

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S



CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022





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CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

INTRODUCTION

I have pleasure in presenting the Scottish Borders Chief Social Work Officers Annual report for 2021/22. 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 that the pandemic has continued to have on people, their families, staff, volunteers, and communities.

It has continued to be a significantly challenging landscape for everyone in society, with those who were already disadvantaged continuing to be disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. From an organisational perspective, the Pandemic has caused significant pressure on the Local Authority, colleagues in NHS (National Health Service), third sector and other partners. 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 continued in the amended outline for the third year in a row by Scottish Government, this is 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 because 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 relentless work over the past year, in what continues to be extraordinarily pressurised situation. Last year I stated that this has been "a year like no other," and whilst I cannot continue to make this statement, it is important that I recognise that all staff and carers have continued to go beyond what was expected of them to deliver critical services to the people of Scottish Borders. I remain incredibly proud of the efforts of all staff and hope that my words will in some way convey my gratitude to them, also recognising the massive contribution from carers and communities across the area who have continued to keep the needs of others at the forefront throughout these challenging times.



CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

OVERVIEW OF GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

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 Strategic Leadership 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.



ROLE OF CSWO

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 regarding rights, risks, needs and capacity. These considerations are often complex in nature and need to consider 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.

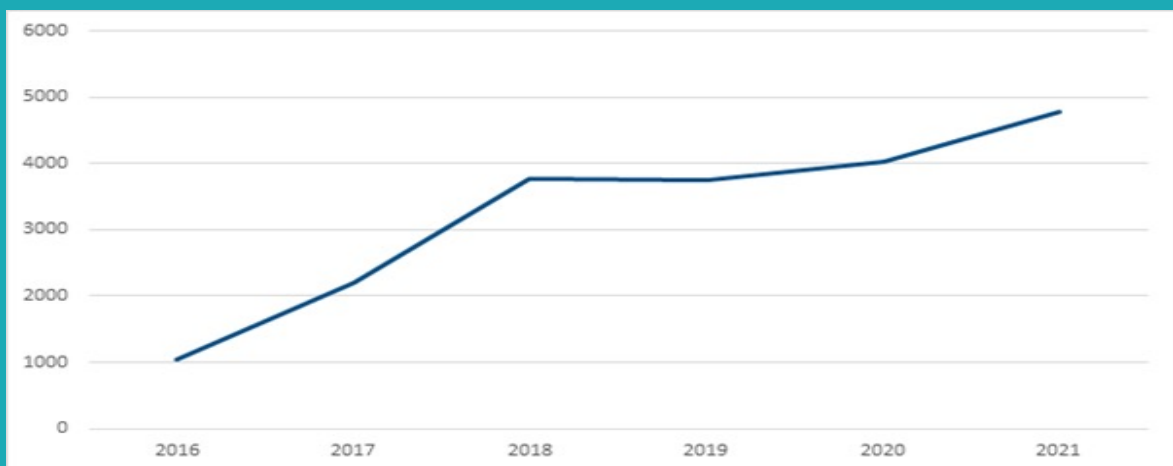
CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

SERVICE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Across the Social Work and Social Care landscape there are significant challenges in maintaining and improving service quality and performance. This is due to some of the challenges being faced with recruitment and retention of staff and the increasing demand for services. This is not an issue that is unique to Scottish Borders as these are challenges being faced across Scotland and the wider United Kingdom.

An example of the increased demand can be seen in the following diagram:

Adult SW referrals:



The number of new referrals has increased from 1,036 in 2016 to 4,782 in 2021

However, despite these challenges we are working hard to improve services in Scottish Borders and develop innovative ways to recruit and retain staff. We are also embarking on a Pathfinder project to make performance data readily available to all staff across the services, carry out process re-engineering to make recording more efficient and planning to give front line practitioners digital equipment that will enable them to be more agile in their day-to-day practice.

ADULT SOCIAL WORK

In Adult Social Work, locality performance spreadsheets are updated weekly which highlights the volume of referrals received per week within each locality and those referrals that have been allocated.

There is also a monthly Social Care and Health workload activity report which gives officers a detailed breakdown of all social work activity spanning the previous four-week period. This allows us to maintain an overview of performance and trends to manage demand as effectively as possible. We are also looking to reintroduce performance clinics to provide narrative behind data to aid learning and system development planning and cascade to relevant staff to underpin/improve performance.

Early in 2022 the Scottish government released funding to local authorities to provide additional social work capacity. The Scottish Government recognised that the expansion of the social work workforce is required to support the increasing adult social care workload and workforce pressures across health and social care. One of the posts created by Scottish Borders Council from the funding is a Policy and Practice Development Officer. The purpose of the role is to lead on the development and review of Scottish Borders Council's social work policies and procedures in line with current legislation and national policy requirements. There is a drive to promote best practice in all aspects of social work policy and procedure.

In addition to this, the following additional posts have been recruited to on the back of this additional funding:

- Central Team – 1 x Assistant Team Leader (Council Officer)
- Central Team 2 x Social Workers (Council Officers)
- Central Team 1 x Paraprofessional
- Hawick Team 1 x Occupational Therapist (Council Officer)
- Community Care Review Team (Early Indicators of Concern/ Prevention) 1 x Social Worker (Council Officer)
- Mental Health Officer Team 1 x Mental Health Officer
- Community Mental Health Team 1 x Social Worker
- There is also a small additional capacity for increased Business Support staff to support the Locality Teams with some tasks and to free up-front line operational managers

In relation to transitions, Scottish Borders Council are undertaking a programme of work with Achieving Real Change (ARC) Scotland on developing Principles into Practice for young people. A working group is currently looking at developing an improved pathway for those transitioning from school and children's services into further education, employment, and adult services. This is being co-produced across several services and organisations including education, children's social work, adult social work, adult learning disability, NHS Borders, ARC Scotland and Branching Out Youth project - Borders Additional Needs Group (BANG). The work aims to engage with young people with lived experience and their families directly, with the aim of developing stronger partnership working, improved communication and more accessible pathways, leading to better outcomes for young people and their families.

Our Care and Repair service has seen improvement on waiting lists and grant applications, however there remain challenges with the availability of contractors to carry out some specified work.

Current day support for older people has two substantive elements, the first is The Local Area Coordination service (LAC), and the second is the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) Social Centres. The former provides community-based support for suitable activities and opportunities, the latter is a buildings-based centre providing transport, activities, and lunch. Any personal care requirements are identified in the care plan and are arranged separate to these opportunities. The Integrated Joint Board (IJB) are carrying out a review of daytime support for carers and crucially involves key partners and service user representation.

