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## **CONTINUED PARTNERSHIP APPROACH WITH ABERLOUR SUSTAIN TO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE 'EDGE OF CARE' IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS**

**Briefing Note by Interim Service Director Children & Young People**

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### **EMERGENCY POWERS – COVID-19**

**12 June 2020**

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#### **1 DECISION(S) REQUIRED BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

##### **1.1 I recommend that approval is given to:**

- (a) agree the continuation of the partnership work with Aberlour in the Sustain project**
- (b) accept the funding offer from the Robertson Trust to support the Project, and by doing so, commit to the continuation of the Sustain "Edge of Care" service for a further 3 years.**

#### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Aberlour Child Care Trust is a charity and has a long history of working with Scottish Borders Council in the provision of complex needs respite care for children and young people. More recently (2019/20), there was the development of the Sustain project, which is a community-based service that offers a flexible response to preventing children entering the care system (**see appendix 1 for evaluation of the Sustain project**).
- 2.2 Scottish Borders Council is committed to reducing the number of children who require to be cared for away from their families; however, we recognise that in some situations this will be inevitable for safety / care reasons. This means that we need to develop and innovate our services to focus our attention on intervening as soon as we can, this project is an example of innovation and partnership working at a local level to reduce the need for children / young people to be placed in care.
- 2.3 Regrettably, it is not always possible for children to remain in the family home, in these circumstances we will always focus on keeping children within their family network where possible and safe to do so. This has led to a significant increase in the number of children / young people who are placed in Kinship Care placements (care with extended family members).
- 2.4 Scottish Borders Council and Aberlour identified the need to do things differently, to prevent Borders' children entering care in the first place, and to create the potential to bring those in out-of-authority placements back to their families and communities with enhanced support where possible and appropriate.

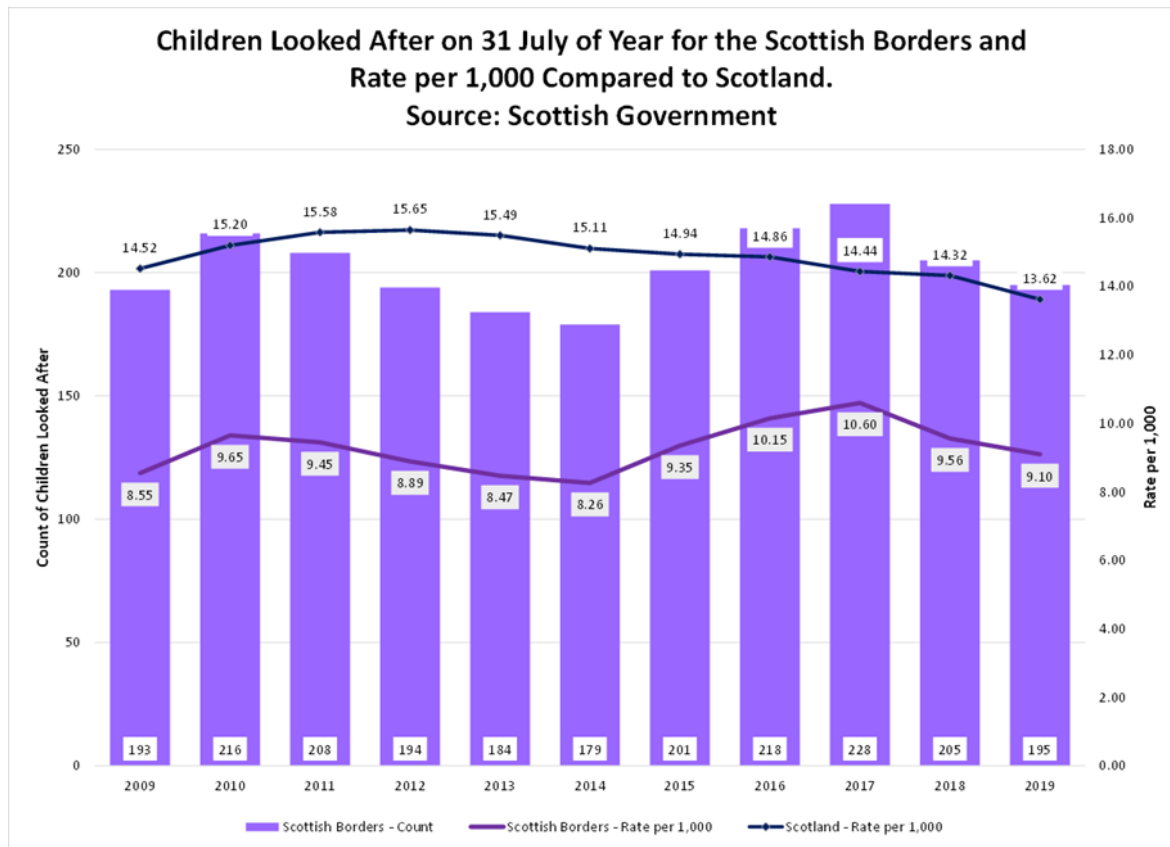
- 2.5 Scottish Borders Council does deliver elements of family support in our communities; however, like many Local Authority services across the country, the significant increase in the level of supervised contact, legally implemented by both Court and Children's Hearings, has significantly reduced the availability of this service.
- 2.6 The Sustain project will directly support the Council's **Fit for 2024** strategy by transforming the way support is provided for local children and families:
- **The Future Challenge:** is to avoid children being placed in care (sometimes outside the authority area), disconnected from their communities and schools. We recognise that families want to stay together and this project has demonstrated its contribution by providing flexible support in the community to achieve this.
  - **Taking advantage of new opportunities:** the Aberlour Sustain workers and Scottish Borders Council Social Work staff, work collaboratively to identify those families most in need of this type of service. The service offers personalised, flexible and responsive support, at times when traditional services do not operate i.e. evenings and weekends. The approach seeks to maximise the potential of family strengths and assets, enabling them access to the required support when and where they need it.
  - **Delivering the best outcomes for Borders communities:** enabling children and young people to remain with their families is at the heart of this project. Services work collaboratively and flexibly to prevent children being accommodated in the first place. Where possible, the outcome is always to keep children at home when it is safe to do so. We know that the outcomes for children and young people in care are less favourable than those who remain at home.

