

Fife Children's Services Annual Report 2025-2026

Children's Services Annual Report 2025-2026

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Introduction

Children in Fife is the Children's Services Partnership for Fife. It involves a range of partners who provide services for children and young people. We promote, support and safeguard the wellbeing of our children and young people, by working collaboratively to provide early, preventative support.

This Annual Report:

- Reviews improvement work undertaken during the past year
- Reflects on the progress made with improving outcomes over the period of the *Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26*.
- Highlights next steps for the improvement priorities within the *Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26*.

The report describes a wide range of work involving staff and services across the Fife Children's Services Partnership. A significant part of this work contributes to improved day-to-day support for children, young people and families (described in section 2 of this report). Further work is helping to strengthen the way that we collectively act to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable (described in section 3 of this report). Work is also ongoing to strengthen our longer-term strategic approach (described in section 4), to ensure that improvement work across the partnership has a wider impact on the lives of all children, young people and families in future years.

Section 5 of the report summarises findings from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment undertaken during the past year, which has formed the basis of the Fife Children's Services Plan 2026-29, and which will help Children in Fife make further progress to achieving our vision: **"making Fife a place where every child and young person matters"**.



James Ross

Chair, Children in Fife

Head of Service, Children and Families and Justice Social Work Services

Fife Council



Lisa Cooper

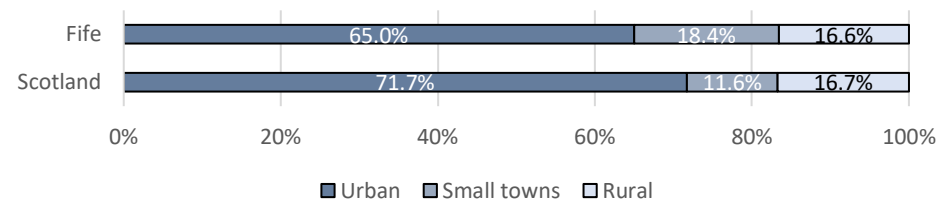
Vice-Chair, Children in Fife

Head of Primary & Preventative Care Services, Fife Health and Social Care Partnership

Context: the communities, children and young people of Fife

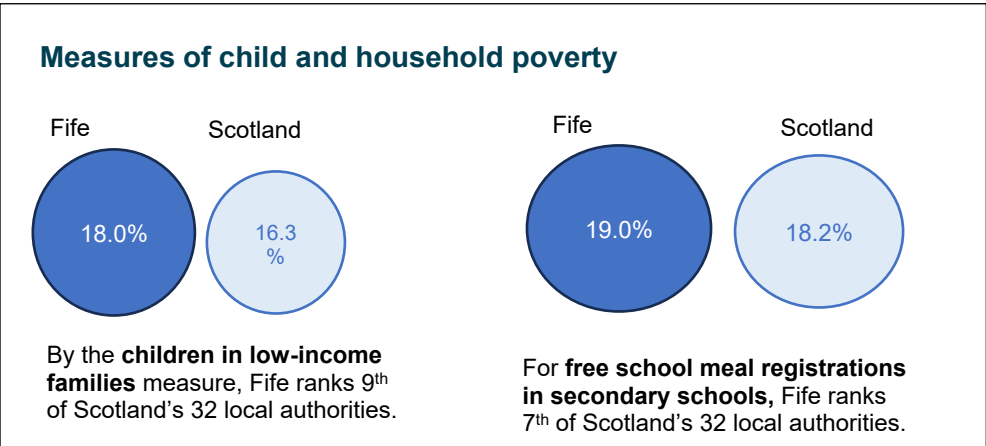
The geography of Fife

Fife has a mix of urban areas, small towns, and rural areas – the overall balance of each classification broadly resembles the geography of Scotland.



However, Fife’s main urban areas (Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Glenrothes and the Levenmouth area) are smaller in scale and are more dispersed than Scotland’s largest four cities, which are classified as large urban areas.

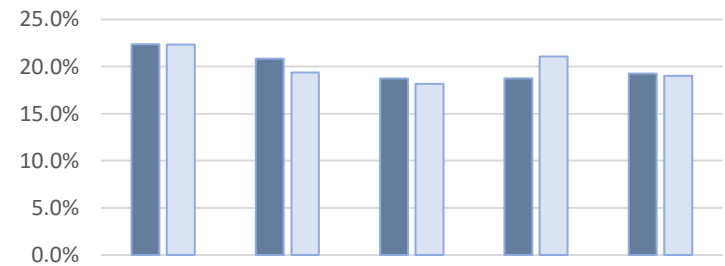
Area	Large urban	Other urban	Accessible small towns	Remote small towns	Accessible rural	Remote rural
Fife	0.0%	65.0%	18.4%	0.0%	16.6%	0.0%
Scotland	40.8%	30.9%	9.7%	1.9%	12.1%	4.6%



Area deprivation in Fife (SIMD)

The table below shows the geographical distribution of school pupils in Fife and Scotland, based on the SIMD Quintile where they live.

SIMD Quintile 1 areas (SIMD Q1) are the most deprived in Scotland. SIMD Quintile 5 areas (SIMD Q5) are the least deprived. The profiles of Fife and Scotland are very similar.



		SIMD Q1	SIMD Q2	SIMD Q3	SIMD Q4	SIMD Q5
Fife		22.4	20.8	18.8	18.8	19.3
Scotland		22.4	19.4	18.2	21.1	19.0

There are 69,513 children and young people aged 0-17 years in Fife; of these, 47,997 attend a Fife school. The table below shows some of the support needs and characteristics of these pupils.

Group	Number	%
With an additional support need	20,053	41.8
Living in SIMD Quintile 1	10,608	22.1
Speaking English as an Additional Language (not fluent)	2,852	5.9
Minority Ethnic	3,884	8.1
Assessed as having a disability	1,358	2.8
All school pupils	47,997	100.0

Section 1 - Notable achievements from 2025-26

Health & Wellbeing

We concluded the scoping phase for the **Mental Health Pathway** and began piloting in two schools to streamline referral processes for staff and support timely and coordinated access to support. The pilot continued until March 2026, with an initial review completed. Learning is already informing further pathway development, and a multi-agency steering group has been established to provide oversight of this work.

The **Our Minds Matter (OMM) Framework** was refreshed and shared across all partner agencies, strengthening shared understanding and consistency of practice. Referrals to community mental health supports have been re-opened to schools and now progress via the CAMHS consultation line, in line with the wellbeing pathway. Clear referral routes have been established, with guidance staff, Headteachers and Depute Headteachers identified as primary referrers.

We **expanded access to universal and digital mental health support**, including rollout of the WYSA 24/7 mental health app to all secondary schools. Evaluation is underway to assess the reach, engagement and impact.

We **built workforce confidence and capacity** through initiatives like the Mentally Healthy Workplace training, bereavement support and Seasons for Growth and identified clear gaps (e.g. neurodiversity and inclusion) which will shape future learning and commissioning.

Targeted prevention and awareness activity was strengthened through the **relaunch of the THINK Again campaign** during 2025/26. Campaign activity focused on raising awareness of the risks associated with stimulant use at key risk periods and on substances of highest concern to young people.

Supporting Families

Using investment from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, we have developed a sustainable model of **Early Help and Support Teams** across Fife's seven localities. These teams play a key role in supporting the ongoing development of a No Wrong Door model of service delivery at community level.

We have **strengthened partnership working** over the course of the 2023-26 Plan, including: a programme of workforce development to strengthen the confidence and awareness of staff in implementing GIRFEC; a strengthened model for reviewing the impact of improvement actions; a more holistic approach to self-evaluation, using the partnership's How Good Is Our Family Support framework; a more strategic use of QI methodology and the expertise of Fife CYPIC; ongoing work to improve the partnership's use of data and evidence.

We have used investment from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to test two evidence-based approaches – developed through **Quality Improvement methodology** (Let's Connect and Communication High 5) – for their potential to achieve scale and spread

Engagement of our Children, Young People & Families

We approved and have been **embedding the Participation and Engagement Framework** for the partnership, setting out a shared, rights-based approach to involving children and young people in decisions that affect them. The framework was co-designed with young people and is now being embedded across services.

We advanced children's rights implementation across the partnership through updated **UNCRC resources on the Children in Fife website**, greater workforce awareness activity, and continued Children's Rights Oversight Group (CROG) oversight.

We made progress in **developing child-friendly complaints processes** by agreeing a consistent set of **good-practice principles**, with early implementation evident across several agencies, including Education. Evidence-gathering is underway to understand the impact.

Equity and Equality

We have developed a **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** to inform our ongoing approach to children's services planning. The Assessment has been informed by a wide range of evidence about outcomes and experiences of children and young people, with a particular focus on disadvantage and vulnerable children.

We have developed a new **Children's Services Plan 2026-29**, with a narrow improvement focus on three specific and significant challenges: (i) mental health and emotional wellbeing; (ii) family resilience and skills; and (iii) early speech, language and communication. The choice of these improvement priorities reflects a consensus view across partners that these underlying, long-term challenges present the most significant barriers to life outcomes for children in Fife over which the partnership has influence.

We have supported the ongoing development of a **Child Poverty Strategy** – involving the wider Fife Partnership – with a view to developing a systems approach to support transformative change in our service delivery.

Our Overarching Approach to Meeting Need

GIRFEC

We strengthened governance and quality assurance of GIRFEC implementation through the establishment of the **Child Wellbeing Pathway (CWP) Oversight Group** which provides multi-agency oversight, scrutiny and assurance on the use and impact of GIRFEC across the partnership.

We agreed to a **multi-agency case-sampling approach** (10 cases per agency) to strengthen recording and monitoring of the Child Wellbeing Pathway, assess the quality and proportionality of responses and partnership working, and use learning to develop an ongoing review and evaluation framework.

We also refreshed the GIRFEC e-module to promote workforce knowledge and understanding across the partnership.

The Promise

We **strengthened leadership and governance for delivering The Promise in Fife** through the appointment of the Promise in Fife Lead Officer and closer alignment with Children in Fife Governance Group.

The **Corporate Parenting Board was refreshed**, with membership now including Police Scotland, Fire Service, Fife College and Skills Development Scotland, to strengthen collective accountability for care-experienced children and young people.

The Lead Officer was a key connector between national and local development, supporting a holistic workforce approach and enabling regular updates to ensure practice and developments are aligned with The Promise plans.

Section 2 - Our progress with improvement in 2025-26

Our approach to improvement

The following page provides an overview of the priorities for improvement identified in the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26.

There are four main areas of improvement:

- **Health & Wellbeing**
- **Supporting Families**
- **Engagement of our Children, Young People and Families**
- **Equity and Equality**

This improvement work is overseen by Children in Fife, the Governance Group for Fife Children's Services Partnership. The group receives regular updates from the strategic lead groups for each priority.

This section provides an update on work undertaken for these four improvement priorities.

Children in Fife oversees the partnership's wider approach to prevention and early intervention, its implementation of GIRFEC and delivery of the Promise. Children in Fife ensures that our **overarching approach** to children's services meets the needs of all children and young people, including children and young people at risk of harm, in need of care, or in need of protection.

Section 3 of this Annual Report provides a review of this work.

