

NHS Ayrshire & Arran



Meeting:	Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board
Meeting date:	Monday 6 October 2025
Title:	East Ayrshire Children's Services Plan annual report 2024-25
Responsible Director:	Craig McArthur, Director of East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership (EAHSCP)
Report Author:	Sina Currie, Senior Nurse Manager Integrated Children's Services, East Ayrshire Council (EAC)

1. Purpose

This is presented to the Committee for:

- Discussion

This paper relates to:

- Legal requirement
- NHS Board/Integration Joint Board Strategy or Direction

This aligns to the following NHSScotland quality ambition(s):

- Safe
- Effective
- Person Centred

2. Report summary

2.1 Situation

The Annual Report 2023/24 (the Report) is presented to meet the terms of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The legislation requires each local authority and the relevant Health Board to publish a report on the extent to which children and young people's services have been provided in line with the Plan and the extent to which delivery is integrated, focused on securing quality and value through preventative approaches and dedicated to safeguarding, supporting and promoting child wellbeing.

The Report is also presented to highlight and celebrate the strengths and talents of local children, young people and families that are fundamental to the vibrancy of our local communities and throughout the Report, children and young people's views, experiences and achievements are also showcased.

The Report sets out the outcomes that partners aspire to and how progress towards these is measured over the lifetime of the Plan. Measurement of improvement in

outcomes for children and young people is aligned to the Local Outcomes 2 of 5 Improvement Plan to ensure consistency of reporting and using a partnership approach to data.

2.2 Background

Children's Services Plans meet the terms outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and follow updated statutory guidance on children's services planning, effective from 1 April 2020. Accordingly, Children's Services Plans seek to improve outcomes for all children and young people by ensuring that local planning and delivery of services is integrated, focussed on securing quality and value through preventative approaches and dedicated to safeguarding, supporting and promoting child wellbeing.

The East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan 2023- 26 (the Plan) sets the local long term strategic intent for improvement in outcomes for all children and young people and is underpinned by a detailed Action Plan for the three-year period. The Action Plan reflects the priorities we have identified and outlines the actions and activities to be undertaken to help achieve the best outcomes for children and young people across East Ayrshire. The core motivation that influenced the development of the Plan was to ensure we continued to provide the best possible services for our children, young people and their families in order that they can flourish and experience the best possible outcomes.

In East Ayrshire, oversight of the Children's Services Plan rests with the Community Planning Partnership Board, with responsibility for strategic planning and continuous improvement activity delegated to the Executive leadership Group for Infant's, Children and Young People and managed on a shared basis with the Child Protection Committee (CPC). The Plan was approved by the Child Protection Committee and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in September 2023 and likewise also approved by the Community Planning Partnership Board in 2023 and considered by the NHS Ayrshire and Arran Board also in 2023. In line with statutory requirements, the Plan was shared with Scottish Government colleagues in September 2023.

2.3 Assessment

The stated vision of our Plan is to make East Ayrshire a place where all children and young people can grow up loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential. To ensure that the work we undertake, and the supports we provide, help every child to experience the best start in life and build the foundation for living well in the future, partners are working together towards the following priorities:

- Our Children and Young People feel respected, listened to and influence change.
- We are working collaboratively, reducing the impact of social and economic poverty on our Children and Young People.
- Our Children and Young People feel safe.
- Our Children and young people have the best start in life and achieve their potential.
- Our Children and Young People's Mental Health & Wellbeing is improving.

This Children & Young People's Annual Report 2024/25 details the improvements and progress which partners have made across the second year of the Plan to advance

our shared priorities. In doing so, the report also highlights and celebrates many of our young people's achievements, talents and contributions and provides examples of our partnership working successes and examples of the positive outcomes achieved for our children and young people. However, we recognise that there continue to be challenges and that partners need to work even more collaboratively together to ensure more positive outcomes for our children.

The Report details key service developments presented by partners from the reporting period including the Strategic Review of Children and Young People's Services, The Children at Risk of Harm Inspection, Early Intervention and Prevention initiatives as well as the Fairer Futures Partnership to support the Scottish Government's vision to eradicate child poverty.

Recommendations from the Strategic Review of Children's Service Leadership has now seen The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership evolve into the Executive Leadership Group chaired by the Chief Executive of East Ayrshire Council and supported by the Integrated Children's Services Group. This represents a significant step forward in ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people in East Ayrshire. By adopting a more integrated and outcome-focused approach, the Integrated Children's Services Partnership has the potential to transform service delivery and create lasting positive impacts for our infants, children and young people.

The Children at Risk of Harm Inspection was completed in March 2025. Inspectors gathered and reviewed evidence to provide a formal evaluation of quality indicator 2.1: impact on children and young people. The evaluation of the quality indicator was **Good** and the inspection highlighted many areas of strength. Overall, the inspectors recognised that the work of partners was making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people at risk of harm. It also identified a few areas for improvement to maximise wellbeing and ensure that children and families consistently have experiences and outcomes which are as positive as possible.

Officers have reviewed the Inspection Report in detail, along with survey returns and feedback from the record reading exercise, to pull out all those findings which have contributed to the overarching areas for improvement. This has led to the identification of 25 actions as part of a comprehensive response and action plan, which is presented at Appendix 2 of the annual report.

The Council and the Community Planning Partnership aspire to direct investment towards prevention, in order that people, including children and young people, can thrive in our communities, living inclusive and fulfilling lives. To support this the Council in February 2024, as part of the annual budget setting process, established, The Early Intervention and Prevention Fund. The initial year of this Fund has seen significant investment to support children and young people, including child poverty in communities through fairer futures partnerships, free and subsidised school meals, speech and language therapy for infants and early years, out of school support for children and young people with additional support needs, and clothing grants expanded to include 3 and 4 year olds.

The Scottish Government's current Programme for Government was published in September 2024 and set out the Scottish Government's four key priorities for 2024/25: one of these priorities was eradicating child poverty. East Ayrshire Fairer Futures Partnership is a partnership between the Council, third sector and Scottish

Government set up to support families living in poverty, by adopting a place-based approach that recognises the different challenges communities face. The partnership aims to reduce child poverty through testing and adopting locally determined and collaborative approaches, based on local needs and assets.

The Report sets out our progress under each of the priority areas through delivery examples and the presentation of a case study aligned to each priority area. The report also includes an overview of the Performance Framework and associated measures we are utilising to assess our progress in achieving our stated outcomes for each of the priority themes, with 2024/25 updates where these are available.

It is key to note the unprecedented number and breadth of delivery examples that were shared by partners and considered while developing the annual report. We have committed to producing reports that are as accessible and succinct as possible and therefore not all of these could be included in the document.

2.3.1 Quality/patient care

The Annual Report 2024/25 demonstrates our performance in relation to the five strategic priorities contained in the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan 2023-26 and highlights the improvements in outcomes that were achieved for children and young people in the reporting period 2024-25. We recognise that the need of our children and families is becoming more complex and that partners need to work even more collaboratively together to continue to ensure positive outcomes for our children.

2.3.2 Workforce

There are no workforce implications arising directly from the Report

2.3.3 Financial

There are no financial implications arising directly from the Report

2.3.4 Risk assessment/management

There are no risk implications arising directly from the Report.

2.3.5 Equality and diversity, including health inequalities

Recognising and advocating the rights of our children and young people directly contributes to ensuring equality and equity of opportunity in East Ayrshire.

2.3.6 Other impacts

The report directly supports East Ayrshire Council's overarching vision for our communities whereby; East Ayrshire is a place with strong, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high-quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people's needs.

This report directly supports the Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic Plan and vision to; Work together with all of our communities to improve and sustain wellbeing, care and promote equity.

The Report also reflects the work and progress of the priorities and actions outlined in our Children and Young People Services Plan 2023-2026 and demonstrates how all partners are contributing to advancing these key priorities.

2.3.7 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

Contributions from partner services and agencies alongside other stakeholders have been included in this report and the report itself is framed by a focus on the progress made by all partners against the 5 key priorities outlined in the East Ayrshire Children and Young People Services Plan 2023-2026. These priorities were directly shaped by children, young people and families through a series of engagement activities including questionnaires, online surveys and a programme of focus groups.

2.3.8 Route to the meeting

This has been previously considered by the following groups as part of its development.

- Executive Leadership Group for Infant's Children and Young People
- East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership Board – 18th September 2025

The Report will also be presented to members of the following Group:

- East Ayrshire Integration Joint Board future meeting.

2.4 Recommendation

For discussion. The Board is asked to receive and comment on the East Ayrshire Children and Young People Annual Report 2024-25 and take assurance from the ongoing work.

3. List of appendices (where required)

Appendix 1: East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan Annual Report 2024-2025



Community Planning in
EAST AYRSHIRE

DRAFT Children's Services Plan Annual Report 2024/25

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1. The First Word

Our children and young people in East Ayrshire bring life, vibrancy and joy to our communities. I have the privilege through the Council of being Children and Young People's Champion which means that on a regular basis, I get to see the achievements of our young people and also, for some of them, the challenges they face. Most of all I get to listen to the views and aspirations of our children and use my influence to embed their voices in the work of the Council.

As we take forward the implementation of the new legislation around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we are committed to embedding children's rights into everything we do. Over the past year, a particular focus has been on ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and valued. We want every child and young person – from the earliest years through to young adulthood – to have the opportunity to influence decisions, shape services, and see their views reflected in the way support is designed and delivered. It has been inspirational to hear from our young people about the small practical things that can make a difference not only in their lives, but in the lives of our communities.

Many of our children thrive with the support of families, schools and communities. Due to reasons such as poverty, disability or broken relationships, the needs of some of our children and families continue to be complex and need more targeted help. By working together across services, and by some of the actions outlined in this report, we are increasingly able to provide early help and support with the clear aim of improving outcomes. At the heart of this work is our commitment to supporting children and young people to be the best they can be and, wherever possible, to achieve their dreams.

The recent Children at Risk of Harm inspection recognised the strengths of partnership working across children's services and the volume of work undertaken to improve outcomes for our children. It also highlighted areas for improvement which we are addressing through a collaborative approach. Alongside this, we have strengthened our governance and decision-making structures to ensure that we can deliver the best possible outcomes for our children.

Through the Council's Early Intervention and Prevention Fund, and in response to the voices we hear, a number of important projects and initiatives have been supported, further enhancing the opportunities available to children and families. None of this progress would have been possible without the commitment, skill and dedication of the staff and partners who work tirelessly to make a difference.

Looking ahead, we will continue to celebrate the successes of our children and young people, recognising the strengths they bring, and ensuring they remain at the centre of all that we do.

Provost Claire Leitch

2. Introduction

Our Children and Young People's Services Plan articulates the outcomes that partners want to realise for all our children, young people and families over the three-year period 2023 – 2026 and highlights the commitment of partners to deliver these improved outcomes for children and young people through active participation in joint planning and delivery structures.

