CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2023

Aberdeenshire Summary

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INTRODUCTION

Aberdeenshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) has been produced initially to inform the development of the Aberdeenshire Children and Young People's Services Plan 2023-26 but will also be a useful resource for other projects, services and organisations.

The JSNA is a 'live' document which will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis and more frequently, as required.

The analysis was undertaken based on current data. Quantitative and qualitative data was also gathered from several sources, including surveys and focus groups with children, young people, families, and our Aberdeenshire wide workforce.

Use of the 7 National Standards for Community Engagement has improved, enhanced and guided the process of engagement, from planning through to implementation of the consultation plan and creation of the 2023-26 Children and Young People's Services Plan. Developing a range of consultation methods helped to reduce barriers of participation and ensured a wide range of children, young people and families voices were heard.

The planning and recording tool VOiCE was used to develop the engagement plan.

Engagement and communication with children, young people and families will continue throughout the duration of the plan to ensure participants receive feedback from the engagement, updates on Children and Young People's Services Plan progress and opportunities to monitor and contribute further to its implementation.

The next section details the process followed.

1. **Gather Statistical Information and Data.**

   This element involved the collation of relevant data and statistical information that helped create a picture of what life is like in Aberdeenshire for our children, young people and parents.

   An array of socio-economic data was used to identify vulnerability factors relating to:

   - Children
   - Parents
   - Communities

2. **Consultation to Gather Views of Children, Young People, Parents and Workforce.**

   This element involved a series of interactive discussions on Aberdeenshire Children and Young People's Services Plan priorities, to better understand what is important to our children, young people, parents and workforce.

   - Focus Groups: Children and Young People's Service's Planning, Social Work and Community Learning and Development assisted in focus group facilitation. Each focus group was unique in formation and discussion in each was varied and dynamic, enabling us to collect rich feedback from participants.

   - Online Surveys: Following planning and initial focus group discussions it was decided not to circulate an online survey. Due to the nature of the information we were gathering, it felt an online survey would be too directive and suggestive, however one survey was circulated to Local GIRFEC Groups to widen workforce representation.

   - Lived Experienced Online Forum: An active online forum where parents engage at a time suitable to them. It takes form of a discussion board where a monthly question is posed and parents with a range of lived experience respond. January 2023 question was focussed on Children and Young People's Service Plan.

Children	*Parents*	*Output*
Primary School Classes Pupil Councils Junior Leadership Teams	Parent Councils Parent groups in community and family learning settings Lived Experience Forum	• 47 focus groups • 1 online survey • 1 online discussion board
Young People	***Workforce***	Involving: • 545 young people • 28 parents • 52 staff
Pupil Participation Forum Academy classes and groups CLD Youth Groups and Youth Forums YPOC (Young People's Organising and Campaigning) Group Lived Experience Groups	Children and Families Network (AVA) Social Work NHS Police Education and CLD	

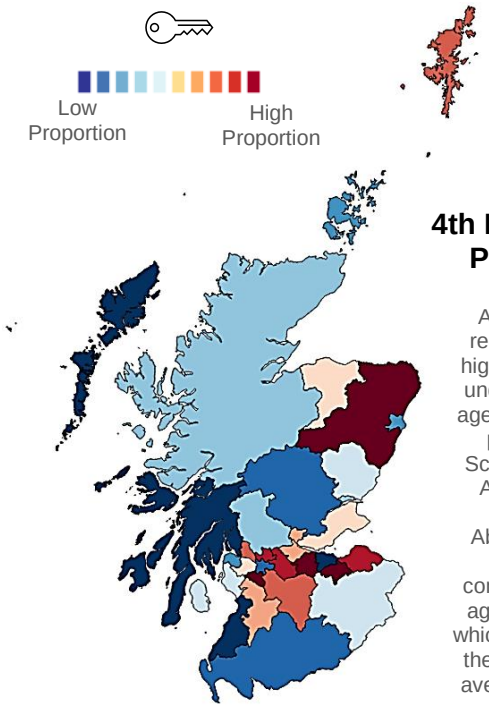
3. Recently completed consultations.

This element involved taking cognisance of recently completed consultations that could potentially help shape the plan. These included:

- *How was it for you? Impact of Covid Survey in Aberdeenshire*
- *Young Carers Research* carried out by Quarriers
- *Turriff Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey* - children, young people and parents
- *Lockdown Lowdown* – Scotland report YouthLink, Young Scot and Scottish Youth Parliament.
- *Children's Services Inspection Consultation Reports October 2022*
- *Bright Spot Survey 2022*
- *SHINE Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey*: School and Authority based reports 2023 – still in process.
- *ASN review consultation*: Parental and school staff completed – young people one still in process.

POPULATION DASHBOARD

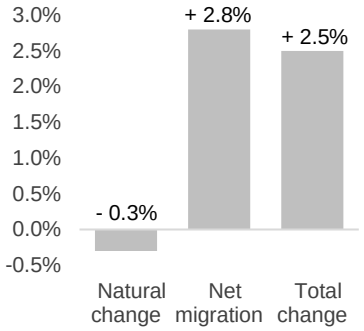
Child Population as a % of Total Population, 2021



4th Highest 0-18 Population

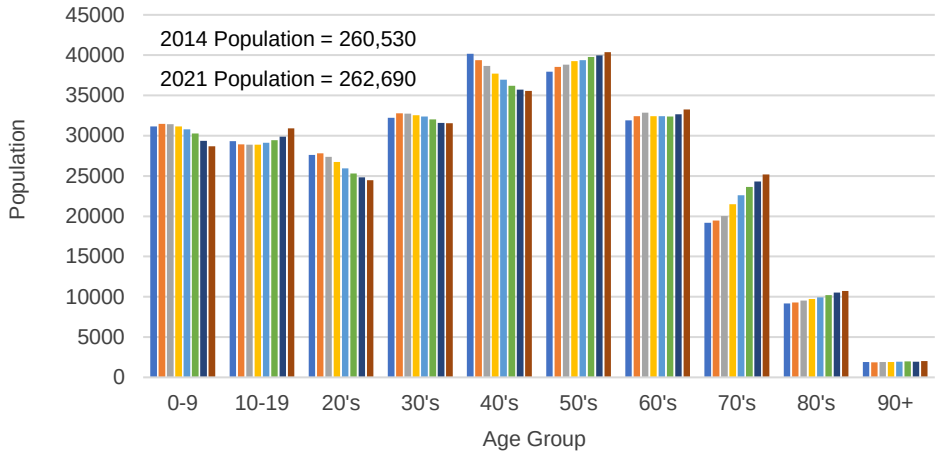
Aberdeenshire recorded the 4th highest population under 19 years of age relative to total population in Scotland in 2021. Approximately 21.7% of Aberdeenshire's population comprised people aged 0-18 years, which is higher than the local authority average of 19.9%.

Components of Projected Population Change, 2018-2028

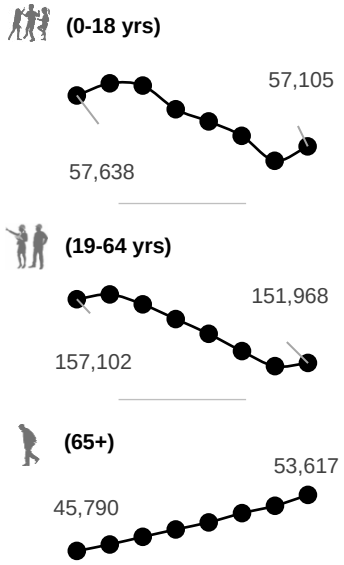


Over the next 10 years, the population of Aberdeenshire is projected to decrease by 0.3% due to natural change (more deaths than births). Total net migration (net migration within Scotland, from overseas and from the rest of the UK) is projected to result in a population increase of 2.8% over the same period.

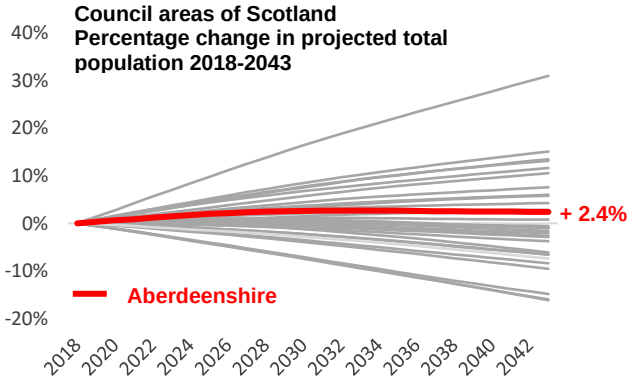
Population per Age Group, Aberdeenshire, 2014 to 2021



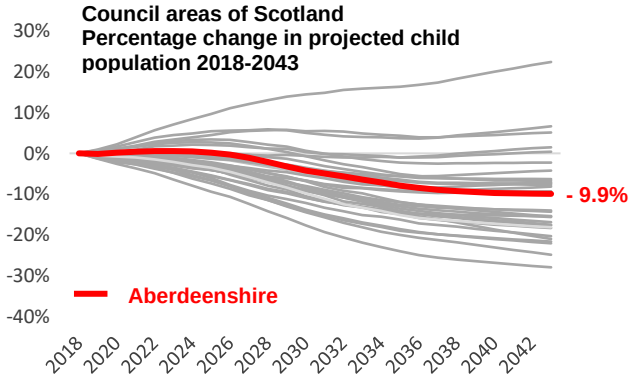
The number of younger children (0-9 years) has fallen in Aberdeenshire since 2014. Conversely, those aged 10-19 increased. A similar pattern emerges in relation to those in their 40's (fallen) and 50's (increased). This suggests there are fewer younger families in 2021 relative to a few years ago.



Population Projections to 2043 (based on 2018 population), Total Population and Child Population, Scotland



Aberdeenshire's population is projected to increase by 2.4% by 2043, reaching approximately 268,000. This is virtually wholly driven by those aged 55+. Those in younger age groups are expected to decrease. This is in keeping with the Scottish trend.



Aberdeenshire's child population (0-18 years) is projected to decrease by 9.9% by 2043, falling from approximately 57,400 to 51,700. The 7-10 year age group is expected to decrease the most in percentage terms. The child population in most other Scottish areas is also expected to decrease.

POPULATION NARRATIVE

KEY POINTS

- Aberdeenshire's population has increased over the last few years – but the rate of growth is slowing.
- Aberdeenshire's population is ageing.
- Aberdeenshire is home to the 4th largest child population (0-18 years) in Scotland relative to total population.
- The child population in Scotland is expected to decrease over the next couple of decades. Aberdeenshire's child population is projected to decrease by 9.9% by 2043.
- The overall population is projected to increase by 2.5% by 2043, largely driven by the 55+ age group.

POPULATION TRENDS:

- **Aberdeenshire's population has increased over the last few years – but the rate of growth is slowing**. Between 1998 and 2014/15, Aberdeenshire experienced one of the highest population growth rates in Scotland. However, the rate of change has levelled off over the last few years. During Aberdeenshire's 'levelling off' period, Scotland's population continued to grow. Despite this, Aberdeenshire recorded the 5th highest population increase in Scotland since 1998 (up 15.3%).

  Latest data (2021) show the population stands at 262,690, up from 260,530 in 2014 – an increase of just 0.8%.

- **Aberdeenshire's population is ageing**. As with many other areas in the western world, Aberdeenshire's population growth is largely driven by older age groups. Approximately 20.4% of Aberdeenshire's population is aged 65 and over, slightly higher than the 19.6% national rate. Like most other areas in Scotland, those aged 65+ in Aberdeenshire now exceed those aged 0-15. The pivot occurred in 2018 and the disparity is expected to increase over the next decade or so. This will likely have significant resource implications in future years. Matters to consider include:

  - Financial costs of health and social care.
  - Workforce sustainability (retirements, etc.).
  - The economic landscape.

Aberdeenshire's total population is projected to increase in future. Over the next 10 years, net migration is expected to result in a population increase of 2.8% from 2018 levels. In the subsequent 15 years (to 2043), the population is projected to increase by 2.5% from 2018 levels. This equates to approximately 6,300 people. Aberdeenshire's growth rate over the next couple of decades is similar to the national rate. However, the number of people in older age groups in Aberdeenshire is projected to increase at a greater rate than the corresponding national rate.

CHILD POPULATION:

- **In percentage terms, Aberdeenshire is home to the 4th largest child population in Scotland**. Latest data (2021) show that approximately 21.7% of Aberdeenshire's population is comprised of people aged 0-18 years, which is higher than the local authority average (19.9%).

  In numerical terms, Aberdeenshire's child population in 2021 is broadly similar to 2014. There are approximately 57,100 people aged 0-18 years in the local authority area.

  However, the characteristics of the younger population are slightly different in 2021 compared to 2014. Aberdeenshire is home to fewer young children (0-9 years) than was the case a few years ago, decreasing from 31,151 in 2014 to 28,665 in 2021. A corresponding increase in the 10-19 age group suggests younger children in previous years have simply aged. A similar picture emerges in relation to those in their 40's and 50's – 40-somethings have reduced in number over the years while those in their 50's has increased. This tentatively suggests Aberdeenshire is home to fewer younger families than was the case a few years ago.

  High child populations are generally found in central Aberdeenshire. Specifically: Banchory-Devenick and Findon (28%); Blackburn (28%); Durno-Chapel of Garioch (27%); Kintore (25%); Garlogie and Elrick (25%); Fetteresso, Netherley and Catter (25%); and Westhill North and South (25%).

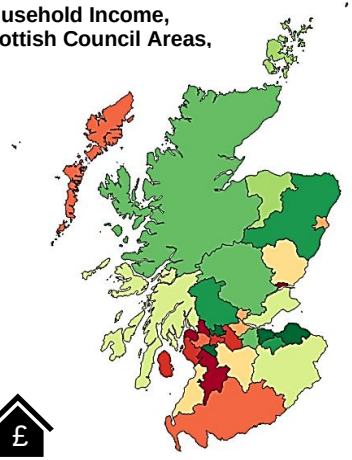
PROSPERITY DASHBOARD

Household Income Data, Aberdeenshire & Scotland, 2022

Relatively low Household Income

Relatively high Household Income

Rank of Median Household Income, Scottish Council Areas,



Aberdeenshire Household Income in a Scottish Context, 2022

Median Household Income

£40,007

Low — High

% of Households Earning More Than £100K

8.7%

Low — High

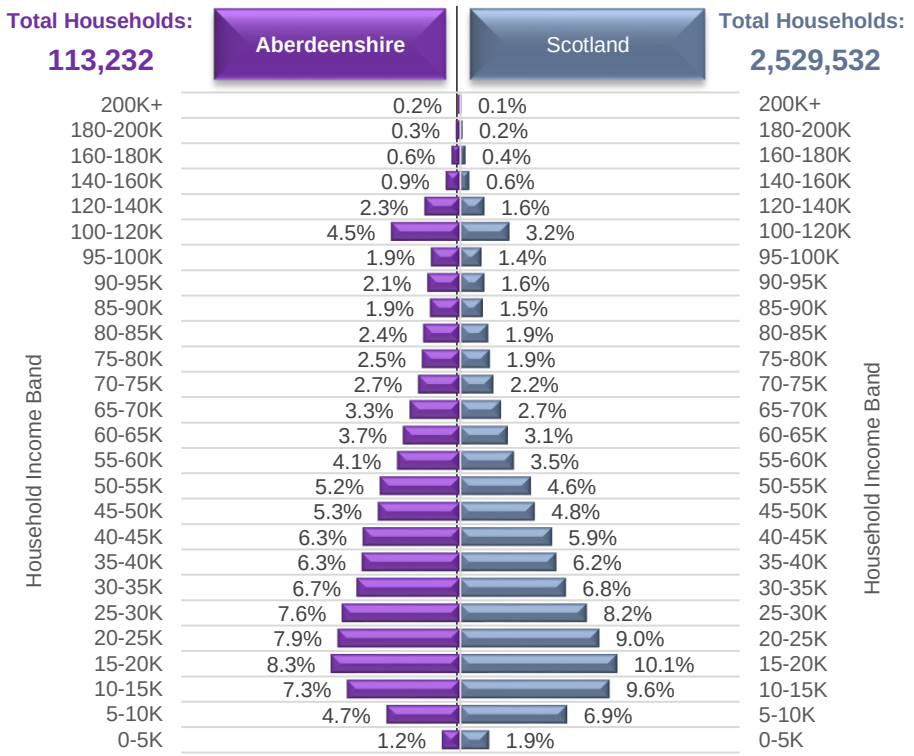
% of Households Earning Less Than £10K

5.9%

Low — High

Median household income in Aberdeenshire equated to over £40,000 in 2022, the 5th highest in Scotland and 21% higher than the national average. Aberdeenshire is home to one of the highest proportions of households earning at least £100,000 (8.7%) and one of the lowest earning less than £10,000 (5.9%).

