Communities Directorate

Children, Families & Justice
Annual Service Report
2026

Introduction

This report reflects the performance of Children, Families and Justice Social Work Service for 2026. It covers the period April 2025 to June 2026, highlighting our delivery, progress, change and improvement plans for 2026-7.

We have considered our performance in relation to the council's policy priorities set out in the Plan for Fife; key indicators; financial and workforce pressures and how we compare in relation to other similar services in other Scottish councils, through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

Individual service indicators and results are published online in advance of this annual review to facilitate scrutiny and feedback.

These are available at **www.fife.gov.uk/councilperformance**

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Contents

Introduction 2
Service overview 3
Demand & delivery overview 5
Our people 7
Our budget 9
Our risks 11
Performance assessment 13
Performance assessment – Operational delivery 25
Our year ahead 27

Service overview

The Children, Families and Justice social work service is part of the Communities Directorate and is responsible for providing a range of voluntary and statutory supports to improve outcomes for children, their families and adults across Fife. The focus of the service is to provide relationship based and trauma informed support tailored to individual needs, to support the wellbeing of vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals who experience complex needs and challenges.

In Children and Families, the priority is the welfare of the child, and the service will provide parenting and practical support to families to enable children to remain at home or within their wider family/ community wherever possible. Underpinned by the Families First Strategy 2025 –28, the service works closely with colleagues in health, education, housing, the third sector and others to provide an integrated approach to meet complex needs at the right time, enabling children and families to meet their full potential.

Where children cannot remain safely in their family's care, our focus is on providing the best quality of care away from home. To do this the service provides a variety of regulated services which are registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide the appropriate level of care. These services include Fostering, Adoption, Supported Lodgings and Residential care. The social work service also works with external care providers when the service is unable to provide the care required to meet the child's individual needs.

Justice Social Work continues to prioritise the use of community-based interventions and disposals for individuals who can be managed safely within the community. This approach supports rehabilitation, reduces reliance on custodial sentences where appropriate, and aligns with national policy ambitions at a time when Scotland's prison population remains under significant pressure.

The Service continues to respond to a changing legislative and policy landscape. The implementation of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act has increased demand for assessment, support and supervision for individuals awaiting the outcome of court proceedings, requiring new approaches to risk management and service delivery. In addition, the Service is preparing for the introduction of revised national Throughcare Guidance, which will strengthen expectations around pre-release planning, support and supervision for individuals returning to their communities following custody.

The Scottish Government's *Vision for Justice in Scotland* sets out a long-term ambition for a person-centred, preventative and rehabilitative justice system. In response, Fife Justice Social Work developed its Outcome Improvement Plan 2024-2027, which reflects the principles of both the *Vision for Justice* and Scotland's *Community Justice Strategy*. The Plan is structured around the five national community justice aims and associated priority actions, providing a clear framework for local delivery and enabling the Service to demonstrate how progress achieved in Fife contributes to improved outcomes and wider national community justice objectives.

Underpinning positive outcomes is the delivery of caring and compassionate services by a skilled, confident and competent workforce. The Children, Families and Justice Workforce Development Strategy (2025 – 2028) is in place to promote an effective learning culture and practice excellence which is agile and

flexible with the capacity to respond to complex needs and improve life chances.

Effective commissioning and partnership working is also key to the delivery of these outcomes, to ensure that wider services are accessible and aligned with local needs. The service contributes as a lead partner to the work of Fife Children's Services Partnership, Child Protection Committee and Corporate Parenting Board, which oversee joint working and planning across wider services to meet shared aims

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Demand & Delivery Overview 2025/26

Children & Families Social Work

Service demand and delivery can be summarised as follows:

- 16,083 requests for assistance to the contact centre
- **8,191 children supported** across Children and Families services during 2025/26, representing a **45% increase** following implementation of the new service structure.
- **5,728 referrals** received by the Early Help and Support (EHS) teams, averaging **477 referrals per month**.
- **128 transfers** from Early Help and Support into Enhanced Children and Families teams during the year, representing approximately **2% of new involvements**
- **186 Child Protection registrations** and **187 de-registrations** completed within the reporting period, with an **average of 116** children subject to Child Protection Registration each month with the highest peak of 127 in January 2026.
- **286 Child Protection Planning Meetings** took place overall, a reduction compared to 298 the previous year.
- **64 children** became looked after in this reporting period, a reduction compared to **78 in the previous year**.
- A total of **713 children were** looked after at the 31 March 2026, a **reduction compared to 753** in the previous year.
- **140 children** looked after at home
- **236 children** living in in Foster Care
- **758 children** living in Kinship Care (including children who are not looked after)
- **33 children** living in Residential Care
- **52 young people** in Supported Lodgings
- **63 young people** living in Continuing Care
- **69** Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children supported
- **1,219 Looked After Child Reviews** took place
- **1323 Children's Hearings took place**

Justice Social Work (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026)

Service demand and delivery can be summarised as follows:

The service received **474 Diversion from Prosecution referrals from COPFS**, representing an increase of over **20%** compared to the previous year. Despite this growth in demand, **99% of Diversion cases were successfully completed**, demonstrating strong engagement and positive outcomes.

