# Chief Social Work Officer
# Annual Report

## 2025 - 2026

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## 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 independent sector. The CSWO should assist local authorities and their partners in understanding the complexities and cross-cutting nature of social work service delivery - including 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 2025 to 31 March 2026.

I am delighted to share this year's annual report. The report highlights the significant transformation across Children and Families and Justice Services as we implement a Fife wide approach to early effective intervention and prevention. These services have been co-designed with families, the workforce and informed by service data. The motivation and innovation of the workforce is showcased in the data presented throughout the report. These services have a highly skilled workforce who are making significant difference to the children, young people, adults and families across Fife. We seek to achieve the ambition of the Promise through transformation and employee contact with Fife citizens daily.

We recognise that there continues to be greater expectations from services by the people of Fife and from the ever-changing policy and legislative landscape. This report showcases the considerable demand for services, the ongoing challenges with resources but the strategic transformation that is being undertaken to ensure we provide high quality services wherever possible to people when they need it most.

## GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND STATUTORY FUNCTIONS

### Children, Families and Justice

The Children, Families and Justice structure have not changed since the 2024/25 reporting period and continues to sit within the Communities Directorate in Fife Council. This supports collective oversight and evaluation of strengths and opportunities for collaborative practice to support shared, vulnerable communities in Fife. An example of this is in the continued shared development of the No Wrong Door approach within the Communities Directorate, supporting cross-service change which tackles poverty and improves community wellbeing.

The Children, Families and Justice service have retained the established strategic and operational relationships with key partners across Fife. The responsibility for the Children's Services Plan (2023-2026) 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

In this reporting period the structure of senior leadership team within Children, Families and Justice service was strengthened with the development of a Public Protection Service Manager post. This post is funded by key partners and works on a multi-agency basis. The aims of this post are to align and co-ordinate work across the boundaries of public protection, including child protection, adult support and protection, MAPPA and Violence Against Women, recognising that families and communities do not inhabit separate policy spaces.

**Adult and Older Adult Services**

The Adult and Older Adult service structure has not changed since the 2024-25 reporting period, 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 localities of Fife within the context of multi-disciplinary partnership working. Collaboration with the independent and voluntary sector is key particularly in social care.

We expect that the development of locality screening hubs (under No Wrong Door), gives an opportunity to consider the step up from early intervention to a more focussed multi-agency approach to prevent escalation to the need for social work, often resulting in Adult Support and Protection referrals.

**Governance and Accountability Challenges**

In 2025-26, the HSCP and the CSWO strengthened the governance from the CSWO to adults and older adults social work and social care.

The Principal Social Work Officer within the HSCP is the key professional assurance link between adult and older adult social work and social care and the CSWO. The current post holder started in June 2025 and reports jointly to the Director of Health and Social Care (within the partnership) and the CSWO.

In January 2026 the CSWO established the Social Care and Social Work Governance and Assurance Oversight Group. The purpose of this group is to ensure that the CSWO has access to data, leadership intelligence and quality assurance activity to be assured on the quality of social care and social work services being delivered across Fife. The first meeting took place in March 2026, and the group meets on a quarterly basis to understand and share both risks and good practice. There is a direct reporting line across to the HSCP Clinical and Care Governance Group. The CSWO in 2025 established a service manager forum across justice, children and families and the HSCP to develop a shared senior social work and social care management network.

## Workforce Challenges

In this reporting period, the CSWO and senior leaders worked closely together to deliver an improved and visible connection of workforce development activities across adults, older adults, children and families and justice. In March 2026 we held our first whole service celebration of World Social Work Day, connecting practitioners from all services to share and recognise the difference they make in Fife. This day linked directly to the inauguration of the National Social Work Agency and the national connection was made at this local event.

To effectively and consistently scaffold operational teams, the approach to shared social work development priorities was collectively reviewed and developed with feedback from practitioners across all services. Examples of progress include supporting the transition of the supported year approach into operational teams, consolidating relationships with local Universities to support a consistent approach to student placements across Fife, and designing a co-ordinated support programme for all practice educators to improve peer support and shared learning. The Magic (Beam) Notes Oversight Group also continues to meet enabling an opportunity to reflect on the use of this tool and development needs across all services, to reduce the administrative burden on staff. This has sparked interest in the use of AI amongst social work staff with examples of good practice across services.

In Children, Families and Justice the refreshed workforce development strategy was implemented to support the service re-design and shift in practice from crisis response to increased early intervention support. The impact of this approach was evaluated in January 2026 incorporating feedback from practitioner consultation and evidence from quality assurance activities. A streamlined planner of learning activities was developed for 2026/27 ensuring a focus on learning activities aligned to strategic priorities across the service, delivered at a pace that is manageable for the workforce.

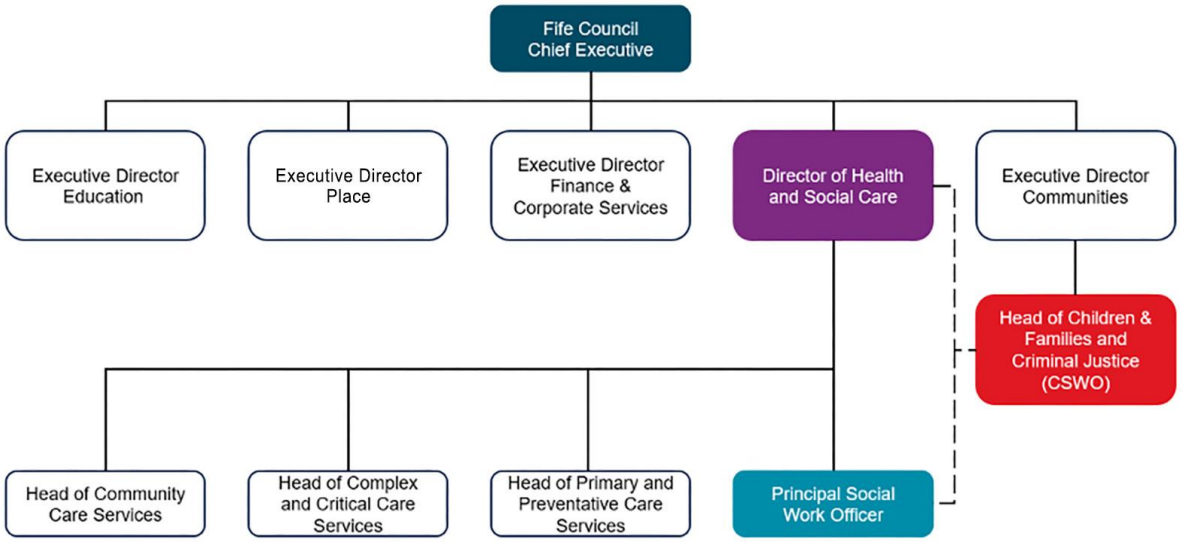
For adults and older adults in 2026-2027, the role and function of social work teams for adults and older adults is being strategically reviewed sitting under an updated Health and Social Care Partnership strategic plan for 2026-2029. The strategic plan has a focus on community; prevention and digital. The review of the role and function of social work relates to the pressure on front line staff by demand and complexity.

