

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S



CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2020 /2021





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CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

INTRODUCTION

I have pleasure in presenting the Scottish Borders Chief Social Work Officers Annual report for 2020/21. This report is an opportunity to reflect on the past year, highlight the progress made against service priorities, to celebrate what has gone well, and to acknowledge the significant impact of the pandemic on supported people, their families, staff, volunteers and communities.

It has been a significantly challenging year for everyone in society, with those who were already disadvantaged being disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pandemic has caused significant pressure on the Local Authority, colleagues in NHS, third sector and other partners which has led to a seismic shift in the way we support our communities. With the rapid transition to the use of technology to manage the delivery of services and to reduce risk, agencies have adapted well to the challenge, whilst maintaining physical support to those requiring it. We recognise that significant challenges remain and we continue to work together to mitigate the impact on the people of Scottish Borders.

Please note that the format of this report has been amended for the second year in a row by Scottish Government, in order to enable Chief Social Work Officers to present reports for local governance structures, whilst having due regard to current pressures being experienced across the sector as a result of COVID-19.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the exceptional work and dedication of all Social Work and Social Care staff across Scottish Borders for their tireless work over the past year. This has been “a year like no other” and without fail, staff and carers have gone above and beyond what was expected of them to deliver critical services to the people of Scottish Borders.

I am incredibly proud of the efforts of all staff and hope that my words will in some way convey my gratitude to all those who have continued to deliver essential services throughout the pandemic.



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GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Local authorities are required, under Section 3 (1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 as amended, to appoint a Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). The role of CSWO in Scottish Borders is fulfilled by the Chief Social Work & Public Protection Officer.


The role of the CSWO is to ensure professional oversight of social work practice and service delivery; this includes professional governance, leadership and accountability for the delivery of social work and social care services, whether provided by the local authority or commissioned through the third or independent sector.

Scottish Borders Social Work services have clear governance arrangements in place. The CSWO is a member of the Council's Corporate Management Team and as such has direct access to Elected Members, the Chief Executive and senior managers of other Council services. The governance of Social Work Services is undertaken through two separate but interconnected structures. Children and Families Social Work, Justice and Public Protection services are directly managed through internal Council structures and all other delegated services are managed through the Integration Joint Board (IJB). These arrangements are embedded and provide assurance that the social work function is being undertaken to the highest possible standards. The CSWO is a non-voting member of the IJB and offers professional advice and guidance to the IJB on matters relating to Social Work service delivery. The CSWO is also a member of IJB Leadership Team and other senior leadership forums between NHS Borders and Scottish Borders Council, further strengthening the integration of services.

In all Social Work services there are a range of multi-agency operational and strategic groups that add significant value to the work of Social Work. There continues to be a strong emphasis on partnership working in these forums and, given the co-terminus nature of the Local Authority with the local NHS Board, this continues to be a crucial element of our ongoing improvement.

The CSWO has continued to monitor, review and advise the Council on Social Work matters, whilst providing leadership for all staff in Social Work and Social Care in providing high quality and safe services for the Borders. The CSWO assures the quality of social workers and of social work practice by ensuring that we have robust auditing processes, quality and performance indicators and quality assurance/improvement measures in place.

The CSWO has responsibilities in respect of statutory decision making, specifically the public protection arrangements. The CSWO also has oversight of practice standards relating to services delivered by registered social workers. This also includes statutory decision making in relation to public protection and/or the restriction of individual liberty and requires consideration of individual



circumstances with regard to rights, risks, needs and capacity. These considerations are often complex in nature and need to take into account a range of issues, including the risks to the wider community. The statutory decision making includes the placement of children in secure accommodation, transfers of children and young people in cases of urgent necessity who are subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders, adoption, fostering, community payback orders, statutory interventions linked to the Mental Health Officer role, adults with incapacity measures, and the protection of children and adults at risk.

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

I feel it is important and appropriate at this point to highlight the impact that COVID-19 has had on Social Work in order to contextualise the remainder of the report and to highlight the excellent work undertaken by frontline staff and managers.


As COVID-19 started to impact on how and where we worked, the accepted boundaries between work and home life dissolved as workers suddenly “did life together”, videoconferencing into each other’s homes. It should also be noted that our first priority was and is to safeguard staff, ensuring their immediate health and safety, providing remote and flexible work options, and focusing on providing safe work environments. Without these, the ability for the services to respond to the changing needs of people in our communities would be impossible.

In some instances workers started to conduct from home what is normally community-based work, attempting, and sometimes struggling, to maintain fragile relationships as well as addressing increased concerns about the safety, health, and wellbeing of people who access services.

At the beginning of the pandemic, and on an on-going basis, caseloads were reviewed and prioritised to ensure a consistent approach to supporting and protecting those most in need, maintaining face to face contact where required, intervening as early as possible to prevent an escalation in need and risk.

All actions and decisions made in relation to service delivery have been based on the principles of the Scottish Government “Framework for Decision Making”, namely:

- **Safe:** We will ensure that transmission of the virus remains suppressed and that our NHS and care services are not overwhelmed.
- **Lawful:** We will respect the rule of law which will include ensuring that any restrictions are justified, necessary and proportionate.
- **Evidence-based:** We will use the best available evidence and analysis.
- **Fair & Ethical:** We will uphold the principles of human dignity, autonomy, respect and equality.
- **Clear:** We will provide clarity to the public to enable compliance, engagement and accountability.
- **Realistic:** We will consider the viability and effectiveness of options.
- **Collective:** We will work with our partners and stakeholders.



Engagement with staff has ensured an awareness of how the pandemic has impacted on them and to ensure the right level of support was provided. From those discussions it was clear that some staff were working longer hours and finding it difficult to separate office from home when working from home.

It was recognised that additional staff support was needed, which included additional reflective space and time for staff to slow down for short periods, creating opportunities for connection with colleagues across teams and service areas and to share and learn together.

Over a four month period in Autumn 2020, the Professional Development Team provided a range of 'Supportive Practices' sessions to create a new route for reflection, support and connection.

From early 2021, additional team and individual support was made available, by way of mentoring and coaching sessions. This was in addition to the extensive range of Council and National wellbeing, resilience and self-care material being made available to all social work staff.

It became clear in spring 2020 that in order to keep providing learning and development opportunities to staff, training courses and workshops would need to be moved online. A large number of courses across all sectors had to be postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak and those that were rescheduled were all delivered virtually via MS Teams, such as Permanence training or the Solihull Approach.

Priority was given to maintaining Student and Newly Qualified Social Work (NQSW) group sessions, and group sessions started to be conducted virtually in partnership with neighbouring Councils from September 2020 onwards.