Social Centres are still on a post COVID journey, and a recent contract review summarised the challenges. Social Centres were constrained by social distancing and other COVID restrictions, for example, they could only transport one person per vehicle and community transport partners did not resume activity as early as RVS. Some centre providers were slower than others to risk assess and agree terms that would allow us to resume activity. Understandably there was reluctance by some clients to return to centres and COVID was still impacting in terms of staff and client illness. Lockdown with the reduced physical activity and social isolation has affected many to the point where they could not participate fully at the centres.

Between September - December 2021, there were 100 clients, attending 131 days with 134 spaces available. Due to social distancing requirements, this had reduced this to nearer 160 spaces in total. This year shows a steady increase month on month from 97 clients attending 127 days to 125 Clients attending 164 days. There is reported evidence that the cost-of-living crisis is having some impact, pre COVID clients would attend on average for 1.44 days a week, and this has reduced to 1.32 days a week. This is something we will continue to monitor and put appropriate measures in place to mitigate this impact where appropriate.

In Scottish Borders people have a choice regarding payment of funds for option 1 under Self Directed Support, namely 'all pay' cards. All other local authorities have chosen to opt out of personal banking arrangements, in preference of all pay cards. However, following close discussion with the Self-Directed Support (SDS) forum and working group, the agreement, given that this blanket approach did not consider the individual circumstances of people and their Carers, is people within Scottish Borders should retain the options of having monies come into their own bank accounts as well as the option to have an 'all pay' card.

There is also ongoing third sector support in Scottish Borders with various initiatives e.g., café recharge and community larder.

Ability to deliver statutory functions and Key risks to delivery

We are managing to deliver all statutory functions, however capacity and pressure within the social work teams is challenging. We also recognise that there are significant challenges in delivering services within the timescales to meet community need and this is something that we are working closely with partners across the health and social care partnership to address. The difficulties in accessing the right support at the right time for people in our communities is exacerbated by recruitment and retention issues for all social care providers, both internal and external to Scottish Borders Council.

Key figures relating to performance:

Average figures:

327 social work cases allocated per month (12month average to March 2022)	1,023 patients have gone through Home First (Year to March 2022)	On average 18,430 hours of planned Homecare per month, for 748 people	Clients received, on average, 25 hours of planned care per month.	1,276 active Community Alarms in individual's homes in the Scottish Borders
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Waiting lists across the 5 locality Adult teams:

Clients on Waiting List

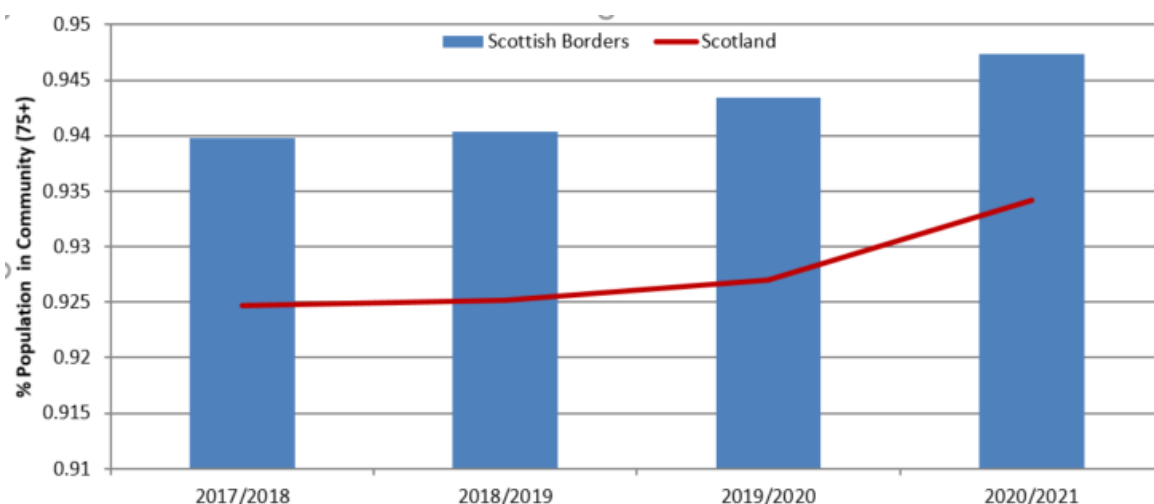
	at 31.03.2021	at 31.03.2022
Central	136	176
Duns	31	52
Hawick	47	20
Kelso	51	76
Peebles	22	81
All Areas	287	405

Referrals received across the Adult teams:

Referrals Received

	21/22 TOTAL
Central	1647
Duns	658
Hawick	1243
Kelso	1003
Peebles	921
START	436
Total	5908

The percentage of the population >75 years of age in Scottish Borders compared to Nationally:



ADULT SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

The Public Protection Committee continues to provide leadership and oversight of the governance arrangements for public protection including Adult Support & Protection (ASP). The operational work for ASP continues to be overseen by the Adult Protection Delivery Group, as advised, we have recently had an inspection of our Adult Support & Protection processes which is due to be published on 18 October 2022.

Over the past year there were a total of 464 Adult Protection referrals leading to 184 ASP full Investigations. This was an increase of 52 referrals from the previous year resulting in 54 more full investigations. The highest service user group referred was older people followed by adults with learning disability. The greatest type of harm referred was physical, followed by financial and then sexual harm. The most usual places for harm to occur was the service user's own home followed by a care home setting.

This increased ASP activity was also reflected in the number of Protection Orders taken – two temporary Banning Orders and two full Banning Orders.

There has been one Initial Case Review under Adult Support & Protection this year, this did not meet the criteria required to escalate to a Significant Case Review.

This past year has seen a process of self-evaluation developed across all ASP activity and performance. Service improvement plans are in place to address areas for development across operational activity, staff guidance and support, and strategic areas of work. To date over half the actions on the plans have been achieved with others well under development.

ASP procedures, both for individual and large-scale investigation processes have been reviewed using a co-production model and new procedures produced. Associated workflows have been updated and a new and more robust set of performance indicators has been put in place. All of these will be monitored and reviewed over the coming months to measure their effectiveness.

Ability to deliver statutory functions and Key risks to delivery

The delivery of ASP continues to be led through the Public Protection Unit which is co-located alongside NHS Borders and Police Scotland services. The role of the Adult Protection Officers has evolved over the past 12 months providing both support to operational teams and undertaking direction and scrutiny for all ASP activity. The unit continues to direct the ASP case work of 'Council Officers' (CO's) investigating under the Adult Support & Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. We are well positioned to continue to meet our statutory responsibilities.

New auditing processes have been put in place and to demonstrate that we are working well to keep adults at risk safe. We continue to uphold our partnership vision that "Everyone in the Scottish Borders has the right to live free from abuse, harm and neglect." Partnership at operational and strategic level remains strong.

