

STRATEGIC DELIVERY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD OF 27th OCTOBER 2022



CHILDRENS SERVICES SDP

Date of last meeting: 14th OCTOBER 2022

CURRENT ISSUES OF CONCERN/CHALLENGES REQUIRING SUPPORT FROM THE SDP CHAIRS EXECUTIVE:

n/a

MAIN CURRENT FOCUS OF THE SDP

A main focus for the Children Services SDP has been shaping a forward agenda for partnership work that captures where collaborative work will be most impactful and where self-evaluation work would be beneficial and what framework might get used for that. This will help inform the development of the next Children's Services Delivery Plan.

PROGRESS UPDATE (INCLUDING AREAS OF SUCCESS)

Since the last meeting of the Community Planning Board, there has been 2 meetings of the SDP – 01 September and 14 October. The SDP has in place an approved strategic action plan. Key areas of progress:

Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Work Linked to Children's Services

Consideration of a report focused on the results of a test of change to increase support, and remove barriers to accessing support, for young people affected by their own or someone else's substance use. Opportunities for system level collaborative working and joint commissioning are now being explored and scaling up the test of change to secondary schools throughout South Ayrshire.

Whole Family Wellbeing Approach and Funding

The SDP has been considering the approach to Whole Family Wellbeing and the options to utilise funding being made available by the Scottish Government. South Ayrshire's work on The Promise has been sector leading and led to significant change so the foundations we are building on are strong foundations. The SDP is considering some initial scoping work to help assess current provision and to undertake systems mapping and analysis to understand the different touchpoints within the South Ayrshire system and identify opportunities for service changes and transformation around the ambitions of the whole family approach. By connecting this with evidence of good practice, this will lead to evidence-based family support options leading into test of change and pilot work. This work will also consider training requirements.

Joint Improvement Group

As part of its forward plans, the SDP has considered the remit for the Joint Improvement Group. It is anticipated that the remit of the Joint Improvement Group will encompass:

- supporting a programme of self-evaluation across children's services using an agreed self-evaluation methodology e.g. The Care Inspectorate Self-Evaluation for Improvement Framework and available data including the Local Government Benchmarking Framework;
- supporting identification of improvement areas emerging from self-evaluation activity and develop an improvement programme and overseeing progress of the improvement programme;

- undertaking performance management of the Children's Services Plan;
- drawing on available information and data from self-evaluation, improvement and performance management to inform future priorities for children's services;
- to consider new national policy initiatives, legislation and funding opportunities in terms of local implementation and training requirements and provide advice to the Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership on local implementation; and
- to undertake appropriate preparations for inspections.

UNCRC

The SDP is considering the implementation of legislation enshrining the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law in Scotland and the implications for policy and practice in children's services and staff training.

GIRFEC

The Scottish Government is refreshing guidance on Getting it Right for Every Child and the SDP is looking at the implications for children's services work and for staff working in this area

Thriving Communities

A helpful update was provided to the SDP on the range of work being undertaken by Thriving Communities to support children and families in the community particularly during holiday periods.

Children's Services Annual Report

An annual report is prepared summarising key activities undertaken to support progress on the strategic objectives set out in the Children's Services Plan. A copy of the 2021-22 annual report is attached for information (appendix a)

KEY ISSUES

- Continuing a coordinated partnership response to the challenges posed by the Ukrainian crisis;
- Continued development of implementation plans for UNCRC;
- Continued development of implementation work on The Promise and Whole Family Wellbeing;
- Preparing for self-evaluation and joint improvement work; and
- Keeping the children's service plan under review.

UPDATE ON ACTION TO SUPPORT THE LOIP/PLACE PLANS

The SDP supports the strategic theme of 'Closing the Poverty Related Outcomes Gap' and 'Supporting Young Carers.'

Report Completed by:

Officer: Claire Monaghan

Date: October 2022

South Ayrshire Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership

Children's Services Annual Report 2021-22

FOREWORD

I'm delighted to present this Children's Services Annual Report which sets out what the Children Services Partnership has been focussed on during the past 12 months. The period has been characterised by transitioning out from the shadows of the pandemic and preparing for a new future. New legislation, new policy initiatives and the emergent cost of living crisis characterise our forward agenda and we know that it will bring a new set of challenges but we're ready to respond and to do our best to deliver for our children and families in South Ayrshire.

The COVID pandemic brought out the best of partnership working across services. We have been building on that over the past 12 months and really focussing on where collaborative advantage as a set of strategic partners can improve outcomes. We have been taking stock of where we are in terms of service delivery and partnership working and we are preparing a programme of self-evaluation and improvement work to inform our next children's services plan. As a Partnership we remain resolute in our commitment to do the best for our children and families in South Ayrshire and to focus our energies on our most vulnerable children. We will have a strong forward focus on mitigating the impact of poverty for our children and families and we anticipate this to be challenging work over the next 12 months. We will be working hard to embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child across our services and we will focus on delivering the plethora of national initiatives which affect our children, young people and families.