Within Justice social work, the limited availability of national training resulted in delayed delivery of essential training to new staff and the professional development of others, and had a significant impact on the ability to deliver service. Three Social Workers recruited during the reporting period were unable to timeously complete the Level of Service Case Management Inventory (LSCMI) and other training including Stable and Acute, SARA and Caledonian, resulting in an inability to undertake risk assessments informing Court Reports. This resulted in additional pressure being placed on existing staff, who carry more complex caseloads. Despite increased delivery of training, there continued to be a presenting challenge as Community Justice Scotland training and development colleague's attempted to address the backlog in unmet training need across all Local Authorities.

The increased use of digital technology permitted maintained contact with each other, with people who access services, and with other professionals. It has offered a degree of flexibility and accessibility that we need to utilise going forward.

Within Children & Families Social Work (C&FSW), the utilisation of digital technology has had its challenges which included meetings being disrupted where one or more of the participants encountered poor connectivity and limitations to remotely support parents and children/young through discussion of difficult issues. The time taken to undertake a meeting was considerably longer using virtual means than "in person", however this was in some way off-set by reduced travelling time for both staff and families.

Where it was assessed that face-to-face contact was required, meetings took considerably longer, due to the need for adequate planning associated with COVID-19, such as ensuring appropriate PPE; all child protection visits remained as face-to-face throughout the time period.

Within Wheatlands residential care home, restrictions were placed on family and friends visiting children and young people as a result of public health guidance and, again, technology assisted communication was implemented.

As a result of the curtailment of court proceedings, there have been significant delays in formal decision-making in respect of children requiring alternative permanent care. This has also impacted on the ability to progress court applications for Guardianship.

Within the Family Placement Team, as a result of public health and Care Inspectorate guidance, the Short Breaks Service (respite for children and young people with complex needs) was postponed; additionally, whilst the assessment of prospective foster carers continued throughout the pandemic, the restrictions on face-to-face contact and home visits resulted in considerably longer assessment timescales.

There are a number of children and young people in care placements outwith Scottish Borders, who would in normal circumstances be visited by their social worker more frequently than was possible or safe during lockdown, however alternative means of communication was utilised.

As a result of moving to virtual Children's Hearings, the number of Hearings which took place was reduced which resulted in a backlog of meetings, and this is something that services continue to work hard on with colleagues in the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.


Within Justice social work, a prioritised case management system was implemented to ensure those assessed as presenting as a high risk to themselves and/or others or who were vulnerable due to other factors continued to be managed and supported throughout the pandemic on a face to face basis; for other service users telephone contact was maintained.

The volume of new court-generated work was significantly reduced as a result of the temporary closure of local courts, with only essential business being conducted from Edinburgh, and, as such, the above delivery model worked well in practice.

During the initial and subsequent lockdown period, a percentage of justice social work staff, were redeployed to assist with the undertaking of shielding calls. Staff were later relocated to community resilience hubs and local health centres to assist with the support of ongoing communication and ensuring support services were in place for vulnerable members of the community. Unpaid work service staff assisted with the delivery of food parcels, medication and other essential goods to those identified as requiring support through the Shielding calls, Resilience Hubs and Out of Hours social work service.

Management of individuals subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), was maintained, with panel meetings moving onto a digital platform and Risk Management Case Conferences being undertaken via telephone conferencing. This arrangement maintained the oversight of Risk Management and provided support and reassurance to staff from across agencies, ensuring plans were robust and deliverable despite the challenges of working within COVID-19 restrictions.

Risk Management Plans continued to be adhered to, ensuring priority contact for those assessed as High and Very High risk, and there was a focus on responding to the challenges of prison liberation for those requiring to travel home on release across Local Authorities in differing restriction tiers.



Adult Social Work services adjusted immediately to cope with the sudden and whole system impact from COVID-19. With immediacy the Adult Social Work teams restructured to work and lead the integrated response at a community level. Through the formation of locality hubs our social care and social work responses were triaged through Community Assistance Hubs to allow for community responses for lower levels of need.

The Social Work teams operated over a 7 day week to provide social work and social care and also to support the distribution of PPE across care homes, care providers and unpaid carers. Our teams formed cohorts of staff at a local level and staff worked virtually and from the local offices in line with government guidance.

Our Occupational Therapists and Social Workers used technology as well as following PPE guidance throughout the period. The resilience of the social work teams was strong with teams focused on the challenges of the pandemic as well as supporting their existing clients in very different ways. To maintain wellbeing each team formed different forums in which to virtually meet up and check-in with each other about their work and to maintain relationships.

The Local area coordination service provided face to face contact where required; access to community resources was restricted due to the wider impact of COVID-19 on universal and voluntary sector services.

Within Adult Social Work and Social Care crisis command and incident management protocols were implemented to ensure a coordinated approach took place across the delivery landscape of all health & social care settings. NHS Borders, Public Health, Scottish Borders Council, Emergency planning team and other partners such as Care Inspectorate were included as necessary.

Throughout the year our statutory duties in regards to assessment and specifically in relation to hospital discharge have remained in place. During the period we implemented a Trusted Assessment Scheme within NHS Borders. The Trusted Assessment Scheme was not required as an emergency measure but is now in place and is being further developed. Trusted assessors are where Allied Health Professionals & Nurses can look to provide an initial assessment or 'social prescription' which has the oversight and signoff by a qualified Social Work professional. In essence, this is to speed the process of assessment for those who use our services.

Over the period additional resources were placed into the Community Care Review Team. This team undertakes community reviews across Care Homes, Home Care and Unpaid carers. Whilst the additional pressure of undertaking unscheduled reviews within care homes added a pressure due to the timescale of completion, the service has undertaken the significant majority of reviews whilst also supporting NHS & Public Health monitoring of care homes.

Adult Learning Disability services have managed to deliver all statutory functions, although like all other areas of provision, pressure within the social work team is high. The ability to undertake timely reviews and proactive transition planning has been impacted as a consequence of Covid-19.

The closure of Day Services for adults with learning disabilities due to the impact of Covid-19 has placed increased pressure on family carers and supported living tenancies adding to the risk of placement breakdown. To mitigate the impact, priority was given to those in greatest need to identify what urgent replacement support was required, and outreach support was provided by day service staff or commissioned through external agencies.

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ACHIEVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS DURING 2020/21

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SOCIAL WORK COMMISSIONED SERVICES PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Aberlour Sustain “Edge of Care” project continued to operate throughout the pandemic, and families continued to engage positively, taking advantage of various means of support including virtual support over MS Teams, text, and telephone. As restrictions permitted, support was also offered during home visits and family contact in person and families engaged with ‘garden visits’ and ‘socially distanced walks’, observing social distancing and with the use of PPE.

