



Midlothian Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2023/24



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Introduction/Reflections 2023-24

I am pleased to present my fourth and final Chief Social Work Officer's annual report for 2023/24. I shall be retiring in October 2024; therefore, the Chief Social Worker role shall be passed over to Nick Clater, Head of Adult Services. This year's report will be written on the same template as last year, a fuller report with agreed headings to try and offer some consistency across the 32 CSWO reports. The report is produced for noting to relevant Committees and Council. The report will focus on local governance arrangements, service delivery, resources and workforce.

This report along with the 31 other Chief Social Work Officer's reports will form part of a national summary report which shall evidence some of the changing trends and outcomes across the country as well as highlighting significant achievements and the very many challenges faced by all.

Despite the very busy landscape within Midlothian, we have maintained a focus on delivery of services and improvement. Within Adult Services we have had a flurry of activity around inspections. In October 2023 there was the joint inspection of Adult Services with a focus on people with physical, long-term conditions and their unpaid carers. In January 2024 notification was received that there an adult support and protection inspection would commence. Children's Services also had a visit from the Care Inspectorate to inspect our fostering, adoption and continuing care services. Justice continued to have many discussions around the new multi-agency public protection system (MAPPS) that is being rolled out by the Home Officer to better report and monitor those individuals who are assessed as high risk and living within our communities. The new MAPPS proposal remains an area of continuous discussion and controversy across Scotland.

There continues to be a great deal of national and local discussions centred on the workforce with there not being enough suitably qualified and experienced social workers, resulting in an over reliance of agency staff.

The national context for social work and social care in 2023/24 remains characterised by legislative and policy developments such as the National Care Service (NCS), The Promise, Care and Justice Act, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to name but a few, all which impact on how services are delivered. Demands for new initiatives outstrip financial and human resources, with savings impacting upon core services. In addition, short-term funding makes attempts to meet sustainable local needs difficult.

We reported last year on the war in Ukraine and the impact this had on individuals and families fleeing and coming to Scotland with some arriving in Midlothian. At the time of writing the war continues. We have had over 200 Ukrainian people arrive in Midlothian via the various visa routes on offer. This is in addition to families from Afghanistan who are at risk of harm from their home country, fleeing and awaiting accommodation in Britain. Midlothian to date has received and supported 40 Afghanistan people. Another significant factor is the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who mainly arrive via the small boats which travel across the English Channel. These young people risk life and limb and are often very traumatised when they arrive within Midlothian. Over the past year there has been significant discussions around

the increasing numbers and how local authorities are unable to sustain the current mandated requests for placements.

It is not possible to convey every aspect of social work services within one report. The report therefore focuses on key areas of development and improvement, with a view to showing how we continue to prioritise supporting people within their own homes and communities. I wish at this point to also acknowledge the incredible work that has been undertaken in the last year by staff and my appreciation goes out to everyone who works in social work and social care, and those who support this important work.

I hope you find the report of interest and that it gives a broad overview of the work that has been undertaken over the last year.

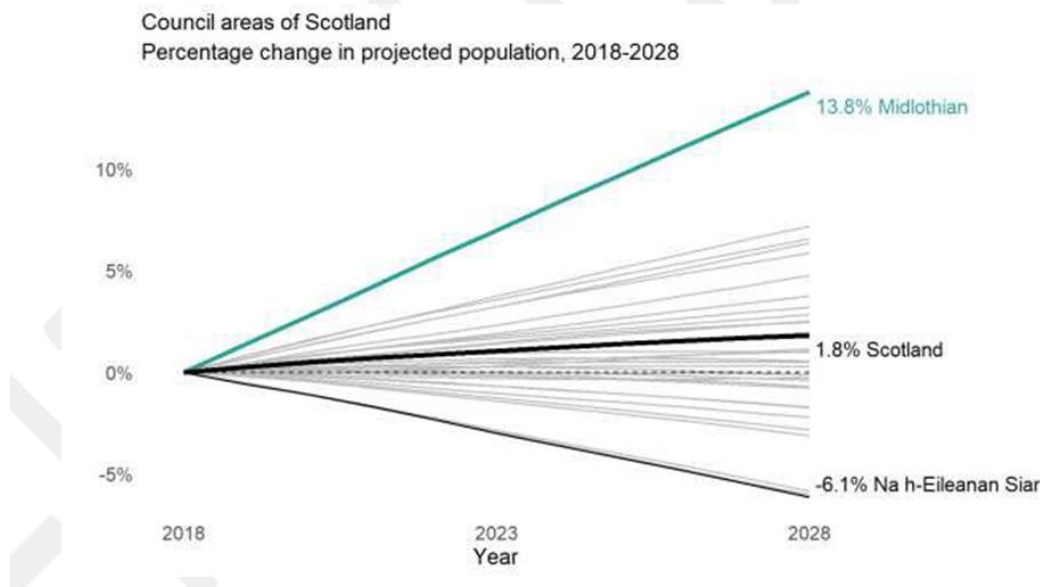
Joan Tranent
Chief Social Worker Officer



Midlothian Profile

Midlothian continues to be the fastest growing local authority in Scotland, which shall see a growth rate of 13.8% until 2028 compared to the Scottish average of 1.8%

Fig 1: NRS 2018-28 % Change in Projected Population



Our demographic profile shows growth in all age groups but particularly acute in the 0-15 years and over 75 age groups and therefore there will be significant demand for early years, schools, children's services and older people's services.

There is a gap in outcomes for people in different parts of Midlothian. Some areas have poorer levels of employment; lower wage rates; lower average life expectancy, greater concentrations of people who are elderly or disabled; poorer access to physical amenities such as shops, health care, public spaces and play facilities; lower than average qualifications and higher levels of crime.

In Midlothian there are 3 communities in the top 20% of most deprived areas in Scotland. These are Central Dalkeith/Woodburn; Mayfield/Easthouses and Gorebridge.

The Third Sector plays a vital role in fostering a sense of identity and belonging within communities. They provide essential resources, services and opportunities that enable individuals to actively participate and drive positive change within their communities.

Governance, Accountability and Statutory Functions:

The Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) role ensures the provision of appropriate professional advice in the discharge of a local authority's statutory functions as set out in Section 3 Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The role also has a place set out in integrated arrangements brought in through The Public Bodies (Joint Working)

(Scotland) Act 2014. The CSWO's responsibilities in relation to local authority social work functions continue to apply to functions which are being delivered by other bodies under integration arrangements. The appointment of a CSWO is a statutory requirement of the local authority.

The strategic direction for the role and contribution of social work and social care services in protecting and improving the wellbeing and outcomes of Midlothian residents sits within the context of community planning and the integration of health and social care. The Midlothian Community Planning Partnership deliver the Single Midlothian Plan 23-27 which has 3 outcomes covering the next 4 years:

- Individuals and communities have improved health and skills for learning, life and work
- No child or household living in poverty
- Significant progress is made towards net zero carbon emissions by 2030

Social work services in Midlothian are well established and are delivered between Midlothian Council and the Integrated Joint Board (IJB). Adult social work and social care services, including health visiting and school nursing services and justice social work are delegated to the IJB and delivered and managed within the Midlothian Health and Social Care Partnership. Children's social work services are managed within the council structure as part of the People and Partnership Directorate which includes Education and Community Lifelong Learning and Employability.

The role of the Chief Social Work Officer currently sits with the Chief Officer of Children's Services, Partnerships and Communities, however as I have already stated the CSWO role shall transfer to Nick Clater, Head of Adult Services in October 2024. The CSWO attends the IJB to provide professional advice and guidance to social work functions which have been formally delegated. Having a children's services background allows me to have an overview of delegated services which include health visiting and school nursing. Midlothian IJB is well established and evidences good governance and accountability. This arena allows for robust discussions around the pressures within both council and health services and for solutions to be sought at a strategic level. The anomaly of having health visiting and school nursing out with children's services requires good engagement and communication between the services at all levels which is evident within the Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023-2026 .

