

Children's Services, Partnership and Communities Annual Performance Report 2020/21



01. Progress in delivery of strategic outcomes

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.

Whilst this report refers to Q4 reporting it also summarises the events that have taken place over the past year. This has been a year like no other with a global pandemic impacting on everyone of us and our services. Home working became the default position for many staff in order to try and reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Having endured two lock downs since March 2020 where schools, shops and hospitality outlets were closed down, our services had to adapt to the increased level of risk for some people within our communities.

Communities and lifelong learning very quickly began to divert resources to supporting communities via the resilience work, ensuring that those within our communities who were shielding or self-isolating were able to access food and receive their prescriptions. In addition given the impact of school closure and remote working for some young people, there was a big push to support those who were unable to access college, university or work placements. Work began around how they continued to engage with those most vulnerable and at highest risk of reaching a negative destination. As the year progressed there has been significant investment to ensure that those young people are prioritised as we begin to emerge from the latest round of restrictions.

Within children's services they immediately agreed a rota for staff to be in the building as working from home was not a viable option when trying to assess and offer reassurance that children, young people and families are safe. This year has been a challenge as home visits had to continue where safe to do so and with appropriate PPE, and it is fair to say that this has caused a lot of angst and worry amongst staff and the requirement for senior managers to be around to offer additional support. This said most activities such as case conferences, reviews, children's hearings and planning meetings have all continued using digital devices, thus we have ensured that children's future planning has not been paused as a result of the pandemic.

Within Children's Services and Communities and Lifelong Learning we have continued to adapt and respond to the challenges of COVID-19. 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 placed at the fore front of everything we do. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, Children's Services have continued to show improvement throughout 2020.

Communities and Lifelong Learning have continued to offer support to adults and families who required additional support and also offered one to one sessions with young people who were unable to attend school or college but were in need of additional input. In addition the volume of grants that have been on offer to young people and adults to support them into further training or employment has taken up a significant amount of time.

People and Partnerships directorate which included all partners education, children's services and CLL have continued to work together and share resources during school closures to ensure all vulnerable families were supported. A directorate wide vulnerable children's overview group was established which maintained an overview of children returning to in school learning with a view to responding at an early stage to any challenges or issues that arise as a result.

The Promise/UNCRC

There is ongoing planning to take forward the recommendations set out in The Promise and the UNCRC legislation. These changes remain key drivers and Midlothian is represented at relevant national and local strategic groups. The directorate conference in February included a moving session on the Promise. This showed immediate impact with school staff contacting care experienced young person to share memories of their role in his life.

National Child Protection Guidance

The new National Child Protection Guidance is due to be implemented by all Local Authorities from May 2021. The new child protection minimum data set reflects timescales set within the new guidance. Midlothian has now started reporting against the new data set and progress will continue to be monitored by the Performance and Quality Sub Group of the Public Protection Committee.

Equity and Inclusion

The new Equity and Inclusion GIRFEC subgroup is now established and partners have been confirmed for the group. The group have invested time in developing a new vision which has now been adopted as the Directorate wide vision *All children, young people, adults and communities in Midlothian are supported to be the best they can be. This will be achieved through a nurturing, respectful and collaborative approach that promotes wellbeing, equity, inclusion and lifelong learning.* This vision and approach were shared at the first Directorate wide conference in February and will remain a focus of the future conferences.

The draft plan for 2021/2022 will be presented to the GIRFEC board in May and focuses on 6 themes: the development of an equity and inclusion strategy; a review of Additional Support needs; attendance and engagement in education; nurture; poverty and attainment and family learning.

Reducing Poverty

The income maximisation project remains in its one year pilot phase with a remit to work with parents of children who are on the child protection register and those looked after at home. The first evaluation of the work achieved highlights that between October 2020 to the end of March 2021, 30 referrals were received which led to 18 direct contacts with parents. Outcomes of these referrals have evidenced an encouraging start with an evidenced service user financial gain of £29,877.18. A number of parents were also signposted onto other services for additional support i.e. fuel poverty, employment etc.

This offer has been successful in making financial gains for those who are able to access the support. Due to capacity we have not been able to extend this support to families at Hawthorn Family Learning Centre, as was originally intended. However Hawthorn continues to support families with food hampers, home cooked meals and vouchers.

Mental Health

There are a range of strategic groups in place to review and develop the local supports for mental Health. The Mental Health strategic group is now established and developing a plan for 2021/2022. MEAP planning is progressing to explore new tests of change to address early action and the Community Mental Health Fund has now reviewed further applications to support new initiatives for this financial year.

Updates are shared via the GIRFEC Board and operational manager meetings.

Family Group Decision Making

During the period October 2019 – April 2021, the service managed 87 referrals which is comparable with the more established and larger Family Group Decision Making services across Scotland. Since October 2020 – April 2021, the service has already received 42 referrals, 14 meetings have been held and an additional 8 plans created. 6 referrals remain in progress. There is evidence of improved outcomes with children not being placed in local authority care or returning to families. New processes have allowed the team to proactively seek referrals for pre-birth or ICPC for children under 5.

Given the success of the project we have agreed that Family Group Decision Making service will be part of our core business going forward. We are currently negotiating the composition of the service. While the project was originally attached to the Family Placement Team, it is more appropriate the services sit within the auspices of early intervention going forward.