Although Sustain is a service supporting families where children are assessed as being on the ‘edge of care’, support is offered as early as possible, and involves collaborative working with social work staff.

The Children 1st Abuse and Trauma Recovery Service, jointly commissioned by Children and Families Social Work and the Children and Young People Leadership Group, also continued to deliver services.

The service is available for children and young people aged 3-18 who have experienced sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse and where there is an impact of parental behaviour, providing Tier 2 and 3 support for young people who are not eligible for CAMHS specialist support, but are considered too complex for more universal support such as schools based emotional health and wellbeing service.

Children 1st prioritise referrals based on a number of factors such as severity of trauma symptoms, age, and trauma history, with children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse being given primary priority.

Engagement with Children 1st identified that the number of referrals increased over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time of writing a further financial commitment to the service has been agreed to ensure additional capacity is available to meet need.

STRATEGIC CARE HOME OVERSIGHT GROUP

This multi-agency group was established in response to the pandemic and its impact on social care provision, and has proved to be invaluable for partners to respond to specific issues in Care Home and care at home provision across the authority area. There have been significant challenges in the management of COVID-19 outbreaks, hospital discharge, staff needing to self-isolate and being able to recruit to vacancies. All of these factors placed significant additional pressure on service providers across the Social Work and Social Care landscape and the group provided a platform to support co-ordinated decision-making and approaches to service delivery.

PUBLIC PROTECTION

The Scottish Borders multi-agency Public Protection Committee (PPC) was established in January 2020 to provide leadership and oversight of the governance arrangements for Public Protection across the Scottish Borders on behalf of Scottish Borders Critical Services Oversight Group (CSOG). The PPC holds responsibility for adult support and protection and child protection and functions as the local 'Adult Support and Protection Committee' and 'Child Protection Committee' in line with Scottish legislation and Government guidance. The PPC also has oversight of Domestic Abuse services and MAPPA activity locally.

Throughout the pandemic the PPC has continued to meet remotely to ensure that local public protection services continue to operate effectively. Throughout the reporting period, the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on face to face contacts put in place to control the spread of the virus has had a significant influence on the work of the Public Protection Committee and partner services. Across services, managers and front line staff rose to the challenge of adapting practice to the new environment and increased adversity and risk for those vulnerable in our communities. Despite restrictions, where risk was present, staff have continued to carry out visits to provide appropriate assurance that mitigations are reducing risk.

Throughout the pandemic, the Critical Services Oversight Group maintained an overview of public protection services, ensuring that a clear focus was maintained on Child Protection, Adult Support & Protection and Domestic Abuse.

From the onset of the pandemic all Local Authorities have produced a weekly reports to Scottish Government on key delivery areas of:

- Child Protection activity
- Adult Support & Protection activity
- Homelessness numbers
- Children subject to multi-agency plans
- Children subject to through care and aftercare provision

Whilst this has been of particular benefit in ensuring consistent and regular reporting and monitoring at a local and national level, it is acknowledged that it has also been a significant undertaking for the performance team and operational services, and the efforts of those involved are greatly appreciated.

SAFE AND TOGETHER

We continue to develop the use of the Safe and Together approach to working with families where Domestic Abuse is a significant concern. We have embarked on multi-agency training to ensure that all partners are aligned to the benefits of this approach and crucially are able to begin using the same language in the understanding of Domestic Abuse. The approach aims to improve the support given to women and children by keeping children with the survivor parent, focusing on the strengths of the survivor parent, and intervening with the abuse perpetrator to reduce risk of harm. This has significant benefits in assessment and planning, including better assessment of coercive control, less victim blaming and better assessment and documentation of the impact of perpetrator's behaviour on children.

The PPC is committed to embedding the Safe and Together agenda across services and agencies, and a dedicated short life Oversight Group leads on this development work.

WELLBEING SUPPORT

The wider impact of the pandemic has seen many children experience disruption in relationships with people who are important to them including their parents, brothers and sisters, other family members, friends, professionals, social and school supports. Many families have experienced challenges due to increased unemployment and furlough schemes, and increased anxiety for children and young people.

As part of the response to COVID-19, some additional short-term funding was provided by Scottish Government to enable additional support. We have worked collaboratively with partners to make best use of this funding to ensure discretionary financial support is available to families in need, ensuring they can access food, goods and additional service provision from third sector partners.

EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND LEARNING

The Justice Service commissioned employment and training support and entered into a partnership with Works+, a local 3rd sector provider. Through delivery of employability support, Works+ supports people aged 18+ to overcome barriers leading to employment and/or training.

Further commissioning work saw a partnership arrangement put in place with The Community Learning and Development Service (CLDS), with CLDS delivering support to learners through a combination of virtual, postal and face to face platforms. This service is for people aged 18+, to access sustained engagement in learning, achieve self-identified goals through an Individual Learning Plan, gain SQA accreditation and progress to other learning opportunities (CLD service, Borders College, Open University etc.)

Both commissioned services aim support desistance from further offending, and as a result build safer communities across the Scottish Borders.



CONNECTING SCOTLAND

Social Work services supported the roll-out of the Connecting Scotland project, which targeted provision of digital devices and connectivity. 160 devices were provided to a range of services within Children and Families Social Work and Justice Social Work, and support was also provided by social work staff who volunteered to act as Digital Champions, delivering support remotely, and engaging with new learners who lacked digital skills and confidence, and supporting children, young people and families to use the internet confidently and safely.

TRANSITIONS PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

The Learning disability services along with partners in education, children and families' teams and adult social work have been accepted on the Principles into Practice Transitions trial along with a number of other local authorities in Scotland, supported by The Association for Real Change (ARC) Scotland. During this 2 year programme we will carry out a self-assessment of existing practices and identify priority actions to improve and deliver within the principles framework, building upon the work developed by the Learning Disability Service.

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SERVICE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

During the period, the complaints process continued and the following table denotes the number of complaints made. The difference in the open and closed columns is due to some complaints not being resolved within the reporting period of this report.

Total Complaints	Opened	Closed
Children and Families Social Work	35	28
Health Social Care	4	3
Adult Social Work	71	54
Total Complaints Social Work Services	110	85

Total Complaints	Opened	Closed	Closed
Children and Families Social Work	6	22	28
Health Social Care	0	3	3
Social Work	19	35	54
Total Closed by Outcome for Social Work Services	25	60	85

DUTY OF CANDOUR

The organisational Duty of Candour provision of the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016, and The Duty of Candour Procedure (Scotland) Regulations 2018, set out the procedure that organisations providing health and care services and social work services in Scotland are required by law to follow when there has been an unintended or unexpected incident that results in death or harm.

