, and in December 2024, 20 staff completed training, doubling the rota capacity.

## Care and Repair Service

The service is operating effectively with a full staffing complement. Waiting times for both assessment and adaptation have decreased. There has been an increase in the number of adaptations completed post-COVID, as staff and contractors have been working diligently to address the backlog. This year, 420 minor adaptations and 151 major adaptations were completed. Consideration is being given to providing advice on adaptations, accessing funding, and the Handyperson Service at the What Matters Hubs. A trial period will commence in 2025.

## Care at Home

The care at home sector continues to face significant challenges, primarily due to limited capacity, especially in rural areas, and a growing reliance on Adult Social Care (ASC) to deliver services in more remote locations. The Matching Unit has played a crucial role in sourcing packages of care, successfully matching 1,417 packages, which equates to 7,312.62 hours of care delivery.

An unintended 10% increase in care delivered by ASC has been observed, reducing the proportion delivered by the independent sector. This shift is largely attributed to service changes during the reporting year:

- Decommissioning of Support Services 1st Choice was completed on 1 May 2024, resulting in 47 packages of care being transferred to ASC under TUPE regulations, adding approximately 900 hours to in-house provision.
- Notice provided by DDL Home Care Services returned 117 hours to ASC, with 12 staff also transferring under TUPE.

The Care at Home Re-Design (CAHRD) Project Group was established in 2024. This group has undertaken:

- A comprehensive needs assessment involving a wide range of stakeholders
- Benchmarking exercises against other local authorities.

A mixed model approach of Care at Home provision including directly provided and commissioned services remains the preferred option. Next steps include:

- Developing a new commissioning framework
- Engaging the market regarding tender opportunities.

During 2024–2025, a total of 1,862 care at home reviews were completed by locality teams and the Community Care Reviewing Team.



## Care Homes

The Council's in-house care home services achieved grades of 4 (Good) across all five services providing permanent placements. This represents an improvement for three Local Authority care homes compared to the previous year. Within the independent sector, performance remains steady, with 14 of 16 independent homes achieving grades of 4 or higher, and three homes receiving the Quality Award.

Under the Adult Support and Protection (ASP) statute, there were 47 individual ASP referrals raised, and 35 investigations completed during the reporting period. No care homes were subject to formal procedures under a Large-Scale Investigation. Performance and practice continue to be monitored by the Community Care Reviewing Team, with each home allocated a dedicated Link Officer. Significant events are recorded within MOSAIC provider chronologies.

A total of 644 reviews were completed, comprising 597 within the SBC area and 67 out with the region.

Due to high demand, the block purchase contract for one high-dependency respite bedroom in a Kelso care home has been extended for 12 months, with provisional bookings secured until the contract end date.

To support patient flow from the Borders General Hospital, an additional 15 beds were commissioned which were used by 27 individuals during the reporting period. In addition, a new care home vacancy matching process has been introduced as a one-year test of change. This process aims to provide a single point of contact and more accurate data on bed capacity. The Community Care Reviewing Team now leads on matching service users to appropriate care settings across the region. Early indications suggest this approach has reduced backlog delays and is shortening waiting times for care home admissions.

## Reablement

Reablement services are available at Upper Deanfield in Hawick and Garden View, Tweedbank, for those not well enough to return home post-hospital. The majority of home based reablement is provided by the NHS Borders Home First service, however ASC has also piloted a discharge to assess reablement team in Central Galashiels.

## Day Services

Following the outcome of the 2022 judicial review and the subsequent request to re-establish a building-based day service in Hawick, Teviot Day Service has been operational since 29 April 2024. To date, 46 individuals have accessed the service, which has proven to be a highly valued resource. It provides carers with essential respite and plays a key role in preventing premature admission to residential care for those attending.

In Eildon, work commenced with the formation of an Eildon Day Supports Task and Finish Group. Consultation and survey findings completed in early 2024 highlighted gaps in meaningful day opportunities for older adults with personal care needs, alongside challenges in accessing information about existing services and transportation barriers. While the demand for a dedicated building-based service was less pronounced than in Hawick due to a high uptake of respite under Self Directed Support, engagement events reinforced the need for carer respite and positive outcomes for individuals with higher dependency needs. This is being explored and is expected to conclude in 2025-26.

## Community Equipment Service (CES)

2024-25 saw an increased demand for services and equipment, especially in postural care, paediatric, and bariatric care. Staff recruitment has been a challenge but is improving as we approach 2025-26, with only one vacancy left to fill.

A Short-term Wheelchair loan service for Scottish Borders residents has been launched, replacing the Red Cross service. This is now fully operational.

Additionally, we've upgraded our Elms equipment ordering software to enhance efficiency, communication, and user satisfaction.

Operationally, there has been increased pressure on the service due to rising demand to support critical hospital discharges and evidence of more people being rehabilitated in the community rather than in a hospital setting. This has put considerable strain on budgets towards the end of year. By introducing an emergency provisions process, the service continued to support critical discharges and admissions to hospitals. In 24/25, the service issued 13,338 pieces of equipment, equating to circa £1.8 million of which circa £1.6 million was stock recycled by the service. 91% of issued goods were returned and recycled, and of those returns, 4% had to be scrapped.

## Occupational Therapy (OT)

Ensuring adequate coverage by qualified Occupational Therapists, as well as addressing general recruitment and retention, remains a challenge for 2024-25. Agency OT staff have been employed to help manage demand and mitigate service user risk. With the support of newly trained Paraprofessionals/OT Assistants and the What Matters Hubs, waiting lists have been successfully reduced across most areas with further improvements required in Tweeddale.

Referral rates continue to rise as the population ages, which is also reflected in the increased demand for equipment services.

All Locality Paraprofessional and OT Assistant staff have completed Equipment and Minor Adaptations Trusted Assessor training. We are also exploring the possibility of in-house training for SBC's own qualified OTs from within our non-OT registered staff cohort. There is national interest in this initiative, which has been identified as a priority within the Royal College of Occupational Therapists workforce strategy (Scotland). Performance Reporting and Dashboards.

## Charging Policy

The Charging Policy (Internal Group) completed two Integrated Impact Assessments in 2024 regarding the elimination of charges for the provision of microwaves and freezers, and the removal of stand-alone/unique charges for respite at Station Court in Duns. Both assessments were presented and approved by the Internal Charging Group and the External Charging Forum.

The Appeals Panel continues to meet with Finance, Care Resource Team, and Benefits staff to review appeal applications submitted by care managers on behalf of individual service users.

## Ordinary Residence

In Scotland, Ordinary Residence (OR) refers to the local authority area where a person is considered to have their settled home, which determines which council is responsible for funding and providing their community care services. OR cases are reviewed fortnightly and occasionally on an ad hoc basis. This area of work has seen the development of an OR checklist, a Transitional Funding briefing note, and a template table in 2024 to address increased activity. SBC has resolved several cases in its favour through improved consistency in recording and the use of an OR chronology. All OR developments for 2024-25 are now available on the SBC Intranet and will be integrated into the Mosaic database (Social Work and Adult Social Care) in late 2025.

## Corporate Appointeeship

A Corporate Appointee is responsible for managing and maintaining benefit claims on behalf of 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. Corporate Appointee accounts are specifically used to handle money received from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and not for income from employment. Support includes paying bills, managing benefits, and budgeting for the individual.