### 3 NEED AND DEMAND

- 3.1 The Council's Children and Families Social Work service continues to deliver a quality service to Borders families. This is in a landscape where the service is funded in the lowest quartile in Scotland per head of population. Despite this, the percentage of the population who are looked after by the Local Authority remains consistently below the national average as illustrated in the following charts:

**Children Looked After on 31 July of Year**

Year	Scottish Borders		Scotland	
	Count	Rate per 1,000	Count	Rate per 1,000
2009	193	8.55	15,287	14.52
2010	216	9.65	15,892	15.20
2011	208	9.45	16,231	15.58
2012	194	8.89	16,248	15.65
2013	184	8.47	16,032	15.49
2014	179	8.26	15,600	15.11
2015	201	9.35	15,404	14.94
2016	218	10.15	15,317	14.86
2017	228	10.60	14,987	14.44
2018	205	9.56	14,736	14.32
2019	195	9.10	14,015	13.62



3.2 The Council's Social Work Assistant workforce (formerly Family Support Service) have historically provided a wider service including flexible support to families in their own homes, reducing the need for children and young people to be accommodated. However, with the significant increase in court / Children's Hearing ordered supervised contact between children / young people and their parents, this service has fundamentally needed to facilitate the legal requirement for the supervised contact, and consequently is no longer able to carry out the early intervention family support that it has in the past.

3.3 Notwithstanding the current cessation of face to face supervised contact in Scottish Borders due to Covid-19, the normal weekly level of supervised contact across the Borders is:

- 75 supervised contacts per week involving 50 children / young people
- Actual contact time = 77.5 Hrs
- Travel time = 104.5 hrs approx.
- TOTAL 182 Hrs per alone
- Average hours still needing to be covered in Scottish Borders is 47.5 Hrs per week

3.4 The Council currently has children and young people in foster care and residential care locally, out of authority foster care and in some circumstances out of authority residential placements. In these cases, a legal decision that the child / young person cannot be cared for in their home environment has been taken. The reasons for this can be varied, however, it is a last resort for these children and young people and is not a decision that is taken lightly.

3.5 The current budget for out of authority placements is £5.93m per annum catering for 61 children / young people. The Sustain project allows us to

respond to the needs of children / young people on the 'edge of care' and as such, plays a vital role in keeping this budget under as much control as possible. Without services like Sustain, there is a real risk that the Council's Children and Families Social Work budget could be overwhelmed quickly.

#### **4 ROBERTSON TRUST AND SUSTAIN BORDERS**

- 4.1 The Robertson Trust is also keen to support the strategic partnership between the Council and Aberlour. The Trust want to support the partnership to move towards stronger collaboration and investment in early intervention. To this end, Aberlour has secured an offer of investment from The Robertson Trust in the Borders for the following linked activities:
- A commitment to support the revenue funding of the Borders Sustain service in 2020/21 (value: £120,000) – this offer is contingent on the understanding that Scottish Borders Council commits to a further three years of funding for Sustain – on the basis of continued delivery of agreed outcomes and savings. This is the Borders new 'edge of care' support service, piloted successfully in 2019/20, that provides intensive support for families to keep their children and young people at home rather than entering a care placement.

#### **5 IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.1 Financial**

The proposal is an extension of the Council's commitment to working in partnership with Aberlour. The £240k annual cost of this service will be funded from the £120k contribution from the Robertson Trust, an earmarked balance and permanently from within existing budgets.

##### **5.2 Risk & Mitigations**

The report fully describes all the elements of risk that have been identified in relation to this project and in particular, it highlights the potential impact of this service not being available i.e. potential increase in the number of children / young people requiring to be cared for out with the family home.

##### **5.3 Equalities**

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on this proposal and it is anticipated that there are no adverse equality implications.

#### **8 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, and the Chief Officer Audit and Risk have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.
- 8.2 The Convener, the Leader of the Administration and the Leader of the Opposition are being consulted and any questions will be responded to by relevant Officers and any comments received will be considered by the Chief Executive in arriving at her decision.

**Author(s)**

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Stuart Easingwood	Interim Service Director Children & Young People

**APPROVED:**

Executive Director: Rob Dickson Date: 3 July 2020

Having consulted -

Leader of the Administration: Cllr Shona Haslam Date: 23 June 2020

Convener: Cllr David Parker Date: 23 June 2020

Leader of the Opposition: Cllr Stuart Bell Date: 23 June 2020