Household Income per Income Band (% of Households), Aberdeenshire & Scotland,



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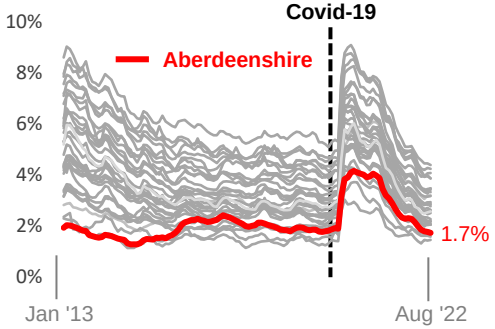
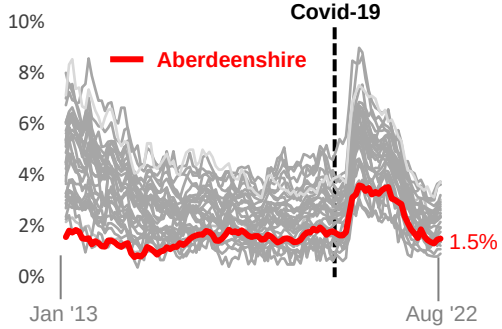
Alternative Claimant Count (Unemployment Rate), Scottish Council Areas, Jan 2013 to Aug 2022

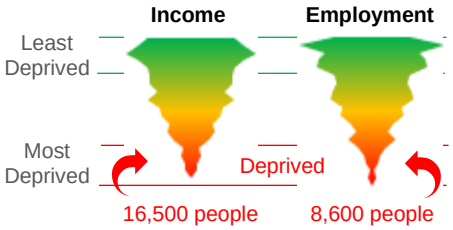
Council areas of Scotland Claimant Count, 16-65yrs, Jan 2013 to Aug 2022



Council areas of Scotland Claimant Count, 16-19yrs, Jan 2013 to Aug 2022

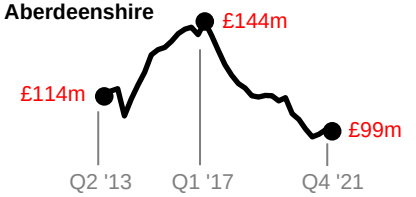


SIMD 2020 Deprivation



Personal Loans Outstanding (2013-2021)

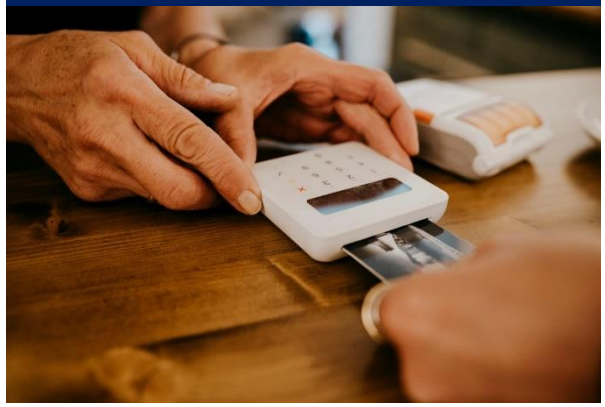
Total £ Amount, Aberdeenshire



PROSPERITY NARRATIVE (1 of 4)

KEY POINTS

- Household income found to have significant impact on a child's cognitive and educational outcomes, as well as social and behavioural development and physical health.
- Median household income in Aberdeenshire equated to over £40,000 in 2022, the 5th highest in Scotland and 21% higher than the national average.
- Aberdeenshire has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the country
- A range of services in Aberdeenshire support young people to increase their confidence and to enhance their transition to post school opportunities.



HOUSEHOLD INCOME

- **Household income is important for a number of reasons**. Statistically speaking, the higher the income, the better the outcomes experienced by the general population in the respective area. The importance of money in determining a child's life prospects, for example, is highlighted in numerous studies, with household income found to have a significant impact on everything from children's cognitive and educational outcomes to their social and behavioural development and physical health.

- **Median household income in Aberdeenshire equated to over £40,000 in 2022**, the 5th highest in Scotland and 21% higher than the national average. Aberdeenshire is home to one of the highest proportions of households earning at least £100,000 (8.7%) and one of the lowest earning less than £10,000 (5.9%).

  Larger settlements that are home to a relatively large proportion of low-income households include: Huntly (12%), Fraserburgh (11.8%), Macduff (11.5%), Banff (11.4%), Peterhead (10.3%), and Turriff (9.5%).

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

- **Aberdeenshire has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the country**. Approximately 1.5% of those aged 16-19 in Aberdeenshire are claiming unemployment benefits as at August 2022 (163 people). This is in line with the historic average after peaking at 3.5% in the months during COVID-19 lockdowns. A similar picture emerges in relation to those aged 16-65, with 1.7% of that age group now claiming unemployment benefits (2,740 people), down from 4.0% during the COVID peak.

A relatively large number of the 163 people aged 16-19 currently unemployed in Aberdeenshire reside in the northern portion of the region. The top 5 Wards in Aberdeenshire in terms of the number of young people unemployed are:

1. Peterhead and North Rattray: **26** (16%)
2. Fraserburgh and District: **20** (12%)
3. Troup: **18** (11%)
4. Central Buchan: **14** (9%)
5. West Garioch: **13** (8%)

Three Wards recorded numbers too low for publication (due to data protection issues). They are: Banchory and Mid Deeside, Aboyne Upper Deeside and Donside, and Westhill and District.

Most recent data showed a total of 26 people aged under 18 in Aberdeenshire were registered as unemployed. Of these, 7 resided in Peterhead and North Rattray and 7 resided in Troup.

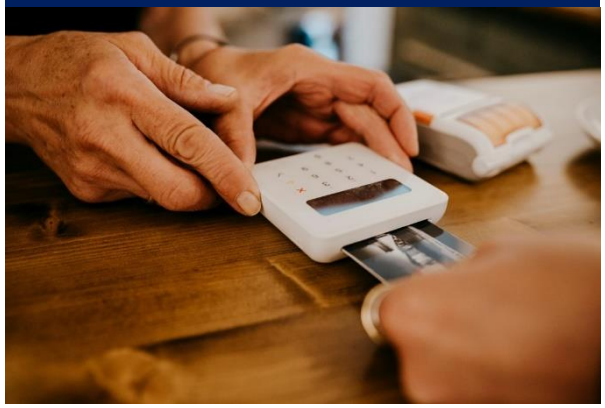
Despite the low numbers, youth employability remains an important element for children's services in Aberdeenshire, particularly in relation to those who require additional support for varying reasons. In policy terms Developing the Young Workforce is one of three main building blocks along with CfE and GIRFEC underpinning Scotland's offer for children and young people.

As part of the Developing the Young Workforce programme, the Scottish Government has ambitions to significantly improve the work- related offer to pupils across Scotland and has identified Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) as a central part of achieving this vision. The strategic context rests in the first two recommendations from the Scottish Government report "Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce report: Education Working for All!"

PROSPERITY NARRATIVE (2 of 4)

KEY POINTS

- Aberdeenshire is among the least deprived areas in Scotland in terms of income and employment deprivation. However, thousands of people are still classified as either income or employment deprived. Many tend to reside in the northern portion of Aberdeenshire – but pockets of deprivation are found across the region.
- CACI household income data is an important dataset and may be used to identify potential vulnerable areas in Aberdeenshire (down to a few dozen households in some cases), thereby optimising service delivery and improving outcomes for those most in need.



Recommendation 1 - **Senior Phase Vocational Pathways**: Pathways should start in the senior phase which leads to the delivery of industry recognised vocational qualifications alongside academic qualifications.

Recommendation 2 - Preparing Young People for the World of Work: A focus on preparing all young people for employment should form a core element of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence with appropriate resource dedicated to achieve this.

YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY

- A range of services in Aberdeenshire support young people to increase their confidence and to **enhance their transition to post school opportunities**, building on their resilience, knowledge and skills. One such workstream relates to Aberdeenshire Employability Agreements (AEAs).

AEAs are delivered by a range of council services including CLD and partner agencies which are grant funded through CLD.

Aberdeenshire Employability Agreements are for young people aged 16 to 19 who are either leaving school and requiring support to move into a positive destination or currently unemployed. The AEA is a creative package of activity and learning for those requiring one-to-one support based around a young person's needs and interests and aims to address barriers. This could be a range of activities, such as personal skills development including confidence building to work tasters. Young people set their own learning goals and gain transferable skills to positively progress onto a positive destination.

A total of 42 AEA referrals were made in 2021/22, lower than the previous year but the sign-up rate was considerably higher (60% *versus* 19% the year earlier). The positive destination rate also improved considerably year-on-year, rising from 47.4% in 2020/21 to 75.8% in 2021/22.

Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) have also been highly successful and continue to be developed. Over 820 pupils have started a FA course through the Aberdeenshire delivery model in June 22.

Work is being carried out to ensure pupils have clearer pathways into Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and other work opportunities. More FAs than ever have secured jobs, MAs over the course of 2022.

A Scottish Government report found that perceived key issues for young people in a post-COVID world included a lack of employment choice or availability and financial insecurity.

DEPRIVATION

- Despite being among the least deprived areas in the country, SIMD 2020 data suggest approximately 16,500 people in Aberdeenshire are income deprived, and 8,600 are employment deprived.

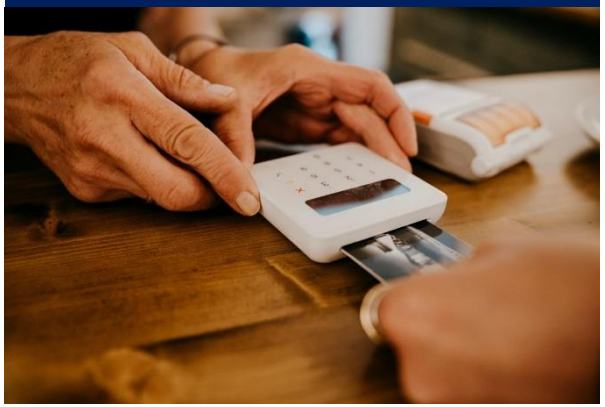
Areas with relatively high rates of income and employment deprivation tend to be situated in the northern portion of Aberdeenshire, such as Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff, Mintlaw, Huntly and Macduff.

These areas tend to feature prominently in the rankings of households earning less than £10,000. They are very closely correlated. Indeed, the correlation coefficient in relation to households earning less than £10,000 and areas of income and employment deprivation equates to 0.88 (out of a maximum of 1.00). This is statistically significant. It means policy makers can use CACI household data – which is published more frequently and includes more localised data – to approximate deprivation at a neighbourhood level.

PROSPERITY NARRATIVE (3 of 4)

KEY POINTS

- Many areas in Aberdeenshire are among the most geographically deprived in Scotland. This may inhibit optimal service provision for certain groups or communities. These differences may contribute to an even greater level of inequality, particularly for low-income families.



In fact, the household income data is closely correlated to a number of SIMD indicators, including chronic health conditions, people with no qualifications, emergency hospitalisations, overcrowding, and school attendance rates. In each case the correlation coefficient number is statistically significant in relation to households earning less than £10,000.

Therefore, the CACI household income data is an important dataset and may be used to identify potential vulnerable areas in Aberdeenshire (down to a few dozen households in some cases), thereby optimising service delivery and improving outcomes for those most in need.

GEOGRAPHIC ACCESS

Aberdeenshire's size and rural characteristics, while beneficial in many respects, presents its own challenges. The area is one of Scotland's 14 rural authorities and is defined as 'mainly rural'. Scotland's rural and urban economies are inextricably linked. However, distinct differences remain between the two.

Often these differences are spatial in nature– remoteness being one example, or relatively poor geographic access. Many areas in Aberdeenshire are among the most geographically deprived in Scotland. This means the time taken to drive via car or public transport in order to access certain local amenities is among the highest in Scotland. This may inhibit optimal service provision for certain groups or communities. These differences may contribute to an even greater level of inequality, particularly for low-income families.

What's more, 26% of both young people and parents responding to the Turriff Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey reported rurality as the main issue in accessing mental wellbeing services with lack of local activities to support mental wellbeing.

Latest data show there are now 18,667 young people in Aberdeenshire who have a travel entitlement on their Young Scot National Entitlement Card, so demand is there, particularly among those aged 11-20 years.

COST OF LIVING & FUTURE OUTLOOK

- Since late 2021, the UK has experienced several changes to contributory factors leading to **rising costs for individuals and businesses**. This rise, which includes the cost of energy, has meant many UK citizens are seeing an impact on their cost of living. For many, this has meant having to make difficult decisions about how they prioritise their household income, which may have a knock-on effect to their standard of living.

It also raises specific issues for benefits policy. Those on low incomes will tend to find it hardest to tide themselves over during a period in which their real incomes are eroded.

A recent Young Scot Survey (Dec 2022) found that the cost-of-living crisis is having a negative impact on survey respondents; on their quality of life, their choices and opportunities, and their mental and physical wellbeing.

Many young people reported making a larger contribution to family finances, either by increasing the proportion of their income they contribute or by reducing the costs they incur. Survey respondents were also worried about the impact that the cost of living crisis is having on their parents or carers.

Young people reported that they had changed how they were using the heating in their homes (80.1%) and were more aware of how much electricity they used (82.7%).

PROSPERITY NARRATIVE (4 of 4)

KEY POINTS

- The cost-of-living crisis is expected to ease in the second half of 2023, but deep recession concerns may limit public sector budgets and result in sub-optimal service delivery in the years ahead.

Over half (52.4%) were concerned about affording heating and over half (50.9%) were concerned about being able to afford electricity.

Young people have been speaking to the people they live with (77.5%) and their friends (62.9%) about the cost-of-living crisis. Over two thirds of respondents

(70.4%) were concerned about their parents, carers or guardians.

The Bank of England has stated that inflation (which is driving the cost-of-living crisis) will likely fall from the middle of 2023, largely due to the following reasons:

Firstly, the price of energy won't continue to rise so quickly. The Government has introduced a scheme that caps energy bills for households and businesses for six months.

Secondly, the price of imported goods is not expected to rise so fast. That's because some of the production difficulties businesses have faced are starting to ease.

Finally, there will likely be less demand for goods and services in the UK due to higher borrowing costs (interest rates). This has disinflationary effects.

Economists have predicted that the UK will face one of the worst recessions and weakest recoveries in the G7 in the coming year. This may negatively impact the financial resources of public services and may result in sub-optimal service delivery in the years ahead

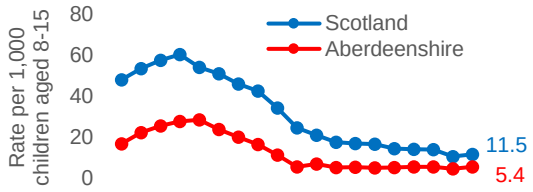
VULNERABILITY FACTORS DASHBOARD

Vulnerability Factors (Children) - Selection of Latest Health Data, Aberdeenshire and Scotland

Indicator	Latest Available Figures: A'shire	Scotland	A'shire Compared to Scotland	Shire Trend	Indicator Measurement
Babies exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks	40.6	31.8	8.7%	Up	Percentage
Children hospitalised due to asthma, aged 0-15 years	54.7	118.6	-53.8%	Down	Age-sex standardised rate per 100,000
Deaths in children, aged 1-15 years	8.2	10.1	-18.6%	Down	Crude rate per 100,000 population
Exposure to secondhand smoke at 6-8 weeks	8.8	7.3	1.5%	Down	Percentage
Healthy birth weight	83.3	84.2	-0.9%	Up	Percentage
Immunisation uptake at 24 months - 6 in 1	97.4	97.1	0.3%	Up	Percentage
Immunisation uptake at 24 months - MMR	93.8	94.4	-0.7%	Up	Percentage
Maternal obesity	23.8	25.3	-1.5%	Up	Percentage
Maternities with drug use	11.6	16.5	-29.6%	Up	Crude rate per 1,000 maternities
Post-partum smoking rate	12.4	16.3	-3.9%	Up	Percentage
Smoking during pregnancy	10.5	13.9	-3.4%	Down	Percentage
Teenage pregnancies	20.6	29.2	-29.5%	Down	Crude rate per 1,000 females aged 15-19
Unintentional injuries in under 5s	1043.9	1054.4	-1.0%	Down	Age-sex standardised rate per 100,000

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)

Young people referred to Reporter, rate per 1,000 children aged 8-15, Aberdeenshire & Scotland, 2003/04 to 2021/22

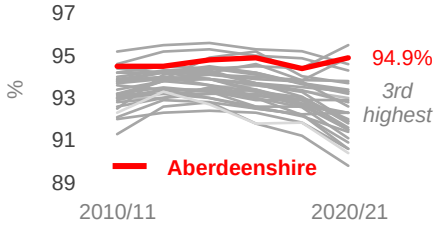


Referral rate for a selection of categories, Aberdeenshire & Scotland, 2021/22

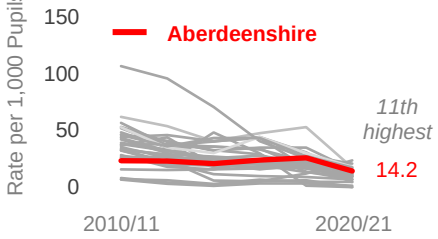
Referral Category	A'Shire	Scotland
Females Referred	4.3	10.4
Males Referred	6.4	12.5
Referred For Offending	4.5	5.0

Vulnerability Factors (Children) - Selection of Latest Education Data, Aberdeenshire and Scotland

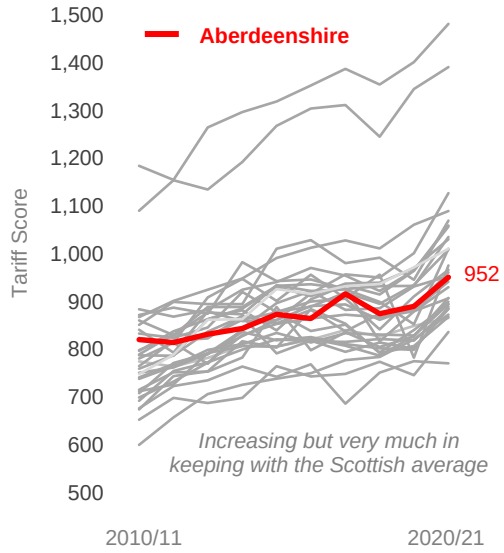
School Attendance Rate, Council areas of Scotland, 2010/11 - 2020/21



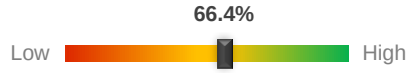
School Exclusion Rate, Council areas of Scotland, 2010/11 - 2020/21



Overall Average Tariff Score, Council areas of Scotland, 2010/11 - 2020/21



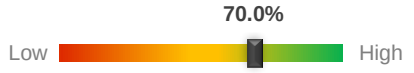
% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CFE Level in Literacy, 2020/21 (Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context)



% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CFE Level in Numeracy, 2020/21 (Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context)

Attainment Gap - % Difference in Tariff Scores Between Pupils in the Most Deprived and Least Deprived Quintiles, 2020/21 (Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context)

% of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 5, 2020/21 (Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context)



% of pupils entering positive destinations, 2020/21 (Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context)

% of Primary School Pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN), 2020/21 (Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context)

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (1 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- The health and wellbeing of children is of fundamental importance to their ability to grow, develop, and learn.
- Data on child mental health and wellbeing may be categorised as an intelligence gap. There is little statistical evidence at a local level on which to base a robust assessment of the mental wellbeing of children and young people in Aberdeenshire.
- However, proxy indicators are being utilised in order to action this workstream.

