

## ITEM No ...6.....

**REPORT TO:** CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE COMMITTEE – 25 OCTOBER 2021

**REPORT ON:** CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**REPORT BY:** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE

**REPORT NO:** 289-2020

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report provides Elected Members with the first progress report on the implementation of Our Promise to Care Experienced Children, Young People and Care Leavers 2021-23, Article IV of minute of meeting of this Committee of 8 March 2021. The report outlines how the Council has worked with partner services over the last 6-12 months to continue to enhance support in accordance with the 5 foundations of The Promise outlined by the Independent Care Review. It also outlines some of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and how support has been adapted and maintained during this period.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Elected Members:

- i. Note the progress made in the implementation of Our Promise to Care Experienced Children, Young People and Care Leavers 2021-23
- ii. Instruct the Executive Director of the Children and Families Service to provide a further update report in 12 months' time

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no immediate financial implications for the Council but previous reports to Elected Members and the findings of the Independent Care Review noted significant avoidable costs involved in current approaches towards care experienced children and young people which can persist into adulthood. These costs are associated with overall numbers of care experienced children; the balance of different placement types; and what the review describes as the personal, social and economic impact of current care system failures (Independent Care Review: Follow the Money).
- 3.2 The range of actions noted in previous reports to re-balance the profile of placements away from external residential care and external foster care towards local family-based arrangements are continuing. The service is also supporting more young people into Continuing Care. The effects of the pandemic have resulted in a delay in returning some young people and increased the level of support required for others but the net result of these measures is positive. When comparing costs in March 2017 with costs in September 2021, there has been an overall reduction of £1m.
- 3.3 In support of this work, the Scottish Government also continues to award local authorities additional funding in the form of the 'Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund'. For session 2021-22, this is £355,200 and it continues to be used to fund 8 Pupil Support Workers to provide extra support in schools and 2 Health and Wellbeing and Employability Workers for care leavers. As outlined in this report, these posts appear to be contributing towards continued improvements in health, wellbeing and attainment.
- 3.4 The Council is also one of 5 organisations in Scotland to be awarded £200k by the Independent Care Review in 2021-22 because it is considered by them to be 'on the journey' towards implementing The Promise. This funding is intended to act as a further catalyst for change and develop initiatives which can be replicated elsewhere. Locally, it is being used to support work with Third Sector partners on the development of a volunteer strategy to enhance support to children and young people on the edges of care, along with the implementation of the Fast Online Referral Tracking system.

## 4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 requires all Local Authorities to implement a Corporate Parenting Plan for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. This statutory requirement was introduced to strengthen support to care experienced children and young people and care leavers. It informed the development of our first Corporate Parenting Plan 2017-20. In some key areas, marked progress has been over the last 4 years and in others there have been slight improvements. This includes the following:

- **A move towards more local and/or family-based living arrangements** – up from 88.3% in 2018-19 to 89.2% in 2019-20. Currently, this is 89.7%
- **Increased stability across all types of placements** – internal foster care stability has increased from an average of 15 to 33 months
- **Markedly reduced school exclusions** – from 202 per 1,000 in 2016-17 to 54 per 1,000 in 2019-20
- **Improved attainment levels** – from 19.5% of Looked After pupils in S5 gained SCQF Level 5 in Literacy and Numeracy in 2017-18 to 41.2% in 2019-20.
- **More young people in Continuing Care** – up from 18 in 2019-20 to 31 in 2020-21. There are currently 27 young people in Continuing Care.
- **Increases in positive destinations** – from 86.7% in 2017-18 to a slight increase of 87.5% in 2018-19.

4.2 This work has been accompanied by work with partners to enhance support to children and young people considered to be on the edges of care. As described in previous reports (report numbers), this includes work on the What Matters 2 U initiative; on approaches towards engaging with families where there are concerns about possible neglect; and on the development of FORT. This is collectively designed to build capacity, confidence and competence across the workforce to identify concerns, improve relationships with families and promote easier access to better support.