This report does not set out to capture all the corners of service delivery work which partners have undertaken within South Ayrshire. It is focussed on what we have been working on as a children's services community planning partnership over the past 12 months and key things which we have been working on to deliver our strategic objectives. Key focusses for us have been the pandemic, child poverty, taking a rights-based approach to services, whole family wellbeing and early preparation for our next children's services plan.

I am profoundly grateful to the members of the Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership for their input and for their tireless work to deliver and improve services for all children and families across South Ayrshire so that together we can close the gaps and ensure that all of our children and young people achieve their potential.

Mark Inglis

Chair of South Ayrshire Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

When South Ayrshire developed its Children's Services Plan for 2020 to 2023, our overarching aim was set out as Closing the Gap and Achieving Potential.

Our Shared Vision was:

All children and young people in South Ayrshire deserve the chance to reach their full potential. We will support those who start at a disadvantage and remove barriers for those who are struggling, we will stretch the most able and protect and nurture all children, especially the most vulnerable. Our aim is to reduce inequalities in outcomes for children and young people, in particular, to close the gaps in outcomes related to deprivation so that all can achieve their potential.

Our vision was underpinned by five High Level Priorities:

- **Outstanding Universal Provision:** Ensuring our children get the best start in life; South Ayrshire is the best place to grow up; and all children and young people are successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors;
- **Tackling Inequalities:** Reducing the gap in outcomes between the most and least deprived children and young people in South Ayrshire;
- **Love and Support for our Care Experienced Young People and Young Carers:** Ensure children and young people who are care experienced or young carers are loved and supported to improve their life experiences and life chances.
- **Good Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Ensure all children and young people are supported to achieve and maintain good physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- **Promoting Children's Rights:** Work to ensure we are delivering on the provisions of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as incorporated into Scots Law

At the time the Children's Services Plan was agreed, COVID was just starting to make its presence felt in Scotland. There was no inkling of the breadth and depth of impact which the pandemic would have on society, on family life and on public service delivery. Despite the turmoil it brought about, at a recent workshop, partners agreed that these strategic objectives remained valid and should continue to guide our children's services work pending the development of a new plan.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE COVID PANDEMIC

The pandemic prompted outstanding joint work across the voluntary sector and community groups working hand in hand with the Council, children and families social work, and NHS colleagues.

Work between agencies focused on where support was needed most. Each school for example, had an identified social worker as a first port of call for issues. A Schools Hub met weekly involving social work, health and education staff to problem solve emerging issues. Childcare hubs were set up in schools for children of key workers and for those who needed a bit of extra support. Funded providers were a central part of this service. Education staff switched at rapid speed to remote educational learning and managed to keep in touch with families and especially with children who needed some extra support. Around 1,500 digital devices were distributed to children to support access to learning in a partnership between Scottish Government, the Council and our colleagues in the voluntary sector. Meals were prepared and delivered and hardship payments made. Third sector organisations such as Aberlour offered support and guidance to families. Help was provided to families experiencing fuel poverty and food poverty with a focus on income maximisation. Through VASA and many third sector organisations, communities were helped to support each other. Coordinated work was undertaken

to promote the vaccination programme and encourage uptake of vaccines amongst young people and as the pandemic abated, children were supported to return to the classroom.

Our response to COVID ran through much of our partnership work during 2021-22 and subsumed a lot of our strategic and operational capacity. However, it saw us respond effectively to the needs of families and children during unprecedented times and helped us grow and strengthen as a children's services partnership. We believe this concerted collaborative work will position us well for the challenges presented by the cost of living crisis.

Strategic Outcome 1: Outstanding Universal Provision

Our strategic commitment to **Outstanding Universal Provision** is concerned with ensuring our children get the best start in life; that South Ayrshire is the best place to grow up; and that all children and young people are successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. When the Children's Services Plan was developed, we identified strands of work to help us deliver against this strategic outcome:

- Improve outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs
- Identify vulnerable pregnancies early and provide support through community/hub/team around the family model
- Review and refresh the Youth Justice Whole System Approach
- Provide intensive family focused support to families who are experiencing crisis and prevent family breakdown
- Police Scotland will deliver a range of activities to support children and young people
- Deliver community and evidence-based parent and family learning programmes
- Improve early education intervention approaches to support the development of children under 5 years old
- Improve educational attainment for all children and young people
- Deliver positive community safety initiatives for young people and their parent/carers
- Continue to develop team around the family/community hub mode

Key areas of progress during 2021-22 are set out below:

High Risk Pregnancies

A High-Risk Pregnancy Protocol has been implemented across South Ayrshire. A pregnancy may be deemed high risk if it meets the criteria of one or more of the following circumstances in a household; substance abuse, learning disability, domestic abuse, previous history of child abuse or neglect and serious mental health issue. Following assessment by the Safeguarding midwife, a multiagency forum ensures a proportionate level of support is provided to families. Safeguarding midwives undertake a pre-birth assessment for families of unborn children where pregnancy is identified as high risk. A screening group is established between health and social care. Where it is identified that child protection support is not required pre-birth, a process has been developed where the Health Visitor and midwives are notified and provide support. Further work is required to ensure robustness of this process and to evaluate effectiveness. The performance standard is for 90% of high risk pregnancies to be initially assessed by week 24. Quarter 1 of 2021/22 saw 92% of high-risk pregnancies assessed.