Within Midlothian we have a joint public protection committee across Midlothian and East Lothian. The Chief Social Work Officer attends the East and Midlothian Public Protection Committee (EMPPC) as well as being a member of the Chief Scrutiny Oversight Group (CSOG) along with other Chief Officers and both Chief Executives. This partnership allows for sharing of practice and learning across the public protection arena which includes adult support and protection, child protection, violence against women and girls and MAPPA. The inception of a joint public protection committee in 2014 means it is well established and has over the years evidenced robust challenge and scrutiny.

The social work landscape is probably the busiest it has ever been with so many strategic drivers in all our service areas. It is difficult at times to fully grasp the impact

of all the new developments, policies and agendas that come across the desk of a CSWO. This said it is vitally important that as leaders we can engage in strategic discussions so that we can influence policy and share any concerns we may have. As CSWO I attend fortnightly CSWO meetings where all 32 CSWO's from across Scotland discuss a very full agenda and offer our views around new initiatives and the potential impact this will have, changes to legislation and any other relevant business. The Head of Adult Services who deputises as CSWO also attends and chairs groups at a national level that involve adult mental health and drug and alcohol groups. As CSWO I also chair the Social Work Scotland Children and Family standing committee which is a national group of not just social workers, but others involved in children and families work. In addition, many service managers across the three areas are involved in national arenas thereby sharing their own experiences and gaining knowledge and information from others which may be helpful in improving their own areas of work.

Within the last CSWO report I advised that we were in the early stages of developing a Social Work Assurance Group (SWAG). I am pleased to report this group is now established as of May 2023, with a Terms of Reference and agreed membership. As CSWO I chair the group and have the deputy CSWO as well as two service managers in attendance. The very busy agenda allows us to track progress on recent inspections ensuring that improvement plans are progressing. The remit of the group shall over time evolve to include other aspects of scrutiny and assurance. Currently the group provides strategic assurance, governance and scrutiny to Directors, Chief Executive and where appropriate elected members on the progress of actions derived from Care Inspections, significant complaints and audit work. The group also provides leadership to create a culture of transparency and openness to support learning and practice improvement as well as overseeing the approval of policies within children and families and adult services.

Duty of Candour:

All social work 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 Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016, the people affected understand what has happened, receive an apology and the organisations learn from the experience and put in place improvements.

An important part of this duty is the requirement for organisations to provide an annual statement detailing how the duty of candour is implemented across services. Between 1st April 2023 and 31 March 2024, there has been one incident in a care home where it was deemed that the duty of candour be applied.

Resources:

Financial pressures continue for both local authorities and health services with demands ever increasing. As the fastest growing local authority in Scotland the increase in families and older people residing within our communities is growing at a rate that far outweighs our resources.

Within Children's Services the picture is very similar to last year with a continued shortage of foster carers across both the local authority and Scotland coupled with the ever-increasing demand upon us being mandated to receive unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) which is placing significant pressure on local resources.

As a local authority our budget was approved in February 2024 with Children's Services budget agreeing to a 5.5% increase in foster fees for 2024/25, this was in addition to the new Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA) being agreed and partially funded by Scottish Government. The SRA ensures that both foster carers and kinship carers receive a standard allowance payment which is consistent across Scotland.

As reported last year the ongoing concerns around ring fenced or short-term funding streams do not promote confidence for future planning within services. The demands on children and adult services are ever increasing in Midlothian due to the population growth therefore budgets need to be aligned to this growth.

As CSWO I attend budget setting meetings in both the Council and the IJB and would assess that there are sufficient processes in place that allow me to share or voice any concerns around potential efficiencies that would impact or increase the risk to those we work with. I have monthly meetings with my Chief Executive and regular meetings with the Director of Health & Social Care which offers me the opportunity to raise any such concerns.

Within adult social care there are significant budget pressures one of which is attributable to demographic pressures within the learning disability population. These pressures arise from a combination of an increasing number of young people with complex needs transitioning to adult services and increased life expectancy. Steps are being taken to ensure we have clearer and more consistent approach to the transitioning of young people with additional support/complex needs into adult services and that our planning and budgeting are more transparent within all 3 service areas, children, education and adult services.

Workforce:

Maintaining a consistent and skilled workforce has been another significant challenge particularly in the social care sector however social work has also been impacted. Within Midlothian we are fortunate to have a dedicated practice learning and development team which consists of a range of highly skilled and experienced trainers, practitioners, assessors and administrative staff. The team skills are diverse and cover a range of training areas and development opportunities. Although the team sits under the Head of Adult Social Care, it also reports into other directorates including Children and Families services and Education due to the range of training delivered to staff in these service areas.

Developing the workforce continues to be a key priority for both Children's Services and the Health & Social Care Partnership in Midlothian. From April 2023 to April 2024 there has been an improved focus on the learning and development frameworks across both areas. A new Learning and Development Practitioner was recruited in October 2023 for Children's Services who has undertaken a full review of the learning requirement

of the current staffing in post and what the service needs going forward. This has seen an increased investment in Open University Social Work Modules working towards a degree in Social Work. Also experienced social workers and team leaders undertaking a range of post qualifying courses including Child Welfare and Protection, Practice Education, Leadership and Management along with PG Cert Young People in Conflict with the Law.

Adult Services review of learning has seen an increase in interest and commitment to Practice Education (PE) and Leadership and Management through both Napier and Stirling University. This increased uptake of PE has enabled the services to host more social work students on placement which has always assisted in encouraging newly qualified social workers to come and join Midlothian following their positive practice placements with Midlothian Council.

In addition, we have an ongoing successful completion of social workers completing the Mental Health Officer training each year. 2 social works completed it last year and one about to complete this year with another social worker commencing in August 2024.

The SVQ Assessment centre continues to deliver a range of programmes across SCQF frameworks from level 5 up to SCQF 8 for our social care staff across Adult and Children's services. This includes Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships for Health and Social Care as well as Children and Young people. In the last year we have had a total of 87 people completing awards across these levels with an additional 111 currently undertaking an award. There is still a significant waiting list of 76 people across services, but this is due to the increased change of staffing because of the impact of Covid and staff leaving and retiring. An investment in an SVQ assessor is being developed to meet this demand to ensure all staff meet the registration and qualification requirements in the appropriate timescale for the SSSC registration.

The Learning and Development team has a dedicated Trauma development worker who commenced in January 2023 and has delivered training to a wide range of staff across Midlothian as follows: -

- Total number trained: 558 participants
- Total number of training events – 53 training events
- Level 1 - 446 participants
- Level 2 - 112 participants

The Trauma strategy focusses on working towards a more Trauma informed community in Midlothian. The training has been well received and staff are feeling more confident in supporting people who may have experienced Trauma in their lives.

Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS): The team continue to support the NQSWSs and facilitate face to face sessions which prove to be the most popular and effective forum. The team continue to work with East Lothian to offer a bi-monthly joint session for NQSWSs across authorities, this has been well received and evaluated.

Social Work student placements:

- We provided a total of 13 student social work placements within this time, from the OU, Stirling, Edinburgh and Napier courses as well as 3 Occupational Therapy student placements.
- 1 sponsored student completed their SW training within this time.
- We had 20 NQSWs during this timeframe.
- 6 members of staff completed the Link Worker course.
- 2 members of staff completed the Stirling Practice Educator course within this time.
- 2 members of staff completed the Leadership & Management course at Stirling and 3 completed the Child Welfare & Protection Course.
- 2 staff members completed their Mental Health Officer training and 1 applying for this year.

Overall, there is an ongoing dedicated commitment to invest and develop our Social Work and Social Care workforce – providing all the mandatory training necessary for individual roles as well as opportunities to develop their career increasing retention levels enabling Midlothian to have highly skilled and experienced workers across both Adult and Children’s services.

Adult Mental Health Social Work Team:

Drug and Alcohol

Drug Related Deaths (DRD) and Alcohol Specific Deaths are published by the National Records of Scotland and both reports will provide a detailed analysis of the Drug and Alcohol deaths at national, health board and local authority level.

DRD published report is due for publication in August 2024, on receipt of this the services will continue to review locally through our DRD group and take any recommendations forward.

The next published report for Alcohol Specific Deaths is due in August 2024.