## 5.0 DEVELOPMENTS

5.1 Following approval by Elected Members of Our Promise in March 2021, the Council has worked with partners to implement the plan whilst continuing to navigate the challenges of Covid-19. With oversight from the Children and Families Executive Board, a Promise Partnership has coordinated work under each of the 5 inter-related foundations of The Promise. As part of the response to the pandemic, where partners have increasingly focused on support to all vulnerable groups, a new Alliance Group focused on the volunteer strategy and FORT and a new Hidden Harm Group are also contributing towards this work:

### 5.2 SCAFFOLDING

5.2.1 In order to promote easier and quicker access to better support across the care pathway, partners have worked to simplify and standardise arrangements. This has included the implementation of FORT by the Alliance Group and the introduction of a new Social Work management structure involving the integration of East/West locality teams, the dis-establishment of some posts and the creation of 3 Practice Manager posts. This new structure is allowing the service to use management and performance data to provide more consistent and targeted support, whilst implementing new initiatives. Details include:

- **Alliance Group and FORT** - the system went live in March 2020 and 110 agencies have since made 1,485 requests for support to this central referral point, leading to the distribution of £570k in welfare funding alongside face-to-face and/or digital guidance and advice. This group also coordinated Summer Play activities with a focus on children and young people at greater risk whilst not at school. In order to continue to progress this and

related work, such as the development of the volunteer strategy, this now key group will be sustained beyond recovery from the pandemic

- **Implementation of Multi Agency Screening Hub (MASH) Adolescent Pilot** – in response to an increase in the number of young people aged 12-16 years escalating quickly from initial referral to being placed in care during the first 5 months of the pandemic, all teenage referrals now progress directly to 2 Adolescent Teams where they can receive more immediate assessment and support. This has reversed trends and following recent staff recruitment and training, will be supported by the targeted introduction of Functional Family Therapy from September 2021.
- **Introduction of new Minimum Practice Requirements** – in order to consistently balance responses to the risk of infection and other forms of harm associated with the pandemic, these are designed to ensure the frequency of face-to-face and/or digital support is carried out in accordance with levels of risk of harm. They have contributed towards both children and young people on the Child Protection Register and Care Leavers in the city receiving significantly higher levels of face-to-face contact than the national average during the pandemic.

### 5.3 FAMILY

- 5.3.1 In Children's Social Work, Locality Teams have continued to work in collaboration with DDARS (Dundee Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service) to enhance support to families where substance use is compromising parenting and the children are at risk of entering care. This involves 3 DDARS Nurses co-located with the teams. The nurses are all at varying stages of completing training to support the provision of same day prescribing and the implementation of Medication Assisted Treatment Standards within the team environment. Support includes intensive therapeutic input to parents and early indications suggest joint working is well received by families and having a positive impact.
- 5.3.2 As a similarly high proportion of children and young people are at risk of entering care due to the emotional impact of domestic abuse, the service is also piloting a domestic abuse test of change. This involves Locality Teams, Community Justice and the Third Sector jointly applying the Safe and Together model to support mothers and children whilst holding typically male perpetrators to account and addressing the complex dynamics of relationships where domestic abuse and coercive control exists. Following a successful bid to the Corra Foundation for 3-year funding, it is being supported by a dedicated lead.
- 5.3.3 In relation to kinship care, where children and young people are cared for by fully assessed, approved and supported extended family members, the service is currently exploring options to create a dedicated Kinship Care Team to provide targeted support, enhance stability and promote improved outcomes. It would be progressed alongside the continued development of a Kinship Carer Hub with Tayside Council on Alcohol (TCA). Where it is possible, this placement option offers opportunities for children and young people to maintain positive relationships and attachments with family members.
- 5.3.4 In relation to emergency interventions, over the last 12 months there has continued to be a higher number of Child Protection Orders when compared with other areas. These Orders are approved by the Sheriff Court where it is considered that a child or young person is at imminent risk and no other current measures will suffice to protect them from significant harm. A monthly quality assurance process between Social Work and the Children's Reporter has been introduced and confirms that Orders have been necessary and proportionate but oversight of this highly intrusive measure will continue, whilst also developing the range of preventative support.

