



**Chief Social Work Officer
Annual Report**

2024 to 2025

Contents

Governance, accountability, and statutory functions	3
Service Quality and Performance	7
Resources	19
Strategic Workforce Planning	22
Key staffing and workforce issues-Recruitment and Retention	22
Wellbeing	24
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	25
Looking Forward	

INTRODUCTION

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

The CSWO also has a contribution to make in supporting overall performance improvement and management of corporate risk across the local authority. Social work services are delivered within a framework of statutory duties and powers and are required to meet national standards and provide best value. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the statutory work undertaken on the Council's behalf during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Whilst social work and social care services experience significant demand on services I am pleased to be able to report the considerable improvements that all sectors have led on to provide sector leading services that are aspirational in transforming the lives of the most vulnerable in Fife. Our workforce are our people, and they make a difference in the hearts of communities daily. This report seeks to provide a window into practice across the sector. A renewed focus on governance and assurance through improved data collection and service user feedback has enabled us to be proud of key areas of practice and allowed us to identify areas for service improvement.

Governance, accountability, and statutory functions

As indicated in the 2023-2024 report, Children and Families and Justice now sit fully within Fife Council and image 1 below demonstrates the structure.

Children, Families and Justice

In 2024 the Children, Families and Justice service moved from the Education to the Communities Directorate. This was a planned move to strengthen relationships with strategic partners across wider welfare-based services. This has supported collective oversight and evaluation of strengths and opportunities for collaborative practice to support similar, vulnerable communities in Fife. In December 2024 it was identified that Children, Families and Justice service was best placed to lead on the implementation of No Wrong Door approach within the Communities Directorate and the implementation of this will begin in July 2025. This system cross-service change will tackle poverty and improve community wellbeing. This structure has enhanced the working practices of Justice Social Work in Fife, supporting holistic and person-centred support for service users and their families.

The Children, Families and Justice service has retained the established strategic and operational relationships with key partners across Fife. The responsibility for the Children's Services Plan (2023-2024) is held by the continued Fife Children's Partnership (structure

chart in image 2), represented by the Children in Fife Group. This partnership binds Fife Council, the voluntary sector, Police Scotland, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, NHS Fife, and the Health and Social Care Partnership in common purpose. The Children in Fife Group reports to the Fife Partnership. There are four main areas of improvement:

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

The move into Communities Directorate led to a change in Children, Families and Justice reporting arrangements to elected members. This is being reviewed, and a new scrutiny process will be agreed for the year 2025 -26.

Adult Services

The Adult Service structure has not changed since the 2023-2024 reporting period (and therefore a structure chart is not provided), and all adult and older adult social work and social care registered services sit under the Fife Health and Social Care Partnership governance and delivery framework under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014. There are two Heads of Adult Services pertaining to social work and social care with the portfolio of care homes, care at home, adult social work, older adult social work and adult resources services delivered across the 7 localities of Fife within an overall integrated structure. Collaboration with the Independent Sector is key.

There are several key enabling and support services including a Public Engagement and Participation Team, Contracts and Commissioning, Self-Directed Support Team and Community Services (who sit outside social work) but who provide a service for those who needs can be met with community supports, in effect an early intervention community-based service.

In 2024 conversations progressed to consideration of a cross agency public protection management function to better address system wide protection concerns, and this strategic management function will be delivered in 2025-2026 supporting all lead officers with protection functions.

Governance and Accountability Challenges

The CSWO must be assured by the quality and safety of all service delivery. Given the size and scale of services in Fife this creates a challenge.

The Principal Social Work Officer within Adult Services is the key professional assurance link between adult services and the CSWO and there was a gap in this post for much of early 2025 (the postholder did not start until after April 2025).

In 2025, the refreshed governance structure (using the CSWO agreed framework and learning from the inspection on governance and accountability) will be developed to clarify assurance, escalation of risk and oversight.

Workforce Challenges

The vision for workforce in 2025 particularly in social work is that we are better aligned across adults, children and justice to better connect our workforce supports and opportunities. A good example of this is demonstrated in our newly qualified social worker supported first year programme and in 2025 our co-ordinated implementation of Magic Notes after a successful pilot to reduce the administrative burden on all front-line social workers in line with Setting the Bar.

Following evaluation in 2024 a new service structure was developed across Children, Families and Justice social work, creating the capacity to shift the service approach from crisis response to increased early intervention support. While this change process was viewed positively by the workforce, the scale of this did mean that they experienced some disruption as they moved to new teams or roles. To ensure that the workforce is sufficiently supported to deliver this new approach, the Workforce Development Strategy was refreshed in early 2025 and additional funding provided to ensure the service had the capacity to upskill and retain staff. A planner of learning and development activity was developed to support developmental needs, and the impact of this will be reported on in the next CSWO report.

For adults, the better alignment of social work teams for adults and older adults is being reviewed alongside a new Health and Social Care Partnership strategic plan for 2026-2029. Social work services across Fife continue to be delivered by a workforce with varied levels of experience. While services do not have significant vacancies going into 2025, Fife Council experiences the same issues reported nationally in retaining and recruiting qualified social work staff. In the year 2024-25 there were at times significant staffing absences because of sickness. In social care, the turnover of staff in our internal care homes is an issue that requires further scrutiny.

The widely reported staffing challenges across social work and social care means that the role of the CSWO is more important and ever. There have been many engagement events over the year including walking the floor with staff, staff forums, pride and practice events and engaging the workforce in celebrating World Social Work Day. The workforce is seeking further opportunity to engage with the CSWO and PSWO to share their ideas for the vision of social work and to have their support in ensuring professional identity is recognised within the Local Authority. A key task for the CSWO is to provide an annual timetable of events that recognise the positive impact of social work in communities and families as well as ensuring a strong interface with the workforce.