Court-related activity also increased substantially. A total of **624 Bail Suitability Assessments** were submitted to the courts, a **25% increase** on the previous year, while **174 Bail Supervision Orders** were imposed, representing a **42% increase**. The service maintained strong performance, with **86% of Bail Supervision Orders successfully completed**.

The service submitted **1,581 Justice Social Work Reports** to the Courts and saw **839 Community Payback Orders (CPOs) imposed** during the year. Completion rates remained positive, with **67% of Community Payback Orders successfully completed**. In addition, individuals subject to Community Payback Orders completed **58,869 hours of unpaid work**, delivering significant benefits to communities across Fife.

Demand also increased in relation to statutory throughcare and parole-related work. The service completed **295 Home Circumstances Reports for the Parole Board**, compared to 275 in the previous year, and supervised **461 individuals subject to statutory Throughcare**, an increase from 411 in 2024/25.

Specialist domestic abuse interventions continued to play an important role in supporting behaviour change and victim safety. During 2025/26, **48 Community Payback Orders included a Caledonian Requirement,** and **21 men commenced the Moving Forward: Making Changes (MF2C) programme**. Alongside this, the **Caledonian Women's Service received 346 referrals**, providing support to women affected by domestic abuse.

Overall, the year saw sustained growth in demand across key areas of service delivery, alongside strong completion rates and positive outcomes for individuals, victims and communities.

Our People

CHILDREN, FAMILIES & JUSTICE SERVICES – 2025/2026

Workforce Profile, including headcount

- 754 headcount, 693.75 FTE. Represents 4.1% of Fife Council's headcount.
- 80.5% are full time, 99.1% permanent and 84.6% female.

Workforce age

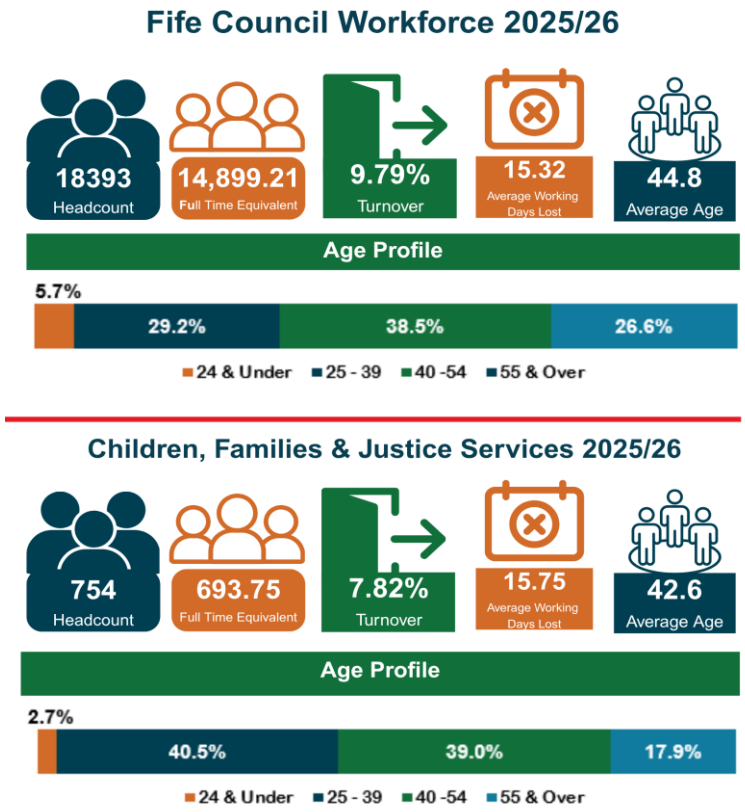
- Average workforce age is 42.6. This is below the Fife Council average age of 44.8.
- Average age of leavers is 43.6 and new starts 37.4.
- 2.65% of the workforce is aged 24 and under, down from 3.22% in 2024/5.

Workforce Turnover

- Turnover rate is 7.82%, slightly lower than 8.59% in 2024/25.
- 27.12% of leavers were aged 55 and over. The top reported leaver reason was other employment.