Staffing capacity remains the main risk to service delivery however we have made good progress in increasing the number of Council Officers across operational teams. A Borders wide Council Officer rota system is in place to ensure that we can deliver on our duty to inquire and investigate requirements under the Act.

Key figures relating to performance:

Annualised figures:

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Adult Protection concerns	265	328			
AP Referrals	493	642	583	412	464
AP Investigations	143	194	209	130	184
Initial ASP case conference	34	44	84	43	28
Review ASP case conference	57	112	140	109	57

Referral outcomes:

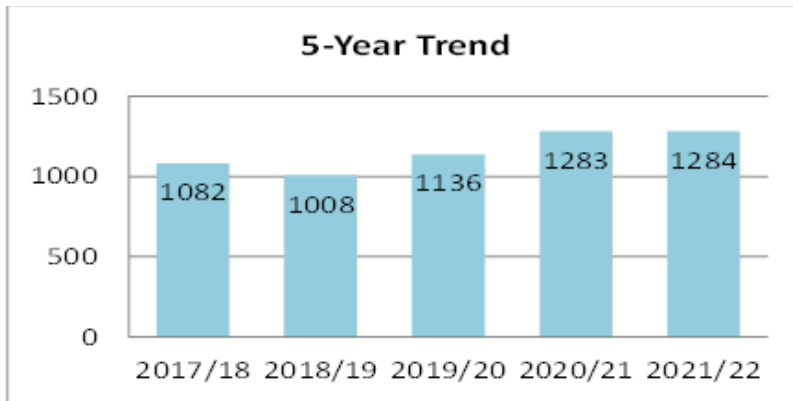
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Further AP action	265	330	334	186	193
Further non-AP action	228	312	238	185	183
No further action	0	0	11	41	0
Not known	0	0		0	88
TOTAL	493	642	583	412	464

Large Scale Investigations:

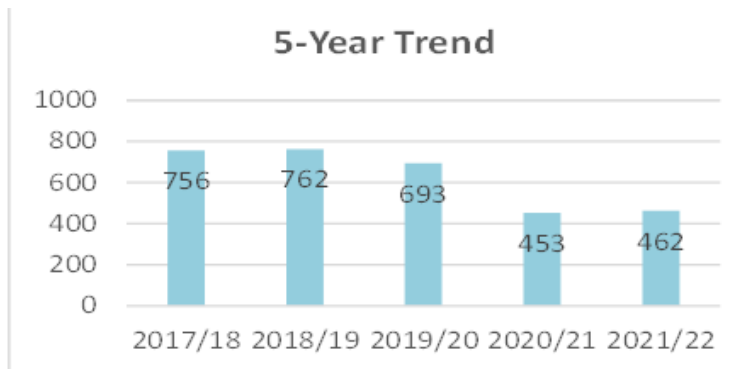
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
No. Large Scale Investigations	2	3	2	0	2

Domestic Abuse figures:

Number of reported incidents of domestic abuse (cumulative)



Number of Referrals To SBC Domestic Abuse Service (DAAS) (Cumulative)



MENTAL HEALTH

Community Mental Health Services are developing a Mental Health Transformation programme. The IJB have recently issued Direction's to the Health and Social Care Partnership to further develop our Community Rehabilitation Support services which will lead to enhanced supported accommodation, a reduction in the number of days patients are accommodated in specialist hospitals and a reduction in local inpatient beds by two. The new model will be up and running by autumn 2022.

Following additional Scottish Government investment in Primary Care Mental Health services, the Health and Social Care Partnership have prioritised the development of Primary Care Mental Health support to under 18-year-olds recognising this as the area of priority need. The development of plans is being undertaken in close partnership with children's social work, education services, the commissioners of children's services and GP's.

General recruitment to vacant social work posts has been a significant limiting factor throughout the year. However, we have managed to fully recruit to vacant posts. Through the additional funding from Scottish Government to boost adult social work staffing we have agreed to recruit an additional full time social worker into the Community Mental Health service.

Ability to deliver statutory functions and Key risks to delivery

We are managing to deliver all statutory functions although there are capacity issues and pressure within the social work team is high. The ability to undertake timely reviews and proactive transition planning is impacted by the challenges presented by the staffing resource in addition to the added pressures to manage the impacts of COVID 19.

MENTAL HEALTH OFFICER SERVICES

Over the period 21/22 the Mental Health Officer Forum has been developed further. Under the National Standards for Mental Health Officers, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to provide staff training and development. To meet these requirements the previous 6 weekly Mental Health Officer forum has been developed into a training and experience sharing forum. All the Council's MHOs (Mental Health Officers) are invited to the forum (this includes the members of the MHO team, alongside all satellite MHOs and EDT (Emergency Duty Team) staff who are qualified MHO's.

Previously the forums had been used as an opportunity to check in with one another and share experience, but during the reporting period we have expanded this into more of a developmental forum. To this end it is suggested there is a topic for discussion each time and where appropriate invite guest speakers.

During a recent away day for the MHO's, we focused on the Scottish Borders Response to the Mental Health law consultation. Areas for improvement of the local services were discussed including the need for more joined up working and improved interface with our health colleagues. In addition, consideration of the development of local resources such as intensive home treatment teams/ expanding the remit of the current crisis team to reduce inpatient care and thereby reduce the pressure on hospitals was discussed.

During the period 2021-22, three MHO trainees were released from their substantive posts to undertake the MHO Award. These individuals have now successfully passed the course and will add to Scottish Borders Council cohort of satellite MHOs.

To further support learning, consolidate knowledge and build team relationships some of the newly qualified or satellite MHOs are being provided with the opportunity of working in the Mental Health Officer team for a 6-month period. This rolling programme has been possible thanks to the additional monies provided by the Scottish Government as mentioned earlier. In this reporting period we have had one successful secondee.

During this reporting period we have created the post of Adult with Incapacity worker to specifically undertake welfare guardianship supervisions. In addition, we have developed a training programme to enhance knowledge and understanding of the role of guardianship supervision amongst adult social care and health teams.

Ability to deliver statutory functions and Key risks to delivery

The Mental Health Officer’s in Scottish Borders continue to deliver on their statutory functions for Scottish Borders Council.

