



**Fife Child Protection Committee
Annual Report 2020-2021**



Preface from Chief Officers

Welcome to the Annual Report for Fife Child Protection Committee 2020-2021.

The report covers 16 months beginning in April 2020 and ending with the academic year in July 2021, shortly after covid restrictions were introduced. Together services have worked to keep children safe, working through the challenges of social distancing and the need to frequently change practitioner guidance to allow for continued focus on Fife's most vulnerable children and families. The impact of Covid 19 on children, families, communities and the workforce has been significant and the collective ambition and commitment across the partnership, coming together to keep children and young people protected from harm was exemplary.

Partners continue to be committed to ensuring that all children in Fife are safe and protected from harm. This is evident in the partnership's day-to-day delivery of and strategic planning around supporting children and families.

Multi-agency collaboration is key to the CPC's roles and success, ensuring the care and safety of Fife's children and young people.

Looking ahead, the policy imperatives such as the Promise, UNCRC, and the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021, will shape the way that we move forward to deliver services.



Steve Grimmond
Chief Executive
Fife Council



Derek McEwan
Divisional Commander
'P' Division Police Scotland



Carol Potter
Chief Executive
NHS Fife



Introduction

Welcome to the Fife Child Protection Committee (CPC) Annual Report 2020/2021. This report covers the period 1st April 2020 to 31st July 2021. The reporting period has been lengthened to comply with guidance for Child Protection Committees which recommends that we no longer report in line with the financial year and adjust to the academic year which runs from 1st August to 31st July.

This report identifies our achievements, key strengths, and areas for further improvement. It describes our improvement journey and how we work together through our Working Groups to drill down and focus on key priorities. As this report is written retrospectively there is a strong temptation to disproportionately reference the global Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on all of us. This unprecedented public health emergency has seen us all adapt our working and living practices and as we start to move on from public health restrictions we take with us new ways of working, innovative practice developments and a renewed commitment to ensure the continued protection of Fife's children.

As a CPC we are focused on practice change and improvement, which empowers and supports a competent, and confident workforce. We are continuing to make sustained improvement in our key child protection processes and practices, constantly reviewing and testing our approach through self-evaluation and performance monitoring. In this respect, I must acknowledge the part that our working groups play in taking forward the ambitions of the CPC. The chairs of the working groups are all substantive members of the CPC, and the members are a mixture of CPC members or staff delegated to represent their service or organisation. Their commitment is over and above their substantive roles and is vital to ensuring Fife CPC continues to work towards our aim to see all of Fife's children achieve their full potential by providing them with a safe and supportive environment.

The pandemic has impacted on many of the CPC's planned activities. Fife CPC has responded by embracing technology to ensure essential work has continued and despite the unprecedented challenges faced, the Committee has worked hard to fulfil its functions. The use of technology has served us well and we will continue to use remote meetings where practicable hopefully moving to a blended approach when risks to health are lessened.

In March 2020 a meeting which was scheduled to assess progress towards the aims of the 2017-20 CPC Improvement Plan and agree priorities for 2020 -2023 had to be cancelled. As a result of this and other resource implications it was agreed to postpone the refresh of the improvement plan until 2021 given the balance of competing demands and the reality that the impact of the pandemic will undoubtedly bring fresh challenges and increasing need for support for children, young people, and their families.

In 2019 our CPC Lead Officer Viv Boyle began a period of sickness absence which culminated with her retiral in the summer of 2020 and tragically her death in December 2020. Viv's contribution to the work of the CPC was invaluable and her absence seriously impacted the CPC's ability to achieve its ambitions during the first year of the pandemic. Viv's successor Patricia Pattison was appointed in January 2021 and has made a significant contribution to the authoring of this report.

The closing section of this report outlines areas for development in the coming year and provides reassurance that in these challenging times Fife CPC will continue to work towards keeping the children and young people in Fife safe from harm.



CPC Independent Chair

Aim, Values, Priorities Role and Membership

Fife Child Protection Committee (CPC) has a clear vision for all children in Fife to be safe and protected from harm. As a partnership, Fife's Child Protection Committee exists to develop, implement, and improve child protection strategy and thread child protection work through a wide range of local agencies and across the community. The CPC embodies the ethos that "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright."



OUR AIM is to see all of Fife's children achieve their full potential by providing them with a safe and supportive environment.