Child Protection

Children are placed on the Child Protection Register when there are significant concerns for their safety. Children on the register will be the subject of close monitoring and support with a multi-agency plan to effect changes to reduce risk. If the risks to a child cannot be managed with them remaining at home, alternative care arrangements are considered. Once it is assessed that the level of risk has reduced sufficiently, the child's name will be removed from the Register. At October 2021, the number of children on the child protection register was 19 continuing a progressive decline from 37 children at July 2019 and 29 at July 2020. The implementation of new Child Protection Guidance is being taken forward on a pan Ayrshire basis to ensure a common approach is taken across the partnership. The focus is on identifying issues at the earliest point to ensure right supports are put in place to protect children from harm.

Breastfeeding Rates

In 2020/21, 23.5% of babies in South Ayrshire were exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks. This is higher than Ayrshire as a whole (21.1%) for the same time period but lower than the Scottish average (32%).

Ealy Years Support

Our early years work is focussed on delivering high quality, flexible Early Learning Childcare (ELC) that is accessible and affordable for all families.

We also offer funded early learning childcare to eligible two-year olds who are most likely to benefit from early access. This includes all looked after children and children whose family receive a qualifying benefit, which is around a quarter of the two-year old population.

The Early Years Forum works collaboratively with social work and health to support families with children birth – 5 years experiencing difficult times and often in crisis to access early years provision when they need it most.

Educational Services

The 2020-21 Educational Services Standards and Quality Report provides the detailed overview of attainment and achievement across this service including for young people with additional support needs.

Parenting and Family Learning

The Early Years Family Learning Team (FLT) has continued to engage with and support families in Early Years Centres (EYCs) across South Ayrshire and have supported parents and families by delivering the Parent Early Education Programme (PEEP) and book bug sessions.

The FLT delivers targeted work with bespoke packages for individual families using PEEP and the Solihull evidence-based approaches to support those families struggling with confidence, mental health issues and isolation and also those with children having additional support needs.

A number of schools are using some of their Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) to support parental engagement. There is also a variety of family learning activities taking place across the authority such as family learning afternoons, workshops on literacy, numeracy, play-based learning, growth mindset and online safety. In addition, there are examples of innovative partnership working with Developing the Young Workforce, Princes Trust, Ayrshire College, Seascope and CLD. In many cases the involvement of other partners have enabled parents to engage in further learning opportunities and accredited courses of their own.

Our parental engagement and family support work has included home link workers and welfare officers using their skills and strategies to engage with parent when relationships with the school have broken down.

Youth Justice

The Whole Systems approach continues to be rolled out over South Ayrshire with a focus on youth diversion, early and effective intervention, court support and court notes. There are also intensive support and interventions in place as an alternative to Children's Reporter for offence reasons.

Campus Police Officers

Campus Officers continue to work within all secondary schools and feeder primary schools, supporting staff and pupils, building working relations and promoting positive life choices. Campus Officers contributed to the health and wellbeing of young people by delivering inputs and workshops on a variety of subjects and provided interventions and diversionary work.

Trauma Informed Practice

We are committed to developing an integrated approach to Trauma Informed Practice in partnership with Community Planning Partners. Following a recruitment process, a Trauma Informed Practice Officer came into post in January 2022. The main responsibility of the post holder will be to co-ordinate and manage the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan which sets out 9 high level domains. There is Member Officer Working Group providing momentum for this initiative and awareness raising and training sessions are being developed and rolled-out. Effective partnership working continues with South Ayrshire Council being recognised as leading the way with good practice amongst other local authorities, NHS Boards and wider organisations.

Strategic Outcome 2: Tackling Inequality

Our strategic commitment to **Tackling Inequality** is concerned with reducing the gap in outcomes between the most and least deprived children and young people in South Ayrshire

When the Children's Services Plan was developed, we identified strands of work to help us deliver against this strategic outcome:

- Ensure every family referred to the HSCP is provided with benefits maximisation and financial advice by referral to hub
- Target our youth work to the most deprived schools and communities in South Ayrshire
- Work in partnership to improve positive destinations for young people in our most deprived schools and communities
- Implement the Child Poverty Action Plan
- Reduce the poverty related attainment gap through use of targeted interventions and supports – including the use of Pupil Equity Fund and Attainment Challenge programmes
- Deliver holiday meals programmes in targeted areas
- Refresh the Getting it Right for Every Child model and work in partnership to train staff and implement the new processes
- Establish the pilot of the Team Around the Family - Whole Systems Approach in the Belmont Academy cluster

Child Poverty and the Cost of Living Crisis

The Child Poverty Action Group (Scotland) defines poverty as: “growing up in families without the resources to ‘obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities’ which are the norm in 21st century Scotland.” Children are considered to be living in poverty if they live in households with less than 60% of median household income.