CHILD HEALTH AND WELLBEING – GENERAL

- **The health and wellbeing of children is of fundamental importance to their ability to grow, develop, and learn**. Much activity and effort is directed towards protecting their health and promoting their wellbeing. Most children will receive all of the support that they need from within their family and wider community, but some will require additional support and intervention from services.

MENTAL HEALTH

- **Data on child mental health and wellbeing may be categorised as an intelligence gap**. There is little statistical evidence at a local level on which to base a robust assessment of the mental wellbeing of children and young people in Aberdeenshire.

  Perhaps an acceptable proxy is contained in the ScotXed Pupil Census Data, which records the number of Aberdeenshire pupils receiving support due to mental health needs and / or social, emotional or behavioural needs. This number has steadily increased year-on-year from 2017. Latest data show 849 pupils received support for mental health reasons (primary n=162; Secondary n=676; Special; n=11), and 5,761 pupils received support due to social, emotional and behavioural needs (primary n=2,855; secondary n=2,804; special n=102).

  Other proxies may include Aberdeenshire Support Service Data. Of the 545 new referrals to the Educational Psychology Service between April 2021 and March 2022, 225 of these cases involved concerns regarding emotional wellbeing and / or regulation. (Nb. These figures do not include cases that were already open to the service prior to April 2021 (n=>2000).

108 young people accessed the School Counselling Service between April 2021 and March 2022. In the reporting period July to December 2021, the most common presenting issues were, relationships with others; anxiety; family issues; depression; self-worth.

Approximately 215 primary aged children were supported by Intervention and Prevention Teachers from July to December 2021. 70 of these children were assessed as experiencing emotional distress. The most common reasons for children being supported by an Intervention and Prevention Teacher was anxiety, followed by reasons related to trauma.

Approximately 1081 pupils were supported by Pupil Support Workers from July to December 2021. Most, although not all, of these pupils were secondary age. The most common reason for young people receiving support was anxiety, followed by low mood/depression, reasons related to trauma, self-harm, bereavement, and gender identity.

The Children's Wellbeing Team support children and young people who have a mental wellbeing concern and who are care experienced or on the edge of care, by providing weekly intensive support. 25 children and young people are currently receiving support, with anxiety, low self-esteem/confidence and emotional literacy being the most common themes. The team covers Fraserburgh, Banff, Ellon, Central Buchan and Peterhead.

There is no quantitative data available from the Aberdeenshire School Nursing Team. However, there is a consensus that there has been an increase post-COVID-19 pandemic in referrals in regard to wellbeing concerns, with the majority of referrals including anxiety, low mood, self-harm and eating disorders.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (3 of 9)

KEY POINTS

- Kooth Digital Mental Health Service aims to support the 10–18-year-old population. There were 2,058 new registrations since its launch in June 2021. The most common reasons for children and young people accessing support have been anxiety/stress; suicidal thoughts, self-harm and friendships.
- Of the 607 clients aged 16-24 registered on the Hanlon system, which is used to monitor employability, mental health is recorded as a barrier for 197 individuals (32%).

Kooth Digital Mental Health Service aims to support the 10–18-year-old population. There were 2,058 new registrations since its launch in June 2021. The most common reasons for children and young people accessing support have been anxiety/stress; suicidal thoughts, self-harm and friendships.

Togetherall Digital Mental Health Service aims to support the 16 years+ population. There were 252 new registrations from June 21 to end March 22. 79 Aberdeenshire residents have signed up for courses during this time. The top 4 courses were “Balance your thinking”; “Stop Procrastinating”; “Managing Stress & Worry”; “Managing Depression & Low Mood”. 271 Aberdeenshire residents have carried out self-assessments during this time. The top 4 self-assessments undertaken were “Anxiety”; “Depression”; “The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale” and “Sleeping”.

Of the 607 clients aged 16-24 registered on the Hanlon system, which is used to monitor employability, mental health is recorded as a barrier for 197 individuals (32%).

A useful survey was recently undertaken in the Turriff catchment area which perhaps speaks to future need. The Aberdeenshire Mental Health & Wellbeing GIRFEC Group undertook an overview of Primary and Academy aged Children and Young People and Parent views about Mental Health and Wellbeing in the area.

A total of 158 participants took part across all surveys and 10 young people attended discussion forums, 42 of which scored their mental health as poor. Lack of confidence asking for support was a common theme.

Gaps in mental wellbeing provision were related in part to impact of Covid pandemic on young people being able to access friends, activities, and services. Common issues cited included rurality and transport access to support general mental wellbeing and in accessing clinical mental health services. Young people reported lack of awareness of where to go for mental wellbeing support or how to access information or process of getting help if needed.

A Mental Health Toolkit for schools has been developed based on Education Scotland Whole School approach to Mental Health Resource. This has been piloted with schools in 2021-22 and will be launched early 2022-23.

A Mental Health progression framework will now be developed in Aberdeenshire in consultation with schools.

Scotland Developments

Public health Scotland developed the COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS) to address the gap in knowledge about the experience and impact of Covid-19, and the associated restrictions, on young children aged 2-7 years in Scotland. Mental Health:

- The pandemic appears to have substantially increased the percentage of children reported as experiencing difficulties with their emotions, behaviours and mental health. Increases were seen in the proportion of children with scores of ‘high concern’ at 20%.
- Differences regarding parental wellbeing, concerns and challenges were particularly evident between different socioeconomic groups. Low mental wellbeing for parents in the lowest income category was far higher compared to the highest income category. This was also the case when observing very negative impacts of the pandemic on parental mental health, physical

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (3 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- National data show that the Covid pandemic appears to have substantially increased the percentage of children reported as experiencing difficulties with their emotions, behaviours and mental health. Increases were seen in the proportion of children with scores of 'high concern' at 20%.
- Overall, the findings suggest that for a substantial proportion of children in their sample, parents and carers perceive the pandemic to have had a negative impact on child and family health, wellbeing and development, particularly for those with low incomes.

health, relationship with their partner and connectedness to local community.

- Overall, the findings suggest that for a substantial proportion of children in their sample, parents and carers perceive the pandemic to have had a negative impact on child and family health, wellbeing and development.
- The impacts generally appear to be felt to a greater extent in families from low-income households, who may have already been struggling before the pandemic.
- The impacts do not appear to be universal, areas that some families report as having a negative impact, others report as having a positive impact.
- There are areas where the perceived impacts tend to be positive, rather than negative, and these should not be overlooked.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH DATA

Systems have now been established within Education Support Services (Educational Psychology, School Counselling, Intervention & Prevention Teachers, Pupil Support Workers) to systematically collate mental health and wellbeing data on a six-monthly basis. However, it remains difficult to access population-level data for Aberdeenshire from partner agencies. Some data is collated on a Grampian-wide basis (e.g. CAHMS) and Aberdeenshire-specific data cannot be extrapolated. There are also ongoing challenges related to organisational governance.

It is planned that the SHINE online pupil mental health survey will be piloted with the secondary school population during 2022-23. A school-level Health & Wellbeing data report will be returned to each participating school to support whole school health and wellbeing improvement planning, as well as inform the PSE curriculum agenda. Cluster-level and authority-level reports will also be produced in order to inform the strategic work of the GIRFEC Mental Health Group (dates to be confirmed).

SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT AMONG SCOTTISH CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Public Health Scotland (PHS) was asked by the Scottish Government to: (1) review the available data about children's speech, language and communication (SLC) development and examine the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; (2). examine the longer-term consequences of delayed language development; AND (3) look at the ways that children and young people's language development is supported in Scotland.

The subsequent reports highlighted that children's SLC development difficulties are relatively common, with inequalities seen between population groups, and that early childhood language development is important for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, educational outcomes and employment opportunities later on. The earlier a child receives support for their language development, the better their language abilities are liable to be. Intervening later in childhood is likely to be more complex, challenging and expensive. As such, children's SLC development should be considered a public health issue. In order to make sure that children have equitable opportunities to develop to their full potential, a systematic approach, at national and local level, is needed to promote and support early childhood language development, as well as to identify children with language difficulties as early as possible.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (4 of 9)

KEY POINTS

- In terms of healthy birthweight, Latest data show approximately 83.3% of babies in Aberdeenshire were considered a healthy weight at the time of birth, and the longer-term trend is positive. However, Aberdeenshire's rate is lower than Scotland's equivalent (84.2%).
- Positively, latest data show that the hospitalisation rate for children in Aberdeenshire due to problems associated with asthma is the lowest in Scotland.

BREASTFEEDING & BIRTHWEIGHT

- **Nutrition plays a crucial role in the early months and years of life and is important in achieving optimal health**. Encouraging and supporting breastfeeding is recognised as an important public health activity. There is good evidence demonstrating the short and long-term health benefits of breastfeeding for both mothers and infants. Breastfed infants are likely to have a reduced risk of infection, particularly those affecting the ear, respiratory tract and gastro-intestinal tract. This protective effect is particularly marked in low-birth-weight infants. Other benefits include a reduced risk of childhood obesity and there may be an association with improved cognitive development. Women who breastfeed have lower risks of breast cancer, epithelial ovarian cancer and hip fracture in later life.

Latest data show approximately 40.6% of babies in Aberdeenshire are exclusively breastfed at 6 to 8 weeks, and the longer-term trend is positive. Aberdeenshire's breastfeeding rate is higher than Scotland's equivalent (31.8%), and the 8th highest in the country.

Localised data show that a total of 12 Intermediate Zones in Aberdeenshire (out of 59) recorded a lower (i.e., worse) rate than Scotland. General places include Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Rosehearty, Portsoy, Macduff, Cruden, Kemnay, Gardenstown and King Edward, and the southern part of Inverurie.

In terms of healthy birthweight, Latest data show approximately 83.3% of babies in Aberdeenshire were considered a healthy weight at the time of birth, and the longer-term trend is positive. However, Aberdeenshire's rate is lower than Scotland's equivalent (84.2%).

Localised data show that a total of 34 Intermediate Zones in Aberdeenshire (out of 59) recorded a lower (i.e., worse) rate than Scotland. Unlike breastfeeding data, which generally showed rates were worse in the northern portion of Aberdeenshire, birthweight statistics don't point to a specific region as an area for concern. Some of the worst birthweight rates are associated with the least deprived areas in Aberdeenshire.

CHILDHOOD ASTHMA

- **Asthma is the most common chronic disease of childhood in developed countries, affecting 1.1 million children in the UK**. The global prevalence of childhood asthma is increasing. The condition impacts physical and psychosocial morbidity. Therefore, wide-ranging effects on health and education outcomes are plausible.

Positively, latest data show that the hospitalisation rate for children in Aberdeenshire due to problems associated with asthma is the lowest in Scotland. What's more, Aberdeenshire recorded one of the greatest reductions in child asthma hospitalisations over the past couple of decades.

There is currently no localised data for hospitalisation rates for childhood asthma.

SMOKING – RISK OF HARM

- **Passive smoking is especially harmful for children as they have less well-developed airways, lungs and immune systems.** Children who live in a household where at least one person smokes are more likely to develop:

KEY POINTS

- Latest data show Aberdeenshire recorded a higher rate of exposure to second-hand smoke at 6 to 8 weeks than Scotland as a whole (8.8% versus the national rate of 7.3%). However, the longer-term trend is downwards. Nonetheless, this is one of the few health-related areas where Aberdeenshire does not compare favourably to the rest of Scotland
- Local anecdotal data suggests vaping may be an increasing issue among young people in Aberdeenshire. This seems to be reflected across Scotland as a whole.

- Asthma
- chest infections - like pneumonia and bronchitis
- meningitis
- ear infections
- coughs and colds

Latest data show Aberdeenshire recorded a higher rate of exposure to second-hand smoke at 6 to 8 weeks than Scotland as a whole (8.8% *versus* the national rate of 7.3%). However, the longer-term trend is downwards. Nonetheless, this is one of the few health-related areas where Aberdeenshire does not compare favourably to the rest of Scotland.

There is currently no localised data for exposure to second-hand smoke in Aberdeenshire.

- **Vaping:**

Whilst vaping is considered less dangerous than smoking, Cancer Research UK states "E-cigarettes are not risk-free". The best estimates suggest potential harms to the respiratory system and heart, which is at higher risk for those with pre-existing conditions.

Aberdeenshire training (Crew 2000) suggest vaping is an increasing issue among young people in the region as it featured highly in general discussions with them. Partners also raised concerns with vaping among Aberdeenshire primary and secondary-aged young people. These concerns were raised via the GIRFEC Strategic Group (GSG).

Other evidence is contained in the *How Was it for You Survey* - 17% of young people who completed the survey (total of 1702 respondents) stated they had either vaped nicotine products or smoked a cigarette with 35% of these young people selecting vaping as their main choice. 31% of young people said people in their friend group had either smoked or vaped nicotine products while 40% said someone in their family does. Happy for you to reword to fit into the space.

The Crew 2000 team note that attitudes to smoking has dropped significantly throughout Scotland (especially in relation to younger people). However, there has been an increase nationally in the proportion of young people vaping. The ITC youth study showed 28% of respondents hadn't smoked but had started vaping. Although not statistically significant, Crew's own research shows 61% of participants at a single event vaped regularly, with a further 13% vaping occasionally.

IMMUNISATION UPTAKE

- **When a child is immunised, they're helping to protect the health of the whole community, not just their own health.**

When enough people are immunised against an infection, it's more difficult for it to be spread to those who are not immunised. This is called 'herd immunity' or 'population protection'. This is important because children with some severe medical conditions and allergies can't have certain vaccinations.

Deprivation is one factor that can influence a parent/guardian's decision to immunise their child: immunisation rates increase across deprivation quintiles, from the most to the least deprived. Recent research by McQuaid et al (2022) shows that uptake improved across deprivation levels during the pandemic, but inequalities persisted.

At 97.4%, the immunisation uptake at 24 months for the 6-in-1 vaccine was 0.3% higher in Aberdeenshire than Scotland as a whole (97.1%), but the rate for the MMR vaccine at 24 months was slightly lower (93.8% *versus* the national rate of 94.4%).

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (6 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- Lower immunisation uptake rates locally tend to be associated with the northern portion of Aberdeenshire, particularly Peterhead and Fraserburgh, which bears out national findings that deprivation is a factor. However, some areas not associated with deprivation *per se* do feature in the poorer end of the spectrum in terms of immunisation uptake historically. Stand-out areas in this respect include Dunecht, Durris and Drumoak, Banchory West, and Stonehaven South.
- The rate of unintentional injuries in the under 5 age group in Aberdeenshire is very similar to the Scottish rate. Local rates have remained steady in recent years.

Localised data show that lower uptake rates tend to be associated with the northern portion of Aberdeenshire, particularly Peterhead and Fraserburgh, which bears out national findings that deprivation is a factor. However, some areas not associated with deprivation *per se* do feature in the poorer end of the spectrum in terms of immunisation uptake historically. Stand-out areas in this respect include Dunecht, Durris and Drumoak, Banchory West, and Stonehaven South.

UNINTENTIONAL INJURIES IN UNDER 5's

- **Unintentional injury is a common cause of emergency admission to hospital for adults and children in Scotland**. In the financial year ending 31 March 2022, unintentional injuries accounted for approximately 1 in 7 emergency hospital admissions for children and 1 in 9 for adults. Another possible outcome of unintentional injury is death. This was the case for approximately 1 in 23 adult and 1 in 18 child deaths during the calendar year ending 31 December 2021.

However, the majority of unintentional injuries result neither in death nor in hospital admission but are treated by GPs, Accident & Emergency departments or by the child's parent or carer, although accurate data from these sources are not available and so not reported in official statistics.

The term 'unintentional injury' is preferred to 'accidents' as the latter implies that events are inevitable and unavoidable whereas a high proportion of these incidents are now regarded as being preventable.

Unintentional injuries can occur in any age group, but children and the elderly are generally more vulnerable.

Latest data show that the rate of unintentional injuries in the under 5 age group in Aberdeenshire is very similar to the Scottish rate (1,044 per 100,000 population, compared to 1054 for Scotland as a whole.). Positively, the rate has decreased in Aberdeenshire over a longer period and has remained relatively steady over the past few years.

National data shows that Falls were by far the most common cause of emergency admissions for unintentional injuries in children, for both males and females, accounting for almost half (46%) of the 5,919 emergency admissions in 2021/22. (Localised data is currently unavailable.)

The Scottish Government is developing targeted safety measures for new families to try to reduce the number of hospitalisations as a result of unintentional injuries.

MATENAL HEALTH

MATERNITIES WITH DRUG USE

- Taking drugs (including tobacco and alcohol) when pregnant, even in small quantities, can put the baby's health at serious risk. It increases the risk they'll be stillborn or will die in the first few weeks and months of life.

  The baby is also more likely to:

  - be born early
  - be underweight
  - have feeding and breathing problems
  - get infections
  - have problems with their development and growth

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (7 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- Women in the most deprived areas are more likely to be obese than those living in the least deprived. This may be a factor in relation to Aberdeenshire's rate of maternal obesity, which is lower than the Scottish average. However, the Aberdeenshire rate has increased over the past few years.
- In Aberdeenshire, latest data show the rate of teenage pregnancies is lower than Scotland as a whole and, like Scotland, the rate is on a downwards trajectory.

These have lifelong consequences.

In Aberdeenshire, latest data show the rate of maternities with drug use is lower than Scotland as a whole (11.6 per 1,000 maternities *versus* the national rate of 16.5). However, the rate has been increasing over the past few years in Aberdeenshire. This, coupled with the higher-than-average exposure to second-hand smoke, may be a cause for concern.

There is currently no localised data for maternities with drug use.

MATERNAL OBESITY

- **Women who are obese before they become pregnant are at increased risk of pregnancy complications including gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia and having a baby who is 'large-for-gestational age'**. Excessive weight gain during pregnancy in women who were obese pre-pregnancy has been associated with consequences for their child's longer-term health. These include increased risk of childhood obesity and behavioural and emotional problems, such as autistic spectrum disorders.