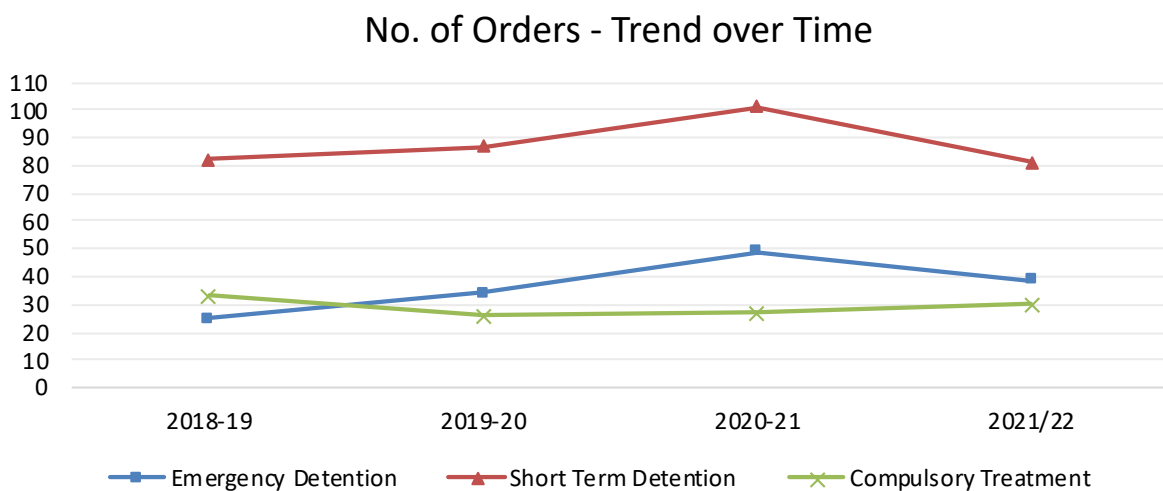
Challenges from COVID 19 are particularly those associated with working remotely. To reduce some of the isolation felt, we introduced teams catch up sessions and encouraged the buddying up of colleagues for peer support.

Key figures relating to performance:

MHO interventions:

during reporting period 01 April - 31 Mar	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Emergency Detention	25	34	49	39
Short Term Detention	82	87	101	81
Compulsory Treatment	33	26	27	30

Same statistics but in a different format:



Appropriate Adult provision:

Scottish Borders Council has a statutory duty under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 to provide an Appropriate Adult Service. The Appropriate Adult service in the Scottish Borders is managed by the Mental Health Officer Service.

Appropriate Adults are social work staff already employed by the social work service working in our teams across the Scottish Borders. We currently have 35 Appropriate Adults who provide communication support to vulnerable victims, witnesses, suspects and accused persons, aged 16 and over, during police investigations.

The police must provide support for persons in custody who are unable to understand sufficiently what is happening or communicate with the police because of a mental disorder. In practice, this support is provided by an Appropriate Adult.

Scottish Borders Council operate an Appropriate Adult Duty rota to ensure it can fulfil their statutory obligation daily. Data collected to date suggests that Scottish Borders are receiving an increased number of requests from the Police this year than the previous year.

In this reporting period a business support post has been created to specifically work with the Appropriate Adult's service on data collection, coordination, and processes. A referral form and a feedback form has been created which detail time spent on callouts and issues raised. We are eager to embed Appropriate Adult Forums in the Scottish Borders bringing best practice into line with standards set by the Mental Health Officer service and in doing so provide a regular opportunity to offer mentoring and peer support to our Appropriate Adult team.

LEARNING DISABILITY

Social work continues to manage their waiting lists through a monthly prioritisation meeting. There continues to be a prominent level of ASP and Adult with Incapacity Act (AWIA) activity.

As already mentioned, the new Transitions pathway is being implemented to ensure that there is a key focus on supporting the transition of young people into adult services. We are continuing to develop appropriate accommodation and support arrangements in line with needs of service user groups and are progressing plans to develop accommodation to support people with complex needs with the aim of reducing the likelihood of accessing placements out with the Borders.

The commission of the Shared Lives scheme (March 2020) has delivered 11 new placements to date and further placements planned for this year including respite care and day care support for adults with complex needs.

The IJB has now directed the Health and Social Care Partnership to commission a new model of day support services. This will be locality based providing appropriate support for people with a range of support needs. The formal commissioning process has now commenced and is due to complete by November 2022.

The service continues to face significant financial pressures driven by an increase in complexity of need for young people coming through transitions. A lack of specialist health and social care placements, including in-patient services along with social care staffing shortages and inflationary pressures are the main contributing factors driving costs. This is a UK wide challenge.

Ability to deliver statutory functions and Key risks to delivery

We are managing to deliver all statutory functions although capacity and pressure within the social work team is high.

The closure of Day Services due to the impact of Covid 19 and the partial re opening to date has placed increased pressure on family carers and supported living tenancies adding to the risk of placement breakdown.

JUSTICE

Throughout the reporting period Justice Social Work consistently adapted and responded to National and Local COVID recovery plan guidance. The service maintained a level of core service across all elements of justice delivery, despite challenges arising from staff absence due to fluctuating COVID infection rates, disjointed recovery pathways across justice partner services, ongoing lack of face-to-face training and stubbornly entrenched staff vacancies, particularly for qualified social workers.

Key figures relating to performance:

Justice Social Work activity:

during the reporting year 01 April - 31 March	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
CJSWR Completed	247	143	243
CPO - Supervision Only	43	33	43
CPO - UPW only	110	63	110
CPO - UPW plus Supervision	40	13	24
Total CPO issued	207	110	177
No. of Diversion from Prosecution Referrals	22	43	80
No. of Diversion from Prosecution Assessments	22	27	64
Number of open DTTOs	8	3	1
% of successfully completed DTTOs	44%	60%	50%
DTTOs Imposed	4	0	1
No. of new Voluntary Throughcare Cases Offered	30	10	34
No. of new Voluntary Throughcare Cases Accepted	10	4	10
Open Statutory Throughcare Cases	61	57	32
In Custody	40	42	50
In Community	21	15	12

An internal audit completed as part of the SBC (Scottish Borders Council) Audit Annual Plan 2021/22, the purpose of which was to assess the adequacy of internal controls, administrative procedures, and resources in place to meet statutory obligations, included Justice Social Work's alignment with local Community Justice arrangements.

The Audit was able to provide substantial assurance to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee that the service was delivering within a satisfactory risk; with control and governance systems in place to meet statutory obligations. Internal Audit made no recommendations, noting actions that were underway, at the time- to improve the efficacy of governance to achieve objectives. It also recognised Community Justice Strategy links, advising that; improvement actions should also be considered following reviews carried out by Scottish Government (Justice Strategy), Community Justice Scotland (OPI Framework) and the Justice Service.

Ability to deliver statutory functions and Key risks to delivery

The service maintained a position of delivery for statutory functions throughout the reporting period, despite carrying vacant social work posts. This is primarily due to service demand generated by Courts, Criminal Justice Court Reports and Community Payback Orders, including Unpaid Work remaining lower than pre pandemic numbers.