Our progress in improving Health and Wellbeing

Context

The **Health & Wellbeing Strategy Group** oversees implementation of the improvement plan for Health and Wellbeing. The group includes lead members from the 3 key partnership groups that oversee work relating to health and wellbeing. It:

- Owns: the action plan for the improvement theme of Health & Wellbeing
- Provides a link to the work of the Fife Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (ADP) and the Health and Social Care Partnership
- Promotes: within the UNCRC relating to health and wellbeing

The table below provides an update on progress in implementing the improvement plan for Health and Wellbeing, as set out in the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26:

What is the key issue/challenge?	What do we need to do to address this?	Summary of progress made during period, including evidence of progress April 2025 - March 2026
Multi-agency approaches to ensure access to mental health supports and services for all children, young people and their families	Improved accessibility to mental health supports for children, young people and their families, ensuring they receive the right support at the right time from the right service	Sustained progress has been made in strengthening multi-agency approaches to ensure equitable access to mental health supports and services for children, young people, and their families across Fife. The Mental Health Pathway scoping phase has concluded, and a pilot is now well underway in two schools to streamline referral processes for school staff and support timely, coordinated access to support. Partner agencies are meeting weekly to review referrals collectively, promoting shared decision-making, consistency, and early learning across the system. The pilot continued until March 2026, with an initial review completed and learning already informing further pathway development and a multi-agency steering group has been established to provide strategic oversight of this work. Shared practice has been reinforced through the refreshed Our Minds Matter Framework, clearer referral routes for schools and reopened access to community supports aligned to the wellbeing pathway. Universal and digital supports have also been strengthened. Access to the WYSA app, providing 24/7 mental health support, has been extended to all secondary

		schools, with an evaluation underway to inform future planning. Workforce capacity and confidence are being further supported through the development of a suicide guidance workshop, aligned to newly finalised guidance on understanding and responding to young people at risk of suicide, now available via NHS Fife's website. A one-day professional training offer is being developed to support consistent implementation. Commissioning activity has advanced, with evidence-informed briefs finalised and issued to support longer-term, sustainable provision.
	Professional Development and capacity building opportunities are in place for all staff supporting children, young people and their families' mental health, focusing on early intervention approaches	Workforce capacity was strengthened through a structured, evidence-informed approach, including partnership-wide workforce surveys that identified priority learning needs, preferred delivery methods and gaps in areas such as neurodiversity, learning disability and LGBTQI+ inclusion. Targeted professional learning and shared knowledge exchange supported stronger trauma-informed and wellbeing-focused practice, alongside continued delivery of Mentally Healthy Workplace training and bereavement support, including Seasons for Growth sustainability activity. Collectively, this work is improving professional confidence, coordination of learning and system capacity to support better outcomes for children, young people and families.
	Improved multi-agency data to inform the mental health needs of young people and their families in Fife, ensuring that we respond appropriately	We have worked collectively to ensure data from Health, Education and Social Work partners can be collated and shared to inform service improvement. This work now needs to progress into the development of a Children in Fife shared data dashboard to ensure all partners are working from a consistent and agreed data set.
Children & young people's physical wellbeing and participation in physical activity & sport has been negatively impacted by the covid- 19 pandemic.	Increase access to sport & physical activity for our most vulnerable and / or disadvantaged Children & Young People. Enable Children, Young	Significant progress was made in strengthening system coordination, capacity and access to health promotion, physical activity and healthy weight support for children, young people and families. System connectivity improved through clearer governance, shared reporting, coordinated communications and the use of data-informed quality improvement approaches.

The Scottish Parent Survey reported a consistent decline in children's activity levels, socialisation & free play with other children, with the greatest impact on those most vulnerable and / or disadvantaged.	People & families to understand the importance of leading an active lifestyle, healthier diet and healthy weight.	Targeted service delivery has expanded, with strengthened evaluation, inclusive participation pathways and increased workforce capability across health promotion and healthy weight interventions. Collectively, these actions are improving consistency, reach and sustainability of provision, with a clear focus on reducing inequalities and supporting long-term healthy lifestyle outcomes.
Increasing the level of confidence, competence and knowledge of the workforce to engage with children and young people about Healthy Relationships and Substance Use (including parental substance use)	Develop and deliver a workforce development programme for staff working with children and families.	Progress was made in strengthening prevention, early intervention and workforce capability across substance use and sexual health through delivery of a structured, improvement-focused action plan aligned to the Children's Services Plan. Activity focused on enhancing existing provision, addressing identified gaps in confidence, skills and pathways, and improving access to timely support for children, young people and families. Workforce development and multi-agency integration have been strengthened, supported by routine review and assurance through established governance arrangements. Overall, this work has improved system coordination, capability and responsiveness, with a continued focus on reducing risk and supporting vulnerable groups.
Increasing the confidence, competence and knowledge of parents and carers to engage with children and young people about Healthy Relationships and Substance Use	Develop and deliver resources, information, support and training to parents and carers.	Good progress was made in strengthening family support for children and young people affected by substance use. Targeted support for parents, carers and foster/kinship carers has increased through evidence-based training and interventions, improving confidence and communication within families.
Ensuring safety, health and wellbeing of children and young people who experience alcohol or drug related hospital admissions	Ensuring safety health and wellbeing of children and young people who experience alcohol or drug related hospital admissions	System coordination was strengthened through multi-agency action groups, with routine use of data to identify emerging risks and inform targeted awareness and communications activity.

		Timely hospital-to-community pathways have been sustained, improving early identification, engagement and outcomes for children and young people affected by drugs and alcohol.
Understanding and responding to children and young people who are care-experienced or in need of additional support in relation to Healthy Relationships and Substance use (Including parental/ carer substance use)	Explore the needs of care-experienced receiving additional support in relation to healthy relationships and substance use.	Targeted prevention and awareness activity was strengthened through the relaunch of the THINK Again campaign during 2025/26. Campaign activity focused on raising awareness of the risks associated with stimulant use at key risk periods and on substances of highest concern to young people. A targeted approach with residential settings has improved relevance and reach, supporting earlier awareness, informed conversations and harm reduction for vulnerable children and young people.

Review of Progress 2023-26

Over the course of Fife's Children's Services Plan 2023–26, partners have made sustained progress in strengthening how children, young people and families are supported to achieve positive health and wellbeing outcomes. The partnership has moved towards a more coordinated, preventative and rights-based approach, with a growing emphasis on early intervention, inclusion and system improvement.

Strengthening whole-system approaches to mental health and emotional wellbeing

A significant area of progress has been the development of more joined-up, multi-agency approaches to children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Partners have worked collectively to improve clarity, consistency and access across pathways, recognising the need for the right support to be available at the right time, and as close to universal services as possible.

This has included the refresh and embedding of the Our Minds Matter Framework across services, supporting a shared understanding of roles, thresholds and responses. In 2025–26, the scoping and piloting of a multi-agency mental health pathway for schools enabled more timely, coordinated and proportionate responses to emerging need. The establishment of regular multi-agency referral discussions and a dedicated steering group has strengthened shared decision-making, learning and accountability across partners.

The partnership has also increased the availability and visibility of universal and digital supports, including access to 24/7 mental health tools for young people, and improved consultation routes into specialist services. Importantly, targeted action has been taken to improve access for children and young people at increased risk of poor mental health outcomes, including care-experienced children and young people and those

with neurodevelopmental needs. Collectively, these developments demonstrate a shift towards a more preventative, integrated mental health system.

Building workforce confidence, capacity and consistency

Across the three years of the Plan, sustained investment has been made in workforce development, recognising that confident, skilled and supported staff are central to improving outcomes for children and families. The partnership has taken an increasingly evidence-informed approach to identifying learning needs, coordinating training offers and reducing duplication across services.

By 2024–25, this had progressed into structured workforce intelligence gathering, including cross-sector surveys and training needs analyses, providing a clearer picture of gaps, priorities and preferred learning approaches. This intelligence has directly informed the development of shared professional learning offers across mental health, bereavement, trauma-informed practice, relationships, sexual health and substance use.

A key achievement has been the strengthening of cross-sector learning and shared language, supporting more consistent conversations with children, young people and families, regardless of service entry point. Training activity has increasingly focused on early intervention, relational practice and supporting staff to have confident, compassionate conversations about complex issues. Over time, this has contributed to improved system confidence and reduced reliance on specialist services alone.

Improving physical wellbeing, activity and healthy weight

The Children's Services Plan period has seen a concerted effort to respond to the long-term impacts of the pandemic on children's physical wellbeing, particularly for those most vulnerable to inequality and disadvantage. Progress has been made to strengthen coordination, target resources and increase access to physical activity, sport and healthy weight support.

Over the three years, partnership working has improved through clearer governance, strengthened links between strategic and delivery groups, and more consistent use of data to inform planning. This has supported a move towards a more coherent system, with localities able to tailor responses based on identified need.

Targeted services, including Active Schools and the Child Healthy Weight Service, have evolved placing greater emphasis on evaluation, inclusion and early identification, with innovative test-of-change activity strengthening pathways between universal services and targeted support. Workforce skills in health promotion have also been expanded, particularly across early years and community settings, helping to embed healthy lifestyle messages within everyday practice.

Embedding children's rights, participation and partnership working

Across all areas of the Plan, progress has been underpinned by a growing commitment to children's rights, participation and collaborative leadership. Over the three-year period, partners have increasingly sought to involve children, young people and families in shaping services, using feedback, participation activity and learning from lived experience to inform improvement.

Governance and assurance arrangements have matured, with clearer reporting, stronger use of evidence and improved alignment between strategy and delivery. This has enabled the partnership to demonstrate impact more clearly, identify gaps and adapt approaches in response to learning.

Supporting healthy relationships and responding to substance use

Children and young people often turn to alcohol and/or drugs when they are struggling with their mental health and often use substances to cope with anxiety, depression or stress. Throughout the Plan period, the partnership has strengthened its preventative and early-intervention response to healthy relationships and substance use, recognising the interconnected nature of physical health, mental wellbeing and safety.

Progress has been characterised by better alignment across sexual health, substance use, education and wider children's services. Social Work, Education, Alcohol and Drug Services and Health including Public Health have collaborated to develop a plan of action to address this issue of drug related deaths among young people. The number of Drug Related Deaths reduced by 74% between 2023 and 2024 (2025 data will be available in August 2026).

Workforce confidence has been enhanced through targeted training and shared resources, while parents and carers have been increasingly supported to engage in open, informed conversations with children and young people. For those experiencing acute harm, responses have been strengthened, including improved pathways for children and young people presenting to hospital with substance-related issues, ensuring timely follow-up and whole-family support.

There has been significant training with professionals, carers and parents to raise awareness of the harm of drugs, increased education input in schools and with foster and kinship carers, a dedicated 24-48 hour hospital liaison response provided by Clued Up for all under 18 year olds presenting at ED or admitted to a ward due to alcohol or drug use and online and in person parenting sessions provided by Barnardos.

The partnership has demonstrated responsiveness to emerging risks, including the use of targeted awareness campaigns and focused work with care-experienced children and young people.

Fife Acute drug related hospital admissions in 11-17 age group decreased during 2024/25 following an increase in the previous year. There was a sharp rise in 18 - 25 age group for admissions from 2023/24 to 2024/25. For all age groups 41% of admissions were from the most deprived SIMD quintile.

Despite progress in Fife to address the impact of substance use by young people, this remains a significant challenge across Scotland. Strengthening mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children, young people and families will play a significant role in addressing the challenges of substance use.

Next Steps

Whole-system mental health support for children and young people has been strengthened throughout the course of this Plan. Building on this progress, evidence from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) suggests opportunities for further improvement for children, young people

and parental mental health. Strengthening mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children, young people and families will be a key improvement area in the next Children's Services Plan (2026-29), supported by the Our Minds Matter (OMM) Steering Group.