The Midlothian Substance Use Service [MLSUS], Mid and East Lothian Drugs [MELD] and Health In Mind Peer Support as part of Mid and East Lothian Drug and Alcohol Partnership (MELDAP) services continue to implement and progress the Medication Assisted Treatment [MAT] Standards. The services were evaluated against the Mat standards implementation team, and it is predicted that the services continue to demonstrate sustainable implementation of MAT 1-5. As MAT 6-10 is being rolled out over years 2024 and 2025, the services have been predicted provisional green which is the highest score for this year required by the Scottish Government by March 2024.

Midlothian Services continues to deliver substantial harm reduction work to mitigate the harm associated with substance uses in line with the national priority. Due to the changing picture of substance use in Midlothian, East and Midlothian Drug and Alcohol Partnership (MELDAP) along with both Mid and East Lothian services, developed and formed an ‘Emergence of Psychoactive Substances’ group to deal with ‘crisis’ events driven by these new substances. This group links to Lothian wide concerns, themes and emerging patterns and national warnings, through RADAR. This group has been

proactive and positive in sharing intelligence to deal with specific new trends through amending key harm reduction messaging and introducing other measures such as the use of drug testing strips.

MELDAP continue to commission a range of services in Midlothian which are designed and tailored to best meet individual needs and enable them to remain in treatment for as long as they wish to, empowering the individual to reach their person-centred goals and to safely manage their substance use and promote their own recovery. Services continue to engage and support families and carers to address and support their needs.

Mental Welfare Commission reports

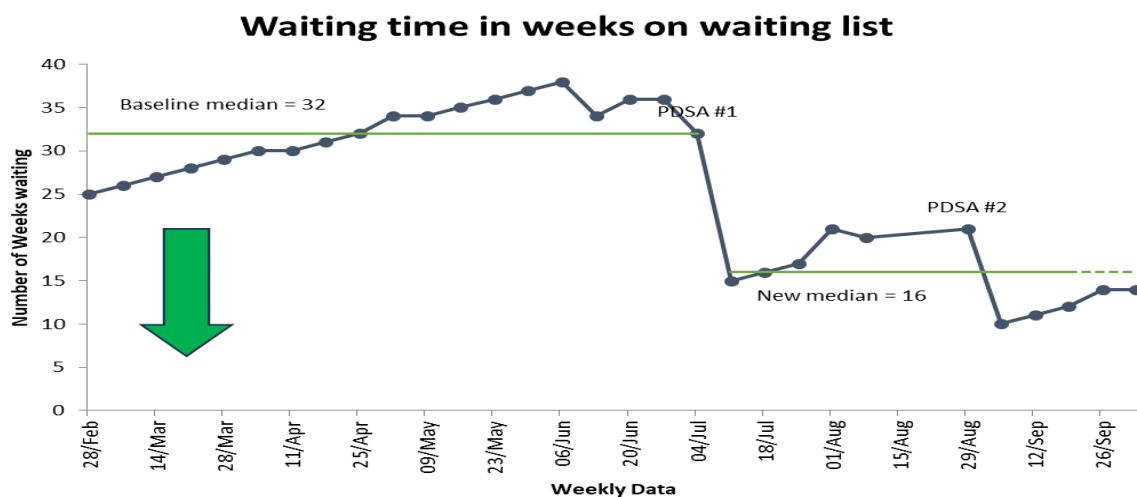
During 23/24 Midlothian HSCP has received 7 Mental Welfare Commission (MWC) Reports. Within each report there are key finding areas in which Midlothian Mental Health Services, both NHS and Council need to benchmark against and implement recommendations and findings

Fuller details are embedded within a report received by the Council and NHS. In the main Midlothian HSCP continues to benchmark positively against the reports received by the MWC and any gaps in areas identified are highlighted and improvement work progressed to meet the recommendations. Midlothian HSCP can provide assurance via the Social Work Assurance (SWAG) on the delivery of all recommendations from the Mental Welfare Commission.

Adult with Incapacity (AWI)

Midlothian Mental Health Leads over the last year have made significant improvements to the management of AWI, ensuring individuals wishes are respected and they are not waiting for long periods of time in places that do not meet their needs.

There has been a commitment to reduce the waiting time for Guardianship applications and improve our local processes. We have increased our Mental Health Officer capacity, and this can be seen to correlate against our improved waiting list times. June 2023 saw a significant investment into the management of waiting times with a 50% reduction in the mean waiting time from 32 weeks to 16 weeks. (See chart below)



Positive outcomes:

- Provide consistency of practice to the client and their family.
- Enable the case to be closely monitored and reviewed by the original allocated social worker to ensure the other social work tasks are undertaken timeously.
- MHO engagement at the right time.
- promotes an improved and timely approach to adults with incapacity.

Improvement work this year focused on data and the recording of the data. In partnership with the performance team, the development and implementation of a new recording form ‘CC MH Guardianship Application Record’ within our electronic record system enables robust monitoring of the referrals and ownership of each referral and current waiting times. This provides the necessary oversight and management of AWI and assists in maintaining low waiting times.

During 2023/2024, 80 Guardianship orders were granted- relating to 77 individuals
Current Guardianship waiting lists include 17 individuals (LA = 4, Private = 13)

Local training sessions have been developed on AWI which will be rolled out across all social work and social care teams, to enhance staff’s awareness and role within AWI.

The Learning Disability Team:

Investment in the housing, specialist support and training aspects of the support for people with complex needs related to learning disability and autism continues to pay dividends. Midlothian remains the area with the fewest inappropriate placements of the 32 partnerships and the lowest rate of people in urgent categories on Dynamic Support Register as detailed in the latest Public Health Scotland (PHS) publication ‘Insights into Learning Disabilities and Complex Needs: Statistics for Scotland’.

Several of the housing elements of the Strategic Redesign of Learning Disability Services in Midlothian have moved on significantly. These developments are designed to support people, regardless of the level, range and complexity of need, to live independently with the same choice, control, and protection as any other citizen, in an environment that enables them to stay safe and empower them to participate in their

local community. Building and care tenders are well underway for four people with a profound and multiple learning disability to move into Primrose Lodge in Loanhead in Autumn 2024. The main part of the building will be occupied by four tenants as their permanent home and there are two further bedrooms that will be used for respite and short breaks for people with similar needs.

St Cuthbert's, a newly built development of eight single tenancies in the centre of Bonnyrigg, will be ready for occupation mid-June. The tenants will be a diverse group of young neurodiverse people, and their support will be highly individualised and tailored to their particular needs, strengths and interests. Many will be young people in their first tenancy and there will be a strong focus on enhancing and transforming the health and wellbeing of tenants using innovative digital technologies.

Making Choices Keeping Safe Midlothian is designed to support young people who expose themselves to risk whilst navigating the complex world of relationships and social media. It is a series of themed workshops developed and designed around the lived experience of six young people with the aim of supporting them to stay safe whilst promoting their right to healthy relationships and a full life. The project demonstrates the value of partnership working and early intervention by bringing together the different perspectives of the young people themselves, their families and carers, the social work learning disability team, Police Scotland, The Enable Local Area Coordination Service, The community learning disability team and third sector providers to understand the issues and develop a response that was uniquely designed to meet the needs of the young adults. Initial evaluation, as well as sustained attendance by the participants, has evidenced that the workshops are both popular and effective. The next course for a group of young men is currently underway.

The Pavilion Project is an imaginative developmental day opportunities programme for neurodiverse young adults with complex needs for whom group day services aren't suitable. A close collaboration between the learning disability social work and community health teams, Midlothian Leisure, Midlothian day services, and a number of third sector providers has created a programme of highly individualised, developmental opportunities for young neurodiverse adults which builds upon their skills and discovers new interests. To date the partnership has delivered 260 regular sessions of developmental community activity for 12 young people with complex needs. Time to reflect on the impacts of the work and contribute to setting subsequent aims as the activity develops and grows is central to the long-term success of this work and tailoring the right support for people with the most complex needs who are making the transition to adult life.

The transition development worker has now been in post for six months. A transition working group with cross sector participation has now been convened to oversee the development and delivery of a range of work streams and actions aimed at improving the process for young people transitioning from Children's Services to Adult Services. This group is supported by a young person's group and a parent carer group which are now both established.