The CSWO, appointed by the Department of Work and Pensions, acts on behalf of SBC to manage benefits and safeguard the interests of vulnerable individuals. The operational management of these accounts is delegated to care managers within Social Work, supported by business support staff.

The Council has 105 Corporate Appointee clients under the following service areas:

Service User Group	Number of Clients
Adult at Risk	4
Adults with a Learning Disability	28
Alcohol Related Brain Damage	1
Alcohol Related Brain Damaged (suspected)	1
Autism	1
Child Illness/Disability	3
Family Stress	1
Head Injury	1
Mental Health	25
Misuse of Drugs, Alcohol or Volatile Substances	1
Older People	17
Older People with Dementia	5
Other Children in Need	2
Other Functional Impairment	1
People with a Physical Disability	10
Person Seeking Financial Advice	1
Substance Abuse	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>

In addition, we have three clients in residential care which SBC continue to be corporate appointee.

Each Corporate Appointee client has a designated bank account with the Royal Bank of Scotland where their benefits are deposited. From these accounts, expenses such as utility bills are paid according to their budget plan. The Council utilises "Allpay Ltd" to provide an accessible means for clients to manage regular spending, serving as an alternative to cash withdrawals. Funds from the client's designated DWP benefits account are transferred to Allpay and then loaded onto a card, which is managed either by the client or their care provider. Currently, 38 clients use Allpay Ltd.

Below outlines which service areas our 38 clients are in who use Allpay for their daily “cash” expenses.

Service User Group	Number of Clients
Mental Health	15
Learning Disability	10
Adult at Risk	3
Children Young Person	
Older People	1
Older People/Mental Health	
Person with a Physical Disability	3
Substance Abuse	
Other	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

'Other' includes Alcohol Related Brain Damage, Child illness/Disability, Family Stress, Head Injury, Other Vulnerable People, Person Seeking Financial Advice

The table provided shows the average monthly charges incurred by SBC for withdrawals and credits on Allpay cards (all ex. VAT) in the year 2024/25:

				Total average cost per month
Cost per ATM withdrawal	£1.51	Average number of ATM withdrawals per month	92.6	£139.83
Cost per Credit to Card	£1.74	Average number of credits to card per month	117.25	£204.02
				<b>£303.85</b>

DOSH is a commissioned provider supporting people with a learning disability to manage their money. We have 43 clients who use this service directly and DOSH hold the Corporate Appointeeship.

## Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service

The Domestic Abuse Advocacy Support Service (DAAS) is SBC's specialist domestic abuse service based in the Public Protection Unit. It provides support to any adult over the age of 16 years living in the Scottish Borders who has or is experiencing domestic abuse perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner. They support both men and women, including transgender men/women.

DAAS are a small team of qualified independent domestic abuse advocates (IDAAs). They work in partnership with other services to provide a coordinated response to protect survivors and their families. DAAS are the only specialised IDAA service in Scottish Borders and operates as a Leading Lights accredited service which requires specific standards e.g. response times, risk assessments to be achieved. DAAS will respond to all self and Police Scotland referrals within 24hrs and agency referrals within 48hrs.

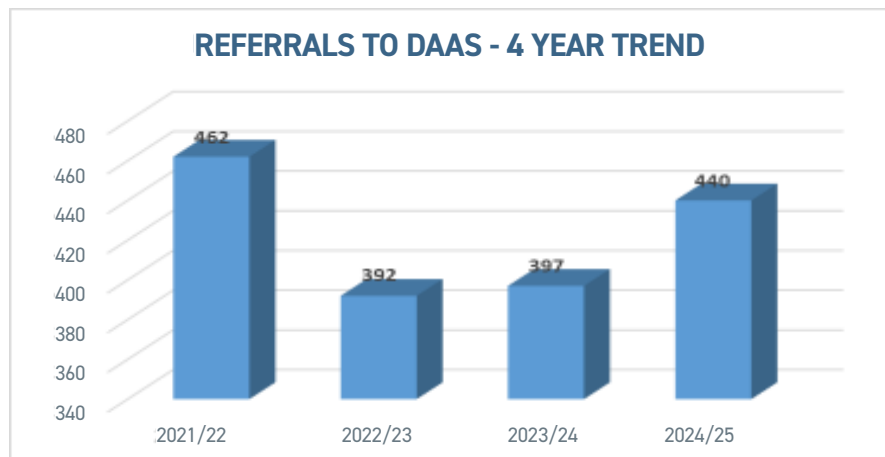
**DAAS** is one of only two Leading Lights accredited services in Scotland.

**DAAS** will support clients to identify abusive behaviours, and to identify the risks that abusive behaviours can generate. They will work with clients to create a bespoke safety plan and explore, creatively, the range of options for survivors.

**DAAS** can support clients through the criminal court process if their partner or ex-partner has been charged with committing domestic offence(s).

In August 2025, **DAAS** will be launching the new Domestic Abuse Court Advocacy (DACA) Service to extend the reach in providing court advocacy to anyone in the Scottish Borders, this includes people working with other services. This is part of the national network of DACA services in Scotland, training and implementation support being provided by Scottish Government funding. **DAAS** has three staff members trained as Domestic Abuse Court Advocates and this will increase the capacity to work with new partners.

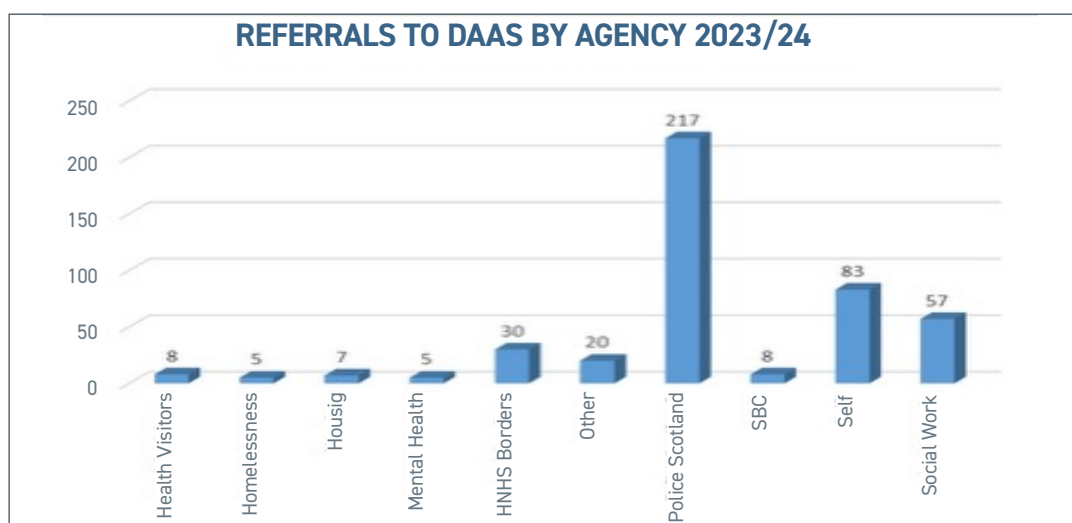
#### DAAS Referrals April 2024 to March 2025



In 2024/25 **DAAS** received 440 referrals representing a 10% increase on the previous year. Trends in relation to victim demographic remain constant: the vast majority (96%) of referrals are for female victims, most clients are in the 25-48yr age range, this reflects the trend for incidents reported to Police Scotland. There is an increase in particularly young clients referred, this requires more collaborative working with partners such as social work, health, specialist services to manage the interface between public protection and domestic abuse risk management.