## 5.4 CARE

- 5.4.1 Where children and young people unavoidably enter care, work has been accelerated to recruit and support more foster carers. Recruitment activity has been disrupted but we have embarked on a digital and social media recruitment campaign, leading to 16 notes of interest; 11 current assessments of potential carers; and 1 new foster carer household and 5 adoptive households recruited. The Fostering Resource Team and Adoption and Permanence Team have maintained support to all carers, including support with challenging trauma-related behaviour. In the last 12 months, 37 children have been matched into their forever homes.
- 5.4.2 In the context of supporting care experienced children and young people into their forever homes as quickly and appropriately as possible, a PACE project continues into the third year, with a focus this year on the improvement of timescales for obtaining necessary Court Orders. During the pandemic, the timescales for undertaking rehabilitation assessments have been maintained at over 80%. The project has also now been extended to teenagers with improvement work being undertaken in engaging with young people about their long term/permanent planning.
- 5.4.3 The annual Care Inspectorate inspections of our 5 Children's Houses have been similarly disrupted by the pandemic but we continue to implement recommendations from previous inspections. In order to enhance support to young people, who are now remaining in the houses for longer periods under Continuing Care, we are also in the process of recruiting additional staff, introducing rota arrangements with 2 staff providing overnight support and creating bedroom capacity for an additional young person in each house. One house previously used as a secure unit will be renovated between October 2021 and March 2022.
- 5.4.4 The final and most intrusive placement in the care continuum involves secure care, reserved only for those who are at risk of significant harm to themselves or others and who are regularly absconding from current arrangements. Where children and young people meet the criteria laid out in legislation, these placements still require Chief Social Work Officer authorisation. They will also be applied where the Sheriff Court remands a young person aged under 17 years. Over the last few years, there has been both a local trend towards lower numbers entering secure care, from 304 nights in 2017-18 to 86 in 2020-21.
- 5.4.5 To inform improvements in support to this small group of particularly vulnerable young people, Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative (TRIC) partners are presently finalising a self-evaluation against new national Secure Care Standards. These standards have been developed with the close involvement of young people with experience of secure care and promote good partnership practice before, during and after such placements. They place emphasis on the importance of pro-active engagement with at risk young people, including proper notification and explanation of these highly intrusive decisions.
- 5.4.6 In relation to vulnerable young people at risk of harm to others and offending or re-offending in general, these developments run in tandem with the continued implementation of the Whole Systems Approach to Youth Justice across the city. Whilst this does not exclusively apply to care experienced children, young people and care leavers, research shows that they are at greater risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. We therefore continue to work with partners to provide age-appropriate proportionate support and there have been a further increase in the number of young people Diverted from Prosecution:
- **2017-18** - 7
  - **2018-19** - 29
  - **2019-20** – 31
  - **2020-21** - 42
- 5.4.7 For young people leaving care, the Aftercare Team has maintained markedly higher levels of face-to-face support during the pandemic than the national average. The team moved swiftly to a flexible rota system involving some evening and weekend work. The designated Employability Worker is also now linked with all secondary schools to enable early identification of and support to care experienced school leavers who are likely to find the

transition challenging. This year 73 young people were supported towards a sustained positive destination with 68% of the young people successfully securing employment or training.

- 5.4.8 The number of care experienced young people currently receiving support from the Aftercare Team in Further or Higher Education or training also continues to rise. On 1 October 2020 there were 96 young people in Further or Higher Education and training, with a further 21 in employment. Close links with Dundee and Angus College, which have contributed towards the college being the top performing in Scotland for care experienced learners, have been maintained. Under the Council guaranteed interview scheme for care experienced young people who meet the essential criteria, there were 18 applicants for posts in the last 12 months.
- 5.4.9 In order to further improve transitions into adulthood for both care experienced young people and others who may find this process challenging and require additional support, partners are presently working with Arc Scotland on a Principles into Practice Enhanced Trial Programme for young people aged 14 to 25 years. This provides an opportunity for the development of a clear and consistent framework with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for all partners. A newly established Transitions Oversight Group will report on progress to the Children and Families Executive Board in February 2022.

## **5.5 VOICE**

- 5.5.1 During the pandemic, the Council has continued to support care experienced children and young people to express and record their views when developing and reviewing their Child's Plan. In the last 12 months, 75% recorded their views, with some either not expressing a view and/or it not being recorded. Over the next 12 months, a key priority is now to both increase the proportion of recorded views and collate and analyse the information to inform how we continue to improve support. This work is being coordinated by a new multi-agency Your Voice Our Promise Team, which also coordinates the development of the Champions Board.
- 5.5.2 In order to develop more flexible methods of engagement, a Mind of My Own (MOMO) digital application is also being piloted. This allows children and young people to express their views and offer suggestions in their own time, including in relation to preparation for Planning Meetings, Hearings, Reviews and Child Protection Case Conferences. Information gathered from this process will inform our decision making and support to both individual children and young people and the wider care experienced population. To promote a consistent approach, it will similarly be coordinated by the new Your Voice Our Promise Team.
- 5.5.3 The Council also pro-actively offers advocacy support through an independent advocacy service commissioned from Who Cares? Scotland. In the last year, advocates supported a total of 52 young people, 35 of whom had not received advocacy services before. In doing so, advocates worked alongside children and young people on 242 individual advocacy issues. The advocates also provide group-based support to all young people in the Children's Houses and external residential placements. A key priority over the next 12 months is to work with Who Cares? Scotland to measure the impact of this support.