South Ayrshire's child poverty levels are reducing. The 2020/21 figure published by the End Child Poverty Alliance is 20.6% as compared with 24.8% estimated in 2019/20. Despite this reduction, the Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership is acutely aware that this means that approximately 1 in 5 of our young people are deemed to be living in poverty. We are also acutely aware that poverty is a dynamic concept and that the cost of living crisis that is developing now, will pull many more families into the poverty orbit.

The drivers of poverty are complex and include income from employment, the cost of living, and income from social security. The primary focus of our work on mitigating the impact of child poverty has centred on 6 strands of activity:

- **Income maximisation** ensuring that people are accessing all benefits and grants that they are entitled to. This work includes a programme of awareness raising sessions within the NHS and HSCP to highlight financial inclusion pathways that people can be referred on to.
- **Tackling fuel poverty** with both the Information and Advice Hub and Home Energy Scotland providing support to local communities through access to fuel poverty grants and information about funding along with the Energy Agency who have been promoting energy efficiency measures.
- **Tackling food insecurity** through the South Ayrshire Community Food Network and the Food Pantries and trying to ensure that people can access low cost food with relative ease and that they are not disadvantaged if they live outwith the main towns. We have also continued with our holiday meal programme which combines the provision of meals with activities in targeted areas.

- **Access to Period Products** and preparing to implement The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 through consulting on local arrangements to inform a local delivery plan which respects dignity and adheres to the principles of the legislation. The wee white bag initiative has been very popular with 9,500 distributed since it launched in Summer 2019.
- **Employability and Inclusive Growth** to support as many people into employment as practicable and to maximise the inclusive growth opportunities offered by the Ayrshire Growth Deal and the South Ayrshire approach to Fair Work.
- **Community Wealth Building** to redirect wealth back into local communities and focused on 5 key principles: procurement, fair employment, financial power, land and assets and democratic ownership of the economy.

Development work is now beginning on a new child poverty plan to align with the new national plan and the emergent challenges being thrown up by the cost of living crisis.

Referrals to Information and Advice Hub by HSCP staff

The Financial Inclusion Pathway continues to be used by all health and social care staff to support families to maximise their income by referring them to South Ayrshire's Information and Advice Hub. Support can also be provided from Home Energy Scotland to support families to reduce their energy costs.

Closing the Gap

Reducing the cost of the school day by providing access to uniforms, study materials and home learning packs has continued to be introduced in a number of schools.

South Ayrshire has three primary schools and one secondary as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) Schools Programme. Additionally, many other schools in the local authority have high levels of relative deprivation and rural poverty. Relative deprivation includes Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) indicators and free meal entitlement as a trigger for Pupil Equity Fund (PEF).

Robust monitoring arrangements have been put in place for PEF and SAC, which ensures that educational services and headteachers have regular oversight of school level expenditure. PEF expenditure is separated from core school budgets, ensuring that spending is not subsumed within overall school budgets, and can be easily tracked and monitored. Almost all of the interventions focus on improving literacy, numeracy and Health and Wellbeing (HWB) and are having an impact in closing the poverty related gap.

Employability Programmes for Young People

The Youth Strategy Implementation Group coordinates youth work across South Ayrshire with a focus on the most deprived communities and rural communities. The Positive Futures programme has supported 149 young people with 34 leaving the programme to progress to a positive destination. Young people are supported to engage in a range of groups, activities and accredited qualifications to develop their personal and employability skills. All support is tailored to the individual needs and abilities of the young person.

The Town Centre Programme has been a valuable addition to our youth provision. To date 24 young people have participated in a one day per week placement to help them improve their confidence and develop the necessary skills to see them progress.

Some of our young people had the opportunity to work with our Outdoor Activity Instructor to focus on communication and confidence:

- 11 completed the Outdoor Discovery Award as part of the programme.
- 13 completed First Aid in the Workplace training
- 4 completed the Health and Safety in the Workplace at SCQF Level 4.

School Leaver Destination

This continues to be an area of strength for South Ayrshire. Data published in June 2022 confirmed South Ayrshire to be the best in Scotland with 97.6% of school leavers being in a positive destination. Of the 2020/21 school leavers in South Ayrshire who are 'declared or assessed disabled' 94.4% were in a positive destination compared with the national average of 89.2%. And for school leavers 'declared or assessed as being care experienced' 97.6% were in a positive follow-up destination (this equates to 40 pupils out of 41 being in a positive destination). All young people who are not in a positive destination are offered support from Thriving Communities and Skills Development Scotland.

Belmont Family First Project

The Belmont Family First is focussed on early and preventative support to boost family resilience and reduce some of the pressures that parents and families feel. Building on the Team Around the Child process, the project identifies those children who are at greatest risk of being accommodated away from home or those who are already living in external provision but within the Belmont cluster, with a view to supporting a return home or to a kinship or foster placement in South Ayrshire. Through these family-centred approaches the aim is to:

- Reduce the number of emergency or outwith authority placements
- Reduce the need for/risk of statutory intervention
- Reduce the numbers of children and young people subject to:-
 - Child Protection Investigation
 - Child Protection Registrations
 - Staged Intervention at Level 3
- 100% of families completing benefits maximization
- Retain South Ayrshire children within South Ayrshire and, where possible within family-type care settings

As of April 2022, there were 31 children from 24 families referred to the Belmont Family First project. To date the outcomes from this approach have been:

- No external placements from Belmont Cluster
- No Child moved to external or internal foster care
- No child placed within secure care
- No child became Looked After and Accommodated from this cluster
- No child was placed on the Child Protection Register from this cluster.