The stated vision of our Plan is to make East Ayrshire a place where all children and young people can grow up loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential. To ensure that the work we undertake, and the supports we provide, help every child to experience the best start in life and build the foundation for living well in the future, partners are working together towards the following priorities:

1. Our Children and Young People feel respected, listened to and influence change.
2. We are working collaboratively, reducing the impact of social and economic poverty on our Children and Young People.
3. Our Children and Young People feel safe.
4. Our Children and young people have the best start in life and achieve their potential.
5. Our Children and Young People's Mental Health & Wellbeing is improving.

This Children & Young People's Annual Report 2024/25 details the improvements and progress which partners have made across the second year of the Plan to advance our shared priorities. In doing so, the report also highlights and celebrates many of our young people's achievements, talents and contributions and provides examples of our partnership working successes and examples of the positive outcomes achieved for our children and young people. However we recognise that there continue to be challenges and that partners need to work even more collaboratively together to ensure more positive outcomes for our children.

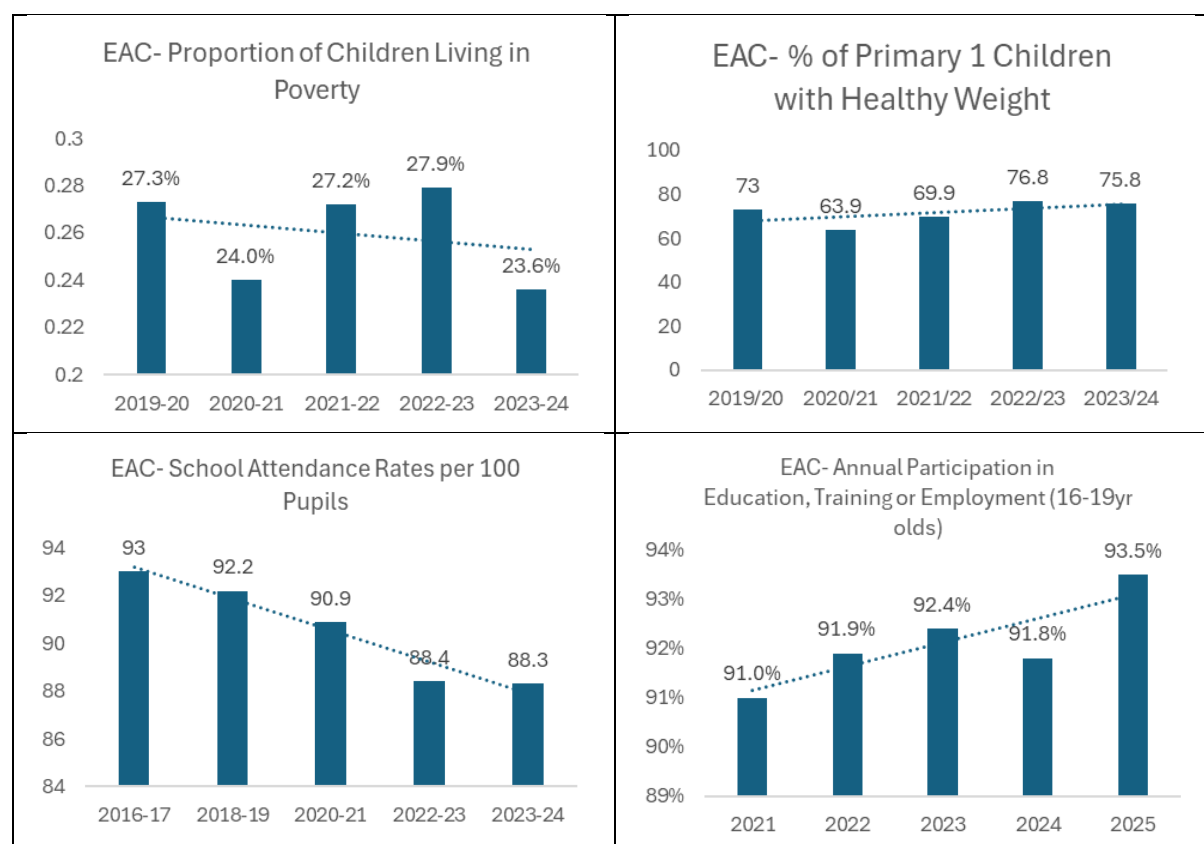
3. How Did We Measure Up?

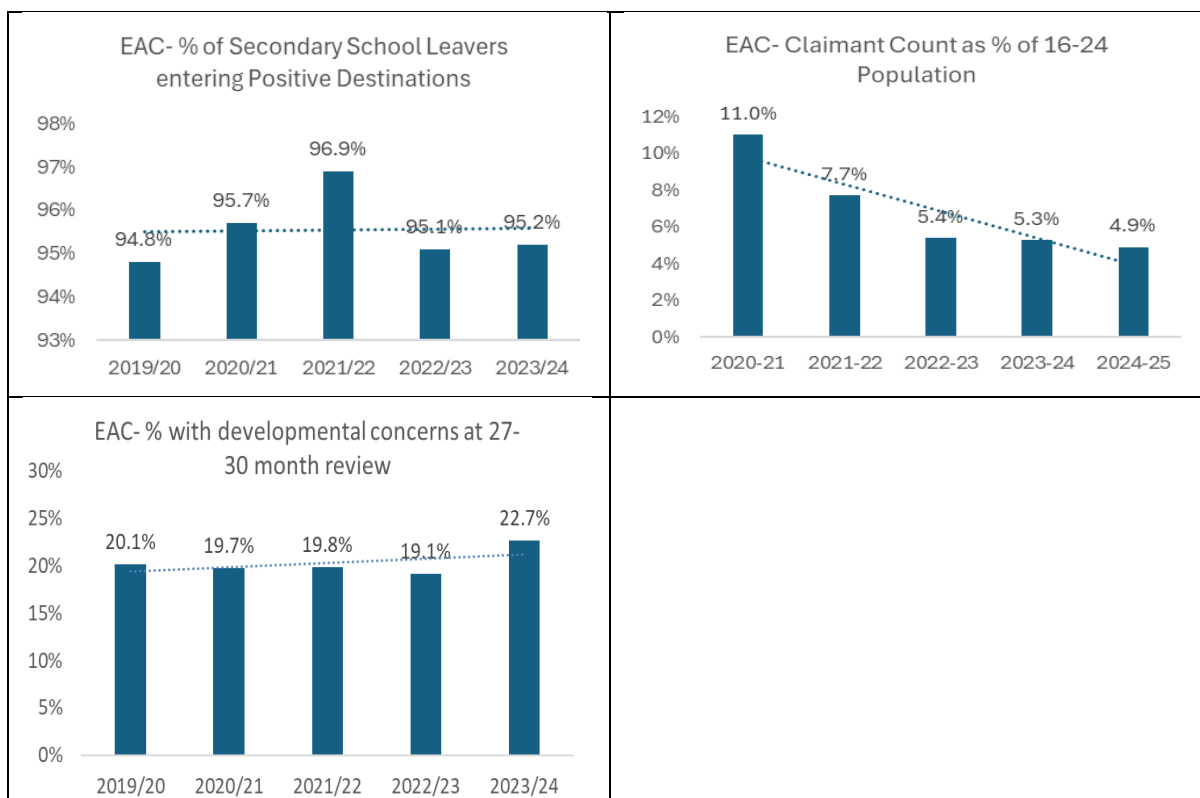
Over the course of 2024/25, partners have achieved positive levels of improvement across a range of key measures associated with the health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for our children and young people. These improvements are a positive indication of the effective collaboration of all partners in East Ayrshire who work with our children, young people and families.

We also know that children and families continue to face significant challenges and that even more collaborative working across all community planning partners is needed to continue to deliver better outcomes for all our children and young people.

Appendix 1 of this report provides a detailed update on the performance indicators that were identified in the Children and Young People's Services Plan 2023-2026. The Local Outcomes Improvement Plan Annual Report 2024/25 and related reporting materials also include a number of key indicators that relate directly to our children and young people, reflecting the commitment of the wider community planning partnership to ensuring that all children and young people in East Ayrshire get the best possible start in life.

While we see some signs of progress, we are ambitious and recognise that there is still more to do.....





In respect of those measures where we do not see evidence of improvements or where we have been unable to build on previous positive results, this information is used as part of a wider evidence base to identify the areas where improvement is required and to direct partnership resources accordingly. Ensuring that our framework of measures is aligned to key actions and areas of focus will help us to continue to evidence our improvement in delivering positive outcomes in these areas.

4. Key Service Developments

We want all of our children and young people to live in a community that enables them to flourish and to be treated with dignity and respect and to have their rights always upheld. Whilst we know that many children and young people in East Ayrshire thrive, we also know that for others they and their family can face real adversities. For many, these challenges can have a direct impact on their wellbeing and can affect outcomes into adulthood. Throughout 2024/25, partners across East Ayrshire initiated a range of new strategies and services that focused on addressing these challenges and supporting the delivery of improvements in outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Collaborative Leadership Review Update

The strategic review of collaborative leadership across children's services in East Ayrshire in 2023/24 explored drivers and barriers to successful multi-agency partnership working for children's services, with a focus on facilitating change and delivering optimal outcomes for East Ayrshire's children. The findings from the review resulted in a series of recommendations being developed, highlighting themes around structures and governance; communication and data sharing;

planning, budgets and decision making; engagement and participation; and relationships and behaviours.

The transition from the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to the Integrated Children's Services Group represents a significant step forward in ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people in East Ayrshire. By adopting a more integrated and outcome-focused approach, the Integrated Children's Services Partnership has the potential to transform service delivery and create lasting positive impacts for our infants, children and young people.

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership has evolved into the Executive Leadership Group chaired by the Chief Executive of East Ayrshire Council and supporting the Integrated Children's Services Group. To strengthen relationships and behaviours, both groups are participating in a joint programme of leadership delivery supported by Insight Discovery.

Both groups include representation from the local authority (early years; education; housing and communities); East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership (social work, health visiting; school nursing and adult services); NHS Ayrshire and Arran (midwifery, specialist services); North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)); Police Scotland; Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA); the Third Sector; the Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Ayrshire and Arran Public Health Department and Kilmarnock College. This partnership has responsibility for the development of strategic planning, governance and reporting of children's services in East Ayrshire, including oversight of our most recent Children and Young People's Services Plan 2023- 2026.

The review highlighted a gap in the availability of data that is necessary to support a shared vision of integrated budget spend and priorities across our children's services. The need for establishing enhanced systems that facilitate timely and effective communication, along with shared databases and platforms for data-driven decision-making, was highlighted, to bridge knowledge gaps among professionals and services. This was also highlighted within the Children at Risk of Harm Inspection and in response to this, recruitment is now underway to identify resource to support the completion of a comprehensive strategic needs assessment for children, young people and families. This will be a significant driver for the CYP Service Plan 2026-2029, future Community Planning Partnership plans and the new Council Strategic Plan that will be developed for implementation from 2027.

Within Integrated Children's Services, the integrated and collaborative leadership team recognise that whilst oversight of shared budgets is productive, to date these tend to be relatively small. Real progress in improving the lives of children will be achieved when the impact of these investments influence utilisation of the core investment in line with Christie principles.

