

Children's Services, Partnership and Communities

Performance Report Quarter Two 2020/21



01. Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

'Our vision is to improve families' lives by giving them the support they need, when they need it'

Children's Services have shown improvement throughout 2020 despite the many challenges posed by Covid-19. The Joint Inspection of services for children in need of care and protection in Midlothian, highlighted many good areas of practice. An action plan addressing the identified areas for improvement shall ensure that our journey of continuous improvement is progressed thus improving the outcomes for the children, young people and their families within Midlothian.

Within Children's services and community and lifelong learning we have managed to adapt and respond to the challenges of Covid-19 during quarter 2. The vast majority of tasks undertaken by children's service staff have remained similar to pre-covid times with the safety and protection of children and young people very much at the fore front of everything we do. Within CLL staff were initially redeployed to support communities however as schools have reopened they have reverted back to their original tasks. A priority is to ensure that all the young people who were due to go to college or further education are supported to either stay on at school or to support them with their remote learning for their college course. The foundation apprenticeships and other funded projects to support young people into employability are being progressed, therefore Q3 shall see us reporting on the numbers undertaking the various different routes of learning and employment.

Between February and March 2020 the Care Inspectorate with its partners completed a joint inspection of services for children and young people in need of care and protection in Midlothian with the following grades awarded;

- Leadership and Direction – GOOD
- Impact on Families – GOOD
- Impact on Children and Young People – GOOD
- Improvement in the safety, wellbeing and life chances of vulnerable children and young people – GOOD

The report was very positive citing that the Inspection team were very confident that the partnership in Midlothian has the capacity to continue to improve.

Working collaboratively with partners in health, police, education, The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and the third sector, a partnership approach will now be taken to develop an action plan to meet the areas identified for improvement.

Integrated Children's Services Plan:

A new 3 year plan was completed and submitted to the Scottish Government in draft pending final governance approval by the NHS in September 2020.

The Promise:

Ongoing work around the planning to take the recommendations forward continues and Midlothian is represented at this strategic group. It is hoped by the beginning of 2021 a plan will be in place.

Foster Carers and Adopters:

We currently have 44 foster carers who currently look after 54 children and young people and therefore are at capacity and working hard to support vulnerable children and families, some have converted into adult carers to support Continuing Care placements. Though a number of foster carers also retired during 2019/20 though we have been fortunate to replace many of our fostering population. Though Covid-19 has had an impact on our ability to recruit in the way we normally would the team are using available technology and have already ran a number of Preparation Groups. Our foster carer input has been excellent during the pandemic and despite a number of anxieties, they continue to accommodate children as well as help and support family contact.

Adoption and Permanence Planning:

Despite the impact of Covid19 Midlothian Council continue to run a permanence service. The Care Inspectorate did an unannounced visit in February 2020 and the service received a very positive report where the evaluative Grades awarded were all 'Good'. The Care Inspectorate commented on the quality of our own internal mechanism for recruiting adopters (and foster Carers) and asked that this be continued.

Residential Care Homes:

Our care homes continue to provide residential care for up to 9 young people with one emergency bed. Our residential care staff have proved to be excellent during the pandemic and have gone above and beyond to support our most vulnerable looked after population. This includes working longer shifts, covering locum cover to reduce the footfall in our care homes and in some instances leaving their own family environment to provide a consistent high level of care to our young people.

Kinship Care:

Midlothian's Kinship Carers continue to be a key resource for children and young people who can no longer remain with their parents and we currently have 69 children placed in kinship care. Children's services remain committed to supporting kinship carers both financially and emotionally to ensure that all placements are offered the right support when needed. This was borne out in the recent increase in allowances which was also awarded to Kinship Carers. The Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) statistics for 2018/19 illustrate that the majority of children (70%) who are unable to live with their birth parents, were provided with a secure and stable setting through a kinship arrangement. This is in line with our policy direction to secure children within an extended family arrangement wherever possible.

Youth Justice Strategy:

The Midlothian Youth Justice Strategy, 2020-22 has been signed off by the Getting It Right For Every Midlothian Child (GIRFEMC) Board and will now be rolled out across all partner agencies. We continue to strengthen the positive links and networking with the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ) and the Scottish Government to focus on priority themes;

- Advancing the whole system approach
- Improving life chances
- Developing Capacity and Improvement

Mental Health:

In order to ensure that the work that Midlothian Early Action Partnership (MEAP) is doing is not duplicated a strategic planning group for children and young people's mental health, has been established as a sub group reporting to the GIRFEMC Board to ensure that all the work undertaken across the community planning partnership is set out in a plan with identified actions to take forward. The strategic planning group shall have the responsibility of ensuring the plan is taken forward and to bring a progress report to the GIRFEC Board on a 6 monthly basis.