In social care, Adult Resources continues to have very high levels of absence. The focus has been in stabilising the service and the priority in 2026 will be to strengthen the governance of the service including support to staff and to re-focus the priorities of the service.

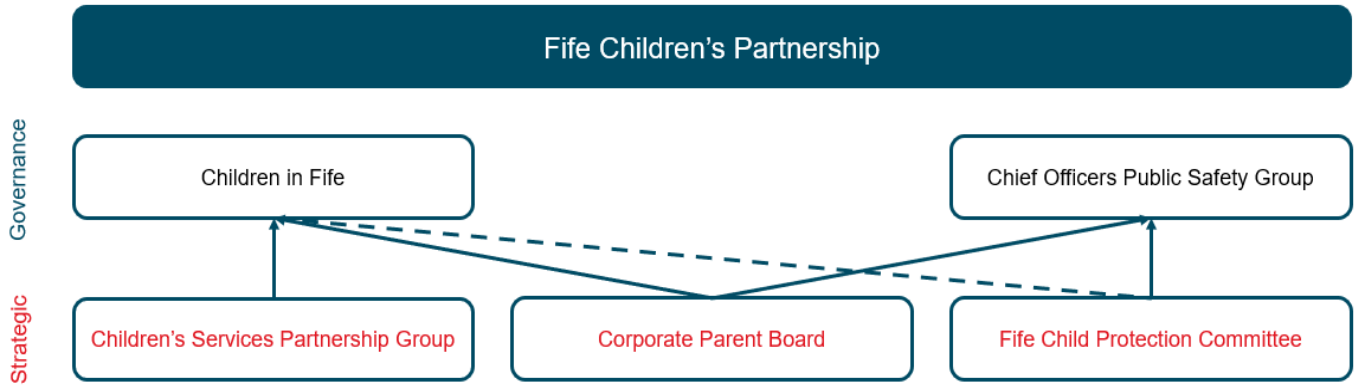
The widely reported staffing challenges across social work and social care (In Adults and Older People) means that the role of the CSWO is more important and ever. There have been many engagement events over the year including walking the floor with staff, staff forums, pride and practice events and engaging the workforce in celebrating World Social Work Day.

The workforce is seeking further opportunity to engage with the CSWO 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 Chart




## 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. Being in 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 service re-design was implemented and supported with the new Families First Strategy. The aim of this was to reach more families at the earliest opportunity, providing support to reduce the risk of families reaching crisis, and enabling the delivery of high-quality relationship-based support for those who require statutory services.

Evaluation of the first year of operation identifies that this model has been successful in achieving its aims in the following ways:

- The service supported 45% more children in the first year of re-design, reaching most new families through early intervention support provided in the newly created early help and support teams.
- Qualifications in Family Group Decision Making were supported to enable the service to pilot a “My Family Meeting” model of support with families in need. Learning from this pilot will support wider roll out across the service in 2026/27.
- Engagement in early years strategic evaluation and mapping with multi agency partners including the third sector, to strengthen early intervention support and planning for local communities.
- Delivery of a wider range of evidence-based interventions to children and families in collaboration with the third sector.

**Challenges:**

In this reporting period, the service continued to be involved in the development of the No Wrong Door approach in Fife, aiming to support household needs collectively, and have only one “front door” to requesting assistance. Due to some unexpected barriers in multi-agency participation, this approach was unable to be expanded across Fife, and instead the focus has been on strengthening the approach in the pilot area. As part of this, the Children and Families service tested a change in model, moving away from a contact centre and supporting local teams to be the first point of contact for families in need. Initial findings identified that this would be a more effective and supportive approach for local families, and so a process is underway to support change in this structure of delivery in 2026/27.

Some early help and support teams have experienced challenges in managing the demand for services in areas of higher deprivation. Evaluation of local data has identified the need for an 8th Early Help and Support team, to effectively respond to demand in central Fife. This team will be created as part of the service structure in 2026/27.

At a national level, the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026 places significant expectation on the local authority to expand the support provided to those who have experienced care. The service re-design in Fife has placed us in a favourable position to deliver most of these aspirations, however further clarity is required through Scottish Government guidance and regulations to enable us to effectively plan and ensure ongoing capacity to meet need.

## 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 this reporting period the offer of internal intensive services was refreshed to respond to emerging gaps in services particularly for children and young people with highly complex needs. The Youth Intervention Service (YIS) was established to work with young people exhibiting high risk behaviour and, in some circumstances, coming into conflict with the law. Through close collaboration with Justice services, the team has delivered a compassionate and child centred approach which has supported some significant and positive outcomes for young people, acknowledged by local solicitors as effectively "breaking the cycle of offending and punishment".

The Multi Systemic Team (MST) model was expanded with the introduction of the Child Abuse and Neglect Adaptation (MST-CAN), designed to treat families where children are at risk of care due to physical abuse and/or neglect. Following review of local need, another MST team has been developed and will launch in June 2026, focused on providing intensive support to enable looked after children to return to the care of their birth families.

We also expanded the reach of our Supporting Birth Families Service, which provides intensive support to mothers who have lost their children through permanence proceedings. In this reporting period we increased the number of mothers supported by the service after a successful awareness raising campaign and also identified and started to build relationships with fathers who would benefit from this support.

Alongside these models of delivery, a complex case panel process has been introduced as a supportive measure for the workforce. Chaired by a Service Manager, this provides a mechanism for group reflection on complex situations, and a solution focused approach to achieving positive outcomes.

Following implementation of the service re-design and introduction of the Early, Help and Support Teams, there was less demand for commissioned intensive services. This provided an opportunity to work with third sector services to review local needs and amend the model of delivery to move away from a focus on thresholds and high risk, enabling the provision of flexible and person-centred scaffolding support. This also led to some financial savings for the local authority through the agreement not to recruit to vacant posts in third sector services where there was less need.

**Challenges:**

In line with the national context, Fife continues to work with families facing multiple and complex challenges. 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. Following review of the model of support in Fife, it was identified that the Children Affected by Disability team will shift to reflect that of an Early Help and Support team, increasing the team's resource and capacity to provide effective early intervention support. The team is currently in the process of recruiting the required practitioner's and will move into this model of delivery in 2026/27.