The biggest increase has been in the 50+ age range, with a 69% increase in referrals in 2024/25.

**DAAS** works closely with partner agencies across the statutory and voluntary sector: this is critical in order that wherever victims seek support, partner agencies respond effectively and refer to **DAAS**. Over the last 12yrs **DAAS** has worked to develop clear referral pathways, supported staff to risk assess and safety plan and developed working relationships with key stakeholders.



The source of referrals to **DAAS** has remained constant over the last 10yrs, with most referrals coming directly from an incident i.e. Police Scotland. However, there is an increase in referrals from social work, adult and child protection and a significant increase in self-referrals.



**DAAS** continues to see a repeat referral rate of approx. 30%; this is in line with the national trend, demonstrating domestic abuse as a repeating pattern of abusive behaviour.

**DAAS** have been a recipient of the NatWest Circle Fund since 2022 (£2000/annum) providing much needed additional funding for survivors predominantly to improve home security and safety: this enables many survivors and their families to remain safe in their own homes.

In relation to identified risk, approx. 30% of all referrals are deemed “high risk” and as such require a robust risk management process, regular reviews and active safety planning. High risk cases will be referred to the local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

## Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) have been running in Scottish Borders since 2016 and year on year, there has been an increase in cases heard. They operate every four weeks, and core agencies meet to share information, analyse risk and creatively safety plan to protect victims and their families. MARACs operate to a standardised model and Scottish Borders has been assessed twice by Safe Lives as an effective, well managed MARAC.

MARAC heard 210 cases in 2024/25 representing an increase of 56% on the previous year. The MARAC Steering Group are undertaking a review with partner agencies to explore any required changes to the MARAC meeting schedule to accommodate the increase in referrals.

The **DAAS** service manages the MARAC process by providing the MARAC Coordinator role, MARAC Advocate role and a MARAC Chair. Other agencies who chair MARAC locally include Children1st, Justice, Berwickshire Housing Association and Police Scotland.

## Scottish Borders Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership

The Scottish Borders Violence Against Women & Girls Partnership (VAWP) is a long-established partnership responsible for the implementation of Scotland's Equally Safe Strategy. Most recently they successfully implemented the outcome of a pilot on Human Trafficking in partnership with Consortium of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Scottish Government and the National Trafficking Service, TARA.

Scottish Borders hosted a national, online learning event in October 2024 at which 170 delegates heard from partners involved in the pilot about the work to design and deliver a more effective response to human trafficking in a rural local authority.

Resources shared nationally included new Human Trafficking Multi-agency guidance, an e-learning module, and a refreshed referral pathway for the Scottish Borders. This followed an extensive workforce development programme in the Scottish Borders and the implementation of a First Responder Team in the Public Protection Unit. The pilot and the resources developed were highlighted by COSLA as examples of best practice in developing an effective human trafficking response.

## Independent Living Fund

In 2024 the Independent Living Fund (ILF) reopened for applications, having been closed to new applications since 2010. Local Authorities were designated a limit on applications for the year therefore Scottish Borders developed an allocation protocol to ensure a fair selection process, the Borders being allocated a maximum of 16 applications for the reporting year. Each application is checked and approved through a local panel before submission, with the draft guidance currently being updated to include recent changes to the criteria.

Following the ILF closure to new applications, 40 people in Scottish Borders continued to receive an ILF award in the year prior to the ILF reopening. In the reporting year Scottish Borders achieved its target of 16 applications, making 18 applications in total following consultation with ILF. Allocation figures are yet to be confirmed for the year 2025-26.

## Self-Directed Support

Self-Directed Support (SDS) is the legislation which governs the way that support is delivered to children, adults (or their legal representatives) and carers, in the community. The principles of choice and control lie at the heart of SDS, people receiving the support they require to meet agreed personal outcomes.

Central to SDS are the 4 Options through which people can choose to receive their support.

### For the year 2024-25:

- 17.46% of people chose a Direct Payment (Option 1)
- 0.37% of people chose an Individual Service Fund (Option 2)
- 72.18% of people chose Social Work Managed support (Option 3)
- 9.99% of people chose a Mixed Package (Option 4)

At present Scottish Borders continues to be one of the highest users of Direct Payments in Scotland, however the take up Option 2 remains low.

In June 2023, the Scottish SDS Improvement Plan 2023-2027 was published, proposing a whole system approach to improving service delivery. Following extensive consultation, the Post Legislative Scrutiny report by the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee was published in 2024. The Committee concluded that the current model of social care delivery is incompatible with the principles of SDS, making it very difficult for local bodies to develop a culture which supports SDS principles to become a reality.

As a result of the recommendations within the report, the Council Management Team (CMT) agreed an action plan to begin the process of change, starting with the adoption of SDS Learning and Improvement Framework developed through Social Work Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Scottish Government.

In the Scottish Borders the SDS Forum is made up of people who receive SDS or have an interest in promoting the legislation; membership including the SDS Lead. The SDS Lead also chairs the SDS Improvement Group which includes HSCP staff, people who receive SDS and third sector representatives. The SDS Lead and members of the Forum have presented at national events and together with the Improvement Group provide an established base for co-production, from which we can progress and work on our identified priorities. The recently published SDS Standards have provided us with a map of what good looks like, the Learning and Improvement Framework outlining how we evaluate progress to begin to address local issues. In using the Framework and SDS Standards we will be able to continue the work we do well, whilst targeting the improvements required on a local level.

The SDS Lead attends the national Community of Practice and Learning Forums with the intention of taking forward the Framework and developing greater consistency with other HSCPs. Locally the short life Direct Payment Rate Improvement Group is finalising their recommendations, and we continue work on staff training which includes electronic, online and face to face sessions involving third sector partners. Work also continues in the updating and reviewing of SDS staff guidance.

## Sensory Services

The Scottish Borders Annual Sensory Services Review 2024 reflects a year of steady progress and ongoing challenges in supporting individuals with hearing, vision, and dual sensory impairments.

A key strength during the year was the improvement in integration with health and social care services, particularly through closer collaboration with NHS Borders and third-sector partners such as RNIB

Scotland and Action on Hearing Loss. This partnership approach enhanced referral pathways and helped deliver more coordinated support for individuals with complex needs. Outreach activities and community engagement also increased, raising awareness of available services and encouraging earlier intervention.

Access to assistive technology improved, with more demonstrations and home-based assessments offered, enabling service users to benefit from practical solutions tailored to their needs. Carer support was another positive development, with better assessments and signposting to resources that help families manage the impact of sensory loss.

Despite these achievements, the review identifies areas requiring further attention. Service delivery in rural and remote areas remains inconsistent, with some individuals facing delays or limited access to specialist support. Workforce capacity and training continue to be challenges, particularly in developing expertise for dual sensory loss and complex cases. Additionally, while statutory obligations are met, data collection and performance reporting need strengthening to provide clearer insights into service outcomes, waiting times, and user satisfaction. Formal feedback mechanisms from service users are underdeveloped, limiting opportunities for continuous improvement.