The Unpaid Work Service, having taken learning from the first "lock down" period and the commissioning of external digital provision, including Street Cones and The Wise Group, for Other Activity, was able to continue to offer some limited opportunities to service users to engage during the second "lock down" period.

Significant staffing and performance issues within the Unpaid Work Service, limited the services ability, during the reporting period, to perform at a level that enabled adherence to National Standards and Outcomes. Raising the potential to destabilise the Courts confidence in the services ability to deliver Unpaid Work and or Other Activity. Swift action was taken to resolve the situation, including a trawl of all files for those subject to unpaid work by senior staff, and appropriate action taken to return cases to court, as required, ensuring appropriate and timeous case management arrangements were put in place. As we move into the next reporting year, maintaining this position remains challenging given this element of service continues to experience significant staff issues.

Key risks include: The potential for the Court to lose confidence in the ability of Unpaid Work Service to deliver, stemming from a lack of dynamic and proactive service management, ongoing challenges in adapting to covid recovery plans, and a high staff turnover, creating an inexperienced workforce.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SOCIAL WORK

During the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the number of referrals made was 2938, an increase on the 2490 referrals in 2020/21. Arrangements are in place to screen and prioritise referral information quickly via the Children & Families Duty Team based at Langlee. Whilst social work is not an emergency service, swift responses to referrals are considered good practice.

Looked after Children (LAC)

In 2021-22 there was a monthly average of **176** Looked After Children (LAC) in Scottish Borders, a decrease from the monthly average of **182** in 2020/21.

As of 31 March 2022, there were **174** LAC; of these **26** were at home, **49** were in kinship care, **59** in internal foster care, **7** in external foster care, **0** in secure care, **30** in residential care and **3** in "other."

Kinship Care

The most marked change in relation to LAC is the rise in the number of kinship care placements, increasing from **25** children in 2010-11 to **49** children in 2021-22.

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. 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.

Details in respect of fostering, permanence and adoption are contained with the Scottish Borders Fostering Panel Annual Report 2021 and the Scottish Borders Adoption and Permanence Panel Annual Report 2021; both reports are based on the calendar rather than fiscal year period.



Performance Panel
Annual Report 2021



Fostering Panel
Annual Report 2021

Key figures relating to performance:

Duty team referrals:

C&F Duty Team	Annual Average	
	2019-20	2020-21
Total No. of Referrals	2326	2490
No. of Referral & Screening (New Cases)	320	298
No. of Referral & Screening (prev referred)	752	775
No. of One-off Contacts	1254	1417

Children Affected By Disability Team workload:

CHAD	Annual Average	
	2019-20	2020-21
Total No. of CHAD Cases	151	169
No. of cases (Serviced)	21	28
No of cases (Receiving SDS/DP)	52	49

16+ team caseloads by type:

16+	Annual Average	
	2019-20	2020-21
Total Number of Cases	93	83
No. of LAC Cases	7	10
No. of Continuing Care Cases	31	29
No. of Aftercare Cases	52	44

Long term team allocation and breakdown of type of case:

LTT	Annual Average	
	2019-20	2020-21
Total LTT Case Load	443	452
East Team	202	203
West Team	241	249
Looked After Children	181	176
East Team	93	86
West Team	88	90
Child Protection	40	45
East Team	19	24
West Team	21	21

Family Placement/Resources

Despite on-going recruitment activity, the Family Placement Team saw a reduction of 6 foster carer households in 2020 (calendar year). Although the overall number of children and young people placed in foster care / continuing care saw a slight reduction the percentage occupation of approved foster placements increased from 89% to 100%.

Despite the pressure on the Scottish Borders Fostering Service, developments continued across the service. Of note was the introduction of Foster care Welcome Packs for children and young people when they arrive in a new foster placement. The contents of the packs were decided upon jointly by young people with care experience, foster carers and the Family Placement Team. The team's approach to participation has been enhanced with the development of a joint foster carer – Family Placement Team (FPT) group. The FPT Development Group which aims to develop aspects of the service and support for both carers and children. A quarterly Family Placement Newsletter for children and young people was also introduced in 2020-21 and has been well received. The Newsletter is a combination of pertinent information for children and young people (around initiatives, developments, advice and guidance) and fun articles. The Newsletter has been well received.

The team are particularly proud of Betty Falconer, Foster Carer, who was awarded the President's Award 2021 from the Fostering Network's Fostering Excellence Awards 2021. Betty has been a foster carer with Scottish Borders for around 20 years and has worked tirelessly on both a local and national basis to improve services for children and young people in foster care.

The Family Placement Team also assess and support kinship carers. Over 2020-21 a specific support group for kinship carers was commissioned from Children 1st who now provide an independent Kinship Care Support Group on a monthly basis.

Wheatlands Children's Home continued to provide quality residential care for young people in the Scottish Borders over 2020-21. They were graded as 'Excellent (6)' for 'How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?' and 'Very Good (5)' for 'How well is our care and support planned?' As part of their approach to implementing the findings of the Promise, Wheatlands initiated an action plan to improve Love and Relationship Based Practice within the home. The plan was co-produced with young people and covers areas such as training and improving staff awareness of the importance of love and relationship based practice; on-going participation and advocacy for young people; ensuring a positive physical environment; and, encouraging ex-residents to remain involved and access support from the Wheatlands residential staff team.

Key figures relating to performance:

Children adopted / placed for adoption:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Children adopted during the reporting year (Apr-Mar)	1	0	
Children placed with prospective adopters at 31 March	3	2	4

Looked after children (LAC) placed outwith Scottish Borders area – figure, percentage of LAC outwith and number of kinship placements:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
LAC placed outside areas as at 31 March	40	41	44
% OOA	21%	24%	24%
Kinship placements as at 31 March	57	52	48

Number of LAC and figure + percentage in residential care:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Looked After Children as at 31 March (SBC)	195	173	180
Looked After Children as at 31 July (Scotland)	14,458	13,255	-
Residential Placements as at 31 March	29	27	30
% Residential Placements	15%	16%	17%

Secure Accommodation numbers per year:

at 31 March	19	20	21	22
"Secure Accommodation" placement type	2	1	1	0

Child protection orders granted in court:

01 Apr - 31 Mar	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Child Protection Orders granted	9	0	1	2
	8	9	18	12

Complaints

With regard to complaints about Social Work services, there were 120 complaints received in the year April 2021 – March 2022. Of these 98 were concluded with 32 being upheld, 58 not upheld and 8 relating to policy issues which were also not upheld. It should be noted that some of the complaints are very complex and given that 120 were received as a snapshot of the applicable year, the remaining 22 were ongoing beyond the reporting year.