Women in the most deprived areas are more likely to be obese than those living in the least deprived.

This may be a factor in relation to Aberdeenshire's rate of maternal obesity, which is lower than the Scottish average (23.8% of maternities *versus* the national rate of 25.3%). However, the Aberdeenshire rate has increased over the past few years.

Localised data show that maternal obesity tends to be higher in places in and around Cruden, Ellon West, Peterhead and Fraserburgh, Aberchirder and Whitehills, and New Pitsligo. Certain areas within these general regions are among the most deprived in Aberdeenshire.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

- **A number of teenage girls experience unintended or unwanted pregnancies. With a higher rate of teenage pregnancy than most other western European countries, reducing unintended teenage pregnancy is a national target for the Scottish Government.**

While teenage pregnancy rates have reduced across all levels of deprivation in the last decade, they have fallen more rapidly in the most deprived areas which has narrowed the absolute gap between the most and least deprived areas.

In 2020, however, those living in the areas of highest deprivation still had teenage pregnancy rates five times higher than those in the least deprived (44.9 compared to 9 per 1,000 women).

Teenage women from the most deprived areas are more likely to deliver than to terminate their pregnancy. In contrast, those from the least deprived areas are more likely to terminate than to deliver.

In Aberdeenshire, latest data show the rate of teenage pregnancies is lower than Scotland as a whole (20.6 per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 *versus* the national rate of 29.2). Like Scotland, the Aberdeenshire rate is on a downwards trajectory.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (8 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- Attendance at Aberdeenshire schools in 2020-21 was 94.9% which was 1% higher than 2019-20 and 2% higher than the National figure for 2020-21. (Aberdeenshire's rate was the 3rd highest in Scotland.) Attendance increased in all sectors in Aberdeenshire year-on-year.
- Nationally, there is an expectation for learning establishments to place a greater importance on inclusion through effective learning and teaching, promoting positive relationships and behaviour and employment of preventative approaches which reduce the need to consider exclusion.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATE

- Whilst both the causes and the impact of poor attendance are known to be complex and multifaceted, research demonstrates the potential impact that poor attendance can have. **Poor attendance has been linked to lower levels of attainment; peer relationships; emotional and behavioural difficulties and poorer employment opportunities**. This was found to be the case even when prior attainment and pupil characteristics were taken into account.

Attendance at Aberdeenshire schools in 2020-21 was 94.9% which was 1% higher than 2019-20 and 2% higher than the National figure for 2020-21. (Aberdeenshire's rate was the 3rd highest in Scotland.)

Attendance increased in all sectors in Aberdeenshire year-on-year.

Authorised absence decreased from 4.6% in 2019-20 to 3.8% in 2020-21 and unauthorised absence decreased from 1.5% in 2019-20 to 1.2% in 2020-21.

Absence from school in 2020-21 due to Covid-19 related sickness (with and without home learning) was very low at just 0.06% and absence from school due to Covid-19 self-isolation (with and without home learning) was 0.95%.

Attendance figures are based only on days when schools were open to allow for comparisons with previous years and to allow for school closures due to Covid-19.

More localised data show attendance rates are generally lower in Banff & Buchan and Buchan, and higher in Garioch and Kincardine & Mearns. Positively, attendance rates in all council areas increased in 2020/21 relative to the previous year.

From analysis of SQA level data, a correlation may be drawn between attendance at school and performance: generally speaking, the lower the attendance rate, the poorer the educational outcomes. This phenomenon contributes to the attainment gap within Aberdeenshire.

SCHOOL EXCLUSION RATE

- **Aberdeenshire's school exclusion rate is relatively high in the context of Scotland**. In 2020/21 the rate was 14.2 per 1,000 pupils, which was the 11th highest rate in the country. However, Aberdeenshire's rate has reduced over the last couple of years, in keeping with most other council areas in Scotland.

Nationally, there is an expectation for learning establishments to place a greater importance on inclusion through effective learning and teaching, promoting positive relationships and behaviour and employment of preventative approaches which reduce the need to consider exclusion.

Locally, the policy document *Promoting Inclusion and Reducing Exclusions in Educational Establishments* is now live and has been shared with all schools. Guidance has also been issued to all schools. The Policy and Guidance outline the procedures for Aberdeenshire educational establishments to follow to reduce the need for exclusion through the promotion of inclusion. The guidance defines clear protocols that schools must follow when considering, initiating and managing all aspects of the exclusion process. The Education department is currently looking at gathering data authority wide on exclusion.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (9 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- Aberdeenshire's attainment tends to exceed that of the National establishment across most measures. Data for 2022 show Aberdeenshire exceeds the National figure on 12 of the 14 key attainment measures.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the normal processes for considering, analysing and discussing attainment data in departments, schools and across Education and Children's Services in 2019-20 and 2021-22. E&CS continue to have performance review meetings with each school.

SCHOOL ATTAINMENT

- Due to data-related issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following broad messages pertaining to educational attainment in Aberdeenshire should be interpreted with a degree of caution.

  Analysis of local data shows that:

  - Aberdeenshire's attainment tends to exceed that of the National establishment across most measures. Data for 2022 show Aberdeenshire exceeds the National figure on 12 of the 14 key attainment measures.
  - Aberdeenshire's attainment in 2022 is above the 2019 pre-Covid level in 11 of the 14 measures.
  - There are consistent strengths in Aberdeenshire in Literacy & Numeracy in S4 since 2019 compared to the Virtual Comparator (VC) and National figures.
  - The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ awards at level 5 by the end of S4 has been consistently higher than the National figures but lower than the VC figures since 2019.
  - The percentage of pupils achieving 3+ awards at level 6 by the end of S5 has been mostly consistently higher than the National figures but lower than the VC figures since 2019.
  - The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ awards at level 6 by the end of S6 has been consistently lower than the National and VC figures since 2019.
  - Students leaving Aberdeenshire schools continue to have higher levels of Literacy and Numeracy than those across the rest of the country and Aberdeenshire also tends to exceed its VC, particularly at Level 5.

  Analysis of longer-term trend show that:

  - Attainment levels in Aberdeenshire are very close to that seen Nationally on 5 of the 6 key attainment measures. The exception is the 5+ passes at SCQF Level 5 measure, which continues to show Aberdeenshire 2-3% points above the National level.
  - Most of the measures show a broadly stable, or very slightly increasing picture of attainment, except for those at S4, where the Level 5 measure is showing an improving trend, whilst the Level 4 measure continues to show a negative long-term trend. This may be related to the decreasing trend in the numbers of entries at Level 4 over the recent past.

  As previously noted, The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the normal processes for considering, analysing and discussing attainment data in departments, schools and across Education and Children's Services in 2019-20 and 2021-22. E&CS continue to have performance review meetings with each school. The agenda is now more evenly distributed across attainment, wellbeing and leadership development.

DEPRIVATION-RELATED ATTAINMENT GAP

- The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge will continue to provide support for children and young people impacted by poverty through Strategic Equity Funding, Pupil Equity Funding, Care Experienced

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (10 of 10)

KEY POINTS

- Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy across Aberdeenshire 's primary schools has been close to the national average.
- The attainment gap among primary school pupils is closing between Quintiles 1 and 5 for both literacy and numeracy.
- pupils who are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) do not perform as well as year groups on the whole and also in most cases do not perform as well as pupils in Decile 1 and 2. This gives the council a clear agenda for improvement which has led to the creation of sub measures for this cohort of pupils.

Children and Young People funding and a number of national programmes. The main aim of the policy is to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and **accelerate progress in closing the attainment gap.**

Primary School Attainment Gap

Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy across Aberdeenshire has been close to the national average. From consideration of statistics from 2016 to 2021, the gap is closing between Quintiles 1 and 5 over time for both literacy and numeracy. When writing as an aspect of literacy is considered as an individual area, over time this has been an area requiring development across Aberdeenshire. It also requires some support and challenge by way of moderation processes, ensuring there is a shared level of understanding on what constitutes a level in broad general education (BGE).

This has led to the Sub measures around writing which have been added to Aberdeenshire's targets for session 2022-2023. On reviewing data across the BGE it is evident that pupils who are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) do not perform as well as year groups on the whole and also in most cases do not perform as well as pupils in Decile 1 and 2. This gives the council a clear agenda for improvement which has led to the creation of sub measures for this cohort of pupils.

The targets set for levels of attainment are in line with previous rates of attainment over previous years.

The targets will contribute over the medium term to closing the attainment gap for Aberdeenshire.

Schools will be issued with the levels of attainment that would be required for the local authority to achieve its stretch targets.

Aberdeenshire will review approaches to setting stretch aims from session 2022-2023 to ensure appropriate medium-term aims are ambitious but achievable going forward.

School Leavers achieving 1 or more qualification at SCQ Level 5 and 6

In 2021/22, 69.4% of pupils in Quintile 1 (most deprived) achieved one or more SCQ level 5 and 20.8% achieved one or more SCQ level 6. This compares to 96.1% and 79.1% of pupils in Quintile 5 (least deprived) respectively. Therefore, the gap is 26.7% for level 5 and 58.3% for level 6. The 2022/23 targets are 21.5% and 54.5% respectively.

As the schools in Quintile 1 are accounted for in only 2 areas, the calculation of the overall gap is of limited value in driving improvement. It is evident, however, that in general, the attainment gap will be closed by ensuring significant improvement in those two areas.

PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

Around a third of children and young people in Scotland's publicly-funded schools additional support. And that number has been increasing for years. There are many reasons why a child might need additional support. Some of the most common are: social, emotional and behavioural difficulty; English as an Additional Language; other moderate learning difficulty; and dyslexia.

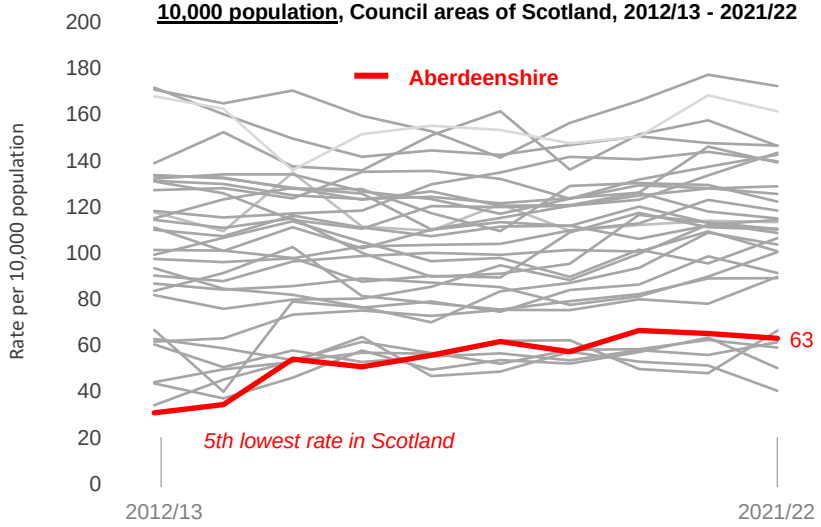
Across Aberdeenshire, a full review of how we support pupils with Additional Support needs is underway, considering both the local context we find ourselves in as well as national reviews including the Review of Implementation of Additional Support for Learning (ASL Review published in 2020.)

VULNERABILITY FACTORS DASHBOARD

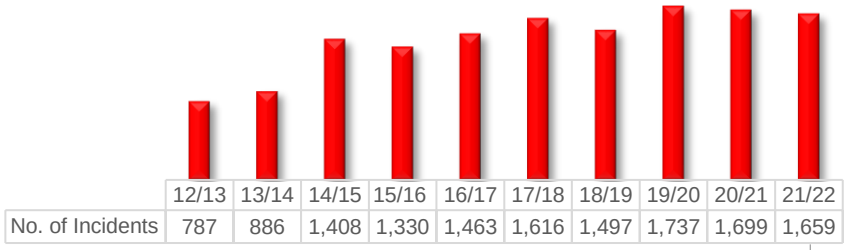
PARENTS

Domestic Abuse Incidents Recorded by Police, 2012-13 to 2021-22

Incidents of Domestic Abuse recorded by the police, rate per 10,000 population, Council areas of Scotland, 2012/13 - 2021/22



Number of Incidents of Domestic Abuse recorded by the police, Aberdeenshire, 2012/13 - 2021/22



	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
No. of Incidents	787	886	1,408	1,330	1,463	1,616	1,497	1,737	1,699	1,659

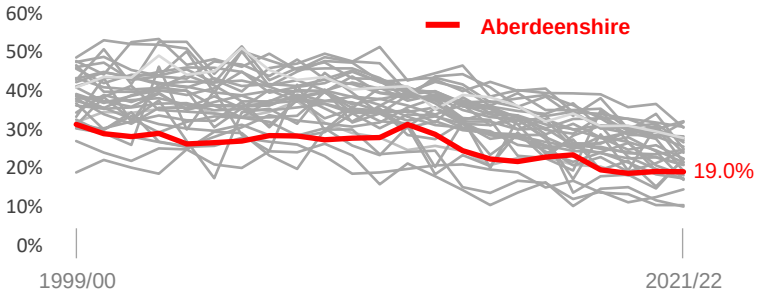
Percentage of Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police which involved a crime or offence, Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021/22

*Scotland average = 39%

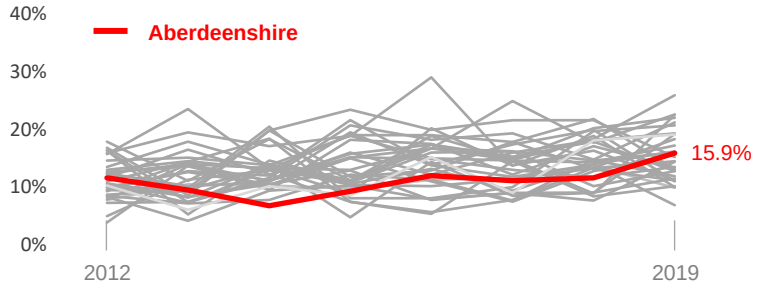
Other Vulnerability Factors (Adults) & Potential Drivers of Child Poverty / Deprivation

% Children in Working Households, Council areas of Scotland, 2006 - 2021

% of first-time mothers under 25, Council areas of Scotland, 1999/00 - 2021/22



% of Adults reporting a limiting long-term physical or mental health problem - households with children, Council areas of Scotland, 2012 - 2019



% Single Parent Households

2.2%

Scotland = 4.4% (2019)

% Large Family Households

5.6%

Large Family = 3+ children
Scotland = 5.2% (2019)

% Households Managing Financially

61%

Scotland = 55.5% (2019)

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (1 of 4)

PARENTS

KEY POINTS

- Aberdeenshire recorded a rate of 65 Domestic Abuse incidents per 10,000 population which is the 5th lowest rate in Scotland and significantly lower than the national average.
- The Scottish Government note the main drivers of child poverty include:
  - Employment: Income from parents' work and earnings is insufficient to lift them from poverty.
  - Household costs: The costs of living that households must cover are too high.
  - Social Security: Income from Social Security has been cut back significantly, particularly for families with children.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

- Taking the population of Scotland as at mid-year 2021, there were 118 recorded incidents of domestic abuse per 10,000 population in 2021-22. At a local authority level, Dundee City (172), West Dunbartonshire (161) and Glasgow City (147) recorded the highest incident rates per 10,000 population. Shetland Islands (50), East Dunbartonshire (59) and East Renfrewshire (61) recorded the lowest rates per 10,000 population.

Aberdeenshire recorded a rate of 65 per 10,000 population which is the 5th lowest rate in Scotland and significantly lower than the national average.

It is well documented that women enduring domestic abuse in rural areas are half as likely as urban victims to report the abuse and abuse in rural communities can last on average 25% longer than in urban areas (National Rural Crime Network). This is a particular challenge for Aberdeenshire, and it would be naïve to assume that the lower number of recorded incidents reflects that domestic abuse is less of an issue in the area.

In September 2020, Scottish Women's Aid published initial research *Crisis and Resilience: the impact of a global pandemic on domestic abuse survivors and service providers in Scotland*; and in June 2021, Public Health Scotland published research undertaken by Robert Gordon's University on *Supporting victims of domestic violence during COVID-19: the impact of the pandemic on service providers in North-East Scotland and Orkney*. Both reports highlighted the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic saw a significant rise in gender-based violence and increased risks of harm for domestic abuse survivors, due to restrictions on movement and an increase in social isolation. Essentially, women were 'locked down' with the perpetrator of abuse. In the northeast this was reported as seeing a 400% increase in referrals to support services.

Approximately 44% of recorded domestic abuse incidents in Aberdeenshire included at least one crime or offence being recorded by police. This is higher than the national average (39%) and the 5th highest rate in Scotland.

This doesn't necessarily mean instances of domestic abuse are more serious in this area; it may mean that local services utilise the criminal justice system as part of an overall strategy to prevent and negate the impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families in the region.

As noted in a later section, domestic abuse is the number one reason for placing children on the Child Protection Register over the most recent year.

DRIVERS OF CHILD POVERTY

- On the 24th of March 2022, the Scottish Government published the second version of the Tackling Poverty Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022 - 2026, Best Start Bright Futures.

This plan builds on the foundations of Every Child, Every Chance and continues to focus on the three drivers of child poverty:

1. **Employment**: Income from parents' work and earnings is insufficient to lift them from poverty.
2. **Household costs**: The costs of living that households must cover are too high.
3. **Social Security**: Income from Social Security has been cut back significantly, particularly for families with children.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (2 of 4)

PARENTS

KEY POINTS

- Approximately 2.2% of households in Aberdeenshire are headed by a lone parent, which is a considerably smaller proportion than Scotland as a whole (4.4%).
- Lone parents are the least wealthy household type in Scotland, probably translating into less disposable income.
- They are more likely to be in unmanageable debt than two-parent households.
- They are disproportionately impacted by cuts, freezes and benefits caps and limits, particularly those who also have a disabled adult or child in the household, partly because of a higher reliance on benefits.