Fife also continues to make improvements to the transition experience for young people with complex needs who require support from adult services. A Lead Officer has been seconded to develop multi agency guidance to support the clearer identification of multi-agency responsibilities and practice principles, enabling an improved experience for young people and their families.

## 3. Looked After Children:

**Achievements:**

The service developed its new Families First Strategy in November 2025, which provides the vision and direction for our work with children and their families. The strategy, underpinned by the principles of the Promise and GIRFEC, focuses 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 7 years the strategy in Fife has supported positive outcomes for looked after children in by:

- Shifting the balance of care, supporting more children to live in community-based placements.
- Reducing the use of External 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.

Below is the breakdown of data extracted on 1st of April 2026 for looked after children and care experienced young adults. It's important to note that to detail change in the balance of care this data includes all kinship care and not just those formally looked after, and young people no longer looked after in supported lodgings and continuing care.

| Type of Placement | No of individuals per care setting April 2019 | No of individuals per care setting April 2026 |
|---|---|---|
| Looked after at home | 186 | 140 |
| Foster Care | 484 | 236 |
| Kinship Care | 598 | 758 |
| Residential care | 147 | 33 |
| Supported Lodgings | 22 | 52 |
| Continuing Care | 37 | 63 |

In this reporting period the service has seen a 5% reduction in the overall population of looked after children. This aligns with the implementation of the Enhanced and Youth Intervention teams as part of the service re-design, and changes beginning in the model of delivery from the Aftercare and Continuing Care Teams. This indicates that the delivery of high-quality relationship-based support can be effective in supporting young people to achieve positive outcomes and reducing the requirement for statutory intervention.

In terms of wider achievements, the service has also continued to support 100% graduation from the House Project, supporting young people to effectively sustain permanent tenancies and secure employment or further education. The Permanence Lead Officer has led on the delivery of a refreshed permanence strategy, effectively co-ordinating practice and learning activities to address improvement areas. The service has also been proactive in developing the model of support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), providing creative intensive support to enable a large sibling group to remain living together, reducing any further experience of trauma.

**Challenges:**

Fife is not experiencing the same placement challenges that have been reported by most Local Authorities. There have been many refreshed strategies on early intervention, kinship care, reunification and recruitment and retention of non-kin carers that have enabled us to have available fostering, residential, supported lodgings and adoptive placements. The area of challenge of us in Fife is the ability of adults to meet the complex and wide-ranging needs of children and young people who cannot be cared for within families.

**Adult and Older Adult Services**

Strategically the Health and Social Care Partnership reviewed its three-year strategic plan in 2025-6 and will deliver a new three-year plan in April 2026. The key focus will be prevention, communities and digital.

Adult and older adult social work and social care services remain as follows within the HSCP service structures:

- Complex and critical care-includes the registered adult resources with a range of services including accommodation services for those with complex needs, day support and respite services. Social work services including locality adult and older adult teams and the dedicated Mental Health Officer (MHO) function.
- Community care-includes care at home, care homes and two dedicated hospital discharge social work teams.
- During this period the Adult Contact Centre moved under Children and Families management responsibility bringing both Contact Centres for adults and children together. It is envisaged in 2026-2027, that this model will develop into early contact and screening hubs across localities focused on the needs of adults and older adults.

**Key Performance and Legislative Overview-Adult Support and Protection**

All Adult Support and Protection data collected is in line with National Minimum Data Set.

- During 2025/26, there were 5,118 reports of harm recorded for 3,014 individuals. The unique count of adults in 2024/25 recorded a total of 3,173 for 5,580 referrals.

- The volume of activity from 2024/25 through to 2025/26 records a decrease of 462 in the overall number of reports of harm (5,118-5,580). This is a decrease of 8%.

In alignment with the revised Code of Practice (July 2022), inquiries are recorded as a type. Where an inquiry begins and concludes with the collation and consideration of relevant materials (an Inter-agency Referral Discussion - IRD), including consideration of previous records relating to the individual and seeking the views of other agencies and professionals, then this inquiry does not necessarily need to be undertaken by a council officer and will be counted as 'without investigatory powers' (WOIP).

Investigatory powers will be required, and a council officer involved, where there is a need for a visit and direct contact with the adult for interview or medical examination, or for the examination of records (S7-10 Activities). Where an inquiry begins with an IRD and progresses to Investigation, then this inquiry will be counted as 'using powers' (WIP).

*(Source: ASP national minimum dataset Guidance for recording and submission of data, July 2025*).

- 2025/26 recorded 1,672 inquiries with a triggered start date in a reporting quarter within the year.

- There were 799 inquiries WOIP relating to 704 adults. This is a 23% decrease when compared to 2024/25 (-245, 799-1044).

- There were 873 inquiries WIP relating to 801 adults. This is a 12% increase when compared to 2024/25 (+91, 873-782).

- 2025/26 reports a split of 48% of inquiries WOIP and 52% WIP. A significant shift from the 57% of inquiries WOIP versus 43% WIP in 2024/25.

- When analysing 2025/26 by type of inquiry, those WOIP primarily report physical harm, neglect, self-neglect, and psychological harm whilst inquiries WIP report financial harm, self-neglect, and physical harm. This hasn't altered from 2024-2025.

- A total of 255 Case Conferences were reported in 2025/26, an increase of 59 compared to 196 in 2024/25. The increase in case conferences supports the increase in inquiries WIP.

- 2025/26 reports a split of 57% initials and 43% reviews. This is an increase in % split by type when compared to 51% for initials and 49% for reviews in 2024/25, however, initials still lead.

## Adult Support and Protection Team Focus

There is a continued focus on hoarding and self-neglect, including the roll out of internal hoarding Interventions training, facilitating an interagency spotlight event on self-neglect and non-engagement, and the establishment of the hoarding and self-neglect group as a permanent working group, which also includes an interagency hoarding consultation group, supporting cross-agency discussions. The Hoarding Surgery continues to be held three times a year as an opportunity for interagency partners to network, highlight complexities and share good practice around hoarding. Nationally, in early 2026, three articles were published by IRISS providing a “Spotlight on Fife” highlighting stories of innovation and addressing some of the challenges around supporting people who hoard.

The focus of National ASP Day 2026 was general ASP awareness raising, delivering the clear message that ASP is everyone’s business and ensuring the public and partner agencies know when and how to make a referral.

The review, update and integration of the Non-ASP Case Conference Guidance across services, with Case Conference training being expanded to include interagency staff, and templates produced to support partner agencies to convene and chair a Non-ASP Case Conference, where ASP criteria are not met.

