

Children's Services, Partnership and Communities Annual Performance Report 2021/22



01. Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

21/22: Year End Report

Our Vision: All children, young people, adults and families in Midlothian are supported to be the best they can be. This is achieved through a nurturing, respectful and collaborative approach that promotes wellbeing, equity and inclusion.

General

Over the past year children's services have seen some significant improvements in the work they have undertaken. Despite a significant rise in referrals into children's services we have maintained a lower than Scottish average number of children on the child protection register and children who have required to be looked after out with their family the numbers remain very low. This would suggest that our earlier intervention models of intervention are working. The National Housing Project offered 9 care experienced young people their own permanent tenancy as they left care and a year down the line all 9 have sustained their tenancy with no issues reported. This is a significant success and as the project comes to an end in 2023, we need to ensure that we mainstream our approach to supporting young people leaving care. The evidence is overwhelming whereby if young people are able to get a secure tenancy their overall outcomes improves due to the stability this brings in their lives.

Hawthorn Family Learning Centre undertook a full review of the service and has recruited into all the posts. This was a significant piece of work especially as it was undertaken during covid. We look forward to hearing about how the service will lead to better outcomes for children and their families.

Residential staff adjusted their working week to twelve hour shift patterns, to reduce the risk to young people during the pandemic, this has been so successful they have agreed to continue with 12 hour shifts, knowing this is what the young people prefer. We welcomed and supported two families fleeing from Afghanistan over the past year. Family Group Decision Making has become part of children's services and the team were successful in bidding for external money in order to grow this team. In line with the Promise we are supporting families to agree their own plan so that they can stay together. The Family Placement Team were also successful in bidding for external funding in order to employ someone who will support families who have had a child adopted.

Within Communities, Lifelong Learning and Employability, the past year has been a challenge with many courses having to cease or significantly reduce the numbers attending due to the pandemic. However since August 2021 numbers attending and engaging with this service have increased and actually surpassed many of the targets we hoped to achieve. There have been many grants to support young people and adults into further education, training and employability. Youth work has opened up in all clusters although there continue to be areas across the county where finding suitable venues remains an issue.

Other successes over the past year are the summer family learning programme which was well attended, foundation apprenticeships commenced and extra places offered. Young Carers were successful in getting additional funding allowing more young people to attend groups or 1:1 sessions for support. 3 year funding for grants was launched with a cross party group agreeing who the successful organisations were.

Children's services continues to be impacted by Covid and similar to other services has encountered a higher than average number of staff absences within the workforce. We have managed to sustain and deliver services through creative and flexible solutions. However, for the most part, especially in our children's houses we have relied heavily on the commitment and dedication of our staff to go above and beyond the call of duty. Staff continue to work on a rota basis within Eskdaill Court until such times that Scottish Government guidance allows for a return of all staff. In summary our staff remain as committed as ever.

There have been many success within the service over the past year and the strengthened partnership working within the Children, Young People and Partnership Directorate is key in enabling us to continue to offer the right support at the earliest opportunity to children, young people and their families within our communities.

The last year has seen a significant increase in referrals (37%) and we continue to explore and trial different methods for understanding and managing the varying referral routes and pathways and whether these could be managed differently. We have also undertaken an audit of the data and in the process of making sure it is as reflective as it can be of the current challenges. We are also in discussions with comparable authorities and professional bodies to benchmark referrals and identify solutions although (52%) of the increase continues to be linked to financial support, given the economic difficulties around the increased cost of living and fuel and food prices and the impact this is having on many families within our communities. .

UNCRC

Within the People and Partnership Directorate we continue to promote a rights based approach to all our work. We have just submitted our latest UNCRC report which highlights how we uphold children's rights which can be accessed [here](#).