The OMM Steering Group will oversee progress on various improvement actions in the next Plan. The JSNA indicated particularly poor mental health for specific groups of children and young people, including pupils with additional support needs and those living in our most deprived areas. An initial action will be to identify and strengthen the existing support offers for vulnerable groups. The workforce supporting children and young people plays a crucial role in supporting mental and emotional wellbeing. Another key improvement action will focus on identifying and rolling out mandatory training, for all working with children and young people across the partnership.

Our progress in better Supporting Families

Context

Children in Fife has used investment from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund as the basis to improve support for families.

Review of Progress 2023-26

Over the past three years this investment has supported three significant developments that have played an integral role in strengthening our children's services approach to improvement:

- The development of **Early Help and Support Teams** across Fife's seven localities. These teams play a key role in supporting the ongoing development of a No Wrong Door model of service delivery at community level. Further information can be found in the Case Study on the following page.
- Our work in **strengthening partnership working** over the course of the 2023-26 Plan. This has included: a strengthened model for reviewing the impact of improvement actions; a more holistic approach to self-evaluation, using the partnership's How Good Is Our Family Support framework; a more strategic use of QI methodology and the expertise of Fife CYPIC; ongoing work to improve the partnership's use of data and evidence. Further information can be found in the case Study in Section 4 of this Report.
- Work to progress two evidence-based approaches developed through **Quality Improvement methodology** (Let's Connect and Communication High 5), which were tested for their potential to achieve scale and spread

Further information about Fife's use of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund can be found in the WFW Fund Annual Report 2025-26.

Case study: Early Help and Support Teams

As part of the WFW funding and whole-system change the Senior Practitioners (SPs) in Schools test of change was established. 5 Senior Practitioners were recruited from the C&F service who undertook an active leadership role in 5 High Schools across Fife to drive forward confidence and improvements in practice and partnership working. The role was able to provide additional evidence alongside the Homemakers Test of Change to underpin the vision of a wider early intervention plan from Children and Families (C&F) Social Work. The project evidenced a better collective awareness of targeted support, having a more aligned joint approach across the partnership and clarified next steps in the transformational change needed in the delivery of C&F social work.

The Early Help and Support Teams were formed using the learning from the Senior Practitioners in Schools project and the Homemakers Test of Change which evidenced that consistent and more effective partnership provided a better outcome for children, young people and families. Staff (SW and Education) also reported a more effective and positive working relationship which built confidence in process and practice.

The Early Help & Support Teams focus on delivering a range of effective interventions which are community based, building resilience and capacity through a whole family model which promotes effective partnership working, minimises duplication and promotes a collaborative model with children, young people and their families at the centre. These teams comprise of Family Support Workers, 1 Senior Family Support Worker, Social Workers, 3 Senior Practitioners and a Team Manager. A higher level of staff resource is allocated to each team to ensure that families receive the right support at the right time.

The impact of the Early Help and Support Team model

Since the launch of the EH&S model, data across the service has evidenced that the change in delivery has shown positive outcomes for example:

- Referral rates to the Social Work Contact Centre remained consistent in comparison to previous time periods in 2025. Out of 1303 referrals per month, 59% of those coming into the Social Work Contact Centre resulted in 'no further action'.
- The Looked After Child population has reduced significantly. Throughout 2025 we have seen a steady decline in the number of LAC: 733 children in January 2025 and reducing to 639 children in January 2026.
- The longer term trend also evidences that Child Protection Registrations have shown a steady decline.
- The demand for early help and support has been significant with the new model being able to respond to on average 1000 more children and their parents and carers over a 3-month period. Across the 7 EH&S Teams in January 2026 the number of children with an open case was 1414 which breaks down to an average of 202 children per team. This has increased as this year has progressed. Over the past eight months, the number of children and young people referred to Early Help and Support has remained consistently close to 500 per month.

Next steps: partnership investment in continued improvement

Recognising the positive impact achieved by the actions taken in the Children's Services Plan 2023-26, partners have acted to establish a core support team to support ongoing self-evaluation, quality assurance and continuous improvement. This will use resourcing from within core service budgets or other partnership funding streams for:

- Part-time support from a *Partnership Coordinator*. This will support strategic planning and reporting for the partnership.
- Part-time support from an *Improvement Coordinator*. This will enable continued development of a more strategic use of Quality Improvement methodology and expertise.
- Part-time support from a *Policy Officer*. This will enable ongoing support for a more systematic approach to self-evaluation.
- Full-time support from a *Workforce Development Lead Officer*. This will enable the development of a coordinated programme of workforce development: to support delivery of the Plan, to enable a Communities of Practice model to be piloted, and to strengthen ongoing partnership working.
- Full-time support from a *Children's Services Data Analyst*. This will enable continued support to improve the partnership's core data processes and performance reporting, as well as ongoing development of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

Next steps: embedding an improved model of self-evaluation

Over the next three years, Children in Fife aims to further develop its use of its *How Good Is Our Family Support (HGIOFS)* framework. This will involve establishing self-evaluation and quality assurance for a range of core partnership approaches, as well as for the improvement priorities within the Children's Services Plan.

The partnership's core approaches have been identified following a review of partnership working and groups, undertaken in preparation for the new Children's Services Plan. The table below summarises the partnership's core approaches and identifies the partnership core groups which oversee the related areas of working.

Many of the partnership core groups have direct links to related national working groups and improvement programmes (e.g. the National GIRFEC Group, the Regional Promise Networks). This helps to ensure that the ongoing development of Fife approaches reflects current national policy developments. It also enables the Partnership to influence ongoing development of policy at a national level.

Additionally, Fife Voluntary Action will work collaboratively with partners to use the self-evaluation toolkit '[How good is our third sector participation in Children's Services Planning?](#)' as a structured framework to reflect on and strengthen the quality, consistency and impact of third sector involvement in children's services planning processes.

By engaging statutory partners and third sector providers in honest assessment against the toolkit's quality indicators, we will identify strengths, gaps and opportunities for improvement, inform shared action planning, and support more meaningful, inclusive and effective participation. This process will help ensure that the voice of the third sector is well represented, influences decision making, and ultimately contributes to improved outcomes for children, young people and families across Fife.

Our progress in improving Engagement

Context

The **Children's Rights Oversight Group** oversees implementation of the improvement plan for Engagement. It is a partnership group that oversees work to promote children's rights and the partnership's approach to participation and engagement.

The table below provides an update on progress in implementing the improvement plan for Engagement, as set out in the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26:

What is the key issue/ challenge?	What do we need to do to address this?	Summary of progress made during period, including evidence of progress April 2025 - March 2026
Develop a consistent approach to participation and engagement with children and young people.	Jointly agree the principles of effective engagement and participation. Create an overview of engagement and participation across services.	The Participation and Engagement Framework was developed and approved for use in the partnership. Single agency embedding and training is being delivered. The Participation and Engagement subgroup is mapping ways of engaging with children and young people across Fife.
Ensure that there are active and meaningful engagement of children and young people in decisions that affect them and the planning and delivery of services across Fife.	Support the framework devised by young people during the Children's Services Plan 2021-23	The workforce was supported to embed the Children's Services Participation and Engagement Framework into practice through a 7-minute briefing.

Ensuring that we work with – and support – young people in a rights-based way.	Raise awareness of UNCRC across wider partnership services <i>(Delivery Group: Workforce Development Subgroup)</i>	UNCRC sections of Children in Fife website have been updated and circulated to CiF membership and the wider workforce.
	Promote a rights-based approach through the introduction of a Children's Rights Charter. <i>(Delivery Group: Participation and Engagement)</i>	The Children's Rights Charter work continues to be progressed through the Participation and Engagement subgroup.
	Develop Guidance for creating child friendly complaints processes <i>(Delivery Group: Child Friendly Complaints Subgroup)</i>	There has been an embedding of Good Practice Guidance and broad principles across the partnership.
	Ensure that we fulfil our requirement to report progress to the Scottish Government. <i>(Delivery Group: Children's Rights Strategic Oversight Group).</i>	Progress is continuously being made to fulfil the partnership reporting duties to Scottish Government in 2026.

Review of Progress 2023-26

Over the course of the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26, partners have made sustained and measurable progress to embed a more consistent rights-based and participation-focused culture across services. Driven by the Children's Rights Oversight Group (CROG) and its subgroups, work has supported the embedding of the principles of the UNCRC, increasingly shaping practice, workforce development, decision-making and service planning. Workforce awareness and confidence in rights-based practice improved through multi-agency development sessions, the refreshed GIRFEC Child Wellbeing Pathway and wider access to updated e-learning, supported by a workforce survey that provided a clear baseline for strengthening practice. The implementation of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act in July 2024 accelerated progress, with partners enhancing access to rights-related information and updating the Children in Fife website to support workforce and community understanding.

The mapping of all engagement activity began early in the Plan and continued throughout 2025, helping to identify duplication and clarify the landscape of participation across Fife. This work provided the basis for a more coherent system and supported the development and refresh of the Participation and Engagement Framework. The updated Framework, co-designed with young people and aligned with legislative change, was completed and supported by accessible child-friendly formats. It is now being made available to services through the Children in Fife website.

Children and young people's influence on planning and decision-making has increased across the partnership. The co-production of the Fife Children's Rights Charter and its launch in December 2024 represented a major milestone, with Children's Rights Ambassadors and a Youth Empowerment Panel shaping both its content and supporting materials. Work aligned to The Promise also contributed to greater visibility of the voices of care-experienced young people, who increasingly influence corporate parenting planning, data reporting and service design.

Partners also made significant steps in developing child-friendly complaints processes. A consistent set of good practice principles was created, with early implementation evident across several agencies, including Education, where work is underway to streamline a partnership approach supported by compliance teams. Evidence-gathering has begun to understand impact, and the approach now contributes directly to accountability under the UNCRC.

Redesign activity—such as Early Help & Support Teams, No Wrong Door, and improvements to early intervention—further embedded rights and participation into wider system change.

Next Steps

Looking ahead to the 2026–29 Children's Services Plan, several core priorities will guide the next phase of improvement.

Completing the mapping of participation and engagement activity will allow partners to design a more coherent and streamlined system that reduces duplication and builds on existing strengths.

Embedding the Participation and Engagement Framework across all services will remain a key focus, supported by training, implementation planning and workforce development.

A new accreditation framework will be developed to measure maturity of participation and engagement across single agencies. Expanding the use of child-friendly formats and co-produced resources will ensure accessibility for all children and young people.

Rights-based practice will continue to be strengthened in line with UNCRC incorporation. This includes updating guidance, maintaining the Children's Rights section of the Children in Fife website and ensuring services act compatibly with the legislation.

There will be an increased focus on using Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) and Integrated Impact Assessments (IIAs) to ensure rights and equality considerations are embedded into all decision-making and service redesign processes.

Embedding the Children's Rights Charter across the partnership will be a further priority.

Work to develop a consistent approach to child-friendly complaints will continue through collaboration with compliance teams. Workforce training and practical tools will support the adoption of rights-respecting complaints handling as standard practice.

Strengthening the evidence base remains critical. Evidence gathering for statutory reporting to the Scottish Government in 2026 will continue. Particular attention will be paid to data about engagement, rights-based interventions and outcomes for key groups, including those with care experience.

Strengthening local capacity and leadership will support the rights-based approach, including the development of local Communities of Practice (CoP) to support implementation across Fife's seven localities.

Clear messaging from senior leaders and a continued focus on partnership working will be essential to sustaining progress and delivering improvement at scale.

Our approach to improving Equity and Equality

Context

In order to better focus work across the partnership to address all forms of disadvantage and inequality, a **Poverty and Equalities** Group was established in 2024-25. The Group has worked during 2025-26 to support ongoing delivery of the Local Child Poverty Action Report, and the development of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to inform our Children's Services Plan for the period 2026-29.