Working days lost (WDL) per FTE

- This Children & Families Service average WDL to sickness absence was 17.61 this is slightly higher than 17.07 in 2024/25. Long Term absences (over 28 days) account for 13.55 days.
- Justice Services average WDL to sickness absence was 10.37 this is lower than 12.76 in 2024/25. Long Term absences (over 28 days) account for 8.01 days.



People Plan Priorities

- Upskill Team Managers through the delivery of a bespoke Social Work Leadership & Management course, increasing confidence and understanding of leadership theory to support transformational change.
- Support a confident and knowledgeable workforce through the delivery of a wide range of training aligned to strategic priorities.
- Strengthen the conditions for relationship-based practice by embedding reflective supervision, peer support, and collaborative team learning.
- Regular engagement with the workforce to support close communication.
- Pride of Practice events take place twice a year to showcase and celebrate examples of good practice, enabling the workforce to see that that their contribution is valued.
- Focus on minimising long-term absence, improving employee safety and wellbeing with regards to lone working, and making use of digital technology to reduce administrative burdens.

Our budget

Business Area	Budget 25/26 £m	Provisional Outturn 25/26 £m	Variance 25/26 £m
Children & Families/CJS	74.483	68.947	(5.536)
Total Net Expenditure	74.483	68.947	(5.536)

	Budget 25/26 £m	Provisional Expenditure / (Income) 25/26 £m	Variance Overspend/ (Underspend) 25/26 £m
Staff Costs	46.943	42.616	(4.327)
Property Costs	0.680	1.106	0.426
Transport Costs	1.696	1.797	0.101
Supplies and Services	4.594	2.906	(1.688)
Third Party Payments	27.869	28.431	0.562
Transfer Payments	5.352	5.016	(0.336)
Support Services Charges	0.001	0.008	0.008
Total Expenditure	87.136	81.881	(5.255)
Internal Income	(0.508)	(0.785)	(0.277)
External Income	(12.144)	(12.148)	(0.004)
Total Income	(12.653)	(12.933)	(0.281)
Net Expenditure	74.483	68.947	(5.536)

Key points

The main variances against the budget are summarised below:

Staff Cost £4.327m underspend:

- Of this underspend, £3.992m sits in Children and Families and is temporary due to £0.835m being held to support planned service savings in 2027/28. Delays in planned recruitment and spend of the Whole Family Wellbeing funding contribute towards £0.197m of underspend, and the rest relates to staff turnover and vacancies across Children, Families and Justice.

Third Party Payments Overspend:

- £1.277m of this is due to Continuing Care packages, £0.783m to provide respite care for children affected by a disability. This overspend is partially offset with £0.728m from our purchased placement budget due to a reduction in high-cost residential packages through implementation of the re-design discussed throughout this report.

Our risks

Risk	Mitigation
Workforce Challenges	• Workforce Development Strategy created including planner of relevant learning opportunities. • Introducing initiatives to support and promote staff wellbeing. • Developing pathways to support existing staff members to progress career in the social work sector. • Robust oversight and monitoring of staff absence to reduce barriers to returning to work after sick leave. • Investment in Leadership training to support the development of staff and workforce.
ICT Failure	• Business Continuity Plans provide robust reporting processes and escalation protocols for ICT issues. • Established links with BTS colleagues to actively develop and create resilience within record systems. • Adopting the Digital Champions model to encourage sharing of expertise and build confidence. • Ensuring all staff complete mandatory cyber security training.

Risk	Mitigation
Legal & Regulatory Compliance Failure	• Regular monitoring of the Looked After Child, Fostering and Adoption Panel system to support compliance within expected timescales. • Professional Assurance framework created outlining a range of activities which provide assurance to the Chief Social Work Officer. • Regular liaison between the Care Inspectorate and regulated care services. • Service reporting to Scrutiny Committee to provide assurance.
Data Records Management	• Mandatory training to ensure data is processed and subject access requests are supported according to data protection legislation. • Liaison with data protection team to ensure appropriate processes underpin multi agency practice. • Ongoing communication with Business Technology and Performance and Improvement teams to develop recording system as required. • Improved automated reporting via development of data dashboards.

Risk	Mitigation
Health & Safety	• We are committed to high standards of health and safety compliance to protect the health, safety and welfare of our staff and the public. • Health and Safety framework has been developed for CFJ. • Continue to implement key aspects of the Health and Safety framework in all aspects of our Service provision. This will ensure robust health and safety management arrangements, procedures and practices are embedded as an integral part of management practice and day-to-day service delivery.
Keeping children safe and protected from harm	• Workforce development strategy and training to support a confident and effective workforce • Investment in management and leadership support to ensure oversight of quality of practice • Child Protection guidance updated and robust reporting on the Child Protection Planning Meeting processes. • Ongoing support of Learning Reviews via the multi-agency Child Protection Committee • Multi agency development sessions on use of the Child Wellbeing Pathway.