The Promise

The Promise is a key driver for moving forward and shaping the future of children's services. Following a nationally published report which was initially critical of Councils for what was perceived to be a lack of progress towards the commitments, Midlothian Council has played a key role in providing CoSLA with information to showcase the work being done. Our local report was developed around the five priority areas and key milestones which are:

1. A Good Childhood
2. Whole Family Support
3. Supporting the Workforce
4. Planning
5. Building Capacity

The report published by CoSLA includes extracts from the Midlothian Council's progress report. The Midlothian Council report prepared for CoSLA can be accessed via the link below:

https://www.cosla.gov.uk/data/assets/word_doc/0022/32287/Midlothian-Council-Progress-on-the-Project.docx

National Child Protection Guidance The new National Child Protection Guidance has been published. The national implementation group which Midlothian is part of, is responsible for implementing all the actions and have already commissioned someone to write local procedures.

Equity and Inclusion

The Equity and Inclusion GIRFEC subgroup is well established and a plan has been approved with key areas of work identified: ASN review, attendance and engagement in education; nurture; poverty and attainment and family learning.

Mental Health Services

The increase in the number of referrals for support for mental health over the past year has proven to be a challenge across the country. With the additional funding from government we have worked with our third sector colleagues and developed many opportunities such as nurture and wellbeing sessions, adult counselling, art therapy, family support and counselling and play therapy to name but a few of the sessions people can access. These groups offer early support for mental health and wellbeing. Discussions are ongoing to develop a one point of contact for mental health and family support across the local authority.

This remains a priority area of work over the coming year.

Reducing Poverty

Within Community Lifelong Learning and Employability (CLLE), Covid has had a significant impact on the service. Being unable to have youth clubs or young people in school on a regular basis coupled with other restrictions due to Covid has impacted on the number of people we have been able to support. This said there is a renewed focus on ensuring we return to pre-Covid numbers as a priority in order to re-engage young people who have experienced disruption to their education, training and employment opportunities. Identifying and supporting this group is key if we are to improve their longer term outcomes as they enter adulthood.

The Community Planning Partnership has approved a one year strategic poverty prevention group, co-chaired by Dona Milne. The operational child poverty group led by CLLE and Health has completed the final Local Child Poverty Action Report (Year 3) and this is going through governance arrangements before submission. Child Poverty in Midlothian has risen by 2.1%. The highest rate of child poverty is in Dalkeith Central and Woodburn 35%.

The child poverty plan will now focus on poverty prevention and early intervention, particularly income maximisation, cost of living, income from employment and income from benefits.

CLLE

The Draft Midlothian No One Left Behind (NOLB) Action Plan for employability is out for consultation with employability partners.

As part of the Community Learning and Development Partnership Strategy increasing our engagement with local people to pre pandemic levels was a key priority. Our target for 2021/22 was 4000 engagements, by the end of Q4 we have exceeded this by 2233. 2351 of the 6233 engagements were with people and families living in the 40% SIMD areas of deprivation. It is important to keep this momentum and build local people's confidence to engage with us both online, in person and blended going forward. Over the next two years our target is 7,000 plus engagements. We as a service have also exceeded our target of providing one to one employability or positive destination support to 861 individuals exceeding our target by 361. The communities' team have supported 83 groups mainly with operational support.

CLLE supporting Asset Transfer and Small Grant

Vogrie Hall, has been successfully asset transferred to St. David's Brass Band SCIO enabling them to secure additional funding to make the building accessible to communities going forward. The CLLE service has worked with elected members, third sector and community members to score small grants. This provides £89,000 of support to 35 organisations. The impact of this funding is monitored through CLLE nominated grant monitoring officers.

Supporting local people to secure employment or learning opportunities – Improving skills, for learning, life and work.