Children at Risk of Harm Inspection

The Joint Inspection of Services for Children and Young People at Risk of Harm in East Ayrshire took place between September 2024 and March 2025. The Inspection Team included inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and Education Scotland.

The Team also included young inspection volunteers, who are young people with direct experience of care or child protection services. The remit of the joint inspection was to consider the effectiveness of services for children and young people up to the age of 18 at risk of harm. The inspection looked at the difference the Community Planning Partnership is making to the lives of children and young people at and their families, taking account of the full range of work within the area, including services provided by social workers, health visitors, school nurses, police officers, teachers, the third sector and a range of other partners including housing and Vibrant Communities.

The Inspection was undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 (September – December) included a staff survey and review of children and young people's records. Phase 2 (January – March 2025) included a survey of children, young people, parents and carers; submission of a position statement and supporting evidence and a programme of engagement activity, including focus groups.

The [Inspection findings](#) were published on the Care Inspectorate website on 15 April 2025. You will also find on the website [a short video](#) which was produced by young inspection volunteers to explain our findings to children and young people, but which will make useful viewing for anyone interested in the outcomes of the Inspection.

Inspectors gathered and reviewed evidence to provide a formal evaluation of quality indicator 2.1: impact on children and young people. The evaluation of the quality indicator was **Good** and the inspection highlighted many areas of strength. Overall, the inspectors recognised that the work of partners was making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people at risk of harm. It also identified a few areas for improvement to maximise wellbeing and ensure that children and families consistently have experiences and outcomes which are as positive as possible.

Officers have reviewed the Inspection Report in detail, along with survey returns and feedback from the record reading exercise, to pull out all those findings which have contributed to the overarching areas for improvement.

This has led to the identification of 25 actions as part of a comprehensive response and action plan, which is presented at Appendix 2. The Plan includes details of responsible officers, timescales and examples of evidence and outcomes to show that improvements are being made. Where appropriate, links are also made to existing improvement action plans. It is recognised that our plan is ambitious and this in part reflects the work to drive improvement already underway across the Partnership.

HEART Wellbeing Model

Our Children's Services Wellbeing Model is an innovative approach to improve how children and families are supported in East Ayrshire. Its vision is to ensure that our children and families can access support at an early stage within their community, in a way that challenges discrimination and stigma. Multi-disciplinary team working and the GIRFEC principles are central to this model, and it was given the name 'HEART' (Help Everyone At the Right Time).

HEART was developed as a strategic driver for change in response to feedback from families who were struggling to obtain help when and where they need it. The model fundamentally seeks to improve the way that children and families are supported, ensuring they get help at an early stage and in the communities in which they live, through a 'no wrong door' approach. Implementation of HEART commenced early in 2020 at the same time as the start of Covid and we recognise that progress in developing the model is not as embedded as anticipated. There is an aspiration, following service discussions in preparation for this report and the information from the CARH Inspection, that we move forward to reinvigorate the aspiration and principles of HEART across our communities in the coming year.

Early Intervention and Prevention

The Council and the Community Planning Partnership aspire to direct investment towards prevention, in order that people, including children and young people, can thrive in our communities, living inclusive and fulfilling lives. To support this the Council in February 2024, as part of the annual budget setting process, established, The Early Intervention and Prevention Fund. This sees the Council set aside around £4m each year, for a period of ten years, to support early intervention and prevention initiatives. The initial year of this Fund has seen significant investment to support children and young people, including child poverty in communities through fairer futures partnerships, free and subsidised school meals, speech and language therapy for infants and early years, out of school support for children and young people with additional support needs, and clothing grants expanded to include 3 and 4 year olds.

ASN Summer Supports

The ASN out of school holiday support programme was secured for four years in 2024 with £150,000 per annum funding agreed through the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund. Further to the Cabinet decision in October 2024, Officers entered negotiations with Aberlour in respect of continuing with delivery of the Out of School ASN support programme. The outcome from these discussions was that we moved from a commissioned service to a directly delivered service within the Council. Officers worked with children and young people, families, education, vibrant communities and wider partners to codesign a bespoke programme of activities at Willowbank, Park and Crosshouse Communication Centre to ensure successful delivery of the summer programme for 2025. The content of the ASN programme designed specific interventions, activities, adaptations, and support mechanisms which were put in place to meet the diverse needs of the children participating in the programme. These focused on the delivery of tailored support and the creation of an inclusive learning and fun environment with specialised and general resources/materials. In addition, a programme of family funday sessions was delivered as well as additional family swimming opportunities being provided within Hillside.

The evaluation of the programme will be shared with children, families and all partners in the near future.

Moving forward in partnership with parents, children, young people and partners, opportunities that are accessible and inclusive for all children and young people with additional support needs will be further explored.

Speech, Language and Communication

EAC and partners across children's services have, for several years, worked together to understand, develop and deliver services that improve capacity in supporting parents with core strategies and messages for improving the speech, language and communication skills of our infants and children (Communication, Language and Nurture group (CLAN)). Despite these interventions, currently 30.35% of children and young people in East Ayrshire require some level of SLT support and our data is showing an increase in reported concerns around SLC development across East Ayrshire at both the 13–15-month and 27–30-month child health reviews. Information gained through the National Early Language and Communication project data also highlighted the co-occurrence of other developmental domain concerns which should also improve by having early SLC support.

The importance of early intervention and prevention starting from an antenatal perspective and the need for a whole systems approach was evident.

To reduce overall concerns and to narrow the poverty related gap, leaders all agreed it was therefore key that we address language and communication of our young children with all recognising that early speech, language and communication development is a critical foundation for better long-term outcomes for children.

This evidence was persuasive in demonstrating that investment in SLT using professional expertise to give confidence to both parents and Early Learning and Childcare staff in communication, could be integral to delivering improved outcomes for infants and children, both in preparation for school and also as a foundation for life. As a partnership we understand that some of the impact can be over many years and look forward to seeing the impact from the investment.

To allow capacity for this work to go ahead, an application for funding support was submitted to EAC Early Intervention and Prevention Fund. Elected members were completely supportive of this model and agreed the proposal with funding of £200,000 each year for the next 3 years being allocated.

This money will from 2025/26 fund a dedicated staffing resource, with SLC expertise and leadership, to:

- raise awareness of importance of SLC (taking a public health approach)
- provide professional development for the workforce, which includes coaching and modelling
- develop preventative approaches from pre-birth
- collaborate with key stakeholders
- create sustainable approaches and resources for long term systems change
- evidence the effectiveness and impact of activity undertaken.

This echoes the proposed model identified through the NELC project. We have also identified very clear governance structures to support and ensure collaborative engagement to the delivery of this early intervention and prevention model. Continued national support will be helpful to ensure we deliver the best collaborative approach to meet the needs of our children.

This has been made possible and received higher profile due to the sponsorship of the Council's Chief Executive, Senior Leaders and Elected Members

Childhood Poverty

The influence of poverty on children's health and wellbeing in East Ayrshire is very clear and we know that children living in poverty are more likely to have poorer health outcomes including low birth weight, poor physical health and mental health problems. The health impacts of growing up in poverty are significant and follow children across their life and this is why we believe it is essential that health inequalities are addressed to improve child health outcomes and allow them to experience improved life chances and better outcomes.

The East Ayrshire Local Child Poverty Action Plan sits within the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Strategic Plan 2023-26, and the update provided under Priority 3 of this report represents our Local Poverty Action Plan update report for 2024/25. Key indicators within the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan Annual Report 2024/25, particularly in relation to economic growth, are also relevant to this work.

The Scottish Government's current Programme for Government was published in September 2024 and set out the Scottish Government's four key priorities for 2024/25: one of these priorities was eradicating child poverty.

The programme clearly states that eradicating child poverty is the single greatest priority of the Government and that sustained and cohesive effort is needed across local and national government, the third sector, businesses and communities to work collectively to achieve this. The actions set out within the programme include a commitment to expand place-based child poverty pathfinders through 'Fairer Futures Partnerships', with East Ayrshire identified as one of five new areas, alongside three existing ones.

Fairer Futures Partnership

East Ayrshire Fairer Futures Partnership is a partnership between the Council, third sector and Scottish Government set up to support families living in poverty, by adopting a place-based approach that recognises the different challenges communities face. The partnership aims to reduce child poverty through testing and adopting locally determined and collaborative approaches, based on local needs and assets.

Within East Ayrshire, it was agreed that the Fairer Futures Partnership would be match-funded by the Council and that the totality of the funding would be passed directly and equally to three local and trusted third sector partner organisations to deliver place-based supports that will reduce poverty, demonstrate fairness, provide skills for learning and work, move individuals into employment and reduce demand in other areas. It was agreed that the third sector partners would lead local place-based approaches, in response to their knowledge of their area and feedback from families and service users.

There are therefore a range of approaches being taken by the three organisations in order to provide holistic, person-centred support and address individual needs. At the centre of this is a strong focus on building relationships and trust, understanding the needs of the individual, building on their strengths, addressing the barriers that they face and creating the conditions that will support them and their families to improve their outcomes.

In the first few months, 275 individuals have received support and a key theme across all partners has been the development of positive, strong relationships and trust. Individuals do not feel the stigma or concerns that they may have about engaging with statutory services, leading to deepened engagement, better understanding of needs and support for basic needs, based on the individual. Some of the key activities undertaken in Quarter 1 include:

- Understanding that many families require complex, ongoing support including practical assistance, advocacy and referrals, child focused support and bespoke solutions. This varies from person to person.
- A range of activity for kinship families and a focus on kinkids, through classes, events and scholarships at CenterStage. Good relationships are being built, leading to improved confidence.
- A targeted marketing campaign has been undertaken by Yipworld to increase visibility and accessibility of the service in SIMD communities. Early learning and initial evaluation of feedback have pointed to two core areas of focus – family support services and group support/community resilience.
- Within The Zone, there have been positive individual outcomes through support with childcare, CVs and interview skills.

2023-2026 Children and Young People Service Priorities

Priority 1: Our children and young people feel respected, listened to and influence change.

Embedding Children's right is a key part of East Ayrshire's approach to the delivery of services outlined within our Children and Young People Services Plan 2023-2026. Children's rights are driving forward the way in which we plan to work better together as a community planning partnership. Across all partner services and agencies, Children's rights underpin how children and young people are supported by services and we have introduced a range of mechanisms to empower children and young people to be the heart of decision making within their own lives and to support service delivery and improvement

We said we would

- Develop and implement a broad range of programmes and structures that will encourage participation and co-production by our children and young people in our work
- Develop a strategic framework to involve our children and young people across our partnership in line with the ambitions of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.
- Develop a training programme to support our workforce in enhancing and developing their ability and skills to involve and empower our Children and Young People.
- Put in place a clear system to ensure feedback on our approaches to involvement is heard, considered and acted upon.

We Did – Key Delivery Examples

Implementation of UNCRC

Progress is being made in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across the East Ayrshire Council area by introducing a Champions model approach.

This model aims to embed children's rights into decision-making processes, ensuring compliance with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 by leveraging a network of dedicated champions to foster a culture of accountability, collaboration, and empowerment for children and young people within East Ayrshire.