Image 1: Structure Chat

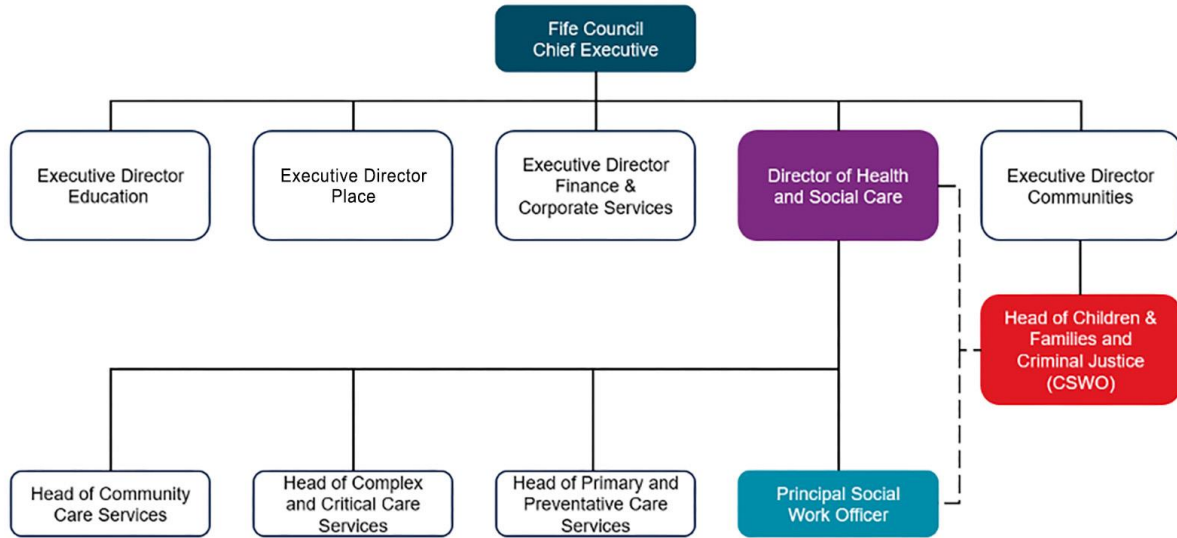
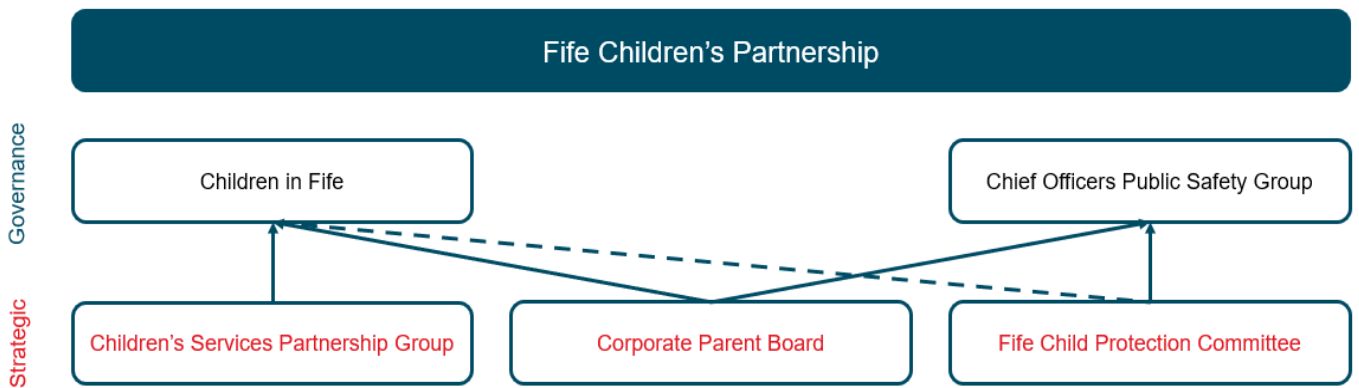


Image 2: Fife Children’s Partnership Structure



Service Quality and Performance

Children and Families

The following pages provide an overview of activity within this reporting period in key areas of practice, including the achievements made and challenges faced.

1. Early Intervention

Achievements:

The Children and Families service continues to hold positive working relationships with partners across the local authority, Police, Health and Social Care Partnership and the Third Sector. The move to the Communities Directorate has enabled the service to become more integrated with wider welfare support services and explore further opportunities for the collaborative delivery of whole family support at the earliest opportunity.

In this reporting period, the progression of planning for the No Wrong Door approach has been a significant achievement, which will transform the way in which early intervention support is provided in Fife. This approach will support all services in Fife including Children and Families, to support household needs collectively, and have only one “front door” to requesting assistance. The assessment of need and support provision should take place in a more co-ordinated and person-centred manner, supporting the implementation of the Promise and Whole Family Wellbeing principles. This transformational change will begin in July 2025, and an evaluation of its impact will be provided in the next CSWO report.

Other service achievements include:

- Delivery of a range of evidence-based interventions to children and families.
- Innovation supported via the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, with temporary funding provided to enable tests of change in the local area.
- Children and Families re-structure plans progressing to increase resource in the Early Help and Support teams, adding capacity to deliver wider early intervention support including Family Group Decision Making.
- Implementation of multi-agency Practice Development Sessions, supporting increased practitioner awareness of roles, understanding of responsibilities and implementation of the wellbeing pathway.

Challenges:

At a national level, the updated Promise plan 2024 – 2030 noted that while services across Scotland have invested in early intervention supports, there is an ongoing need to strengthen community relationships and collaboration to ensure that service provision is equitable and responsive to the complex needs and challenges that families can experience. This also continues to be an area of ongoing development in Fife where early intervention services have historically been developed or commissioned in separate ways across the Directorates. Research conducted in 2024 (The Together for Change report) heard from people with lived experience, who identified that services are not always available when they are needed most, and that services led by criteria or thresholds for support can be exclusionary for some.

In consideration of this, the Children and Families service is now leading a mapping exercise to better understand the development and commissioning of early intervention support across the local authority, HSCP and Third Sector. An update on this mapping and evaluation will be provided in the next CSWO report.

2. Intensive Family Support and Scaffolding

Achievements:

Fife continues to offer a wide range of intensive family support services offering support to families, which if not addressed timeously could lead to family breakdown. The underlying principle is that children/young people receive support at the right time in the right place.

In the past year the offer of internal intensive services was reviewed and refreshed to respond to emerging gaps in services particularly for children and young people with highly complex needs. Areas of work currently in progress include the development of the following teams:

- Youth Intervention Service (YIS) a team which will work with young people exhibiting high risk behaviour and, in some circumstances, coming into conflict with the law. This approach also responds to the introduction of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024. The focus of this team will be to work together in a different way to promote positive outcomes for young people by intervening at an earlier point in their lives.
- Multi Systemic Team Child Abuse and Neglect Adaptation (MST-CAN). This is an adaptation of the MST model designed to treat families where children are at risk of care due to physical abuse and/or neglect. The team will work with the family and professionals to keep children safely at home or to support a rehabilitation plan. It is recognised that working with chronic neglect requires a high level of skill and collaborative approach to maintain children at home.
- Close Support Team - The Emergency Support Team, Close Support Team and Residential Support Team will be streamlined into one Close Support Team to create a flexible and agile workforce that can respond timeously to emerging risk and need. This team will work flexibly with one another to support children and young people, their families and carers when they need it most.

Challenges:

In line with the national context, Fife continues to work with families facing multiple and complex challenges. The Children and Families service continues to work closely with key partners in health, education and police to collaboratively assess risk and work together to improve outcomes for children and young people. A key focus for the partnership is the early identification of the need for intensive family support services, to enable an opportunity to provide whole family scaffolding prior to families experiencing crisis or child protection procedures.

In Fife the current provision of services means that children affected by a disability, particularly children who are neurodiverse, often rely upon intensive support services which are expensive and have limited capacity. In this reporting period the service conducted a mapping exercise to better understand presenting need and available services across Fife. The service will now work with partners to progress a shift away from intensive services, to developing a more diverse range of supports to enable a more proportionate and sustainable approach moving forward.

3. Looked After Children:

Achievements:

The Belonging to Fife strategy continued to provide the vision and direction for our work with children and their families. The strategy, underpinned by the principles of the Promise and GIRFEC, focused on a strength based and outcome focused approach, supporting children to remain living with their families or within their communities where safe to do so. Over the past 6 years this strategy has supported positive outcomes for looked after children in Fife by:

- Shifting the balance of care, supporting more children to live in community-based placements.
- Reducing the use of High-Cost Residential Placements and supporting children to stay in and remain active members of their community.
- Increasing the use of Kinship Care and developing the scaffolding supports to sustain kinship care in the longer term.