This section:

- Reviews how Children in Fife's contribution to tackling child poverty has developed over recent years.
- Summarises the scope of Fife Partnership's working to tackle child poverty.
- Outlines how the Fife Children's Services Plan 2026-29 – and Children in Fife's wider partnership working – will help to support continuing improvement of equity and equality – and, in particular, work to tackle child poverty.

The ongoing development of Fife's approach to tackling poverty and preventing crisis

Tackling poverty and preventing crisis has been a focus of the Fife Local Outcomes Improvement Plan since the end of the Covid pandemic and the work of the children's services partnership has been a significant element supporting recovery, reducing inequality and driving service reform.

The recent development of Early Help and Support Teams within Fife's seven local areas has ensured a transformational change in the delivery of services for children and families at a local level (further details can be found in the Case Study in section 1 of this Plan). This change is supporting the ongoing development of a **No Wrong Door** model as a key approach to supporting families and communities experiencing poverty and related challenges. The No Wrong Door model promotes early intervention, community-based support and more effective joint working across partnership services. Central to this approach is a locality-based triage system, enabling services to work together to build a holistic understanding of family circumstances and ensure that children and families receive timely, coordinated and appropriate support.

Fife's child poverty strategy

Children's services partners play an integral role in tackling child poverty in Fife, with work across communities demonstrating a strong commitment to early intervention and prevention through locality based, cross-directorate working. This includes:

- **Maximising family incomes** by helping to embed income maximisation across a wide range of community and statutory services, contributing to the development of the Fife Advice Framework.
- Supporting families with the **cost of living** through various support measures to address crisis and material deprivation, illustrated through Cash First pilots and the strategic support given to the Big Hoose project.
- Recognising that **employability and employment** are key levers to sustainably lifting children out of poverty through fair work. The Local Employability Partnership has invested in targeted parental employment support including Making it Work for lone parents (Fife Gingerbread and CARF partnership project).
- Amidst the local and national **Housing Emergency**, Fife has worked to reduce child homelessness and sought opportunities to improve the experience of families navigating temporary accommodation. Building Hope, a national systems change project led by Shelter, will be delivered locally by Fife Gingerbread and Fife Council colleagues.



During the course of the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26, Fife's child poverty strategy has been an integral part of work by the wider partnership to tackle poverty and prevent crisis. This has been a focus of the Plan for Fife (Fife's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan), which was updated after the Covid pandemic to support ongoing recovery and reform of Fife's service delivery.

During 2025-26 work has begun – supported by Public Health Scotland – to review Fife's Child Poverty Strategy, with a view to developing a systems approach to support better service delivery at a local level. This work is ongoing and will further strengthen the approach being developed through the No Wrong Door model across Fife's localities.

Further information about the work summarised above – including evidence on the impact of these approaches – can be found in the [Fife Local Child Poverty Action Report 2024-25](#) and will be further reported in the Fife Local Child Poverty Action Report 2025-26, which is currently being developed.

Next Steps

Our approach to partnership improvement will help us to continue improving equity and equality and, in particular, tackling child poverty over the course of the Fife Children's Services Plan 2026-29.

In particular:

- The improvement priorities for the **Fife Children's Services Plan 2026-29** address key barriers to outcomes for children and families living in poverty: mental health and wellbeing (priority 1), family resilience (priority 2), and early child development (priority 3). The evidence-based approach that we are taking to address these priorities – supported by our use of QI methodology – will help us to strengthen our understanding and measure the impact of our partnership working to address these barriers.
Further details about our planned improvement actions can be found in the remainder of this section.
- The ongoing work to strengthen our approach to self-evaluation– supported by the use of the How Good Is Our Family Support Framework – will help to ensure ongoing continuous improvement of our **core partnership approaches**. This will help the partnership to strengthen and improve the service design and operational processes supporting children and families with needs.
- The piloting and further development of **Communities of Practice** at a local area level will help to establish a structured, locality-based approach that promotes collaboration, shared learning and continuous improvement across all aspects of joint working within children's services (see Section 4). This will help to ensure improved local support for children and families living in poverty and provide more effective support for the continued development of the **No Wrong Door** model at a locality level.
- Ongoing refinement and further development of the partnership's **data and evidence** will help to ensure that we can better monitor, publicly report on, the outcomes and experiences of children who live in poverty – as well as other groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

Section 3 - Our overarching approach to meeting need

Our approach to delivering The Promise

Context

Work on Delivering the Promise in Fife is overseen by Children in Fife, the governance group for the Fife Children's Services Partnership, and The Promise in Fife Lead Officer.

The table below provides a summary of progress in addressing the key actions identified to strengthen Fife's approach in the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26. The following pages provide a more detailed review of ongoing work.



What is the key issue/ challenge?	What do we need to do to address this?	Summary of progress made during period, including evidence of progress April 2025 - March 2026
Keeping The Promise in Fife	Ongoing role of Promise in Fife Lead Officer, to provide a strategic lead for The Promise and to coordinate with other aspects of children's services. Awareness of the Promise and its importance to the work of all in Fife Partnership – as corporate parents	The Lead Officer ensured Fife Council and its partners' planning, service design and delivery were in keeping with the aims and vision of The Promise. This post is Fife's lead in the national Promise network, and also co-chair of the Corporate Parenting Board. Key tasks: • Engaged with children, families, communities, and partners to consult, collaborate and co-produce • Kept Fife connected with national Promise updates and developments • Coordinated partnership activity to be aligned with the aims of the Promise via the Corporate Parenting Board. Links between practice and strategic development were strengthened, supporting partners to undertake self-evaluation and embed the reporting of outcomes and impact.

	Data for the Promise, Corporate Parenting Board	The impact of The Promise being kept in Fife is measured using both qualitative and quantitative data. • Qualitative data is gathered through Flash Reports submitted by Corporate Parents to the Board. These reports focus on the question: <i>“How do we know that the care-experienced community are feeling the impact?”</i> • Quantitative data is provided through thematic reports and a dedicated data dashboard, offering measurable insights into progress and outcomes.
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Review of Progress 2023-26

In April 2025, there was a personnel change for the Lead Officer, enabling an opportunity to review the priority activities for this post. To inform the approach, the Lead Officer connected with partners to determine how this post could best support improvement across the Partnership. The following outcomes have been achieved since April 2025:

Development of the Corporate Parenting Board:

The Lead Officer led a review of the membership of the Board and re-engaged the Fire Service, Police Scotland, Fife College and Skills Development Scotland to ensure that all local partners are appropriately engaged in corporate parenting duties and working collaboratively. The reporting framework was reviewed and is now in place to enable improved collation of evidence of implementation of The Promise.

A data dashboard was developed and is now being populated to inform quantitative progress. A new flash report process has also been implemented, supporting all partners to provide wider qualitative updates of progress against priorities within the Corporate Parenting Plan. These activities support Corporate Parents to have an improved collective awareness of available support.

The Lead Officer made a connection with Who Cares Scotland to progress the development of the Corporate Parenting Board. This included a workshop for Elected Members and Corporate Parents in January 2026 to strengthen and promote understanding of their roles.

Connection with National Promise Developments:

The Lead Officer acts as a key connector between national and local development and has attended eight networking meetings led by The Promise Scotland and four chaired by COSLA. This consistent connection has supported a holistic workforce approach, enabling regular updates to ensure practice and developments are aligned with the Promise plans.

The Lead Officer has met with key professionals across the partnership on seven occasions to provide an overview of the Promise and gather information to inform a gap analysis of Fife’s implementation of the Promise. The Lead Officer has given a presentation to partners on local and

national Promise developments on seven occasions, reaching approximately 200 key professionals to disseminate information across their services.

Consultation, Collaboration and Co-production:

The Lead Officer has had line management responsibility for the Quality Assurance Team within Fife Council, and this provided an opportunity to support improvement activity that is aligned to The Promise Plan. Activities have included increased consultation and self-evaluation activity across the social work service to support the voice of children and their families.

The Lead Officer has also led on a transition plan for an internal Children's Rights service which is aligned with the principles of The Promise and includes co-design by young people who will access the service. This will support the development of a stigma-free, rights-led approach.

Supporting Links between Practice and Strategic Development:

Alongside the Corporate Parenting Board, the Lead Officer is a key participant in multi-agency strategic forums including:

- Children in Fife strategic meetings
- Children Service's Strategic Leads Group
- Children's Rights Oversight Group
- Chairperson of the Children's Rights Participation and Engagement Subgroup

This participation supports strategic development that is informed by the Lead Officer's knowledge of partnership activity.

Next Steps

In April 2026, a partnership consultation will take place to further evaluate the impact of the Lead Officer post and inform the next steps required to embed The Promise activity into practice.

Next year's priority is to evaluate the impact of the current approach and explore ways to maximise the workforce understanding of The Promise developments and its application in everyday practice. Relying on one post to undertake the lead information sharing role across the partnership brings capacity and reach challenges, therefore, it is proposed that a Promise Network is developed in 2026 to further embed understanding and implementation at a practitioner level.

This could improve sustainability across the partnership, where key practitioners across services develop their roles by taking ownership for the promotion and implementation of The Promise. This approach could also enable strategic partners to consider how they embed this ownership into their leadership teams to support strategic planning.

It is proposed that this post requires another year of funding. This would enable the Lead Officer to build on the outcomes achieved in relation to corporate parenting and co-production, while exploring new ways to develop links between strategy and practice. Without this funding, progress may not be sustained, as there is currently no identified alternative capacity or approach to deliver this support.

It is recognised that this post will not be funded by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) beyond March 2027. Outcomes of the evaluation exercise in 2026 will determine whether the Lead Officer post will remain and how the post will be funded from the existing budgets with contributions from key partners. If the evaluation identifies an alternative approach to embed practice across practitioner networks and strategic partnerships, then this activity will be planned across existing posts within the partnership at no further cost.

Children in Fife Governance Board have directed that progress on The Promise should be overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board, reflecting the alignment between both areas of responsibility. The Promise ambition is full implementation by 2030, covering the period of the next Children's Services plan (2026-29).

The Lead Officer for the Promise facilitates and coordinates the work of the Corporate Parenting Board, linking the board with the national developments and ensuring the work and the services in Fife on delivering The Promise is communicated widely.

Fife Corporate Parenting Board (FCPB) has been strengthened over the last year with the additionality of new and returning members. There are clear reporting and quality assurance structures.

Evidence of Progress: Flash Reports and Thematic Oversight

Flash Reports submitted by Board members provide concise summaries of local activity and progress aligned to the thematic focus of each eight-weekly meeting. These offer vital qualitative evidence of how Fife continues to keep The Promise, capturing lived-experience, impact and highlighting where improvement is needed.

Alongside qualitative reporting, the FCPB aims to identify and challenge the individual and structural inequalities faced by care-experienced children and young people. These inequalities—often intensified by poverty, trauma, and loss—are deeply embedded in many care journeys. To strengthen accountability, the development of the FCPB Data Dashboard will support clear and consistent monitoring of Fife's progress in reducing these inequalities and improving outcomes.

Developing the Workforce: Building Shared Responsibility

To ensure wider awareness of the responsibility to recognise and challenge inequalities, Corporate Parenting training is available online for the Fife Council workforce. In addition, targeted training and development sessions have been delivered for elected members, Corporate Parenting Board members and foster carers. These sessions enhance understanding of collective Corporate Parenting duties, deepen awareness of The Promise Scotland and promote trauma-informed practice aligned with Fife's strategic priorities.