This model offers a structured approach to ensure that children's rights are not only recognised but actively upheld in every aspect of local governance. It is built on the principle of distributed leadership, where individuals within local authorities are designated as "Champions" for children's rights. These champions act as advocates, educators, and facilitators, driving the integration of UNCRC principles into their respective domains and services. This model represents a proactive and inclusive approach to embedding children's rights within local governance. By empowering individuals to champion the UNCRC across East Ayrshire will begin to develop a

cultural shift towards the realisation of children's rights. This model not only aligns with legal obligations but also reflects a collective commitment to creating a society where every child can thrive. The implementation of UNCRC across East Ayrshire is being supported by the national improvement service.

Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments

The Council has been actively embedding Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA) within its structures to ensure the rights of children are at the forefront of policymaking and service delivery. The CRWIA has been integrated into existing frameworks to support use of a familiar approach, ensure consistency and promote a more holistic approach to impact assessments.

This approach will address legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010, including the Fairer Scotland Duty, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2024, The guidance covers Human Rights and Children's Rights, focusing on the Human Rights Act 1998 European Convention on Human Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Partnership engagement across the equalities agenda is taken forward by the Ayrshire Equality Partnership, with representation from a range of partners including the three Ayrshire Councils, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, HSCP, Ayrshire College, Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

Resource Development

Training has been developed to support the completion of CRWIAs to meet the requirements of the UNCRC and it is available to colleagues. Guidance on the integrated impact assessments will sit within the toolkit and will include comprehensive information on children's rights, the legal aspects of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, and practical tips for a rights-based approach based on existing guidance from the Scottish Government to ensure both legal and procedural compliance. The guidance will outline the CRWIA preparation process, paying particular attention to the importance of engaging children and young people. Moving forward it is anticipated that a separate CRWIA will be developed for policies that deal exclusively with children and young people.

Care Experienced Cabinet

A positive example of this support can be witnessed in the activities of care experienced young people in East Ayrshire who have a strong voice and influence through forums such as Care Experience Cabinet and Art Club?. This is a forum where care experienced young people collectively influence and make changes to benefit other looked after children and young people in collaboration with elected members and corporate parents. Our young people have been instrumental in the development of the [Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2024/27](#).

We are passionate about further embedding the aspirations and values of 'The Promise' across our services. We have continued to support our care experienced young people over the last year to maintain the Care Experienced Cabinet and ensure it both functions and grows.

Working with the Chair and the Health and Social Care Partnership's Planning and Performance team, the Cabinet recently agreed new parameters for its functions and how it reports back to our young people, with the aspiration to complete the cycle of the Lundy model of participation (Article 12) around Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. Children and young people are also working to refresh the original East Ayrshire Connecting Voices 'Promise' at the time of reporting, due to be launched in September 2025 along with the Corporate Parenting Action Plan. We also now have in place a better feedback loop between the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group and Care Experience Cabinet to ensure our young people are kept up to date with progress made.

Other examples include the Bairns Hoose Change-makers Participation Group and commencement of Children First's the change-makers group. These forums also raise the profile and represent the needs and rights of young people through participation at national conferences and active engagement in a range of activities.

Signs of Safety and Healing

In 2025, East Ayrshire started the journey to implement Signs of Safety and Healing, to support strength-based and risk-balanced practice, underpinned by children's rights and focused on family-decision making. In taking forward this approach, Signs of Safety and Healing will provide a framework for the consistent delivery of Safe and Together and Restorative practice with Family based Group Decision Making (FGDM) as a wider Practice Vision.

Children's Houses

Our Children's Houses continue to meet and champion the needs of the most vulnerable children in East Ayrshire to ensure that they grow to their potential in every aspect of life. We want to keep 'The Promise' by ensuring that our children grow up safe, loved and respected, especially when their personal circumstances are challenging.

Our three Children's Houses endeavour to ensure that our young people have all the opportunities and experiences that their peers have. Over the last year, this has included enjoying activities and holidays ranging from trips to Disneyland and Spain, to holiday parks closer to home, whilst making sure our young people are thriving in education environments. We are particularly proud of our cohort of young people who have recently transitioned on to further education at Kilmarnock college.

We are keen to see our young people fully participating in their local communities and having their voices heard in relation to what it means to be care experienced. As such, our young people are regularly involved in a range of groups including 'ArtClub?', football clubs and various youth clubs.

Keeping the Promise Pilot - Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

In the past 6 months, SCRA Ayrshire have adapted the supports offered to help to enable families to attend hearings and ensure they feel able to participate and have their voices heard. Staff now contact families in advance of hearing by telephone to discuss any possible challenges people face coming along to a hearing centre for instance; discussing travel options, signposting to advocacy services or discussing additional supports; discussing individual needs and any ways we can

adapt the hearing centre environment to accommodate these needs. SCRA are also actively offering pre hearing visits to alleviate anxieties for children and their families. In East Ayrshire over the past 6 months we have received wonderful feedback regarding this new support and have seen a reduction in the percentage of hearing deferred for the attendance of a relevant person. This prevents unnecessary anxiety and delay for children and families and enables care plans to be progressed.

Child Friendly Scheduling Pilot

SCRA Ayrshire have now begun Phase 2 of the Child Friendly Scheduling Pilot. We have widened the scope and now aim for all children to be afforded the opportunity to have their voices heard and be part of decision making when it comes to the scheduling and arranging of their hearings. Children and young people have the opportunity to say how they wish to participate (virtually, in person, through an advocacy worker, or by submitted their views in writing), where they wish to participate from (virtually from school or another safe space) and what dates they wish to avoid the hearing taking place on. We now are sending all children and young people Hearing Scrapbooks to support them to prepare for their hearings. We have managed to meet the wishes of young people in over 97% of cases where views were provided, and from the feedback received children value the chance to have their voices heard and hearing scheduled around their needs.

Participation and Citizenship

Young people in East Ayrshire schools continue to actively participate through a range of pupil led forums including Pupil Councils and formal pupil groups through Rights Respecting Schools /UNCRC. Our learners also actively participate in, and contribute to, school improvement with their voice heard formally in annual school improvement plans. Moreover, through specific subjects within Social Subjects and Citizenship in our secondary schools or interdisciplinary learning across all stages, pupils learn about democracy in local, national and international contexts.

Participation across all sectors in The Clean Green Awards focused on the key themes of the climate change strategy – energy, transport, waste and natural environment – which children and young people helped to develop through the work of the Youth Climate Change Conferences held each September.

All East Ayrshire schools are being supported to work towards Bronze, Silver and Gold award accreditation and a highly commended accreditation was also introduced for each of the three award categories. The Gold award asks children to demonstrate that climate change work has been embedded across all themes and that they are making a difference not only within their schools but within the wider community. Gold awards were presented to – Kilmarnock Academy for their commitment to Green Health, Netherthird Primary and Early Childhood Centre for their dedication to tackling climate change by making positive change in their school and community; and children from Park School received Gold and the Outstanding Achievement 2024/25 for their exceptional commitment to achieving environmental change.

Hearing the Voices of Young People - Housing and Communities

Warm safe housing is vitally important to the wellbeing and development of children and young people. Insecure or inadequate housing can result in increased risk of physical or mental health issues, educational difficulties, and behavioural issues. It can also be a key intervention to ending child poverty.

There is a real drive within the new Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2025 – 2030 to reduce inequality and promote the rights of children and young people across all strategic priorities and outcomes.

As part of the development process for the new LHS, it was essential that the voices of young people were heard. In order to achieve this, a youth housing survey was conducted. The survey was developed to look at young people's current housing situations and aspirations for the future.

Youth workers and organisations such as SL33 and YIPworld were involved in the development and content of the survey and after the consultation was launched, they promoted the survey amongst their young people and encouraged participation.

An Engagement HQ page was developed and used to promote the consultation and host an online survey. As an incentive, a £50 East Ayrshire Gift card was offered to encourage participation. The consultation was also promoted at two roadshow events, in Cumnock and Kilmarnock, organised by the East Ayrshire Tenant Federation. There were 51 contributions to the online survey overall, with 154 visitors to the site.

The feedback from the consultation helped shape the outcomes and actions within the strategy and Housing Services will continue to work with partners to deliver positive outcomes for children and young people across East Ayrshire.

Curricular Choice

All seven secondary schools have reviewed option columns from Senior Phase curricular options as these have in the past constrained the curricular pathways of young people. This approach is responsive to the curricular pathway preferences of each cohort of young people rather than young people choosing from pre-set options. The impact of this can be demonstrated in improvements in attainment outcomes in S4 where there have been significant increases over the past 5 years:

Year	5 or more qualifications at SCQF Level 3	5 or more qualifications at SCQF Level 4	5 or more qualifications at SCQF Level 5
2020	56.58%	41.45%	11.18%
2021	60.12%	47.24%	11.04%
2022	65.33%	57.29%	15.08%
2023	77.92%	61.90%	10.39%
2024	72.98%	60.48%	15.73%

Schools continue to develop Senior Phase pathways beyond S4 alongside partners, such as @SQConnects, to extend the range of curricular opportunities available to young people in East Ayrshire.

The continuation of the highly successful @SWConnects virtual learning campus for Senior Phase pupils ensures a wider range of Advanced Highers and Highers can be offered in all schools and provides an equitable, sustainable, digital solution to improve outcomes for learners. In 2024/25, 20 young people from East Ayrshire were presented for 7 different subjects via @SWConnects. This innovative learning approach helps prepare our young people with key skills for learning, life and work and builds student capability to successfully enter university, college, or work with the confidence of having acquired the skills for learning in the future.

Participatory Budgeting

Central Education officers continue to work with headteachers to ensure children and young people have an active role in shaping the planning of any Participatory Budgeting (PB) elements of PEF spend. All schools consult children and young people regarding SIP priorities. To ensure meaningful PB engagement, a number of schools have carried out projects chosen through consultation with children and young people, ensuring there is a shared responsibility for decision making where appropriate.

Fire Skills Programme

Partnership with Scottish Fire & Rescue, we were able to complete 4 different cohorts for each workstream throughout 2024. This aims to develop core skills and includes a range of sessions based on firefighter drills, the group focused on problem solving, communication, teamwork and leadership. All young people/parents successfully completed and gained their cardiac arrest training and fire skills certificate. SL33/Kilmarnock Fire Station.

CASE STUDY

Henry James story in raising awareness of pupils with autism in his primary school of Darvel [Clipchamp](#)

Priority 2: We are working collaboratively, reducing the impact of social and economic poverty on our children and young people.

Local Child Poverty Action Plan Report (LCPAR)

Following revised guidance from Scottish Government on Local Child Poverty Action Plan reporting, partners in East Ayrshire took the opportunity in 2023 to incorporate child poverty action planning and reporting within the framework of the Children and Young People's Services Plan 2023-26. This is now reflected under Priority 2: We are working collaboratively, reducing the impact of social and economic poverty on our Children and Young people. This annual report therefore also serves as the East Ayrshire Child Poverty Action Report 2024/25.