Sexual Exploitation Strategy

The Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2020-25 is focussed on working towards:

- The risk that children, young people and vulnerable adults are exploited is reduced through a focus on prevention and early identification.
- Children, young people and vulnerable adults at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation and their families receive appropriate and high-quality support.
- Perpetrators are stopped, brought to justice and less likely to re-offend.
- Cultural and social barriers to preventing and tackling sexual exploitation are reduced.

Delivery of the strategy is underpinned by awareness raising and training.

Strategic Outcome 3: Love and Support for Care Experienced Young People and Young Carers

Our strategic commitment to **Care Experienced Young People and Young Carers** is concerned with ensuring that these young people are loved and supported to improve their life experiences and life chances.

When the Children's Services Plan was developed, we identified strands of work to help us deliver against this strategic outcome:

- Develop supports for young people eligible for Throughcare and Continuing Care to ensure that young people can access nurture and care when required to ensure that they feel nurtured and cared for when they most need it
- Implement the recommendations from the Independent Care Review (Scotland)
- Support young people in children's houses in their development, wellbeing and to achieve positive outcomes
- Implement the Champions Board Implementation Plan
- Work with partners to improve positive destinations for your people who have care experience
- Implementation of the Young Carers statement within the Team Around the Child approach and Carers Act
- Develop a Schools' Champions Board to give care experienced children and young people a voice in the decisions that affect them
- Develop continuum of enhance support for care experienced children and young people at point of transition
- Implement the Stop Go Charter (superseded by The Promise).

The Promise

The South Ayrshire Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership recognises that good outcomes for our children and young people are underpinned by good outcomes for families. We have focused on The Promise and as part of our improvement journey. This involves seismic change including significant cultural change as well as tangible steps. A comprehensive self-evaluation was undertaken with a multi-agency assessment of where South Ayrshire is against each Ask of the Promise and an action plan developed. We have identified Promise activity as key change activity for South Ayrshire with dedicated resource from our change team to help us measure progress and impact and we have participated in a data collaborative.

As a fundamental element of our Promise activity is to embed the 10 principles of intensive family support into practice, planning, commissioning and delivery across all South Ayrshire children services partners. This includes:

- Reflecting the 10 principles of intensive family support in the planning, commissioning and evaluation of all support provided for children and their families
- Incorporating 'quality of relationships' into local commissioning and monitoring frameworks as standard
- A commitment to build on the whole family support models introduced by South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drugs Partnership to include intensive family support principles and integrate the work of the Alcohol and Drugs partnership with our Promise activity. (All of our promise improvement areas are included in our parenting promise action plan [South Ayrshire's Parenting Promise 2021](#))

Whole Family Wellbeing

We want as many children as possible in South Ayrshire to be raised safely in their own families and our ambition is for every family that needs support to get the right support at the right time. To achieve this, we need to look far beyond our corporate parenting agenda and ensure a cohesive approach across universal services and across our partnership activity. We are currently delivering and commissioning a range of family focussed activity including;

- In education our Virtual Schools Team and early years' service both have a strong whole family focus and are all moving towards aligning with the ten principles of family support.
- Within our Thriving Communities service, employability and skills house a family engagement team, our Community Learning and Development colleagues lead on PEEP parenting, our Health and Wellbeing team has broadened its offer to whole families, our libraries offer family focused activity.
- Within our Health and Social Care partnership our Champions Board continue to use their lived experience of care to influence service design around areas important to them, they have developed a growing evidence base of local policy and practice changes. Our intensive family support services are currently under review and the voices of families who have used services has been a key catalyst to the redesign.
- Our Alcohol and Drugs Partnership working with families to better understand the benefits of whole family support within the context of addiction and recovery.
- Our young carers voices are becoming stronger as we better understand and respect the agency and uniqueness of each family through more focused activity.
- The Belmont Family first, and Small Steps to Wellbeing services are both early intervention model designed to build on family strengths and networks.
- Investment in the *Signs of Safety* approach which has resulted in training for all staff and senior leaders working with Children in South Ayrshire along with the focus around early intervention to work with Families and Children and young people at an earlier stage of challenges becoming known, we have begun to see some significant changes in the efficiency and effectiveness of our collaborative working.