Looking ahead, the review emphasised the need for enhanced workforce development, improved digital and outreach solutions for rural communities, and structured user engagement to inform service design.

## Technology Enabled Care


The Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Team has been making significant progress in its analogue to digital telecare transition. They were recently awarded the Bronze Digital Telecare Implementation Award in recognition of their efforts. To achieve this milestone, they successfully deployed digital-ready alarm devices to at least 50% of all dispersed and group alarm users.

The team faced challenges such as funding issues, equipment shortages, and telecom provider difficulties, but they overcame them and began actively installing alarms in the last year to ensure the Borders citizens remain safe during this transition period. At this point in time 95% of their clients have been upgraded to digital alarms. Their Alarm Receiving Centre, based in East Lothian Council, is expected to become fully digital by the end of August 2025, and they are optimistic about achieving the Silver Digital Telecare Implementation Award in 2025.

## Justice Social Work

Justice Social Work continue to provide a statutory justice service, delivered using a range of relationship-based practice, aimed at prevention, diversion, reduction and management of offending. Within the current reporting period:

- 425 Criminal Justice Social Work Reports were completed, a small decrease since last year, and as with the previous year, 100% of reports were submitted on or before time
- 236 Community Payback Orders were imposed, a modest increase on the previous year
- 42 Diversion from Prosecution cases commenced, a 28% decrease from the previous year
- Seven Drug Testing and Treatment Orders were in effect on the last day of the reporting period, one less than the previous year
- 40 Voluntary Throughcare cases were offered, a slight decrease on the previous year
- 31 Statutory Throughcare cases in the community were in effect on the last day of the reporting period, a marginal increase on the previous year
- Assessment for bail reports reduced again this reporting year by 20% from the previous year to 62 assessments
- Structured Deferred Sentences cases imposed almost doubled from 14 to 27 individuals in the reporting period
- There was no fiscal work orders imposed in the report period



In addition to individual based practice, Justice Social Work continue to deliver several group programmes. These include offence-specific programmes for sexual offenders, domestic abuse perpetrators, and domestic abuse survivors. Not all service users are suitable for the group programmes, and so one to one work was also undertaken, adapted according to presenting risk and need.

Partnership working with Police, Health, Housing and other partners in the management of registered sex offenders continues to be considered an area of strength, sharing information to formulate risk management plans in line with the MAPPA process.

The Justice Social Work service continues 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.

The Unpaid Work Service (UPW) continues to be a visible aspect of Justice Social Work. In collaboration with Just Cycle, the service collects discarded bikes and undertakes restoration; service users learn how to build, repair, restore and maintain bicycles. They are then delivered to the charity workshop where they are sold. UPW continue to use one of our skilled supervisors to deliver a woodwork workshop where 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 and continues to be developed for service users requiring light duty UPW 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. There are plans to increase the staffing resource for this area in the next reporting period.

Other courses continue to be delivered, such as Home Maintenance, which equips individuals with the skills and knowledge in maintaining their home, and a cooking programme which provides service users with an opportunity to gain a qualification recognised by employers in the food and hospitality industry. The UPW Greenhouse team provide the fruit and vegetables for the project.

The Women's Hub continues 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 creative thinking and mindfulness.

Since March 2023 Justice Social Work have been providing, in conjunction with a registered social landlord, accommodation for those subject to bail or release where a lack of accommodation might otherwise result in remand or where additional support is required. Support arrangements are delivered in partnership with Homelessness Services and include regular visits as part of an intensive support plan or to identify suitable ongoing accommodation options.

### ***Caledonian Men's Service***

It is approximately four years since delivery of the Justice Service Caledonian Programme was brought in-house and the service has consistently maintained numbers to ensure meaningful delivery and learning experiences for participants. 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.

### ***Caledonian Women's and Children's Service***

A total of 55 survivors of domestic abuse were offered support during the reporting period, with support offered ranging from personal safety planning to emotional support, signposting and assisting women to increase their own and their children's safety.

During the reporting period 93 court reports were completed that included a domestic abuse element. Going forward to the new reporting year, the Children's Service will be provided by Children 1st, working closely with the Justice Social Work team.

### ***Connections Group Work Programme***

The Justice Service previously developed a generic group work programme for male service users subject to Community Payback Orders. 'Connections', a 12-week cognitive-behavioural programme for men continues to be offered, focusing on identification of problems and improved emotional regulation, consequential thinking, decision-making and victim awareness.

The Connections group builds on, and supplements offence focused work undertaken as part of a CPO case management plan.

### ***ReConnect***

The 'ReConnect' Service is a Justice Service dedicated women's programme. It is a 15-week programme focusing on improved wellbeing and emotional regulation, building resilience and provides a framework for better decision making, self-efficacy and reduction in offending.

### ***Wellbeing Officer***

The Justice Service continues to include a Wellbeing Officer who works with service users to support health and wellbeing. This includes delivering tailored wellbeing sessions, including counselling and confidence building, or providing signposting to other support services. The Wellbeing Officer has created links and referral pathways with several mental health support services, dental health, NHS Healthy Living Network, wellbeing cafes and several community gardens, thus providing both direct support and a broader wellbeing focus to improved mental health.

### ***Commissioning***

During the reporting period, Justice Social Work continued to commission a Recovery Peer Mentor Service from Recovery Coaching Scotland which provides people with addictions the opportunity to work on a holistic recovery pathway, tailored to their needs supported by someone with 'lived experience'. Feedback remains positive and there is a plan in the new reporting year for an extension to this commission to include a female peer mentor to work within the women's service space.



### ***Other Work Programmes***

The Community Intervention Service based in Edinburgh continue to deliver sex offender specific programmes, funded by Justice Social Work and facilitated within Edinburgh or via Microsoft Teams if this is considered appropriate. In addition, Social Work staff deliver the pre-group work and individually tailored interventions.

The Justice Service continue to work closely and provide funding to other Council services delivering support to Justice service users including an employability officer to work with offenders to identify long term employment opportunities. The Employability Service dovetails with supports offered by the Community Learning Support Service who offer bespoke learning opportunities to access sustained engagement in learning and achieve self-identified goals.

### ***National and Statutory***

The end of the reporting year saw a cohort of prisoners serving less than four years released under the Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill passed in November 2024. As numbers were extremely small there was little impact on the day-to-day delivery of services in the Scottish Borders.

The Justice Service continue to maintain strong links to Social Work Scotland and have active representation at the SWS Justice Standing Committee and on several of the associated Delivery Sub-groups.

The Justice Service continue to support and embed a trauma aware and responsive approach to the delivery of services. A refurbishment upgrade to the Women's Hub has commenced to make the environment more comfortable using a trauma informed approach. Service users will be involved in this work via the painting and artwork in the lounge area.

### ***Community Justice Partnership***

Although the Community Justice Partnership (CJP) sits separate to Justice Social Work, the two continue to work closely together. A key feature of the governance of the Board is the oversight of the Scottish Borders Community Justice Partnership Priority Action Plan in response to the key national outcomes for Community Justice. Much of the local direction reflects the national agenda for early intervention and diversion from prosecution, even though we saw a decrease in numbers this reporting period.

### ***Challenges***

The Scottish Borders still lacks a forensic mental health service, creating challenges in both consultation and access for individuals presenting with mental health issues. While we collaborate with general mental health services, there are ongoing gaps in timely access to specialist forensic assessment and treatment. The impact of this is logged on our risk register and discussions are ongoing between partner agencies as to how we work together to manage this current gap.