It is also recognised that wider partnership activity, particularly in relation to inclusive economic growth, plays a significant role in addressing the root causes of child poverty. This wider contribution is reported through our [Local Outcomes Improvement Plan Annual Report 2024/25](#). In addition, work has been taken forward during 2024/25 to develop a new Community Planning Partnership Anti-Poverty and Inequalities Strategy. This development recognises the intransigent nature of the challenges that our communities face in relation to poverty and the need for a focused whole systems multidisciplinary team approach to address this. It is anticipated that the new strategy will be launched in Autumn 2025 and that it will complement the existing activity set out in the Children and Young People's Services Plan.

Child poverty levels remain stubbornly high in East Ayrshire, and as people across our communities have struggled with rising costs of living, our children have also been impacted, particularly in families who were perhaps 'just managing' before the challenges of the last few years particularly Covid.

The data shows a 4.3 percentage point reduction in the proportion of East Ayrshire children living in poverty (after housing costs), from 27.9% in 2022/23 to 23.6% in 2023/24. National and family group rates have also fallen, although by lesser degrees. And yet we still have around 6,000 children living in poverty. These figures underline the significant challenge this presents for our community planning partners.

We know there are no 'quick fixes' for child poverty, nor is it something that can be tackled by any one individual agency alone. This challenge needs the totality of our partnership effort, commitment and resource. We are therefore working collectively with national and local partners to tackle poverty in the round – providing the immediate support and care that people need to allow them to live well and also putting in place long term strategic plans to grow our economy in an inclusive way that supports the wellbeing of people across our communities. One of our key development areas mentioned earlier in this report, the Fairer Futures partnership recognises this partnership approach involving the Council, third sector and Scottish Government to support families living in poverty, by adopting a place-based approach that recognises the different challenges communities face.

For this priority children's services have aligned the three main drivers from the child poverty plan (income from employment, cost of living and income from social security and benefits in kind) to the relevant articles of the UNCRC incorporation.

We said we would

- Work collaboratively to support our children and young people and families maximise their income and mitigate against the cost-of-living crisis
- Develop and implement new and innovative work-based learning programmes that improve employability prospects for our young people.
- Ensure that collaborative, creative and innovative programmes are developed that encourage equitable access to participation in play, sport and active recreation opportunities.
- Ensure all children, no matter what their financial challenges have access to opportunities to thrive, develop and gain life experiences in their communities.

We Did – Key Delivery Examples

Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

Through the early intervention and prevention fund and the innovation fund there are a range of initiatives that deliver towards the criteria and aspirations of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. Rather than using this fund directly, the opportunity of redesigning our children's services governance arrangements and decision-making forums has resulted in an agreement that the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund would sit centrally within the Integrated Children's Services budgets. This has provided an opportunity for all services to work more collaboratively to agree the spend of this fund while meeting the outcomes of The Promise and the child poverty priorities. This will now be managed utilising a Place Based Investment Programme approach to support spend and monitoring arrangements to ensure the impact we make to children and young people's lives is positive.

Half Price School Meals

We provide meals to early years, primary school and secondary school. East Ayrshire Council agreed this year that they would support Universal Free Schools for P6/7 which now allows all primary school children to be entitled to a school meal. Council also agreed that we would continue with half price school meals, a meal deal in Secondary Schools for paying customers.

Driver: Cost of Living

UNCRC: Article 27 – Right to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, moral and social development.

UNCRC: Article 24 – Right to the highest attainable standard of health.

The council has also upgraded its cashless catering system which allows parents to pre order their meals three weeks in advance. SS pupils can pre order school meals and all menus are available on the cashless catering system with photographs, nutritional information, allergy information and weekly choices so that this can be viewed by parents. Communications on School meals are sent out via school apps, social media and parent pay.

Food education programmes continue in schools supported by our Development chef, ongoing and booked in via the schools. This is in place for both Primary and Secondary Schools.

The menu meets all Healthy Eating in Schools guidance required for Primary, Secondary and Early Years settings.

Surplus food when available is left in a dignified area for young people to take home at the end of the day, reducing food waste.

School Clothing Grant

In February 2025 the Council agreed to extend the Clothing Grant-Adequate Clothing payment to eligible 3 and 4 year olds. 3,524 children received a clothing grant for academic year 2024-25, and the total value of this was £708,680.

Driver: Income from Social Security and Benefits

UNCRC: Article 26 – Right to benefit from Social Security

UNCRC: Article 27 – Right to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, moral and social development.

Child Wellbeing Model Financial Inclusion Team

Early Intervention

The Financial Inclusion Team (FIT) has continued to deliver income maximisation services for the residents of East Ayrshire throughout 2024/25. This has included a schools-based Education project and an Early Years Health Project, delivered through non-recurring funding through until September 2024, with exit strategies beginning in June 2024. During this period, the FIT focused on three core models: Child Wellbeing; Employability; and Health.

Driver: Income from Employment

UNCRC Article 18: States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible

UNCRC: Article 27 – Right to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, moral and social development.

Under the Child Wellbeing model, the Early Years project supported Health colleagues working with families and young children to ensure their income was fully maximised. The project worked with families with children from pre-birth to pre-school and referrals were received directly from Health Visitors through an agreed referral pathway. Between April and June 2024, the Early Years project assisted 83 families with financial gains coming in through to September 2024 totalling £637,510.

The School Project based within each of the academies, also supported families within the early childhood centres and primary schools. This project assisted 112 families from April to June 2024 with financial gains to February 2025 of £658,806. The team developed and supported pupil engagement through the Learner Voice network, under Child Poverty Action Group (See case study and information below).

Both projects supported the promotion and uptake of welfare benefit provisions and wider supports through regular communication on apps within schools and Ayrshire Bairns, an NHS Ayrshire and Arran App. Staff also attended and supported community initiatives and education run initiatives such as information events and

parents evenings, as well as 'Baby Chat' sessions in partnership with Early Years Health, whilst also working with local partners from Social Security Scotland to enhance take up levels of welfare provisions.

FIT Employability: the Employability team continued to support unemployed people, lone parents and low-income households. The project supported clients with income maximisation as well as breaking down barriers to allow people to move into positive financial destinations. During the reporting period, the Employability project received 128 referrals, with financial gains of £226,853 generated for 101 people and families.

Replicate the SL33 model to provide equity of provision across East Ayrshire

Operation of two Skills and Learning centres, located in Kilmarnock (SL33) and Netherthird (SL66), both purpose-built for vocational learning. Each centre is unique, featuring fully equipped barista setups, digital suites for podcasting, a hair and beauty salon, and facilities for design and manufacturing, providing a comprehensive learning environment for a range of industries. As an SQA-accredited centre, they are approved to deliver a variety of qualifications including the Employability Award, Barista Skills, Customer Service and Health & Wellbeing Award.

No One Left Behind

NOLB Provision for Economically Inactive Young People provides workshops and group sessions that focus on building soft skills through relationship development and practical activities. These interventions aim to increase confidence, improve communication, and develop teamwork, all of which are essential for entering any workplace.

Two teachers from the East Ayrshire Support Team (EAST) now integrated into the core SL team to oversee an additional 10 young people who are not engaging with or attending school. This model is in its early stage of delivery and will allow each of the young people to be able to achieve core school curriculum national 3s in a more nurturing flexible environment. They can also gain SQA qualifications, participate in work experience, and explore various careers through taster sessions, helping them develop practical skills and work towards a positive destination. Prevention is key is at the forefront of delivery in this intervention.

Care-Experienced 1:1 Support: We offer personalised support for young people with social work involvement, helping them resolve pastoral issues that may affect their progress into work or further education. For example, we assist with accessing financial support, securing housing, or addressing emotional well-being, ensuring they have the foundation needed to move forward.

ASN Skills Sector Programme: This 24-week programme supports 10 young people with additional support needs (ASN) in gaining work experience in technical roles primarily in NHS but also other employers. Participants complete structured work placements, which helps them develop specific skills aligned with their abilities, building confidence and preparing them for long-term employment.

The Skills and Learning Post-School offer links those young people not in education, employment or training to opportunities, utilising employability workshops and activities that improve skillsets and knowledge around the world of work. Groups engaging with Post-School at Skills and Learning can benefit from bespoke packages of support, including workplace shadowing at highly sought-after industries; as well as intensive support to obtain Modern Apprenticeships through Pre-Apprenticeship programmes.

Collaborative working is key to delivery for Post-School as it provides links to opportunities within professional settings that instil workplace values, for example, through continuing partnership with Scottish Fire & Rescue.

All activities within Skills and Learning are designed to be inclusive and practical, with group work fostering peer support and learning for all levels. Our SQA qualification menu is tailored to meet the diverse needs and abilities of all learners, with additional weekly groups in areas such as Digital Skills, Beauty, Creative Art/Writing, Social Clubs and Barista Training, all delivered in a relaxed and supportive learning environment. This allows for confidence building and developing of soft skills.

An existing strong partnership with Skills Development Scotland ensured all young people supported through our post-school employability teams have access to, and awareness of, current and future opportunities in East Ayrshire. This includes weekly collaboration with Skills Development Scotland at SL33 to target those who are Economically Inactive to make contact and a refreshed Skills and Learning offer. This can be identified through the School Leavers Destination Report (SLDR) highlighting those with an unconfirmed or unknown destination. As a result, the positive destination figure has increased from 89.9% to 96%.

To support the Skills and Learning offer we have an in-house offer that directly responds to rapid needs of our clients. SALUS Working for a Health Economy - delivers support to anyone who is experiencing health and wellbeing problems which are causing difficulties in progressing towards and/or sustaining employment. The service provides personalised one to one support with a Case Manager who is a qualified NHS Health Practitioner. The Case Manager will support the individual to explore their health, wellbeing and current circumstances. Working towards an agreed action plan, they are supported by the same case manager with the areas they have identified as barriers. They are able to provide strategies, advice and practical support to assist young people/parents to reaching their goals and make progress with health, wellbeing and employment prospects.

Try The Trades

Launch of the “Try the Trades” initiative offering pre- and post-school leavers hands-on experience in trades such as plumbing, electrical work, and painting/decorating over a 14-week period. Delivered in partnership with Ayrshire College and SL66, the programme includes an SQA qualification and work-readiness workshops. Employability and life skills workshops were also incorporated. Successful participants will have improved opportunities to enter Ayrshire College’s Level 4 Pre-Apprenticeship course in the January intake.

Three young people entered Level 4 Apprenticeship courses including: painting and decorating, joinery and carpentry and Aeronautical engineering. Two young people progressed directly into employment, and one returned to complete the academic year within school. Try the Trades Programme.

Introduction to Outdoor Work:

This programme was delivered in partnership with East Ayrshire Council's Greener Communities for both young people and parents Participants to gain invaluable experience within this sector. All young people completed First Aid at Work training as part of the six-week programme.

This was delivered over two days per week which seen one of the days focus on horticultural work that contributed to the local community: including, planting of builds, grass cutting and leaf blowing. The other day each person was assigned to a specific squad within the cleansing team for general waste collection across East Ayrshire.