Carers

The HSCP has continued to work with and invest funding in third sector partners to expand the offer and range of opportunity for support within the community for unpaid carers. VOCAL, carer support and carer centre, have led new service developments expanding services to develop locality provision; promote and support future planning including Power of Attorney; and increasing community capacity to support carers at the beginning or wherever they connect with support on their caring journey. The range of engagement from very early intervention via grass-root activities, though to specialist support with issues such as legislative orders has seen Third Sector partners work collaboratively to deliver the diverse range of support needed.

Self-Directed Support (SDS)

Development of social work practice in relation to Self-Directed Support continues to be an important area of work. An SDS planning officer is taking forward the implementation of SDS standards within Midlothian. Work is being progressed in several priority areas for development that includes support planning, resource allocation systems and a system of accountability.

Drug and Alcohol Related Deaths

Midlothian Substance Use services continue to make on going improvements to continue the delivery of the 90% target for A 11 (A11 all individuals accessing services will be seen within 21 days from point of referral) Q2 and Q3, seen the services working towards improvement of 90%, where in Q4 Midlothian's performance has been maintained at 100%. The services continue to provide direct access to timely and appropriate treatment that best meets an individual's needs, psycho-social support and peer led support for those affected by their or other drugs and/or alcohol use.

Community Justice:

The model for Community Justice in Scotland came into operation on 1 April 2017, underpinned by the [Community Justice \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) (the Act), which places duties on those within our partnership to engage in community justice planning and to report against our nationally-determined outcomes.

In preparation of the new improvement plan a participation statement outlined those consultations over the course of the last year and those methods used to gain views. It was imperative to accurately reflect in the new improvement plan views of people most affected by Community Justice in our community.

The improvement plan seeks to support the Single Midlothian Plan within the community planning approach to work towards the objective "Making Midlothian Safer". The current Community Justice improvement plan will be delivered over the next five years (2023-2028) with 26 actions that align with the [National Strategy for Community Justice](#) which was published in summer of 2022 and the associated [Community Justice Performance Framework](#), published in March 2023.

Our improvement plan acknowledges the need for robust partnership relationships particularly in the context of budgetary restraints. Our strong emphasis in Community Justice is early intervention, the use of diversion and intervention at the earliest opportunity. We seek to provide the right support at the right time to reduce offending becoming a cyclical pattern.

Over the last year we have completed the restorative justice café programme. Midlothian continues to explore how to best use restorative justice offering greater continuity in approach across all services in the community justice partnership. Work progresses to enhance the voice of young people with partners from the third sector presenting collaboratively to schools with peers who have experienced the justice system. Continued strong links with our colleagues in Justice Social Work ensures that Community Justice can offer new opportunities for those navigating the justice system. Community Justice in Midlothian remains a preventative approach with the overarching goal to increase resilience for individuals and communities.

Your Chance to Change

The Your Chance to Change service continues to support men to undertake the Caledonian Men's domestic abuse perpetrator programme on a non-Court-mandated basis. Rebranded and relaunched in February 2023, staff have continued activity during 2023/2024 to promote the work of the service, which places responsibility for the abusive behaviour on the man, whilst providing hope that change is possible. The service currently supports a total of five men, which represents a 500% increase on the previous reporting period.

Women's Group Work Service – Midlothian Spring Service

Spring is a multi-disciplinary team which recognises the barriers to women accessing services. It provides a group work programme for women in Midlothian who may have experienced past or current trauma, may be struggling with their mental health and/or substance misuse and may be in contact with the Justice system.

During the reporting period, 43 women were referred to Spring. 5 women graduated during the reporting year. At the end of the reporting period there were 12 women actively involved with the group work programme. Future service development include the delivery of the phase one trauma intervention, Survive and Thrive, and the establishment of a national network of statutory services supporting women in the Justice field to share and develop best practice. Spring will celebrate its ten-year anniversary in June 2024 and staff and service users have been planning for this. There are many accolades from users of the service that highlight the positive impact this service has had on people's lives by promoting their confidence, helping understand the trauma they suffered and how these impact on their emotions.

Community Payback Orders:

Over the reporting year 227 Community Payback Orders (CPO) were imposed; 154 with a supervision requirement and 149 with an Unpaid Work requirement.

Supervision: The aim is to reduce and manage the risk of re-offending, and of causing harm, through providing the individual with opportunities to engage in a process of change; with the aim of increasing their ability to desist from offending in the longer term. A range of supports is provided to clients including our 'Stride' programme focused on improving men's emotional management skills and decision making. We have also utilised a range of supports in the local community from partner services including Venture Trust, Substance Use Service, MELD, Skills Development Scotland, Midlothian Communities and Lifelong Learning Team and Health in Mind. This multi-agency approach to supporting individuals enable the development of individualised case management plans to effectively address the risk and needs associated with an individual's offending behaviour.

Unpaid work: During the reporting year the team completed 309 projects benefitting 236 beneficiaries. This requires working alongside social work teams, community groups and partner organisations to undertake work benefiting the most vulnerable in the Midlothian community. In addition to providing opportunities for clients to make reparation to local communities for their offending behaviour, the unpaid work team continue to deliver a range of training opportunities promoting rehabilitation and increase employability.

110 qualifications were gained by Unpaid Work clients. One development in the reporting year has been the establishment of a SVQ in Work Skills. To support us to increase our pathways to employability a member of staff qualified as an SVQ Assessor. She supported our first two service users to successfully complete this qualification. One of the individuals has used this qualification to successfully apply to college and is due to start a full-time course in August 2024.

Supervision of Throughcare Licences and CPOs:

Justice Social Work have continued to develop interventions and services to help people who need additional support to live and reintegrate into in their community and to be responsible citizens. The Justice Service have worked closely with colleagues from the Psychological Services Team to ensure that appropriate responses are taken with those with complex needs and to ensure that risk assessments and risk management plans are robust. This is achieved through weekly formulation sessions. Staff from the Justice Service also have access to clinical supervision with a psychologist to ensure that they are supported to manage the complexities of the work and reduce the risk of vicarious trauma.

No 11 Allocations Meeting: The Justice Service continues to work with partner agencies to ensure that individuals being liberated from custody have suitable accommodation and are fast-tracked into relevant services including recovery networks. We have consulted with service users to confirm what additional supports can be provided and in 2024-25 we will be working with Health in Mind and Change Grow Live to provide 'liberation packs' which will include practical items such as a phone, toiletries and contact details for local addiction and recovery services and support for health and wellbeing.

Bail Services: We have continued our commitment to provide early intervention for those involved with the Justice system to help address presenting needs that may lead

to reoffending and to reduce the use of remand. During the reporting year we made the decision to bring the service in-house to ensure that we could provide a consistent level of service. During 2023-24 we completed 33 assessment reports for Supervised and/or electronic monitoring. 5 people were placed on supervised bail as an alternative option to remand. All 5 went on to successfully complete their supervised bail.

Children's Services:

In last year's report we advised of the worrying increase in referrals into social work. Over the past year we have undertaken a significant piece of work to ensure that only those referrals that meet the criteria for social work intervention are coming into the system, and other early supports are utilised for families in need. This has resulted in a significant reduction of referrals; however, child protection work remains high. Child protection work is complex and comes with a high level of risk, therefore it is imperative that the workforce is experienced and knowledgeable. Due to the workforce issues around being unable to recruit experienced workers this leaves us with a significant challenge. Therefore, whilst referrals have reduced due to other forms of intervention from the family wellbeing service being involved at an earlier point of contact, we are now looking at how we can better support those less experienced staff at the front end of the service.

Within the practice teams the workloads remain high and again the lack of experienced permanent members of staff is impacting on the service user experience. There remains a great deal of good work happening within all the teams' ensuring children and young people remain with their own families where it is safe and possible to do so and protecting families from identified risks such as domestic abuse, and drug and alcohol issues.

The Midlothian Housing Project is a successful approach we have adopted within Children's Services fully supported by the council. This approach ensures that care experienced young people who are moving on from care, move into a permanent tenancy with support. This approach takes time to build relationships and ensures the young person is ready to move before any agreement is made. To date over 30 young people have benefited from this project with no tenancy break downs. A very successful team and project.

.Child Protection and Looked After and Accommodated

During this reporting period we devised new Child Protection Procedures across Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian based on the National Child Protection Guidance (2021). These are now embedded in practice.