OUR VALUES

We will:

- Treat children as individuals considering any diversity
- Ensure we use the least intrusive intervention needed
- Hear children
- Maximise the strengths within families and communities



OUR PRIORITIES we will always consider the steps outlined in the 'Six for Safety' in all of our practice.

The needs of children are at the centre of all practice.



‘Six for Safety’ promotes best practice when working with children and families. Developed from analysis and learning from Learning Reviews, these are day-to-day best practice principles of working, to support and protect children and young people and support improved decision making.



Ensuring that all relationships with children, parents/carers are effective, constructive and are central to improving wellbeing and minimise risk of harm.



All assessments and plans are effective in achieving outcomes in meeting needs and minimising risk of harm. All available resources, techniques and tools are used to best effect.



Relevant information is shared appropriately, clear lines of responsibility for action are understood across partners and communication is effective in minimising potential risks.



Early and effective intervention is achieved where possible, minimising the risk of harm to children and young people.

A culture of effective management support and/or supervision is embedded which embodies the values and principles of Fife Child Protection Committee.



Our Work

Fife's Child Protection Committee is a locally based, inter-agency strategic partnership which leads on the development of local Child Protection Policy and Practice. The Committee also works with the Scottish Government and other partners to take forward Policy and Practice Developments.



The Chair of Fife Violence Against Women Partnership also attends the Committee.

The Committee is committed to promoting individual and collective leadership, recognising cross cutting themes and the complexity of child protection working.

Improvements are driven through the Child Protection Improvement Programme and are monitored by the Committee and our Annual Report is made widely available.

OUR WORK

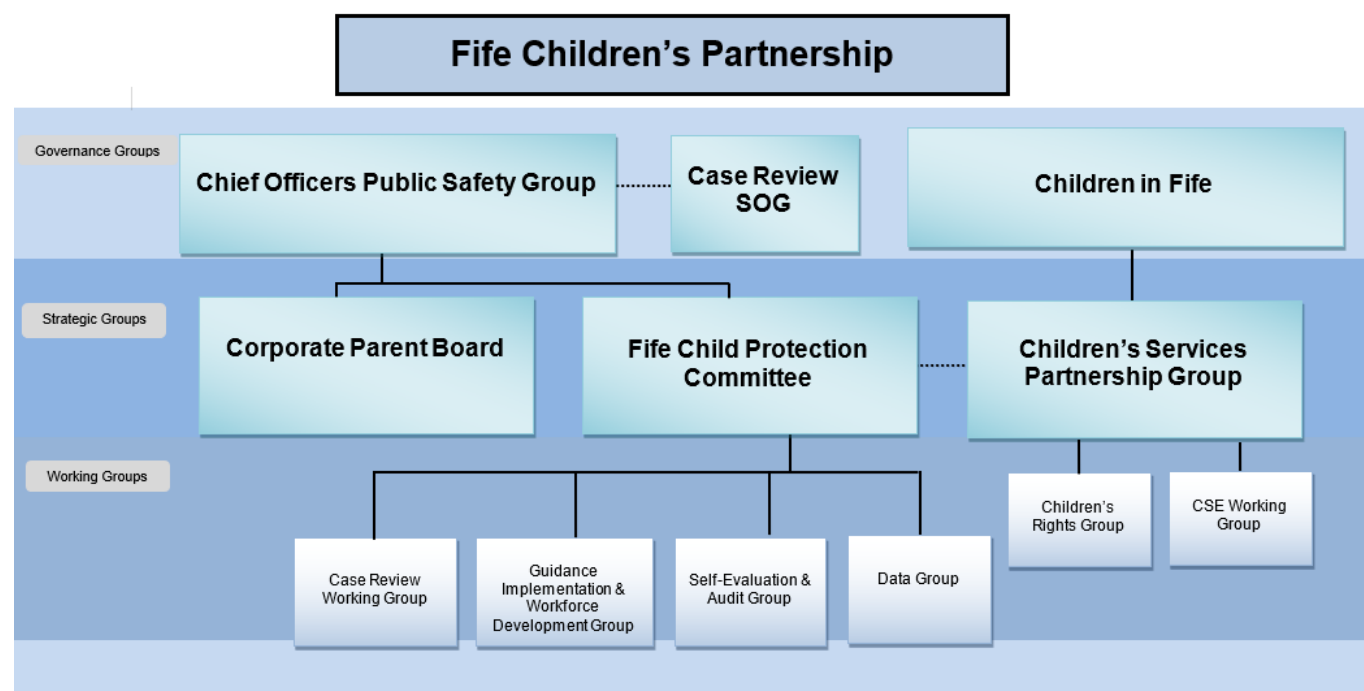
The Committee retains a strategic overview of child protection policies and procedures reporting on a quarterly basis to the Chief Officers Public Safety Group. In 2019 the Scottish Government published refreshed guidance outlining Child Protection Committee and Chief Officer responsibilities "Protecting Children and Young People". Fife CPC functions were already well established and are aligned to the functions the guidance supports in respect of:

- Continuous improvement, developing policies, procedures, and guidance
- Public information, engagement and participation
- Data on Child Protection Services and performance
- Quality Assurance and Self Evaluation
- Forging strong links to strategic plans locally, regionally and nationally
- Strategic planning and connections
- Annual reporting on the work of the CPC

The CPC normally meets six times a year. There are currently four permanent subgroups tasked with delivering an appropriate workplan and they report directly to the CPC.

In December 2020 the CPC met for a focused Workshop Development Day. The workshop considered membership, governance, function, agenda setting and other areas relevant to the committee. The Workshop was well attended, and valuable contributions were made by members and areas for development were identified. As we have moved through the year areas such as Committee and Group membership have been addressed, a new style of Agenda and Reports have been agreed and a Communications Strategy agreed and signed off.

The diagram in Appendix 2 shows the subgroup structure and wider governance structure in which the CPC currently operates.



Immediate Response during Covid 19

Fife's partnership approach to wellbeing and protection continued despite Covid-19. The partnership recognised the stresses for children and families and how a reduced reach from universal, targeted and intensive services may impact on children and their families.

The Scottish Government issued supplementary National Child Protection Guidance on the 31st March 2020, stating *"The rights of children do not alter during this pandemic, and nor do professional responsibilities in relation to child protection. We know that leaders responsible for the protection of children locally, have already made and continue to make complex decisions about managing risk within the dynamic context of their evolving responses. The protection of children must continue to be prioritised during this period."*

The Chief Officers Public Safety Group (COPS) responded by commissioning a Covid 19 Public Protection Group (PPG) chaired by Alan Small. The group's purpose was to monitor all trends and issues arising from the pandemic which may impact public protection, reporting to the COPS Group by exception. The PPG

met weekly from April 2020 up until 7th July 2021 then reverted to fortnightly meetings. In addition, the Public Protection Group published a weekly Public Protection Covid-19 Bulletin covering Adult and Child Protection information which was produced and circulated on a weekly basis until December 2020.

Recognising that 'lockdown' conditions impacted on services and the public's visibility of children and young people a campaign to raise public awareness and ask for vigilance when families were doing essential food shopping was launched in May 2020. The campaign was carried out in partnership with the Adult Support and Protection Committee to maximise the opportunity to heighten awareness about children, young people and adults at risk of harm. All of Fife's supermarkets were contacted and asked to display posters in public areas and staff rooms with the Fife Council Contact Centre telephone number and information as to how to make a child protection referral.

Social Work staff worked together with partners in Health and Education to identify children, young people and families who were most at risk, due to poverty, vulnerability and individual circumstances, to ensure weekly visiting remained in place and additional supports were offered through Children's Activity Centres during the school day. This offer included those children whose names were on the child protection register and the days were organised to best reflect the diverse age groups and interests. Transport was also provided for those who required it.

Child Protection Case Conferences responded to the challenges of Covid by transitioning to MS Teams, in order that families and professionals could meet in a safe, virtual space, to discuss planning and agree decisions. Participation was central to this, and families were offered additional support, equipment and network coverage to enable virtual participation.

Fostering and Adoption panels continued their work and Family Placement Service continued to recruit for new foster and adoptive carers.

The social work service sought feedback from families to ensure during this difficult time, the offer was meeting needs and to sense check if any additional supports were required. Feedback was positive with many families feeling connected and enabled to have a voice in their meetings online.

In Police there were no changes to the Child Wellbeing and Protection Referral processes during restrictions. A concern Report is the method by which information is passed from front line officers to the Police Concern Hub. Hub Staff then assess the report and where necessary and proportionate, disseminate to external partner agencies including SCRA, Social Work, Health and Education, all identified concerns, which relate to members of our community, including children, young people and adults. This also includes the sharing of information with certain Third Sector Organisations.