Path To Care:

The skills and learning team delivered a training programme which was a targeted intervention to support parent's and young people into employment within the care sector (Path to Care), we have built strong partnerships across the Health and Social Care Partnership and local Care homes which has enabled us to provide a robust programme that can offer a direct pathway into the care sector upon completion.

This included:

- Accredited training - Moving and Handling (Objects and People)
- Adult Support and Protection, Dementia Awareness
- Placements 2 days per week for 4 weeks within a Care home in East Ayrshire.

Rurality-Dalmellington

The Future Skills team developed and ran their first pre-apprenticeship programme. 14 young people were involved, 13 completed the full 6 weeks. Of that 13, 9 pupils then attended interviews for the Modern Apprenticeship of their choice and 6 were successful. These 6 young people will be gaining skills and qualifications in areas such as Horticulture, Leisure Management, Health and Social Care and Youth Work. 4 who completed the course decided to return to school for a final year. For the 3 pupils who were unsuccessful, their information has been passed to our Employability Service for support to continue to look for employment and/or further training.

It is hoped this programme will continue in the south of the authority and to look at developing it with other secondary schools across the authority during 2025/26 school year.

The Home Link Service

The Home Link service was redesigned in April 2024 and this change in practice has allowed the Home Link Team to provide tailored early intervention support* for 288 children, young people and their families (74.65% - Q1), of those, 153 (55.4%) children and young people no longer require Home Link support, achieving positive outcomes. (*2,851 one-to-one sessions, 1,008 home visits, 205 Team with the Family meetings).

With a specific focus on supporting school attendance, a number of bespoke supports were delivered. Resulting in;

- Term 1, attendance improved for 45 pupils out of 129 in total (35%)
- Term 2, attendance improved for 66 pupils out of 128 in total (52%)
- Term 3, attendance improved for 69 pupils out of 109 in total (58%)

The Team's improving school attendance through partnerships work was published on Education Scotland's Website highlighting the good practice in relation to.

During term time, the staff delivered programmes across the authority which promoted readiness to learn, wellbeing, high aspirations and broader achievement. The team developed approaches to ensure programmes gained appropriate accreditation, as such, 31 awards were secured for families.

Parental Engagement

The team worked collaboratively with external partners and community groups to run several innovative, impactful and sustainable programmes to support closing the poverty-related attainment gap. 398 parents participated over the year and 36 of them were supported to take up volunteering opportunities.

NHS – Parent Placements

A pan-Ayrshire collaboration with SL33 and NHS Ayrshire and Arran have facilitated 26-week paid placements for parents across a range of departments. As a result, three parents supported through the Parental Employability Support Fund have successfully sustained employment following the completion of their placements. This opportunity has provided a sustainable path to employment and allowed for flexible working to work around any childcare barriers.

Schools

All establishments continue to provide COSD projects and use their PEF funding to support children and young people where poverty is a barrier to their learning. Breakfast clubs and fully funded school trips are commonplace. One secondary school delivered an awareness session with staff, young people and parent/carer focussing on the COSD. The setting up of a poverty proofing steering group took place, which included staff and young people working together to mitigate against poverty-related barriers to learning. Central Education Officers will continue to support a wider spread of such initiatives

Cost of the School Day (COSD)

There is a strong commitment by all establishments to continue to adopt Cost of the School Day (COSD) actions and reduce poverty-related barriers to education.

Schools continue to provide breakfast clubs and where appropriate grab and go breakfast for latecomers, hence removing another barrier for such instances. Schools have sourced more affordable uniforms and often fully meet the costs of trips and outings; therefore ensuring barriers to participation are reduced or completely removed. Practitioners are encouraged to complete the COSD online learning module or in-person training, which is available to all staff. Establishment Headteachers continue to have digital access to a number of resources to support planning and implementation to support COSD measures, including sign up instructions to the COSD Voice network (See CPAG/FIT link)

National Entitlement Card

The Education Service Post-School team continue to ensure that every young person receiving support from the service is supported through the process of applying for their travel card. Ensuring that young people are able to travel to Skills and Learning premises, attend 2-3 days per week to build employability and life skills through workshops. They can also gain SQA qualifications, participate in work experience, and explore various careers through taster sessions, helping them develop practical skills and work towards a positive destination.

Pupil Equity Fund

PEF impact visits led by the Equity Education Support Officer are complete in all of our schools to ensure all PEF monies are utilised effectively with COSD approaches embedded. The visits focused on expenditure, impact and future planning. Central Officers use the PEF Planning Tool to collate the areas of expenditure across all EAC PEF spend. Providing a clear guide to the use of PEF monies. These are broken down into the five key areas associated to National PEF guidance (% of spend at June 2025 is shown in brackets):

- Attainment and Achievement (65%)
- Attendance (3%)
- Inclusion (14%)
- Engagement (11%)
- Participation (7%)

PEF spend across Financial year 2024/5 was 97%. The Children and Young People's Impact Forum (see CYP 4-12 / CYP 1-09) continues to support and challenge our educational establishment leaders around PEF expenditure and impact.

Driver: Cost of Living

UNCRC: Article 6 - Right to life, survival and development.

Article 31 - Right to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Article 24 - Right to the highest attainable standard of health.

Article 27 - Right to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, moral and social development

Number of Households with Children Assisted by Tenant Support Fund

Housing Services identified one off funding to alleviate financial pressures for all tenants as a result of the cost-of-living crisis via a Tenant Support Fund. The Fund is assessed under 3 Tiers to support tenancy sustainment and prevent homelessness occurring; improve overall wellbeing within the home and address child and fuel poverty.

Since its implementation in July 2023 the Fund has assisted 116 households with children.

CHAT

Connecting Housing and Tenants (CHAT) visits are an integral function for the Neighbourhood Coaches who engage with tenants in relation to all housing and tenancy matters. CHAT visits are an excellent opportunity for Neighbourhood Coaches to focus on ensuring tenants are receiving all benefits to which they are entitled to increase household income to reduce rent arrears and poverty within the home and maximise opportunities for children and young people to thrive in a healthy home.

Driver: Income from social security and benefits

Income from Benefits

UNCRC: Article 26 – Right to benefit from social security

UNCRC: Article 27 – Right to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, moral and social development.

The CHAT visit has established a platform for upstream early intervention, enhancing tenants' health and wellbeing. It has improved data collection in relation to aids and adaptations, saving time and resources when allocating homes and supporting tenants.

Preventing Infant Food Insecurity in Ayrshire and Arran

During 2023-24, NHS Ayrshire and Arran Public Health Department and Family Nurse Partnership worked together to develop Ayrshire wide Infant Food Insecurity Guidance which has now been published in a response to preventing food insecurity. The guidance has been developed in response to:

- The 'Scottish Government (2020) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Bill: rights and requirements' states that all children have the right to the best possible health (article 24) and an adequate standard of living (article 27) which includes appropriate nutrition to meet their developmental needs.
- The levels of children living in relative low-income families in Scotland alongside the high numbers of families with young children approaching or being referred to food banks and baby banks for help (can provide refs)
- Families in crisis do not always reach out for early help and may wait until they can no longer cope before they seek support. This could be due to feelings of shame, stigma or simply not knowing where to go for this help. It is vital that parents and carers with an infant child and pregnant women know how, where and who they can reach out to for help and support.

International Food Aid Network

The NHS Ayrshire and Arran Health Improvement Team, within the Public Health Department, have worked in partnership with the International Food Aid Network (IFAN) to produce a "Worrying About Money?" information leaflet. This provides

signposting for families experiencing food insecurity and financial crisis in East Ayrshire. The resource was published in early 2025 and is available on the IFAN website, featuring key agencies who provide financial information and support in the area. This is being promoted widely across East Ayrshire and is a useful tool for staff supporting families, with hard copies available directly from IFAN at no cost to local teams. It will be highlighted as a key resource within our Public Health Child Poverty and Financial Inclusion Referral Pathway Workshop, which is available to all health and social care staff across Ayrshire and Arran.

Early Years Universal Support

Midwives, Health Visitors, Family Nurses and support staff across East Ayrshire who are working with families who have infant children and who are experiencing money worries, including those who are struggling to afford infant formula, before and at crisis point utilise the guidance. The guidance provides information on available resources, including financial inclusion services in each HSCP area. The guidance is intended for use alongside wider advice and support for income maximisation, and where immediate support is required, access to infant formula milk or breastfeeding support for as long as it is needed.

CASE STUDY

Working with the Financial Inclusion Team, starting in September 2023, Child Poverty Action Group were invited to East Ayrshire and delivered workshops within 5 of our academies, with a focus on child poverty where learners explored cost barriers to learning at school and looked at article 26 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)- the right to benefit from social security. The Financial Inclusion team developed this link within all academies. Following on from this, all seven secondary schools in East Ayrshire joined the Cost of the School Day Voice network. Each school formed a Cost of the Day pupil group working to reduce costs at school and continue to highlight support available to families through the Financial Inclusion Team.

CPAG created a [case study](#) in the summer of 2024 to highlight this work.

Priority 3. Our children and young people feel safe

The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland was published in 2021. It aims to ensure that children's rights and voices are central to child protection and underline the critical need to engage with families to offer support and reduce risk of harm. Significant activity has been undertaken to support its implementation and we are in full compliance with all aspects of the national guidance.

A child's experience of abuse or neglect can have a lifelong and even intergenerational impact. Over the past three years we have focused on both ensuring that children and young people in East Ayrshire are kept safe from abuse, harm and neglect and strengthening the support in place to children who are on the child protection register and their families.

We said we would

- Work in partnership with our families to improve children's safety at home, school and community.
- Provide our workforce with the tools and training to identify, support and challenge neglect and harm against children and young people
- Develop innovative support models which will strengthen the safety of children, young people and families

We Did – Clear Delivery Examples

Safeguarding Midwifery Service

The Safeguarding Midwifery Team provides specialist, holistic care to women and their families where there are identified wellbeing or child protection concerns. Within NHS Women and Children's services and close working relations with the HSCP, the team plays a pivotal role in early intervention, risk assessment, and multi-agency collaboration, ensuring that safeguarding is central to maternity care. The service supports families across the perinatal period, offering trauma-informed, relationship-based care that reflects national guidance and local priorities.

In response to the updated *National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2022)*, in partnership with multi-agency partners, a comprehensive review of safeguarding processes in pregnancy was undertaken. This led to the implementation of a standardised approach to child protection concerns, including the embedding of pre-birth Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs) into routine practice. These changes have strengthened early identification and support for vulnerable families and enhanced consistency across Ayrshire.

Learning from a significant event highlighted the need to better support men in their transition to fatherhood. This insight led to the development of a Father-to-Be Pack and tailored parentcraft education for dads. Fathers accessing the service are now offered face-to-face sessions on baby care, infant feeding, and bonding and attachment. A particular focus is placed promoting early attachment with the bump to stimulate brain changes in men that support responsiveness and positive parenting. The pack includes bespoke information for men and a gifted book from the Scottish Book Trust, encouraging early reading and interaction. Qualitative feedback was

overwhelmingly positive with many Dads reporting more preparedness for fatherhood and a feeling of being included and considered.