The plan continues to highlight the six priority family groups:

1. Lone-parent families
2. A household where someone is disabled
3. Families with three or more children
4. Minority ethnic families
5. Families with a child under one year old
6. Families where the mother is under 25 years of age

These families continue to be at a higher risk of poverty and future policies should continue to focus on them. There is a need for an individual, holistic approach, within a framework of understanding structural barriers, in order to avoid perpetuating stereotyping and stigma.

Localised data regarding some of the priority family groups listed above has been provided in the dashboard section of this chapter. The following sections provide a contextual narrative.

LONE PARENT FAMILIES

Approximately 2.2% of households in Aberdeenshire are headed by a lone parent, which is a considerably smaller proportion than Scotland as a whole (4.4%). Aberdeenshire's rate was the 4th lowest in Scotland at the last time of recording (2019).

National research shows that, in terms of **income from employment**:

- Lone parents are less likely to be in paid work than other groups.
- Those who work tend to work fewer hours and have a lower hourly wage, reflecting the gender pay gap.
- They are more likely to have low or no qualifications, and those with degrees are more likely to work in low or medium skilled occupations.

In terms of the **cost-of-living**:

- Lone parents are the least wealthy household type in Scotland, probably translating into less disposable income.
- They are more likely to be in unmanageable debt than two-parent households (9.1% of lone parent households experience unmanageable debt compared to 3.1% for two-parent households).

National research also shows that, in terms **of income from social security**:

- Lone parents experience high anxiety and uncertainty when looking to claim benefits.
- They are disproportionately impacted by cuts, freezes and benefits caps and limits, particularly those who also have a disabled adult or child in the household, partly because of a higher reliance on benefits.

Potential issues to consider:

- Challenges around balancing work and childcare commitments with a lack of access to flexible working
- Impact of precarious financial situation on health and mental wellbeing
- Potential impact of non-payment of child maintenance
- Helping lone parents who want to gain qualifications through tailored employability/ training initiatives

LARGE FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS (3+ CHILDREN)

Approximately 5.6% of households in Aberdeenshire are considered to contain large families (3+ children). This is slightly higher than the national rate (5.2%).

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (3 of 4) PARENTS

KEY POINTS

- Approximately 15.9% of adults with children have some kind limiting physical or mental condition in Aberdeenshire (2019). This is similar to the national rate (16.0%), and the 14th highest rate in Scotland.
- Disabled parents are generally less likely to be in paid work, and if in paid work, more likely to be underemployed.
- Approximately 19.0% of first-time mothers in Aberdeenshire were under the age of 25. This is lower than the national rate (23.0%), and the 8th lowest rate in Scotland (2020/21).
- Young mothers are less likely to be in paid work.

In terms of **income from employment**, national research shows that:

- The challenges of organising and paying for childcare increase with more children, potentially making it less financially viable to work or limiting hours worked.
- Large families are less likely than parents with fewer children to be in paid work, although at least one adult is in paid work in the majority of families in this group.

Costs of living:

- The risk of relative poverty increases with the number of children.
- Overall, larger families require higher levels of income to achieve an adequate standard of living.
- Cost of childcare and other living costs are higher with more children.

Potential issues to consider for large family households:

- Flexibility in both paid work and childcare may be key for this group.
- Supporting parents who want to develop skills and qualifications while they are out of the labour market.

HOUSEHOLDS WHERE SOMEONE HAS A LIMITING CONDITION

Approximately 15.9% of adults with children have some kind limiting physical or mental condition in Aberdeenshire (2019). This is similar to the national rate (16.0%), and the 14th highest rate in Scotland.

Income from employment:

- Disabled parents are generally less likely to be in paid work, and if in paid work, more likely to be underemployed.
- They experience additional barriers accessing employment (including transport, application processes, discrimination).
- They are more likely to have low or no qualifications.

Costs of living:

- Overall, disabled families face higher costs of living than non-disabled.
- Families with long term conditions find it harder to afford childcare.
- They face barriers around finding the right childcare to support children's needs.
- They are less likely to have savings (among families with long term conditions).

FAMILIES WITH YOUNGER MOTHERS

Approximately 19.0% of first-time mothers in Aberdeenshire were under the age of 25. This is lower than the national rate (23.0%), and the 8th lowest rate in Scotland (2020/21).

National research provides that, in terms of income from employment:

- Young mothers are less likely to be in paid work.
- Women and young people are at higher risk of in-work poverty and have a lower average hourly rate of pay.
- They were strongly affected by social isolation and the absence of childcare to allow them to work or study during the pandemic.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS NARRATIVE (4 of 4) PARENTS

KEY POINTS

- 68% of children in poverty in Scotland live in working households. This highlights the need for good quality, well paid, flexible jobs.
- Cost, flexibility and availability of childcare, including for babies and disabled children, is important across all priority groups.
- Priority family groups may experience challenges navigating social security systems, and are disproportionately impacted by cuts, freezes and or changes to eligibility criteria for social security.

- 17% mothers under 20 have a qualification at Higher Grade or above compared with 50% early twenties and 80% 25 or older.

Costs of living:

- Adults under 25 are less likely to have savings, which, combined with low paid jobs, make it harder to meet living costs.
- Pregnant young women and young mothers (under 21) make up about 1 in 25 of all applications for homeless assessments in Scotland.
- UK data highlights that younger people spend a higher proportion of their income on housing and food than older people.

Income from social security:

- People under 25, including those who are lone parents, are entitled to a lower allowance of some benefits than people aged 25 and over.
- Mothers under 20 are considerably more reliant on state benefits and tax credits than are older mothers, making them disproportionally impacted by cuts or changes to eligibility criteria in benefits or support services.

Issues to consider:

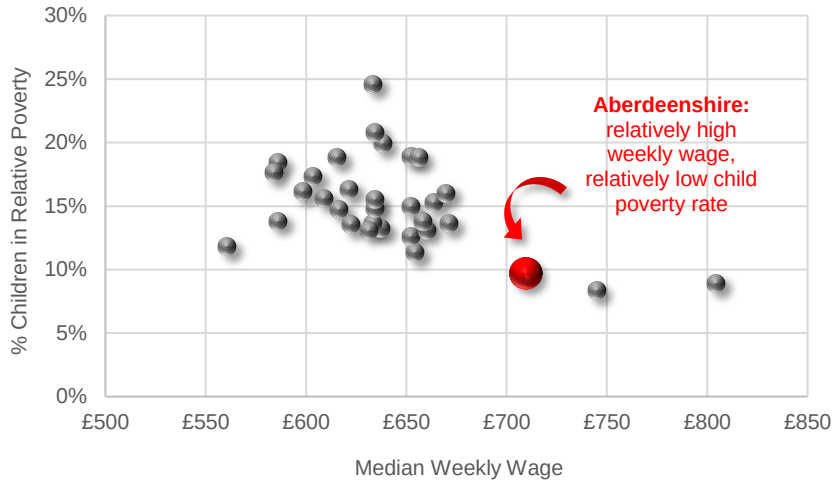
- In-work poverty particularly relevant for this group
- Consideration of social security benefits for under 25s
- Issues around housing costs and availability
- Digital inclusion

Overarching challenges across all priority groups

- 68% of children in poverty in Scotland live in working households. This highlights the need for good quality, well paid, flexible jobs.
- Cost, flexibility and availability of childcare, including for babies and disabled children, is important across all priority groups.
- Priority family groups may experience challenges navigating social security systems, and are disproportionately impacted by cuts, freezes and or changes to eligibility criteria for social security.

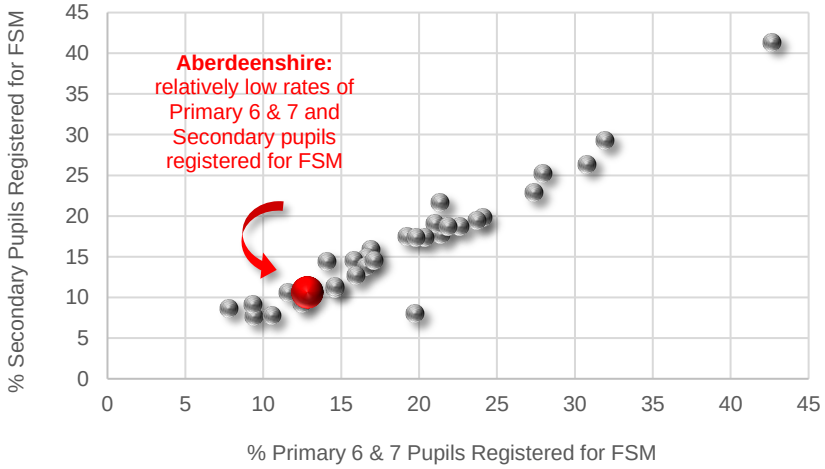
Relative Child Poverty Rate versus Median Weekly Wage, 2021

Relative Child Poverty Rate versus Median Weekly Wages, council areas of Scotland, 2021



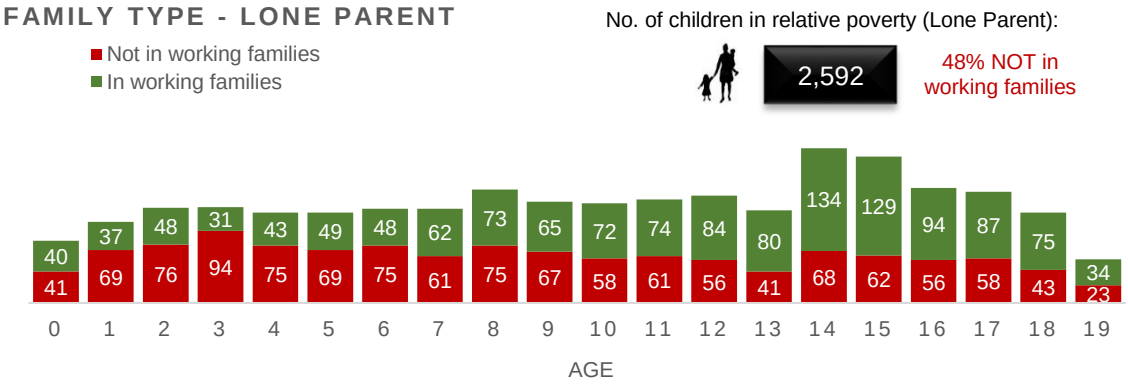
Primary 6 & 7 Pupils versus Secondary Pupils Registered for Free School Meals, 2022

% of Primary 6 & 7 Pupils registered for Free School Meals versus Secondary School Pupils registered for Free School Meals, council areas of Scotland, 2022

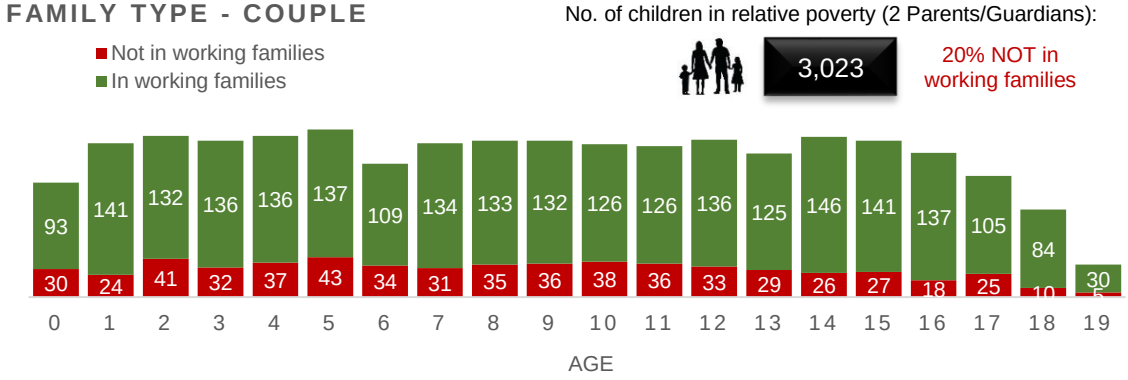


Number of Children in Relative Poverty per Single Year of Age and Family Type, Aberdeenshire, 2020/21

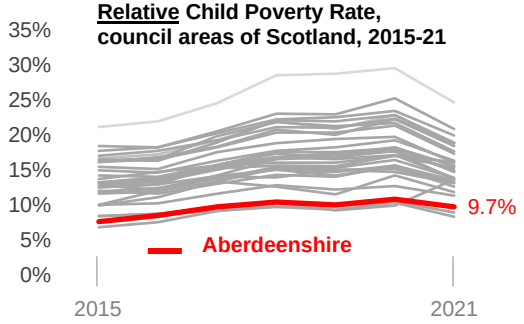
FAMILY TYPE - LONE PARENT



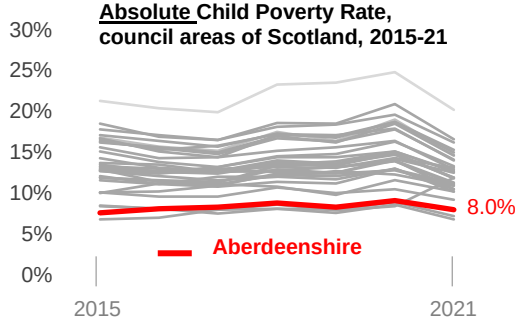
FAMILY TYPE - COUPLE



Relative Child Poverty Rate, council areas of Scotland, 2015-21

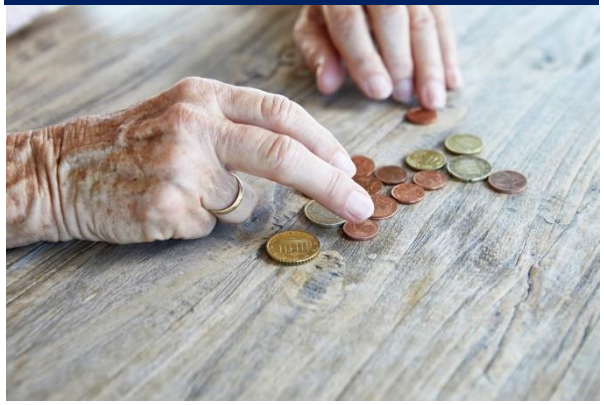


Absolute Child Poverty Rate, council areas of Scotland, 2015-21



KEY POINTS

- Children and families living and growing up in poverty and low-income households experience many disadvantages. These can have negative health and social consequences during childhood and into adulthood.
- Approximately 5,615 people aged 0-19 live in relative poverty in Aberdeenshire, of which 2,592 (46%) live with a lone parent and 3,023 (54%) live with two parents/guardians.
- The top 10 Intermediate Zones in respect of the number of children living in low-income families account for almost 30% of the total number of such children in Aberdeenshire (2020/21).



CHILD POVERTY

- **Children and families living and growing up in poverty and low-income households experience many disadvantages. These can have negative health and social consequences during childhood and into adulthood.**

  Being exposed to some or all key factors below, as well as the accumulation of exposure over time, can adversely impact on child development and health outcomes.

  - Limited money for everyday resources - including good quality housing.
  - Stress of living in poverty.
  - Unhealthy lifestyles.
  - Poorer education and employment opportunities.

  Children's experience of poverty can also lead to bullying, or feelings of exclusion, as they may have fewer friends and less access to the social activities of their peers.

- The Scottish Government has an explicit commitment to ending child poverty through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 ('the Act') which outlines a statutory requirement to reduce the number of children who live in poverty.

  Reducing poverty is one of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) priorities which is led by the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Group.

- The dashboard data above tend to suggest Aberdeenshire is situated towards the less severe end of the spectrum in terms of child poverty indicators. For example, Aberdeenshire recorded one of the highest average weekly wage figures in Scotland, and one of the lowest rates of children living in relative poverty after housing costs. Aberdeenshire also recorded one of the lowest rates of Free School Meal registrations among Primary 6/7 and Secondary pupils in Scotland.

  Nonetheless, approximately 5,615 people aged 0-19 live in relative poverty in Aberdeenshire, of which 2,592 (46%) live with a lone parent and 3,023 (54%) live with two parents/guardians. The dashboard data provide this information per single year of age.

  Lone parents of children living in relative poverty in Aberdeenshire are less likely to work compared to those categorised as 'couples'. Approximately 48% of children and young people living with a lone parent were part of a non-working family, compared to 20% for those living with two parents/guardians.

  That 48% figure equates to approximately 1,244 children and young people in Aberdeenshire.

  Areas with relatively high numbers of children living in low-income families include:

  - Peterhead Harbour (288 children)
  - Longside & Rattray (232 children)
  - Rosehearty & Strathbeg (167 children)
  - Fraserburgh Harbour & Broadsea (167 children)
  - Howe of Alford (141 children)
  - Inverurie South (138 children)
  - Banchory-Devenick & Findon (137 children)
  - Ythsie (125 children)
  - Peterhead Links (120 children)
  - Durno-Chapel of Garioch (116 children).

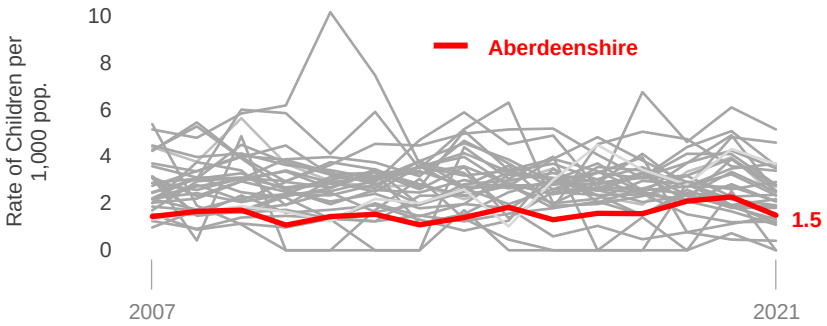
  The top 10 Intermediate Zones listed above account for almost 30% of the total number of children living in low-income families in Aberdeenshire (2020/21).