Raising Attainment – This is a key improvement area identified as part of the findings from the recent joint children's services inspection. In order to progress this area of work a further sub group has recently been established which will report to the GIRFEMC board. This group will also ensure that all the work undertaken across the community planning partnership is set out in a plan with identified actions to take forward. The strategic planning group shall have the responsibility of ensuring the plan is taken forward and to bring a progress report to the GIRFEC Board on a 6 monthly basis.

Income Maximisation Project:

Midlothian Council is working in Partnership with Penicuik Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to improve the financial circumstances of families supported by the Children and Families Social Work teams. A dedicated Income Maximisation Worker based at Penicuik CAB will work with and receive referrals from Children and Families Social Work Department and work primarily with families where children are on the child protection register or are looked after.

The Income Maximisation Worker will develop a wraparound service through liaison with mental health projects, family support, AIM HI Project, specialist debt/money advice worker and linking with local organisations such as Health in Mind, VOCAL, Sure Start and Changeworks. The worker will aim to increase household income and improve the quality of life for the family, ensuring families experiencing difficulties are able to access the service.

Family Group Decision-Making:

We developed a pilot Family Group Decision-Making service (FGDM) to empower families and meet the recommendation set out in a number of policy documents which include recommendations of the Independent Care Review. The pilot commenced in October 2019 and currently consists of 0.5 FTE manager and 1.00 FTE social worker. To develop the various policies, systems and processes we established a steering group and were fortunate to have members of the City of Edinburgh's FGDM be part of the group. Due to relative small size of the service in Midlothian we have had to look at the areas that the service is able to focus on. We have chosen to concentrate our efforts on the following areas:

Pre- birth Family Meetings- all pre-birth children with a social work plan have the right to be offered a family meeting. Children aged 0-5 who have been referred for Initial child protection case conference.

Emergency family meetings and those on the cusp of care. To date the FGDM Service has received 43 referrals which include support to remain at home, to explore kinship options and sustain the kinship placement. Out of these referrals 13 did not proceed although the rest involved family meetings or significant pieces of work – this statistic is comparable with other FGDM services.

COVID supporting vulnerable families – People and Partnerships directorate including education, children's services and CLL worked together and shared resources during school closures to make sure that all vulnerable families were supported. A directorate wide gatekeeping process was introduced to review referrals for families in need and provide appropriate supports including 1:1 youth work, places at early years and school hubs. The council worked in partnership with Midlothian Sure start and After school clubs to provide similar support during the summer holidays. Over the period of school closures children and young people attended school hubs. Over the summer 765 children from 599 families attended early years or activity hubs.

HFLC:

HFLC was a key part of providing support to vulnerable families during lockdown and summer 2020. Over 18 weeks Hawthorn supported 121 children from 63 vulnerable families. Hawthorn gained approval from the Care inspectorate to temporarily change their registration to provide support from birth to 16 to ensure families could be supported together. As a consequence of the ongoing need for family group and sibling support Hawthorn has now had a permanent variation to provide day care for children from birth to the end of primary school.

While some of Hawthorn's normal activities and groups remain on hold due to COVID restrictions nursery placements have resumed and a number of families who were supported during lockdown have remained at Hawthorn. Hawthorn has also started providing 3-5 placements as part of Early Years expansion.

Given the new experiences prompted by COVID Hawthorn has sought further feedback from service users, staff and partners and is in the final plan for redesign and review will be shared in Q3 with a view to a formal review recommencing.

Blended CLL and Employability Learning Offer for Adults and Young People:

CLL staff have undertaken consultation with learners and stakeholders on their preferred learning models. Small socially distanced face to face groups were preferred by all as their first choice of learning. The team have developed and refined their Covid 19 learning offer to reflect the needs of both young people and adults offering 1;1 outreach, small group work and online learning including foundation apprenticeships, Nat 5 Maths, literacy and numeracy, wellbeing and targeted employability programmes. CLL have both created and are delivering a learning offer for 100 young people across the 6 secondary schools who had planned to leave school in June to seek work. The PAVE and PAVE 2 programmes for 56 young people have been revised with a new more direct referral route in place to support young people in S4/5, one to one support for vulnerable young people aged 16-19 has been expanded by additional resource transfer from Children and Families. Contracts have been awarded by the DYW to CLL for adult employability work delivering short courses in customer service and construction, The parental employability support programme funded by Scottish Government has been launched with staff recruited to the 2 posts and initial client referrals. The CLL service has taken over operation of Penicuik Town hall and is developing a user led management committee, similarly a user groups led management committee is being established for the Dalkeith Woodburn Community hub buildings (Aim High /MARC/Grassy Riggs).