Our employability programmes for all ages have experienced an increase in numbers of local people accessing them. There has been an increase in the number of employers accessing the employment recruitment incentive which we operate as part of our youth guarantee (YPG) support with 81 young people via local businesses accessing this fund. Through YPG funding we have been able to extend a significant number of Kickstart Placements. CLLE has secured a contract for 104 foundation apprenticeship level 4/5 places for young people in Midlothian covering hospitality, automotive and construction. We have advertised 20 opportunities for paid work placements for the long term unemployed aged over 25. We have also supported 1341 adults or families to engage with one or more of our 157 learning opportunities offered across our first steps to certificated programmes. We operate a dedicated parental employability support programme offering support to 177 parents to get into work, education or training. The adult learning consultation indicates that of the 200 people we spoke to in February and March.

The key headlines from the data gathered are;

72% of respondents were keen to take part in learning over the next year and 52% of them were interested in gaining new qualifications to support with their employability
Learners are looking for blended learning models with a greater range of classes available in the evening

Supporting young people through youth work and wider learning opportunities

The youth work service has provided opportunities for 3467 young people, and there are currently waiting lists for young people to join provision in the Lasswade and Woodburn areas. P7 CLLE operated transitional support to high school programme has commenced in each cluster. The open Duke of Edinburgh Groups have started the residential elements of their awards. The CLLE service has developed a water awareness and safety programme for young people and it operates on a Thursday evening in Newbattle area and Fridays in Woodburn. CLLE supports the Young Carers project and have supported over 100 young people to prepare their young carers statement and complete an assessment of need. There are currently lunch time secondary school drop-ins for youth work for young carers in each cluster. The Bounce project is a diversionary project for those at risk of offending and has completed working with the second cohort of 10 young people. These young people have not reoffended whilst engaged with the project.

Instrumental Music Service

Following the Scottish Government's 100 day pledge to provide free music tuition, a review of the Instrumental Music Service is underway to ensure we can deliver a modern and sustainable service for the future. This review will also look at the role of visiting specialists in the arts within schools. Consultation with young people, parents and staff is being undertaken.

The Youth Music Initiative (YMI) funded by Creative Scotland has the aim of ensuring that every child in Scotland receives at least 12 hours of free instrumental music education by the time they leave primary school. The YMI has engaged with a total of 68 pupils in P5 through 3 ensemble projects and a further 2,960 primary school pupils through Drumming for Excellence. In addition, a pilot Early Years Music Project at Mayfield Nursery has been successful in engaging with nursery children using music to develop soft skills and pre-reading skills including recognising sounds, listening, co-operation, self-confidence and self-expression.

02. Challenges and Risks

21/22:

National Care Service Consultation

Decisions around what next have been paused at the moment due to local elections, however it should not be underestimated the increase in workload this shall evoke when decisions begin to be made around what is in the NCS and what is not, or indeed if everything is included. This brings increased risk to services and practice as officers begin to unpick what this means for their workforce and service area.

Scottish Childhood Interview Model

The new model of joint interviewing children and young people who have been at risk of abuse is welcomed however to date there has been no additional funding offered to social work teams. The training for this new model is resource intensive for both social workers, partners and their managers and it is a concern that no additional support with regards to funding has been forthcoming at this point. The challenge is that within Midlothian we are unable to offer more staff the opportunity to undertake this training due to other competing demands.

Impact of Covid-19

The impact of Covid across the entire children's service and CLLE remains a challenge.

During the last two years more children and young people have gone into kinship placements as a result of the pressures on families. The need to reprioritise resources to ensure there is adequate support in place to support the kinship carers has placed additional pressure on our social work teams who are already at capacity. In line with the foundations of the Promise we have aligned staff to other areas of the service so that they ensure earlier support via Family Group Decision Making which supports families to develop their own plan and identify what support they require. A plan to extend this service so that we continue to make a difference and improve outcomes for families is underway. We are currently pursuing external funding to support this.