Risk	Mitigation
High Risk Offenders	• Consideration of Serious Incident Review process for all incidents which occur in Fife. • Adherence to National Outcomes and Standards and local policy. • Ensuring appropriate resources are dedicated to the highest risk of harm individuals. • Extensive training and development opportunities for all practitioners to ensure competent and confidence when working with complex cases.
Replacement of VISOR (MAPPS)	• Engagement in national meetings to support development of national arrangements and guidance. Local implementation group in place to progress developments. • Continued engagement with HR partners regarding staff vetting. • Continue to utilise ViSOR trained staff to support connectivity testing for MAPPS.
Impact of the Children's Care and Justice Act	• Continue to support and develop Youth Intervention Service to provide specialist age-appropriate services for young people in conflict with the law. • Senior leadership oversight of high-risk cases and planning around young people most at risk. • CSWO authorisation and ongoing approval of secure placements.

Performance assessment – Priorities & Progress

Introduction - service delivery context and challenges

During 2025/26 Children and Families Social Work service completed the first year of a significant service redesign. Following evaluation of local demand and service delivery, a new structure was implemented in April 2025 to strengthen early intervention, improve accessibility of support and ensure statutory social work services provided high-quality support to children and families experiencing the greatest levels of risk and complexity.

The redesign established Early Help and Support Teams across Fife, expanded intensive support provision and introduced the Youth Intervention Service to provide targeted support for young people in conflict with the law. Throughout the year the service focused on delivering the priorities contained within the Families First Strategy, with particular emphasis on increasing early support, improving permanence outcomes, strengthening family-based care and enhancing specialist supports.

While implementation of the new structure resulted in a period of transition for staff and families, early indicators demonstrate that the service is reaching significantly more children and families, reducing escalation to statutory intervention and maintaining stable child protection and looked after populations despite increasing complexity of need.

Alongside significant internal developments, the Children, Families and Justice service continues to adapt to external factors such as rapid changes in policy and legislation across social work services.

These changes require agility, and the service is supporting the workforce to implement new practices effectively as they arise. Financial pressures and the increasing complexity of needs, including neurodiversity, remain key considerations, and the service is focused on making the best use of available resources to maintain high-quality care and support.

Priorities & progress

In this reporting period the shared priority areas of focus across Children, Families and Justice have been:

- Early Intervention & Preventative Support for Individuals and Families
- Responsive Support for Complex Needs
- Community Based Interventions and Care
- Developing a Skilled, Confident and Competent Workforce
- Quality Assurance

Priority 1 **Early Intervention & Preventative Support for Individuals and Families**

Progress

The introduction of Early Help and Support Teams in this reporting period has significantly increased the number of children and families being supported by the service. The aim of these teams is to reach more families at the earliest opportunity, providing mostly voluntary support to reduce the risk of families reaching crisis or needs requiring escalation through the pathways of statutory social work. Early indications suggest that these teams are meeting their aims, with only 2% of all new referrals being transferred to the Enhanced teams for support with multi-faceted or complex need and risk.

Across the 7 localities in Fife the teams have worked closely with local partners, working collectively to overcome the perception of social work services and stigma associated with their involvement, and meaningfully connect with the communities. Several family fun days, outings and activities across the school holiday periods have been facilitated to support this engagement.

Partnership working has been essential to this approach, and within this reporting period connections have been strengthened with third sector services to support a co-ordinated approach to meet local needs. This includes the shared delivery of accredited group work and development of accessible services based on the views of those with lived experience.

Diversion from Prosecution remains a key component of the early intervention approach within Justice Social Work, providing individuals with opportunities to address criminogenic needs and reduce the risk of future offending. Demand for the service increased during the reporting period, accompanied by a rise in case complexity, particularly in cases involving sexual offending and domestic abuse. In response, the service has expanded its range of tailored interventions, enhancing its capacity to meet increasingly complex needs while continuing to achieve strong outcomes for individuals and communities.

There has been a significant national focus on increasing the use of community-based interventions in response to ongoing pressures within the prison estate, which have continued to intensify during this reporting period. Bail Supervision has continued to provide the Courts with a credible and effective alternative to custodial remand, combining intensive support, robust risk management, and close supervision within the community.

The continued growth in the use of the service reflects increasing confidence in community justice approaches and recognition of the positive outcomes that Bail Supervision can achieve. By supporting individuals to comply with court requirements, maintain family and community connections, and address factors associated with offending behaviour, the service helps to reduce the unnecessary

use of remand while contributing to improved outcomes for individuals, communities, and the wider justice system.