If we believe an event may trigger Duty of Candour we must seek the views of a Registered Health Professional (RHP) to confirm that one of these “harms” has occurred as a result of the unexpected or unintended incident, rather than as a result of the individual’s illness or underlying condition.

Scottish Borders Council Services have identified a number of routes for incidents which may trigger the duty of candour, including accidents reported by staff providing services, review of significant occurrences, incidents reported through Adult or Child Protection processes, complaints, or claims received by the Council.

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, there were zero incidents where the duty of candour applied.

EXTERNAL SCRUTINY

There are a number of services subject to registration with the Care Inspectorate and subject to inspection.

CHILDREN'S SERVICE INSPECTIONS

There were no external children's services inspections during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, however a Care Inspectorate report relating to an unannounced inspection at Wheatlands children's residential home on 5 March 2020 was published.

Wheatlands is registered as a care home for children and young people and can care for a maximum of seven young people between the ages of 12 and 22 years including two over 16 years in a nearby satellite flat, and provides residential care for young people who are assessed as requiring medium to long-term care. It is the Council's only residential service for children and young people within Scottish Borders.

In evaluating quality, the Care Inspectorate use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent. During the inspection 2 areas were subject to scrutiny:

1. How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing? 6 - Excellent

The report noted consistent evidence of warm nurturing relationships, and that all young people reported feeling safe.

2. How well is our care and support planned? 5 - Very Good

The report noted that all young people had plans which appropriately assessed and met their needs.

Suggestions for improvement included a more up to date computer system and greater use of technology to permit staff more direct contact with young people.

SIGNIFICANT CASE REVIEWS AND SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS

There has been one Initial Case Review (ICR) under Adult Support & Protection and one under Child Protection in the period. Neither of these cases required to escalate to a Significant Case Review (SCR).

Additionally, there were no Justice service Serious / Significant Case Reviews undertaken during the reporting period. There were two social work-led cases which were subject to initial notifications to the Care Inspectorate and Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Strategic Overview Group. No further action was required for either of these cases.

The learning from reviews undertaken within other local authority areas are considered within the structure of Public Protection.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL INTERNAL AUDIT

During 2020-21 a Scottish Borders Council Internal Audit was undertaken in respect of Kinship and Foster Care payments, internal controls assurance work.

The report noted a number examples of good practice, including improvements in the electronic recording system, regular budget and service meeting, robust record keeping for all payments, regular reporting to the Scottish Government and that a formal plan was in place to ensure policies are reviewed, updated and published in a timely manner.

The report concluded that internal audit were able to provide comprehensive assurance that sound risk, control, and governance systems are in place, that these should be effective in mitigating risks to the achievement of objectives, and made no recommendations.

As well as the audit of Foster and Kinship Carer Payments, internal audit also carried out an audit of the Physical Disabilities Services (Adults & Children) and attended meetings of the Social Work Performance Board and Social Work Review Delivery Group to aid with an independent review of these meetings.

Internal Audit also carried out an audit of the Community Equipment Service; reviewing the governance of the service, statutory obligations to meet needs of customers, service delivery and value for money. An audit of Social Work Locality Offices' Payments regarding financial support to Corporate Appointees, Social Work Section Payments during the pandemic and the use of 'allpay' cards to meet customers' needs was conducted.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY CHILDREN & FAMILIES SOCIAL WORK DUTY TEAM

During the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, the number of referrals made was 2490, a slight increase on the 2326 referrals in 2019/20.

Robust arrangements are in place to screen and prioritise referral information quickly. Whilst social work is not an emergency service, swift responses to referrals are considered good practice.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

In 2020-21 there was a monthly average of 182 Looked After Children (LAC) in Scottish Borders, a decrease from the monthly average of 197 in 2019/20.

As of 31 March 2021 there were 172 LAC; of these 35 were at home, 52 were in kinship care, 55 in internal foster care, 2 in external foster care, 1 in secure care, 25 in residential care and 2 in "other."

The most marked change in relation to LAC is the rise in the number of kinship care placements, increasing from 25 children in 2011 to 52 children in 2021. For the first time, the number of children in kinship care is greater than foster care.

Kinship care is a formal care status and regulated under the Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014. Kinship carers are paid an allowance for the children they care for which equates to the allowance paid to foster carers (foster carers also receive a fee in addition to the allowance and therefore costs are greater).

The benefits of providing alternative care for children within their own family and community are clear in terms of positive identity, relationships and sense of community, and is also the most cost effective form of alternative care for children and young people.

The number of children looked after at home has reduced over time, with the number of children in foster care and residential care remaining relatively stable.

The % of population aged 0-17 who are LAC in Scottish Borders in 2020 was 0.9%, lower than the national average of 1.4%.

Further details in respect of fostering, permanence and adoption are contained with the Scottish Borders fostering Panel Annual Report 2020 and the Scottish Borders Adoption and Permanence Panel Annual Report 2020; both reports are based on the calendar rather than financial year period.



**Fostering Panel
Annual Report 2020**



**Permanence Panel
Annual Report 2020**

CONTINUING CARE

Under the provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, local authorities in Scotland are required to provide care leavers with the opportunity to continue with the accommodation and assistance they were provided with immediately before they ceased to be looked after.

The Continuing Care Service, registered since November 2018, enables continuity in care placements for young people aged 16-21 who are no longer 'looked after' but have a legal status of 'continuing care'.

Continuing Care is an opportunity to plan in a gradual way increasing independence at a rate and stage that suits the evolving capacity of the young person. The aim of the provision is to ensure that all eligible looked after young people are encouraged, enabled and empowered to stay in an existing care placement until they are able to transition to interdependent living.

With regard to service delivery, this effectively means that young people are in care placements longer than they would historically have been. Young people who enter Continuing Care are able to remain in their placement until their 21st birthday. The financial impact is compounded when young people are in external care placements.

As of 31 March 2021, there were 31 young people within continuing care placements. The majority of young people were within internal foster care, however there were young people in kinship care, external foster care, internal residential care and external residential care.

ALBERT PLACE SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

Commencing in 2010, Albert Place is a joint Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) initiative which provides semi-supported accommodation for care experienced young people.

The project consists of 4 self-contained semi-furnished transitional flats, 1 Training Flat and a Concierge Office. SBC Concierge staff provide tenants with on-site security & support from 6pm to 6am, 365 days a year.

SBHA Transitions staff provide emotional & practical hands on support with a variety of day to day issues, as well as information, advice & guidance on all aspects of housing options, tenancy management, independent living skills, safe door control & neighbourly respect.

Albert Place has had significant success in providing support and accommodation for care experienced young people and enabled many of them to sustain permanent tenancies of their own following the period of transitional support.