Type of Placement	Number of children in placement type April 2019	Number of children in placement type April 2025
Looked after at home	186	155
Foster Care	484	253
Kinship Care	598	793
Residential care	147	42
Supported Lodgings	22	3
Continuing Care	37	67

The strategy assisted the service to become sector leading by promoting creativity and innovation, moving away from traditional case management practice. This led to the development of:

- Additional residential houses including a solo placement and house for children affected by disability and with complex care needs.
- A House Project, supporting care leavers to sustain permanent tenancies and secure employment and access further education.
- The This is Us support service to parents who had lost their children to permanence care. After successful pilot this service has now been embedded into the core establishment.
- Trialling new engagement support to care experienced young people such as Embrace and Participation and Engagement Officers.

- Developing homes of multiple occupancy for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) transferred to Fife under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). This provided a more suitable living environment for young people with shared life experiences and created increased capacity in other resources to enable young people to return to Fife.
- A Permanence Lead Officer post to increase oversight of practice in all areas of permanence, and effectively co-ordinating practice and learning activities to address improvement areas.

Challenges:

While the number of children in foster care within Fife is decreasing, the demand for foster placements remains a challenge. This is because there continues to be a notable shortage of carers for older children, siblings, children with additional needs, children with disabilities and short break carers. Fife has been actively involved in the design of the Scottish Government's national recruitment campaign and continues to work with local partners to develop creative recruitment opportunities.

In 2024 Fife experienced an increase in the use of residential care resulting from the unique complex care needs of specific young people. Our service met these challenges with a co-ordinated action plan. This included reviewing the offer from intensive services to scaffold teams to meet the demands of multiple complex risks and needs in the community. One residential house was also re-designed to offer close support and an intensive wraparound of support through a short-term singleton placement option. This improvement work supported a more proportionate use of residential care, however the next year will bring additional challenges for all local authorities due to the increasing cost of care, fewer available placements nationally, and new legislative and policy changes.

Adult Services

Adult social work and social care services are organised as follows within the HSCP structures:

- Complex and critical care-includes adult resources with a range of services including accommodation, day support and outreach services and social work services including locality adult and older adult teams and the MHO function. This also includes the front facing Social Work Contact Centre and Compass (Alcohol and Drugs team).
- Community care-includes care at home, care homes and hospital discharge social work teams.

Key Performance and Legislative Overview

Our data capture of performance is extensive and will not be replicated in full. The participation and engagement team have a wealth of experience and resource in terms of engaging in service change and developments, however systematic understanding of whether outcomes are improving needs greater thought.

Adult performance as an overview suggests that the last two years have seen a substantial increase in the number of calls to the Social Work Contact Centre with 8522 more calls received in 24/25 compared to 23/24. This is an increase of 22% (38,403 v 46,925). In short demand is growing. About 68% of referrals are allocated as an assessment of need, with the other third working with our community resources, the Wells. The Wells is an embedded community resource model as opposed to solely signposting

and this service area is growing for those who do not meet critical need and therefore funded services.

Adult Support and Protection Referrals have risen considerably from 2002-2023 and although numbers peaked at the start of 2024, numbers of referrals remain higher than two years ago which has put significant pressure on front facing teams. Inquiries using powers display the same pattern as referrals.





Inquiries using powers peaked in Quarter 2, decreased in Quarter 3 and climbed again in Quarter 4. This continues to place considerable pressure on teams in terms of time and resources including the number of LSI IRD meetings for care homes which exceeds other LSI IRD demands.

Over the past year, the Adult Support and Protection team supported:

- A focused programme of work on hoarding, including the development of hoarding guidance, the creation of an Interagency Hoarding Clinic to support cross-agency discussions, and awareness-raising campaigns delivered via radio and other media.
- Introduction and review of non-ASP case conference guidance, which enables professionals to come together to discuss and respond to risk in situations where ASP criteria are not met.
- Completion of the Annual Learning Review Thematic Report, identifying key themes and actions for system-wide improvement. Learning themes identified included:
 - 44% drop in Learning Review referrals which included hoarding as a theme this year compared to last year.
 - Importance of effective information sharing during transitions (between services)
 - Adults Non engagement with services
 - Effective inter-professional communication
 - Fire Deaths
 - Increased the numbers of Learning Review referrals
 - The new ASP Strategic Plan for 2025–27 is currently in progress.
 - Enhancement of our established quarterly ASP Interagency Practitioner Forum to promote reflective practice, interagency learning, and continuous improvement.
 - Improvement in transitions

Supporting vulnerable young people, including those transitioning from Children's Services continues to be a priority across all agencies. In response, the team have developed the Vulnerable Young Persons Protocol alongside Child Protection colleagues to provide clearer guidance. The single agency Social Work Guidance was approved and rolled out in November 2024, with the multi-agency version approved in May 2025 before rolling out in July 2025. Future developments and priorities for improvement in the upcoming eighteen months are captured in the Strategic Improvement Plan, under the four strategic priorities of stakeholder engagement, outcome focused improvements, improving procedures and workforce development.

Mental Health Officers Team continue to experience a steady increase in demand of their workload. Examples of this demand can be demonstrated by the increase in the number of Guardianship orders (below) and in particular emergency detentions which have risen month on month. Data started to be provided on emergency detentions to the CSWO for oversight in November 2024. The model in Fife is a dedicated MHO service (with two teams) with satellite MHOs in locality services. It is recognised that there is insufficient MHO cover and in 2025 the commitment of satellite MHOs will be required to be assessed to ensure sufficient cover.

Mental Health Officers Team	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Trend	Variance to same Qtr last year
	Q1 2022/23	Q2 2022/23	Q3 2022/23	Q4 2022/23	Q1 2023/24	Q2 2023/24	Q3 2023/24	Q4 2023/24	Q1 2024/25	Q2 2024/25	Q3 2024/25	Q4 2024/25		
Guardianship Orders	948	966	978	974	1006	1046	1065	1095	1118	1189	1227	1271		 176
Legal Orders - Average	61	61	68	57	53	58	66	71	69	79	72	61		 -10

The dedicated MHO teams continue to offer daily duty systems and education and awareness sessions with all social work and health colleagues. In 2025-vacant posts were changed to create a social worker and two part time social work assistant to carry out assessments of adults within the MHO service to provide a more holistic service. This has been a positive development. Nevertheless, the pressure on the MHO function requires greater scrutiny.

In 2025, the CSWO asked for better oversight of the implementation of Adults with Incapacity given the growing number of Guardianships referrals, and as such an oversight group was established which is developing both performance measures, audit and an overview of training.

The role of social work within hospital discharge is key and the pace of demand increased from 2024. The hospital discharge social work teams have developed strategic priorities for 2025-2026 and key to development will be ensuring the guiding principles of discharge without delay are embedded and clarifying the interface with community teams.

A key challenge is to improve performance in relation to the delivery of adult carer support plans from within the HSCP, delivered in a mixed model from staff within the HSCP and staff with carers organisations. The delivery model was reviewed in 2024-2025 and the provision of funding for ten social work assistants was made available. Strengthening the interface between social work and unpaid carers services will be a key feature in 2025 within the Carers Strategy Group.

The provision of independent advocacy is contained within the HSCP advocacy strategy for 2023-2026. In 2024, the commissioning team commissioned a new advocacy service. This was a significant piece of work conducted during April 2024 to September 2024 when the new contract commenced. Fife Advocacy Forum works in partnership with Fife Health and Social Care Partnership to support delivery of the Advocacy Strategy 2023 – 2026.

Operationally, all our front facing adult and older adult social work teams are under great pressure, but all have excellent links with key partners and their focus on outcomes for service users and their families is consistent with their social work values. Adult services have focused on those with most complex needs, on the Dynamic Support Register and have worked with partners to effect positive moves which can be life changing. There are challenges with suitable accommodation for those with most complex needs.

