

**Keeping the Promise in Midlothian****Report by Joan Tranent, Chief Officer, Children's Services, Partnerships & Communities****Report for Decision:****1.1 Council is asked to:**

- I. Note the significant progress and achievements delivered by Midlothian Council in its commitment to the Promise,
- II. Note the revised '#Keeping the Promise in Midlothian', publication alongside the updated 3-year Corporate Parent plan,
- III. Agree the future priority areas and action, and in particular,
- IV. The launch of our Promise Guarantee,
- V. Note that Edinburgh College has also committed to the Promise Guarantee and other partners have the scheme under consideration,
- VI. Agree the 2023/24 proposed 5% uplift to Midlothian Council foster carers fees.

**2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary**

- 2.1** This report provides Council with a brief overview of The Promise, the context from which it emerged and the significant achievements already delivered within Midlothian, as well as our key priorities going forward. It is important that the interface with our Corporate Parenting Plan is articulated and understood.

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### 3 Background

- 3.1** In 2016 the First Minister instructed a root and branch independent review of the Care System in Scotland. The independent review concluded that Scotland needed to radically transform the way in which it designs and structures services to better support children and families. Thus 'The Promise' emerged as a key driver to radically transform services in Scotland. The ambition is that Scotland will be:

***“...the best place to grow up and a place where all children are loved, safe and respected so they can reach their full potential...”***

- 3.2** Scottish Government and all 32 Councils committed to 'Keeping The Promise' and to deliver on the changes required throughout. Plan 21-24 is the first of three plans that set out how Scotland can, by 2030, keep its promise to care experienced children and young people. The plan focusses on:

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

### 4. Successes and Achievements

- 4.1** Children's Services had already embarked on its own journey of change and since 2013 has worked relentlessly to ensure that where possible children and young people remain with their birth or kinship families. Over the last five years, the number of looked-after children in Midlothian has reduced by **33.6%** and the number of children living with kin carers as opposed to 'stranger' care has increased. The data in relation to referrals and service demands highlights that the workload is not reducing. However, it does suggest a change in how we work *with* families as opposed to seeking intrusive, compulsory measures of intervention.
- 4.2.** Our solution-focused approach has allowed us to create flexible and responsive services within our existing budgets, and in doing so prevent children coming into the care system in the first instance. The investment into services such as Kinship Care, Family Group Decision Making, the Midlothian House Project and our Income Maximisation Officers (who to date have supported our families to recover **£367,293** in benefits) are truly having an impact. Our strong youth justice partnership has diverted a number of children and young people away from criminality. This has been achieved through innovative partnership campaigns and initiatives, namely "No Knives Better Lives".

Furthermore, our longitudinal data illustrates that these diversions have resulted in a reduction of the number of young people being referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) on offence grounds. While we do need to be mindful with regard to our youth justice figures, as of April 2023, our figures were the lowest in Scotland. This trend is also reflected in our 'repeat referrals' which stood at **24** as of April 2023, compared to **33** the previous year.

- 4.3** In 2022/23 and based on Scottish Governments allocation methodology, Midlothian Council received £535,000 from the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) to develop local family supports. During this time period and as part of its restructure, Education committed additional resources to design a new service that was neither aligned with Education or Children's Services. Instead we agreed that the service be underpinned by our joint strategic aims and local strength based, non-stigmatising approach. The evolution of this service including the interface with our 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector partners remains a future priority.
- 4.4** For children who have no option other than to live within an alternative setting, such a foster care or care home, we ensure they experience the best care possible. This is evident in a recent inspection into our care homes for young people, where we received grades of 'very good', a significant achievement. Though the recruitment of foster carers remains a national challenge for all Councils we remain committed to increasing our foster care population. Given the economic challenges and cost of living crisis we previously agreed a 5% uplift in the maintenance element of looking after a child; ensuring that kinship carers would also benefit from the increase. However as part of our ongoing commitment to recruiting and retaining foster carers we seek a 5% increase to the foster care 'fee' element for 2023-24.
- 4.5** We are delighted to announce that we are one of the few Councils in Scotland to develop our nationally recognised Midlothian House Project. The project supports young people exiting the care system to live connected and fulfilling lives. The young people are supported by a holistic team to ensure that no care leaver becomes homeless. This project has been recognised nationally and quite rightly, viewed as a model others should aspire towards.

## **5. Corporate Parenting**

- 5.1** While the ambition of The Promise is to overhaul the current care system it does not negate our Corporate Parenting duties. Scottish Government defines Corporate Parenting as the performance and actions necessary to uphold the rights of and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver to ensure their physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational developments are promoted.