Delivering the FCPB Framework

To deliver on the FCPB framework, the Board is working to the Corporate Parenting Plan 2024–2027. The Plan sets out seven priority areas that link directly with the foundations of The Promise and guide the Board's focus over the three-year period. These align with the proposed priorities of the new Children's Services Plan.

Our approach to implementing GIRFEC



Context

The Child Wellbeing Pathway is Fife's multi-agency process in place across the Children's Services Partnership to support implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). The Pathway was refreshed in 2023-24 to take account of new national GIRFEC guidance and national Child Protection Guidance.

What is the key issue/ challenge?	What do we need to do to address this?	Summary of progress made during period, including evidence April 2025 - March 2026
Ensuring that the Child Wellbeing Pathway provides an effective basis for our GIRFEC approach	Ensure all staff have clear guidance on the use of the Child Wellbeing Pathway	The GIRFEC Quality Assurance Group was established in September 2025 as a subgroup of Children in Fife, with representation from Health, Social Work and Education. Since its formation, the group has developed and conducted a staff confidence survey, facilitated single-agency focus groups and is now progressing with multi-agency focus groups and case sampling (10 cases per agency). A report outlining the findings and recommendations will be submitted to Children in Fife. Monitoring the traffic accessing the GIRFEC tab within the Children in Fife website has been important. It is critical that the website contains up to date information, links and documents.
	Workforce development on use of the Child Wellbeing Pathway	The GIRFEC E-module is currently being refreshed by Kerry Cooper, Workforce Development Lead Officer. The Communities of Practice (CoP) model will initially be piloted within the Cowdenbeath locality. A development session was held to explore and refine the overarching vision for the model. Linda Sheret (Service Manager) and Kerry Cooper will be leading on this work.
	Ensure that we are recording use of the CWP and are able to monitor the journey of children	The group agreed that each agency will select ten cases for an in-depth review. This review will examine: • Early identification of unmet need or emerging concerns • The appropriateness and proportionality of responses • The quality of communication with children, young people and their families

		• How effectively partner agencies worked together to support the children, young people and their families An ongoing review and evaluation framework will be formulated once this review has concluded and its learning has been considered.
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Review of Progress 2023-26

Over the course of Fife's Children's Services Plan, Fife's multi-agency partnership made sustained progress in refreshing and strengthening the Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach. This period has been characterised by a collective effort to simplify processes, build workforce confidence and strengthen consistency and quality across the partnership. The vision is to improve collaboration across services.

Across agencies, there has been a renewed commitment to a shared GIRFEC vision grounded in holistic, whole-family support. This was reinforced through development sessions, engagement activity and refreshed materials including updated models of assessment and planning.

This shared vision helped partners realign practice around children's wellbeing, early intervention and relationship-based support.

Clearer articulation of the Named Person and Lead Professional roles supported improved consistency, especially around communication, early identification and coordinated planning.

The renewed focus on the '5 key GIRFEC questions' supports more structured, analytical conversations about children's needs and circumstances. This should increase practitioner confidence and strengthen the quality of assessments across services.

One of the aims of the refresh was improving assessment, GDPR understanding and information sharing processes. The partnership developed clearer processes and tools (e.g. Information Sharing Flowchart), with workforce engagement showing improved clarity and confidence.

Partners worked together to simplify the Child Wellbeing Pathway from early concerns to planning and review, with the aim of working more collegiately.

The aims of the refresh were to facilitate quicker identification of concerns, more proportionate responses, improved coordination between agencies and clearer communication with families.

A major priority across 2023-26 was workforce development, and partners delivered:

- GIRFEC Learning Network sessions
- Multi-agency development sessions
- Pilot programmes (e.g. Social Workers in Schools, leading to implementation of Early Help and Support teams)
- Improvements in tools and guidance

Two notable pilots supported the refresh aims:

- Social Workers in Schools, improving early access to support and strengthening direct relationships with families.
- Partner meetings, improving multi-agency information sharing and early intervention

Informing the refresh was:

- Analysis of staff confidence surveys
- Single-agency and multi-agency focus groups
- Case sampling across services

Next Steps

The Child Wellbeing Pathway Oversight Group provides strategic oversight for the implementation and embedding of the Child Wellbeing Pathway in Fife. The purpose of the group is to:

- Provide assurance to Children in Fife Governance Board
- Ensure quality assurance of CWP guidance and its application in practice
- Identify gaps, themes, and emerging issues that require attention
- Maintain oversight of the Children in Fife website

The work carried out by the Child Wellbeing Pathway Oversight Group will sit as part of Children's Services core approaches. Moving forward, the Child Wellbeing Pathway Oversight Group plans to:

- Engage systematically with practitioners to refine and improve partnership working through surveys, focus groups, observations, discussions, triangulation of data and outcomes from learning reviews.
- Collaborate with other groups to identify and report on key QA measures within the Child Wellbeing Pathway, including themes from complaints and escalations used to manage professional disputes and promote joint learning.
- Identify and share innovative, high-quality approaches.
- Benchmark against best practice across Scotland by engaging with GIRFEC leads.
- Oversee the ongoing use and development of the Children in Fife website.

Section 4 - Improving our strategic approach

How our approach to children's services has developed over time

Background

During the 2010s, Children in Fife established a **nurture-based approach** to partnership working and improvement. This reflected developments in the wider policy landscape, with a strong focus on early intervention and prevention following the publication of the Christie report. Through this work, the Partnership developed a range of **evidence-based approaches** for family support and child development that have continued to be used – or that have informed subsequent developments in – partnership approaches.

A key element in the development of these evidence-based approaches has been a long-established focus on the use of **Quality Improvement Methodology** to support improvement. This has been supported by the work of the Fife **Children's and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC)**. The Fife work of CYPIC members has often been pioneering, with Fife work being recognised through national awards and scaled at a national programme level. A clear example is the National Improving Writing Programme, which originated in Fife and has since been scaled up to primary 4 learners across 20 local authority areas.

The Covid pandemic interrupted the development of these approaches and prevented many programmes being delivered face-to-face. It also interrupted arrangements for self-evaluation and quality assurance. The emergency resilience response required a shift towards closer working with the wider Fife Partnership, through **place-based approaches**.

Figure: the evolution of our partnership approach to improving Fife Children's Services

	Establishing a nurture approach to early intervention (pre-2020)	Responding to the Covid pandemic (2020-2023)	Supporting recovery & ongoing reform of services (2023-present)
Children's Services	• Early Years Strategy and Strategy Group (2009) • Family Nurture Approach and Family Nurture Steering Group (2013-17) • Children's Services Plans: 2011-14; 2014-17; 2017-20 • 'Cluny Clays' Development Sessions introduced	• Children's Services Plans: Agile Action Plan 2020-21; 2021-23 • WFWF programmes introduced: ◦ Family and Parenting Support- Evidence-based group work ◦ STEPP Outreach Service ◦ Emergency Support Team ◦ Community Social Work • Initial support from the WFW fund in 2022-23 was used: ◦ To establish a workforce development lead, supporting practice development across children's services ◦ Developing the How Good Is Our Family Support self-evaluation framework	• Children's Services Plan 2023-26 • WFWF review of funded work (2024) • Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2025) • Supporting Families Toolkit (HGIOFS) used as framework for Children's Services Development Sessions • Continued funding from the WFW Fund used to support a range of initiatives including: ◦ Establishing Early Help and Support teams across Fife's 7 localities ◦ Senior Practitioners in Schools pilot ◦ Workforce Development ◦ Support to strengthen system-level capacity
QI Work/ Fife CYPIC	• Fife Early Years Collaborative established (Oct 2013) • Fife Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative established (2016) • QI Award (2017): Inspiring Leader • QI Award (2018): Excellence for QI in Primary Years • QI Awards (2019): ◦ Excellence in Using QI to Support The Best Start in Life (0-8 years) Look Who's Talking Project ◦ Achieving Results at Scale: Spreading Learning for Writing Using QI ◦ QI Leader of the Year	• QI Awards (2021): ◦ Compassionate Collaboration: Making it Work for Families in Fife ◦ Supporting Better Outcomes (8 years+): Inverkeithing High School Using QI to ensure equity in accessing the curriculum ◦ Spreading Improvement: Learning During Lockdown ◦ Improver of the Year	• Move to ensure a greater strategic impact from Fife CYPIC expertise • QI Methodology used to develop improvement actions in 2026-29 Plan • WFWF QI projects scaled up: ◦ Let's Connect ◦ Communication High 5
National Policy	• Early Years Framework (2008) • Christie Commission & Scottish Government response (2011-12) • 3-Step Improvement Framework (2012) • Early Years Collaborative (2012) • Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 • Raising Attainment for All programme (2014) • Maternity and Children Quality Improvement Collaborative	• Whole Family Wellbeing Funding announced (2021) • Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) Order 2021 (1140 hours) • Supporting Families: A National Self-Assessment Toolkit for Change developed (2022)	• UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 • Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Action Plan (2025)

Case Study: our work to strengthen partnership working over the course of the 2023-26 Plan

Over the past three years the Children in Fife partnership has strengthened its capacity for self-evaluation, quality assurance and continuous improvement – using investment from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. This section summarises some of the key elements that have supported this approach – and the improvements that have been achieved in partnership working through these changes.

A more systematic review of improvement actions

A strengthened model of strategic self-evaluation was introduced, supported by the establishment of a post for a Policy Officer for Children's Services. This has enabled a more systematic approach to evaluating progress with the improvement priorities in the Children's Services Plan, via an annual cycle of self-evaluation meetings. The reviews have been supported by members of Fife CYPIC, to help strengthen support and challenge. This is helping to provide greater clarity regarding the theories of change underpinning improvement work and to strengthen the evidence of impact.



A more holistic approach to self-evaluation

The *How Good is Our Family Support (HGIOFS)* self-evaluation framework has been used as a basis for partnership self-evaluation, over the past three years. The HGIOFS framework was closely modelled on the Supporting Families Toolkit, developed to support the delivery of Whole Family Wellbeing. The framework has been used to structure Children's Services Development sessions over the past three years, enabling a rounded view of partnership working, which can be reviewed on an ongoing basis.



A more strategic use of Quality Improvement methodology and QI expertise

Quality Improvement (QI) expertise within the Fife Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) has been used to help develop the strategic priorities for the new Children's Services Plan. This has included workshops to help develop a theory of change for each improvement priority, which will provide the basis for ongoing evaluation of progress with improvement. It has also enabled work to synthesise the knowledge gained from a wide range of previous QI work undertaken by partners through use of QI methodology, providing a clearer focus for future potential improvement.



Improved data and evidence on outcomes and experiences

A post of Children's Services Data Analyst was established, to support the development of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and to strengthen partnership's core data processes. This has helped to improve the level of analysis undertaken in developing the JSNA, as well as enabling the development of new performance reports and a more regular cycle of updating core outcomes data



How we are developing a more strategic use of Quality Improvement methodology

From January to June 2025, the Fife Children & Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) led a partnership Quality Improvement (QI) programme to strengthen improvement capability across Fife Children's Services.



This work brought together practitioners from Education, Health, and the Voluntary Sector to form a shared faculty and learning community. The programme focused on building skills, confidence and connections so that teams could lead meaningful improvement work aligned to Children's Services priorities.

Fife CYPIC

CYPIC's core purpose is to develop the improvement capability of Fife's workforce so that services can improve outcomes for children, young people and families, and deliver on key strategic priorities.

Quality Improvement expertise across the system is limited and variable. To address this, CYPIC worked strategically to pull together QI expertise and resources from across the partnership, creating a shared approach rather than duplication of effort.