Appropriate Adults

Self-evaluation following the Care Inspectorate template indicates a need to develop clearer governance, recruitment and oversight of this function. This will be a development area in 2025.

Lived Experience examples

Self-Directed Support has a dedicated team in Fife and has been working on understanding the experiences of those in receipt of support. The survey has been distributed to over 1200 individuals in receipt of support over the age of 18 years. It is hoped this will help us understand the SDS customer experience in Fife. The comments and suggestions will be used to inform our new SDS training for staff. The training will include a mandatory e-learning module for all staff across the authority who are involved in all aspects of self-directed support as well as a face-to-face module for assessing practitioners which will focus on the legal duties, the good conversation and how best we can support individuals and their families to meet their identified personal outcomes.

The Fife BSL plan for 2024-2030 was signed off in 2024 and this involved extensive involvement of BSL users in the development of the action plan.

The dementia strategy group has been benchmarking plans against the national dementia strategy and as such engagement will take place in 2025-26 on the experiences of people with dementia and their carers accessing and experiencing services which will assist with priorities for the local action plan.

Unpaid Carers

Considerable engagement took place in 2024-2025 in terms of the key deliverables of the Carers Strategy which runs from 2023 - 2026. This work has been ongoing since 2022, involved many unpaid carers and has involved the establishment of the Fife Carers Forum and Fife Carers Provider Forum. The focus of this work was to ensure that the voice of unpaid carers is embedded not just within the carer's strategy but also wider strategic developments and service changes.

Audit

In March 2025, Fife Social Work Service undertook a comprehensive case file audit to evaluate the quality of adult social work practice and case recording across key service areas. A total of 230 cases were sampled, covering a range of service areas including locality teams, hospital discharge, transitions, and Adult Support & Protection. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining detailed file reviews, multidisciplinary team (MDT) discussions, and direct feedback from adults and carers.

Examples of good practice were:

- Positive relationships: Many adults and carers described feeling listened to, supported, and respected by social workers.
- Effective multi-agency working: In some cases, co-location and regular MDT meetings supported timely, collaborative responses.

- Good practice examples: Evidence of person-centred planning, appropriate use of legislation, and clear risk analysis was noted in several cases. Some assessments and reviews demonstrated collaborative planning and effective documentation of service user and carer views.

Key improvement themes are carer identification and support, service user and family involvement in care planning, and the quality of case recording. Full results and recommendations are outlined in the audit report, with feedback sessions to take place. Social Work will be developing a clearer shorter audit programme to be more focused for example around the quality of supervision practice.

Strategic Developments

Overall, the new strategic plan for the HSCP will be developed through 2025-2026 and will build on the themes of home first and locality models of delivery alongside greater integration where positive outcomes can be demonstrated. Developments of the closer alignment of adult social work and older adult social work teams has been in consideration but requires to be aligned with locality integrated arrangements as part of the HSCP refreshed strategic plan in 2026.

The social work service for those with alcohol and drug problems, Compass, is on a positive journey of integration with NHS colleagues and this will continue.

Registered Services

Care Homes and Housing

Fife Council has a commitment to replace care homes for older people and a replacement build for the care home in Cupar is well underway and will be opened in 2026. This build includes housing on site and a day service. In 2025-2026, we expect a clearer developed model of both intermediate care and assessment beds, including a consolidation of such models within a small number of Fife Council homes (linked to the Home First strategy). A further replacement care home is also planned in Northeast Fife. There has been a focus in 2024-25 on developing a quality improvement and involvement Plan, ensuring regular reviews and stakeholder feedback drive continuous improvements.

There are well established models of collaboration for care homes in Fife. The Fife Care Home Collaborative (the Collaborative) has continued to thrive as a Partnership of Independent and Third Sector Organisations supported by Fife HSCP and Scottish Care. Throughout 2024 and continuing into 2025, the Collaborative has maintained high levels of participation and engagement, meeting fortnightly to discuss both strategic and operational interests. The work of the Collaborative covers a broad agenda that aligns to the strategic priorities of the Fife Integration Joint Board. The common purpose and intent of the Collaborative is underpinned by a Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding which were reviewed and updated in 2024 and to coincide with the growth of the Collaborative on the renewal of the Fife Care at Home Framework Contract. A 3-Year strategy supports the work of the Collaborative to ensure that the delivery of strategic intent of local priorities of interest such as Home First, Prevention and Early Intervention, Workforce Strategy, and others are met.

Adult Resources

Adult resources have a diverse and unique portfolio of services. Changes in services, particularly community services (day services) took place during the pandemic and a review in 2024 suggested a refreshed model. The vision and model of care will be developed in 2025, taking into account the changing needs of service users and care models.

A replacement build for the Fife Council respite unit for those with complex needs has been agreed and work will develop in 2025-2026 on the respite model.

Innovative services like Deaf Connections and Shared Lives are also housed within the resources service.

Shared Lives Fife provides family-based care in the homes of carers across Fife to adults with a learning disability, physical disability, mental health or other sensory disabilities. It aims to match carers who are willing to share their homes, lives, experiences and skills with adults who need support to live their lives to the fullest. In Fife we offer long term, short break and day support provision. In 2024-2025 the service provision increased from 93 to 110 individual placements across Fife, with the service being motivated to continue to expand.

A collaborative approach to Supported Living providers will be developed in 2025.

Care at Home

The Fife Care at Home Collaborative (the Collaborative) has continued to thrive as a Partnership of Independent and Third Sector Organisations supported by the Fife HSCP and Scottish Care. Throughout 2024 and continuing into 2025, the Collaborative has maintained high levels of participation and engagement, meeting fortnightly to discuss both strategic and operational interests. The work of the Collaborative covers a broad agenda that aligns to the strategic priorities of the Fife Integration Joint Board. The common purpose and intent of the Collaborative is underpinned by a Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding which were reviewed and updated in 2024 and to coincide with the growth of the Collaborative on the renewal of the Fife Care at Home Framework Contract. A 3-Year strategy supports the work of the Collaborative to ensure that the delivery of strategic intent of local priorities of interest such as Home First, Prevention and Early Intervention, Workforce Strategy, and others are met.

The Fife Council care at home service continues to develop innovations around technology and training for staff. Access to updated shortened care plans for carers on their mobile devices and the role of the assessment function within the service is key.

Identified Challenges

Visibility with Social Work Staff

The HSCP has a clear engagement structure involving senior leaders across the partnership on cross cutting developments, this includes a locality model of engagement. The visibility of senior leadership and understanding of the pressures and challenges of front-line adult social work staff has not been consistent. A social work and social care development programme of sessions will be in place from 2025-2026 for adult, older adult social work, social care, (resources, care homes and care at home), Heads of Service and the Principal Social Work

Officer, to develop key development themes, management of risk, with professional developments in social work and social care and communication fed back to the CSWO. The PSWO has been asked to meet all social work teams in 2025 and will provide feedback on challenges, methods of communication on professional issues and the visibility of professional leadership. The CSWO needs to be assured that social work teams have the capacity to deliver statutory functions.

Financial Pressures

Financial pressures are affecting all HSCPs across Scotland. There are programmes of transformation, but it is essential that pressures on social work and social care staff are identified and that staff are supported to identify need, risks and outcomes with adults and their carers. We expect this to be a feature of the next few years. Transforming care with a focus on modernising our assessment and review processes, with a focus on digital first, if at all possible, will be prominent in 2025-26.