SPECIALIST AND TARGETED SERVICES

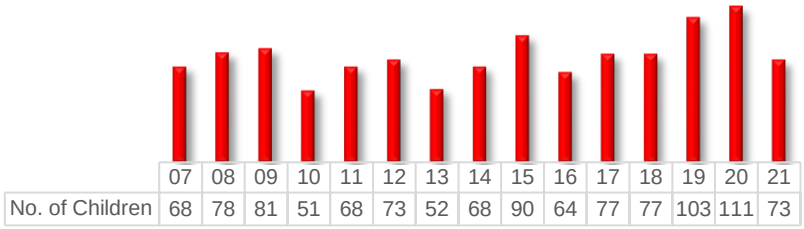
DASHBOARD

Social Work Data - Child Protection Register

Rate of children on the Child Protection Register, council areas of Scotland, 2007-21

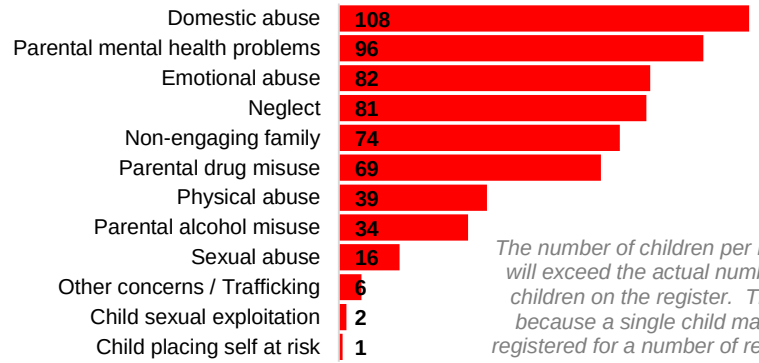


Number of children on the Child Protection Register, Aberdeenshire, 2007-21



	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
No. of Children	68	78	81	51	68	73	52	68	90	64	77	77	103	111	73

Reasons for placing children on Child Protection Register, Aberdeenshire, 2021/22



The number of children per reason will exceed the actual number of children on the register. This is because a single child may be registered for a number of reasons.

Care Experienced Young People Data

Total number of Care Experienced Young People in Aberdeenshire, 2021

390

Male: **213** (55%)
Female: **177** (45%)
Under 5 **72** (18%)
Over 16 **54** (14%)
Disability **72** (18%)

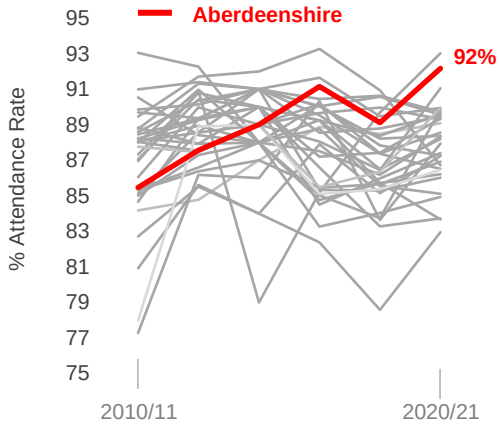
Care Experienced Young People as a proportion of 0–17-year-old population, Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021

In the community					In residential accommodation	
At home with parents	With friends / relatives	With foster carers provided by LA	With foster carers purchased by LA	In other community	In LA home/ Voluntary Home	In other residential care
61	79	124	44	13	35	34

Care Experienced Young People: gross cost per child per week (community setting) Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021

Care Experienced Young People: gross cost per child per week (residential accommodation) Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021

Care Experienced Young People school attendance rate, council areas of Scotland, 2010/11-20/21



Care Experienced Young People school exclusion rate per 1,000 children CEYP, Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021

% of Care Experienced Young People with 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 3, Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021

% of Care Experienced Young People with 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 4, Aberdeenshire in a Scottish Context, 2021

SPECIALIST & TARGETED SERVICES (1 of 2)

NARRATIVE

KEY POINTS

- the Child Protection Committee have been reassured that partner services work well together to recognise risk and respond appropriately.
- The number of children and young people on the register has remained constant over the course of 2022 with slight increases and decreases throughout the year, averaging at around 91 individuals.
- Aberdeenshire continues to have a lower number of children on the Child Protection Register than the national average.

CHILD PROTECTION

- Child Protection work in Aberdeenshire is overseen by the multi-agency Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee (CPC). The CPC publishes an annual report, endorsed by the Chief Officers, which sets out the work undertaken by the Committee.

  To date, the Child Protection Committee have been reassured that partner services work well together to recognise risk and respond appropriately.

  To support local partners' commitment to improving practice and outcomes for vulnerable children and families in Aberdeenshire, the CPC has developed a shared Quality Assurance Strategy and a Quality Assurance Activity Plan which sits alongside the CPC Improvement Plan.

  The CPC Improvement Plan is underpinned by local multi-agency quality assurance activity and takes cognisance of existing and emerging Scottish Government child protection policy developments.

- **Interagency Referral Discussion**: The Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) is a joint process Social Work, Police, Health and Education staff must follow when they are responding to a Child Protection referral to agree a plan for investigation. The purpose of an IRD is to ensure all relevant information is shared and analysed to ensure that any Child Protection Investigations are based on a reasoned, informed and considered plan. The level of referrals is relatively consistent (averaging about 25 referrals and 36 children per month), with the most common trigger for an IRD being physical assault.

  In 2022 a shared IRD process and template was introduced across Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Moray. The need for this was identified through the North East Implementation Group that was established to implement the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM), who recognized that it was necessary to develop a shared IRD process to support the roll out of SCIM across the North East.

  The relevant sections of the new National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2021) have been implemented within the new process and guidance to reflect the change in the operating model for IRD. Whilst each local authority area have made slight adaptations to the guidance to reflect differences in local practice, this new shared process will ensure a more consistent approach where our police partners will be working to the same process across all 3 local authorities.

  Plans are in place to develop a shared quality assurance framework across the 3 areas. Each authority will however continue to undertake their own quality assurance activities to ensure that any learning can be fed back to the practitioners on the ground and that any emerging themes or issues can be considered on a more localised basis.

  IRD quality assurance process provides reassurance to the CPC that partners are working together collaboratively and making the right decisions to protect and keep children safe.

- **Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM)** is a new approach to investigative interviewing which is trauma informed, maintaining the focus upon the needs of the child in the interview and minimizing the risk of further traumatization, whilst seeking to achieve the best evidence through improved planning and interview techniques. Elements of SCIM such as the use of evidence-based interview protocol, specialized training and adaptation of the

KEY POINTS

- Partners believe that Aberdeenshire's now well-embedded GIRFEC Framework continues to have a positive impact in reducing the number of children's names on the Child Protection Register through early multi-agency intervention.
- Latest data show data show that there is a significant rise in the number of registrations for domestic abuse and also for parental mental health problems.
- Children and young people at risk of harm generally stated that they had a worker they could go to for help or if they were worried. Examples included class teachers, guidance teachers, social workers and youth workers.

interview according to the needs of the child support adherence to the European PROMISE Barnahus Quality Standards (standard 6). Changes that local areas make to accommodate SCIM can also help increase readiness for Barnahus. Discussions regarding the implementation of the Scottish Bairns' Hoose models are ongoing on a North East basis.

As mentioned previously, there has been a shared approach in the North East to the implementation of the SCIM. We now have designated Social Work Practitioners and Police Officers from across the three authorities who have completed a rigorous training programme to provide them with the specialist skills and knowledge for forensic interviewing of children. Until more training is rolled out, it is recognized that the SCIM trained cadre will not be able to meet all the demand for investigative interviews, hence the practitioners trained under the previous Joint Investigative Interview model have had refresher training to better align them with SCIM.

The North East SCIM Team went live on 21 November 2022. In the time that the SCIM Team have been operational they have managed to undertake 84% of the investigative interviews within Aberdeenshire, where the requirement for an interview was agreed at an IRD. The SCIM interviewers have been getting involved at the point of the initial IRD, which ensures that they have a good knowledge regarding the needs of the child. Early indications are that the new model has also brought about improvements in the timeframes from IRD to the investigative interview.

- **Child Protection Register**: In Scotland the child protection register (CPR) is a confidential list of all children in the local area who have been identified as being at risk of significant harm. It allows authorised individuals to check if a child they are working with is known to be at risk.

  If a child is added to the CPR they must also have a child protection plan, which sets out what action needs to be taken by whom and when, in order to safeguard the child and promote their welfare

- **The number of children and young people on the register has remained constant over the course of 2022 with slight increases and decreases throughout the year, averaging at around 91 individuals.**

  In terms of the extremes, February 2022 saw the highest number of individuals on the register (101) and June 2021 saw the lowest (65).

  Aberdeenshire continues to have a lower number of children on the Child Protection Register than the national average. The most up to date Scottish Government statistics for Child Protection (2021) advises that the rate (per 1,000 pop 0-15) of children on the Child Protection Register in Aberdeenshire was 1.5%. This is less than the comparator average rate and less than the Scotland average rate of 2.3%.

  Partners believe that Aberdeenshire's now well-embedded GIRFEC Framework continues to have a positive impact in reducing the number of children's names on the Child Protection Register through early multi-agency intervention.

  Perhaps significantly, 2021/22 data show that there is a significant rise in the number of registrations for domestic abuse and also for parental mental health problems. They are now the top two reasons for placing children on the Child Protection Register in Aberdeenshire.

KEY POINTS

- There were 390 Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) in Aberdeenshire in 2021. This equated to 0.7% of the total population aged 0-17, one of the lowest rates in Scotland.
- The attendance rate at school of CEYP equated to 92% in 2020/21, which is one of the highest (i.e., best) rates in Scotland. From analysis of SQA level data there can be correlation drawn between attendance at school and performance which contributes to the attainment gap within Aberdeenshire.

CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

There were 390 Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) in Aberdeenshire in 2021. This equated to 0.7% of the total population aged 0-17, one of the lowest rates in Scotland.

The majority of CEYP (55%) were male, 18% were under 5, 14% were over 16, and 18% had some kind of disability.

Most CEYP reside in the community, either with foster carers provided by the local authority (124 CEYP), with friends or relatives (79 CEYP), or at home with parents (61 CEYP). A total of 69 CEYP were housed in residential accommodation.

The attendance rate at school of CEYP equated to 92% in 2020/21, which is one of the highest (i.e., best) rates in Scotland. From analysis of SQA level data there can be correlation drawn between attendance at school and performance which contributes to the attainment gap within Aberdeenshire.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES INSPECTION SURVEYS

- **The Joint inspection for services for children and young people at risk of harm in Aberdeenshire surveys (Oct 2022)** gathered the views of children and young people at risk of harm, their parents, as well as staff who work with vulnerable children and young people in the area. A synopsis of each survey is provided below.

Children and Young People at Risk of Harm (119 Respondents)

All respondents who commented indicated that they had a worker that they could go to for help or if they were worried. Examples included class teachers, guidance teachers, social workers and youth workers. A few respondents had mixed experiences with workers. For example, a few felt that their views had not always been considered or that workers had not always listened to them.

Approximately 93% of respondents felt safe where they lived at the time of the survey. Of the 60 children who added comments, 44% said that nothing needed to change to make them feel safer. Reasons for this included feeling happy and safe living with family members. A further 17% of respondents indicated that they did not know what would need to change to help make them feel safer.

Those who identified examples of change that would help them feel safer noted the following would assist in that regard:

- Moving to different locations to be nearer family and friends
- Living with different family members or pets
- More space in the house (room to self) and some time for self
- Stopping arguments at home
- Reducing crime or worries about problems in community and drug dealers
- Better responses from police

Parents of Children and Young People at Risk of Harm (71 Respondents)

Approximately 80% of respondents stated that their children lived with them at the time of the survey. A majority of parents (70%) also stated that their child(ren) were safer because of the help and support they received from workers (15% stated they were not safer).

SPECIALIST & TARGETED SERVICES

KEY POINTS

- The Joint inspection for services for children and young people at risk of harm in Aberdeenshire surveys (Oct 2022) gathered the views of children and young people at risk of harm, their parents, as well as staff who work with vulnerable children and young people in the area.
- Approximately 93% of respondents (children at risk) felt safe where they lived at the time of the survey. Of the 60 children who added comments, 44% said that nothing needed to change to make them feel safer. Reasons for this included feeling happy and safe living with family members.

A number of parents found services helpful. They included:

- Social work services in general (majority of responses), including social workers and family support workers as well as support from specific social work teams.
- School staff and general school support (primary and secondary)
- Health visitors
- Housing staff
- Support workers
- Homestart
- Advocacy service

Some respondents added information around the type of support they found helpful. They included:

- Drugs and alcohol support
- Trusting relationships with a worker who listens and responds quickly
- Helpful information regarding foodbanks and other services
- General support and understanding
- Respite support
- Support with disabled children

Staff Working With Children and Young People at Risk of Harm (655 Respondents)

This online survey was aimed at people who work with, or provide support to, children and young people at risk of harm and their families. This includes health visitors, school nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers, police officers, and staff working in the voluntary and independent sector. The majority of respondents (58%) were frontline staff, the remainder (42%) were categorised as first line management.

Key points are outlined below:

- 32% of respondents agree/strongly agree that the **mental health outcomes of children and young people** at risk of harm are improving. 52% disagree/strongly disagree, 14% stated they didn't know. Those in Education were far more likely to say the mental health of children and young people was improving compared to respondents in health services.
- 80% of respondents agree/strongly agree that the Getting it Right for Every Child approach is having a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people at risk of harm that they are working with. 10% disagree/strongly disagree, 9% stated they didn't know.
- 40% of respondents agree/strongly agree that children and young people at risk of harm are living in the right environment to experience the care and support that they need. 30% disagree/strongly disagree, 26% stated they didn't know. Those in social care/social work were more likely to agree.
- 81% of respondents agree/strongly agree that they are confident that effective intervention processes are in place to prevent or reduce incidences of accumulating signs of child abuse, neglect or exploitation. 12% disagree/strongly disagree, 6% stated they didn't know.
- 77% of respondents agree/strongly agree that they have confidence that local child protection arrangements respond in an effective and timely way to reports of child abuse, neglect and exploitation. 14% disagree/strongly disagree, 7% stated they didn't know.
- 70% of respondents agree/strongly agree that participation in regular local multi-agency training and development opportunities has strengthened their contribution to joint working with children and

KEY POINTS

- Aberdeenshire was one of three authorities to pilot the Bright Spots Survey in conjunction with Celcis (March 2022). The survey sought direct feedback from Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) about their experience of support/services. Suggested improvements include:
  - Listening to young people regarding the level of time they wish to spend with their family
  - Having a trusted adult
  - Knowing their social worker
  - Feeling settled
  - Improving general wellbeing (which was negatively impacted by such things as not enough family time, appearance issues, and not liking school).

young people at risk of harm. 15% Disagree / strongly disagree, 8% stated they didn't know.
- 70% of respondents agree/strongly agree that participation in regular local multi-agency training and development opportunities has strengthened their contribution to joint working with children and young people at risk of harm. 15% disagree/strongly disagree, 8% stated they didn't know

BRIGHT SPOTS SURVEYS

- Aberdeenshire was one of three authorities to pilot the Bright Spots Survey in conjunction with Celcis (March 2022). The survey sought direct feedback from Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) about their experience of support/services. This informs Corporate Parenting work and confirms Aberdeenshire's commitment to meaningful participation.

Approximately 68% of current Care Experienced young people and 41% of care leavers responded. Key areas for improvement based on their feedback are provided below.

Children and young people in care aged 4-18yrs:

- Listening to young people regarding the level of time they wish to spend with their family. Approximately 87% of children (8-11yrs) in the Bright Spots comparator group reported seeing at least one parent, but the proportion was much lower in Aberdeenshire at 62%.
- Having a trusted adult.
- Knowing their social worker.
- Feeling settled.
- Wellbeing – Lower overall wellbeing was statistically associated with: Family time with brothers and sisters 'not right', Being less happy with appearance, Feeling less settled and safe where they live, Not liking school and being afraid of bullying, Not having a carer or parent they can talk to, Not trusting their social worker, Not getting outside as much.

Young people who have left care:

Key improvements highlighted by this group include:

- Higher levels of anxiety, loneliness, anger and isolation.
- Transitions – Many of the more negative comments made by those who have left care related to difficult transitions, particularly in relation to the process of leaving care. This has resulted in a working group being formed which starts in November.
- Low life satisfaction/wellbeing.
- Accommodation.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

POPULATION

- Aberdeenshire's population has increased over the last few years – but the rate of growth is slowing.
- Aberdeenshire's population is ageing.
- Aberdeenshire is home to the 4th largest child population (0-18 years) in Scotland relative to total population.
- The child population in Scotland is expected to decrease over the next couple of decades. Aberdeenshire's child population is projected to decrease by 9.9% by 2043.
- The overall population is projected to increase by 2.5% by 2043, largely driven by the 55+ age group.

PROSPERITY

- Household income found to have significant impact on a child's cognitive and educational outcomes, as well as social and behavioural development and physical health.
- Median household income in Aberdeenshire equated to over £40,000 in 2022, the 5th highest in Scotland and 21% higher than the national average.
- Aberdeenshire has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the country
- A range of services in Aberdeenshire support young people to increase their confidence and to enhance their transition to post school opportunities.
- Aberdeenshire is among the least deprived areas in Scotland in terms of income and employment deprivation. However, thousands of people are still classified as either income or employment deprived. Many tend to reside in the northern portion of Aberdeenshire – but pockets of deprivation are found across the region.
- CACI household income data is an important dataset and may be used to identify potential vulnerable areas in Aberdeenshire (down to a few dozen households in some cases), thereby optimising service delivery and improving outcomes for those most in need.
- Many areas in Aberdeenshire are among the most geographically deprived in Scotland. This may inhibit optimal service provision for certain groups or communities. These differences may contribute to an even greater level of inequality, particularly for low-income families.
- The cost-of-living crisis is expected to ease in the second half of 2023, but deep recession concerns may limit public sector budgets and result in sub-optimal service delivery in the years ahead.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS (CHILDREN)

- The health and wellbeing of children is of fundamental importance to their ability to grow, develop, and learn.
- Data on child mental health and wellbeing may be categorised as an intelligence gap. There is little statistical evidence at a local level on which to base a robust assessment of the mental wellbeing of children and young people in Aberdeenshire.