The quarterly ASP Interagency Practitioner Forums are supported to promote reflective practice, interagency learning, and continuous improvement. Topics for 2025-2026 included Vulnerable Young Persons, Non-ASP Case Conference, Financial Harm and Cuckooing/ Mate Crime. The internal trainer role within ASP ensures availability of a full suite of ASP training for all interagency and third sector partners. New courses have been developed and rolled out in 2026, in response to key themes from learning reviews and interagency audits, these include; Protection Order, Second/ Supporting Officer and Professional Curiosity and Disguised Compliance. In person ASP Training Reflective Sessions have been introduced to allow time for reflection and gather qualitative and quantitative data around longer-term retention of knowledge, skills and implementation into practice. There are ongoing review and updates to ASP policies and procedures to ensure best practice and compliance with national guidance. Documents updated include, but are not limited to, Public Protection Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Guidance, ASP Multiple Report of Harm Protocol and ASP Interagency Large-Scale Investigation (LSI) Guidance.

The ASP Team’s library of easy-read resources has been reviewed and expanded to include “Moving into a Care Home” and “ASP and Domestic Abuse” as well as general interagency ASP letters. These have been created through joint work with People First, to enable accessibility and better understanding of the ASP process for those with a learning disability.

There is a continued collection and use of data to drive forward evidence based, and outcome focused improvements to ASP practice and procedure. ASP activity has been evaluated using single-agency audits (8 undertaken by a range of partners in 2025), performance data, national data, staff surveys (annual staff survey closed June 2025 with 300 responses – increase of 66% from the previous year), practitioner forums, ASP Quality Improvement Framework and interagency audits. An action log and improvement plans are maintained by the ASP team and reviewed regularly to ensure continuous improvement. The 2025 ASP

case conference audit identified improvement action required to capture the adult at risks views and experience, to measure if the adult felt safer because of intervention. From August 2025, four scaled questions were added to the Case Conference Minutes Template to capture, where possible, the adult's view of their ASP journey.

There remains a continued focus on vulnerable young people, including those transitioning from Children's Services. Following implementation of the Vulnerable Young Persons Protocol in 2024/ 2025, several sessions were held over the last year to raise awareness of the protocol and the impact on practice. All training materials were also updated to highlight awareness of the protocol to all partner agencies and third sector organisations.

Identification of key themes and actions for system wide improvements, following receipt of learning review referrals in 2025. These will be presented in a joint learning review thematic report including ASPC and CPC learning review referrals, INRs (MAPPA) and their outcomes, as part of Public Protection reporting going forward.

Future developments and priorities for improvement will be captured in the ASP Strategic Improvement Plan 2027-2029, under the four strategic priorities of stakeholder engagement, outcome focused improvements, improving procedures and workforce development. This is currently in progress.

**Adults with Incapacity/Mental Health Care and Treatment Act**

During 2025-26, an Adults with Incapacity/Mental Health Care and Treatment oversight group was established to review performance data and consider best practice and areas for improvement. Considerable time was spent in ensuring that data collected is accurate and of good quality.

In 2026, an MHO development day was facilitated with dedicated and satellite MHOs to look at expectations and support for MHOs and a better connection between dedicated and satellite MHOs.

**Key Challenges-Legislation Oversight**

Whilst there is key improvement in the quality of the data gathered and performance frameworks, there remain challenges with the demand particularly of private guardianships and the impact on social work teams.

A key challenge is to improve performance in relation to the delivery of adult carer support plans from within the HSCP. In the first quarter of 2026, the adult carers support plan was reviewed and refreshed with colleagues from Fife Carers Centre and Social Work, and a comprehensive training programme was developed and delivered for staff on the adult carer support plan. This training evaluated well and will be delivered quarterly.

However there remain issues with data collection and oversight of performance in this area.

Overall adult and older adult social work needs a refreshed focus on service and practice standards, and we aim to develop this work in 2026-7.

A wide variety of advocacy services continue to be available in Fife, and the final year of the advocacy strategy was reported to the Integration Joint Board in 2025. Fife Advocacy Forum worked in partnership with Fife Health and Social Care Partnership to support delivery of the advocacy Strategy. It was acknowledged that the outcomes for advocacy will now sit within the overarching strategic plan.

Strategically, 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. We expect in 2026 to have formalised our structure and governance to develop a system wide Coming Home programme.

**Self-Directed Support-Lived Experience examples**

In keeping with the SDS learning and improvement framework for Scotland, the SDS team issued a survey to individuals in receipt of support as the first stage in evaluating Fife HSCP's openness, responsiveness and commitment to continuous SDS improvement in Fife. The SDS Scottish Government return for Fife, submitted on 6th June 2025, provides a breakdown, by SDS option, of the number of supported people in Fife who are in receipt of care and support funded by Fife HSCP.

A sample of 1242 supported adults were sent the survey. The purpose was to understand how the SDS options were offered and explained. In keeping with the legislative intentions and language of self-directed support, the conclusions are framed around 6 key outcomes: Outcome 1: Access to SDS information: People and carers must be provided with timely, relevant SDS information and advice to enable them to make well-informed decisions. Outcome 2: Active involvement and collaboration: People with lived experience should be actively listened to and involved throughout their assessment and support planning. Outcome 3: Relationship-based practice: Assessors should use outcome-focused and relationship-based approaches that uphold individual rights and reflect the SDS values and principles. Outcome 4: Staff competence and compliance with the legal duties: All staff must understand SDS, be able to explain the four SDS options clearly and competently and comply with the legal responsibilities under the 2013 Act. Outcome 5: Fair and consistent delivery SDS should be delivered fairly and consistently across all age groups, teams and services. Outcome 6: Creative and flexible budget use People should be able to use their individual budgets creatively and flexibly to meet their agreed outcomes.

As a result of this survey, e-learning on SDS has been developed and we expect to deliver on SDS e-learning for staff in 2026 and to organise a strategic development day for SDS in Fife.

**Unpaid Carers**

The Unpaid Carer strategy was refreshed after significant engagement and will launch in April 2026. As indicated, the Adult Carer Support Plan was fully updated in 2026, and planned core training is in place jointly for Social Work and Third Sector staff for 2026.This was a key feature of improvements from the case file audit from 2025.

## Care Home Protection and Quality Assurance

The Large-Scale Investigation process under Adult Support and Protection was more consistently reported on during 2025-26. This included reporting all Large-Scale Investigations through the Care Home Quality Matters Assurance Group and the Adult Support and Protection Committee with key learning themes.

The Fife Care Home Collaborative (the Collaborative) has continued to work very well as a Partnership of Independent and Third Sector Organisations supported by Fife HSCP and Scottish Care.