Transitions

Transitions of young people to adult services has been evidenced as a key challenge from a number of learning reviews. A system wide transitions group to look at protocols, practice and assurance will be established in 2025 with the CSWO taking the lead.

Governance

As indicated in the report by the Care Inspectorate, arrangements for understanding social work and social care risks can be complicated within an integrated arrangement of services. The PSWO in 2024, developed a professional assurance framework which was approved by the Integration Joint Board. The social work and social care assurance function needs to be refreshed and importantly needs to be understood by front line staff.

Community Risks

Unmet need for those awaiting assessments and for an increase to their care at home package in the community is rising and although there is a protocol developed for care at home escalations for older adults, more formalised work needs to be undertaken on a wider community escalation protocol recognising the risks for adults waiting for an assessment and adults waiting for suitable accommodation. This protocol and guidance will be developed in 2025-26.

Equipment

Long waits for the provision of equipment for particularly older adults in their homes remains a significant pressure, a review of the current model needs advanced in 2025.

Justice

The National strategy, Vision for Justice in Scotland sets out the Scottish Government's transformative vision of the future justice system for Scotland. Fife Justice Social Work produced an Outcome Improvement Plan 2024-27 in May 2024 which encapsulates the key principles of this strategy, alongside the National Strategy for Community Justice. Our local strategy mirrors the five national aims and aligns to the priority actions, allowing us to consider how progress achieved in Fife works towards the wider community justice agenda.

The first priority relates to promoting the use of diversion as an early intervention. This is an area of work which has been a focus over the reporting period and Key Performance Indicators evidence an 89% successful completion rate for Diversion from Prosecution cases. This exceeded our target of 85% for this period. As a Service, a range of tailored programmes have been developed to consider flexible and creative ways of supporting individuals to access support. An example of this is the Road Traffic Safety Programme which was co-produced with colleagues from Safer Communities. This programme provides targeted and consistent intervention, promoting confidence with those within the judiciary that early intervention and diversion from the Court system can be effective and reduce recidivism. Another example is the development of the Healthy Relationships Programme, developed by Social Workers within the Groupwork Team who have extensive experience of working with perpetrators of domestic abuse, however acknowledging that an early intervention programme would be beneficial for those who are perhaps evidencing early indicators of controlling and/or abusive behaviour. This programme is delivered as part of diversionary work, however, can also be delivered to those who are subject to statutory supervision, who self-identify or are assessed as potentially facing challenges within intimate relationships.

A significant development in our work with care experienced young people in the Justice System is the creation of NexTURN for this service user group. Research into internal provision evidence a high prevalence of care experienced young people within the Justice Service and it was acknowledged anecdotally by workers that there was a significant gap in confidence, self-esteem and living skills for this group of young people. NexTURN focuses on these areas incorporating a range of physical activity to engage young people, whilst raising themes such as employability, living skills and education to support young people to explore opportunities often unknown or unachievable due to their circumstances. During the reporting period, over 12 young people had engaged with NexTURN and this project continues to grow.

The second national priority which aligns to our service delivery model is the promotion of community-based interventions. During the reporting period, successful completions of Enhanced Bail Supervision in Fife was 89% evidencing the pro-active and welfare orientated work undertaken by practitioners in this service. In Fife, all individuals appearing from custody are assessed for bail supervision, with anyone not suitable, immediately signposted to SACRO Navigation Service. This ensures that all individuals who wish to be supported, are provided with an opportunity to engage at an acute time of need/crisis. This pre-sentence support also promotes compliance with Court processes such as report writing, increasingly the likelihood of the Sheriff accessing the appropriate information to inform sentencing in a timely manner. In addition to this, also reduces likelihood of remand, which impacts on the prison population crisis. The support and development of report writing within the Service is an area of focus with regular report writing training, facilitated by experienced practitioners and enforcement of 'peer checking' of any reports prior to submission to Court. Investment in this area is reflected positively with 68% of reports where a Community Payback Order was recommended by the report writer, was imposed by the Sheriff.

One area of practice which requires further development is the immediacy of Unpaid Work starting within seven working days. This result has decreased from the previous reporting year (46%-30%) and with a full review of Unpaid Work ongoing, the data supports exploration of this process and consideration of alternative approaches to support service users commencing unpaid work without delay. In contrast to this, service users being seen within one working day, promoting immediacy after Court appearance, increased 3% to 71%

evidencing the Service's priority in engaging those where a community-based disposal is imposed, at the earliest opportunity, promoting engagement and compliance.

The provision of robust, high quality, trauma informed services is the third priority action which we would determine as an area of strength within Fife Justice Service. With the development and promotion of various initiatives relating to a trauma informed approach, our commitment to this has matured further during this reporting period. With 139 staff members trained to Trauma Enhanced level 3, confidence and understanding regarding people's circumstances and experiences, which was evidenced through a recent trauma audit project undertaken within the Women's Justice Team. This approach has also been applied to the delivery of our Unpaid Work Service, creating person-centred opportunities for those who face barriers to engaging with standard unpaid work activities. This provides a wider range of options for those where Unpaid Work may have not been a community-based disposal available previously.

Priority four details the importance of partnership working and promoting connections across Community Justice partners. An example of this practice in Fife is the development of the Liberation Meeting in response to the emergency release of short-term prisoners. This model involved multi-agency discussions of all individuals released early under the emergency legislation and ensured that partner agencies were aware of the release and support proactive engagement wherever possible. In relation to promoting awareness, the Service continues to engage with partner agencies and the wider community via social media platforms. This exposure has been beneficial in many ways, raising the profile of the work undertaken in Justice Social Work and dispelling misconceptions. Engagement with external agencies has created opportunities and connections which supports benchmarking and sharing positive practice across the country and beyond.

The final priority details the importance of service user engagement and involvement. As Justice Social Work is an involuntary service, it is more crucial than ever that service user's views on the services they receive are gathered and considered. Despite individuals being subject to mandatory interventions, the ethos of choice and participation is strongly supported throughout the Service. In February 2025, a group of thirteen service users volunteered to meet with Care Inspectorate inspectors and share their own experiences of receiving a service from Fife Justice Service. The feedback from this visit was positive and aligned with the feedback provided by practitioners, evidencing transparency and positive working environments. This validation exercise was beneficial to the Service and has supported development and growth in a number of areas.

The delivery of high-quality interventions is part of both the National Strategy for Community Justice and Fife's Justice Outcome Improvement Plan. During 24-25, a review of Unpaid Work services commenced, led by a strategy detailing the importance of reducing barriers to engagement, robust assessment of those made subject to unpaid work and promoting employability options to those who evidence skills, attitudes and values during unpaid work which could be utilised in other ways. The development of a UPW Hub for Fife is underway, with a vision of delivering unpaid work services from a single location and utilising transport to connect with service users in their local communities. The UPW Hub will also accommodate equipment and activities which will support the development of lifelong skills and in some instances, completion of certifications. We will support service users to enhance

skills/confidence/learning which they may not have had an opportunity to do so previously, reducing the stigma and supporting growth, with the ultimate goal of reducing re-offending.