- However, proxy indicators are being utilised in order to action this workstream.
- Kooth Digital Mental Health Service aims to support the 10–18-year-old population. There were 2,058 new registrations since its launch in June 2021. The most common reasons for children and young people accessing support have been anxiety/stress; suicidal thoughts, self-harm and friendships.
- Of the 607 clients aged 16-24 registered on the Hanlon system, which is used to monitor employability, mental health is recorded as a barrier for 197 individuals (32%).
- In terms of healthy birthweight, Latest data show approximately 83.3% of babies in Aberdeenshire were considered a healthy weight at the time of birth, and the longer-term trend is positive. However, Aberdeenshire's rate is lower than Scotland's equivalent (84.2%).
- Positively, latest data show that the hospitalisation rate for children in Aberdeenshire due to problems associated with asthma is the lowest in Scotland.
- Latest data show Aberdeenshire recorded a higher rate of exposure to second-hand smoke at 6 to 8 weeks than Scotland as a whole (8.8% versus the national rate of 7.3%). However, the longer-term trend is downwards. Nonetheless, this is one of the few health-related areas where Aberdeenshire does not compare favourably to the rest of Scotland
- Local anecdotal data suggests vaping may be an increasing issue among young people in Aberdeenshire. This seems to be reflected across Scotland as a whole.
- Localised data show that lower immunisation uptake rates tend to be associated with the northern portion of Aberdeenshire, particularly Peterhead and Fraserburgh, which bears out national findings that deprivation is a factor. However, some areas not associated with deprivation per se do feature in the poorer end of the spectrum in terms of immunisation uptake historically. Stand-out areas in this respect include Dunecht, Durris and Drumoak, Banchory West, and Stonehaven South.
- The rate of unintentional injuries in the under 5 age group in Aberdeenshire is very similar to the Scottish rate. Local rates have remained steady in recent years.
- Women in the most deprived areas are more likely to be obese than those living in the least deprived. This may be a factor in relation to Aberdeenshire's rate of maternal obesity, which is lower than the Scottish average. However, the Aberdeenshire rate has increased over the past few years.
- In Aberdeenshire, latest data show the rate of teenage pregnancies is lower than Scotland as a whole and, like Scotland, the rate is on a downwards trajectory.
- Attendance at Aberdeenshire schools in 2020-21 was 94.9% which was 1% higher than 2019-20 and 2% higher than the National figure for 2020-21. (Aberdeenshire's rate was the 3rd highest in Scotland.) Attendance increased in all sectors in Aberdeenshire year-on-year.
- Nationally, there is an expectation for learning establishments to place a greater importance on inclusion through effective learning and teaching, promoting positive relationships and behaviour and employment of preventative approaches which reduce the need to consider exclusion.
- Aberdeenshire's attainment tends to exceed that of the National establishment across most measures. Data for 2022 show Aberdeenshire exceeds the National figure on 12 of the 14 key attainment measures.

- The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the normal processes for considering, analysing and discussing attainment data in departments, schools and across Education and Children's Services in 2019-20 and 2021-22. E&CS continue to have performance review meetings with each school.
- Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy across Aberdeenshire 's primary schools has been close to the national average.
- The attainment gap among primary school pupils is closing between Quintiles 1 and 5 for both literacy and numeracy.
- pupils who are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) do not perform as well as year groups on the whole and also in most cases do not perform as well as pupils in Decile 1 and 2. This gives the council a clear agenda for improvement which has led to the creation of sub measures for this cohort of pupils.

VULNERABILITY FACTORS (PARENTS)

- Aberdeenshire recorded a rate of 65 Domestic Abuse incidents per 10,000 population which is the 5th lowest rate in Scotland and significantly lower than the national average.
- The Scottish Government note the main drivers of child poverty include:
    - Employment: Income from parents' work and earnings is insufficient to lift them from poverty.
    - Household costs: The costs of living that households must cover are too high.
    - Social Security: Income from Social Security has been cut back significantly, particularly for families with children.
- Approximately 2.2% of households in Aberdeenshire are headed by a lone parent, which is a considerably smaller proportion than Scotland as a whole (4.4%).
- Lone parents are the least wealthy household type in Scotland, probably translating into less disposable income.
- They are more likely to be in unmanageable debt than two-parent households.
- They are disproportionately impacted by cuts, freezes and benefits caps and limits, particularly those who also have a disabled adult or child in the household, partly because of a higher reliance on benefits.
- Approximately 15.9% of adults with children have some kind limiting physical or mental condition in Aberdeenshire (2019). This is similar to the national rate (16.0%), and the 14th highest rate in Scotland.
- Disabled parents are generally less likely to be in paid work, and if in paid work, more likely to be underemployed.
- Approximately 19.0% of first-time mothers in Aberdeenshire were under the age of 25. This is lower than the national rate (23.0%), and the 8th lowest rate in Scotland (2020/21).
- Young mothers are less likely to be in paid work.
- 68% of children in poverty in Scotland live in working households. This highlights the need for good quality, well paid, flexible jobs.
- Cost, flexibility and availability of childcare, including for babies and disabled children, is important across all priority groups.
- Priority family groups may experience challenges navigating social security systems, and are disproportionately impacted by cuts, freezes and or changes to eligibility criteria for social security.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL

- Children and families living and growing up in poverty and low-income households experience many disadvantages. These can have negative health and social consequences during childhood and into adulthood.
- Approximately 5,615 people aged 0-19 live in relative poverty in Aberdeenshire, of which 2,592 (46%) live with a lone parent and 3,023 (54%) live with two parents/guardians.
- The top 10 Intermediate Zones in respect of the number of children living in low-income families account for almost 30% of the total number of such children in Aberdeenshire (2020/21).

SPECIALIST AND TARGETED SERVICES

- The Child Protection Committee have been reassured that partner services work well together to recognise risk and respond appropriately.
- The number of children and young people on the register has remained constant over the course of 2022 with slight increases and decreases throughout the year, averaging at around 91 individuals.
- Aberdeenshire continues to have a lower number of children on the Child Protection Register than the national average.
- Partners believe that Aberdeenshire's now well-embedded GIRFEC Framework continues to have a positive impact in reducing the number of children's names on the Child Protection Register through early multi-agency intervention.
- Latest data show data show that there is a significant rise in the number of registrations for domestic abuse and also for parental mental health problems.
- Children and young people at risk of harm generally stated that they had a worker they could go to for help or if they were worried. Examples included class teachers, guidance teachers, social workers and youth workers.
- There were 390 Care Experienced young people (CEYP) in Aberdeenshire in 2021. This equated to 0.7% of the total population aged 0-17, one of the lowest rates in Scotland.
- The attendance rate at school of CEYP equated to 92% in 2020/21, which is one of the highest (i.e., best) rates in Scotland. From analysis of SQA level data there can be correlation drawn between attendance at school and performance which contributes to the attainment gap within Aberdeenshire.
- The Joint inspection for services for children and young people at risk of harm in Aberdeenshire surveys (Oct 2022) gathered the views of children and young people at risk of harm, their parents, as well as staff who work with vulnerable children and young people in the area.
- Approximately 93% of respondents (children at risk) felt safe where they lived at the time of the survey. Of the 60 children who added comments, 44% said that nothing needed to change to make them feel safer. Reasons for this included feeling happy and safe living with family members.

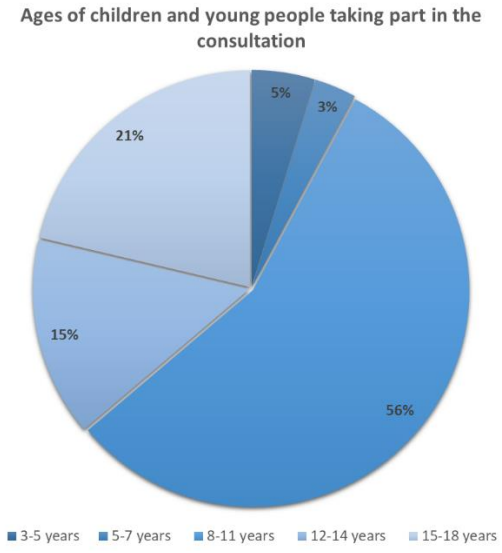
- Aberdeenshire was one of 3 authorities to pilot the Bright Spots Survey in conjunction with Celcis (March 2022). The survey sought direct feedback from Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) about their experience of support/services. Suggested improvements include:
    - Listening to young people regarding the level of time they wish to spend with their family
    - Having a trusted adult
    - Knowing their social worker
    - Feeling settled
    - Improving general wellbeing (which was negatively impacted by such things as not enough family time, appearance issues, and not liking school).

VOICES OF CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND WORKFORCE

CHILDRENS SERVICES PLAN CONSULTATION:

A total of 622 children, young people and parents aged took part in a series of 40 focus group discussions across Aberdeenshire between November 2022 and February 2023.

Children and Young People: Focus groups with children and young people were facilitated within a mixture of schools across Aberdeenshire (North, Central and South areas) to capture the diverse nature of our local communities, this included remote rural, accessible rural and non-rural primary schools and academy's. A number of community youth groups also took part in focus group discussions. Discussions were facilitated by Early Years Practitioners in Early Years settings to capture what our very young children value in their communities.



17 Primary School classes including single year and composite classes:
1 x P1-7 class, 1 Pupil Council and 1 Junior Leadership Team.

8 Academy Groups: S1-S6 classes and lived experience groups i.e. care experienced young people, young carers.

9 CLD Groups including employability groups and youth forums.

PPF (Pupil Participation Forum) pupils from each Academy in Aberdeenshire.

YPOC (Young People's Organising and Campaigning Group) Aberdeenshire wide group.

Discussion were facilitated by Early Years Practitioners with very young children (aged 3-5) across 5 Early Years settings (geographically spread across Aberdeenshire).

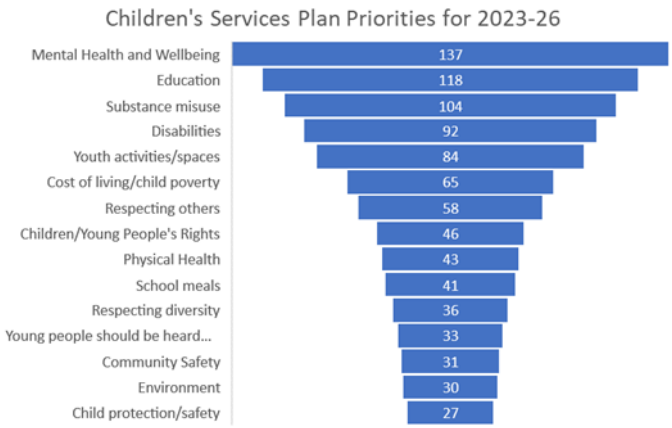
Awareness of the plan

Most young people that took part in the focus groups reported they did not know about the plan and had never seen it before. Within the PPF 3 members recognised it – all 3 are MSYP's for their given area within Aberdeenshire, have taken part in training for their MSYP role and have attended Education and Children's Committee meetings, these contributing factors had raised their awareness.

During the first focus group held, young people raised the fact that the current plan document is too long and not user friendly. The Scottish Government and Children's Services Young Inspectors raised the same issue. It was decided to incorporate a question to identify a group of young people to lead the development of a child/young people/user friendly version of the Plan. The group have met once so far and once the version is complete it will be shared with all of those who participated in the focus groups. It will also be shared wider with all schools in Aberdeenshire and through the youth participation structure.

Content of discussion topics:

Mental health and wellbeing Children and young people in every focus group expressed the need to have fun and socialise as well as to have time in their own space to develop their own interests. As a whole children and young people voiced their opinion on what they enjoyed doing in their spare time and voiced the positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.



25% of children and young people told us that mental health and wellbeing was an issue for them and/or their peers. Some young people reported that waiting lists for mental health and wellbeing support were too long and that they had to wait until crisis point until they were seen. Young people expressed a need for earlier intervention. Young people were able to tell us where they would go for support, and some were able to identify local support structures available to them i.e. Kooth (online mental health and wellbeing support). Some young people spoke about the LIAM project and School Counsellors and so had awareness of recent and ongoing developments in building capacity for earlier intervention. Children and young people also spoke about the support they get within school as positive to increase their ability to support their own mental health and wellbeing. However, it was clearly expressed that the Children's Services Plan should continue to have mental health and wellbeing as a priority for the coming 3 years.

Education This was the second common feature in focus groups with 22% of children and young people expressing a wide variety of views and opinions in this category. Children and young people voiced the need for shorter school days and longer breaks, particularly in rural areas where transport to and from school added significantly to their school day. Comments also included those relating to curriculum subjects (need for teachers in their school for particular subjects, need for more active and practical subjects/learning, free study periods for S4), need for additional support during exam times and building related issues (e.g. toilets, need for a new build).

Substance use/misuse 19% of children and young people taking part in focus groups were very vocal around this issue and the impacts on mental and physical health. A constant issue of vaping, either by themselves, peers, family members or within their communities, was raised and discussed. Marketing and promotion of vaping products was identified as an added concern as it made these products more attractive to a young audience.

Smoking, alcohol use and drug taking were all raised as being something children and young people are aware of within their schools and local communities. Worry around being offered drugs and being aware of peers taking drugs and the effect this may have on them were also raised. Use of alcohol within peer groups and the community was also raised as a concern with some young people stating that " people turn to alcohol and drugs because there's nothing else to do". Children and young people feel that there is not enough being done in their local communities to address this issue.

Children and young people with disabilities This was the 4th most commonly raised issue in focus groups, with 17% of young people expressing the need for support for children, young people and parents. The term disability covered a wide range of comments around needs from physical disabilities to hidden disabilities and support.

It was felt that more needed to be done with regard to access for children and young people with disabilities in fun activities for example wheelchair swing seats were consistently raised as a solution in local play parks. Recognition of additional support needs were consistently raised, with additional support for children and young people with dyslexia, ADHD and autism being highlighted. There were discussions around developing the use of brail and sign language in our schools and communities.

Youth activities and spaces This was regularly raised as a local issue for 15% of the children and young people taking part in focus groups. Many young people particularly in rural areas said that unless you are part of an organised activity i.e. sporting, creative, musical group/club then there is very little opportunity to come together with friends and peers to socialise and have fun out with home and school. Where there are facilities like skateparks, bike trails and youth club's children and young people expressed the value they hold on these, whereas in areas where these are not available there is a clear desire for them.

This topic often linked with mental health and wellbeing and seen by young people as something that increases their happiness and wellbeing.

Cost of living 12% of young people expressed their concern at the cost of living crisis and could see the difference this is making on their families. Activities in their community, school trips and family holidays were often linked to this discussion, with young people stating how expensive these activities can be and this can deter them being able to take part. Children and young people suggested more affordable activities in their local communities. Young people voiced their concern around the rising cost of food with suggestion that in rural communities the choice of food available locally can be unhelpful in keeping the cost of food down e.g. needing to buy a pack of 6 bread rolls instead of 4 not only impacting on costs but also contributing to increase in food waste.

Respecting others This was frequently raised alongside respecting diversity, being inclusive and supporting peers to be themselves in order that everyone feels welcomed and part of their communities. Racial and cultural diversity was also linked into these discussions with recognition of those families moving to Aberdeenshire for refuge and how as a society we ensure children, young people and families are welcomed and supported to live the best life they can.

Children and young people's rights This was raised in many of the discussions, young people on the whole appear to have a good understanding of the Articles within the UNCRC and feel strongly about their rights. Children and young people's right to education featured significantly in these discussions, with concerns being highlighted around disruptive pupils taking the attention of teachers. The right for food and clean water also featured in these discussions with children and young people linking this to the cost of living crisis. Children and young people want their opinions to be heard, taken seriously and have influence in decision making that affects them and their peers. Freedom to make choices, learn from their own mistakes and building independence were also highlighted as being important.

Access to medical support was also raised and could feature under Children and Young People's Rights. We know that many families are discussing their concerns on this and the media attention NHS has had of late will have impacted on this. Children and young people, however, offered examples of difficulties in accessing medical support when it is most needed e.g. in one rural community children reported that GP's are only available 2 days a week during school time, access to a local dentist etc. Concern was also raised about accessing hospitals in an emergency and treatment for long term conditions.

Physical health This was a topic that children and young people raised and often linked with the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing. Having access to activities and

facilities locally was highlighted as important in children and young people's lives. Again, physical health was often linked to socialising and making new friendships.

Other: Many comments on school meals were highlighted from the size in portion, menu choices and nutrition. These comments will be passed to our school catering service for their information and consideration.

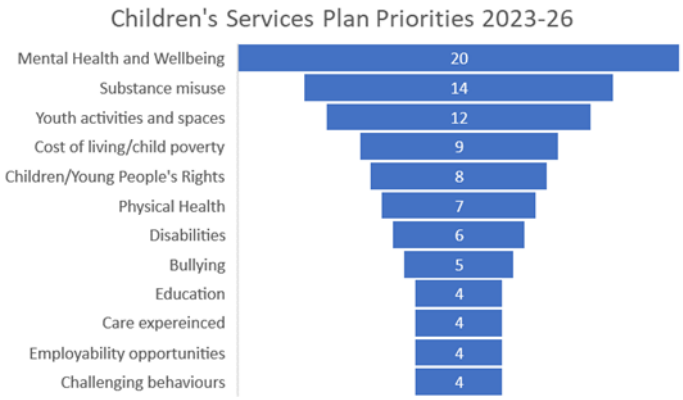
Care Experienced Young People and young people make up 0.7% of our Aberdeenshire child population. As such it is not surprising that support for Care Experienced Young People and young people did not come up as one of the most commonly raised priorities. However, 25 children and young people highlighted this as something that should be considered as a priority within the plan. A focus group with a group of care experienced young people gave us some more in depth insight into what kind of support is valued and/or needs further development: "attachments are really important particular with our brothers and sisters, plan needs to take this into account", "financial resources to see brothers and sisters" "education of professionals of what its like being in care like teachers, police, solicitors, so they understand children in care and can provide us best support" "not being labelled as being bad for being in care. Corporate parents challenging stigma in the council, the police, schools, with other pupils, carers and children's homes"

Discussion around safety took place frequently, in terms of community, road and online safety. Children and young people want to feel safe in their communities without fear of harm from others – anti-social behaviour, vandalism and littering all featured as part of this. Road safety was highlighted as a concern within communities and around schools and was at times linked with transport. Support for our LGBTQ community and specifically gender recognition was raised as a rising cause for concern, with waiting lists for support being long and unreasonable, with the nearest clinic being in Glasgow. These issues were mostly always linked to mental health and wellbeing. Issues around taking care of our environment, homelessness, employability and transport were also raised.