## Identified Challenges

### Visibility with Social Work Staff

The HSCP has a clear engagement structure involving senior leaders across the partnership on cross cutting developments, working across health, social work and social care.

In 2025-26, the social work professional leadership focused on improved visibility and engagement with social work staff. A social work and social care development programme of sessions took place from 2025-2026 for Team Managers of adult, older adult social work, social care, (resources, care homes and care at home). These sessions have allowed connections across service areas.

In 2025-26, the Principal Social Work Officer undertook to meet all Social Work Teams face to face as part of her role. The experiences of staff varied whether working in adults and older people social work. Themes and issues ranged from the difficulties in accessing services for service users; some duplicating processes with care at home and lack of recognition of the social work role.

Identity and engagement were a key theme as needing strengthened across social work. There were several specific recommendations which were actioned by the Adult Protection Co-ordinator with Team Managers to reduce some of the bureaucratic processes surrounding adult support and protection recording. There was a focus on shared understanding and ownership of risks in the community. Adult social work staff recognised the challenges of lack of housing models for adults with disabilities in Fife. The HSCP accepts that out of area placements need the lens of strategic planning and transformation. This is a complex area as identified in Coming Home workstreams, not least the available resource. Social Work and Social Care Team Managers will continue to have development sessions in 2026-2027.

## Transitions

A system wide transitions group to look at protocols, practice and assurance was established in 2025 with the CSWO taking the lead. Guidance will be developed and implemented in 2026.

## 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.

An annual update report was produced in August 2025 which details the work undertaken over the initial 12 months of the Outcome Improvement Plan, alongside identifying areas for continued improvement moving forward. The areas below provide a brief overview of the developments, however this link provides access to the full report Fife Justice Social Work Annual Report 2024-2025

### Priority 1: Maximise diversion as an early intervention

This priority focuses on increasing the use of diversion from prosecution as an early intervention to reduce offending behaviour. The Service continues to perform above the locally set target, with 99% of diversion from prosecution cases resulting in successful completion in 2025-26.

Over the past year, diversion assessments and programmes have continued to be delivered effectively and within timescales. Recent quality assurance activity focused on a sample of 255 of Diversion cases which had successfully completed in Fife during 2025-26. A review of the cases showed only one individual had come to the attention of Justice Services after completing a diversion from prosecution programme, totaling 2.8% of those sampled. This small scale, local review would indicate that this approach remains effective at diverting individuals away from the Criminal Justice System.

Specific approaches, including the NEXTURN project who support young people involved in Justice with both group and individual support have provided age-appropriate interventions to achieve outcomes for those subject to diversion from prosecution. With 33 young people supported through this project during this reporting period, the programme continues to adapt their approach to engage young people and explore positive use of time. Tailored programmes such as Road Traffic Safety and Healthy Relationships have been developed to enhance early intervention in an attempt to avoid individuals with predominate welfare needs entering into the Justice System.

The Service has equally had to respond to an increase in complexity in Diversion from Prosecution cases, including domestic and sexual offending. We have pro-actively worked with colleagues from Groupwork Services Teams to ensure that presenting risks are managed appropriately, despite being enveloped within the Diversion from Prosecution offering. This level of complexity will have an impact on the staffing resource required to manage Diversion from Prosecution cases in the future, which will be closely monitored and reported within national forums.

**Priority 2: Increase in the availability of robust, community-based interventions**

There has been considerable focus regarding the promotion of community-based interventions due to the ongoing prison population crisis which has escalated over this reporting period. The continued promotion of Enhanced Bail Supervision has resulted in a 25% increase in assessments being completed (624). During this reporting period, 174 Orders imposed, which is an increase of 65.7% compared to the previous reporting period, and 86% of these Orders were successfully completed. Fife's model of assessing all individuals appearing from custody has been recognised by the Scottish Government as best practice in terms of reducing unnecessary remands and this continues to take place across Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy Sheriff Court.

Post release supervision continues to be an area of development for the service, building on the offer of pre/post release support for those leaving custody. This provision includes a Justice Worker being assigned to the individual prior to liberation, supporting the development of a working relationship, with particular emphasis on relationship-based practice. This offering was developed as a result of quality assurance activity which indicated that the majority of recalls to custody after release occurred in the initial three months after release. Developing this service supports the transition for the individual into the community, providing robust support and monitoring during this critical time in the community. During this reporting period 68% of throughcare cases resulted in a successful completion, which is an increase of 3% from the previous year. Despite the number of those successfully completing post release supervision after a period of imprisonment has increased, there is a continued focus on public protection and the importance of robustly managing those who have a propensity to cause harm.

Delivery of groupwork services is critical to the effective delivery of community-based interventions. Over the reporting period, the Service has invested in a model of delivery which involves members of staff from the wider Service, being identified and trained to deliver Caledonian and MF2C alongside core groupwork facilitators. This has brought great benefit to both service delivery and staff development. With staff embedded within area teams with first-hand knowledge and expertise of facilitating groups and also added resilience to the pool of resource, supporting the groups to operate, even at times of staff absence etc. Overall, the successful completion of groupwork programmes in 2025-26 was 62% which is a 1% decrease from the previous year.

**Priority 3: Ensure the provision of robust, high quality, trauma informed services**

This priority centers around the importance of embedding trauma informed practice within all aspects of the Service. Over the reporting period, The Women's Justice Team has now undertaken a trauma informed case audit which was completed with service users. This provided an opportunity to reflect as a Service regarding the progress made, also to identify next steps and areas for improvement.

As part of the Unpaid Work Review in Fife, the Unpaid Work and Opportunities Hub has provided an opportunity to develop the offering for those who have been previously unable to engage in unpaid work due to varying reasons. This includes specific offerings in terms of

1:1 work, small groups and horticultural offerings which can support mental health and wellbeing, creating an opening for those who have experienced significant trauma and barriers to engagement as a result of these experiences. In addition to this, the promotion of media-based communication has also been a development in the service during this reporting period. This includes footage of unpaid work projects, office buildings and specific activities which provides those with barriers to engagement with an understanding of what is being asked of them. All of these approaches are hoped to increase individual's likelihood of engaging wih unpaid work and utilising the opportunity to gain new skills and experience as part of this offering.

**Priority 4: Strengthen partnership working to raise awareness of community justice and improve outcomes**

This priority focuses on improving outcomes through strong partnership arrangements.

There has been continued engagement in community safety planning and strengthened partnerships across partner agencies. The Liberation Meeting model continues to operate, expanding its remit to service those individuals being released under emergency release arrangements. Multi-agency working with Health, Housing and HSCP colleagues has improved pathways for individuals with additional care needs. Partnerships with NHS Fife and the Alcohol and Drug Partnership have also been strengthened.