We have also continued to embed the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) into practice despite the lack of funding to backfill social workers who undertake extensive training to take on this role. Feedback is evidencing that the model is supporting better outcomes for children involved in child protection investigative processes. We are training a second person in this approach.

Our looked after and accommodated population of children and young people has remained fairly static over the year. Albeit can change on a day-by-day basis. Most

children who need to come into care go and live with family. Our child protection numbers over the reporting period have also remained relatively consistent. This data supports our early intervention and preventative approach whereby we are involved with families at an earlier point of contact and work with them to try and prevent a crisis. Our preventative supports such as family systemic practice and family group decision making, support families to better understand and work through concerns and to plan should things not work out.

Our Reviewing Officers offer quality assurance over all children's plans who are looked after away from home and those on a compulsory supervision order at home. They report to the senior management team on themes and trends they are observing through their chairing of both child protection and looked after meetings.

Hawthorn Family Learning Centre (HFLC)

Hawthorn Family Learning Centre continues to increase the number of children they work with circa 80 children a week. The manager and service manager both returned from maternity leave in the Autumn of 2023, which was very much welcomed. There have been some improvements made to the centre over the past reporting year. In July 2023 the centre was closed to allow it to be repainted and undertake work externally through refurbishing the play areas with new equipment and increasing the number of car parking spaces. A new kitchen makeover was also undertaken. During this period staff and children moved to Mayfield primary school. Over the reporting period staff have undertaken 142 outings with children, provided £400 worth of food vouchers as well as supplying winter coats and appropriate footwear to children and parents. The dedicated income maximisation worker who attends the centre on Mondays and Fridays, supported parents to ensure they were receiving the correct benefits amounting to £65k extra income for the families by then end of December 2023. This invaluable support also assists parents with debt and money advice.

Children with additional support needs

Year on year we continue to see a rise in the number of children and young people who have additional support needs. This remains an area of significant growth across both children's services and education. Our health colleagues at CAMHS have developed two waiting lists one which is for those children and young people with significant mental health issues and the other for those children and young people awaiting a neurodevelopment assessment. The waiting times for those with significant mental health concerns are reported into Scottish Government and regularly scrutinized. The other waiting list for children and young people awaiting on a neurodevelopmental (ND) assessment is not reported on to Scottish Government and currently within Midlothian the waiting list adds around 200 children and young people's names to it every quarter. There is real concern that children will be 'aged out' before ever being seen by a clinician.

These concerns are raised at our local children's planning board and relayed to Scottish Government. Work is being undertaken to consider what early interventions and training can be offered to staff to support families whilst they sit on this lengthy waiting list.

Going forward we are recruiting an experienced service manager to have an overview of disability who shall help us develop a pathway for children affected by disability that ensures all services have clearer awareness as to how many children and young people we need to be planning for within children services, early years and education and into adult services.

Self- Directed support (SDS) is available if families meet the criteria, however demand for services far outstrips availability. Going forward we aim to plan for future need by better understanding the demand so that we have sufficient funding and resources in place.

Family Wellbeing Service

In January 2023, the Family Wellbeing Service (FWS) was created to provide holistic family support to families across Midlothian. The Family Wellbeing Service is one Midlothian's tangible ways of bringing The Promise, The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and the Strategic Equity Fund to life. The Service works with families, schools, health and third sector partners to provide holistic support with the aim of supporting families as early as possible and preventing children and young people requiring input from statutory children's services.

Over 23/24 the FWS engaged with:

- 309 children referred to Team Around the Child (TATC)
- 164 children progressed to allocation in FWS
- 161 children allocated to FWS at year end
- 477 food packs provided to families

Data highlighted that there was a similar number of early years/primary school aged children compared to high school aged children referred to the service.

Data collection processes have been reviewed and amended for 2024-25 to enable better data collection and evidence of outcomes of intervention. This includes the staff team being trained in the use of Outcomes star measures to enable qualitative data from families and routine feedback.

Good news stories from the last year

- * 84% of children referred based on school attendance had improved attendance during and at the end of the intervention.
- * An 11-year-old was supported to return to school after 5 months of absence
- * A young person increased their attendance from 6% to 44%
- * A Mum who struggled with her mental health was supported to get a diagnosis of ADHD and reports this has improved her self-esteem, self-image and ability to seek support.
- * A Dad who struggled to meet people was supported to engage with therapeutic support and talk about his feelings.

Family Centered Care

This year has continued to see a high level of staff turnover within this service which has impacted on our performance. The Care Inspectorate arrived in September 2023

to inspect, fostering, adoption and continuing care. The manager of the service had only been acting into the post for a few months at the time of this announcement. The outcome of the inspection was deemed to be 'adequate' which was very disappointing for the team members to hear. This was mainly due to the high turnover of staff, which had impacted on our development and quality assurance work, coupled with our communications with carers not being as good, due to staffing issues. This said there were many positives around children being loved and well cared for within their foster care households. There was an acknowledgement that carers knew the children well in their care and relationships were built on empathy, compassion and trust. There was also cognizance that staff and carers worked hard at keeping siblings together where possible.

A robust improvement plan is in place, and this is overseen at the SWAG meetings to ensure everything is on track. We have ensured that regular communications with carers is in place. In October 2023, Scottish Government approved the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for both foster carers and kinships carers and in February 2024 Midlothian Council agreed to a 5.5% increase to foster carer fees.

We have an ongoing recruitment campaign which focuses on general fostering but also considers how we can attract more carers for our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people given the growth in this area of work.

Residential Services

The two houses remain at capacity with demand far outstripping placements. Both Woodburn Court and Ladybrae staff continue to support young people beyond their time living within the houses, inviting young people back for dinner and supporting them as they move into their own tenancies. We have also had three unaccompanied asylum-seeking children residing within our houses over the reporting year. The young people have engaged in full time education and joined the local football clubs as well as being supported to attend their local Mosque. The positive impact of living in a safe and nurturing environment has resulted in many of our young people going into further education with one gaining an apprenticeship in a garage.

Young Carers

We have a Young Carers project plan and at the start of the academic year in 2023 there were 226 young carers registered on SEEMIS, the school recording system a 23.5% increase. The plan illustrates the progress the small team are making in supporting young carers. In August 2023 a full time adult young carer was appointed resulting in 43 young adults (16–25-year-olds) being identified and supported via 1-1 support and supporting them to access social outings.

Keeping the Promise & Corporate Parenting

The Promise work continues to drive forward our children's services improvements. Over the reporting year we have continued to work on the promise plan 21-24 set out under the five headings of the Plan. Across Scotland reports evidence that the number of children coming into care is reducing with a 20% reduction in children being looked

after since 2015-16. Further positives are that 82% of looked after children experience no change to their placement and whilst there remains work to do in relation to the remaining 18% who do experience multiple placements this number is decreasing. There are many positives to report however equally there remains a lot of work to do to make sure there is equity for all children across Scotland.

On the 28th of June 2023, we launched our Promise Guarantee which has been established to promote our commitment to our care experienced young people, ensuring they have an opportunity to gain valuable work experience throughout the council and beyond. There remains a lot of work to get this piece of work underway. We have met on several occasions and agreed that initially we shall only be considering care experienced young people within Midlothian as we do not have sufficient resource to go wider at this time. However, our ambition is to broaden the scope of this project over the coming years.

“Our future priorities include the implementation of our Promise Guarantee which strengthens our existing commitment to care experienced young people in that those who wish to work with the Council, to gain valuable work experience including a guaranteed interview, can do so. Our Elected Members and Senior Officers have also offered a number of mentoring and ‘shadowing’ opportunities should young people and any care leavers wish to know more about the respective roles”

Our Corporate Parenting Plan requires a refresh therefore we have commissioned Who Cares? Scotland to establish a new participation strategy to support us in refreshing our existing Champs Board and Corporate Parenting Plan.

Whole system approach – children in conflict with the law

The partnership approach to children and young people in conflict with the law continues to grow, and over the last year we have re-formed the Task Action Coordination Group. This fortnightly meeting aids a partnership response to anti-social behaviour. This approach has once again evidenced a reduction in the number of young people being referred to Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) on offence grounds. The 23/24 data informs us that despite there being a slight increase in the number of referrals being made to SCRA the number of those based on offence grounds involving children has significantly decreased. This is a clear example of how early and effective interventions can be successful.