### ***Service User engagement***

One of the key priority local actions is the enhancement of service user engagement and feedback. Efforts continue across the Justice partnership to understand and incorporate the voices of victims of crime, survivors, those with lived experience and their families into the planning and delivery of services. Questionnaires are offered to all Justice service users to gain feedback and monitor quality.

## ***Customers Feedback:***

### **Unpaid work service**

#### **1. February 2024 Feedback from a local third sector charity**

"We would like to express our deepest gratitude to each of you for the incredible work you have done in creating this garden for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Your efforts have not only transformed a limited space but it feels like it has been the final 'cherry on the top' for our premises, and those who use it.

Restorative justice participants have used their time and skills to contribute something truly meaningful. It will provide comfort to those who have trauma and offer them a space to reclaim moments of joy on their path to recovery.

Thank you for all your hard work and those who committed to giving back to the community."

#### **2. October 2024 equipment made for a school nursery**

"Thank you so much for all the wonderful equipment you made for the nursery, the children are all using it well and are excited to play on the new stage, we will definitely be using your services in the future."

### **Extracts from Justice Service User feedback questionnaires (for service users on a Community Payback Orders/Unpaid Work)**

"I now have a better understanding of my offending, and the programme has allowed me to address the issues that were enabling my offending."

"Unpaid work has raised my self-esteem and helped me feel I was giving back to the community. The weekly sessions with my Justice supervisor helped me come to terms with my offending and gave me hope for the future."

"The programme was delivered in a professional manner allowing me to come to terms with my offending behaviour."

"It hasn't been easy, and a lot of people have given me time and knowledge. I will endeavour to repay their hard work by behaving in a law-abiding manner."

"The Programme is well structured and the staff all very committed. Three years is a long time to be on a supervision order however I feel I have applied myself to the payback programme by helping the local community and this gave me a boost to my wellbeing."







## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

### OUT OF AUTHORITY PROJECT

The Out of Authority Project was established in February 2024 to address the increasing number and spiralling costs of out of authority residential care and education placements. This aligns with the Council's strategic aims of Fulfilling Our Potential and Good Health and Wellbeing.

The Project Brief has the following objectives and strategic goals:

Following extensive work across the Children's Services partnership, a report (with recommendations) on Phase 1 of the Out of Authority Project was submitted to SBC on 24 October 2024. The report and recommendations were accepted and the Council agreed over £2,000,000 additional investment across Education and Children's Services.

Additional resource agreed within Children and Families Duty Team, Family Placement Team and Educational Psychology Service, and recruitment was undertaken following approval.

A further report was submitted to SBC on 19 December 2024 which outlined the approach of Phase 2 of the Out of Authority Project. The report proposed a staged intervention model with five workstreams identified to progress service development.

- 1) Workstream 1** takes a focused data driven approach to identifying the individual care, therapeutic support and education packages associated with each of the young people being looked after out of authority and will create an individualised plan for return to Scottish Borders wherever possible to an appropriate provision within the staged intervention model.
- 2) Workstream 2** considers service delivery models across multi agency landscapes. This includes consideration of specialist education service delivery, family support service models, tailored support programmes and localisation of teams and services to be responsive and adaptive to meet needs.
- 3) Workstream 3** focuses on workforce development, identifying the staffing models, including through external commissions, roles and responsibilities of staffing models as well as training and development needs will be designed to deliver the proposed models. Consideration will be made of how to minimise the need for children and their families to build new relationships with different teams across the care journey. Alongside this work, a programme of Volunteer Engagement and Mentoring Programs, in partnership with The Vardy Foundation will recruit and train volunteers to mentor care-experienced young people, offering emotional support and guidance, develop peer support networks and facilitate connections between care-experienced young people and adults with similar experiences.

**4) Workstream 4** considers models of residential provisions, considering types of home environments for children and young people at different stages of their care journey. Consideration will be given to ensuring safe and appropriate housing to support kinship models, respite, supported family living and alternative approaches to keeping siblings together in a stable housing provision as well as adapted living spaces for young people with additional and complex needs. Further options for consideration may include long term supported independent living provisions and emergency or respite models of accommodation.

**5) Workstream 5** assesses and plans the funding and delivery of the physical environments and infrastructure needed to respond to the proposed models of care, living and education to support both the return of the young people currently placed elsewhere and to make provision to prevent the need to revert to placing young people in out of authority in future. This workstream will consider a regional level of facility, likely to be based in the Lowood development area as well as the localised provisions and housing needs.

All the workstreams will progress during the next reporting period, with some aspects of the project involving engagement with The Vardy Foundation, a charitable organisation with experience in an entrepreneurship approach to prevention and early intervention, and to develop models of funding and delivery to support the transformation programme.

### ***The Coming Home Programme (young people and adults with a learning disability)***

The Coming Home Programme is the predominant strategic and operational focus for the service and will remain so for the foreseeable future in line with Scottish Governments Coming Home report. As of April 2025, we reported 22 people on the Scottish Government's national Dynamic Support Register in the red and amber categories, including two people who are delayed in hospital. Recognising the significant challenges in supporting those with the most complex needs, we have engaged a consultancy, Lives Through Friends, to support us in delivering a different more individualised approach to service design. This approach is being delivered to four people whom we hope to support to return to the Borders. Our efforts have been delayed due to lack of availability of appropriate housing.

A further project to deliver four new tenancies within the Borders has opened in December 2024, with plans for four people to move in by the end of 2025. Delays moving people into these tenancies relate predominantly to the challenges of recruitment of Social Care workforce. We envisage a future demand of three new people with complex needs year on year. Financial affordability is a key challenge for the HSCP.

## **Chronologies, Analytical Writing and Professional Curiosity**

Improving the quality of chronologies remains a national challenge, consistently highlighted in Joint Inspection reports across Scotland for both adult and children's services. This is also a key focus in the Scottish Borders, where there is a strong commitment to driving meaningful change. To support this, a multi-agency workstream, CAP (Chronologies, Analytical Writing, and Professional Curiosity), has been established under a 'Think Family' approach. CAP brings together professionals from health, police, education, justice, and social work (both children's and adults' services) to explore how analytical writing and critical thinking can strengthen the link between chronologies and professional curiosity. The aim is to enhance the analytical depth of chronologies and foster a culture of curiosity across all partner agencies.



Through audits, staff surveys, and focus groups, the workstream has gathered valuable insights into current practice and the barriers to effective use of chronologies and professional curiosity. This engagement has helped benchmark the current position, inform the refresh of local guidance, and identify training needs. By embedding analytical writing and curiosity into everyday practice, the workstream seeks to support sustainable improvements and values-led decision-making. By the end of the workstream, updated local standards for chronologies and professional curiosity will be published, aligned with national guidance, and underpinned by research. Most importantly, this work aims to improve engagement and outcomes for service users, families, and carers across the community.

## Service User Engagement

In December 2023 the Scottish Borders appointed an Adult Support and Protection (ASP) Service User Engagement Officer to enhance this part of our process. Time has been dedicated to building relationships and gathering feedback from individuals with lived experience of ASP. This has given adults the opportunity to share their personal stories, highlighting what worked well and what could be improved.