Duty of Candour

All Health and Social Care Services in Scotland have a duty of candour. This is a legal requirement which means that when unintended or unexpected events happen, that result in death or harm as defined in the Act, the people affected understand what has happened, receive an apology, and that organisations learn how to improve for the future. There has been <5 Duty of Candour incidents in the reporting year for Scottish Borders Council. From this, significant learning has been identified and implemented across services to mitigate the potential of this type of issue occurring again. There is an annual report where more detail can be found.



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RESOURCES


It would be fair to say that all services across the social work and social care landscape are under pressure. Whilst this is not unique to Scottish Borders, there is an ongoing need for us to overlay decision making in the context of the rurality challenges we face. Primarily this is in the context of maximising positive outcomes for those we serve, whilst maintaining a best value approach for the resources we have.

Scottish Government have provided additional funding for Adult services via the Health and Social Care Partnership which is primarily to support the recovery from the pandemic. However, it is apparent that there has been no additional resource in relation to children and families social work services. There are pressures within children and family's services as we begin to see the full effects of the pandemic on children, young people, and their families, particularly in relation to the impact on mental wellbeing. We are seeing a trend of complex cases which are irretrievably breaking down, sometimes requiring alternative care provision for these children and young people. It is hoped that the work that will be taking place in relation to the delivery of the Scottish Governments 'The Promise' will impact upon acute presentation and focus more on early and effective intervention. However, we recognise that this situation is not a quick fix and fundamentally shifting the balance of care will take a significant amount of time.

ADULT SOCIAL WORK

Given the new requirements set by the Care Inspectorate on care home living conditions including environmental factors such as room sizes, work is underway within the Health & Social Care Partnership to scope the provision of a care village based in Tweedbank. A 60 bedded multi-housed complex catering for older adults and intermediate care is being investigated, based on a community living model including a social centre and shop. A similar model is being scoped for the Teviot area.

We have had two new extra-care housing facilities purpose built within the last reporting period. This has provided properties in both the Galashiels and Duns community areas. In Galashiels 39 extra care housing flats are now in place and in Duns, there are 19 amenity bungalows and 30 extra care housing flats with a mixture of one or two bedrooms. Of the resources in Duns, 4 beds have been protected as step up / step down provision. Step up from the community to prevent hospital admission and /or alternative accommodation to those living in the community who are requiring crisis intervention or a place of safety and step down beds to facilitate discharge from hospital to await a return home or transfer to a homely setting.



Both of the extra-care provisions above has a 24hr staff team on site delivering flexible care, support, a meal service and tenancy management.

Financial Resources

It is recognised that there has been some additional financial resource for adult services, however there is a continuing need to make efficiencies as part of the wider corporate savings plans. This is challenging as we move into a position where the cost of living is increasing for people in our communities as well as increased costs in relation to transport, equipment etc.

ADULT SUPPORT AND PROTECTION

The Adult Support and Protection budget has been optimised and a plan is being developed to create an operational Quality Assurance role which will support Council Officers undertaking investigative work and which will oversee the quality of practice.

MENTAL HEALTH

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

MENTAL HEALTH OFFICER SERVICE

The Mental Health Officer service is maximising the available resources to ensure that we are positioned to be able to respond to the challenges ahead. The crucial statutory role that the MHO's provide in relation to mental health assessments and guardianship processes under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 is a clear priority.

LEARNING DISABILITY

There is financial pressures within this service with elevated levels of support needs 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. We continue to work with NHS Lothian in the development of NHS in-patient facilities for AWLD (Adults with Learning Disabilities) 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. This is delivering significant cost avoidance for the service.

Substantial improvement actions in the assessment and care planning process are resulting in the maximisation of enablement, the development of outcome focused support plans and the maximisation of our local area coordination service.

JUSTICE

The service welcomed additional Scottish Government Recovery Grant funding; in addition to Section 27 monies. The first tranche of recovery funding did not however support the local recruitment of additional staff, primarily due to insufficient time to facilitate recruitment processes for temporary posts, and the lack of any mechanism to carry funding over into the next fiscal year. As a result, short term contracts that might have been offered were not practical to the service when induction and training required to be included in the available period. The opportunity to recruit from an additional tranche of funding, has resulted in relief staff being recruited within the Unpaid Work Service in addition to an additional 10-hour social work post. The additional social work support offered has been highly valued by social workers due to the elevated level of skill, knowledge, and experience of working with Registered Sex Offenders, and the delivery of community programmes including MF: MC, held by the successful candidate. The appointment not only provided much needed support for the completion of Risk Assessments and Court Reports, but also facilitated a degree of quality support and learning opportunity for inexperienced staff, at a time when partner service provision was limited and or national training was “on hold.”

Recovery Grant funding enabled the Unpaid Work Service to purchase specialist equipment and enhance work opportunities within the workshop. The purchase of a minibus allowed the service to increase the number of service users who could be transported to participate in project work across more rural parts of the Borders. The vehicle is also utilised by social workers, who facilitate socialisation and physical and emotional well-being opportunities for all service users; including walking and sports groups.

Local third sector organisation, Work+ were commissioned to provide enhanced employability and training opportunities. The service can dovetail into supports offered by the commissioned Adult Learning Support Service provided by the SBC Community Learning and Development Service.

Street Cones – “Road to Change” programme is a specialist 12-week online work programme, targeted at behavioural change through creative workshops. Commissioning of this programme provides an interactive art based alternative opportunity for the completion of Other Activity.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SOCIAL WORK

The overall revised budget for Children and Families Social Work has remained static despite additional expectations from National legislative, policy and guidance changes and increased costs.

The largest spend within the budget is in relation to External Placements which includes Day Care, Foster care, Residential care, and Secure care.

There have been several 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, the impact of COVID on familial relationships and child well-being, and policy impacts e.g., Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

Most external providers have 'in-house' health and psychological services and offer a range of therapeutic services not available within local resources. Prices are non-negotiable although the council's Procurement Team have worked hard to limit uplifts and placement costs through challenging proposed increases from providers. As a small local authority with few external placements, we spot-purchase which leaves no option of block negotiation.

There are no year-to-year increases in the Children & Family Social Work budget allocation to reflect increases to external placement costs which places strain on the budget.

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 £878,212 in 2021/22. 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 budgetary impact unless additional action is taken, and investment made, to reduce the number of children in care and external care provision.

Recruitment and retention of social workers has been an issue within the service for several years which has resulted in posts remaining vacant or being filled by temporary agency staff. This is a risk in relation to delivering essential services and on the wellbeing 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 supervision by line managers is critical in mitigating this.

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 prominent level of demand for agency workers because of COVID-19. Agency staff costs in 2018/19 was £626,888, and have reduced year on year since, with the overall cost in 2021/22 being £299,613.