## **5.6 PEOPLE**

- 5.6.1 In order to continue to support the workforce to identify and respond to concerns before they escalate, 300 staff received training in new multi-agency GIRFEC Guidance in September 2021. This work will be complemented by plans to roll-out various levels of trauma informed training to the partnership workforce in 2021-22. In Social Work, the new Minimum Practice Requirements were accompanied by weekly audits during lockdown and monthly audits in the current stage of recovery. Over 90% were viewed as being appropriately assessed with commensurate levels of face-to-face support, with real-time follow-up on others.
- 5.6.2 In Social Work, as part of a wider Improvement Plan launched in December 2019 more extensive quality assurance using a Care Inspectorate audit tool has also been applied since May 2021. This auditing process is confirming good quality assessments, along with very

good involvement from and relationships with children and young people and parents/carers. It is leading to incremental progress in the quality of chronologies to inform assessments and outcome focused Child's Plans. A current Joint Inspection of Services to Children and Young People at Risk of Harm will prove informative when published in January 2022.

- 5.6.3 Going forwards, as we move through the recovery process the service is also continuing to support teams with the impact of the pandemic. At present, teams work on a rota basis in buildings to facilitate face-to-face family support whilst also carrying out home visits and working from home as required. Team development and individual support is provided through face-to-face and digital methods. Informed by the findings of ENACT research on the impact of the pandemic on the Social Work and Social Care workforce, developments will also involve peer support, anti-stigma work, individualised support and visible leadership.

## **5.7 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AT SCHOOL**

- 5.7.1 In schools from August to December 2020, the Pupil Support Worker Team worked on supporting the transition of new S1 pupils they had begun to establish relationships with the previous term. In addition, they continued 1:1 contact, small group work where restrictions allowed and support to those unable to attend due to self-isolation. When the country moved in to a second lockdown in January 2021, the team played a pivotal role in supporting attendance or ensuring regular contact was made or delivering work from school as appropriate. Cluster Deputy Head Teacher leads highlight the following examples of success:

- An S2 pupil who had very poor attendance in S1 and at the start of S2. The PSW arranged a socially distanced walk during the first lockdown and built a relationship with the pupil and his dad. His attendance went up from 75% to 97% last term.
- Three struggling S4 pupils were encouraged throughout lockdown and beyond. All 3 have had at some time suffered traumatic events but their attendance has remained above 90% due to the support they received.

- 5.7.2 The team of 8 Pupil Support Workers have also been working with pupils with sessions aimed at improving self-esteem, acting as a 'Buddy' in Team Around the Child Meetings and Child Protection Case Conferences, facilitating the formation of secondary school Champions' Boards and encouraging care experienced secondary pupils to engage with the Young Persons Participation Group. In a survey carried out with care experienced children and young people in the spring of 2021, very high levels reported good access to digital learning and wider supports, whilst also noting the impact of the pandemic on curtailing many activities.

## **6.0 SUMMARY**

- 6.1 In the 6 months since Our Promise was approved by Elected Members, the Council has worked at pace with partners to implement a broad range of new measures which reflect the 5 foundations. Whilst doing so, it has continued to navigate the many challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and sustain high levels of support. There has been a focus on earlier access to services; strategically targeting resources towards key priorities such as substance misuse and domestic abuse; building local placement capacity; supporting the workforce; and actively listening to children and young people.
- 6.2 Going forwards, with the continued support of the Children and Families Executive Board, Our Promise Partnership and Alliance Group, which link with each other as well as other partnership groups, arrangements are in place to build on this work across the care pathway. In the next annual report to Elected Members, updates will include details of the development of a Volunteer Strategy, the dedicated Kinship Care Team, the impact of Functional Family Therapy, the expansion of Children's Houses, the Secure Care Self-Evaluation Action Plan and work on transitions.
- 6.3 Priorities will also be informed by the findings of the current Joint Inspection into Services to Children and Young People at Risk of Harm due to be published in January 2022. This inspection will be the subject of a separate report to Elected Members and although the focus

is on children and young people at risk of harm, many of whom are not care experienced, there are clearly crossovers. In responding to the findings, the Chief Officers Group and Child Protection Committee will ensure and communicate a consistency of approach across all services.

## **7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 This Report has been subject to an assessment of any impact on equality and diversity, fairness, poverty, environment and corporate risk. There are no major issues.

## **8.0 CONSULTATIONS**

8.1 The Council Management Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

9.1 None.

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October 2021

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