Areas for Improvement

- Engagement with local partners continues to ensure that the scope of social work support is understood to maximise referrals to the service at the earliest opportunity.
- Third Sector services will be re-commissioned in the next reporting period to strengthen local service delivery that aligns with social work provision and the priorities identified in the Fife Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2026 – 29.
- Key areas for improvement within Justice include strengthening the delivery of early intervention services through alignment with the forthcoming revised national Diversion from Prosecution guidance, helping to promote greater consistency, quality, and effectiveness of practice.
- Expanding specialist interventions, building service capacity, strengthening partnership approaches, and improving the measurement of long-term outcomes for individuals and communities.

Relevant KPI details

- 8,191 children supported across the Children and Families service.
- 5,728 referrals received by Early Help and Support teams.
- Parenting Support, Behavioural Support and the impact of Domestic Abuse were the most common reasons for Early Help and Support team support at the end of the reporting period.
- While there is no time limit to support, **89%** of children and families were supported to meet their outcomes and successfully end their involvement with the Early Help and Support Team in this reporting period.
- Only **2%** of new referrals transferred from Early Help and Support to Enhanced Teams for ongoing support.
- **64 children** became looked after in this reporting period, a reduction compared to **78 in the previous year.**
- 472 Diversion from Prosecution assessments were received from COPFS, a **20% increase** on the previous year, reflecting growing demand for early intervention services.
- **99%** of Diversion from Prosecution cases were successfully completed, demonstrating the effectiveness of diversion in achieving positive outcomes and reducing further involvement in the justice system.
- 624 Enhanced Bail Suitability Assessments were submitted to the courts, representing a **25% increase** on the previous year and continued demand for community justice interventions
- 174 Bail Supervision Orders were imposed, a **42% increase** on the previous year, reflecting increased confidence in Bail Supervision as an effective alternative to remand.

Priority 2
Responsive Support for Complex Needs

Progress

The service re-design provided an opportunity for the Enhanced teams to provide a more intensive, relationship-based approach to support children and families who have multifaceted needs, including children who are looked after at home or away from home, or subject to child protection registration. The aim of the teams is to work in a strengths-based manner, supporting children and families to meet their individual needs, reduce risk and improving wellbeing. Early indications suggest that the teams are meeting these aims, with an overall reduction in the looked after population, and a higher number of children being de-registered from the Child Protection Register in a timely manner. These two outcomes suggest that multi agency intervention is effective in reducing risk and achieving outcomes.

In this reporting period the Youth Intervention Service was established, supporting young people and care-experienced young adults who are in conflict with the law across Fife. The team has demonstrated some positive individual outcomes for young people through an approach that promotes children's rights, builds on strengths and recognises the wider impact of adversity and trauma.

There has also been an expansion of intensive support services, to increase the provision of flexible and responsive support in areas of strategic priority. This includes support for children experiencing neglect, and to enable a successful return to their family's care or local community.

Following review of local needs and support, the Children Affected by Disability team model has started to shift to align with the Early Help and Support teams, and the team has increased to include family support workers. This change will support the development of a wider range of support for children impacted by disabilities at the earliest opportunity, including increased group and social support, strengthening inclusion in local communities and improving emotional wellbeing.

Justice Social Work continues to deliver responsive, person-centred services to individuals presenting with increasingly complex needs. Through the NEXTURN project, young people involved in the justice system, including those subject to diversion from prosecution, have accessed tailored group and individual interventions aimed at reducing offending behaviour, addressing underlying vulnerabilities, and improving long-term outcomes. In response to emerging needs, bespoke programmes such as Road Traffic Safety and Healthy Relationships have been developed, recognising that many young people require timely, age-appropriate support to address both justice-related concerns and broader welfare needs.

Performance assessment – Priorities & Progress

Groupwork services remain a key component of justice delivery, providing evidence-based interventions that support rehabilitation while contributing to public protection. During the reporting period, nationally accredited programmes, including the Caledonian System and Moving Forward 2 Change (MF:2C), continued to support individuals to address the attitudes, behaviours and circumstances associated with offending. These interventions promote meaningful behavioural change, reduce the risk of further harm, and contribute to safer communities, improved outcomes for victims, and enhanced wellbeing for individuals and their families.

The complexity of need among those accessing Justice Social Work services continues to increase. Demand has grown among individuals with neurodivergent conditions, learning disabilities, age-related needs, and those assessed as presenting higher levels of risk. Rising demand for Throughcare services, increased statutory post-release supervision, and greater Parole Board activity have required significant service capacity to support successful reintegration and effective risk management. At the same time, an increasing number of individuals requiring intensive multi-agency oversight, including those managed under MAPPA Level 3 arrangements, has placed additional pressure on resources.