Insights from this feedback informed the development of the first Service User Engagement and Improvement Report, which was presented to the Adult Protection Deliver Group (APDG). The report identified four key priority themes:

- challenges in communication with service users, including clarity, accessibility, and consistency
- the impact of busy work cultures, which can limit practitioners' ability to deliver truly person-centred support
- low attendance of service users at Adult Protection Case Conferences, which is less frequent than expected or desired
- the need for improved advocacy uptake and trauma-informed engagement.

Work to address these areas is now being progressed, with the APDG maintaining strategic oversight. This includes the ASP Service User Engagement Officer working in partnership with Borders Independent Advocacy to increase advocacy uptake for adults involved in the ASP process. Additional actions include the development of tailored communication resources and contributions to staff training focused on recognising and addressing barriers to engagement in ASP.

## Policy and Practice Development Officer Role

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 has been promoting knowledge, understanding and best practice in all aspects of Adult Social Work policies and procedure. The PPDO has developed strong working relationships with partner agencies, success of a refreshed information platform for practitioners, learning from complaints informing practice and policy development. This year the established PPDO has focused on the following Guidance and processes:

- Induction for New members of Staff
- Care Home Placements
- Supported Living
- Appropriate Adult
- Appropriate Adult
- Ordinary Residence
- Medicine Assessment
- Adult with Incapacity (Guardianship)



## The Scottish Borders Young Person & Adult's Co-ordination Strategy Group (Y-PACS)

Research shows that the transition from child to adult services is often a challenging and vulnerable time for young people and their families. This period is particularly difficult for those with additional support needs, who frequently face barriers to accessing services due to the siloed nature of child and adult systems. These structural divides can obscure transition pathways and negatively affect young people's experiences of support.

In the Scottish Borders, it was acknowledged that there is currently no dedicated strategic or commissioning plan specifically for young people and young adults with additional support needs. While they are included to varying degrees within children's or adult services planning, the distinct needs of this age group (approximately 14 to 30 years) are not addressed within a single, cohesive framework. Although several groups and meetings exist that focus on or include work related to this age group, they are not always clearly connected. This highlighted the need to review and better coordinate relevant workstreams.

As a result, Y-PACS was established. Its overall purpose is to coordinate information, set priorities, and oversee the strategic response to the needs of young people and young adults across the Scottish Borders.

### This includes:

- An audit was completed of all 16–30-year-olds within Adult Social Work services to better understand the transitions pathway within adult services and the quality of the service which service users this age received.
- An audit report was completed that identified themes and findings fed into the Y-PACS review.
- Interface with child protection and adult support and protection regarding the pathway for 16/17 years.
- Providing information on and increasing the quality and diversity of operational practice to enhance the lives of young persons and adults through access to existing research, benchmarking and identifying best practice.
- Considering the case for developing a dedicated young person and adult's service/operational practice teams within the target age group.
- Developing of a Vision statement appropriate to the strategic and commissioning needs of young persons and young adults.
- Agreed the pilot of Care and Risk Management (CARM) to be implemented 24/25.
- Revision of Vulnerable Young Persons Protocols (VYP) 24/25.

## Local Area Coordination Service

Local Area Coordination (LAC) is a strengths-based approach to supporting individuals and communities by building local capacity and reducing reliance on statutory services. Originating in Australia and adopted across the UK, LAC focuses on enabling people, particularly those with learning disabilities, mental health challenges, physical disabilities, and older adults, to live independently and participate actively in their communities. Coordinators work collaboratively with individuals, families, and community groups to develop accessible resources, promote early intervention, and foster inclusion. Rather than providing direct care, LACs facilitate connections and skill-building to empower people to engage with community opportunities, aiming to prevent crises and reduce long-term service dependency.

In the Borders we commissioned a review of our LAC Service; although highly valued by staff and service users, recognising that it had drifted from its original model. We have commissioned a leading proponent of LAC to support us with the service redesign recommended by the review which is underway. The new service will provide enhanced outcomes and will further support the development of localities and communities, reducing the reliance upon statutory services.

## Alcohol Related Brain Injury Coordinator

In October 2024 a report was presented to the Joint Executive Team of NHS Borders and SBC. The report outlined a comprehensive gap analysis and set of recommendations for improving care and support for individuals with Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD) in the Scottish Borders. It highlighted the prevalence and impact of ARBD, including significant hospital bed usage and inadequate service provision, and emphasizes the need for coordinated, multidisciplinary approaches.

Key recommendations included permanently recruiting an ARBD coordinator, securing appropriate housing and care packages, developing age-appropriate residential options, and enhancing multi-agency collaboration. The report also proposed commissioning specialist rehabilitation services and continuing the ARBD Steering Group to oversee strategic developments. The Joint Executive Team supported the recommendation to recruit to the ARBD coordinator post which has now been successfully recruited to. A detailed work plan has been developed and the delivery of this will continue over this reporting period and into next year.

## Digital Pathfinder

The Social Work Pathfinder was a key digital transformation project implemented to address growing pressures on social work services, such as an ageing population, recruitment challenges, and financial constraints by leveraging digital tools to enhance efficiency, data maturity, and service quality. It aligned with the Council's broader aspiration to deliver citizen-centred services and improve outcomes through technology.

The initiative aimed to reduce administrative burden and free up time for frontline staff to engage more meaningfully with service users as well as deliver financial efficiencies.

The Pathfinder was delivered through four key workstreams:

1. **Council Information Hub** – integrating data systems into management dashboards to support real-time insights and decision-making.
2. **Process Design and Simplification** – re-engineering workflows to be more efficient and person-centred.
3. **Enterprise Mobility** – equipping staff with mobile technology (e.g., iPads with Total Mobile Mosaic Mobilise) to complete tasks in the field, reducing travel and improving responsiveness.
4. **Data Governance and Culture** – enhancing data maturity and promotes a culture of evidence-based practice.

The programme used agile methodologies—sprints, prototypes, and early equipment rollout—to ensure staff were supported through the change. The Pathfinder was overseen by a Programme Board, with representation from senior stakeholders across social work, IT, finance, and transformation. The board tracked progress, resolved issues, and ensured benefits realisation through structured evaluations. The Adult Social Work Pathfinder is already delivering Improved data capture for decision-making, enhanced staff experience and service user engagement, time savings within the teams with good adoption rates and has provided a foundation for future AI integration and cross-service digital transformation.







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# RESOURCES

There continues to be multiple ongoing pressures experienced across the health and social care system which are unlikely to ease over the short to medium term, ever the greater with the system wide financial pressures. As such we will need to continue to focus upon how to do more for less. Whilst there has been greater efficiency delivered and no doubt we will continue to do so, the key risk is that we will simply do more with the efficiency delivered. Whilst this will go some way to addressing the growing areas of demand, this will not address the unaffordability of services if this trend continues. So, a balance will need to be achieved whereby we release some cash savings delivered by the more efficient ways of working whilst re investing in areas of greatest risk.

The two most significant areas causing financial stress during this period are caused by out of area placements both within Children's and Adult Learning Disability services. Both involve a lack of local resources, accommodation, and workforce, which leads to the requirement to source out of area placements, often delivered by the private sector at high cost. Clearly any placement out of area is impactful on the individual being placed and their family but also provides a greater challenge in providing effective governance and quality assurance. An additional driver of out of area placements is the increasing complexity of need that we see coming through Children's Services to Adult Services. Both the Out of Authority Project and the Coming Home Programme are up and running aiming to redress this trend by developing local cost-effective proactive support services and where appropriate accommodation is required.