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WORKFORCE

It is important to note that we are undertaking a workforce planning process across all services. This is to ensure that we can map and effectively plan for future workforce needs, including the need for systemic succession planning. This is not happening in isolation but is being done across the Health & Social Care landscape as well as Council wide.

Workforce planning and development is a key aspect for the recruitment and retention of staff in Scottish Borders. Every Social Work service has had difficulty in attracting staff to vacant posts. To support the recruitment process, staff in conjunction with Human Resource colleagues have worked hard to make Scottish Borders a good place to live and work. We have embarked on extending where we advertise as well as using what we have learned from COVID-19 to promote the agile ways of working that we have implemented on the back of the pandemic.

There is a national issue in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff in Social Work and Social Care which has been exacerbated by people leaving the profession on the back of the pandemic. 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.

We will be undertaking a review of the role and function of professionally qualified Social Workers to ensure this is aligned to the statutory functions and ensure we have oversight of capacity now and what we need in the future. We want to develop an autonomous workforce that can adapt and change their approach in line with the changing needs of those we serve. This on the surface sounds straight forward, however this does involve a significant change in the culture of the organisation and profession.

It is noted that there continues to be an ongoing challenge to recruit social workers and occupational therapists within Adult Social Care and Health. We have several vacancies in both roles with a limited number of applicants when advertised. We are also struggling to secure agency staff to support teams in the short term which is challenging.

Due to some of the challenges of recruitment and retention, we recognise the impact that internal secondments and temporary posts can have an impact on the stability of the service, as well as having an impact on the wellbeing of our staff. There are circumstances where this is inevitable, however, by engaging in the people planning process, we hope to develop more stability in the workforce going forward.

There are innovations that are taking place to assist with some of the recruitment and retention challenges, namely:

Social Work Trainee Scheme Career Pathway

A key response to the challenges of having a sufficient number of qualified social workers is the SBC Traineeship Scheme to 'grow our own' qualified Social Workers through a Scottish Borders' partnership with the Open University offers existing permanent staff the opportunity to have a pathway to a professional social work qualification. This career pathway provides the opportunity to develop and retain current staff as well as attract new talent.

We are actively considering, with the OU to be considered by the SSSC, how apprenticeships can be developed as an additional entry point to develop future skills and build future capability. It is anticipated that apprenticeships will be vital to post-COVID recovery, and create a new entry point and route to a career in social work.

The first intake of trainees began in 20/21 and last year (2022) there were 5 trainees that successfully finished their trainee scheme, and are now Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW).

The table below illustrates the current number of students on our Social Work Trainee Career Pathway programme for the next 3 years.

Stage	Number of Students on Social Work Traineeship Pathway	Number of Students Estimated to Finish August(PG)/October (UG)		
		2023	2024	2025
1&2 Modules (pre training scheme)*	13	N/A	N/A	N/A*
Undergraduate (on training scheme)	6	3	2	1
Postgraduate (on training scheme)	7	2	5	0
Total	26	5	7	1*

*Potentially the total number of qualified Social Worker in 2025 could be 14, should they all be successful at each stage of the pathway.

We are also exploring the opportunity (with partners) to create career pathways for Occupational Therapists, assessing how we can encourage people into the role and create pathways which identify recruitment opportunities for this vital service to assess the needs of our communities. We are also exploring how we can recruit and retain Care Home staff and Home Care staff to ensure that we are looking beyond the immediate and future proofing the continued delivery of services. This will involve career pathways that are meaningful for people considering a career in care provision.

Newly Qualified Social Worker supervision training:

With colleagues in Staff Development, we are looking at how we support and nurture our Newly Qualified Social Workers by ensuring that key front line operational managers have the necessary training to provide the right support, at the right time to this critical cohort of staff.

Adult Social Work and Social Care Wellbeing Fund:

We welcomed the Scottish Government's 'The Workforce Wellbeing Fund for Adult Social Work and Social Care', managed by Inspiring Scotland to provide grants of up to £10,000 until December 2022 for adult Social Work and Social Care staff. This is a great opportunity for staff to consider how their wellbeing can be supported following a period of extreme pressure. The minister highlighted that "Workforce wellbeing must remain a priority as we continue to move through this pandemic and recovery. We will overcome the challenges ahead if we look after our people." (Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care Kevin Stewart, 02 February, 2022).

It is unfortunate that this was only available to adult staff across Scotland.

IRISS analysis workshop:

In conjunction with the Institute for Research & Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) we had 30 staff take part on a workshop to develop skills in writing analysis in Social Care. The output of the workshop series was an online course (<https://content.iriss.org.uk/writing-analysis-social-care/index.html#eir>) which would provide a practical framework for supporting the writing of analysis in social care records, and be relevant across social work domains. IRISS developed this course in collaboration with Dr Theresa Lillis, drawing on the insights generated from the IRISS project and findings from the Writing in professional social work practice in a changing communicative landscape (WiSP) project. This course was launched in March 2021 and is now available on the IRISS website.

From Scottish Borders, the following staff representation took part:

- 10 participants from adult social care and health, including adult protection officers
- 8 participants from Justice, Mental Health teams and the Learning Disability service
- 12 participants from children and families social work, including Child Protection Reviewing Officers

The Promise:

Scotland has an ambition 'to be the best place in the world to grow up' so that children are 'loved, safe, and respected and realise their full potential'. The Promise, published in March 2020, reflects what Scotland must do to "make sure its most vulnerable children feel loved and have the childhood they deserve."

Keeping The Promise requires us to work collaboratively with our multi-agency partners to bring transformational change to the way we deliver our services for children, young people and their families. Change that places love and relationships at the centre of the experiences and outcomes for every child, and keeps the views and voice of children and young people at its core. Scotland has made this Promise to our children and young people, adults and families and we need to ensure we are keeping the Promise in Scottish Borders.

This is an exciting area for Scottish Borders and crucially it gives us the strategic framework for our staff to work more collaboratively across the multi-agency landscape to improve outcomes for all children, young people and their families locally.

Public Protection:

In terms of the workforce and how we ensure that they are clear about their roles and responsibilities in relation to Public Protection, the operational unit consisting of Police Scotland, NHS colleagues and Social Work staff continue to work closely with the Lead Officer for the Public Protection Committee and the Quality Assurance and Development team. The Public Protection training and development delivery group have produced a new multi-agency training and development strategy as well as a framework this year, which has been disseminated widely across the partnership agencies.