The 10 Year Anniversary report, published in September 2020, highlighted that, having had the opportunity to take their first steps towards independent living within Albert Place, 33 young care leavers out of 36 had been successful in maintaining a tenancy for 12 months or more. This equates to a success rate of 91.66%.

In addition, 35 young people had used the training flat which is designed to support young people develop independent living skills (524 overnight stays).

The vast majority of young care leavers engage with the care and support they receive and this has a direct and positive effect on their ability to manage their own tenancies in the wider community and ultimately their long term outcomes.

CHILD PROTECTION

reporting period 01 April - 31 March	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21
Children on the Child Protection Register (at 31 March)	25	28	32	30	47	42	46	30	53
Children re-registered within 2 yrs (at 31 March)	4%	0%	0%	14%	13%	7%	2%	7%	4%
Children on register aged 4 or under (at 31 March)	64%	58%	48%	61%	50%	45%	35%	63%	60%
Total Children registered during the year	49	45	52	46	89	55	69	50	64
Total Children de-registered during the year	58	42	48	49	72	59	65	66	41
Average number of weeks registered (of those on the CPR at 11 March)	28	28	24	24	31	41	35	37	51

Report:
Child Protection:
Time on Register

As can be seen there was an increase in the number of children registered over the whole year, however there have been a number of large sibling groups where all children have been registered, and the increase is also likely to be impacted by the effects of Covid-19 on some families (through increased emotional and financial stress; financial stress; increase in substance use; increase in domestic abuse rates).

The Child Protection Reviewing Officers who independently chair Child Protection Case Conferences have commented that Covid-19 has also impacted on decision-making in this forum, with a degree of uncertainty as to what extent “universal” services were functioning and professionals viewing continued registration as ensuring support was provided. This is something which was raised with managers and continues to form the basis of multi-agency discussions to ensure that children are only registered when appropriate to do so.

The information in the table above in relation to the number of children de-registered, which has decreased, and average number of weeks on the register, which has increased, confirms the experience of the Reviewing Officers.

The number of children re-registered within 2 years continues to show a downward trend since 2015/16, albeit higher this year than 2018/19.

CHILD PROTECTION ORDERS

01 Apr - 31 Mar	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21
Child Protection Orders granted	11	12	5	8	9	18

The number of Child Protection Orders granted by the court has risen from 9 in 2019/20 to 18 in 2020/21.

By way of assurance, all applications are scrutinised by managers within the service before submission to court and the court provides a significant level of rigour to such applications.

Managers identified that some applications involved sibling groups and there were no identifiable concerns that early intervention had not been enacted to support families.

JUSTICE SOCIAL WORK


Justice social work continued to deliver services throughout the period of restrictions as a result of Covid-19. This was and continues to be a challenging time for staff and service users alike.

Directed by Scottish Government and Local Authority guidance, the service quickly established a delivery model based around a reduced office-based team that maintained essential service delivery, primarily focused on the management of risk, with other staff redeployed and engaged directly with the Covid-19 support programme from home and other community locations.

The service maintained links with Scottish Prison Service utilising digital platforms and safe visiting measures implemented to conduct Court Report interviews and attend prison-based case management meetings. While the service was impacted by a small number of staff who required to self-isolate, it was not affected by staff illness. PPE was readily available and presented no issues.

during reporting period 01 April - 31 March

during the reporting year 01 April - 31 March	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21
CJSWR Completed	363	345	247	143
CPO - Supervision Only	52	39	43	33
CPO - UPW only	117	108	110	63
CPO - UPW plus Supervision	55	59	40	13
Total CPO issued	223	206	207	110
No. of Diversion from Prosecution Referrals			22	43
No. of Diversion from Prosecution Assessment			22	27
Number of open DTTO's			8	3
% of successfully completed DTTOs			44%	60%
DTTOs Imposed			4	0
No. of new Voluntary Throughcare Cases Offered			30	10
No. of new Voluntary Throughcare Cases Accepted			10	4
Open Statutory Throughcare Cases			61	57
	In Custody		40	42
	In Community		21	15



As can be seen from the data, the number of Criminal Justice Social Work Reports (CJSWR) considerably reduced, this was a result of the reduction in court business.

The reduction in court business also resulted in lower numbers of Community Payback Orders being imposed.

During 2020/21 81% of Community Payback Orders (CPO) were completed successfully.

The Criminal Justice Social Work Service continued to work in partnership with other professionals to assess and manage the risk posed by people who present a risk of significant harm to others. This includes working within Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The operation of MAPPA is subject to a separate annual report by the Independent chair of the MAPPA Strategic Oversight Group for Edinburgh, Lothians and Scottish Borders.

Unpaid work (UPW) undertaken by supported people as a requirement of a Court Order is a significant part of the Justice Service remit. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, UPW ceased in March 2020. As guidance and restrictions eased, unpaid work staff were redeployed across council services to assist with COVID-19 support. Staff primarily engaged in emergency delivery of food and medical supplies, linking into Community Resilience Hubs and EDT. The services Justice Officer worked with both Scottish Borders Council and a local GP service undertaking shielding support calls. Staff gradually returned to their substantive posts as restrictions eased in the Autumn 2020, when they facilitated the co-ordination and delivery of IT devices across the Borders, to those who experienced digital poverty or who did not have access to IT equipment or WIFI availability, to enable communication and maintain links with key services as part of the Connect Scotland phase 2 roll out.

Powers implemented through the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Coronavirus (Scotland) (No.2) Act 2020 legislated for the extension of pre-existing orders, facilitating additional time for order completion. In addition, in 15 March 2021, The Community Orders (Scotland) Regulations 2021, legislated for a 35% reduction to original CPO's with UPW or Other Activity, excluding those imposed for domestic abuse, sexual offences or stalking. This has reduced the number of unmet hours in the borders by 5,110.75 to 10,996 as at 31st March 2021.

The service has sought to identify additional opportunities for those subject to UPW to complete their hours through other activity, including the commissioning of The Wise Group CPO Connect pilot in February 2021. Delivery of the digital suite of programmes, originally scheduled to end May 2021 will continue through to July and possibly beyond.

Scottish Government carried out the early release of prisoners who met a certain criteria within the prison establishment, however, there were no early prison releases in Scottish Borders. There was no significant increase in relation to longer custodial sentences or people on remand noted during the reporting period, however we are currently seeing an increase in remand numbers and rise in the number of individuals sentenced to between 6 months – less than 2 years. Given the broad Scottish Prison Service reporting criteria for this measure, it is not known how many, if any, of these convictions fall below the 12 month Presumption Against Short Term Sentences.

Further information regarding Justice social work will be available within the Community Payback Order (CPO) Annual Report, however the 2020/21 CPO annual report template has only just been issued and is due for submission to Community Justice Scotland by 31st October.