Overall, the main challenge faced by the Service throughout 24-25 was the recording system limitations and the impact this then had on recording of data and quality assurance. With system issues continuing from 2023-24 reporting period, the challenge of analysing performance become increasingly frustrating, especially due to the lack of support from the system provider. With senior management focused on supporting staff to undertake day to day tasks, the resource to re-establish reporting functions was not readily available. We have worked hard with other local authorities and internally to support adoption of the system operationally, whilst also considering solutions to capturing key data and ensuring reporting requirements to the Scottish Government were fulfilled. During the period, this has had to be undertaken manually which placed significant pressure on key staff members. We are confident, moving forward, that performance, data reports and quality assurance measures will be available in the upcoming reporting year, which will be a significant improvement for the Service.

Resources

Children and Families

Children and Families continue to operate within budget. Robust financial management using date to predict future need is enabling the service to respond to significant demand and provide care for almost all children and young people within the Local Authority. The main challenges within the Children and Families service continue to be managing the increasing demand and ensuring the workforce resource is aligned and sufficiently skilled to respond to need.

Through a process of self-evaluation, the service identified several key change plans to take place throughout 2025/26. In working with key partners in the Communities Directorate and Third Sector, these plans could lead to more efficient delivery of services and possible savings. These include:

- Exploring a more integrated support approach for adolescents with Communities and Justice.
- Reviewing the continued need for ringfenced provision of legal support to the service.
- Reviewing the use of taxi services for looked after children and developing more sustainable approaches.
- Reviewing the establishment and management needs across the Communities Directorate following the introduction of the integrated No Wrong Door approach.
- Reducing the budget for commissioned services to be proportionate to need in alignment with the new Children and Families structure and No Wrong Door approach.
- Transformational change in the delivery of residential care in Fife.

The service re-structure planning identified the need to shift the Children and Families establishment and structure, deploying more workforce resource to early intervention and practical support posts as vacancies arose across the service. This approach supported better alignment of resource to meet service priorities within the existing budget and led to some efficiencies overall with minimal impact on the remaining workforce.

Inspections throughout our residential houses in 2024 – 2025 saw improved grades, recognising the delivery of trauma informed and therapeutic care. The service has been able to reduce the number of children placed in houses together to provide an intensive and high quality of care. However, this approach has seen an increase in the average cost of an internal residential placement, and reduced capacity to care for children in our internal resources. The sustainability of this approach is being explored in the transformational review of this aspect of the service.

In the next year the service anticipates a range of new budgetary pressures because of possible legislative changes. This includes the responsibility for managing the cost of secure care placements and transport without ongoing government support, supporting the right to breaks for all carers and increased support for care leavers.

Adults

HSCP Social Work and Social Care budget pressures featured heavily throughout 2024-2025 within Fife Health and Social Care Partnership in terms of a worsening financial situation from 2023-2024. Service demand is outstripping available resource and there remains high pressure to support discharge from hospital with services in the community whether care at home or long-term care and balancing risks in the community. There is considerable pressure to recruit and retain adult social care professionals with significant pressures because of vacancies.

In 2024–25, the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) faced a significant financial overspend of £34.017m. This was primarily driven by sustained demand across key service areas including prescribing, hospital and long-term care, and adult social care services such as care at home, care homes, and adult placements. The overspend reflects the growing complexity of care needs, particularly among older adults, and the increasing costs associated with delivering high-quality, person-centred care.

To address these financial challenges, the Integration Joint Board (IJB) approved a savings plan targeting £39.033m. By year-end, 52% of these savings were successfully delivered, demonstrating a commitment to financial recovery and service efficiency. These savings were achieved through a combination of service redesign, vacancy management, and targeted cost reductions. The remaining savings have been rolled forward and are embedded in the 2025–26 budget planning process. A specific saving in relation to limiting respite was advanced in 2024 and this oversight will continue in 2025, noting the potential implications of the Care Reform (Scotland) Act.

Areas of Ongoing Pressure

Despite progress, several areas continue to exert financial pressure. These go across health, social work and social care and include prescribing costs: rising volumes and prices remain a concern, although oversight mechanisms are in place; workforce challenges: recruitment difficulties, especially in mental health and specialist roles, have led to increased reliance on locum and agency staff, driving up costs and the cost-of-living impact. The ageing population and increasing complexity of care needs continue to drive demand for care at home and residential services. These pressures are expected to persist into 2025–26, requiring ongoing monitoring and responsive planning.

Areas of Transformation

To ensure long-term sustainability, the HSCP is progressing several transformational initiatives:

- **Transforming Care:** Redesigning care pathways to promote independence.
- **Business Administration and Digital:** Streamlining administrative processes and investing in digital solutions to improve efficiency.
- **Home First:** Prioritising community-based care and early intervention.
- **Community Rehabilitation and Care:** Enhancing rehabilitation services to support recovery in the community.

These programmes are tracked through weekly progress meetings and are central to achieving the £29.424 million savings required in 2025–26.

In terms of positive transformation, Fife co-ordinated a highly successful multi-agency single handed care initiative including use of external care at home services as well as Fife Council. This was a focus on transformation and real partnership that delivered service change and efficiencies of staff rather than a sole focus on efficiencies. Feedback from service users was highly positive.

The eligibility criteria for Fife Council for adult services, was reviewed with a small life working group, an EQUIA and associated engagement leading to the Supporting People Framework being approved by Fife Council in January 2025, with the associated Carers Support Framework being approved by the Integration Joint Board a few months later. Both documents more clearly lay out the framework by which decisions are made but need further work to embed and communicate them publicly in 2025-2026.

While transformation and savings are essential, there is a risk of service impact and associated risks if financial pressures are not adequately managed. Reduced staffing levels, increased waiting times, and limited-service availability could affect outcomes for vulnerable people. It is therefore critical that financial recovery is balanced with a commitment to quality, equity, and person-centred care. Professional leadership is embedded into any vacancy consideration and service redesign process.

A community escalation process was put in place for service users at risk of their situation deteriorating whilst they wait for a care at home service, however it is essential that we extend this to community escalation guidance for those waiting for an assessment (numbers are growing) and those waiting for a long-term care placement in the community. This will be a key piece of work in 2025-2026.

Transforming care will be enhanced in 2025-2026 to include a greater focus on digital and service redesign as well as on-going reviews of care in the community. Interface with providers on changing models of care is essential.

Justice

Budgetary pressures from a Justice Social Work perspective, have improved since the last CSWO report. The anticipated budget figure being provided in December 2024, confirming that COVID consequential funding was being baselined for future years. This allowed for workforce planning to take place ahead of the budget allocation for 2025-26 and provide permanent contracts for staff members who had remained on temporary contracts since 2020.

Despite the service not being significantly impacted by turnover of staff in the initial years, there had been concerns that staff members subject to COVID Consequential funding were starting to explore vacancies elsewhere due to the uncertainty attached to the funding. With the confirmation of funding provided in early 2025, 20 members of staff were provided with permanent contracts as a result.

Additional funding was provided as part of this budget to build capacity within justice social work services. The decision to baseline recovery and bail funding was also welcomed to support service provision and sustainability in this area, ensuring we can continue to assess all individuals appearing from custody for Enhanced Supervised Bail. The focus on the potential release of short term and long-term prisoners continues to be in scope for the Scottish Government, therefore ensuring access to relevant funding to resource demand is essential to service delivery and to manage any significant increase in workload for those providing throughcare services.