The team are also driving the implementation of ICON, a preventative tool designed to support parents in managing infant crying and reduce the risk of abusive head trauma. This is a national directive endorsed by the Scottish Executive Nurse Directors group. Stage one of the project is underway, targeting midwifery, health visiting, and family nurse teams, with stage two expanding to all services involved with children.

Child Protection Health Team

Child Protection Health Team supports all staff within the NHS with child protection practice. This includes Child Protection supervision for named person and school nurses, Family Nurses and Safeguarding midwives. East Ayrshire has 2 whole time equivalent Child Protection Advisors at present to deliver supervision to the staff. This provides staff with a reflective and safe space to discuss more complex cases.

Level 3 child protection training is offered to all frontline health staff who have a role with assessing risk and managing child protection. This is a single agency and includes all health visitors and school nurses. In addition to this staff can access multi-agency training from the multi-agency training calendar. There is also access to bite sized learning events and learn pro modules on risk management and chronology.

In addition to this any staff member can phone the team for advice and support. We work closely with colleagues in social work and Police to undertake Interagency Referral Discussions for children who are most at risk and agree multi agency safe plans.

Collaboratively this support, supervision and training ensure our health teams are equipped to deliver informed supports to our families in need of care and protection.

Family Group Decision Making and Restorative Practice

HEART workstreams during 2024/25 included implementing the Family Group Decision Making and Restorative Practice training and the Request for Assistance Team within our Children's Social Work service. The HSCP commissioned Children 1st to provide restorative family approaches at an early intervention and prevention stage, linked to the development of the HEART model.

At an early stage of development, it was agreed that the service would initially link to the newly established Social Work Request for Assistance (RFA) team. An analysis of data identified a significant need for crisis intervention at point of RFA, therefore service delivery shifted from our original aim of early intervention to crisis intervention and prevention of escalation through the system as more families required detailed multi-agency plans at an earlier stage than is currently the case. This has enabled the service to provide the appropriate support to families when they need it.

Ayrshire Multi Agency Child Protection Guidance

During 2024/25, the East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee (CPC) has continued to work collaboratively with the multi-agency and pan Ayrshire Partnership on a range of matters, including embedding the pan Ayrshire Multi Agency Child Protection Guidance (2023) locally. Subgroups of the CPC have also progressed quality assurance actions in relation to the implementation of the pan Ayrshire and National

Guidance for Child Protection which have included revisions of the IRD process, developing child friendly materials for children and young people and the early development of an East Ayrshire approach to contextual safeguarding and vulnerable young people. The impact of the National Child Protection Guidance and Pan Ayrshire Multi Agency Child Protection Guidance continues to be evaluated to inform the CPC's ongoing improvement work

The CPC continues to prioritise building multi-agency workforce confidence, awareness and partnership collaboration in relation to child exploitation, awareness of contextual safeguarding and the findings identified from completed learning reviews. This was achieved through delivering five multi-agency shared learning events which took place across Kilmarnock and Cumnock during October and November 2024.

Respectful Relationships

A suite of policies and professional learning supports are in place within Education to support respectful relationships including a well-established RSHP curriculum, all schools taking part in the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award process and the Education Service's Respectful Relationships Anti-Bullying Policy and appropriate recording and monitoring mechanisms via the SEEMIS Bullying Recording and Monitoring Module are also in place. This policy will be updated this session considering new Scottish Government Guidance on Bullying and new guidance on prejudiced based behaviours, namely misogyny and racism. Work is in place to embed this new guidance locally.

In session 2024-25, the development of the Regulation Tracker (RT) to track regulation and the Dysregulation Analysis Tool (DAT) to support schools in understanding the function of the dysregulated behaviour so that effective approaches and interventions, based on assessment and analysis, can be implemented. Initially, 15 primary schools undertook a test of change to ensure the assessment tools and draft guidance were fit for purpose prior to full implementation however, by June 2025 most primary schools were using both tools.

Although last year saw a reduction of 18% in incidents of violence and aggression reported in schools compared to session 2023-24, numbers remain concerning. We recognise that the RT and DAT do not 'fix' issues, but give schools a framework to analyse behaviour, record incidents appropriately and base support and interventions on evidence which leads to change, as evidenced by one of the system's early adopters:

Following a baseline audit based on the school's available data and information from the staff team, it became clear that data was fragmented and didn't provide a good understanding of children's behaviour.

Staff undertook CLPL where they were supported in the use of the RT and DAT. They recognised that their perception of behaviours in school did not align with the data provided through the assessment tools and were able to think more critically about interventions which would lead to improved outcomes.

The staff team reviewed current planning for children and analysed assessment information to determine whether the supports they were receiving were required, and/or the right support.

Based on their findings the Headteacher realigned support for children, reallocated resource and reduced the number of children receiving individualised supports. The Headteacher met with parents and explained how support would look for their child, ensuring families were in agreement and Child's Plans reflected changes in support.

Working as staff teams of two, supporting groups of children, colleagues reported their stress was reduced and wellbeing increased. Staff were able to share curriculum planning, resources, targets and knowledge, and reported they felt workload was more manageable. They also felt able to seek advice from each other, supporting each other better resulting in decrease in stress.

Continued analysis from the DAT at whole school level identified a reduction in SHE Reports, and reductions in the number of incidences of violence and aggression. Staff verbally expressed the school felt calmer, impacting positively on the educational experience of all children, especially as classes were no longer disrupted by one or two pupils.

Online Safety

The East Ayrshire Digital Leads network has been reinstated and refreshed this session with representation from colleagues in Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Specialist sectors. This collaborative network enables practitioners to share good practice across the authority. Bi-annual in-person meetings are hosted by Education IT colleagues to share important updates and professional learning opportunities with Digital Leads who then cascade this information to their staff. Cyber Resilience and Internet Safety (CR-IS) features in our East Ayrshire Digital Literacy Progression frameworks from Early Level through to Third Level. All updates in relation to CR-IS are shared with Digital Leads timeously.

Housing Support to Reduce Homelessness

The Housing Services' Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) (2019–2026) outlines actions to support vulnerable groups, including children and young people. In 2024-25, 81 households with children presented to Housing Options, compared to 111 in 2021-22, with lone parent households aged over 25 remaining the largest cohort. As of 31 March 2025, 11 households with 25 children were in temporary accommodation, a reduction from 19 households with 36 children the previous year.

In response to unprecedented levels of temporary accommodation use across Scotland, the establishment of the National Acquisition Programme, backed by investment of at least £60 million from local authority resource planning assumptions within the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, is one of a number of actions the Scottish Government prioritised in 2023-24 to help to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation. The Council has acquired 86 properties to date with 9 properties purchased with sitting tenants, directly preventing homelessness, and avoiding the need for temporary accommodation. For household with children, this ensures stability and prevents disruption to their education and wellbeing.

The Housing First model, funded through the RRTP and launched in August 2021, has delivered significant benefits for children and young people. By adopting a trauma-informed, collaborative approach, Housing First reduces time in temporary accommodation and prevents future homelessness. In East Ayrshire, 17 Housing First tenancies achieved 100% sustainment rate in 2024-25, surpassing the national average of 85%. Notably, this model has enabled 6 parents to maintain contact and relationships with their children by providing intensive support to stabilise their circumstances.

In 2024-25, 16.1% of homeless applications came from young people aged 16-24, up from 15.3% the previous year. To address this, the RRTP funded a dedicated prevention officer who established a weekly presence in third-sector support hubs, such as SL33 and SL66, to provide housing assistance and prevent youth homelessness. This prevention work has now been mainstreamed, with Housing Options Officers collaborating across the community to support young people, including care leavers, through partnerships with the Care Leavers' Cabinet and other services.

An education programme to reduce youth homelessness has been introduced in secondary schools, rolled out during the summer of 2025 at SL33 and SL66, with plans for annual implementation across all secondary schools commencing August/September 2025.

Housing Support for young people who have been Care Experienced

All young people transitioning from a care setting have an allocated lead professional in Children and Families, with many also being supported further by an intensive support worker to assist them with the practical, social, and emotional issues involved in moving on to a more independent living environment. The level of support provided is determined by the needs, vulnerability, and preferences of each young person.

Young people leaving care are entitled to support with accommodation needs from their Council. The primary responsibility for securing accommodation for care leavers rests with East Ayrshire Housing Services, however, it is essential that a Council-wide corporate parenting approach is adopted.

To ensure a managed and fully supported transition to independent living, young people leaving care are considered for re-housing on the Strategic Needs Group within the Common Allocation Policy. Working with colleagues from the Health and Social Care Partnership, accommodation is identified which will provide the best possible opportunity for the young person. This takes account of existing support networks, augmented by a tailored package of support to develop the skills required to set up and sustain a tenancy at a pace which recognises the progress, attainments, and abilities of the young person.

Whole Family Approach

Following a successful review of Getting Our Priorities Right (GOPR) Guidance and a successful practitioner's event in 2023, it became apparent that in ensuring that children and families in East Ayrshire are protected, safe and healthy there was a need to develop the 'Whole Family Approach' to working across children's and adult drugs

and alcohol services in East Ayrshire. The aim is to develop and deliver improvements to strategic and operational multi-agency working practices between children's and drugs and alcohol services. There was a need highlighted to explore, develop and improve practice, processes and resources to support the implementation of the Whole Family Approach in East Ayrshire in respect of children, parents and families impacted by drugs and alcohol.

Currently practitioners are working through a test of change supporting work with identified pregnant drug users and seeking to improve the pre-birth assessment process and pathway towards developing a more integrated approach between children's and adult services. This test of change, as well as seeking to improve the assessment and pathways in pre-birth work, also seeks to improve information sharing processes to deliver a more informed and coordinated approach for the family thereby improving their care and support experience and ultimately to deliver better outcomes for service users and their children.

Anti-Social Behaviour: Educational Project

Preventative working has been on going over the last year within education to work with both primary and secondary schools to engage with young people around the issue of anti-social behaviour and the impact such behaviour has on their local community, as well as the possible consequences across the local authority. This work has expanded to include issues such as racism and hate crime, and internet safety. Within this work, the impact is clear on the young people as it allows them to think about the negative consequences for people who have experienced anti-social behaviour as well as the consequences for those involved. Feedback on the delivery has been positive with a highlight on how informative the sessions are and how it allows for an open conversation between the worker and the young people, and amongst the young person and their peers.

Sports Mentor

The Sports Mentor works with a diverse range of young people, supporting school pupils who experience behavioural challenges and anxiety-related issues that impact their ability to regulate emotions. These difficulties often manifest as disruptive or violent outbursts within the classroom environment.

Boxing is used as a key engagement tool to help break down barriers and build trust with pupils. Through structured sessions based around the GIRFEC principles, pupils are introduced to self-regulation techniques that enable them to recognise emotional triggers and develop strategies to manage their responses more effectively.