02. Challenges and Risks

Impact of Covid-19:

Whilst we continue to operate a rota for staff being in the office. The impact of not being physical around their peers and having access to their line manager as easily as they did pre-covid, is having an impact on staff morale and practice. Whilst home working has its benefits, when managing crisis situations in particular it does pose challenges. Being able to respond with a home visit with your line manager often results in the de-escalation of a situation, however this is not always possible if you are home working in another area as is your line manager. The ability to manage the situation requires a different approach and planning. In order to ensure that staff are fully supported across the services and in conjunction with Health and Social Care colleagues we are looking at how we can provide staff with opportunities for relaxation, wellness and mindfulness. This is as a result of what staff told us in the recent staff survey and from communication with staff directly.

Young People with complex Needs:

Children's Services budget continues to remain a significant and ongoing challenge. Some of this is in part as a result of several factors though we continue to discuss future planning with our Health and Social Care partners as well as external organisations.

Young people who require a high level of specialised care and have severe and complex needs. Whilst there is a lack of specialised resources for those young people who require this high level of support across Scotland, within Midlothian we have opened two additional houses to accommodate 5 young people. We have commissioned two different agencies to provide their packages of care and support. This good practice model allows the young people to remain within their communities, close to their families and attending Saltersgate School. Ongoing work around the transition from school into adult services continues

Secure Care:

Secure care is a very expensive resource and often children's services have limited input as to whether or not a young person is secured. We have invested in our local care homes to ensure the workforce has capacity and the skills to manage young people with challenging behaviours. The Positive Approaches to risk taking guidance has also proven to be beneficial to both the residential staff and the young people living in our care homes. Furthermore, the importance of having a multi-agency approach to young people who are at risk of secure is promoted via the Vulnerable Young Person's Protocol

Mental Health:

CAMHS (NHS) waiting list continues to be a challenge however within Midlothian we are keen to work together to identify other alternatives which could support the child/young person. A strategic mental health group is being established which shall report into the GIRFEC Board. We are keen to ensure that we have a good oversight of all the resources available and to capture the scale of need for wellbeing and specialised mental health services. We liaise regularly with our colleagues from CAMHS (NHS) in order to address any immediate concerns.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: (UNCRC)

The UNCRC bill published on 1 September 2020 is being considered by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. If enacted will require a significant piece of work for the local authority and beyond. Whilst we are already adhering to many of the requirements, there will be a requirement to report every three years on how we comply with children's rights.

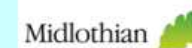
COVID supporting vulnerable families:

As schools returned the gatekeeping groups has been put on hold. Across the county and directorate we continue to see the impact of COVID on children, young people and families. There is an acceptance that this shared resource group may be resumed at a later date.

CLL learning offer requires to be fleet of foot and flexible:

To meet the changing landscape of learners needs for both adults and young people with a strong focus on employability and addressing poverty. This is challenging with the restrictions on access to venues and technology for those digitally excluded but is being actively progressed. Covid restrictions make face to face employer engagement and work experience particularly challenging. We are working with partners in the Employability and Learning CPP group to develop virtual on line work experience offers. The return to a more restrictive lockdown will require CLL staff to revert back to community resilience support roles.

Childrens Services, Partnerships and Communities



Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

● 3 ● 10 ? 0 ? 6

Service Plan Actions (latest)

▲ 6 ● 17 ? 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

● 0 ● 6 ? 16 ? 10

Service Risks (latest)

▲ 4

Corporate PIs Off Target

PIs ● 3

% of service priority Actions on target / completed, of the total number

Percentage of complaints escalated and complete within 20 working days

Average time in working days for a full response for escalated complaints

Service Plan Actions Off Target

Actions ▲ 6

Deliver the actions in the child poverty plan to meet the requirements of the Child Poverty Act

CLL will continue to operate the school work experience programme working with schools and employers

STEM CLL will continue to support STEM activities including, Midlothian Science Zone Graduate apprenticeship, teacher STEM work experience placements, STEM ambassadors and P7 inspiration programme

Continue to increase number of Modern Apprentices supported by CLL

Support learning and development opportunities in the community for people from underrepresented groups

Develop new learning activities to respond to the challenges of community empowerment, community cohesion, peer support and new planning legislation

Service Plan PIs Off Target

PIs ● 0

There are no PIs Off Target

High Risks

Risks ▲ 0

There are 4 Medium Risks and no High Risks

Key
PIs
● Off Target
● On Target
? Data Only
? Data Not Yet Available

Key
Actions
▲ Off Target
● On Target/Complete
? Data Not Yet Available

Key
PIs
● Off Target
● On Target
? Data Only
? Data Not Yet Available

Key
Risks
▲ High Risk/Medium Risk
? Data Not Yet Available