Training remains a priority for both child and adult support & protection and a new training matrix is now in place ranging from introduction to public protection, contributing to ASP processes, risk assessment, Council Officer training and targeted service provider training. In relation to Adult Support & Protection (ASP), we have 29 new 'Council Officers' trained between April 2021 and March 2022, and we are in the process of setting up a new accreditation process for newly trained Council Officers, and a reaccreditation process for existing Council Officers. We are in the early stages of scoping out a plan for joined up ASP training with Midlothian and East Lothian Councils with a view to piloting this over the next year.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTO):

Confidence by the Court for successful outcomes aimed at those subject to DTTO dipped over the last few reporting years, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of assessments requested and orders issued. No orders were issued in 2021. This resulted in a Root and Branch review of the service within the reporting period. The review sought to identify good practice models from providers across Scotland. The Ayrshire Partnership DTTO service model was identified and adopted as offering a comprehensive approach to working with those subject to DTTO. NHS Addiction Services remain the prescriber for substitute medication in line with the new Medical Assisted Treatment standards. Dedicated DTTO justice social work staff manage court orders through a robust case management, testing and progress review process. All DTTO social work staff completed drug testing training, allowing them to undertake additional testing if required. Service user outcomes, absent from the previous delivery model, are now in place and informed using Outcome Star; needs identification tool. The new model of delivery was implemented 1st April 22. Staff delivering the service report "I feel the new comprehensive approach to DTTO assists in supporting people on the road to recovery. The focus on an individual's needs through the Outcome Star helps the person to buy into the Order and hopefully will help them see the progress they have made." Early indicators from service users support consideration that benefits are gained from the structure of more frequent testing in the initial stages.

Caledonian System-Men's Programme:

The Caledonian System is an integrated approach to address domestic abuse by men towards female partners or ex-partners. It works with men convicted of domestic abuse related offences to reduce their reoffending and to improve the lives of women, children. 2021/22 saw the disaggregation of a long-term partnership between Scottish Borders and partners Edinburgh City, East and Mid Lothian, for the delivery of the support to women and children. Successful arrangements were put in place to separate the joint Equalities Grant Funding utilised to fund the services woman's and children's worker. The aim of the adjustment was to bring full-service delivery, support to women and children and the men's programme, under the umbrella of local service provision, to overcome entrenched barriers for attendance and long-term engagement with the men's programme by those subject to a Community Payback Order with Programme Requirement. Barriers experienced by many group participants included a lack of available public transport from rural areas, significant travel distances and limited availability of places that could accommodate employment and carer responsibilities. Until this time, delivery of the Men's programme was delivered by Edinburgh City Social Work colleagues to participants across all 4 partnership authorities.

The service recruited 2 x 17.5-hour group work facilitators, adding to the existing women's and children's workers, and creating a dedicated systems delivery team. National training constraints, due to the impact of COVID, delayed programme delivery training for the new group work staff. An interim delivery arrangement was implemented, spring 22, supported by an experienced team leader. Full-service delivery is anticipated to come online summer 2022.

The National Care Service:

The development of a National Care Service is a clear ambition for Scottish Government. Whilst matters have progressed beyond the scope of this report (April 2021 – March 2022), it is inevitable that there is a degree of focus on what this will mean for the Social Work and Social Care workforce in the future.

Managing expectations and to some extent people's concerns and anxieties about what the future may bring can be challenging. However, I am pleased to say that staff at a local level have maintained their focus on the needs in our communities now whilst we await more detail to come following impending further consultation processes going forward.



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THE YEAR AHEAD

The year ahead is difficult to predict. The work that is ongoing with regard to the development of a National Care Service is adding a degree of uncertainty for staff across the Social Work and Social Care landscape. There are clear challenges that we face regarding winter pressures, how we meet increasing demand which is not matched by increasing resource, the ongoing legacy of the impact of the pandemic on people across our communities, significant challenges in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff etc.

However, we have a lot to look forward to:

The Pathfinder project will deliver on the following points:

- **The Council Information Hub** – all data is in a useable format, making performance management much easier and to give clear data in relation to trends, analysis and predictors. As Social Work services are on the vanguard of this project, it creates an exciting opportunity to realise the benefits of having good quality information at our fingertips.
- **Enterprise Mobility** – staff will have the right equipment to be able to carry out their role and function in as efficient a manner as possible. The potential of being able to sit down with someone we are working with to co-produce is something that each and every member of staff wants to see and do.
- **Process Redesign and Simplification** – the opportunity to reduce bureaucracy within Social Work is something that every member of staff would actively welcome.

For staff this will mean:

- More time with clients and less time in systems
- Access to the right information, at the right time, in the right place
- Update records live – remove duplicated reprocessing
- Eliminate unnecessary travel
- Safe working with Lone Worker protection
- Make better decisions – more timely, more meaningful interventions

For managers this will mean:

- Self-serve reports – less time and more up to date data
- Drillable dashboards deliver greater service insight
- Better holistic and detailed views of their service performance
- Repeatable Trend Analysis – better informed, more proactive decision making
- Better able to understand the communities they support



For the organisation this will mean:

- Reduced cost of reporting
- One source of data eliminates duplicated reporting and allows for one version of the truth
- Greater opportunity to spot patterns and anomalies and avoid risk
- Greater ability to use predictive analytics to inform future planning

Workforce Planning:

This process will allow us to work across the entire landscape of Social Work and Social Care as well as across the wider services areas. By looking at our workforce through the lens of now and into the future, we will ensure that we can identify gaps and ensure that we are as well positioned as possible to meet future need. Succession planning is a key aspect of this, as is our ability to continue with innovations like the Social Work Traineeship.

Development of Locality Services :

Alongside multi-agency partners, we will be looking to develop our services to ensure that we are people orientated. This means being more visible and accountable to our communities across Scottish Borders and approaching this with an open approach to Community Empowerment and coproduction of services locally.

The planned scoping of additional services locally:

The continuation of planning around our ambition for developing local care villages and the development of a residential provision for children and young people with complex needs.

The Promise:

In the next year we will be establishing the strategic oversight of all services to children, young people and their families in Scottish Borders under the banner of the Promise. With a significant emphasis on the whole system needing to respond to need, we will endeavour to begin the process of shifting the balance of care to encourage earlier responses to need and to help maximise positive outcomes in our communities.

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion to this year's annual report, as the Chief Social Work Officer, I am once again 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 continually challenging circumstances.

The commitment of staff, partners, families, carers and communities to keeping people who use our services at the centre of everything that we do is testament to each and every person.

The coming years will continue to be challenging for everyone, but by engaging in meaningful discussion with staff, people who use our services, their families and carers, and our communities, we will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that we achieve the best possible outcomes for all.

I am particularly encouraged and ambitious about how we can continue to work collaboratively across the multi-agency landscape to improve outcomes where at all possible. By supporting our staff and continuing to innovate the way in which we operate, I am confident that Scottish Borders Social Work and Social Care services will continue to rise to the challenge.

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