ADULT SERVICES

The following information highlights some key information over the year:

409 social work cases allocated per month. (12 month average to Feb 2021)	1,280 patients have gone through Home First (Year to Nov 2020)	On average 15,128 hours of Homecare delivered per month, for 716 people	Clients received, on average, 21 hours of care per month.	1,800 active Community Alarms in individual's homes in the Scottish Borders
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The response to Covid-19 has shaped service delivery. From March 2020 onwards Community Assistance Hubs were utilised to triage and direct social work and social care.

Adult Social Work teams coordinated third sector and formal care support according to demand and risk, and provided a care management approach to allow identification and prioritising of resources through a time of high unpredictability.

Adult Social Work played a key role in supporting the distribution of PPE and providing information, guidance and virtual and face to face support to people including unpaid carers in a long-term state of emergency response.

Throughout the period social work teams have undertaken full assessments including from within hospital settings.

Within hospitals and locality teams daily and intra-week multi-disciplinary meetings were held virtually with attendance of third and independent sector providers alongside health and social work. These discussions took place to ensure appropriate prioritisation of community and hospital demands.

In times during lockdown it was essential to reduce non-critical support to individuals in order to prioritise critical care support. In these instances care was re-instated as a priority or reviewed in conjunction with the person/ family as many families had moved-in together or were able to provide unpaid support as a result of not-working or working from home.

The Borders has made progress towards our aim of providing more care in the community and enabling older people to live independently at home:

- 94.3 % of our over 75 population lives at home - either with no requirement for any care at all or supported through social care to remain at home
- 5.7% of our over 75 population are cared for in a care home, hospice or a hospital setting.

Referrals Received	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	20/21 TOTAL
Central	77	113	137	121	122	157	134	130	113	133	119	145	1501
Duns	37	50	52	62	76	64	49	48	35	49	48	58	628
Hawick	78	82	88	115	99	115	84	95	99	123	96	126	1200
Kelso	72	74	91	93	87	84	76	85	85	73	85	105	1010
Peebles	43	59	87	78	68	63	76	69	83	69	64	71	830
START	43	45	49	59	54	32	45	32	40	22	33	35	489
Total	350	423	504	528	506	515	464	459	455	469	445	540	5658

Clients on Waiting List	at 31.03.2020	at 31.03.2021
Central	98	136
Duns	39	31
Hawick	80	47
Kelso	90	51
Peebles	70	22
All Areas	377	287

As can be seen in the above tables, the level of referrals received seen significant increase. This was despite the lower volumes of people who were engaging with GP practices, hospitals or the support they would ordinarily have been linked into prior to lockdown.

A significant proportion of people awaiting a social work response (current 50% - 60%) was in relation to Occupational Therapy assessment. As people were less active and more prone to the adverse effects of social isolation it is anticipated there will be a prolonged period of increase in demand for Occupational therapy input.

Significantly, a number of home adaptations have not been able to be progressed due to Covid-19 restrictions and the impact on planning, accessing materials and works being undertaken.

LEARNING DISABILITY & MENTAL HEALTH:

Learning Disability Social Work continues to manage their waiting lists through a monthly prioritisation meeting. As a service they continue to develop appropriate accommodation and support arrangements in line with needs of service user groups. They are progressing plans to develop local complex care accommodation to enable a reduction in the likelihood of accessing placements out with the Borders. To achieve this, a project delivery group is in place and it is planned that the service will be up and running within 2024/25

The recent commission of a new Shared Lives scheme (March 2020) has delivered 6 new placements to date and further placements are planned for this year, including respite care and day care support.

Mental Health Social Work based within Integrated Mental Health Services are developing a Mental Health Transformation programme. This includes all service areas with priority areas initially being identified in Community Mental Health Teams, Crisis services and Liaison Services. Several projects are also underway to review the Mental Health Day Service and the provision of Mental Health supported living services.

During COVID the focus of the Mental Health teams was supporting service users and responding to the need for ensuring food parcels and financial issues were addressed for those using services across the whole of Scottish Borders.

Like other Social Work services, managing with reduced staff numbers due to recruitment issues made the delivery of services challenging. It is acknowledged within Mental Health services that demand for services for complex needs, which is led by social work is increasing, often for young adults with neuro developmental conditions which are increasing in prevalence. This work involves multi-disciplinary assessments and seeking suitable resources which are often bespoke to the individual's needs. Mental Health services have also had a high demand for Council Officer work in relation to Adult Support & Protection, throughout the Pandemic.

MENTAL HEALTH OFFICER (MHO)

Statutory social work services provided under the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 and Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 are delivered by AHSCP.

The following table highlights that there has been a marked increase in Emergency detentions and Short term detentions over the reporting period.

during reporting period 01 April - 31 Mar	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21
Emergency Detention	21	18	27	17	28	30	25	34	49
Short Term Detention	74	62	77	61	71	71	82	87	101
Compulsory Treatment	37	43	41	28	29	26	33	26	27

The likelihood of a link to increased stress and isolation as a result of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions is highly probable. This is an issue which will be explored in more detail in the future.

The following table denotes the number of private welfare guardianships and the number of Chief Social Work Officer welfare guardianships that have taken place in the reporting period.

As at 31 March	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21
Private Welfare Guardianship	41	64	71	97	115	137	164	182	193
Chief SW Officer Welfare Guardianship	20	22	18	29	38	35	46	56	70

Notably there is a continuing increase in private welfare guardianship applications in line with previous years but also a significant increase in Chief Social Work Officer applications for this reporting year. Some of this increase in the latter applications will be in response to ensuring that appropriate legal frameworks are in place for individuals where there are no power of attorney or welfare guardianship arrangements in place. Having appropriate legal frameworks in place is critical to ensure that individuals' rights are protected and promoted.



CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

RESOURCES & FINANCIAL PRESSURE

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORK

The overall revised budget for C&FSW has remained relatively static despite additional expectations from National legislative, policy and guidance changes and increased costs. The largest spend within C&FSW budget is in relation to "External Placements" which includes Day Care - Complex Needs; Day Care - Social, Emotional & Behavioural Needs; Residential Care - Social, Emotional & Behavioural Needs; Residential Care - Complex Needs; and Foster Care - External Provision.

There have been a number of changes and trends over the last 5 years in children's social care needs. These have included a rise in the number of children either requiring accommodation or being on the edge of accommodation due to significant and complex physical and mental health issues.

This has been compounded by limited local specialist resources; it is estimated that around 65% of external placements require specialist provision due to their additional or complex needs, or behavioural needs.