Despite these challenges, the service has continued to innovate and strengthen partnership approaches to meet emerging needs and improve outcomes. A Social Work-led collaboration with the SOLD Network has enhanced accessibility and communication for justice-involved individuals with cognitive and neurological impairments, supporting improved engagement with services and more inclusive rehabilitation pathways. This partnership has strengthened public protection arrangements and contributed to better outcomes for individuals across Fife.

Areas for Improvement

- The number of children, families and individuals impacted by Domestic Abuse continues to increase in Fife. The Children, Families and Justice service continues to engage with Public Protection partners to explore ways to collaboratively support and safeguard those impacted by this issue.
- Parental mental health, substance and alcohol use are the most frequent vulnerabilities recorded for children on the Child Protection Register. The Children and Families service is working with partners in the Child Protection Committee to develop mutli agency toolkits, assessment frameworks and training to support the workforce to effectively identify and supported families impacted by multifaceted needs.
- The multi-agency Transitions Guidance will soon be launched for implementation in Fife. This will support earlier planning for young people who are identified as needing care or support when they reach adulthood.

Relevant KPI details

- An **average of 116** children subject to Child Protection Registration each month consistent with levels in the previous reporting period.
- Of all children on the Child Protection Register, 21% were unborn babies, and 37% were aged 0-4 years old. This indicates the importance of responsive and early assessment of need to reduce risk.

Performance assessment – Priorities & Progress

- 79% of children were subject to Child Protection Registration for 6 months or less, with 67% being de-registered due to an improved home situation.
- A total of **713 children were** looked after at the 31 March 2026, a **reduction compared to 753** in the previous year.
- Social isolation and emotional wellbeing were the two most frequent reasons for support requests to the Children Affected by Disability team in this reporting period.
- 86% of Community Payback Orders imposed on young people under the age of 18 were successfully completed.
- The number of families supported by the Multi Systemic Team increased by 56%
- 33 young people accessed tailored support through the NEXTURN project, helping to address risk factors associated with offending behaviour and supporting positive outcomes.
- 48 Community Payback Orders included a Caledonian Programme requirement, reflecting the continued use of evidence-based interventions to address domestic abuse and promote safer relationships.
- The Caledonian Women's Service received 346 referrals during the reporting period, highlighting ongoing demand for specialist support for women affected by domestic abuse.
- 21 Community Payback Orders included participation in the Moving Forward 2 Change (MF2C) programme, supporting individuals to address offending behaviour and reduce the risk of further harm.
- Overall, 62% of individuals successfully completed groupwork programmes during 2025/26, demonstrating sustained engagement with interventions designed to support behaviour change, improve outcomes, and reduce reoffending.
- Demand for Throughcare services continued to increase, with 461 individuals receiving statutory post-release support, reflecting the vital role of Throughcare in promoting successful reintegration and reducing the risk of further offending.
- Increased Parole Board activity, with 295 Home Circumstances Reports completed an increase from 275 last year.
- Successful completion of Orders 68%, an increase of 3% from last year.

Priority 3
Community Based Interventions and Care

Progress

As outlined within the Families First Strategy 2025 – 28, the Children and Families service approach is underpinned by the aim of effectively scaffolding families, providing them with the support they require at the right time, to reduce the risk of family crisis and breakdown.

The service promotes family-based care wherever possible. The impact of early intervention and responsive support services was seen with a reduction in the number of children accommodated away from home in this reporting period. For children who were looked after away from home, 94% were living in kinship or foster care, demonstrating strong alignment with the national ambitions of The Promise.

In November 2025 the family-based care teams were realigned to create a Permanence Resource Team and a team focused on the recruitment and support of new foster carers. This change of model responds to the different needs of our foster carer population to ensure they are effectively supported throughout their fostering career. Fife has not experienced the same recruitment challenges reported nationwide and has been able to continually recruit new and local foster, adoptive and supported lodgings carers.

The service introduced a refreshed Permanence Strategy during October 2025 to strengthen permanence planning and reduce delays for children requiring long-term care arrangements. This was supported by the creation of a new Permanence Lead Officer role to lead practice and learning activity to support improvements in this area. The service is beginning to make some progress in this area, with an increase in activity to assess permanent carers and match children to secure their futures.

Community Justice Services continue to play a key role in supporting rehabilitation, reducing reoffending and enhancing community safety across Fife. Throughout the reporting period, the service responded to sustained demand from the Courts and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), delivering a range of evidence-informed interventions that support behaviour change, address the underlying causes of offending and promote successful reintegration within local communities.