Within the wider work of the Concern Hub a move away from face-to-face meetings for child and adult protection saw the increased use of teleconferencing and the introduction of on-line meetings to ensure continued participation. COVID protection measures were introduced across Police Scotland to help support staff and reduce the transmission. Working from home for appropriate staff was introduced which supported business continuity.

In SCRA on 23 March 2020, all SCRA offices and hearing centres closed. Overnight, a virtual response was required despite the necessary infrastructure not being in place. Initially, administrative hearings took place virtually using Vscene technology to ensure that compulsory orders protecting children remained in force. The focus was on maintaining the status quo to ensure Orders did not lapse. As necessary technical solutions were extended, full participation of children and families was facilitated and the secure

sharing of hearing documentation. SCRA recognised that these changes affected children and families' rights and an Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment was published in July 2020.

In May 2020, the First Minister announced that face to face children's hearings would be resuming during phase 1 of the 4 phase Route Map. Face to face hearings resumed in Fife on the 28th July following a robust risk assessment of the Glenrothes Hearing Centre.

Hearing capacity was significantly affected during the pandemic due to the availability of panel members. SCRA worked closely with Children Hearings Scotland and from initially being able to deliver less than 10 hearings per week, numbers steadily increased.

As a result of the reintroduction of restrictions in December 2020, a swift business continuity response was again required but the infrastructure was in place to support a return to fully virtual hearings. The return to face to face hearings in June 2021 was coupled with improvements to hearing room tech that supported 'hybrid' hearings whereby participants join a face to face hearing virtually.

The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 provided SCRA with provisions to ease the burden on the hearing system and ensure Orders remained in place. These provisions were applied only after assessment of the impact on each individual child's welfare. SCRA's business continuity response also required new referrals and review requests to be assessed and hearings prioritised where delay would have posed significant detriment to the child's welfare.

Fife Children's Hearing Improvement Partnership (a cross-partnership group focused on improvements to the Hearing System) continued in a reduced capacity throughout the pandemic with an initial focus on business continuity, then recovery, then onto next steps.

In Education in response to school closures and lockdown, Children's Activity Centres were established very quickly at a range of venues across Fife. These were to support children of key workers and provide access to children and young people who had additional support needs including increased vulnerability and risk.

Strong partnership working developed throughout the lockdown periods in order to respond to changing needs of families and identified risks. Clear guidance was also issued to all schools, setting clear expectations regarding ongoing contact and other methods of support with families deemed in need of additional supports. For families who attended the centres, free lunches were provided. Payments were also made to families who qualified for free school meals.

In March 2020 approximately 1000 digital devices were sourced, licenced, configured and supplied to schools for learning at home to support those learners without access to equipment to support online learning, including 143 connectivity (Mobile WiFi) solutions to ensure network availability.

From the Scottish Government Digital Inclusion grant (July 2020), phase 1 saw 5465 Chromebook devices and 1152 mobile internet connections ordered in summer 2020. These Devices were allocated to schools in line with their proportion of the overall Fife PEF budget. The guiding principles of the approach taken was to improve equity of access for the most disadvantaged learners.

In Spring 2021 Phase 2 saw 5000 additional devices ordered to further support an equity-based approach to supporting learning at home.

In Health the pandemic had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the NHS workforce and patient care, due to a number of reasons, including staff sickness/self-isolation, redeployment to critical clinical areas and requirement to reduce footfall in clinical areas as well as the community.

Nevertheless, core critical functions have been delivered across the partnership and thanks to staff commitment and creative collaboration to minimise footfall, known vulnerable families have had professional contact and support throughout the pandemic. Health staff have worked intensely with partners from social work and education to prioritise those most in need and secure Children's Activity Centre places.

Virtual consultation/Microsoft Teams meetings is a legacy of COVID that is likely to continue in some hybrid form, as restrictions ease further. Our data does not indicate a cohort of children and young people suspected of being victims of hidden harm, and child protection referrals, which initially dropped, have gradually moved towards pre-COVID levels. However, CAMHS referrals have dramatically increased, incidents of domestic abuse may remain unreported, and many families not previously known to services remain unseen and any impact from this is not yet visible. However, we remain committed to respond quickly to any emergent trend.

The Child Protection Team (health) have also focused on creating and delivering online training for staff to ensure that staff remain competent and confident in relation to addressing child protection concerns.