Recruitment and retention challenges are being experienced across provider services (internal and external) and to a lesser extent within the social work workforce. This has led to both challenges in providing timely care and support as well as increased usage of agency staff. Addressing these challenges will require a multi-pronged focus including providing good training and support, effective and efficient processes, staff well-being, well managed teams, and effective whole system working across all sectors. Commissioned providers will require focused support and collaboration to ensure that we both maximise their potential and recognize that they are a key partner essential to providing good social services.



## Commissioning

Financial pressures and recruitment remain the key commissioning challenges facing social care. All sectors are experiencing increased inflationary pressures resulting in increased costs reflected in hourly rates and residential placement fees. Recruitment and retention challenges are also reducing the availability of services with providers often having to resort to purchasing expensive agency staff. As highlighted earlier in the report, increased complexity of need is requiring a strategic rethink in regard to the types of service we need to develop and commission to both meet this demand and to avoid an over reliance upon out of area placements. This is of particular relevance for Children's Service out of area placements and adults with a learning disability and complex needs.

Self-Directed Support and the further development of localities is also key to ensuring that whole system resources are maximised. Enabling individuals to plan their support with greater choice and control will reduce the demand for the more traditional home care services which can be focused upon those people where only that type of support will meet presenting need.

Digital transformation continues to provide us with the opportunity to deliver services more efficiently and provide better data through dashboards to allow improved governance and strategic development. Whilst we now have social work dashboards and Total Mobile, further work is required to maximise the potential of both.



## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# WORKFORCE

As part of our continuous improvement efforts, we remain committed to enhancing our approach to staff appraisals. By developing role-specific and personal objectives tailored to teams and individuals, we aim to align these goals with driving the Council Plan and furthering our strategic people and succession planning processes. This ensures that every staff member contributes meaningfully to the broader objectives of our social work services and the organisation. Additionally, our social work services are advancing their strategic people and succession plans to maintain resilience and ensure readiness to meet future challenges, all while supporting the delivery of both the Council and Financial Plan.

SBC's Strategic People Plan outlines key goals such as becoming an employer of choice, optimising capacity and performance, and fostering a positive and supportive culture. The annual employee survey serves as a key metric for evaluating the success of these goals. This year's survey revealed improvements in areas such as staff enjoyment at SBC, feeling part of a team, and understanding the learning and development opportunities available. However, it also identified areas for growth, including leadership, workload management, and flexible working arrangements. Based on the 2024 survey results, planned actions aim to strengthen leadership and management capabilities, improve communication with frontline staff through face-to-face interactions and digital channels, and enhance overall employee engagement.

While recruiting qualified social workers remains a challenge, the Social Work Traineeship Scheme has proven to be highly beneficial, with staffing levels for social workers showing improvement. This progress is especially notable in Children and Families social work, where staffing has consistently increased year on year. Since its launch in 2019, SBC's Social Work Traineeship programme has been a success.

We continue to support Paraprofessionals and Social Work Assistants, along with other roles in advancing their skills through relevant HNC/D qualifications within the social care sector. One of the most sought-after programmes is the HNC in Social Services, which offers a flexible model combining work and learning. Additionally, several Social Work Postgraduate qualifications are available, designed to enhance professional development and provide additional value.

The recruitment and retention of Occupational Therapists remains a significant challenge. SBC has been actively seeking ways to address this issue, including the potential development of an Occupational Therapy Traineeship like the successful Social Work Traineeship. However, identifying a degree programme with the necessary flexibility to support a workplace traineeship model has proven difficult. Discussions are ongoing with educational providers to explore and develop a feasible approach for the future.

Challenges persist in recruiting Mental Health Officers and Emergency Duty Team social workers, prompting SBC to actively review these services. SBC also supports staff to achieve their Mental Health Officer Award, and we are recruiting to two funded course places this year.

We remain dedicated to fostering staff development by encouraging them to explore training opportunities and engage in research through supervision, appraisals, succession planning and coaching. In our commitment to workplace support, we have refined our mentally healthy workplace policies to provide guidance on recognising stress symptoms, implementing proactive measures to reduce stress, and offering advice and support tailored for both managers and peers.

SBC also promotes employee wellbeing through various benefits and support mechanisms, including the Aviva Digicare+ workplace app. This app offers staff access to services such as digital GP consultations, mental health support, nutritional advice, health assessments, and second medical opinions. Additionally, we provide a variety of resilience-focused resources, such as e-learning modules and online workshops. These include topics like building personal resilience, managing mental health while working remotely, raising mental health awareness, and equipping line managers with essential training.



## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# TRAINING, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

### Core function

We support the social work workforce with the skills, knowledge and behaviours required to deliver progressive services. We adhere to organisational and corporate priorities, working towards achieving greater effectiveness and higher standards of performance.

### Headline Data

E-learning continues to be a key element of SBC's training strategy and remains an effective and well used tool for supporting and developing staff. Social Work staff completed 3,122 e-learning modules between April 2024 and March 2025, including both mandatory and elective modules. A wide range of topics have been covered, including Adult and Child Protection, Climate Change, Human Trafficking, Duty of Candour, and technical and systems training modules.

Mandatory training completion rates are healthy for the Social Work workforce, and overall completion rates are consistent with other departments across the Council. Efforts are being made to support and encourage colleagues to increase completion rates where necessary. The department has extremely positive completion rates on some of the core mandatory modules, including PREVENT training, adult support and protection, child protection and fire safety (all above 90%). Development work is ongoing within the Learning and Development team to create a suite of e-learning support materials in relation to adults with incapacity, and the public protection e-learning modules are under review.

### Learning and Development Activity in Social Work 2024/25

The Social Work department has identified a range of priority learning needs for 2024/25. Key training initiatives include Self-Directed Support, working with adults and children with autism, suicide prevention awareness, multi-disciplinary chair meeting facilitation, Solihull training, Trusted Assessor training, Toolkit for Working with Children, Link Worker and a selection of an independent charity providing evidenced informed best practice in fostering, kinship care and adoption. These, alongside several additional learning activities, are currently underway, with several already successfully delivered.

## Learner Feedback:

**Effective Supervision** – “The training provided useful tools and insights which I can try using within the supervision sessions I deliver. It has also made me reflect on the supervision I get and how I can use this time more effectively.”

**Trusted Assessor** – “I felt the course was very good. And everyone was keen to share ideas, ask questions and take part scenarios.”

**Suicide Prevention** – “Improved my confidence and gave me a better understanding of mental health.”

Since 2019, SBC has delivered a successful Social Work Traineeship Programme in partnership with the Open University, offering a flexible work-based learning route into the profession. Over the past year, five Social Workers have qualified through this, and all have secured roles within the Social Work service on graduation.

Each year, two places on the Mental Health Officer (MHO) Postgraduate Programme are advertised internally to Social Work staff. One student completed the program in 2024/25 and a further two learners have been accepted to complete the qualification between 2025/26. See below summary of MHO's that have qualified through the program.