A significant development during the year was the implementation of the Unpaid Work and Opportunities Hub, which has strengthened the service's ability to meet the diverse needs of individuals subject to community-based disposals. The Hub has expanded access to unpaid work opportunities for individuals who may previously have faced barriers to participation due to physical health issues, mental health concerns or other complex needs. Through the provision of tailored support, including one-to-one interventions, small group activities and project-based work, the service has increased flexibility and accessibility while promoting wellbeing, skills development and meaningful community participation.

Performance assessment – Priorities & Progress

The service has also introduced innovative approaches to improve engagement and support successful completion of community orders. The use of media-based resources, including videos showcasing unpaid work projects, work environments and activities, has helped individuals gain a clearer understanding of expectations and available opportunities. These developments have contributed to improved accessibility, increased engagement and greater confidence among participants, while maximising opportunities to develop skills, build positive community connections and support long-term desistance from offending.

Areas for Improvement

- There has been a slight reduction in the number of children who live with one or all of their siblings. In the next year the service will develop its approach to supporting children separated by care, to re-connect and develop relationships in a supported environment.
- The service continues to review the longer-term approach to the provision of residential care through the Transforming Residential Child Care Board. This includes a focus on developing a model of care to best meet the needs of young people with complex needs and disability.
- Number of Unpaid Work Orders have reduced over the reporting period, however an issue relating to medical fitness has been identified through QA activity will look to improve this area in the next reporting period.

Relevant KPI details

- **94%** of our looked after children are living in community-based care settings, meaning our balance of care reflects the ambitions of the Promise.
- 6 new foster carers, 7 adopters and 4 supported lodgings carers recruited to provide local care in this reporting period.
- **62%** of looked after children are living with some or all of their siblings, a 2% reduction from last reporting period.
- **100%** of young people supported by the House Project sustained their tenancy
- 7 of our residential houses were inspected in this reporting period, 3 sustained their grades and 4 received an improved grade.
- 1,581 Justice Social Work Reports were submitted to the courts.
- 839 Community Payback Orders were imposed, demonstrating the continued demand for community-based justice interventions and assessment services.
- Individuals subject to Community Payback Orders completed 58,869 hours of unpaid work during the year, delivering tangible benefits to communities across Fife.
- The successful completion rate for Community Payback Orders was 67%. While this represents a small reduction from the previous year, it reflects the increasing complexity of the individuals engaging with justice services.

Priority 4
Developing a Skilled, Confident and Competent Workforce

Progress

In Children, Families and Justice the refreshed Workforce Development Strategy 2025 - 28 has helped to set the culture and conditions for a shift in practice, moving from crisis response to increased early intervention support. Focused around three key priority areas - Recruitment and Retention, Skills Development & Training and Leadership & Management, a wide range of learning activity was delivered within this reporting period.

Following evaluation of impact from quality assurance reports and feedback from the workforce, the approach was refined in April 2026 to focus more on training linked to local needs, demands and strategic priorities. This included an increased focus on supporting and communicating with individuals who are neurodiverse or have additional support needs. There was also a focus on upskilling the workforce to understand, assess and effectively support children and families impacted by domestic abuse.

Team Managers across Children, Families and Justice have also been supported to engage in the delivery of a bespoke Social Work Leadership & Management course, increasing confidence and understanding of leadership theory to support transformational change.

Staff morale has remained positive, with many new initiatives being supported, developed and delivered by local teams. The Pride in Practice events are now established to celebrate and showcase examples of positive impact and outcomes, providing recognition to the workforce for their efforts across the service. The service has grown in number of staff, however leaver numbers have reduced indicating a healthy retention of an experienced and motivated workforce.

Areas for Improvement

- The workforce development strategy will continue to be reviewed to ensure that it continues to be relevant within a changing legislative and policy context. The views of the workforce will continue to inform the approach to delivery.

Relevant KPI details

- **948 attendees** benefited from training activities between December April 2025 – February 2026.
- **339 employees** from Children and Families service attended Domestic abuse training between May – July 2026
- **7% reduction** in the number of leavers across Children, Families and Justice compared to the previous year.

Performance assessment – Priorities & Progress

- The age range of the workforce continues to be well balanced, with **40.5% aged 25 – 39 years old**, ensuring the capacity for sustainable service delivery and succession planning.

Priority 5
Quality Assurance

Progress

Children, Families and Justice Services continue to place quality assurance and continuous improvement at the centre of service delivery. During 2025/28, a Professional Assurance Framework was developed to provide a consistent and robust approach to evaluating practice, measuring performance, and evidencing outcomes for children, families and individuals supported across services. Rooted in social work values, rights-based practice and a culture of self-evaluation, the framework promotes shared accountability for quality and improvement at all levels of the organisation.