The development of the Public Protection Service Manager has created the opportunity for services to consider cross cutting themes and support the connection between all public protection areas. The appointment of the Public Protection Service Manager will continue the work undertaken to develop support pathways for those being released from prison with additional care needs. This continues to be an area of need, particularly for older adults who pose a risk of sexual harm.

**Priority 5: Increase Service User Involvement**

As detailed above, service users from Women's Justice Team took part in the trauma informed audit which supported the development of services from the perspective of the service user.

There has been significant development in terms of end of involvement information, with the implementation of text messaging to request feedback from those who have received a service from justice. This has resulted in a 18% return rate for Orders, with some invaluable feedback which shapes the delivery of services moving forward. The creation of the service user participation and engagement practitioner group has provided the opportunity for all feedback to be considered in a transparent manner. This involves frontline practitioners providing views on whether the feedback is representative of the wider service and what could be done to either avoid or expand, depending on if the feedback is positive or an area for improvement. 1,184 feedback forms have been sent to service users, ensuring around 80% of service users have an opportunity to share their views. Colleagues within the Quality Assurance Team have also been supporting direct contact with service users who have agreed to be spoken to by someone not directly involved with the service, focusing on their experience of the Service.

The delivery of high-quality interventions is part of both the National Strategy for Community Justice and Fife's Justice Outcome Improvement Plan. The Unpaid Work Service review is now complete, with the Unpaid Work Strategy now available UPW Strategy 24-27 FINAL.docx Much of this work has been paused due to the delayed opening of the Unpaid Work and Opportunities Hub, however with access provided in January 2026, progress is now being made with the development of unpaid work opportunities including woodwork, bicycle repairs and furniture upcycling. The addition of a polycurb tunnel also provides opportunities for fresh produce to be grown and donated to local food banks, creating new and innovative ways to achieve 'community payback'.

The focus on employability continues, with new partnerships being created across Fife Council, supporting service users to be considered for unpaid placements, resulting in paid employment if they evidence the required skills and commitment. With the awareness that convictions create an additional barrier when attempting to access employment, the creation of placements supports the employer to look past the previous behaviour and see the person who is willing to undertake any tasks necessary to secure employment. This is evident through the partnership with street cleansing services. With 14 Service users now utilising placements with the Service and 4 individuals offered paid employment/placement as a result, this pathway to employment has been highly beneficial and one which can be replicated in other areas of the Council and beyond.

The ongoing challenge for Justice Services in Fife, remains similar to the previous reporting period, the issues relating to recording and collation of data through the recording system. We continue to work with other local authorities actively considering solutions to capture key data and ensuring reporting requirements to the Scottish Government are fulfilled. Despite the picture improving for operational staff, our Performance and Quality Assurance Officer continue to collate key information manually due to the lack of action by the provider to resolve issues, some which remain outstanding from 2023. With internal escalations and improved engagement with the provider over recent months, we are optimistic that improvements will be achieved in the coming months.

## RESOURCES

### Children and Families

The Children and Families service successfully increased the overall workforce capacity through deploying more 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 and led to some efficiencies overall, enabling the expansion of service delivery in focused areas within the existing budget.

Robust financial management using data 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 are managing the demand for early help and support services in areas of higher deprivation, and the provision of support packages for children affected by a disability. Existing packages which rely on expensive external provision and continued levels of new presenting need pose financial challenges. However, the service is supporting a shift in the model of support for this community, to create the resource for increased early intervention support and meet needs in a more efficient and proportionate manner.

The service successfully implemented change plans in this reporting period, including the development and delivery of a workforce development strategy, reducing the use of taxi's for looked after children, expanding the supporting birth families service and implementing new permanence and kinship care strategies. These activities have supported the delivery of focused, efficient and sustainable services. In the coming year work will continue to re-align the commissioning budget for third sector services to support targeted delivery of services to meet local needs.

There will also be a continued focus on longer term transformational change in the delivery of residential care in Fife. In this reporting period 8 of our residential houses were inspected, sustaining high-quality grades with 5 houses receiving an improved grading position. This reflects the services commitment to delivering person centred, 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 through legislative changes such as supporting the right to breaks for all carers and increased support for care leavers.

**Adults and Older Adults**

HSCP Social Work and Social Care financial pressures featured heavily throughout 2024-2025 within Fife Health and Social Care Partnership.

**Financial Pressures**

Financial pressures continue to impact Health and Social Care Partnerships across Scotland, with increasing demand for services, demographic change, workforce challenges and rising costs placing significant strain on available resources. In Fife, these pressures are being felt across social work and social care services, particularly in supporting people with complex needs, reducing delays in care and maintaining safe, high-quality services within a constrained financial environment.

The Fife Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic Plan recognise the need for sustainable transformation, shifting the balance of care towards prevention, early intervention and community-based support wherever possible. During 2025-26, work continued to focus on redesigning services, strengthening community capacity and improving pathways across health and social care to make best use of available resources while maintaining positive outcomes for adults, children, families and carers.

The Partnership's Medium-Term Financial Strategy highlights that financial sustainability will require ongoing service transformation, workforce innovation and closer integration across organisations. It remains essential that social work and social care staff are supported to manage increasing demand, assess risk effectively and work collaboratively with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, wellbeing and resilience. These pressures are expected to continue over the coming years, requiring sustained focus on service reform and long-term financial sustainability

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.

**Justice**

The funding allocated during 2025-26 was the final year of funding utilising the existing funding formula, with Justice Service Managers from across the Country asked to provide their views on the proposed funding formula from 2026 onwards. Views were shared in respect of the proposed elements being included in this revised funding formula as it was acknowledged that the current formula may not be providing the necessary resources to support service provision in some areas.

Despite some delay in respect of being notified of funding allocation for 2025-26, sustained funding levels during this reporting period provided resource stability within Justice Social Work Service in Fife. Retrospective funding in respect of bail supervision and Structured Deferred Sentences has now ceased, allowing for improved spend and utilisation of the funding. The majority of 2025-26 Bail Incentivisation Funding was used to secure and develop the Unpaid Work and Opportunities Hub in Fife. This flagship resource hosts the development of creative and inclusive unpaid work and employability opportunities which will be utilised for years to come. Allowing this one-off opportunity to invest in training, machinery and material has been critical for the vision of this resource to come to life.