What We Did

- Led a Quality Improvement journey programme from January to June 2025
- Supported eight multi-agency improvement teams (32 participants in total)
- Aligned all improvement work to the Children's Services Plan 2023–26
- Formed improvement teams that were best placed to lead change, with a strong emphasis on partnership working
- Provided practical, coached support rather than theory-heavy training

The programme used an experiential learning model, helping teams apply QI tools directly to their own priorities and real-world challenges.

Each team:

- Used data and QI tools to understand the system they wanted to improve
- Set clear and measurable improvement aims
- Developed a theory of change linked to their priority

- Tested changes in a structured way, focusing on high-impact, low-effort actions
- Measured progress over time using simple data tools such as run charts
- Captured learning, impact and next steps in an improvement poster
- Developed plans to sustain and spread improvement gains

Teams worked on a range of priorities, reflecting the varied needs across children's services.

Partnership and Strategic Alignment

This was a shared partnership effort, not a single-service programme. CYPIC worked strategically to:

- Align improvement work to Children's Services priorities
- Build strong multi-agency teams around shared challenges
- Maximise limited QI expertise by growing it collectively
- Create a network of practitioners confident to lead improvement within their own services

Impact and Learning

By May 2025:

- 32 practitioners had increased their confidence and capability to lead QI work
- Teams were using data more effectively to understand systems and measure change
- Stronger cross-service relationships were in place to support joint improvement
- Improvement activity was clearly linked to strategic priorities for children and families

The programme was a significant investment of partnership time, expertise and commitment. By working together, CYPIC and partners have grown stronger foundation for continuous improvement across Fife Children's Services. This work helped ensure improvement activity was coordinated, evidence-based underpinned by method, supporting better outcomes for children, young people and families. Each team captured their improvement journey, learning and impact in a poster to support the partnership's shared learning and memory.

Fife CYPIC QI Programme Teams and Improvement Aims

	Team	Improvement Aim
1	Active Schools	By July 2025, reengage* inactive S1 females (who were previously active in P7) by 10% n Bell Baxter High School (currently 57) and Levenmouth Academy (currently 76). <i>*Participate in extra-curricular sport and physical activity taking place before school, during lunchtime or afterschool.</i>
2	Childcare Levenmouth	Increase booked places at Kennoway Out of School Club from 28 per week (35% capacity) to at least 42 per week (52.5% capacity).

3	Clued Up	By June 2025 attendance at weekly drop-in, for young people aged 16-25 (affected by substance use) will be increased by at least 5 people (baseline 0).
4	Fife Breastfeeding Support	By September 2025, at least 4 mothers per week, from Levenmouth, will be attending the new breastfeeding group in Methil.
5	FVA & Friends	By June 2026, three organisations (Clued Up, YAP, FVA) will demonstrate meaningful participation* of children and young people within their services. <i>*When children and young people can share their opinions, influence decisions and create change.</i>
6	Lynburn / Touch PS	Pupil A: By June 2025, reduce risk of exclusion* by lowering senior leader interventions and increasing positive self-reported feelings. Pupil B: By June 2025, reduce risk of exclusion by decreasing violent and aggressive behaviours from 3 per week to less than 1 per week. <i>*Internal exclusion, supervised by staff away from peers. External exclusion at home, supervised by parent/carer with learning materials provided.</i> <i>**Violent and aggressive behaviour: Physical: hitting, kicking, biting, spitting or throwing objects. Verbal: screaming, shouting and swearing.</i>
7	School Nursing	By April 2026 increase the 'self-referrals' by young people* to the School Nursing Service for sexual health support, aligning with one of the nationally identified 10 priority areas** for School Nursing. The focus is on a selected pilot school. <i>*Young People defined as age 12-18. 'Self-Referrals' is either via QR code or paper form to request appointment.</i>
8	Tackling Child Poverty	By August 2025, access* to health foods will be increased by 3% from the baseline of families within the Levenmouth area who qualify** and use Best Start Foods. <i>*Access is removing the financial barrier to healthy food.</i> <i>**Quality is those meeting the eligibility criteria to Best Start Foods set and administered by Social Security Scotland.</i>

Shaping of Children's Services Plan 2026-29

Fife's Children's Services is committed to scaling and spreading successful programmes to address the emerging priorities identified in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for the Children's Services Plan 2026–29. The Children's Services Partnership will continue to use rigorous QI methodology to identify and meet the needs of children, young people and families across Fife at the earliest point possible.

This will include work to achieve scale and spread of two improvement approaches developed through the work of Fife CYPIC over a number of years: **Let's Connect** and **Communication High 5**. Work to test the potential for scale and spread of both these approaches was undertaken during the Fife Children's Services Plan 2023-26, using investment from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

The following pages provide an overview of these improvement approaches.

Case Study: Communication High 5

Improving Early Language & Communication by Implementing Communication High 5:

Communication High 5 is a set of strategies designed to promote effective communication, supporting children through high quality interactions. These include: Face to face, Thinking time, Less questions more comments, WOW words, and Sign, symbol, object.

There is robust Quality Improvement (QI) evidence showing that consistent, whole-system use of **Communication High 5** in our Early Learning Centres (ELCs) leads to improved language and communication outcomes for children.

Quality Improvement approaches have helped practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of each strategy, why it matters and how to implement it well. Although Communication High 5 has been established in Fife for some time, recent work highlights the importance of effective implementation and using all five strategies consistently.

Knowledge into Action:

We are: Growing QI capability by upskilling 2-3 practitioners within each ELC to use improvement approaches to lead targeted support for children who are not meeting expected language and communication milestones.

Maximising the use of eLIPs data to identify children showing poorer communication outcomes and focus improvement efforts where they are most needed- ensuring high quality interactions have the greatest impact while enriching every conversation with every child.

'It has been beneficial to everyone, children, staff and parents'

(Early Years Officer-cohort 1)

Being fully reflective in our own practice has been a key element. We had implemented Communication High 5, however not fully at times and more on a surface level'

(Early Years Officer – Cohort 1)

Our Aim: To improve Early Language and Communication outcomes for children* not meeting their expected language and communication milestones.

Our Why: "Speech, Language and Communication underpins every aspect of a child's development- their relationships, mental health and wellbeing, learning and future life opportunities. Yet in Scotland today, far too many children, particularly those living in areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage face avoidable challenges in their SLC development." (Scottish Government, 2025)



Impact:

Cohort 1 (results reflect data returned from 4 of the 5 settings)

AIM: By January 2025, 75 % of children* will be assess as 'green' and <10% as 'red' in the 'saying' eLIPS category

*children entering ELC April 2024 intake

	Baseline (Aug 24)				Professional Judgement (March 2025)			
	Green	Amber	Red	Total	Green	Amber	Red	Total
Setting 1	4	4		9	9	6		17
Setting 2	3	1		4	4			4
Setting 3		1	2	3	3			3
Setting 4	5	2	1	8	8			8
Total	12	8	12	32	24	6	2	32
%	37.5	25	37.5	100	75	18.75	6.25	100

Cohort 2

AIM: By December 2025, 61.5% (40) of children* will be assess as 'green' and less than 20% (13) will be assessed as 'red' in the 'saying' eLIPS organiser (Baseline: 47.7% Green, 13.8% Amber, 38.5% Red)

Children entering ELC: *Jan 2025; **April/May 2025; *** Aug 2025, ****Aug 2024

	Baseline				Professional Judgement (December 2025)			
	Green	Amber	Red	Total	Green	Amber	Red	Total
Setting 6	5*		4 (2*/1**/1****)	9	8		1	9
Setting 7	10 (7*/3**)	4 (2*/2**)	7 (5*/2**)	21	11 (8*/3**)	3 (1*/2**)	7 (5*/2**)	21
Setting 8	7 (4*/3**)	2 (1*/1**)	8 (6*/2**)	17	8 (4*/4**)	5 (2*/2**)	3*	16#
Setting 9	4 (3*/1****)	1*	3****	8	5 (3*/2****)	3 (1*/2****)		8
Setting 10	5 (4*/1**)	2 (1*/1**)	3 (2*/1**)	10	9 (8*/1**)		1**	10
Total	31	9	25	65	41	11	12	64
%	47.7	13.8	38.5		64.1	17.2	18.7	

#1 child left setting during programme

Next Steps:

Communication High 5 will be a key element of Priority 3 of the next Children's Services Plan (2026-29). Next steps will:

- **Embed implementation:** Continue to support the 10 ELC who completed the Fife QI Early Language and Communication Programme to fully embed Communication High 5 strategies into daily practice, strengthening high-quality conversations with all children. Staff will use real-time data to drive improvement for children with lower language and communication outcomes.
- **Spread to new settings:** Extend the programme to additional ELCs in areas with high predicted Speech, Language and Communication needs, replicating the model and impact demonstrated in Cohorts 1 and 2.
- **Build improvement capacity:** Further strengthen the Quality Improvement capability within Early Years workforce to ensure sustainable, scalable spread with strong ownership across settings.
- **Enable system-wide improvement:** Continue to adapt systems and processes to fully adopt and support the Communication High 5 approach across the wider system.

Case Study: Let's Connect

Improving Outcomes for Children by Empowering Families to Connect Through Enjoyable, Nurturing Play Interactions

Let's Connect is a multiagency approach, underpinned by quality improvement methodology and developed through the Scottish Government Quality Improvement Practicum. It supports parents/carers to use four key interaction strategies during play and daily routines. Practitioners model, coach and embed these strategies with families, supporting parent-child connection and helping children to develop attention, communication, play, relationships and emotional regulation.



The Four Let's Connect Strategies



Knowledge into Action:

We are:

- ✚ Embedding high quality interactions through consistent use of the four LC strategies.
- ✚ Building workforce confidence, ensuring practitioners can model strategies clearly and coach families sensitively.
- ✚ Using observation summaries linked to strategy use, parent feedback and practitioner observations to identify strengths, target support and track improvement.
- ✚ Strengthening cross sector collaboration, enabling earlier identification and supported transitions.

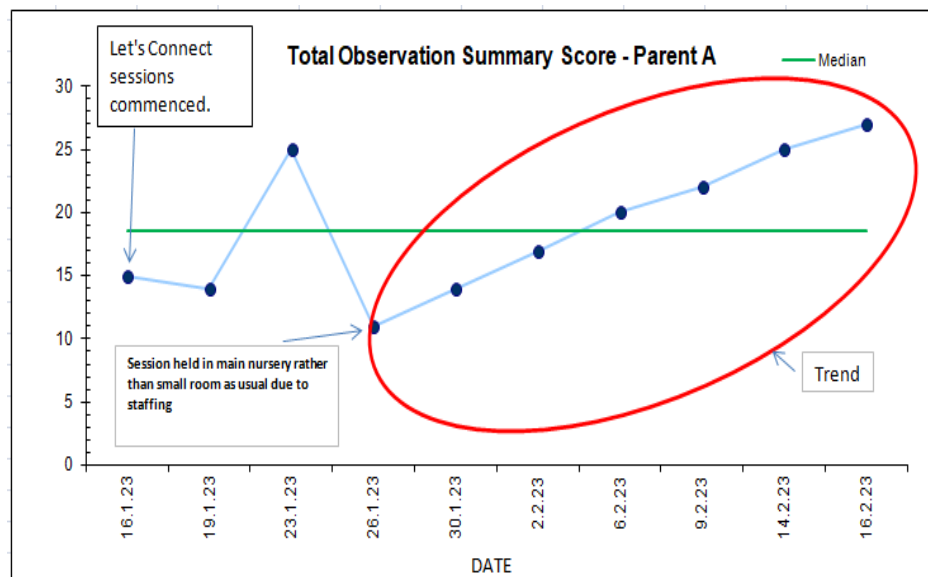
Our Aim: To strengthen early play, interaction, communication and self-regulation outcomes for young children through enriched parent-child interactions and high quality practitioner coaching.

Let's Connect focuses on families who would benefit from enhanced support but are not on specialist pathways.

Our Why: Research consistently shows that nurturing, responsive early interactions underpin every aspect of a child's development—communication, attachment, learning, wellbeing and long-term life chances. Many parents report uncertainty about how best to play with, interact with, or support early communication with their child. LC directly addresses these needs by strengthening everyday moments of connection.

Let's Connect helps families build these foundations through simple, evidence-based strategies embedded into everyday play and routines.

Impact:



Outcome Quotes from Practitioners	Outcome Quotes from Parents/Carers	Outcomes Observed for Children
'LC provides rich professional development' 'LC has supported practitioners skills in modelling and coaching parents/carers' 'LC helps to enhanced our relationships with parent/carer' 'I can see the positive impact on the parent / child relationship' 'It has been really special participating with the family on LC' 'I feel my relationship with the Mum has improved' 'Mum will now play with J in the nursery which she didn't do before' 'We can see play is now embedded in the child's life' 'Mum is now more aware of her impact on play and changes how she engages with B' 'Dad is much more confident playing with his child and therefore playing more' 'It has been a valuable support programme for all our children and families' 'It has been a valuable programme for myself as a practitioner to be able to support parents on the importance of play' 'I found it helps me build closer relationships with parents and deliver tailored play sessions to go with their child's interests' 'The play sessions support parents to prioritise time for play in their child's daily routines'	'My child wants to play with me more' 'My child's concentration has improved' 'My child's language has improved' 'My bond has improved with my child' 'I like that we (EYO and Parent) have connected more too' I realised we don't actually play enough' 'I have got the Bookbug app and bring song into the house' 'I have enjoyed it and I can see a difference in my child' 'LC would be good for other families' 'There is now fun in the house' 'My child can now be understood by all of the family' 'Keeping our language simple has helped- we can communicate now' 'Grandparents are having more to and fro play with child' 'I play with her every day having tea parties, singing rhymes and songs at bath time. Dad joins in the fun too' 'We both feel confident using simple language and her speech is coming on' 'That wasn't so scary after all' 'It's nice to do a session like this knowing it will help my son's development'	Case Study Observations and practitioners reports indicate improved child development within areas such as: attention and listening self regulation communication and language interaction with adults & peers play Quotes: 'Improved listening and attention- stays longer in activities' 'Improved regulations of emotions- calmer and happier' 'Beginning to use single words and gestures to communicate' 'Child is seeking more play interactions' 'It is great seeing the child's progression from start to finish and hearing parents say how their children have been learning new language' 'Quicker to self regulate and settle after distress, reduced adult intervention required to achieve this' 'Reduced distressed behaviours' 'Improved attention & concentration, more evident as the LC sessions progressed'

Let's Connect : Gwen Bell SLT, Tracey Aird OT (both NHS Fife) and Susie McGuinness, EYO (Fife Council)

Next Steps:

Let's Connect will be a key element of Priority 2 of the next Children's Services Plan (2026-29). Next steps will be to:

- ✚ Achieve **100% coverage** across 2-year-old education settings
- ✚ Enhance implementation in under-2 pathways
- ✚ Sustain Champion capacity and supervision frameworks
- ✚ Stronger alignment with CSP governance structures
- ✚ Enhanced outcomes reporting linked to ASQ data and parental behaviour change
- ✚ Long-term workforce model and resource planning

Section 5- Outcomes for Children and Young People

The **Fife Wellbeing Indicator Set** provides an overview of key outcomes for children and young people in Fife. The table below provides a 5-year trend view of current outcomes. Baseline data for the current children's services plan is highlighted in orange.

Outcome	Indicator	Measure	Fife							Scotland							Trend
			Fife 2018/19	Fife 2019/20	Fife 2020/21	Fife 2021/22	Fife 2022/23	Fife 2023/24	Fife 2024/25	Scotland 2018/19	Scotland 2019/20	Scotland 2020/21	Scotland 2021/22	Scotland 2022/23	Scotland 2023/24	Scotland 2024/25	Gap Fife vs Scotland
Context	FWI1	Percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in Relative low income families, after Housing Costs	25.5%	26.4%	22.1%	26.1%	26.6%	16.2%	16.2%	20.2%	21.7%	19.8%	21.6%	21.8%	15.2%	14.8%	
	FWI2	% of P5-S6 children who agree that their local area is a good place to live	Source: Fife HWB & National HWB Surveys 2021-23					60.9%				64.5%					
Safe	FWI3a	Number of children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 aged 0-17	32.5	23.2	24.2	21.8	15.6	18.7%	15.5%	28.0	28.8	23.2	22.3	20.8	20.8	20.5	
	FWI3b	Number of children on the Child Protection Register	209	147	152	136	97	130	108	2599	2641	2104	2019	2077	2111	2087	
	FWI4a	Number of Looked After Children (LAC) per 1,000 CYP aged 0-16	14.8	13.0	13.0	12.0	12.0	11.9	10.9	15.7	15.9	14.7	14.1	13.7	13.2	13.2	
	FWI4b	Number of Looked After Children	935	919	817	748	740	727	666	14262	14458	13200	12447	12084	11778	11818	
Healthy	FWI6	% of pregnancies where women reported being current smokers at ante-natal booking appointment	18.0%	20.9%	17.5%	13.1%	11.4%	10.2%	8.5%	15.2%	14.6%	13.9%	10.8%	9.6%	11.0%	7.0%	
	FWI7	Average Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing (WEMWBS) Score for S2-S6 children						44.9					45.3				
	FWI8	Number of CAMHS referrals per 1,000 aged 0-17	40.3	52.3	39.1	48.1	41.1	39.8	35.3	35.5	35.0	28.5	37.9	38.2	36.1	33.2	
	FWI9	% babies being exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks	30.9%	30.6%	30.7%	30.9%	29.5%	30.9%	32.9%	31.9%	31.6%	32.0%	32.2%	32.0%	32.9%	34.3%	
	FWI10	% P1 year children with healthy weight	85.6%	77.2%		77.3%	77.1%	74.7%	73.1%	71.6%	76.0%		75.0%	76.8%	76.5%	74.5%	
	FWI11	% P1 year children free from obvious dental decay	71.9%	73.7%		70.9%	69.6%	72.3%	75.2%	71.1%	72.4%		73.1%	73.8%	73.9%	76.5%	
	FWI12a	% of S4 pupils who have ever taken illegal drugs, drugs formerly known as legal highs, solvents or prescription drugs that were not prescribed to them						11.0%					10.0%				
	FWI12b	% of S2 pupils who drink alcohol about once-a-week						7.1%					2.3%				

Outcome	Indicator	Measure	Fife							Scotland							Trend
			Fife 2018/19	Fife 2019/20	Fife 2020/21	Fife 2021/22	Fife 2022/23	Fife 2023/24	Fife 2024/25	Scotland 2018/19	Scotland 2019/20	Scotland 2020/21	Scotland 2021/22	Scotland 2022/23	Scotland 2023/24	Scotland 2024/25	Gap Fife vs Scotland
Active	FWI14	% of primary & secondary pupils engaging in physical extra-curricular activity				28.0%		39.0%									
	FWI15	% of P1-S6 children participating in community activities (participation in at least one from list)						75.6%					81.0%				
Achieving	FWI16	% of P1, P4 and P7 children achieving expected CfE levels in literacy	74.2%		64.6%	68.4%	70.3%	71.1%	72.0%	72.3%		66.9%	70.5%	72.7%	73.0%	74.5%	
	FWI17	% of P1, P4 and P7 children achieving expected CfE levels in numeracy	80.2%		71.3%	74.8%	77.0%	77.3%	77.4%	79.1%		74.7%	77.9%	79.6%	80.3%	80.3%	
	FWI18	% of all school leavers in positive destination on leaving school	94.4%	91.9%	93.9%	94.8%	95.3%	95.6%	96.6%	95.0%	93.3%	95.5%	95.7%	95.9%	95.7%	95.7%	
Nurtured	FWI19	% Early Learning and Childcare settings achieving Care Inspectorate grades of good or better				94.6%	88.9%	91.2%	91.1%				87.7%	90.0%	88.3%	87.8%	
Respected and responsible	FWI21	% of P5 to S1 pupils who feel confident often or all of the time						48.1%					50.4%				
	FWI23	% of P5-S6 pupils who spend 3 or more hours of their free time on weekdays using electronic devices such as computers, tablets (like iPad) or smart phones						66.0%					64.1%				
Included	FWI24a	Number of children in temporary accommodation at 31 March	317	343	313	388	533	387	433	Data source: Service DataWork to be undertaken to scope benchmark						10180	
	FWI24b	Rate of children (per 10,000 aged 0-17) in temporary accommodation at 31 March							62.3							99.8	
	FWI25a	Number of children involved in homeless applications	1406	1222	1182	1203	1368	1148	1075							15046	
	FWI25b	Rate of children (per 10,000 aged 0-17) involved in homeless applications							154.6							147.6	

Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

How we developed our JSNA

Over the course of 2025, Fife's Children's Services conducted a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The JSNA is informed by our evidence base and structured across Scotland's key child wellbeing indicators: Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving Respected, Responsible and Included (SHANARRI). It draws on data, wider literature, lived experience and strategic reflections to identify current outcomes, inequalities and systemic challenges.

A link to our full JSNA can be found on the [Children in Fife web-site](#).

Our partners	Our approach	Our evidence
	Workshops 1-3: - Collected existing data, service information and feedback from children, young people and families across services - Partners analysed and distilled the key themes and messages Children's Services Development Sessions: - Presented and sought feedback on collated evidence and emerging themes with workforce Drafting and finalising: - JSNA document was drafted and shared with governance and partnership groups for final sign-off Improvement priorities for 2026-29 Plan identified: - Strengthening mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children, young people and families - Building family resilience through early help and holistic, whole-family centred services - Improving early speech, language and communication to close gaps and support lifelong learning	National & local statistics: - National Records Scotland (NRS) and Public Health Scotland (PHS) - Fife Council Education Service Data, NHS Fife, Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Lived experience: - Fife Children & Young People Health & Wellbeing Survey, Fife Centre for Equalities 'Let's Chat', Care Opinion Feedback National & local policies: - UNCRC, GIRFEC, National Performance Framework - Fife's Education Directorate Improvement Plan, Fife's Local Housing Strategy, Fife Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy

Key findings

The JSNA provided robust insight into persistent issues in Fife. These are some of the key findings which Fife's Children's Services 2026-29 priorities will seek to address.

Mental health need is high and unevenly distributed.

57.7% of S2-S6 have raised SDQ scores, with girls, pupils with ASN and those in SIMD Q1 most affected.

(Fife Children and Young People Health & Wellbeing Survey 2022/23)

Families experience delayed and fragmented access to support.

Feedback indicates long wait times, having to repeat stories and support arriving at crisis points.

(Fife Centre for Equalities, 2025)

Child developmental concerns rose, and remain high, following the Covid-19 pandemic.

New speech concerns are 14.2% in SIMD Q1 versus 4.2% in SIMD Q5.

(Public Health Scotland, 2025)

Child poverty and inequality are persistently high and dispersed despite intervention.