In terms of service challenges, the complexity of cases being held by justice social workers has been acknowledged over the reporting period. Those with additional needs leaving prison and the requirement to liaise with colleagues within health and social care partnership has increased. As a response to this increase, a short life working group was established to create a protocol for practitioners across Justice and Adults/Older People Social Work to undertake a multi-agency discussion at the earliest opportunity to proactively identify complex cases as soon as possible to support a planned transition into the community. There has been a particular challenge around the release of older people with convictions of a sexual nature, with care homes assessing them as unsuitable due to the perceived risk by the individual. Again, to increase the knowledge of staff within care establishments, visits have been carried out to provide input in the function of MAPPA alongside the monitoring and management involved with registered sex offenders. It is hoped this will increase the offering of appropriate care facilities for those who require this upon release.

Workforce

Strategic Workforce Planning

Adult Social Work and Social Care are part of the HSCP workforce plan. From 2025, there is no longer a requirement to submit a 3-year strategy with short- and medium-term plans, instead HSCP's will develop the plans at a local level. An interim 1-Year Workforce Plan using Annex A from the guidance for 2025-26 was submitted by 17 March 2025.

Fife Council Care at Home service initiated a review of social care staffing scheduling to enhance working patterns offering greater flexibility for the workforce, thereby increasing capacity in accordance with the Health, Care Staffing Act (Scotland) 2019 requirements. A review of the operating model for older adult care homes is planned which will include an evaluation of the staffing structure to build resilience in response to high demand.

Key staffing and workforce issues-Recruitment and Retention

In adult social care and social work, there are challenges to recruitment across all localities, however the most challenging is Northeast Fife, partly because of its location, the cost of property and the lack of transport infrastructure because there is no rail service.

Job role wise, for adult social care, following changes in 2023, specifically the immigration rules impacting on Health and Social Care visas, people holding a Health and Social Care

visa for social care roles being unable to bring dependents to the UK has created disparity in the system as these rules only apply to social care and have the potential to make social care careers less attractive as a result, thus compounding existing workforce challenges in the sector. This is felt within Council services but more especially across the Independent Sector.

Formal ways to 'Attract Back' in Social Care and Social Work are promoted including:

- A flexible approach to registrable qualifications to enable social care staff to move from children's services to social care without needing to gain two different qualifications.
- Introduction of return to practice requirements for social workers who have been out of practice and off the SSSC Register for more than two years.

We would see attracting young people into roles a key strength in Fife. A programme of improvement for care apprenticeships for care assistants and home carers started in January 2025. The programme now includes a choice of access to higher national certificate or vocational qualifications to support academic and career progression. Previously apprenticeships were advertised as single positions, with limited success in both attraction and retention introducing a 'campaign' recruitment model with significant social media exposure and direct links to employability websites including Opportunities Fife, we have increased applications by 80%. Progress on this programme will be reported in the 2025/26 report. The HSCP / Care Academy career events continue to be popular with events held in November 2024 and March 2025, with Fife Council, Third and Independent sector employers attending representing Social Care and Social Work careers. We continue to promote with employers and sector leads the value in gathering conversions to employment where possible. Having the events regularly is a benefit to employers who promote the services and showcase talent pipelines to the public. There are several successful employability programmes in Fife including the Life Chances Alternative Recruitment Framework. It seeks to enable services / employers to provide a paid 13-week placement to a person on the employability pathway. There was one successful recruitment to care in 2024-25 with the expansion of this in 25-26 to 28 places.

All services engaged with local schools to attract young individuals to careers in health, social work and social care, additionally, we ensure our presence at career events to promote opportunities. We continue to collaborate with our anchor institutions to develop clear access pathways and leverage alternative recruitment programmes, such as the Fife Council Life Chances Alternative Recruitment model and the King's Trust Get into Health and Social Care programme. Justice Social Work have also provided PowerPoint presentations to high schools throughout Fife, raising the profile of the profession within the Advance Higher Modern Studies Module 'Law and Order'. This has been well received by teachers and pupils, sparking an interest in an area of social work, relatively unknown to the wider community.

Over the last two years, Senior Practitioners from Justice Social Work provided inputs to University of Stirling, Edinburgh, Dundee and Robert Gordon University. This provides students completing the social work degree with an overview of the profession through a practitioner's lens. It provides a platform for the good work taking place in the service to be shared with prospective employees, establishing recruitment pathways. Fife Justice Social Work have also actively recruited several social work students who undertook their final social work placement within the service, providing both the employer and employee with the opportunity to explore whether a career in Justice Social Work suited to them.

Within Justice Social Work, there continues to be an emphasis on shared decision making through the facilitation of practitioner groups. These groups allow work-based issues to be highlighted and addressed, providing a forum for the wider Service to contribute to.

As part of the children and families service re-design, a workforce survey was completed to inform planning around workforce development. This survey identified:

- 63% of respondents have 5 years or more experience, demonstrating that Fife Council has a good ability to support and retain experienced practitioners.
- The age range of the workforce is balanced, with 40% of respondents aged 39 years or younger, demonstrating good capacity for sustainable service delivery and succession planning.
- While supervision was viewed as supportive and covered a range of key areas, only 67% of respondents received this every 4 week in line with service standards.
- 40% of respondents did not have experience of delivering groupwork, an important area of practice in the service's new model which commenced on the 21st of April 2025. Respondents shared a wish for further learning and development activity focused on a range of areas including multi-agency meeting chairing skills; groupwork facilitation; report writing skills; leadership and management and dealing with conflict.

In the past year Children and Families, Justice and Adult social work services have worked closely with colleagues in the Workforce Development to develop and implement a new support approach for Newly Qualified Social Workers Supported Year. Temporary funding was used to create a post in lead on this work in the Workforce Development Service. Fife Council has received positive feedback from the SSSC about the high quality of evidence produced and support provided in the first year of implementation. This temporary post has been extended until March 2026 to enable all service to transition the approach into practice as usual.

Wellbeing

Fife Council Attendance Support Unit assists services in addressing challenges, removing barriers, and finding solutions to manage absences effectively. The service offers a variety of support services available to employees, including wellbeing support, mental health first aiders, counselling, physiotherapy, and external services and supports. Training for managers and employees on fostering a mentally healthy workplace and managing attendance is provided. We conduct multi-factorial reviews in areas with high absence levels and continue to support our workforce through individual supervision, staff support services, and wellbeing hubs. We widely promote i-Matter and workforce surveys and align responses that influence our Workforce and Wellbeing strategic plans. The Health Promotion Service produce the annual Prevention and Early Intervention Training programme as part of Fife's Health and Social Care Partnership to provide our workforce with the skills and knowledge to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Stress Indicator Survey undertaken in late 2024 by the HSCP provided valuable insight into the workplace pressures currently affecting staff. The survey was issued to those employed by NHS Fife and Fife Council and received 1544 responses.

Key themes emerging include workload demands, incidents of aggression or harassment, and concerns around civility, support, and change. This evidence forms a foundation for targeted actions to prevent and reduce work-related stress and will be integrated into workforce planning. Exit interviews have not been well utilised and following a pilot we intend to focus on potentially targeted approaches in areas of high staff turnover.

To tackle workloads pressures and ensure that practitioner's skills and expertise are fully utilised, the promotion of technology is a priority. In 24 -25 there was the introduction of Near Me technology which enables video calls to take place to HMP Stirling. This has enabled staff to 'keep connected' with service users who are remanded or serving custodial sentences. The technology has promoted relationship-based practice and the benefits of this for both service user and staff can be significant. In Fife, we continue to be creative with the use of Near Me, engaging with partner agencies to utilise the technology to address outstanding issues such as housing and health issues. The use of AI solutions is expected to become a more consistent feature of reducing administrative burdens on staff.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the Fife Health and Social Care Partnership advanced its commitment to tackling racism and wider discrimination through the implementation of Year 1 of our three-year Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan. A central principle of the plan is the recognition that while racism remains a critical issue, discrimination is complex and multifaceted. Our approach reflects a broader ambition to systematically address all forms of inequality and bias, whether based on race, disability, gender identity, sexuality, or other protected characteristics through sustainable, structural change.

