

Children's Services 2024/25 Service Plan

Report by Joan Tranent, Head of Children's Services, Children, Young People and Partnerships

Report for Decision

1. Recommendation

- Council is asked to note the progress made towards improving outcomes for children and families within Midlothian Council;
- approve the priority actions set out the Children's Services Improvement Plan 2024/25; and
- that the Children's Services Improvement Plan will be shared more widely, including on the Council's website.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

The purpose of the attached report is to:

- provide Council with an update on work undertaken to support Midlothian's children and families 2023/24; and
- seek Council's approval of the priority actions as set out in the Children Services 24/25 Service Improvement Plan.

3 Background

3.1 This Children's Service Plan links to and complements the actions being undertaken to deliver the outcomes set out in the Midlothian Community Partnership Plan 2023-2027:

- Individuals and communities have improved health and skills for learning, life and work
- No child or household living in poverty
- Significant progress is made towards net zero carbon emissions by 2030

3.2 This Children's Services Improvement Plan brings together the medium and long-term activities to ensure our children, young people, families and our communities are provided with a variety of supports and services to enable them to build a sustainable future that is equitable and provides opportunities for all.

3.3 We will continue to embed a culture of continuous improvement and innovation across the Directorate, in partnership with colleagues and services within the Place Directorate. The Plan sets out how we will achieve our vision, what actions we will undertake and how we will measure our success.

Update

- 3.4 There have been a number of successes and achievements within the service over the past year. The strengthened partnership working within the wider Children, Young People and Partnership Directorate has been key to us being able to offer the right support at the earliest opportunity to children, young people and their families within our communities.

A review of the differing referral routes into children's services has successfully enabled the service to redirect referrals into appropriate services such as Income maximisation, Scottish Welfare Fund, Family Wellbeing Service and Early Intervention.

Whilst there continues to be a significant and unparalleled increase in referrals into children's services the number of children's names on child protection register remains consistent reflecting the impact of effective early intervention.

The numbers of children's names on the Child Protection Register at the end of Q4 reporting was 42 which equates 2.2 per 1,000 population of Midlothian, comparable with the Scottish average which is 2.3. This is a similar picture with looked after at home, our numbers equate to 2.1 per 1000 population which Scottish average is 2.6. For looked after and accommodated children the Midlothian data reports 7.4 per 1000 children whilst the Scottish average is much higher at 9.7. This data supports our theory that we are accommodating less children and therefore are supporting families to remain together where safe to do so. As with all data the numbers change on a daily basis therefore a degree of caution is required.

Midlothian's Promise workstreams are well underway and continue to drive forward the wider partnership and children's services improvement actions.

The Family Wellbeing Service is more established and beginning to have an impact. A key focus has been working in partnership with education colleagues to improve children's attendance and wellbeing. Over 100 families and 177 children and young people are being supported through this integrated service.

A key aim over the past year was to increase the number of families who utilised self-directed support, option 1. This is where families are assessed and choose to take the funding to organise their own support. Over the reporting year there was over a 10% increase in families choosing this option which equates to 87 families.

The Midlothian House Project continues to be held as an example of excellent practice, as recognised following a recent visit by Fraser McKinley, Chief Executive of the Promise Scotland.

Further details about our achievements and challenges can be found in the Children's Services Improvement Plan 2024-2025 (Appendix B).

4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

4.1 Resource

While funding is in place for the Whole Family Support Service until the end of financial year 2025, the long-term funding implications need to be considered. There is also ongoing recruitment issues where the public sector is competing with the salaries provided by the private sector and agencies, leading to staffing shortages in key areas.

4.2 Digital

There are no digital implications directly arising from this report. Digital Services are involved in the delivery of individual projects in line with requirements.

4.3 Risk

The key risk is budget efficiencies leading to gaps in key service areas, overwhelming the wider Children's Services provision, and impacting our ability to deliver parts of the service plan. The cost-of-living crisis could also see large increases in demand on the service, which will be difficult to manage given current recruitment difficulties.

4.4 Ensuring Equalities

We are fully committed to realising a children's rights approach to all of our work and ensuring that we embed the principles of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

4.4 Additional Report Implications (See Appendix A)

See Appendix A

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Reducing the gap in learning outcomes
Reducing the gap in economic circumstances

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious
- None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

Every decision involved in delivering the service plan is considered from a Best Value perspective.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The development of this service plan has been driven by the needs of our community and will be delivered in partnership with private and voluntary providers.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The delivery of this service plan will result in medium and longer-term positive impacts upon the two key related priorities of the Single Midlothian Plan.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Providing a high-quality service to our children and wider community is, by its very nature, preventative.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable.