

## ITEM No ...4.....

**REPORT TO:** CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES – 28 OCTOBER 2024

**REPORT ON:** OUR PROMISE 2023-26 ANNUAL UPDATE

**REPORT BY:** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVICE

**REPORT NO:** 298-2024

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report provides the Children, Families and Communities Committee with the first annual update on the implementation of Our Promise to Care Experienced Children, Young People and Care Leavers 2023-26 (Appendix 1). The report follows Elected Member approval of Our Promise on 23 October 2023 (Article IV of the minute of the meeting and report 295-2023). It outlines key developments over the last 12 months and priorities going forwards.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that committee:

- a Note continued progress made in the implementation of Our Promise 2023-26 and improved outcomes for care experienced children, young people, and care leavers.
- b Request the Executive Director to provide a further update on Our Promise in 12 months, including details of Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) activities and outcomes.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 The Children's Social Work Service is currently projecting a £300k overspend in 2024-25 relating to cost pressures in external residential care. It continues to implement a range of actions to enable children and young people to be cared for and nurtured in local family-based and residential settings. Regular updates will be provided to the City Governance Committee in Revenue Monitoring reports. Further details are provided in paras 5.1 and 9.2.

### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

4.1 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 requires Local Authorities to develop what it refers to as a 'Corporate Parenting Plan' to outline how it will meet the needs of 'Looked After Children'. The Independent Care Review published in February 2020 was critical of this stigmatising language and promoted a stronger collective ambition to achieve transformational improvements in the way we provide support to vulnerable families.

4.2 The review published 7 reports, including The Promise and Follow the Money. Each place an emphasis on prevention, keeping families together and ensuring that, where alternative care is necessary, all children and young people grow up feeling loved, safe and respected. Locally, the 5 foundations of The Promise of Voice, Family, Care, People and Scaffolding have informed a range of actions designed to improve universal, targeted and specialist support.

### **5.0 DEVELOPMENTS**

5.1 Over the first 12 months of the current 3-year plan, the Children and Families Service has continued to co-ordinate and deliver improved support to vulnerable children and young people. Out of a total of 29 actions in the plan, work has started on 26 of them, 12 of which have already been completed and 14 have made significant progress. The other 3 are due to commence in 2024-25. Some key achievements over the period have included:

- The total number of care experienced children and young people reduced from 429 to 386
- The balance of family based versus residential care increased from 85.7% to 90.5%
- There was a reduction in children and young people in external residential care from 43 to 18

- No young people have been admitted to Secure Care 18 months
- There was a 17% reduction in the number of missing episodes from Young People's Houses.
- Care experienced pupils with 1+SCQF Level 4 up from 73% in 2020-21 to 78% in 2023-24.
- Care experienced pupils with 1+SCQF Level 5 up from 35% in 2020-21 to 56% in 2023-24.
- Millview House won a Scottish Social Services Award for Outstanding Care in 2023.
- Our Promise was a finalist in the UK-wide Local Government Chronicle Awards in 2024.

5.2 The key objectives of keeping vulnerable families together, increasing local family-based support and improving outcomes are therefore being increasingly realised. However, as 92% of the whole school population achieved 1+ award at SCQF Level 4 and 82% achieved 1+ award at SCQF Level 5 in 2023-24, our care experienced pupils still lag their peers. This is especially evident in with care experienced children and young people at home or in kinship settings.

5.3 There has therefore been a continued emphasis on the shared development of knowledge and skills within Social Work teams, schools and partners; providing support to build the capacity and confidence of Kinship Carers and Foster Carers; listening and more effectively responding to the voice of children, young people and families; and using data across the workforce to help further drive improvements.

## 6.0 PEOPLE

6.1 In relation to the workforce, the service has implemented a Social Work/School cluster model to promote consistent support to pupils. Teams supporting vulnerable adolescents have completed multi-agency training on specialist risk assessments of harmful behaviour. All Young People's House teams have received training in Growth Mindset and the team at Craigie Cottage Children's House has received a range of training specific to younger children.

6.2 To evaluate and help further improve practice, peer audits of assessments, plans and chronologies have been carried out 3 times a year. When this programme started in May 2021, 58% were graded as Good or better overall. This rose to 93% in June 2023 and 94% in December 2023. The most recent audit in May 2024 focused specifically on adolescents and 83% were graded as Good or better. Targeted support continues to be provided to all teams.

6.3 In terms of capacity, in December 2023 Children's Social Work teams had a 7% vacancy rate compared with a national average of 10%. In each team, individual Social Workers support an average of 15 children and young people. This is consistent with the indicative optimum suggested by a national Setting the Bar report published in May 2022 and recruitment, support and retention continue to be key priorities to enable teams to provide effective support.

6.4 This includes support to recent graduates and Children's Social Work is currently preparing to implement a Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) scheme from October 2024. This national scheme will provide additional support to new entrants to the profession and place restrictions on the number of families they work with during the first 12 months of their career to enhance development and retention.

6.5 Managers also continue to ensure that caseloads across teams are equitable and there is an appropriate division of roles and responsibilities between qualified Social Worker and para-professional staff. Some further work includes exploration of Artificial Intelligence to enable teams to more efficiently prepare formal reports. One of the WFWF services will lead a review of working hours and potential increased out of hours work.

6.6 The overall purpose is to ensure that teams have the capacity, knowledge and skills to carry out appropriately designated roles; streamline necessary bureaucracy; increase face-to-face contact with vulnerable families; and target whole family support at times of greatest need and/or risk. All teams receive regular 1:1 supervision and have access to a range of other Council supports.

- 6.7 In relation to support to carers, the service has cemented links with the Welfare Rights Service and benefits advice has been provided for all Kinship Carers. All 347 Kinship Carers have now received an assessment to help maximise their income. As an example of the positive impact, in the period April 2023 to March 2024 almost £10,000 of backdated benefits payments were received by Kinship Carers.
- 6.8 The Fostering and Adoption Teams have worked with The Lens on an 'Ideas to Action' programme to increase the number and confidence of internal Foster Carers. The programme led to a re-designed website, additional out-of-hours support and a fostering hub. It is also leading to a review of fees and allowances informed by benchmarking with neighbouring local authorities. Proposals will be submitted in 2024-25.

## 7.0 FAMILY

- 7.1 As outlined in Article VI of the minute of meeting of the City Governance Committee of 19 August 2024 refers (221-2024). The service worked with other Children's Service Planning Partnership (CSPP) partners to co-ordinate deployment of Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing Funding. The deployment of this funding aligns with strategic priorities and delivery of new services is being supported by a WFWF Steering Group. Details of impact will be included in the next Our Promise Annual Report.
- 7.2 Over the next 6 months, the service will also carry out a review of all internal and commissioned resources with a focus on developing a consistent 'edge of care offer' to vulnerable families. Currently, the service provides £2.3m annual funding to 14 Third Sector organisations to deliver a range of services from supported accommodation to substance use support, parenting support, mediation, advocacy and disability.
- 7.3 This review will include a focus on the extent to which services can be re-designed to deliver recognised best practice in family support, such as Family Group Conferencing, Signs of Safety and Multi-Systemic Therapy. It would build capacity and the range of specialist support options available to families. In recognition of the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life, it will also include a focus on building support to vulnerable families with babies and infants.
- 7.4 In relation to early years, in the last 12 months the parents of 129 0–4-year-olds were involved in Child Protection investigations. In total, 90 of these were provided with early support but 39 were placed on the Child Protection Register (CPR) and 19 were provided with alternative care. This is why this is a key priority and developments will be informed by collaboration with The Wave Trust 70:30 campaign. Two WFWF initiatives focus on early years.
- 7.5 In relation to older young people, the service and partners completed a review of approaches towards vulnerable adolescents. It was informed by consultation with the partnership workforce and young people. Supported by WFWF funding, it will lead to a co-located multi-disciplinary team focused on young people at risk of significant harm from or to others and supported in either the Child Protection and/or Youth and Criminal Justice systems from April 2025.

## 8.0 VOICE

- 8.1 For younger children, the service has collaborated with NHS Tayside and Dundee University to develop an Infant Pledge resource entitled 'Hello in There Wee One'. This is designed to promote active listening and positive attachments between vulnerable expectant mothers and their babies. Launched in September 2024, it will be piloted in the New Beginnings Team, which supports pregnant women who are at risk of having babies provided with alternative care.
- 8.2 For older children, the service continued to roll-out Mind of My Own (MOMO), a digital app which enables users to provide comments on the support they are receiving or would like to receive. This is then used to inform responses both on a day-to-day basis and during planning and review meetings, to place the child or young person at the centre. It provides an alternative option to 1:1 method to listen and respond more effectively.

- 8.3 In all 8 Secondary Schools, Champions Boards continued to be co-led by Pupil Support Workers and young people. As a result of their involvement in a Champions Board, 20 care experienced young people have now completed a Columba 1400 Leadership Academy, 17 have gained Saltire Awards and 2 have gained Emergency First Aid at Work SCQF Level 6. When asked to complete a sentence 'If it wasn't for the Champions Board', some said:
- 'I wouldn't have completed Columba 1400'.
  - 'I wouldn't have the confidence to join other groups.'
  - 'I wouldn't have met other CE pupils or other schools'.
  - 'I wouldn't have applied to join the Army and volunteered at St Andrews PS'.
- 8.4 The service also rolled out training on Brothers and Sisters Staying Together and Connected. This includes an emphasis on listening to the child or young person's views to inform decisions on whether they can live with a sibling, remain in contact with them or know of their whereabouts. In the context of constraints such as complicated kinship arrangements and large sibling groups, children remaining with at least 1 brother or sister increased from 43% to 51%.
- 8.5 For children and young people who felt they needed additional support to be heard, the service continued to commission an advocacy service from Who Cares? Scotland. This is available to all children and young people and includes a strong presence in all 6 Children's Houses. There is a particular focus on attendance at key decision-making meetings. Between April and June 2024, 32 young people were supported, and feedback is overwhelmingly positive, including:
- 'My advocate was good at helping me to understand my rights'.
  - 'My advocate made me feel it was important for me to be at my meetings'.
  - 'My advocate was very good at helping me with my Hearing'.
  - 'My advocate helped me to understand my options, and this helped me to pick what I wanted'.
- 8.6 One of the WFWF initiatives will also carry out a review of all advocacy services across the city, with a view to raising awareness, promoting easier access, and making best use of the shared resources available to various service providers. A further initiative supports evaluation of the What Matters to You programme, which is pro-actively listening to families in their own local communities via Columba 1400 Values Based Leadership Experiences and Community Cafe Conversations.

## 9.0 CARE

- 9.1 A similar range of developments continued to strengthen support to children, young people and care leavers in different care settings. In Kinship Care, the new team currently provides varying types of support to over 347 carers supporting 420 children and young people across the city. In addition to the welfare rights assessments to maximise income, new supports developed over the last 12 months have included:
- Provision of a Place2B online parenting programme focused on mental health
  - School holiday activity camps and targeted leisure and sports activities
  - Engagement with What Matters to You to build supportive links in local communities
  - Work with 2 Clinical Psychologists to enhance trauma informed skills and practice
  - Joint work with Pupil Support Workers to provide extra support with school attendance
- 9.2 In internal Foster Care, in addition to work with The Lens the service continued to implement an Improvement Plan following a Care Inspectorate inspection published in December 2022. This included a focus on training, with Foster Carers benefitting from training in parenting, adolescence, emotional health and wellbeing and separation/loss. As can be seen below, there has been a slight increase in the number of internal Foster Carers but levels have not yet returned to those in 2022.

Foster Carer Placements	2022	2023	2024
Internal Foster Care	109	84	89
External Foster Care	98	93	93

- 9.3 In the Young Person's Houses, one house, Craigie Cottage, was inspected over the period. This new house's first inspection occurred just 2 weeks after opening in September 2023 and was followed shortly by a further inspection published in May 2024. The more recent report highlights considerable improvements in leadership within the house and growing confidence and skills of the staff team. A full report will be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.
- 9.4 The service also contributed towards the Council-wide review of Youth Participation, which included a focus on care experienced young people. This led to a wide-ranging Delivery Plan and the Head of Children's Social Work is leading on 2 key aspects relating to mentoring provision and flexible further education, training and employment opportunities. In 2022-23, 70.6% entered a positive destination and data for 2023-24 will be available in February 2025.

## 10.0 SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

- 10.1 This report describes how Our Promise continues to have a positive impact in supporting vulnerable families. The number of children and young people in care have reduced, the balance of family-based care has increased, foundational Social Work practice is improving and educational outcomes are getting better. The service was shortlisted as a finalist in a UK-wide LGC award and Millview Cottage received a Scottish Social Services excellence award.
- 10.2 However, there remains a disproportionate number of babies and infants subject to formal Child Protection processes and ultimately in care; children and young people in Kinship Care are less likely to progress well at school; Foster Care capacity has not yet returned to previous levels; and the care experienced population still lags their peers in educational attainment by some margin, with an even wider gap as the level of qualification increases to SCQF Level 6.
- 10.3 Priorities over the next 12 months therefore include implementation of all WFWF initiatives; a continued focus on early years informed by collaboration with The Wave Trust; the development of best practice models of support; targeted support to pupils in Kinship Care; a review of fees/allowances for Foster Carers; implementation of the co-located multi-disciplinary team supporting vulnerable adolescents; employability; and staff support.