Most external providers have 'in-house' health and psychological services and offer a range of therapeutic services not available within local resources. Placements are based on needs assessment and providers on the Scotland Excel Frameworks are preferred to others, and there are a set of schedules including terms and conditions and specification that all providers have signed up to. For those not on the framework we have a standard set of terms and conditions and use the same specification as the framework.

Prices are generally non-negotiable although the council's Procurement Team have worked hard to limit uplifts and placement costs through challenging proposed increases from providers who are not part of the Scotland Excel Framework.

As a small local authority with relatively few external placements we spot-purchase which leaves no option of block negotiation.

There are no year-to-year increases in C&FSW budget allocation to reflect increases to external placement costs which places strain on the budget.

Aberlour Child Care Trust, in partnership with Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) and SBC are planning to build a residential provision for children with complex needs in the Scottish Borders. Scottish Borders Council staff are part of the management group which is progressing this development. The anticipated cost of care is projected at £125,000 per annum, considerably lower than external residential care costs. Crucially, this provision will allow children and young people who require this type of provision, to remain within the Scottish Borders rather than being placed out with.



The costs associated with kinship care continue to rise as the number of carers increases; the costs associated with payments have risen from £585,238 in 2017/18 to £813,760 in 2020/21. Additionally, as the number of kinship carers has grown, so too has the level and volume of support provided.

Likewise, continuing care is placing additional pressure on the service budget and there will be an on-going financial impact unless additional action is taken, and investment made, to reduce the number of children in care.

In 2019, as a result of a number of local authorities citing Continuing Care as a key driver of budget pressure, COSLA surveyed all local authorities in order to determine the extent of the degrees of financial pressures accommodating young people potentially up to the eve of their 26th birthday would bring. At that time, based on the detailed care records of eligible young people, Scottish Borders Council estimated that Continuing Care could cost SBC an additional £4,000,000 - £5,000,000 per annum by 2024.

Continuing Care will require additional financial commitments which are likely to continue to rise unless additional action is taken, and investment made, to reduce the number of children in care and external care provision.

A further pressure relates to discretionary payments for accommodation for previously looked after children within further or higher education. Whilst there is no consistent approach across Scotland, Scottish Borders are one of only a few local authorities where a deduction is made to account for a young person contributing the "local rent" average which is deducted from the bursary payment.

During 2020/21, 47 young people from Scottish Borders were provided with payment, should there be a requirement to pay the bursary in full the financial impact would have been in excess of £130,000.

Increasing the use of Self Directed Support in C&FSW and the development of local, community based packages of care for children with complex needs and disabilities is creating some financial pressure on budget.

There are a growing number of young people with complex behavioural and emotional needs, and at present there are a number of young people aged 14+ with complex needs, including Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

There has been a consistent and sustained growth for supervised parental contact (directed by Children's Hearings and the court) and this has eroded the early intervention support role of the Social Work Assistant, with the majority of staff time now directed towards safely facilitating, hearing or court mandated contact between parents and children.

A snapshot of volume demand in October 2020 indicated 61 weekly contacts, with 87.5 hours staff time involved in contact and 90 hours additional travel, with a total distance of 2523 miles travelled.

In addition there is 0.5FTE staff member dedicated to planning contacts, travel involved prior to the contact e.g. to collect car seats and travel to carers, and all staff are required to update case records and assessments following contact.

Recruitment and retention of social workers has been an issue within C&FSW for a number of years which has resulted in posts remaining vacant or being filled by temporary agency staff at a significantly increased cost.

More recently, there are fewer agency staff available to undertake short term roles; it is likely this is due to a shortage of social workers nationally resulting in a high level of demand for agency workers as a result of COVID-19.

Agency staff costs in 2019/20 was £420,799.45, falling to £315,380.93 in 2020/21

ADULT SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE

Adult Social Work and Social Care extended the existing contracts with third and independent sector organisations. During 2020 we set out a plan to undertake a large scale commissioning and engagement programme which would see the re-commissioning of home care services and our community response services.

This dialogue was paused in terms of progressing with a participation plan for the recommissioning but the conversation on our commissioning approach as being Community Led and aiming to achieve partnerships of organisations focused on outcomes for individuals was ongoing.

This approach and greater involvement in commissioning by a range of service users, service user organisations and our third sector interface organisations is reaching a point of realisation. This has included a consultation through our Older Peoples Planning Group to gather views on their experience of Scottish Borders response during lockdown. Also, it was essential we reviewed our charging policy for non-residential care as we had two extra care housing developments reaching completion in 2021. We also wanted to introduce financial assessment to instances where we had previously had flat rate charges that were not financially assessed.

In reviewing our charges we took a light touch in line with COSLA guidance and in light of the global pandemic impact. We had an online consultation on our charging policy review as well as engagement with third sector organisations and service user forums.

Learning Disabilities services identified that financial pressures have occurred, the number of children transitioning to adult services with and the replacement care costs for those unable to access Day Services due to the impact of COVID-19.

Work is underway to increase local resources to reduce the number of people being placed out of Scottish Borders and we continue to work with NHS Lothian in the development of NHS inpatient facilities for Adults with a Learning Disability to reduce the number of expensive private hospital placements.

The Shared Lives service provides more cost efficient care and support than previously available models of support.

Mental Health Services continue to experience financial pressures. The service is focussing on maximising its re-ablement services such is the Local Area Coordination service as well as reviewing its day service model of support.

ADULT SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE

The Justice Social Work service has a dedicated ring-fenced budget from Scottish Government to deliver the statutory Justice services locally.



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WORKFORCE PLANNING

Across Scotland, Social Work and Social Care are experiencing real challenges with regard to the recruitment and retention of staff. This is particularly challenging in more rural areas and has led to significant challenges in being able to effectively deliver services in Scottish Borders.

Locally, Children and Families Social Work in particular have had significant challenges in recruiting qualified social workers, which is a risk in relation to delivering essential services and on the well-being of staff who are working above their contracted hours to ensure children are safe. As an organisation, we are mindful of the potential for 'hidden harm' in relation to the impact on staff from this level of ongoing pressure, the importance of ensuring that staff are appropriately supported through support and supervision by line managers is critical in mitigating this.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A key response to the challenges of having a sufficient number of qualified social workers is our Trainee Scheme to 'grow our own' qualified Social Workers.

Scottish Borders' partnership with the Open University offers existing permanent staff the opportunity to have a pathway to social work qualification. It provides the opportunity to develop and retain current staff as well as attract new talent.

As mentioned earlier, workforce development is a key aspect for the recruitment and retention of staff in Scottish Borders. Each and every Social Work service has had difficulty in attracting staff to vacant posts. To support the recruitment process, staff in conjunction with Human Resources colleagues have worked hard to make Scottish Borders a good place to live and work. We have embarked upon extending where we advertise as well as using what we have learned from COVID-19 and the more agile way of working via the use of technology to attract the right people for the right roles.