Working Group Activity

As with the Child Protection Committee Working Group meetings have continued throughout the pandemic enabled by remote meeting technology supplied by Microsoft Teams.

As the working groups are the 'doing' arm of the CPC their achievements make a substantial contribution to the committee's improvement journey. What follows is a brief synopsis of the group's contribution within the reporting period.

CASE REVIEW WORKING GROUP

The purpose of a Case Review is to seek learning across policy, systems and practices to enable continuous improvement and promote best practice, to better protect children and young people.

A key responsibility of Fife CPC is to promote effective continuous improvement through robust self-evaluation. This includes the identification of situations where there may be opportunities for partnership learning. Being open to reflection and learning is key. In Fife the initial decision making in respect of this area of responsibility is delegated to the Case Review Working Group (CRWG). This group report any recommendations to the CPC for discussion and agreement, who then report the decision to Chief Officers Public Safety group (COPS) for approval.

The CRWG ensure that learning from local and national reviews, are considered and recommendations incorporated into policy and practice as required. Single and joint learning is disseminated across the partnership.

The CRWG meet between scheduled CPC meetings and agree what learning if any, should be discussed and disseminated to practice. The group agreed that a practice learning event using the 'Practice Reflective and Improvement Short Module (PRISM)' would be helpful to share learning with practitioners.

A PRISM event was held in January 2021 and was attended by a range of professionals. Attendees included staff from Social Work, Education, Police and Health including representatives from Health Visiting, Child Development, Occupational Therapy and Community Paediatrics. The event was facilitated through group discussions. Feedback from all involved was extremely positive and all felt was a good way of learning.

SELF-EVALUATION AND AUDIT WORKING GROUP

The Self Evaluation and Audit group continued to meet regularly throughout the year with a partnership focus on evaluation activity leading to improved experience of services by vulnerable children and their families.

The group refreshed their Terms of Reference in May 2019 which clarified the core tasks and purpose of the group:

The SE&A group report quarterly to the CPC.

The focus of the work over the period was around preparation to engage with the Minimum Dataset for Child Protection Committees.

The National Minimum Dataset (NMD) for Child Protection Committees is a 'package' of resources that collectively support Scotland's 30 Child Protection Committees to collate, analyse and report on an agreed set of indicators in a consistent and meaningful manner.

It was agreed that Fife CPC would adopt the minimum dataset starting with a report in the last quarter of this 2019/20 reporting period. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic this work was put on hold but was picked up in 2021.

The first report was presented to the CPC in February 2021 and for Q1, August to October 2020. Since then, there have been quarterly reports presented to the CPC.

Key Statistics

It is important that we present some 'hard' statistical data to evidence the identified trends in the area of Child Protection in Fife. We use this data to identify trends and support other forms of evaluation. Data isn't linear and requires analysis to provide reassurance on trends.

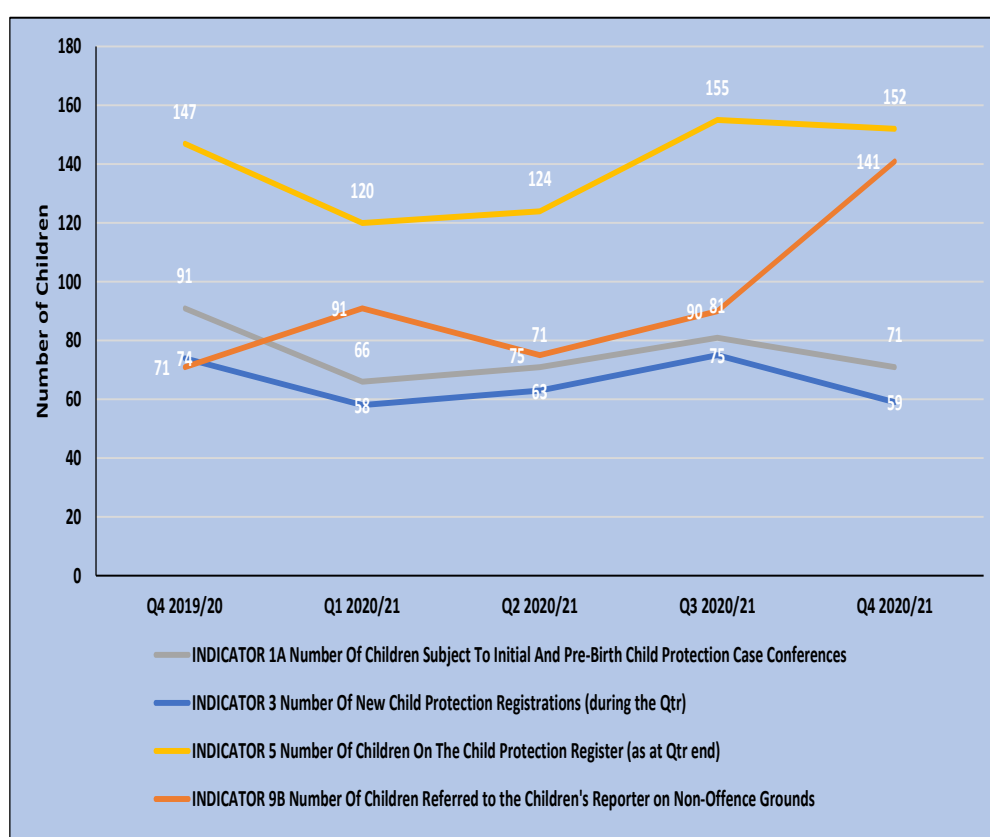
Our engagement with the Minimum Data Sets has led us to reflect on our reporting timescale. The National Minimum Dataset report on the academic timetable of 1st August to the 31st July. Within the partnership we have agreed to adjust our annual reporting period to extend to this period.