Kinship Care

Local kinship carers have long been regarded as crucial to caring for our children and are viewed as a valued and respected group. We have noted an increase in the number of kinship placements made over the past year and believe this is due, in part, to the ongoing success of the Family Group Decision Making service. While this growth area is to be welcomed we do acknowledge that our current kinship resources are directed towards the assessment and care planning demands of kinship care. As a consequence, there is little time to provide early interventions and supports within the wider community. Our proposal is that we align early intervention and engagement with kinship care alongside the Family Group Decision Making Service

National Housing Project

The National Housing Project was officially launched in Midlothian on 1 July 2020. Between this date and 30th September 2020, 10 young people were successful in gaining a place on the project. The young people are all care experienced and come from a range of placement/care backgrounds. A steering group was established with representation from: National Housing Project; Children's Services; Residential Services; Police Scotland; Housing Services; NHS Lothian; Community and Lifelong Learning; Skills Development Scotland and the 3rd sector (Gorebridge Community Cares). As part of the initial stages of the project, an updated housing nomination document was developed and as a consequence, Housing Services have committed 6 properties per cohort. Meetings have been organised with the 3 Housing Associations who have indicated an interest in supporting the project.

An official press release was issued on 28 October 2020 which received significant press and social media interest.

5-12 Residential provision

Children's services have seen a marked reduction in children and young people being placed externally. However, our recent data suggests that there is a real change in the age and profile of the few children who have been placed externally, mainly due to the level of distress and trauma these children aged 5-10 present. Some small children are unable to cope with the intimacy which is part of family living and can only cope with residential provision at that point in their lives.

Children's Services were fortunate that the Elected Members agreed funding for a local therapeutic environment for a small number of children to help them heal and recover from their previous experiences and in doing so be able to be reintroduced into family living. A project board and plan has now been established and a property purchased. A Working groups is under way and in consultation with the care inspectorate and care experienced young people they will develop a brief for the amendments to the home.

CLL

The Communities, Lifelong learning and Employability Service (CLLE) have been supporting communities in partnership with the Red Cross to provide support with prescription delivery and shopping. The team have been a key partner in the delivery of the vouchers for the Midlothian Food and Key Essential Fund delivering 4613 vouchers and fuel support. The team have continued to deliver on their responsibility to support all age groups to build skills for learning life and work. The learning offer has been blended online and face to face in small groups or gate visit when permitted. We have supported vulnerable individuals throughout the last three months specifically young people, families seeking employment and those accessing support through our literacy, numeracy and ESOL Service. Our family learning offer has been recognised as having significant impact on participants by Education Scotland. CLL has provided one to one support to 473 adults and young people over the course of the last year in a variety of settings e.g. gate visits. Although our overall engagement with local people through face to face contact has significantly reduced we are now setting engagement recovery targets as part of our revised offer.

Significant funding (over £1.5 million) has been secured for employability programmes including: Foundation Apprenticeships, No One Left Behind, Modern Apprenticeships, third sector Kickstart partnership, Parental Employability Support and the young persons guarantee. School Leaver Destination figures published in Feb 2021 was encouraging at 94.7% and ninth across Scotland despite challenging circumstances.

We have now entered into the strategic planning phase to deliver on the new CLD partnership plan for 21/24 which will be presented to council and the community planning partnership in Sept 2021. This will cover the joined up learning and communities offer, staff development needs and identify unmet need and ensure provision is adequate and efficient to meet our statutory duties as per the Education Act (1980).

02. Challenges and Risks

Impact of Covid-19

Whilst children's services continue to operate a rota for staff being in the office and working from home, the impact of staff not being physically around their peers and having access to their line manager as easily as they did pre-COVID continues to have an impact on staff morale, well-being and practice. We need to ensure that we are taking cognisance of National guidance and updating our risk assessments accordingly. Opportunities for mindfulness and relaxation for all workers need to continue to be in place.

Over the coming months as we move out of COVID we also need to be in a position to respond to the presenting needs of our most vulnerable families. The impact of poverty on families cannot be underestimated and therefore we need to ensure that readily accessible support is available to those who need it. The work being prioritised and progressed within all sub group activity will continue to highlight these areas throughout the 2021/22 reporting period.

Additional issues around children and young people having access to early mental health support is an area of work being prioritised.

The CLD strategic plan will address recovery participation targets and challenges in order to build skills for learning, life and work including access to face to face localised free delivery spaces. Whilst securing funding for employability programmes is viewed as a success it presents an ongoing challenge in relation to reporting requirements, building and management capacity, temporary staff complement and increased expectations from stakeholders and participants this will be a long term employability offer.

Instrumental Music Service

Staff have worked creatively to adapt the service to offer remote learning. Whilst this has proven to be very challenging the service has continued to teach pupils. Going forward we require a service that is both modern and builds on the learning from our different approach during Covid. The service also has to meet the ambitious financial targets set previously which continues to be a significant challenge moving forward.

Childrens Services, Partnerships and Communities

Midlothian 

Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

● 5 ● 7 ? 1 📊 6

Service Plan Actions (latest)

● 5 ● 18 ? 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

● 2 ● 5 ? 0 📊 25

Service Risks (latest)

▲ 4

Corporate PIs Off Target

PIs ● 5

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

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

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 Actions Off Target

Actions ● 5

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

Evidence further implementation of the Safe & Together model across children's services

Draft Key principles for child protection case conferences using the Safe & Together Approach

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 ● 2

What percentage of children de-registered had a FGDM

What percentage of children placed on a CSO at home had FGDM

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