Children's Services Referrals

As already highlighted earlier in the report the significant increase in referrals requires further analysis and a different approach to supporting the many families who are experiencing financial hardship. Work is ongoing with partner

agencies to consider how we address from a holistic perspective acknowledging that poverty is a growing area of concern and potential demand within our services. Over the course of 2021/22 referrals into Children's Services have risen from 6045 to 8287. The largest increase in referral reason was financial requests rising from 975 to 2140 over the twelve month period an increase of 119% .

Staffing

As with other parts of the Council the impact of the pandemic has had a significant impact on our staffing with sickness absence remaining an ongoing area of concern across services. Thanks to the flexibility and commitment of our staff we have been able to manage this. This should ease as the national Covid position changes.

Residential Care Homes

There continues to be a national shortage within the residential children's workforce in children's services. This is particularly so for children who have complex care needs such as autism and ASN. We have had to place children externally because of the lack of provision across Scotland, these cases relate to external placement breakdowns. We continue to work with partners to explore how best to meet the current demands and pressure whilst making sure we future proof our services to deliver sustainable options locally for children and young people with ASN and Complex and Enduring Needs

Foster Care As stated previously Midlothian Council's existing foster carers are an ageing population who are coming to the end of their fostering career. While Midlothian Council's recruitment statistics compared with other local authorities remains encouraging we continue to seek and explore other options. As identified in Q3 Interestingly, our potential adopters has more than doubled though the numbers of children awaiting adoption in Scotland has significantly reduced. We are already in dialogue with these potential adopters regards the adoption landscape and to determine whether long term foster care could be an option.

Kinship Care

Another growing area as discussed at the beginning of the report. In essence, our resources and kinship services are inextricably linked and rely on each other to rise to the pressure and demands of keeping our children and young in the local community.

CLLE

Our main challenge going forward continues to be access to suitable premises to meet the needs of those engaging in learning in all age groups including older people; employability support both individually and in groups and the delivery of youth work in some geographical areas. The lack of tools and platforms to allow people to engage online and face to face at the same time has still to be resolved although the roll out of Google classroom for all CLLE learners may help to alleviate some of this.

Challenges around access to devices and internet connectivity allowing participants to learn online remains a challenge. The roll out of digital devices to school pupils and the allocation of Connecting Scotland devices to adults has helped but there are still challenges with the cost of internet access and rising electricity charges for many of our most vulnerable learners.

Instrumental Music Service

Providing free tuition to all pupils whilst having to meet a significant savings agreed within the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be challenging. We are undertaking an option appraisal which shall consider how we best deliver and design a service that is modern, implementing the learning during the pandemic, whilst also delivering a service that is equitable and sustainable.

The risks and challenges within children's services and CLLE are highlighted within this report. As we begin to return to a sense of 'normality' across the services the impact of Covid should not be underestimated. This coupled with the challenges of poverty which will impact on many residents and families shall require us work in partnership with our voluntary and 3rd sector colleagues and across the council to ensure we are proactive in taking a holistic approach to supporting and working with families and residents within Midlothian.

Childrens Services, Partnerships and Communities



Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

Pls ● 4 ✔ 7 ? 1 ✔ 8

Service Plan Pls (latest)

Pls ● 3 ✔ 14 ? 1 ✔ 15

Corporate Pls Off Target

Pls ● 4

Average number of working days lost due to sickness absence (cumulative)

Percentage of complaints at stage 1 complete within 5 working days

Percentage of complaints at stage 2 complete within 20 working days

Percentage of complaints escalated and complete within 20 working days

Service Plan Pls Off Target

Pls ● 3

Participant satisfaction with CLL services

Number of CHs deferred

Foundation Apprenticeships completed through CLL

Service High Risks (latest)

▲ 1

Workforce capacity

All Risks - CSPC

Risks ▲ 13 ✔ 14

Key ● Off Target

Pls ✔ On Target

? Data Not Yet Available

✔ Data Only

Key ● Off Target

Pls ✔ On Target

? Data Not Yet Available

✔ Data Only

Key Risks ▲ High Risk/Medium Risk

✔ Low Risk