Children on the Child Protection Registrations (CPR)

The indicators below provide an overview of activity levels and trend. The chart shows numbers of children who come to an Initial or Pre-Birth Case Conference, the number of new child protection registrations, the total number of children on the Child Protection Register and the number of children referred to the Reporter.

By considering these statistics in trend we can see where there are changes, seek explanations for those changes and adjust resources and practice accordingly to meet any change.

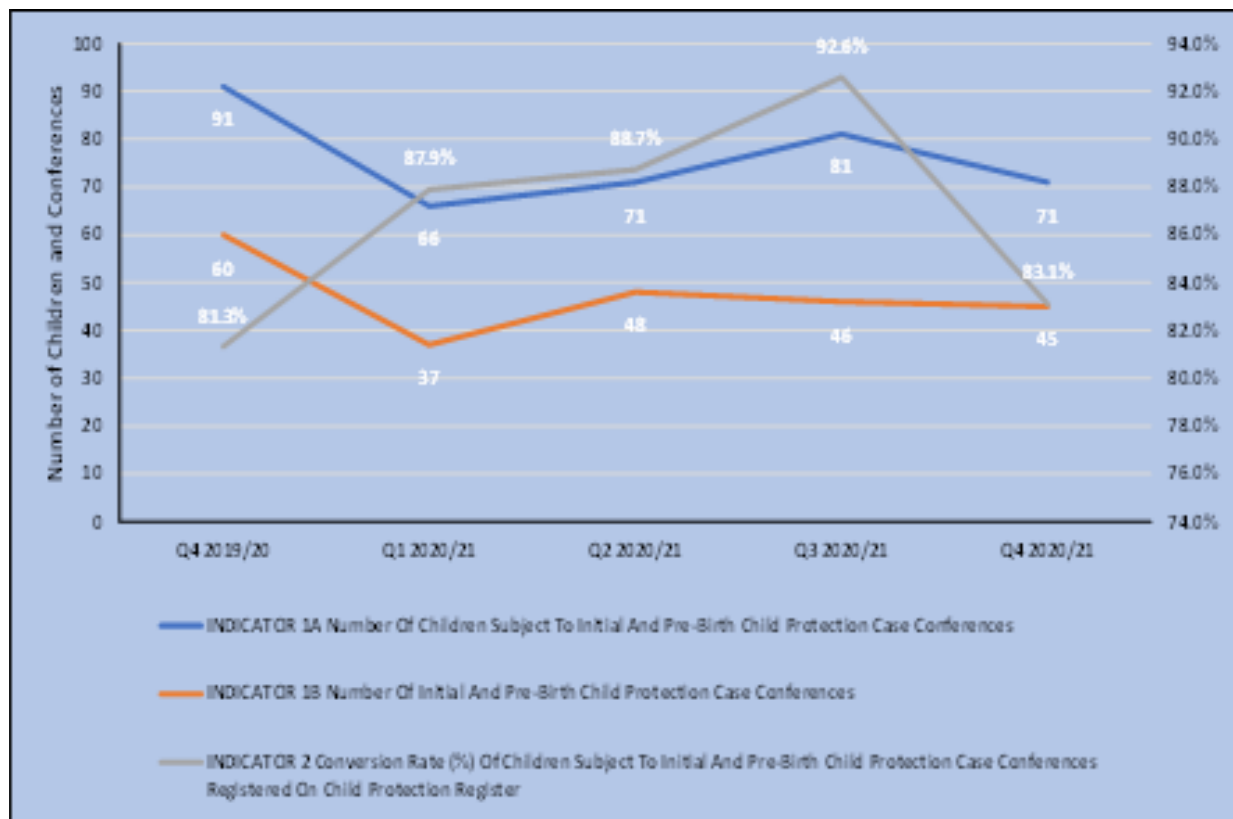
New registrations, De-registrations and referral to the Reporter (Non-Offence)