## 11.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The content of this report was previously considered in report (93-2021) and remains valid. The original report was not subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment. An appropriate senior manager has checked and agreed with this assessment. For follow-ups relating to initial reports agreed prior to 22/8/22 a copy of the Integrated Impact Assessment is available (where applicable) on the Council's website at [www.dundee.gov.uk/iia](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/iia)

## 12.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 The Council Leadership Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## 13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 None.

Audrey May  
Executive Director

Glyn Lloyd  
Head of Children's and Community Justice Services  
Chief Social Work Officer

October 2024

*This page is intentionally left blank*

<b>Our Promise to Care Experienced Children, Young People and Families 2023-25 Action Plan</b>				
<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leads</b>	<b>Measuring Impact</b>	<b>Timescales</b>
<b>Voice</b>	Implement Infant Pledge for babies and toddlers in care	Service Manager	Audit of practice in test sites	¼ audits
	Coordinate Champions Boards to listen and enhance support	Education Officer	Survey Champions Boards	¼ meetings
	Review advocacy to improve access and impact	Service Manager	% offered and accessing	March 2024
	Implement findings of a survey on brother/sister care arrangements	Service Manager	Implementation of plan	March 2025
	Implement and scale What Matters to You in locality areas	Head of Service	Formal evaluation	March 2026
	Include a focus on voice in audits of practice	Service Manager	% where voice informed plans	¼ audits
<b>Family</b>	Coordinate targeted deployment of WFWF	Head of Service	Develop specific measures	Nov 2023
	Develop a clear edge of care offer to all families	Senior Manager	Numbers in care	June 2024
	Review working arrangements to provide support at time of need	Senior Manager	Family stability/disruption	June 2024
	Conduct Welfare Rights assessments with all families at risk	Practice Manager	Income maximisation	June 2024
	Implement Contextual Safeguarding for adolescents at risk	Senior Manager	Audits of Child's Plans	March 2024
	Explore and apply models of best practice in family support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Family Group Conferencing</li> <li>➤ Solihull for Kinship Carers and Foster Carers</li> <li>➤ Mockingbird model for Foster Carers</li> <li>➤ Multi Systemic Therapy</li> </ul>	Senior Manager	Develop specific measures	March 2025

<b>Care</b>	Develop and implement brothers/sisters practice guidance	Senior Manager	Measures inform by survey	June 2025
	Implement therapeutic and other supports to Kinship Carers	Service Manager	Numbers in Kinship Care	June 2025
	Target school attendance support to pupils in Kinship Care	Education Officer	Educational outcomes	March 2024
	Develop and implement new Foster Carer support strategy	Service Manager	Recruitment and satisfaction	Nov 2023
	Complete secure care self-evaluation and implement improvements	Senior Manager	Compliance with standards	June 2024
	Develop and implement new Continuing Care practice guidance	Senior Manager	Compliance with standards	June 2024
	Review Aftercare support to care leavers aged up to 26 years	Senior Manager	% supported and outcomes	June 2024
	Enhance supportive post-care housing support	Senior Manager	Homelessness	June 2024
	Implement Youth Participation action plan	Senior Manager	Positive destinations	June 2024
<b>People</b>	Implement risk assessment and defensible decision training	Service Manager	Audits of practice	¼ audits
	Implement Welfare Rights training	Service Manager	Audits of practice	¼ audits
	Implement an annual foster carer training plan	Service Manager	Attendance and satisfaction	Annual
	Ensure high quality Child's Plans for all care experienced children	Service Manager	Audits of practice	¼ audits
	Scale parenting programme training across teams	Service Manager	Audits of practice	¼ audits
<b>Scaffolding</b>	Fully implement GIRFEC Practice Profile in all sites	Education Officer	Audits of practice	Bi-an audits
	Implement new Social Work Practice Standards	Senior Manager	Audits of practice	January 2024
	Revise all Social Work procedures to be Our Promise compatible	Service Manager	Audits and staff survey	March 2024