It should be noted that there is a national issue in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff in Social Work and Social Care. By looking at how we create career pathways for those we employ, as well as offering attractive learning and development opportunities, we hope to be able to successfully fill permanent posts which are vacant.

That being said, there is a real need for a review of what role Social Workers undertake, aligned to the capacity we have given the challenges of recruitment and look openly at how we can deliver services differently in the future. This is a piece of work which we will be undertaking in the near future and will likely require significant changes.



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THE YEAR AHEAD 2021/22

Social Work managers recognise that Recovery may create anxiety amongst staff and people who access social work services, and understanding these fears is critical to restoring confidence and charting our Recovery pathway.

Covid-19 has been the catalyst to fundamental changes e.g. the “virtualisation” of work. The necessity of operating differently has given us the opportunity to understand what we can do, and what we may want to continue doing; it may also result in altering our strategy and planning.

We need to be in a position to shape our Recovery so that we can emerge stronger, and be in a position to reinvent, identifying new opportunities and becoming the drivers of our “new normal”.

We need to consider changes to demand, explore opportunities for collaboration and conduct scenario planning based on needs.

Questions to consider include:


- Determining which functions, work, and roles need to return to the workplace to be effective, and which can continue to work remotely (blended approach to service delivery).
- Modelling scenarios that evaluate potential workforce and workplace options.
- Adjusting the workplace as needed to ensure staff well-being, health, and safety.
- Establishing feedback channels to understand workforce concerns and conditions.
- Assessing what supplemental support, technology and tools are needed.

We also need to ensure the role of Social Work and the purpose of our services remains clear and we fully comply with the Scottish Social Services Council Codes of Practice for Workers and Employers.

What I can say with some confidence is that the full extent and impact of Covid-19 is not yet known, and it is likely that it will be years before we are able to fully understand the changed demands on services.

The Independent Review of Adult Social Care was published on 3 February 2021 and, whilst the original scope of the consultation focussed on Adult Social Care services, the Scottish Government have expanded this to consider the scope, remit, inclusivity and delivery mechanisms of the National Care Service in its widest sense and a consultation has commenced which also seeks views on the children and young people, criminal justice, community justice, alcohol and drug services, and social work.

The findings of the Independent Care Review culminated in the publication of seven reports in February 2020, including ‘The Promise’. This has since been followed up with the publication of the Plan 21-24 and most recently The Change Programme One.



Whilst the overall service delivery landscape may be impacted by the implementation of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, the activity required to deliver on The Promise will remain relevant and of critical importance across all organisations. We will continue to support the delivery of that vision, building on the good practice that already exists across services for children and young people.

Within the public protection landscape, 2021 will see the publication of new Child Protection Guidance. Whilst the exact detail has yet to be seen (publication is due in September 2021), there are a number of thematic changes of which I am aware, including an increased emphasis on prevention and early help in order to keep children safe without drawing families unnecessarily into child protection procedures, new guidance on information sharing, increased focus on engagement and collaboration with families, and ensuring a learning culture in workforce supervision, training and development.

Within Children and Family Social Work, investment will be made in developing engagement with children and young people, and commissioning a Family Group Decision Making service as part of a “test of change” to support early intervention with families to support the need to reduce the number of children entering non-familial care.

It also worth noting that The Scottish Parliament passed the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Bill in March 2021. Redress Scotland, a new non departmental public body, will assess applications from survivors, make decisions and review appeals for the financial redress award(s) for the next 5 years. The scheme will provide financial and non-financial redress for survivors.

Within Justice Social Work, the planned service expansion which was put on hold in 2020/21 due to the impact of COVID-19 and will be taken forward in the coming year. The service will progress with recruiting a Wellbeing Officer post in the coming year, this 2 year post being jointly funded by Community Justice and the NHS Joint Health Improvement Team.

Two Group Work Co-ordinators will also be recruited in 2021 to deliver the Caledonian Men’s Programme, following work undertaken to disaggregate the previous delivery partnership. The new arrangement ended a long-standing partnership with Edinburgh and the Lothian’s and is aimed at increasing the number of men from the Scottish Borders referred into and who complete the Court mandated domestic abuse programme.

ADULT SOCIAL WORK

Over the next 2-3 years the demands on adult social work and social care are going to increase from three main issues: Firstly, there will be the natural demand that was predictable; secondly, there is the pent up demand as a result of lockdown, people not able to engage with services or the wider world supports and thirdly, there are the people who were living well pre-Covid and but who have been significantly impacted by what the pandemic has inflicted on their lives. Due to COVID-19, the impact of lockdown and a Health system which has predicted 3 years of high pressure on primary and secondary care resources will naturally mean that community social work and strengthening the alliance across third sector, independent sector, public sector and communities must be a focus in terms of service. However, in providing that service and meeting the additional demands it will take organisational change, a reshaping of resources and a vision for social work based on a world which is moving faster. Therefore, over the next year, maintaining a sense of urgency – ‘COVID-19 is not over’ – is critical. Our organisational cultures have changed over the last year, however, the comfort of the past is often more attractive than fast, frequent change; we must be careful to ensure a sense of urgency, immediacy in both Practice and Change.

Strengthening community social work is essential as it embraces statutory duties, is flexible and adaptive. These attributes will better allow Social Work and Social Care to both prevent crisis and respond to crisis situations; whether this is within a family, community or in response to a national or global pandemic. Given the challenges that COVID-19 has presented, it is anticipated that there will be an ongoing period of additional demand as the full scale of the impact of the pandemic becomes clearer. As mentioned earlier, the need to review the way in which we operate will be fundamental to address these challenges.



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CONCLUSION

In conclusion to this year's annual report, as the Chief Social Work Officer, I am privileged to have the opportunity to highlight the effort that has been made to support our communities and would like to thank each and every member of staff from Social Work and Social Care for their hard work and dedication in providing critical services in exceptionally challenging circumstances. Their commitment to keeping people who use our services at the centre of everything that they have done is commendable.

It is also important to note that the pandemic itself is not over and the longer term impact is not yet known. It is crucial that we continue to support our staff groups to continue to collaborate with partners, communities and individuals to support those most in need.

The coming years will be challenging for a number of reasons, however, by supporting our staff and continuing to innovate the way in which we operate, I am confident that Scottish Borders Social Work services will continue to rise to the challenge.



Stuart C. Easingwood
Director of Social Work & Practice (CSWO)

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CORPORATE PARENTING

Scottish Borders Council | Headquarters | Newtown St Boswells

MELROSE | TD6 0SA

email: gstott@scotborders.gov.uk