This ethos has shaped all aspects of our work. The EDI Steering Group was restructured to include inclusive, cross-portfolio representation at senior levels, ensuring that diverse perspectives inform decision-making and increase accountability. Campaigns throughout the year focused on hidden inequalities, such as non-visible disabilities and LGBTQI+ inclusion, based directly on staff feedback, with the extension of the NHS Fife LGBT+ Network to all FHSCP staff creating safer, more visible spaces for peer support and advocacy.

Recognising that lived experience must drive change, our staff-led Partnership Equality Network (PEN) launched the first Neurodiversity Natter event. This provided a vital platform for neurodivergent colleagues to share experiences and generate recommendations now informing the development of an inclusive manager toolkit.

To further dismantle structural bias, we began recruitment for our Reverse Mentoring Pilot pairing staff across roles to build mutual understanding and influence leadership through lived insight.

In the Children, Families and Justice service the re-structure provides the structural support to create the conditions required for value-based practice. The senior leadership team is working hard to remove the perceived barriers for the workforce, encouraging creative and person-centred approaches which are rooted in trauma informed practice, a non-stigmatizing and relationship-based approach across the whole system. This supports the service to further embed the principles of the Promise, Whole Family Wellbeing and Vision for Justice in Scotland.

Taken together, these measures demonstrate our active commitment to addressing racism within a wider framework that acknowledges the interconnected nature of discrimination and our resolve to foster a culture where every individual feels safe, respected, and able to thrive.

We were awarded a 'Bronze Level Pathfinder' award in 2024 for our EDI work in the Partnership and aim to achieve Silver in 2025.

Training and Development

Fife Social Work Service supported 7 Social Work Assistants to complete their qualification in Social Work over the past 12 months. This was a competitive process, with workers across services provided with the opportunity to complete the degree pathway, supported by the local authority, undertaking placements within different areas of social work, ensuring the best possible learning experience for the staff members. The most recent cohort completed the social work degree course at Robert Gordon University, with the expectation that this investment provides the service with a future staff group who are experienced and motivated to embark in a social work career in Fife.

For existing staff, the annual offering of Post Qualifying Awards continues to be a priority for the service, supporting the service wide training plan, the range of Post Qualifying Awards supports staff to attain additional qualifications in their area of practice, such as Child Protection Certificate or Mental Health Officer Award, or a qualification which supports the development of the future workforce through the Practice Educator Award. (Adults)

To enable the service to respond effectively to identified training needs, Children and Families received an additional £400,000 from the whole family wellbeing fund for additional learning and developmental activity. A planner of activity has been created and the impact of this will be reported in the next CSWO report.

Children and Families continue to work closely with the Workforce Development Service to support wider learning. This includes the post ringfenced to support multi agency learning activity identified by the Child Protection Committee, and a temporary post ringfenced to support multi agency whole family wellbeing learning and development.

Within the HSCP, the cross-service systems leadership programme includes formal workshops and informal lunchtime sessions to deliver an Action Learning Set format set to run throughout 2025. There is a full suite of training and workshops in relation to Adult Support and Protection which evaluates very positively. Adult and Older People Social Work Service introduced a one protected learning day per month to support frontline staff to maintain compliance with mandatory training and ensure opportunity to expand learning and development in relevant areas of practice. These protected learning days have seen mandatory compliance increase to approximately 75%. It is essential that this learning time is prioritised amid operational challenges.

There is a dedicated stand-alone training section in care at home but consistent training within internal care homes needs to be refreshed.

As detailed within Fife Justice Social work Improvement Plan, there is a commitment to workforce training, planning and development, including the annual Service Training Plan. This sets out expectations and opportunities for staff in various roles across the Service to support continuous professional development and consider other areas of work which they would wish to progress. As of the 31 March 2025, 77% of staff members were trained, with feedback from staff detailing the positive impact this specialised training has provided when working with service users. The training plan is developed in conjunction with front-line staff, actively encouraging contributions, especially relating to training which is required due to emerging practice or considerations for the workforce.

Looking Forward

The year ahead provides us the opportunity to progress at pace with exciting service transformation through strategic planning and capital investment. I am excited and energised about the scale of possible change through the 'No Wrong Door' programme that will allow system transformation to support the most vulnerable through localised multi agency working. The scale of the proposed change across Children and Families showcases innovation and sector leading practices and the Unpaid Work Hub in Justice creates endless opportunities for all. We know that there will be challenges, but as a professional we work with challenge daily and we meet challenge with innovation and optimism with a passion for change.

A key area of priority over 2025-2026 is to ensure a high level of visibility of senior leadership across the workforce. Our leaders are key to understanding the workforce pressures and demands as well as learning about the successes staff achieve daily. The CSWO must have greater visibility and the role better understood which can only be achieved through a structured programme of connectedness with staff. A shared vision for the workforce that are underpinned by social work values is key to aspiring staff and ensuring that the unique skills and knowledge of the profession are recognised and understood by all of our partners. A stable workforce ensures continuity of care and support to the most vulnerable people in Fife.

Changing the Public Protection structures and re-aligning leads across all protection functions will be a structural change that requires our attention in 2025-2026 as a cross-sector leadership team. An effective protection service working across all areas allows us to ensure that we keep everyone safe and develop more robust practice and guidance across in key areas of transitions, domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health. We know poverty is often at the heart of risk and therefore the ability to further embed prevention and early intervention services within services such as Children and Families and Justice is essential. This service is underpinned by a revised 3-year strategy. We do however need to aspire for this investment within adults social work services.

Developing the use of data to demonstrate impact and change is key, we need to know what is working well and where areas of concern, risk and improvement are. Whilst we have seen considerable improvement in this area a new care and practice scrutiny group chaired by the CSWO is to be implemented so that oversight is enhanced by the CSWO across all aspects of the social work and social care profession in Fife.

The policy, regulatory and legislative landscape is changing and moving at pace across social work and social care, and we must find a way to ensure that staff remain connected and engaged with a focus on social work values. As indicated the Professional Social Work Officer will engage with social work and social care staff and look to review our arrangements in 2025 based on that feedback.

We anticipate that significant budget and resource challenges will be remain for adult services placing pressure on staff and services whilst we try to mitigate risks to service users and carers. Expansion of the appropriate use of digital will continue to be essential across all social work and social care and the appropriate best use of capital assets and clearer models of intermediate care beds and resources will be a priority for 25-26. There are capital developments for adults and young people with complex needs that need to ensure we move

people who are out of area back to Fife if possible and make best use of the resources we have both buildings, staff and finances.

Assuring that we can deliver on statutory functions is key and part of this will include a review of the MHO function, capacity and oversight.

As Chief Social Work Officer, I would like to thank all social work and social care staff for the work they carry out daily to care, support and protect children, young people, adults and families across the communities of Fife. We know that our profession gains access to people and their families at the most vulnerable time of their lives and it is our professional values of empathy, care, dignity and promotion of rights that provides person centred empathic support when needed the most.