The framework brings together a range of assurance activities, including practice and case file audits, performance monitoring, workforce supervision and wellbeing, feedback from people with lived experience, and learning from complaints, compliments and inspection activity. These arrangements provide a comprehensive view of service effectiveness and support the early identification of strengths, risks and emerging trends. Findings are routinely reported through management and governance structures, providing assurance regarding the quality, consistency and effectiveness of practice.

A key area of progress has been strengthening the participation of children, young people, individuals and families in shaping service development and improvement activity. Enhanced engagement and feedback mechanisms are helping to embed a culture of continuous learning and improvement, ensuring that services are informed by the experiences of those who use them.

Investment in workforce development, reflective supervision and professional learning continues to strengthen practice and support effective service delivery. Collectively, these arrangements provide assurance that services are safe, effective and person-centred, while maintaining a clear focus on improving outcomes for the people of Fife.

Areas for Improvement

- Strengthen participation and co-production with children, families and adults involved in the justice system.
- Enhance the collection, analysis and use of service user feedback.
- Improve consistency and quality of recording, planning and outcome-focused practice.
- Further embed self-evaluation and reflective practice across teams.
- Strengthen outcome measurement and evidence of impact.
- Continue to support workforce development, supervision and professional wellbeing.

Relevant KPI details

- In this reporting period we began to record and monitor parental attendance at decision making meetings. With a service focus in this area, the number of parents attending together or separately **increased from 35% to 70%** at the end of the reporting period.
- There was a continued focus on supporting young people to attend or share their views for their decision-making meetings in the way that felt best to them. In this reporting period **63% of children attended their meeting in person**, an increase from 56% the previous year. Where they didn't attend in person, most children shared their views in writing or via their parent, carer or trusted professional.
- Regular monitoring around timescale compliance in child protection processes supported sustained improvements, with an average of **98%** of review meetings going ahead within timescale throughout the year.
- Timescale compliance for looked after reviews fluctuated throughout the year, with an average of **76%** of meetings going ahead on timescale. Reasons for meetings being out with timescale included the child or parent / carer being unable to attend, or professional invites and reports not received on time. Improvement activity is underway to support improvement in this area.

Performance assessment – Operational delivery

Overview of progress

All results against key indicators can be found in Appendix 1 and online at www.fife.gov.uk/councilperformance to facilitate feedback and scrutiny.

Progress

The focus of improvement activity during 2025/26 was the implementation of the Children and Families service re-design and delivery of the Families First Strategy. The overarching aim was to shift the service from a predominantly crisis and statutory response model towards earlier intervention, enabling more children and families to receive support before needs escalated.

Early evidence suggests this has been successful. During 2025/26 the service significantly increased the number of children and families receiving support, whilst maintaining relatively stable child protection activity and reducing the overall number of looked after children. Importantly, only a small proportion of children supported by Early Help and Support required escalation to statutory social work services, providing assurance that needs are increasingly being met at the earliest appropriate level.

Progress was also achieved in permanence planning. A refreshed Permanence Strategy was implemented during the year, and early tracking indicates improved compliance with key permanence milestones and increased focus on securing legally robust, family-based permanence arrangements for children without unnecessary delay.

The service continued to make progress in delivering the ambitions of The Promise through maintaining children within family and community settings wherever possible. Kinship care remains the predominant care arrangement in Fife and residential care placement numbers remain low in comparison to historical levels.

Alongside this, investment in specialist and intensive services has strengthened the support available for children experiencing complex needs. The establishment of the Youth Intervention Service, expansion of Multi Systemic Therapy and Children Affected by Disability provision has increased the range of supports available to prevent escalation, sustain family relationships and improve outcomes.

Challenges

As expected, implementation of significant and large-scale organisational change created some challenges during the reporting year. Workforce movement and recruitment, case transfers and the establishment of new teams temporarily affected performance in some areas, particularly around compliance with report timescales, recording consistency and review activity.

Quality assurance and improvement activity is being supported across the service, with data systems being developed to aid monitoring and reporting in priority areas.

Areas for improvement

The priority for 2026/27 is to move from implementation to consolidation of each priority area discussed in this report. Improvement activity will focus on embedding the re-designed model, improving consistency of practice and sustaining strong areas of performance. This will include the development of recording and reporting systems to better evidence outcomes and impact alongside our KPI's. Alongside this the Children and Families service will also explore opportunities to enhance day and respite support for children affected by disability and a modernised residential care estate.

Our year ahead

Priorities for 2026/27

Across Children, Families and Justice our shared priorities will continue to be:

- Early Intervention & Preventative Support for Individuals and Families
- Responsive Support for Complex Needs
- Community Based Interventions and Care
- Developing a Skilled, Confident and Competent Workforce
- Quality Assurance