Key Messages

- There is no significant variation for Case Conferences and registration over the reporting years.
- There has been an increase in the number of children referred to the Children's Reporter on Non-Offence Grounds from 90 in Q3 to 141 in Q4 of 20-21. This noted rise enabled the partnership to consider the factors and adjust service delivery accordingly.

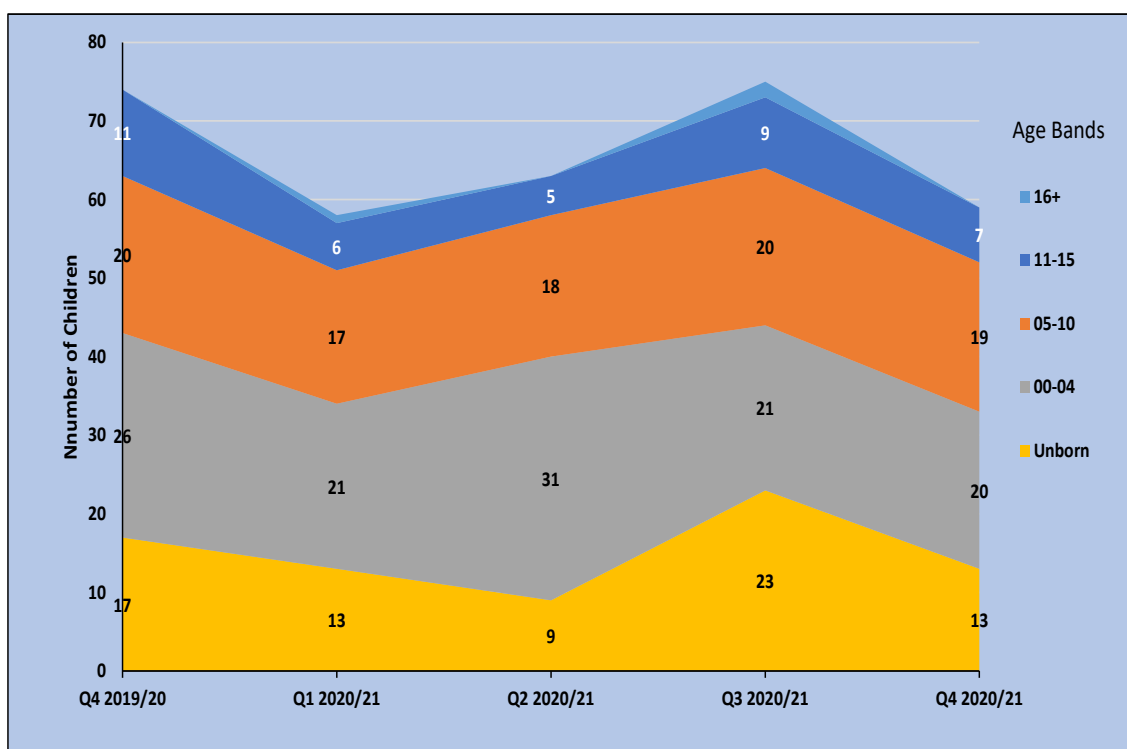
Number of Children Subject to Initial and Pre-Birth Child Protection Case Conference, and Conversion Rate of Children to Registration



Key Messages

- There was a decrease in the rate of registrations from Child Protection Conferences in Q4 dropping to 83.1%. This data is being further tracked and analysed but affords some assurance that decisions are made within case conferences, reflecting partnership and family dialogue around risk and resilience, family to assess risk and resilience.