**5.2** Midlothian Council fully embraced the role of being a Corporate Parent many years ago and remains committed to making sure care-experienced children and young people continue to experience high quality services. We have recently revised our Corporate Parenting plan, in line with our wider Promise commitments

**5.3** Midlothian's active **Champions Board** means that we hear directly from a range of children and young people. Our 'Champs and **Young Champs**' regularly meet with adults and professional from across the sector to provide insight into their 'lived' experience and advise on service improvements. Midlothian Council employs a dedicated Participation Coordinator to support and empower these young people. The following, while not exhaustive, are examples of what we have delivered by learning from our young people:

- Leisure card which offers free or substantially reduced fees for a range of sporting and leisure activities;
- Support for young people undertaking driving lessons;
- Worked with the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration to redecorate and Children's Hearing Centre to create a child-friendly environment;
- Work closely with education and 3rd sector partners to provide bespoke curriculum for care experienced young people;
- Developing a child friendly animated version of our '#Keeping the Promise in Midlothian' document;
- Established our nationally acclaimed Midlothian House Project model, and,
- Developed a nurture led and trauma-informed workforce.

## **6. Future Planning**

**6.1** Note the progress made in our journey of change, endorsed by the Promise, which has enabled a cultural shift towards a rights based, non-statutory approach across Children's Services. While the current economic climate is challenging, we remain resolute in delivering on our commitments so that care-experienced children and young people are supported to be the best they can be.

**6.2** Approve our '#Keeping the Promise in Midlothian' pledges which incorporate a number of actions that will enhance and strengthen our existing commitments. These actions include:

- I. A formal launch of our Promise Guarantee to care experienced young people who may wish to work with the Council, including a guaranteed interview;
- II. Note that Edinburgh College have also agreed to support the Promise Guarantee and will provide Care Experienced Young People with a guaranteed interview;
- III. Other partners are currently reviewing whether they can commit to the Promise Guarantee Scheme;
- IV. Elected Members, and Senior Officers will provide a range of mentoring opportunities should Care Experienced Young People wish to know more about their roles and responsibilities;
- V. Strengthen, and widen local family support through further collaboration with the 3rd Sector;

- VI. In line with our Promise commitment, provide local foster carers with a 5% fee uplift for 2023/24 commensurate with the Midlothian Council employee award;
- VII. Notwithstanding the national challenges, attempt to recruit bespoke and tailored foster carers to meet the changing demands i.e. unaccompanied asylum seeking children, sibling groups, teenagers;
- VIII. Strengthen our training to further develop a highly skilled, trauma informed workforce;
- IX. Further communication of the promise will be co-designed with children and young people to inform and engage with our staff, elected members, children, young people, families, communities, key stakeholders and the national governance and oversight groups;
- X. Our young champs are co-producing an animated child friendly version of our 'Keeping the Promise in Midlothian' commitments.

### **7.3 Digital**

None

### **4.4 Risk**

The successes outlined in this report are as a result of being forward thinking and innovative in the way in which we have used our resources. Whilst not the driving force, there is no doubt that the culmination of our local efforts to deliver improved outcomes, does achieve savings.

While recognising our local financial pressures and demands the impact of not agreeing to the foster carer fee increase is that we cannot be competitive in what is an extremely competitive market. More importantly, we will may lose the goodwill of our local foster carers who always go 'above and beyond'.

### **4.5 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)**

The Promise is premised on delivering positive change for our most vulnerable children, young people and families. The launch of our Promise Guarantee means that our vulnerable young care leavers will be afforded the same opportunities as many protected groups. Please refer to the attached Integrated Impact Assessment.

### **4.6 Additional Report Implications**

## **APPENDIX A – Report Implications**

### **A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan**

This work is a part of the Single Midlothian Plan's key priority and also aligns with the preventative and early intervention approach. The direction of travel is also supported by the national drivers previously mentioned; the Independent Care Review and the Promise.

### **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**

The rationale for the proposals contained within the report is based on achieving best value through effectively managed and governed services. In addition to delivering on Midlothian Council's commitment to the Promise the proposal contribute towards sustained, continues improvement.

### **A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

Throughout our journey of change we have regularly consulted with, and listened to a number of stakeholders including: parents, carers, children, young people and local communities

## **A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes**

The proposals outlined in the report will ensure our future performance is predicated on the continued drive towards local, community based resources.

## **A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

The rationale for the report is to illustrate the journey to preventative, rights based services that work in partnership with families in an effort to reduce our statutory intervention,

## **A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development**

Not applicable

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Background Papers/Resource Links (if applicable)**

The Promise: [Home - The Promise](#)

#Keeping the Promise in Midlothian: [The Promise | Midlothian Council](#)

Midlothian Corporate Parent Strategy 2020-23: [Corporate Parent Strategy | Corporate Parent Strategy 2020-2023 \(midlothian.gov.uk\)](#)