We are seeing the work undertaken thus far generate improved outcomes, for example:

- There has been a 56% reduction in the use of Out with Authority placements for children, cost avoidance of £2.7 million over past three years
- There has been a 52% reduction in the number of looked after and accommodated children over three years
- 79% reduction in the number of Children placed on the Child Protection register over the past 5 years
- 78% reduction in the number of children referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter over the past 3 years
- 45% reduction in the number of Children referred to the Children Reporter on Offence grounds over the past 3 years

We are now taking stock of the progress made as we consider the opportunities presented by the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding being made available and how this might be used to build on this work across the partnership. The commitment to family support complements place and wellbeing work and the development of intense community work currently focused in Wallacetoun.

The Virtual School

South Ayrshire's Virtual School supports care experienced young people and their families, with specific focus on those who are looked after at home and in transition from primary to secondary school. Welfare Officers are allocated to provide support in social and emotional interventions, educational targeted support, family support and enhanced transition work. The enhanced transition comprises of additional visits to the secondary school, building relationships with secondary staff, building confidence in new environments and gaining skills in coping with emotions and independence. Communication between the Welfare Officer and education staff is imperative to the success of the transition.

The Virtual School also supports young people transitioning from an out of authority placement, returning to live in South Ayrshire. Welfare Officers also work in the Children's Houses, becoming regular and familiar members of the houses, building relationships with all young people whilst at the house. This has resulted in all young people living in the house building trust and understanding of the role of the Welfare Officer.

The Virtual School works closely with Employability and Skills to promote positive destinations for care experienced young people. When young people are in S3, a Welfare Officer will work alongside them and a designated Employability and Skills Officer to assist the transition to a new person, a new relationship and share the young person's attributes and vision for next steps.

Parenting Promise

South Ayrshire's Parenting Promise 2021-2030 is a plan written for those who are care experienced and details what you can expect of us as your Corporate Parents. As Corporate Parents, under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, it is our role to make sure that our attention and resources are focused on upholding the rights, safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of South Ayrshire's 'looked after children' and 'care leavers'. We brought together different corporate parents from across South Ayrshire to write the plan. They were joined by some of our Champions Board representatives who have used their lived experience of care to help us understand what's working well in South Ayrshire and what we need to change.

Throughcare and Continuing Care

In partnership with Housing Services, the Health and Social Care Partnership have been working a joint commissioning strategy to develop a new service to meet the needs of young people leaving care and vulnerable young people who find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness. This strategy builds on existing good multiagency practice to improve outcomes for care leavers and vulnerable young people. The strategy has been shaped and informed by the views and experiences of young people who have left care and young people who have experienced homelessness and the social issues that then impact on them.

Champions Board

The South Ayrshire Champions Board is a real area of strength for us. They are represented on various strategic groups including the Child Protection Committee, Communities Reference Group, the Inter-Generational Joint Action Group and Child Poverty sub-group with young people are supported to participate in these groups. This ensures that lived experience informs policy development and delivery.

Social media has played a huge role in how the Champions Board has encouraged participation and maintained relationships. The Champions Board has relied on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok as well as South Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership communications services.

Secure Care Standards

The Secure Care Standards detail what young people should expect before, during and after their experience of secure care. This is shared with all social work staff as part of the wider work of implementing the recommendations of The Promise.

The Signs of Safety Approach

The Signs of Safety Approach draws on solution-focused therapy and the direct experience of effective practice by child protection social workers and the experiences of families within the child protection system. The Signs of Safety approach empowers and enables families to make the necessary behavioural changes to live together safely. It is a strengths-based approach and works with family's assets to support change, reducing the need for more significant intervention from statutory agencies and the need to remove children from their families.

Functional Family Therapy and Intensive Family Support

The Intensive Family Support Service and the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) team are part of South Ayrshire's investment to support children to remain at home with specialist support services for families at a time of crisis. These services engage with families at a point of crisis when the likelihood of escalation through the care system is moderate to high. Through direct evidence-based interventions which are family-centred and relational, the teams are able to support families to live together, through times of stress and dysfunction towards a more supportive and nurturing family experience.

Housing Options

Housing Options for young people leaving care continues to develop alternative housing solutions to prevent young people leaving care accessing the homeless system. Effective partnership working and communication between SAC and the HSCP allows for continuous improvement. Recent contract monitoring and quality assurance have highlighted the positive work being undertaken with young people and other services.

Young Carers

The Young Carers Strategy 2021 – 2026 sets out our local response to the statutory duties of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. In this strategy we explain what it means to be a young carer and outlines our plans to raise awareness, recognise and support young carers over the next five years. Our approach to supporting young carers is aligned to the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework, which promotes and protects young people's health and wellbeing. We have also considered how young carers can be involved in implementing this strategy. Progress is monitored and reported to the Integration Joint Board and the strategy will be reviewed regularly during its lifetime.

Strategic Outcome 4: Good Physical and Mental Health Wellbeing

Our strategic commitment to **Good Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing** is concerned with ensuring that all children and young people are supported to achieve and maintain good physical and mental health and wellbeing.