Characteristics Of Our Vulnerable Children and Young People



Key Messages

- Unborn babies and children under 4 constitute approximately 40% of children on the Child Protection Register.

Benchmarking

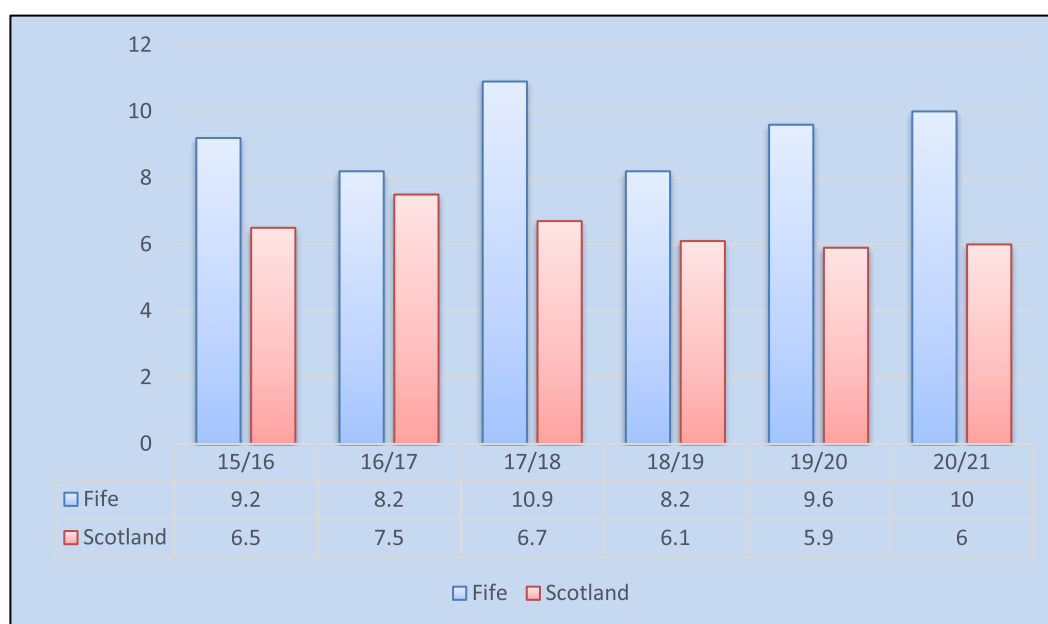
Benchmarking information is available from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA).

It is helpful in allowing us to consider performance and trends across Scotland and our profile and outcomes in Fife.

One such measure is the number of children and young people subject to a Child Protection Order (CPO).

In 2019/20 Fife were above the National Average with 3.7 children per 10,000 of the population of under 16s, subject to a CPO. This was an increase of 1.4 from 2018/19.

Number of Children and Young People Subject to a Child Protection Order (CPO) (per 10,000 of the population of under 16s)



Key Messages

- Fife's CPO numbers have remained relatively consistent for the last 6 reporting periods.
- Further evaluation of this trend will continue into 2021 and a review of children subject to a CPO has been commissioned.

Priority Areas for Development

The Committee, through self evaluation and learning has identified several priority areas for development in the next year. These will form part of the refreshed improvement plan.

- Implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection 2021.
- Implementation of the National Guidance for Learning Reviews 2021.
- Internal and external communications to be enhanced, this will include:
 - Refreshing leaflets and posters for children and families, the general public and staff.
 - CPC Website to be refreshed and content reviewed, updated and appropriate accessibility assured.
- Engagement with Children and Families is enhanced and all opportunities to listen, discuss and where possible act upon the views of those with lived experience of the care and protection system are maximised.
- Child Protection Training provision is reviewed and a blended approach utilising virtual and face to face training is implemented.
- Implementation of the new national Child Joint Investigative Interview model.

- Incorporate the messages from 'The Promise¹' and developing practice accordingly.
- The refreshed Learning Review guidance to be published for consultation in 2022 and is adopted and adapted for Fife Child Protection purposes.

Enquiries

For further information or enquiries regarding this report, please contact the Lead Officer: Child Protection Committee.

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¹ [The Promise](#) is responsible for driving the work of change demanded by the findings of the Independent Care Review.
CPC Annual Report 2020-21
Alan Small, CPC Independent Chair
9 June 2022