Fife's delivery of the Caledonian System was also enhanced with increased funding of over £120,000 this reporting period. This again was instigated by a review of the funding formula which aligned funding to those areas where Caledonian Orders were highest per population. This increase allowed for dedicated roles such as Caledonian women's workers and children's worker to be funded by Caledonian specific funding as they had previously been funded via section 27 funding stream. This supports the Service to protect these specialist posts as the prevalence of domestic abuse remains a focus for the Service moving forward.

In terms of service challenges, the continued complexities of those involved in the Justice System is an increasing challenge for the Justice workforce. In addition to the resource challenges for those being released from prison with additional case needs, which was detailed in the previous CSWO report, the increase complexity seen within Diversion from Prosecution cases is also having an impact on allocation and delivery of services. This challenge is evident particularly for young people who are being considered for Diversion from Prosecution, with sexual incidents being considered on a regular basis, however the complexity of this risk being unsuitable for paraprofessionals (who would ordinarily undertake this work). There is continued monitoring in respect of the impact, which may influence the future investment in workforce moving forward.

## STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

### Adults and Older People

The Scottish Government has not issued any new workforce planning guidance to HSCPs since Director's letter DL (2024) 33 (December 2024). Workforce planning continues to be delivered through an annual workforce delivery plan aligned to HSCP Strategic Plan and informed by local workforce priorities.

An interim one-year Workforce Delivery Plan was submitted in March 2025. The annual planning cycle has now been aligned to the financial year (April–March), with the current plan covering April 2026 to March 2027. The Workforce Delivery Plan, aligned to the Strategic Plan 2026–2029 was endorsed by the Integration Joint Board (IJB) in May. Further Scottish Government guidance for the 2026–2029 period is awaited.

The Workforce Delivery Plan has been developed collaboratively with NHS Fife, Fife Council, and independent and third sector partners, ensuring representation across all HSCP business portfolios.

The Plan supports delivery of national priorities set out in the National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care (2022**)** and reflects the five workforce pillars: Plan, Attract, Train, Employ and Nurture. It also responds to increasing service demand, demographic change, financial pressures, and the need for sustainable person-centred care in line with national health and social care reform.

### Progress and Impact

The Workforce Action Plan has supported evidence-based recruitment and workforce development, strengthening approaches to attraction, retention and career progression across the Partnership. A continued priority within the workforce delivery plan is supporting employees with caring responsibilities. The partnership will build on its commitment to becoming more carer positive by increasing carer positive accreditation across services, helping improve staff wellbeing, retention and workforce inclusion.

Ongoing challenges remain, including financial constraints and the impact of changes to international recruitment, particularly the withdrawal of the social care international visa route. Actions and priorities within the workforce delivery plan will continue to evolve in response to emerging workforce challenges, national policy and local service priorities.

Overall, the Partnership has established a strong foundation for future workforce planning. With the Workforce Delivery Plan endorsed by the Integration Joint Board and strong collaborative governance arrangements in place, the Partnership is well positioned to support sustainable workforce transformation and make the most effective use of increasingly limited resources while delivering the priorities of the Strategic Plan.

## KEY STAFFING AND WORKFORCE ISSUES

### All Social Work and Social Care

The Children, Families and Justice services have experienced less challenges around recruitment and retention in this reporting period. While practitioners experienced some disruption through the implementation of the service re-design, the aims of this process were viewed positively by the workforce and the cultural change has supported retention, with a slight reduction in leavers from children and families and continued minimal leavers in Justice. The age and experience profile across the services is well balanced, ensuring the capacity for sustainable service delivery and succession planning.

Although not currently implemented, a potential recruitment challenge for Justice Services is the requirement for staff to be vetted for MAPPS (replacement for ViSOR). This vetting process is highly intrusive, with concerns being raised nationally across senior leadership networks. With implementation scheduled for April 2028, action will be taken over the next reporting period to approach existing staff to be vetted and factor this into any future recruitment process. The impact of this will be monitored closely as traditionally, Fife Justice Social Work has not experienced recruitment challenges which are evident in other local authorities.

Across all services, practitioners are encouraged to gain experience through developmental opportunities, which includes the delivery of learning to student social workers at the 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. All services have positive experience of recruiting social work students who undertook their final social work placement within Fife, demonstrating the supportive student placement experience.

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. With further extension this reporting year to considering service user feedback and meaningfully implementing changes within the Service. The Service also facilitated development sessions specifically for Justice Workers to attend and share good practice whilst networking with peers across the Service.

In this reporting period senior leaders across Children and Families, Justice and Adult and Older Adult social work services have been exploring sustainable pathways for non-qualified practitioners to become social workers. As part of this we have been working closely with colleagues in workforce development and HR, to prepare for the delivery of the Graduate Apprenticeship Scheme in social work. Fife is engaged with national forums to gather information around the evaluation of the pilot approach, and over the next year aim to use this information to develop and pilot this scheme locally.

A Practice Education Day was held in February 2026; the aim being to connect with practiced educators and ensure that the importance of this role is maintained across services.

## WELLBEING

To ensure a strong interface with the workforce and support cultural change, there have been many engagement events including the CSWO and senior leaders over the year. This has included walking the floor with staff, cross service staff forums and development days, pride and practice events and engaging the workforce in celebrating World Social Work Day. These events are a contributing factor towards staff wellbeing, taking the time to engage and recognise the achievements being made across the services.

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.

### Adult and Older Adult Social Care

A priority workstream that formed through the International Employers Network was that of the development of a Pastoral Care Quality Award – Adult Social Care (PCQA). The development of this Award commenced in Partnership between PSDS and Scottish Care (Fife HSCP Sector Lead) with later onboarding of the Fife HSCP and Trusted Fife Providers. Participation and Engagement with Fife Employers through our Collaborative structures identified that there were approximately one third of all commissioned adult social care staff employed under sponsorship licenses Health and Care Worker visa: Overview - GOV.UK A 2025 Scottish Care survey found that International Workers make up around 26% of the adult social care workforce overall, rising to an average of 32% within individual organisations with some services reporting over 75% or even in some cases 75-90% of all staff employed coming from overseas.

The upscaling of activity and engagement in supporting this workforce population was locally and nationally viewed as requiring specific approaches and interventions to support employers navigate, connect and respond to the complexities and changing landscape of Home Office Policy making and what this could mean for a considerable number of the Fife Social Care Workforce and in many cases their families who had settled with them in Fife Changes to UK visa and settlement rules after the 2025 immigration white paper - House of Commons Library.