When the Children's Services Plan was developed, we identified strands of work to help us deliver against this strategic outcome:

- Develop early intervention supports and clear pathways for vulnerable young people experiencing poor mental health
- Increase confidence and capacity in the workforce by providing staff development opportunities in emotional mental health, nurture approaches. Article 12 and UNCRC
- Implement the Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan
- Introduction and implementation of school-based counselling services to support mental health and wellbeing
- Identify supports for young peoples' emotional wellbeing through the Say it Out Loud (SIOL) survey
- Ensure appropriate access to Health Visitors and School Nurses and that relevant priorities are implemented
- Implement the Physical Activity Strategy in so far as it relates to children and young people
- Work in partnership to address health and wellbeing inequalities for LGBTI young people

Mental Health Strategy

Coming out of the pandemic, supporting good mental health has had a high priority in South Ayrshire including the use of an extreme team to work through issues linked to young people accessing mental health support. Within South Ayrshire, this journey to support & boost mental health and wellbeing is ongoing and is being progressed in line with the Scottish Government's community mental health and wellbeing supports and services framework. The aim both nationally & locally is that every child & young person should be able to access local community services which support & improve their mental health & emotional wellbeing. Children and young people and their families/carers will get the help they need when they need it from the right people. In South Ayrshire, the Mental Health Strategy Group is overseeing the development of the Framework which sits within a GIRFEC pathway, is relationship-based, underpinned by UNCRC and developed with children and young people.

There is a clear focus on local services which support children and young people aged 5-25 and their families with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention, distress reduction & positive mental health and wellbeing support to ensure a holistic approach to support. The additional services were selected based on an understanding of local & national need informed by a scoping audit of available services within this area, along with identification of areas for development & surveys of children, young people & families/carers developed and carried out in collaboration with young people.

Through ongoing links with the mental health strategy group, local partners & stakeholders we ensure that there is wide awareness of these services & how to access them, with particular emphasis on self-referral to services where appropriate. To mitigate risk, links between new community services and CAMHS/health services, as well as staff training and support to understand escalation pathways are crucial.

Current services offered include:

- **Aberlour Sustain** which offers support to families with children from P1 to S4 who need help to improve their wellbeing and confidence.
- **The Blues Programme**, delivered by Action for Children, is an early intervention service providing group support to identified secondary school children with low mood or low-level anxiety.
- The **Let's Blether Box** for primary aged children who have undergone a bereavement or loss.
- **Mind Moose** which is an online programme to help boost self-esteem, confidence and resilience in primary children.
- Promoting alternative thinking strategies (**PATHS**) is a social emotional learning programme for primary children.
- **Penumbra** provides sensitive and non-judgemental support to S1-S6 pupils who are at risk of self-harm and support for Parents/carers.
- The **Let's Talk** programme by SAMH is for children and young people (10-18 years of age), school staff, parents & carers and wider community groups where applicable.
- Through the Scottish Government's **counselling in schools** projects, access to school counselling is available to all young people age 10+.
- **Shout** provides free, confidential support at any time of day or night for young people feeling low or struggling to cope.
- **The Exchange** is a school Mental Health & Wellbeing support service for P1-P7 children – providing psychological wellbeing & emotional resilience in children and families.
- **Togetherall** is a digital mental health community for those aged 16-25 to access support for their mental health.
- **Video Scribe** is a resource to support parents, carers and families with their mental health and wellbeing. It aims to raise awareness of the importance of mental health improvement and provide individuals with the knowledge, skills and tools required to promote mental health improvement within the environment they influence.

Access to Health Visitors and School Nurses

The Universal Health Visiting Pathway is for all children from pre-birth to school entry. Implementation of the National Universal School Nursing Pathway has commenced and will be a key priority going forward to ensure young people can access the support they require from the School Nursing service.

Family Nurse Partnership

In Ayrshire & Arran, the Family Nurse Partnership Programme is for all young women of 19 years and under having their first child and including young women who have experience of care. The programme, which begins in early pregnancy and continues until the child is two years of age, is orientated towards the future health and development of the child and aims to:

- improve pregnancy outcomes;
- improve child health and development; and
- improve parent's economic self-sufficiency.

The programme is delivered by specially trained Family Nurses who work with the strengths of the parents and encourages them to fulfil their aspirations for themselves and their child

South Ayrshire Health & Wellbeing Team

The Health & Wellbeing team continued to support schools and communities to offer a range of opportunities for children and young people to take part in sport, physical activity and outdoor learning across South Ayrshire. The focus of the team are:

- Promoting physical and mental wellbeing
- Supporting pupils to learn outside of the classroom
- Supporting pupils to develop leadership skills
- Encouraging vulnerable young people to stay active
- Giving pupils the chance to explore their local community

Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019

We have working on the implementation of the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019 which removes the defence of 'reasonable chastisement', which a parent or carer could previously use to justify the use of physical force to discipline a child. The focus is now on developing alternative, positive parenting strategies when disciplining a child.

The Child Death Overview Process

Scotland has a higher rate of mortality rate for under 18's than other Western European countries and the Child Death Overview process is a means of ensuring that there is a standard system in place for reviewing and learning or for sharing local learning at a national level supporting a no blame process root cause analysis.