Mental Health

The Midlothian Children & Young People’s Mental Health Strategic Planning Group oversees the allocation of funding and the delivery of early action and prevention services through its administration of the Community Support & Services Framework (Mental Health & Wellbeing) – a funding tranche distributed to local authorities from Scottish Government on an annual basis.

Achievements in supporting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing in 23/24. The Midlothian Children & Young People’s Mental Health Strategic Planning Group oversees the allocation of funding and the delivery of early action and prevention services through its administration of the Community Support & Services

Framework (Mental Health & Wellbeing) – a funding tranche distributed to local authorities from Scottish Government on an annual basis.

Between April 2023 and March 2024 the Framework funded 263 children and young people and 103 family members/carers to access supports and services. Beneficiaries have reported improvements to mental health and wellbeing, to self-esteem and resilience, and to school attendance and learning engagement following their participation in a range of activities including art therapy, supported play therapy and outdoor play, family counselling and mindfulness programmes; as well as a series of targeted and highly personalised creative development placements aimed at those excluded from school or at great risk of being so.

Further Scottish Government funding is provided for the ongoing delivery of a commissioned School Counselling Service which provided one-to-one support to 297 children and young people during the same period, with many more assisted via weekly school drop-in sessions.

Public Protection Arrangements

The East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee (EMPPC) is the local strategic partnership that is responsible for the overview of policy and practice in relation to Adult Support and Protection, Child Protection, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and Violence Against Women and Girls. The primary aim of the Committee is to provide leadership and strategic oversight of Public Protection activity and performance across East Lothian and Midlothian. In the year, it discharged its functions through quarterly meetings of the following Sub-groups:

- Performance and Quality Improvement Sub-group – responsible for the oversight and governance of the performance framework and quality assurance arrangements.
- Learning and Development Sub-group – responsible for the development and delivery of the EMPPC Multi-agency Learning and Development Strategy.
- Learning Review Sub-group – responsible for the oversight of progress of Learning Reviews undertaken in relation to Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection, development and review of the progress of action plans arising from Learning Reviews and oversight of local Learning Review arrangements.
- East Lothian and Midlothian MAPPA Group – responsible for ensuring that the statutory responsibilities placed on local partner agencies for the assessment and management of risk posed by offenders subject to MAPPA are discharged effectively.
- Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Group – responsible for supporting the delivery of the Equally Safe Strategy and overview of local delivery of services.

Through the Critical Services Oversight Group (CSOG), the Chief Officers of our core partners (Councils, NHS and Police) provide strategic leadership, scrutiny, governance and direction to EMPPC. In the year, CSOG continued to be co-chaired by Grace Vickers, Chief Executive of Midlothian Council and her counterpart in East Lothian.

Strategic leaders and operational managers from Midlothian Council and Midlothian Health and Social Care Partnership are represented across all the groups mentioned above. The Chief Social Work Officer has chaired the Performance and Quality Improvement Sub-group since its inception in 2014. In addition, over the past year, staff from Midlothian Council and Health and Social Care Partnership have supported the delivery of multi-agency training in Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection training.

In the past year, CSOG and EMPPC undertook a review to ensure strong arrangements for our Public Protection work. Senior Leaders from Midlothian who are directly involved in the work of EMPPC engaged with the following:

- CSOG reviewed its existing structure and function, with the support of our Care Inspectorate link inspectors, using the Chief Officers Public Protection Induction Resource materials as a framework for this work. CSOG re-stated its commitment to the continuation of a Public Protection Committee across the two local authority areas. This work has led to streamlined membership, with greater clarity of roles, decision making process and improved reporting processes.
- EMPPC held a developmental session in November 2023, which supported a strengthening of its arrangements. This resulted in a welcome addition of two new sub-groups for Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection from April 2024.
- A welcome addition in the year was a new standard agenda item for EMPPC members to update EMPPC on developments, operational context and risk from the perspective of their agency.
- A Learning Review Sub-group was introduced to provide closer scrutiny over and governance of Learning Reviews for Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection.

EMPPC Business Plan

The EMPPC Business Plan details the key actions that were progressed during the past year, under the following five priorities/themes:

1. We will continue to strengthen our leadership arrangements in Public Protection
2. We will provide and support the implementation of multi-agency procedures and guidance for staff working in Public Protection.
3. We will continue to develop our performance framework and approach to quality improvement.
4. We will promote a learning culture by providing staff with multi-agency learning and development opportunities in Public Protection.
5. We will raise awareness of Public Protection through communications and engagement with staff and communities.

Given the breadth and scope of the Public Protection arrangements, this resulted in a plan of 51 actions. Progress of actions were kept under close review by EMPPC

and CSOG, with a prioritisation exercise during the year to address staffing gaps and resource pressures, effectively managing risk and reduced resources.

Joint Inspection of Adult Support and Protection in Midlothian

In January 2024, we received notification of a joint inspection of Adult Support and Protection in Midlothian, with the first Professional Discussion taking place in March 2024, and multi-agency Position Statement was prepared in the early part of the year. The inspection carried on into the new financial year, with the final report being published in June 2024. The findings will be reported in the next Annual Report, but I can report a strong level of confidence and assurance about the Adult Support and Protection work that is undertaken in Midlothian.

I recognise the significant amount of partnership work undertaken by staff and senior leaders across our core partner agencies in the preparation for, and involvement in inspection. In particular, the Committee and CSOG have acknowledged the continual cycle of inspection across the Police 'J' Division, which includes West Lothian and Scottish Borders, and for NHS Lothian, which includes City of Edinburgh and West Lothian.

The EMPPC Partnership was also involved in two external inspections in the past year in East Lothian and across them all, there are common themes in areas for improvement, which will feature in our planning for the coming year:

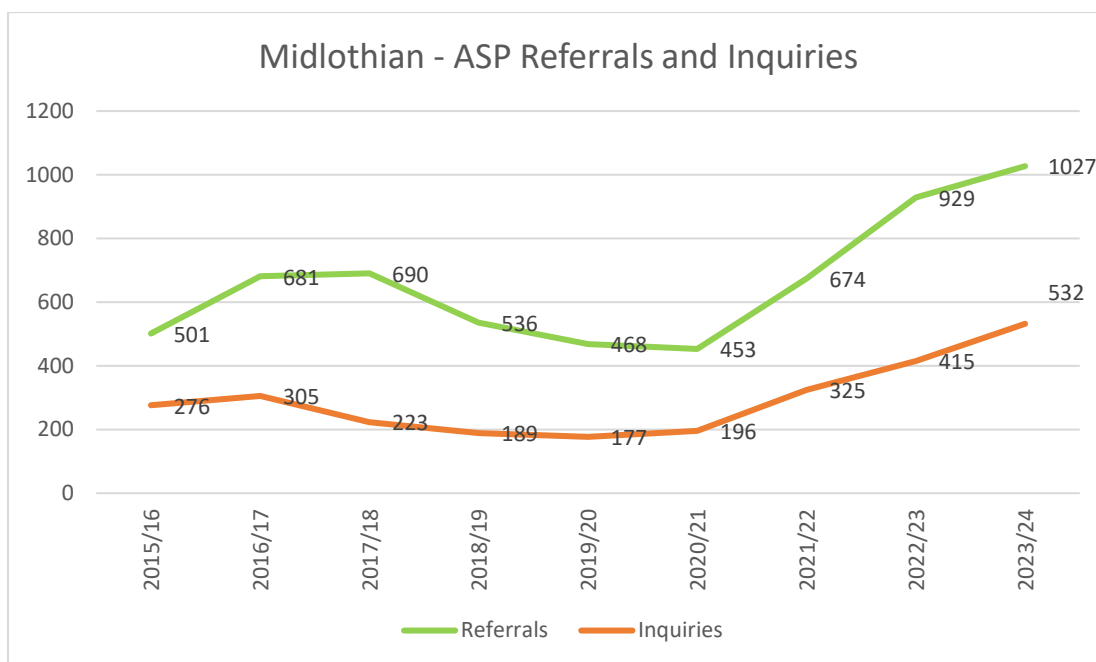
- Seeking, collating and using the views of children, families and adults involved in Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection Processes to inform service improvements.
- Developing a multi-agency approach to audit and quality assurance.