Given the extent of uncertainty, complexities, anxieties and often risks of disconnect that there can be for a person settling in Scotland from overseas the Pastoral Care of their employers was seen a pivotal role to nurture and support. The key features of the Pastoral Care are many, but those highlighted below seek to ensure a common framework approach:

- PCQA supports various care providers across Scotland regardless of size, type, or location, promoting inclusivity and flexibility.
- The PCQA framework accommodates organisations at different development stages with adaptable and proportionate requirements.
- PCQA principles apply to managers, HR leads, supervisors, mentors, and frontline staff supporting workforce wellbeing and culture.
- Engagement with PCQA signals dedication to fair work, inclusion, ethical practices, and enhancing employer reputation.
- Focuses on welcoming and supporting new staff during their initial weeks and months in post
- Pastoral care is continuous, adapting to staff's evolving wellbeing needs over time.
- Encourages inclusion, understanding, and positive relationships within diverse teams.
- Provides access to information, guidance, and trusted support networks through clear communication.

The award will be formally launched in 2026.

## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

### Health and Social Care Partnership

The second year of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan has seen continued momentum as we work to create a culture where everyone feels valued, included and able to thrive.

A key strength of our approach has been ensuring that the voices and experiences of staff continue to shape our priorities. Building on the success of the inaugural event, the Partnership Equality Network (PEN) hosted a second **Neurodiversity Natter**, bringing colleagues together to share experiences, increase understanding and identify practical actions that can make a meaningful difference for neurodivergent staff.

This learning has translated into tangible resources to support both colleagues and managers. During the year, PEN developed and launched two online guides: a **Guide for Neurodivergent Staff** and a **Guide for Managers Supporting Neurodivergent Colleagues**. These resources provide practical advice and information to help foster more inclusive working environments and support positive workplace experiences.

We also expanded opportunities for lived experience to influence leadership through the **Reverse Mentoring Programme**. Following a successful first cohort, a second cohort was

launched with **16 mentoring partnerships** established across the Partnership. By creating spaces for honest conversations and shared learning, the programme continues to strengthen understanding, challenge perceptions and support more inclusive leadership practices.

Equality, diversity and inclusion have remained central to workforce and organisational development activity throughout the year. Through collaboration, engagement and a continued focus on learning, we have strengthened our foundations while creating new opportunities to embed inclusion into everyday practice.

These efforts were recognised through the achievement of **Silver Pathfinder status**, an important milestone in our EDI journey. Building on the Bronze award received in 2024, this recognition reflects the progress made across the Partnership and our commitment to sustaining meaningful change. Work is now underway towards achieving **Gold accreditation**, ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion remain at the heart of how we support our workforce and the communities we serve.

## Training and Development

### All Social Work and Social Care Services

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. The Service also supported four practitioners across Children Families and Justice to complete a postgraduate qualification ‘Young People in Conflict with the Law’ which was supported as a response to staff identifying a lack of confidence in the changing legislation in this area of work. It is hoped that further opportunities such as this will be available as part of the workforce development strategy.

The Children, Families and Justice service used additional funding from the whole family wellbeing fund to invest in upskilling its cohort of Team Managers. Working closely with Dundee University, a bespoke Leadership and Management learning approach was developed to help Team Managers feel confident in supporting a culture of everyday leadership, and quality assuring the delivery of trauma informed and evidence-based interventions.

A planner of learning and development activities was delivered to support the Children, Families and Justice workforce in its delivery of a new service model. Evaluation of this approach in early 2026 identified that the learning was most impactful where approaches were supported and promoted strategically, and where role relevance and organisational value was clear. The planner of activity was refreshed for 2026/27 with a focus on shared strategic priorities which will be promoted across the services.

Within Justice Service, there is an ongoing 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 2026,160 staff members were trained in Level 3 Trauma Informed Practice, with feedback from staff detailing the positive impact this specialised training has provided when working with service users. The service 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.

**Adult and Older People Social Work and Social Care**

Workforce development remained a key priority throughout 2025–2026, supporting staff to deliver high-quality, person-centred social work and social care services. Learning and development activity was aligned to service priorities, with a focus on strengthening professional practice, meeting mandatory training requirements and enhancing leadership capability. Development activity provision was facilitated through CSWO budget, internal delivery and collaborative provision with multi agency partners such as NHS.

In Adult and Older Adult Services, staff accessed a broad range of learning opportunities including Adult Support and Protection, Trauma-Informed Practice, Leadership and Management development, Person Centred Risk Assessment, and Specialist Practice training. This included Dysphagia Skilled training, Tube Feeding Study sessions, Dementia Awareness webinars and Talking Mats Foundation Training.

Protected learning time continued to enable staff to complete mandatory learning requirements and engage in ongoing professional development.

The learning programme also supported the Partnership's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ambitions through the delivery of Introduction to LGBT+ and Transgender Awareness sessions, helping to strengthen understanding of inclusive practice and the experiences of people who use services and colleagues from diverse communities.

The service also invested in workforce sustainability through qualification and career development pathways, including SVQs, Modern Apprenticeships, post-qualifying awards and support for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs).

Adults and Older People NQSW Forums were delivered every two months and were facilitated jointly by Workforce Development and Social Work colleagues. These forums

focused on key areas of practice including case recording, assessment processes and funding, supervision, wellbeing and support for unpaid carers.

These activities supported workforce capability, professional confidence and compliance with statutory and mandatory learning requirements, helping to ensure high-quality outcomes for people using services.

A key feature of 2026-27 will be looking at a sustainable trauma informed training and practice support across social work and social care in Fife.

## LOOKING FORWARD

I am excited to lead the continued transformation of services in partnership with the workforce and our partners. We have so much to build on and to look forward to. We want to continue to develop our stable workforce across Children and Families and Justice Services ensuring our people feel valued and skilled to undertake the complex tasks we expect from them daily. We also have the development of key workforce strategies to achieve the same workforce stability across our Adult and Older People Services.

We will continue to showcase with pride the work of social work and social care with Government Officials, External Partners but more importantly within Fife so that everyone understands and recognises the unique contribution we make across Fife.

We understand that there continues to be pressures and demands but we will embrace these as opportunities as we continue to evolve the services we have transformed across Children and Families and Justice. We are excited to realise the potential of the Unpaid Work Hub, The Family Support Hub in Lochgelly and the Brother and Sisters Resource Centre within this Hub. We have the mother and baby residential and support service to launch later in 2026 as well as the ability to use the capital investment to transform how we deliver residential childcare.

Transformation to provide modern day services to meet the needs of the people of Fife will allow Older People and Adults Services to be in a stronger position to meet the needs of our most vulnerable adults and their families. Embracing innovation and creativity whilst uncertain is exciting, allowing us to care for our adults at home and in community settings to achieve optimal outcomes.

My final comments remain the same as they were last year. 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 is our professional values of empathy, care, dignity and promotion of rights that provides person centred empathic support when needed the most. Your dedication and determination is visible across Fife daily.