Our very young children told us they valued playparks, outdoor spaces and walks as their top 3 things they enjoyed doing. Other comments included play in soft play areas and playing with friends. Young children told us what they are involved in in their communities and swimming (including lessons) was by far the most accessed activity. In addition dancing, gymnastics, going to the beach, cinema and library were popular activities.

Parents

Parents in community settings and Parent Councils took part in 5 focus groups and discussions were facilitated within 5 Early Years settings. As part of the consultation we asked the Lived Experience Online Forum, made up of parents across Aberdeenshire who engage on an online discussion board, to share their views on Children's Services Planning priorities. Collectively this is a small sample of parents but gives us an idea of what is important across Aberdeenshire for parents supporting their children and young people. It is acknowledged that we need to do more to widen our reach of parents to continue to consult and engage with throughout the Children's Services Plan lifespan.



Content of discussion topics:

Mental health and wellbeing 83% of parents taking part in focus group and

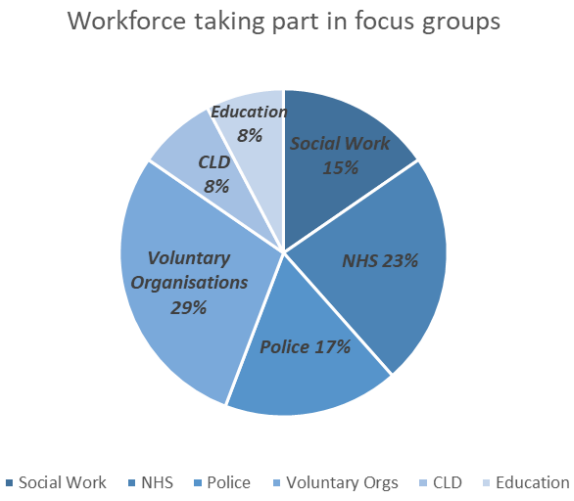
online forum expressed concern around early intervention supports for children and young people. "Although support is better than it was there is still not enough and young people talking about mental health problems are not always taken seriously". Parents felt that there is not enough staff available to support young people earlier and waiting lists for targeted support are long and support is not always pitched correctly for those children and young people with additional support needs.

Substance misuse Concern from parents was expressed around access and availability of drugs and alcohol and vulnerabilities children and young people are exposed to during use. Parents voiced safety concerns around incidences of young people in communities "hanging out on the streets and drinking". Parents are concerned with the link between substance misuse and negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing and vice versa.

Youth activities and spaces 50% of parents would like to see safe spaces for their children and young people to go to at night to socialise and meet friends. This topic often linked with mental health and wellbeing, substance misuse and cost of living/affordability.

Parents in early years settings reported there was a need for more affordable activities and groups for young children and young people to access. A space to meet was highlighted as the second most important gap for them, a community centre or village hall was stated as suggestions which would enable parents to come together and socialise, build their local network and attend classes/groups for parents. Suggested classes, included First Aid courses and parenting classes. Local communication of what is going on locally was also raised

Workforce



46 individual members of staff took part in a range of focus groups and 6 staff responded to a survey between January to February 2023, staff included workers from NHS, Social Work, Police, Education, CLD and Voluntary Organisation (14 different local organisations in total).

Awareness of the plan Of the workforce there was a mixed response to awareness of the plan. 61% said they were aware of the Children's Service's Plan and 39% were not. Of those who said they were aware of the plan 14% said they were aware of the priorities but not necessarily the plan itself.

Content of discussion topics:

Mental Health and Wellbeing Like the responses from our children and young people our workforce offered out information on improvements they have seen due to the work of the Mental Health Thematic Girfec Group, stating how improvements were made in early supports i.e. school counsellors. It was similarly recognised however, that further improvements could be made to the early intervention and support to children and young people with 58% of workforce taking part in the consultation highlighting this is a concern for them and the children and young people they work with. It was also highlighted that the impact of parental mental health on children and young people can be significant to the level of support children and young people receive at home. The cost of living is further impacting on parents' wellbeing

which again has an impact on children and young people. Children and young people's use of social media was strongly linked to their mental health and wellbeing.

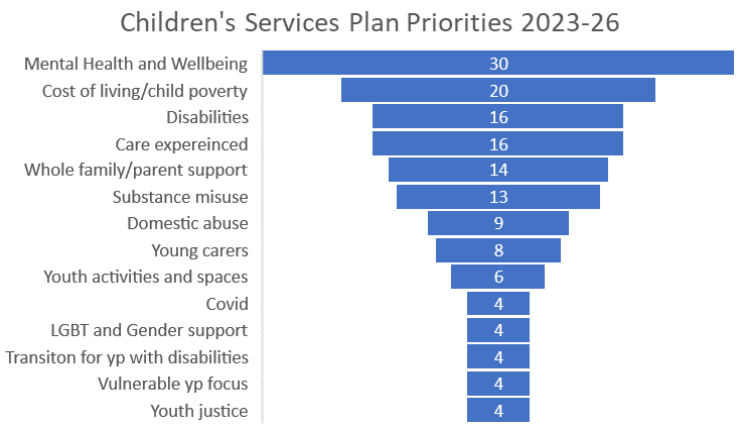
Child poverty and cost of living Workforce consultation shows that 38% of Aberdeenshire workforce feel that child poverty and impact of increase in cost of living as a significant issue that should be considered within the Children's Services Plan going forward. Staff voiced their concern for families under pressure to pay for day to day living costs and commented on the need for more cost accessible activities for children and young people within their local communities.

Children and young people with disabilities 31% of workforce consultation participants highlighted the need for a continued focus within the Children's Services Plan in supporting children and young people with disabilities and their families. The nearly completed Autism Strategy was acknowledged by workforce as a significant positive output from the Children with Disabilities Thematic Grifec Group. However, it is recognised that further work is needed to better respond to needs of children, young people and families living with disability.

Care Experienced Young People and young people Similarly to the above category 31% of workforce taking part in the consultation voiced the need for further focus on our Care Experienced Young People and young people. Acknowledgement of The Promise and Corporate Parenting developments were made alongside the need to further develop work and support in these areas.

Whole family support 27% of consulted workforce stated whole family support as an area for further development. Workforce comments included those around better support for parents prior to time of crisis and the positive impacts of earlier diagnosis and identifications of children's conditions and support needs. It was consistently noted that covid has impacted the way in which parents' parent and some support around boundary setting, resilience building, social media and mental health and wellbeing would be a positive step in better supporting parents to support their children and young people.

Substance misuse 25% of consulted workforce feel that substance misuse continues to be an issue for children, young people and families across Aberdeenshire, stating drugs, alcohol, smoking and vaping in communities as a real issue. Concern around how these include further effects on children and young people's safety, opportunity for exploitation and physical and mental health.



Future action and learning

As part of the consultation process, we have built up an interesting and interactive dialogue with children and young people, this will continue for the duration of the plan:

- We will collate and present children and young people's responses into a newsletter to share with those who took part in the consultation.

- As a result of the focus group discussions a group of young people have expressed interest in creating a user friendly version of the Children's Services Plan. Once this has been published, we will share it with all schools in Aberdeenshire and through the youth participation structure.
- Using the youth participation structure and building on our relationships with children and young people in Aberdeenshire Schools, we will sustain dialogue around community service planning priorities and areas of improvement.

We have already acknowledged the need to widen our reach of parents, we will do this by:

- Promoting the Children's Services Plan through Parent Councils and parent groups
- We will continue to connect with the Lived Experience Forum to inform them of progress of the Plan.

We will continue to promote the Children's Services Plan across our workforce by facilitating workshops to heighten awareness and report on progress of the Plan.

BRIGHT SPOTS:

CELCIS partnered with Coram Voice to bring 'Bright Spots' to Scotland and piloted two surveys in 2021-22 with three Local Authorities in Scotland. After applying, Aberdeenshire was one of the three Local Authorities chosen. The Bright Spots Programme seeks to measure children's subjective wellbeing, ensuring their voices are heard and properly represented. In February/March 2022 all children in care aged 4-18yrs and young people who have left care were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives.

203 children in care responded to the survey from a total eligible population of 298: a response rate of 68%. Children and young people with different living arrangement were all well represented in the survey, with 43% living with foster carers, 23% living with kin, 17% in care at home, and 13% living in residential settings. 64 young people responded to the survey from a care leaver population of 156: a response rate of 41%.

Children and young people shared what is working well for them and what areas need improving. This helped inform our updated corporate parenting plan and we have already taken action to address some of the key issues highlighted. For example, young people who have left care told us that transitions, particularly those involving leaving care continue to be challenging and require improvement. We have heard our young people and are committed to addressing this, ensuring we get transitions right for future young people due to leave care. We have formed a working group which seeks to review the transition process, ensuring each young person experiences a transition that is tailored to their needs, at a time when they are ready, that they have equal opportunities to resources and are fully supported by workers they share trusting relationships with. Children and young people in care told us that although many have had their social worker for over 1 year, relationships could be improved, particularly in the aspect of nurturing trust. This has resulted in us identifying a piece of work which will focus on the relationships shared between children and their workers and the quality time spent with one another.

In order to share the results of the surveys with children and young people, a video was produced by a group of care experienced young people.

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU? SURVEY:

In 2018/19, 2401 young people told us Drugs followed by Bullying/Alcohol (joint second) were the biggest issues for them. They told us that Drugs were :

NORMAL…AVAILABLE…ACCESSIBLE…CHEAP.

Two years on plus the impact of the pandemic we needed a more current picture of how young people were feeling. This led to collaboration across GIRFEC Thematic Groups and agencies to undertake a further survey consultation with young people – 'How was it for You?' On closure 1702 young people from across Aberdeenshire had responded.

Findings of the new survey show us that 46% of young people across Aberdeenshire, completing the survey still cite Drugs as the top issue for them, followed by Bullying (42 %), Mental Health & Wellbeing (35%) and Alcohol (29%). Young people were asked if they had ever taken medicines that they had not been prescribed, 11% said they had and 15% said they had been offered non prescribed medicines for free or to buy. This time the young people said:

EASY TO GET…EVERYBODY DOING IT…IT'S NORMAL…CHEAPER THAN DRINK.

Previous workforce development consultation in 2019 had shown that 75% of frontline staff had had little or no training around substance use and young people, showing limited knowledge or needed refreshing. A programme of initial training was completed, and the findings of the survey informed the development of the Just Say Know Programme. Young People, Drugs and Exploitation key worker survey June 2022, was a short survey to help consolidate anecdotal information from across Aberdeenshire in relation to young peoples' increased accessibility to substances and resulting drug use. The questions also asked about knowledge regarding any exploitation of young people in relation to drugs and drug dealing. There were 83 respondents to the survey:

What are your main concerns regarding the impact, availability and substance use amongst Aberdeenshire's young people?

Comments cited a range of potential and witnessed harms as a result of young people's substance misuse. These included the negative effect on mental health and addition, drugs debts, inability to reach their potential as pupils, the potential for longer term negative effects and the potential for violent and sexual crime.

Respondents frequently mentioned the ease of availability of the substances for young people and the growing normalisation of using substances on a frequent basis. Comments included that the age of young people starting to use substances seems to be lower than previously witnessed.

Frequency of use and incidents encountered:

Vapes are used on a daily basis by young people. Vapes are confiscated on a daily basis at School and can be sold form older pupils to younger pupils. The starting age for using a vape is around 11 years old. Young people have been known to approach adults outside shops to ask them to purchase vapes for them.

Respondents also report regular use of cannabis with possible travel to Aberdeen City in order to source the drug. Like vape use, cannabis seems to be normalised and seen as "not a drug". Respondents also reported frequent alcohol intake, consuming the drug every weekend, sometimes to highly intoxicated levels.

Respondents are aware of an increase in Mcat use by young people, with use sometimes during School hours. Some respondents reported knowledge of young people becoming addicted to Mcat and unable to stop consuming the drug.

Are you aware of any child exploitation as described in this section in your area?

The majority of respondents answered no to this question. However, of those who did answer yes, comments included awareness of pupils selling vapes and/or other substances in order to pay for their own use, knowledge of some young people involved in county lines and the awareness of some parents asking their child to deal cannabis at school.

JOINT INSPECTION FOR SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AN DYOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF HARM IN ABERDEENSHIRE

In October 2022 a joint inspection of services in Aberdeenshire for children and young people at risk of harm, their families and those for whom community planning partnerships have corporate parenting responsibilities in the area. The views of children and young people at risk of harm, their parents and carers and staff across services who work directly with children and young people who are particularly vulnerable were gathered using an online survey. Completing the survey were:

119 Children and Young People
71 Parents and Carers
698 Workforce

The key messages highlighted in the Joint Inspection report include:

- Children and young people are safer because risks have been identified early and responded to effectively.
- Children and young people's lives improve with high quality planning and support, ensuring they experience sustained loving and nurturing relationships to keep them safe from harm.
- Children, young people, and their families are meaningfully and appropriately involved in decisions about their lives. They influence service planning, delivery, and improvement.
- Collaborative strategic leadership, planning and operational management ensure high standards of service delivery .

Examples of good practice included recognition of

- Effective joint working between services/agencies that directly influenced improvement in a child or young person's safety.
- Well embedded Getting it Right for Every Child 'GIRFEC' processes.
- Strong investment in effective staff training and the GIRFEC website.
- Staff skills, knowledge and confidence.
- Almost all children experienced trusting and respectful relationships.
- Use of strength based approaches and creative support to enable families to make and maintain changes.
- Children and families felt listened to and heard.

- Strong leadership with effective governance structures and clear vision
- Robust multi agency self-evaluation activities that highlighted how well we know ourselves in terms of what works well and areas for ongoing improvement.

Overall grade: Evaluation of quality indicator 2.1: Very good

Areas for Improvement:

Whilst the Joint Inspection identified areas for improvement, they recognised that through the use of self-evaluation cycles, that the partnership knew themselves well and had already incorporated the areas into current improvement work plans held by the Child Protection Committee and GIRFEC Strategic Group. These include:

- Continue to embed the new national guidance for child protection including our IRD work.
- Continue improvement work on supporting young people at risk in our communities including our Care and Risk Management processes (CARM).
- Develop child-friendly advice across social media platforms and websites.
- Continue development of our trauma-informed approaches.
- Develop consistency in our key processes (assessment, chronologies and plans)
- Develop our use of outcome data to evidence impact on children and their families.

Section 1: How I grow up and develop	Mental health/wellbeing	Mean score on Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Score (WEMWBS)
		% of S2-S6 children with slightly raised, high or very high SDQ score
	Literacy	66.4% of P1, P4 and P7 children achieving expected CfE levels in literacy
	Numeracy	76.5% of P1, P4 and P7 children achieving expected CfE levels in numeracy
	Positive Destination of School Leavers	96.2% of all school leavers entering positive destinations
	Relationships	% of P5-S5 children who say they always have an adult in their life who they can trust and talk to about any personal problems
	Being listened to and involved in decision making	% of P5-S6 children who agree that adults are good at taking what they say into account
	Diet	% of P5-S6 children who eat both fruit and vegetables every day
	Physical Activity	37% of primary school children took part in Active Schools programmes in 2020-21
	Play/Participation in Leisure Activities	30% of academy aged young people took part in Active Schools programmes in 2020-21
Section 2: What I need from the people who look after me	Bullying	42% of young people completing the 'How was it for you?' survey cited bullying as being an issue for them.
	Pre-school development	2.7 % of children reviewed had at least one development concern recorded at their 27-30 month review
	Easy access to good quality, responsive support	90% of settings providing funded Early Learning and Childcare achieving Care Inspectorate grades of good or better across all four quality themes
	Peer relationships	% of P5-S4 children who agree that their friends treat them well
Section 3: My wider world	Neighbourhood safety	% of P5-S6 children who say they feel safe when out in their local area always or most of the time
	Child poverty	5,614 children and young people (out of 262,690 – 2.1%) live in relative poverty
	Housing security	53 children, young people and pregnant women are in temporary accommodation: 27 households in total. All temporary accommodation in Aberdeenshire comes in the form of fully furnished council housing.
	Children in working households	54.1% of children and young people live in working households
	Digital inclusion	% of P7-S6 children who have access to the internet at home or on a phone or another device
	Neighbourhood satisfaction	% of P5-S6 children who agree that their local area is a good place to live

These are the current CYP indicators defined by Scottish Government. Aberdeenshire has not undertaken the Scotland Health and Wellbeing Census, however we have currently began using the SHINE survey (Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network) in our academies. As such the indicators that are based on the Census are not collated at this time. The ongoing use of this survey will provide Aberdeenshire with consistent data giving an insight into Aberdeenshire young people's mental wellbeing and support the identification of school and/or Aberdeenshire wide interventions to develop and promote good mental health.

STATISTICAL DATA SOURCES

Population Dashboard:

- statistics.gov.scot

Prosperity Dashboard:

- CACI Household Income
- Stat-Xplore - Home (dwp.gov.uk)
- Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020
- UK Finance

Vulnerability Factors Dashboard – Children:

- ScotPHO profiles (shinyapps.io)
- Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)
- Improvement Service

Vulnerability Factors Dashboard – Parents:

- Domestic abuse: statistics recorded by the Police in Scotland
- ONS Annual Population Survey - households by working status
- ISD Parity dataset
- Scottish Government Scottish Surveys Core Questions
- Scottish Household Survey - data explorer

Economic and Environmental Dashboard:

- Pupil census supplementary statistics - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
- NOMIS – Official Census and Labour Market Statistics
- Stat-Xplore - Home (dwp.gov.uk)

Specialist and Targeted Services Dashboard:

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Improvement Service