Physical Activity and Sport Strategy

South Ayrshire's Physical Activity & Sport Strategy advocates an ambitious approach which promotes, engages, and empowers individuals and communities to play an active role in increasing physical activity levels for children, young people and adults across South Ayrshire. This includes a focus to:

- increase the number of children and young people who actively travel to and from school and further/higher education settings.
- promote the benefits of an active lifestyle to children and young people within schools and further/higher education settings
- quality physical education will be coordinated, planned and delivered across all primary and secondary schools.
- physical activity and sport will be embedded in all educational settings promoting pathways to participate, volunteer and officiate in sport.

Sport for All programme

In partnership with the virtual Head Teacher and the Welfare Officer team a programme of support and opportunities was created for care experienced young people to take part in a variety of outdoor activities.

Inspire

Inspire is a disability sport inclusion project which ensures children, young people and adults with additional support needs have a wide range of opportunities to allow them to take part in sport and physical activity. The project aims to build confidence, promote inclusion, increase physical activity and sport opportunities and support positive mental health.

Duke of Edinburgh Awards

Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards programme is an important increases young people's employability, helps them develop skills such as communication, commitment, leadership and teamwork as well as having the chance to take part in an expedition which will challenge them to spend time away from home, encouraging independence.

Strategic Outcome 5: Promoting Children's Rights

Our strategic commitment to **Promoting Children's Rights** is concerned with working to ensure we are delivering on the provisions of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as incorporated into Scots Law

When the Children's Services Plan was developed, we identified strands of work to help us deliver against this strategic outcome:

- Provide advocacy for children and young people who are care experienced and extend the opportunities for the voice of young people to be heard and inform service delivery
- Continue to increase the number of schools with Rights Respecting School status
- Develop processes that allow children and young people to play an active role in developing individual, school, service and community plans and contribute to service improvement
- Support all young people to achieve and sustain positive destinations
- Increase number of young people successfully engaged in the democratic process
- Listening to children and young people's views and taking account of their views on issues that affect them - through the use of youth voice structures such as South Ayrshire Youth Forum / Member of Scottish Youth Parliament
- Develop and deliver training that supports Article 12 of UNCRC
- Increase the number of children and young people participating in and influencing arts and cultural activities

A Rights Based Approach

South Ayrshire welcomed the proposed enshrinement of the UNCRC into domestic law. Once enacted, public bodies and the children's services partnership will be required to act in a manner which is compatible with the UNCRC and report every three years on what they are doing and plan to do to meet the UNCRC requirements.

Work on children's rights builds on a strong foundation of rights respecting schools throughout South Ayrshire and sector leading work on giving young people a voice through the Champions Board and the Youth Forum and through the work of our members of the Youth Parliament.

Pending revised legislation and guidance, we have started preparing for implementation including:

- developing a local vision for UNCRC implementation;
- drafting explanatory information;
- undertaking consultation work with young people on the vision and information;
- undertaking consultation work with staff on rights information;
- starting to shape self-evaluation questions for services to use to assess their compliance with UNCRC;
- undertaking initial consideration of training requirements from awareness-raising for all staff to detailed training for key staff;
- piloting a consultation and lesson plan to capture the views and understanding of about a sample of young people about UNCRC.

A mapping exercise is underway to find out what youth voice groups are operating in South Ayrshire and what key service meetings these groups feed into, what meetings young people sit on and what roles they have which will help inform our implementation of UNCRC legislation. We have pockets of practice that have made a measurable impact such as the Champions Board where we have ensured that young people with care experience use their lived experience to influence changes in local policy and practice but we want to strengthen the voices of young people in service development and delivery.

A key consideration has been the development and training linked to Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA) and getting the voices of children and young reflected into policies and building on the nothing for me, without me ethos woven through work to deliver The Promise.

Looking Ahead

2021/22 has been busy and varied for the Children's Services Strategic Delivery Partnership in South Ayrshire as we have recovered from the COVID pandemic. There is no doubt that many challenges lie ahead not least, linked to the Cost of Living Crisis. We have been looking ahead and a workshop was held with members of the Partnership to review the emerging children's services landscape given the scope and scale of national initiatives focused on children's services. These include

- The Promise
- UNCRC Implementation
- GIRFEC refresh
- New Outcomes Framework for Children's Services
- New Child Protection Guidance
- National Care Service discussion
- New Public Health Framework
- The Whole Family Wellbeing Approach
- Criminal Justice Bill

Following the workshop, a self-evaluation framework is being developed to help inform our next Children's Services Plan and to consider our investment in early intervention and prevention and its effectiveness. We want to think about our commissioning of services and maximising the effectiveness of our use of resources. A Joint Improvement Group is being convened to drive focus and delivery on a smaller number of key areas where partnership working is essential and which focus our energy on where it is needed most for example, the cost of living crisis. We want to enhance our use of available data and ensure the voices of children and families is woven into service development and delivery and we want to link our children's services work into locality and place planning and make linkages with place and wellbeing outcomes. A key consideration is streamlining the national initiatives and supporting frontline staff to navigate the many strands and considering the scope for joint training. It was also recognised that improved communication would help ensure communities and staff are aware of the work going on across children's services and that we should celebrate success.