Data and Performance Information

Adult Support and Protection

The graph below shows an increase in Adult Support and Protection referrals for the third year in a row, with a doubling of referrals since the first year of the pandemic. There was an increase by 10.55% in 2023/24 from the previous year. Inquiries similarly increased for the third year in a row, by 28.19% in the last year. There has been no corresponding increase in Council Officer resource in that period, and no publicity campaigns to encourage referrals about Adult Support and Protection. However, we know from the wide range of referral sources in Midlothian that there is good awareness of the need to refer concerns. This seems to be line with the national picture of increasing referrals.

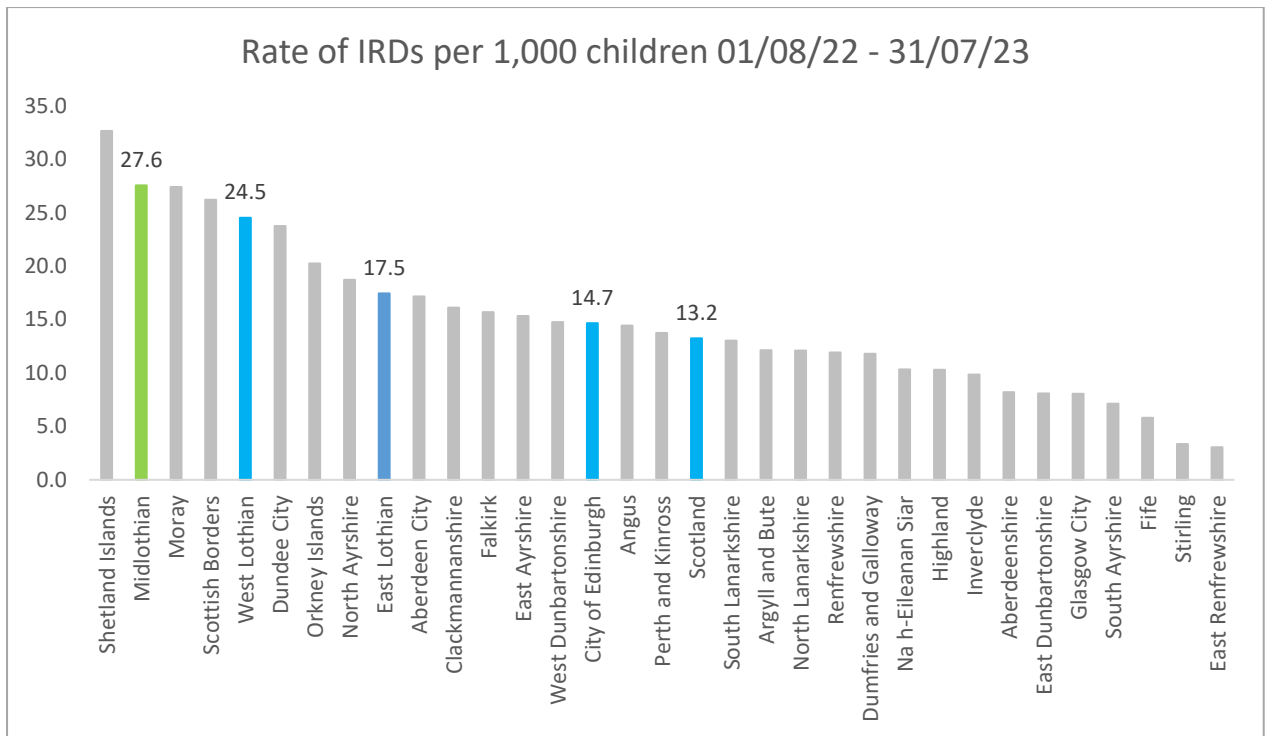
Following receipt of any referral to Adult Social Work to the Midlothian Council Contact Centre, the referral is screened by the dedicated Adult Support and Protection Team, within a standard 24 hours of receipt. The performance in meeting this standard has been excellent over a number of years now, with a well embedded system in place.



EMPPC implemented revised Multi-agency Adult Support and Protection Procedures in November 2023. This brought our Adult Support and Protection practice in line with the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 Code of Practice which was updated in 2022. A key achievement in Midlothian was moving to one inquiry for Adult Support and Protection, supported by improvements to our social work system recording templates. There is strong operational management oversight of Adult Support and Protection work in Midlothian. In Midlothian we also successfully introduced the National Minimum Dataset for Adult Support and Protection from July 2023.