See summary of traineeship qualified social workers and internally qualified MHOs since 2019:

Year	Number of Social Workers Trained	Number of Mental Health Officers Trained
2019-2020	2	0
2020-2021	4	1
2021-2022	2	3
2022-2023	3	0
2023-2024	5	2
2024-25	6	1
<b>Expected Future Provision</b>		
2025-2026	5	2
2026-2027	5	2

SBC also continues to support career development for staff in Paraprofessional and Social Work Assistant roles. Many undertake relevant HNC/D qualifications in the social care sector, with the HNC in Social Services (delivered by Forth Valley College) proving particularly popular due to its flexible delivery model. Additionally, up to two staff per year are supported to undertake a range of postgraduate qualifications aligned to service needs, including:

- 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
- Postgraduate Diploma for Chief Social Work Officers – Glasgow Caledonian University

Year	Total Completed & Currently Undertaking Qualifications (2019-2025)
Practice Education PG-Certificate	12
Social Work Leadership & Management PG-Certificate	10
Adult Support & Protection PG-Certificate	10
Children's Welfare & Protection PG-Certificate	20
Advanced Occupational Therapy Masters	5

The Public Protection Committee (PPC) Joint Learning & Development Framework is now fully embedded with core Child Protection (CP) and Adult Support and Protection (ASP) training being delivered throughout the year. This is multi-agency training that is delivered by the ASP 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.

The ASP and CP Training and Quality Assurance Team have ensured that all multi-agency courses that they write / co-write and deliver / co-deliver are updated in response to legislative and policy developments (including The Promise, UNCRC and the Borders Reframing Our Language Guide), and/or delegate feedback. The team has a rolling schedule for undertaking a comprehensive review of courses.

Two new multi-agency training courses have been developed, both of which are delivered face to face: CP3: Child Sexual Exploitation and ASP4: Core Group.

Six monthly reports now come to the Learning and Development Delivery Group with data and analysis on the number of courses offered, attended and the course evaluation. The table below shows one of the questions in relation to increased knowledge which helps us to continue to evaluate our courses and learning across the workforce.

How much has this training increased your knowledge and understanding?	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Refreshed	A lot
	0.9%	9.3%	23.3%	42.3%	24%

## Quotes:

**PP2 Introduction to Public Protection** - "I feel more confident in when I should report concerns."

**CP3 Child Sexual Exploitation** - "This training experience has increased my existing knowledge and reminded me the importance of being forever vigilant to the possibility of a child I am working with being sexually exploited and how to ensure they get the help they need quickly."

**ASP 4 Council Officer Training** - "I am now far more aware of the processes around ASP. I feel far more confident in progressing discussion around ASP and sharing my knowledge with ward staff."

## Racism and Discrimination

The Council has a suite of HR policies and procedures, all of which emphasise that there will be no discrimination or less favourable treatment in respect of any of the Equality Act protected characteristics.

In particular, the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy outlines a strong institutional commitment to preventing unlawful and unfair discrimination, harassment, or victimisation. The policy explicitly covers the protected characteristics including race, and affirms the Council's role in championing equality both internally and in the wider community.

### Key elements include:

- Raising awareness through induction, training, and communication.
- Monitoring and reporting on equality outcomes.
- Recruitment and selection practices designed to ensure fairness and transparency.
- Remedies and complaints procedures for addressing breaches of equality standards.

This is supported by other policies, such as the Disciplinary Procedures, Grievance Policy and Dignity and Respect in the Workplace Policy, which allow concerns to be raised and action to be taken where required.

The Council also has an Equalities Forum, which is jointly chaired by two Directors and is made up of other senior officers and trade union representatives. The Forum discusses matters pertinent to the advancement of equality and elimination of discrimination, both internally and externally.

A key current project is the strengthening of the equality impact assessment process, and the way it is used, to ensure the advancement of equality and elimination of discrimination are maximised.

All staff across the Council are required to complete mandatory e-learning on equality and diversity, which reflects and expands upon the principles set out in our policies. We also have several elective e-learning modules on unconscious bias. The Council's behavioural competency framework includes a section on equality and diversity, which reflects how the principles of the policy should be put into practice - maintaining a positive culture of respect so all our employees, customers, partners, suppliers and stakeholders feel valued as individuals, can give their best and participate in services. The framework asks colleagues to demonstrate how they embrace the values and benefits of a diverse living and working environment. The competency framework is a key element of the Council's annual staff appraisals.



## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# LOOKING AHEAD

### Social Work Governance

Social work professional governance remains an important consideration for Scottish Borders, having had and continuing to have interim arrangements for delivering the CSWO statutory function. Identifying a long-term solution within the next reporting year will be important to establish.

### National Care Service

The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, introduced in 2022, was significantly revised between 2024 and 2025, culminating in the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025. The Scottish Government abandoned plans to centralise social care delivery, retaining local authority responsibility while shifting focus to cultural reform. Key provisions include the creation of a National Social Work Agency, enhanced rights for care home residents under Anne's Law, improved support for unpaid carers, and commitments to fair work and ethical commissioning. Councils are advised to prepare for workforce transitions, strengthen carer support, align commissioning practices with new standards, and invest in data sharing and leadership to embed person-centred, rights-based care. It will be important to monitor how this develops and ensure that we are prepared for any changes that take place.

### Key themes

Key themes identified in this report will remain the priority for 2025/2026. In particular:

1. **Out of Authority Project** – progressing this project to develop local services allowing out of area placements to reduce in number.
2. **Coming Home Programme** – similar to the Out of Area Project, developing local housing, support and models of care that will reduce the number of out of area placements for adults with learning disabilities.
3. **Locality working** – further enhancing locality working via What Matters Hubs, and the relaunch of the Local Area Coordination service aiming to maximise the use of non-statutory services and taking an individual strengths-based approach.
4. **Digital transformation** – further exploitation of digital opportunities such as Total Mobile and technology enabled support within the community.
5. **Self-Directed Support** – further development of SDS, enabling greater choice and control for individuals expanding the range of personally designed support arrangements moving away from a reliance upon traditional Care at Home.
6. **Financial stability** – social work and social care have an important role to play in the development of resilient and affordable social services. Social Work leadership to design innovative solutions will continue to be essential to ensure that we have a whole system approach working closely with our partners in health, education, housing, third sector, independent sector/private sector and people with lived experience.

7. **Supporting carers** – continuing to focus upon supporting informal family carers whom we rely upon to provide most of the support within the community.
8. **Lived Voice** – working in partnership with people who use our services to ensure that we design, implement and maintain effective and valued support arrangements.
9. **Partnership working** - maintaining and further developing our close partnership working with Health to reduce duplication and enhance care and support pathways taking full advantage of our highly trained and expert staffing resources.
10. **Developing data** – further development of service dashboards ensuring that they are accurate and utilised to monitor the effectiveness of services.
11. **Developing professional practice through learning** – taking further advantage of the local and national learning from the range of case reviews and learning reviews, communicating and embedding the learning outcomes into practice.



## CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

# SUMMARY

As the Acting CSWO during the last eight months, I have been impressed by the high level of motivation and professional expertise across all our social care services. The drive and motivation are highly impressive and the continual drive for improvement I hope is evidenced via the range of developments highlighted within this report. I am left with a high level of optimism and hope for the next year and look forward to seeing how our services further develop. This is all in the context of an almost unprecedented range of challenges that we are facing across Scotland. I would like to thank all our staff and partner agencies for their continued commitment and support.

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