18% of children live in low-income families. This can range between 9.4% to 31.2% depending on the area.

(Fife Council, 2025)

Struggling with mental health, and experiencing anxiety and depression are key drivers for **substance use**. Despite progress in Fife to address the impact of substance use by young people – and recent reductions in Drug Related Deaths – this remains a significant challenge across Scotland.

Challenges with scale of additional support needs and inclusion.

37.8% of pupils have an additional support need.

Pupils with mental health related additional support needs have the lowest secondary attendance.

Minority ethnic learners and disabled households face higher bullying/exclusion and household stress.

(Education Service Data, 2024/25)

Child protection concerns reflect parental issues.

Child Protection initial case conferences: 60% parental mental ill-health, 51% domestic abuse, 48% parental substance abuse.

(Scottish Government, 2025)

Our engagement with children, young people and families

Key findings from the JSNA resonate with the views shared by children, young people and families across Fife.

"It is very difficult to find the right services – you can get moved from group to group as nobody can really help as they all have strict guidelines."

Quote 1- Fife Voluntary Action, 2024

"It's hard to tell your story over and over again. It's so hard to do this when workers change, or you have to see a different person each time."

Quote 2- Fife Voluntary Action, 2024

"Why should I have to wait until something is bad before support is put in place?"

Quote 3- Fife Voluntary Action, 2024

Pupilwise & Parentwise surveys: Designed as a way of encouraging pupil and parental participation to inform service evaluation and improvement planning.

The most recent Pupilwise and Parentwise surveys were completed between January and March 2024.

Fife Centre for Equalities' (FCE) **"Let's Chat" survey**: Gathers insights from families with protected characteristics across Fife, focusing on equality and fairness.

Pupilwise:

27,418 responses from children and young people across nursery, primary and secondary schools.

What pupils feel is going well:

- Feeling Safe & Supported:
 - **73%** feel safe at school
- Health & Wellbeing:
 - **82%** feel encouraged to be healthy & active
- Learning & Engagement:
 - **87%** feel happy

Areas for improvement:

- **51%** feel their school listens to concerns about bullying
- 45% feel respected by other pupils
- **53%** say school knows what they are good at
- **47%** feel school has helped prepare them for the world of work

Parentwise:

12,463 responses from parents/carers to understand their perspectives on their child's wellbeing, school engagement and the support provided by educational settings.

What parents/carers feel is going well:

- Safety & Wellbeing:
 - **78%** say their child feels safe at school/nursery
- Communication & Engagement:
 - **78%** feel well informed about their child's progress

Areas for improvement:

- Relationships, sexual health and parenthood education (**45% positive**)
- Substance misuse education (**46% positive**)
- **50%** say the school listens to bullying concerns & **44%** feel they take appropriate action

Children and young people:

- Indicated facing racism and bullying in schools, with many incidents going unreported. This has a significant impact on their wellbeing as well as their sense of safety and inclusion.

Families:

- Reported feeling unable to access support due to language barriers and digital exclusion. Information about local services is often available online, however this is inaccessible to families who lack digital skills and resources, or whose first language is not English.

Improvement priorities and key evidence

Our three priorities were identified through a review of data and evidence, alongside a wide range of stakeholder engagement across services working both directly with children and families and at a strategic level. Partners reached a shared consensus on where collective effort could have the greatest impact. While Children in Fife acknowledges that other challenges exist, these priorities reflect where the partnership believes it can make the most difference. Our priorities include:

- Strengthening mental health and emotional wellbeing support for children, young people and families.
- Building family resilience through early help and holistic, whole-family centred services.
- Improving early speech, language and communication to close gaps and support lifelong learning.

The table below outlines the identified strategic priorities and associated evidence. Further detail for each of the priorities can be found in the full JSNA document.

Improvement Priority	Summary of Evidence	JSNA Section
Mental health and emotional wellbeing	• Mental health indicators among children and young people are poorer in Fife than Scotland. • Girls, pupils with Additional Support Needs, and those living in our most deprived areas are more likely to experience poorer overall wellbeing, social and behavioural concerns, poor sleep, weaker peer relationships and lower self-esteem. • In Fife, heavy social media use is higher among girls, particularly in early secondary stages. This mirrors wider evidence on gender differences in social media use from UK cohort studies. • 11.6% of women reported smoking during pregnancy – worse than the national average of 9.6%. Smoking during pregnancy is associated with poorer mental health in children.	Section 5.2.1g (Healthy & Active)
	• Pupils with an additional support need relating to family, emotional and mental health issues have the lowest attendance in secondary schools.	Section 5.4.1a (Achieving)
	• Parental mental ill health is the most commonly recorded concern at Child Protection Initial Case Conferences.	Section 5.1.1a (Safe)
	• Despite progress in Fife to address the impact of substance use by young people, with reducing rates of Drug Related Deaths last year, this remains a significant challenge across Scotland.	Section 5 (Safe)

Family resilience and skills	The rate of new emotional and behavioural concerns recorded at developmental reviews at 13-15 months and 27-30 months has risen significantly since COVID. Despite recent easing, rates remain above pre-pandemic levels and those living in our most deprived areas are disproportionately affected.	Section 5.3.1d (Nurtured)
	Fife has higher breastfeeding drop-off rates across most age groups. Mothers aged 20-24 have significantly higher drop-off rates in Fife compared to Scotland. Fife has made progress in reducing the breastfeeding drop-off rate: In 2023/24, the drop off rate was 33.2%, with a target to reduce drop off to 30% by 2025. Fife's drop off rate in 2024/25 was 30.7%.	Section 5.3.1e (Nurtured)
	Priority families at highest risk of child poverty locally include lone parents, households with a disability, minority ethnic families, families with a child aged under one, mothers aged under 25, and families with three or more children. Food insecurity persists and is higher in our most deprived areas, putting pressure on family resilience.	Section 4.5.1 (Priority Groups for Child Poverty Action)
	- Child homelessness has fallen but care-experienced young people and disabled households face increased risks. - Disabled households experience housing challenges including lower satisfaction with their homes, and homes not meeting their needs.	Section 5.5.1a (Respected, Responsible and Included)
	Further consideration is needed around approaches to engaging with parents and opportunities for family learning.	Section 5.4.2 (Achieving)
Speech, language and early communication	- There has been a significant increase in the proportion of new speech, language and communication concerns identified at the 27-30 month developmental review. The gap between Fife and the Scotland average has widened since the pandemic, and levels in Fife remain higher than pre-pandemic levels. - Service reflections highlight increased incidents of distressed behaviours linked to speech, language and early communication. - In Fife, the proportion of children with new speech related concerns at 27-30 months is currently 14.2% in SIMD Q1 (most deprived), and 4.2% in SIMD Q5 (least deprived). - Evidence from cohort studies (e.g. Growing Up in Scotland) consistently shows that measured equity gaps in outcomes for children of school age is already well established by the time that children start school.	Section 5.4.1c (Nurtured)

	• Evidence shows that the development of speech, language and communication underpins every aspect of a child’s development—their relationships, mental health and wellbeing, learning and future life opportunities.	
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Note: Our improvement priorities were developed using evidence and data gathered until the end of 2025. They reflect a consensus view across partners about the underlying, long-term challenges that present the most significant barrier to life outcomes for children in Fife. While more recent data may show improvement and benchmarking may suggest that Fife outcomes are relatively strong in comparison with national outcomes, Children in Fife recognises that significant improvement in outcomes, experiences and equity gaps – particularly for children living in poverty – depends upon these challenges being addressed.

Section 6- How Our Plan is supporting National Policy

The table below provides an overview of the key national policies, guidance and frameworks that influence the work of Children in Fife and our partners. The final section in the table lists several forthcoming policies and reviews which Children in Fife will be closely monitoring.

National Policy/ Guidance		Description	Link to Children in Fife work
Policy	Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014	Places duties on local authorities and health boards to promote, support and safeguard the wellbeing of children, young people and their families through children's services plans and annual report. This includes duties like Corporate Parenting, Named Persons, and Child's Plans.	Children in Fife Governance Group, Corporate Parenting Board
	UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024	Underpins a rights-based approach, ensuring all children's rights are upheld, especially those at risk. GIRFEC promotes coordinated, wellbeing-focused support across services.	Child Wellbeing Pathway Oversight Group, Children's Rights Oversight Group, Participation and Engagement Group
	Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024	Reforms how children are defined, cared for and treated in Scotland's civil and criminal justice systems, emphasising rights-based support and ending the use of Young Offenders Institutions for children.	Children in Fife Governance Group, Children's Rights Oversight Group, Corporate Parenting Board
	Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017	Requires local authorities and health boards to publish Local Child Poverty Action Reports, targeting efforts to reduce poverty, especially among six priority groups.	Children in Fife Governance Group, Child Poverty Strategy
Guidance/ Frameworks/ Strategy	Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)	National approach to implementing the UNCRC. It provides a shared language and framework for assessing and responding to need using SHANARRI wellbeing indicators. It requires coordinated planning across services, early identification and proportionate response to needs throughout universal, additional and intensive interventions.	Child Wellbeing Pathway Oversight Group
	The Promise	National commitment to care-experienced children. It requires trauma-informed, relationship-based approaches to ensure they are loved, safe and supported.	Corporate Parenting Board
	Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE)	Framework designed to improve the delivery of health and social care services by placing individuals at the centre of all decisions about their care and wellbeing	Children in Fife Governance Group, Plan for Fife
	Whole Family Wellbeing Funding	Promotes wraparound, family-centred approaches towards better long-term outcomes for children, young people and families. It requires services to work together to provide holistic support, with consideration to how family circumstances influence child wellbeing.	Children in Fife Governance Group
	Best Start, Bright Futures	National Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan requiring public bodies to collaborate across universal services to deliver holistic, person-centred	Children in Fife Governance Group, Child Poverty Strategy

		support to families – particularly those in the six priority groups most at risk of poverty (lone parents, mothers aged under 25, families with a child aged under 1, families affected by disability, minority ethnic backgrounds, and families with more than 3 children).	
	Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Delivery Plan	Sets out a vision that everyone in Scotland should have the right to achieve the best possible mental health and wellbeing, free from stigma and inequality. A Joint Strategic Board (JSB) for Child and Family Mental Health was established to take forward the actions in the Strategy relating to infants, children and families.	Our Minds Matter Steering Group
	National Guidance for Child Protection	Outlines roles and procedures for protecting children at risk of harm. It emphasises collaboration, timely risk assessments and appropriate action.	Child Wellbeing Pathway Oversight Group, Child Protection Committee
	Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Action Plan	Sets out a vision of ensuring that all children have the strongest start to speech, language and communication at the earliest stage. The Action Plan is structured around three pillars: Leadership and Accountability, Families and Communities and Skilled and Supported Workforce.	Fife CYPIC
	Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC)	National Hub consists of a team of improvement advisors working in Scottish Government to support national priority areas to apply the quality improvement journey both strategically and at targeted local level.	Fife CYPIC
Ongoing Developments	Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill	Seeks to reform children's care services, strengthens rights for care-experienced individuals, and updates planning and advocacy frameworks in line with the Independent Care Review's recommendations.	Corporate Parenting Board
	National Review of Group Based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation	Review exploring whether instances of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation are being identified and acted on appropriately by those services responsible for public protection.	Children in Fife Governance Group, Child Protection Committee
	National Performance Framework	Sets national outcomes focused on reducing inequality and improving wellbeing. It requires Children's Services partners to align their priorities with the outcomes and demonstrate progress through measurable indicators. *CiF acknowledges that the NPF is currently archived and will look to align with the refreshed NPF when published.	Children in Fife Governance Group

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