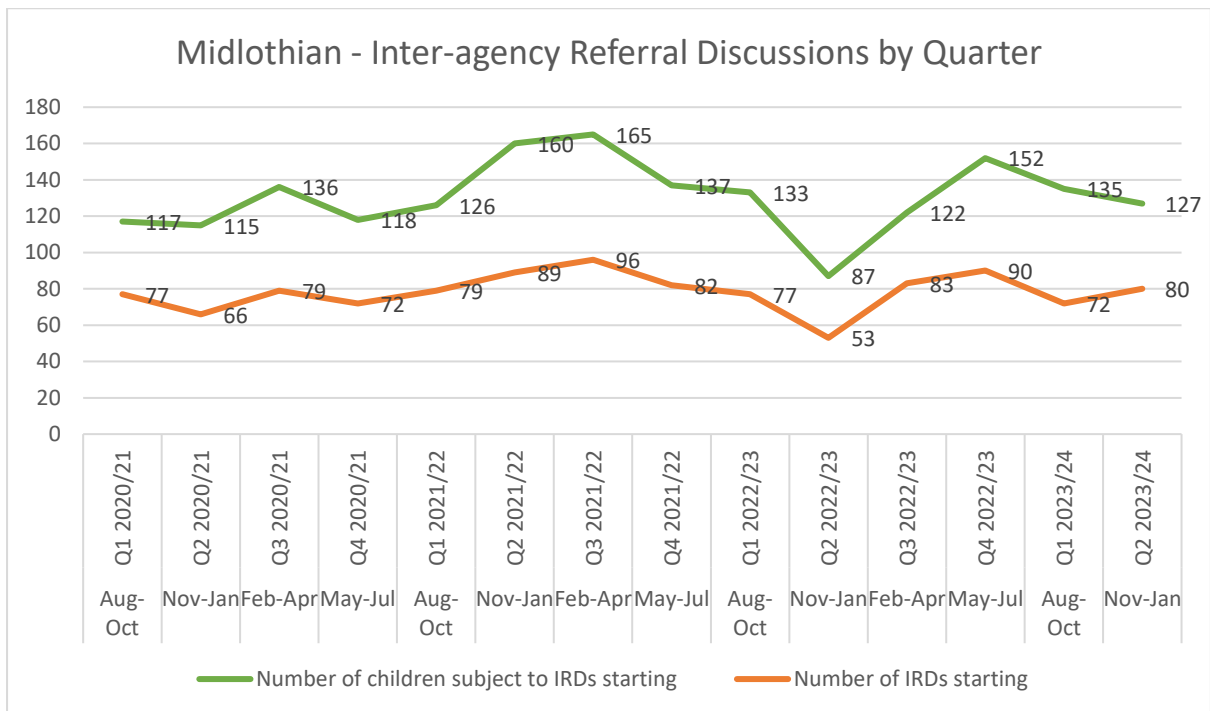
Child Protection

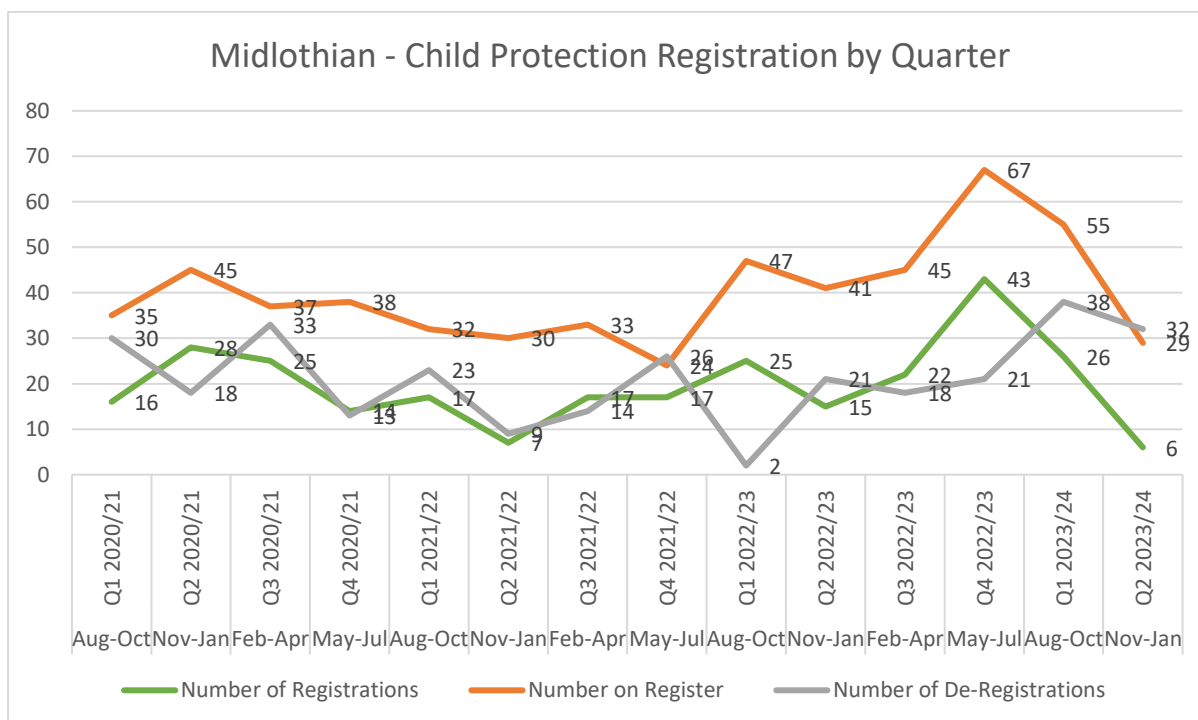
The Scottish Government published the Children’s Social Work Statistics 2022-23 – Child Protection on 26th March 2024. This covers data on children subject to Child Protection processes. The data relate to the reporting period 1st August 2022 to 31st July 2023. From the table below, we can see that the number of Inter-agency Referral Discussions (IRDs) again remained significantly higher than the Scottish average, but with a slight reduction from 31.9 per 1,000 the previous year. The higher rate has been regularly scrutinised through the EMPPC Performance and Quality Improvement Sub-group. We can see that the corresponding rates of our local partners (Edinburgh and the Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures) are also higher. Our local IRD processes are closely aligned to the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland. I am confident that our IRD processes are robust, with an IRD Overview Group meeting fortnightly to review IRDs and the interim safety plans and undertake quality assurance activity. Traditionally in Midlothian we see larger family groupings featuring in IRDs and Child Protection Planning Meetings.



[Note 1] Rate per 1,000 children for 2022 and 2023 is calculated using National Record Statistics mid-2021 population estimates (0-15 years). Rates may vary slightly from previous publications due to updated mid-year population estimates.

[Note 2] The rate shown in this table includes unborn children who are on the Register.





From the above table we can see there is no trend in Child Protection registration with a spike in Quarter 4, 2022/23 (April to June 2023). On discussion at our P&QI Sub-group although we did not identify any particular reason for this increase (i.e., there was no change in practice or process or specific campaigns) the high level of complexity of issues facing children locally in Midlothian and associated implications for service provision were recognised.

There is a very low number of children who are re-registered within Midlothian. Audits completed by Children’s Services’ Managers three months after a child’s name is removed from the Child Protection Register, provide assurance about the impact of supports and intervention for children subject to Child Protection processes.

We implemented the Edinburgh and the Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures in December 2023, and this is well embedded within Midlothian. We also introduced a new version of the Child Protection National Minimum Dataset. This now categorises concerns at Child Protection Registration by identifying vulnerability factors and impacts on/abuse of the child.

In Midlothian, the most frequently identified concerns included the following:

- Vulnerability factors - domestic abuse was the most frequently identified, which we believe reflects the embedding of the Safe & Together approach within Midlothian Children’s Services. The other two most frequently identified vulnerability factors were substance use (alcohol and/or drug use), and services finding it hard to engage.
- Types of harm - emotional abuse, neglect and physical abuse. There are some early signs that the implementation of the EMPPC Neglect Toolkit is supporting staff in their identification of neglect.

MAPPA

Quarterly reporting of MAPPA arrangements in Midlothian is made to the East and Midlothian Management Group (EMMG) Sub-group of EMPPC. The number of registered sex offenders being managed in the community on 31st March 2024 was 60. MAPPA is functioning efficiently and effectively, with no registered sex offenders reported for any sexual re-offending, and audits of MAPPA cases identifying strengths in risk management and partnership working.

Violence Against Women & Girls

Looking at the national figures, we estimate that over 3,500 children in Midlothian are likely to have experienced domestic abuse – these are children we all know in our nurseries, schools, health settings and community groups. The victims and perpetrators live and work in our communities and encounter our health and social work and social care services on a regular basis. The rates of incidents of domestic abuse in Midlothian have been higher than the Scottish average for the last two years up to March 2023, and higher in the three quarters of 2023/24 than the previous year. Domestic abuse as a vulnerability factor features most commonly at Child Protection Planning Meetings.

Each and every one of us who works and lives in Midlothian has a responsibility in challenging and tackling gender inequality and working together to improve outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people and communities in Midlothian. In recognition of this, partners in Midlothian came together to develop an Equally Safe in Midlothian Strategy, which was approved by the Community Planning Board in March 2024. This has been an important step in acknowledging and tackling gender-based violence and delivering the national Equally Safe Strategy needs, to be led and owned on a multi-agency basis, and across all services, not just the core services with operational responsibility for responding to domestic abuse. A Leadership Group was established, which the CSWO chairs, to take forward the priorities on a multi-agency basis.

We continue to deliver Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (Marac) in Midlothian as our key response to supporting the victims at the highest risk of domestic abuse. Marac is a local meeting where representatives from statutory and non-statutory agencies come together to discuss individuals at high risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse and develop safety plans to reduce risk and increase safety. There were 125 victims heard at Marac meetings in Midlothian in the year, a reduction of 12 from the previous year. To meet this demand, there were two additional Marac meetings, bringing the total number of Marac meetings to 15. 119 victims were female and six were male.

Looking Forward to 2024-25

I do not think we can underestimate the funding challenges that the coming years will bring. This coupled with the significant increase in our local population are going to result in some very challenging discussions and difficult decisions being made.

Work is well underway to look at a redesign of adult social work, bringing together the many small teams and developing a more holistic and flexible approach to those that require support from adult services.

Within children's services there will be a change in personnel as I retire from the organisation and a new Chief Officer comes into position.

Working with our colleagues in Adult Services and Education the new service manager shall help develop and improve our transition processes to ensure that young people transition between Children's Services, Education and Adult Services will do so in a seamless manner ensuring the right support at the right time. In addition, we shall be developing and monitoring our improvement plan for any inspections held over the coming year.

In terms of the wider context, we will track progress in respect of the development of the proposal for a National Care Service, as well as the many other pieces of legislation and policy that require input from CSWO's and others.

Conclusion

This report offers a high-level summary of some key developments, improvements and challenges across social work and social care services in Midlothian during 2023-24.

The operating environment for social work and social care remains both complex and fluid with a high degree of uncertainty regarding the future arrangements for service delivery and governance as well as a busy legislative and policy development landscape, challenges in relation to workforce capacity and availability, constrained resource availability and increased demand.

The report highlights clear challenges in relation to unmet need and a requirement to continue to improve timely access to services within our communities, ensuring that we prioritise a preventative approach. Maintaining a balance of focus and prioritisation of the provision of support for people in the community, alongside facilitation of prompt discharge from inpatient care, will be of critical importance in the coming year.

Despite the challenges social work and social care services face across Midlothian, in conjunction with our third sector providers we continue to evidence a high level of commitment in providing good quality care that empowers, supports and protects people.