Referrals to the programme are received via Requests for Assistance from Education, the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), and school nursing teams. The targeted, early intervention approach has led to significant positive outcomes, with many pupils continuing their development by joining North West Boxing Club. This transition into a community sports setting provides ongoing support and reinforces positive behaviours, demonstrating the wider contribution of sport to education and preventative youth work.

Pitchin In Programme

'In' Programme in partnership with The Killie Community, a Kilmarnock Football Club charity. The Programme was designed to help build decision-making and resilience in young people through a participant centred course of discussion, which encourages participants to think for themselves, be more assertive and develop skills in anticipating the consequences of poor decisions. Outcomes for those young people who participated in the Programme were reported as positive with a majority of the young people highlighting improvements in respect of attendance, referrals, crime involvement and concern forms.

CASE STUDY 1

Pitchin In

Case Study B '25 When B first joined Pitchin' In, he was a young person immediately identified as facing significant challenges. With school attendance at just 66% and multiple behavioural referrals, B was at risk of disengaging entirely from education and positive peer networks. Over the course of the 8-week programme, B's transformation was nothing short of remarkable. His school attendance rose to 89%, and his behavioural referrals were halved—from four to two. These improvements were not just statistical; they reflected a deeper shift in B's mindset and self-awareness. Initially known as the "class clown," B often sought attention in ways that disrupted learning—behaviours rooted in a complex home life marked by family separation and the pressures of being one of many siblings. However, through consistent support, structured activities, and meaningful mentorship, B began to channel his energy more positively. He started to reflect on his choices, understand the risks associated with antisocial behaviour, and take ownership of his decisions.

Mairi MacKenzie, Inclusion & Engagement Lead at The Killie Community, reflected on B's progress: "B's journey is a testament to what can happen when a young person is truly seen and supported. He came into the programme unsure of himself and often masking that uncertainty with humour. By the end, he was not only more focused and engaged, but he had also developed a sense of pride in his own growth. That's the power of connection and consistency." The impact of Pitchin' In extended beyond B's personal development.

As PC Cotton, Campus Officer at William McIlvanney Campus, noted: "The programme has improved my individual relationships with each pupil. After each week, the pupils now ask questions and are more aware of the risks of drugs, alcohol, and anti-social behaviour."

Priority 4: Our Children and young people have the best start in life and achieve their potential.

We know that a child's early and developing years are a critical opportunity for building healthy, resilient children and young people to reach their full educational potential. The importance of getting it right for all our children and young people cannot be overemphasised and the challenges are also well understood, for example, reducing health inequalities and tackling issues such as emotional and mental distress. We also know that improved outcomes requires the support of professionals as well as political leaders both local and national, working together in partnership with families, young people and Communities. Another key requirement is strong universal services to support all families and to identify and provide extra early help.

We said we would

- Build upon our Community assets and the skills and talents of our children, young people and families to provide the best start in life
- Implement a series of innovative programmes which will support our children and young people to develop and achieve their potential.
- We will support all of our children and young people, particularly those most at risk to make best use of our support pathways for learning, work and wellbeing

We did – Key Delivery Examples

Neonatal Care

A service improvement project has also been undertaken within the Neonatal Unit to encourage cue-based feeding within the reporting period. This targeted work has been found to reduce the length of time that babies require neonatal care by 7.1 days, to reduce the time taken to support babies with oral feeding from 18.5 days to 13.7 days, and to reduce the level of feeding problems reported by parents and carers on discharge from hospital.

Bump Buddies

The support network around a family has a significant impact on their feeding experience and choices. Bump Buddies are antenatal sessions delivered by a third sector partner to provide information to empower parents in their decisions. Sessions are delivered in 3-week blocks. In 2024/25, 12 blocks (36 sessions) were delivered in East Ayrshire; 79 pregnant women attended with members of their support network. In the same year, 79% of mums living in East Ayrshire who were breastfeeding on discharge from Ayrshire Maternity Unit took up the offer of postnatal breastfeeding peer support; of those, 51.6% were exclusively breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks.

Family Nurse Partnership

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme continues to provide vital support to young families across East Ayrshire. In January 2024, the programme expanded its eligibility criteria to include clients up to age 25 with previous care experience, alongside those aged 19 and under. The team demonstrate strong integrated working through a range of collaborative initiatives including the development of a colic pathway in partnership with east Ayrshire Health Visitors. The FNP service maintains

close working relationships with services including SL33 and SL66 and play an active role in community-based groups such as BabyChat and the East Ayrshire Family Support Group.

We implemented a dedicated sexual health outreach service to improve access to contraception and sexual health advice for FNP clients. This service offers emergency contraception, bridging methods, STI testing and treatment, pregnancy testing, and education around Sayana Press—ensuring young people receive timely and confidential support. The team is dedicated to sharing learning and building capacity across East Ayrshire. FNP nurses support the Health Visiting Service with over 70 professionals attending FNP-led Motivational Interviewing workshops, with advanced sessions planned. Supervision workshops for Clinical Team Leaders also continue, promoting leadership and reflective practice.

Notably, the [FNP Data Linkage Study](#) highlights the programme's impact on early childhood health. Positive outcomes include increased breastfeeding rates, reduced exposure to second-hand smoke, and higher dental registration by age two—demonstrating the programme's contribution to improving long-term health and wellbeing for children in East Ayrshire.

Baby Friendly Gold for Breastfeeding standards

Ayrshire and Arran have achieved Baby Friendly Gold for Breastfeeding standards for another 2 years in 2024 and our rates for breastfeeding have improved especially at initiation stage from 52.7% in 2022/2023 to 53.9% (increase of 1.2%) in 2023/2024. However, we are seeing a decrease at the 6–8-week review where breastfeeding rates drop from 22.3% in 2022/2023 to 21.4% in 2023/2024 (drop of 0.9%). Going forward, the service will focus on improving breastfeeding rates at the 6–8-week review and beyond. The service now has 16 Breastfeeding Champions across all bases in East Ayrshire who will undertake additional training, provide additional support to Health Visitor's, support joint home visits for breastfeeding challenges where needed and link with specialist infant feeding team where more specialist support is deemed necessary. The service is also working with the working with the Quality Improvement team and champions/Clinical Team Leader's to review data and ensure test of change is evaluated before further roll out of support is escalated.

Child Healthy Weight Team

NHS Ayrshire and Arran's Child Healthy Weight team has continued to support children and their families to achieve a healthy weight through the well-established Jumpstart programme. Jumpstart works with families of children aged 5-17 years old and children with additional support needs, delivering four programmes: Junior (ages 5-9), Senior (ages 10-13), Teens (ages 14-17) and Jumpstart Plus (additional support needs). A total of 46 referrals were received during 2024/25 for children living in East Ayrshire, accounting for 32% of all referrals to the Ayrshire and Arran wide service.

The referrals received were evenly split in terms of gender, with 23 male and 23 female. Of the 46 referrals, the majority originated from SIMD 1 and 2 (82%), with the remaining 18% from SIMD 3 and 4. No referrals were received from SIMD 5 areas. In addition, the team also supported 6 teenagers through a Teen Fit

programme, delivered 92 group based physical activity and health education sessions and attended 14 events to promote the service over the last year.

Delivery of 2-5 year old Flu Vaccine

In partnership with Education colleagues, the Early Years service delivered the 2–5-year-old flu vaccine during 2024/25 within all nursery settings with one exception, across East Ayrshire where parents gave consent but did not have to be present. Parents also had the option to support their child whilst having their vaccines. The service's dedicated team of staff nurses delivered the flu vaccines over a 6-month period, as well as 27 routine immunisations per week.

Nationally, the overall flu uptake across pregnant women, older people and staff groups was lower this year, however our staff have worked closely with Pharmacies, Public Health and Portering services to meet the demands of the programme and to promote local uptake of the vaccine. The service achieved an uptake rate of 57.8% in East Ayrshire

Babychat Groups

The Early Years service's seven 'Babychat' groups situated across East Ayrshire have continued to deliver health information, infant feeding advice and support to infants aged six weeks to six months and their carers on a range of topics.

Families are identified by their Health Visitor to access support and are invited into the six-to-eight-week programme. These sessions continue to be undertaken through a collaborative approach involving various partners such as Speech and Language Therapists, Dietetics and Community Practitioners, and are delivered by Health Visitor Support Workers. Infant massage and 'Bookbug' are also core elements of the programme.

Feedback from parents/carers have been very positive with some parents stating that they were anxious prior to coming but that staff, the environment and other parents made them feel at ease. They added how the sessions were fun and informative and has helped them make friends with other local parents.

Speech and Language Therapy Service

Resource constraints and a reduction in commissioned funding necessitated the need to remodel the Children and Young People Speech and Language Therapy service in 2024/2025. Service delivery has adopted a locality-based approach in line with the HEART Model, enabling the service to be more accessible within communities. This work increased local capacity by realising benefits such as regular clinic slots and reduced travel time and reduced waiting times for children and families however also resulted in a reduction of established interventions within educational settings. Families have responded well to the delivery of services in the localities they live.

Parent stories

"I had concerns that my child had suddenly developed a stammer and was unsure how best to help, as there was lot of information online which felt very overwhelming. Within two weeks of noting my concern, I was able to attend a face to face drop in session with an experienced Speech and Language Therapist only

5 minutes from our house. This immediately gave me the appropriate knowledge and tools of how to help, reduced my level of worry and has resulted in my child not actually needing specialist SLT input. Her stammer improved almost immediately. I am delighted with this outcome. Thank you."

"I now do not need to travel on two buses to get to my child's Speech and Language appointments. This has had a huge benefit to us by reducing time and cost of public transport."

"Having a key link Speech and Language Therapist for my child's school who visits on a regular basis is so reassuring. I know I can access their advice if I need it."

Early Language Development

The CLAN (Communication, Language and Nurture) steering group re-launched April 2024. This ensures strong, collaborative relationships across all levels. This group will report to Integrated children's services.

A number of new initiatives have been introduced and trialled across East Ayrshire to further enhance children's speech, language and communication and lead to improved child outcomes. The priority initiatives are linked to the national theory of change and include the following:

Three locality areas Doon Valley, Irvine Valley and Kilmarnock East were identified for a pilot programme allowing professionals across health and education to connect every term to share assessment data and impact evidence gathered across agencies. The networks are proving to be very successful. Collaboration between health and education colleagues has improved as a direct result and this is building capacity and confidence across the systems. Each locality network group is driving forward initiatives ensuring a preventative model with early intervention at its heart.

The introduction of Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) sessions for children with complex needs in January 2024 for a six-week block. The aim was to build parent confidence and support their knowledge around speech and language development, in safe, caring environments. A Home Visiting Teacher facilitates the sessions and is supported by colleagues from SALT and OH. The sessions have been extended to four different locality areas. All parents who attended the sessions have indicated that they have increased their knowledge and understanding of language development and interactions as a result of attending. A guidance document has been devised to support the roll out of this initiative and ensure a consistent approach.

From the 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 153 PEEP sessions were delivered across the authority. Families during the school holiday periods were also invited to attend PEEP Session which took place within Stewarton, Patna, Bellsbank, Newmilns, Annanhill, the Dean Park, Catrine and Cherrytrees There were 4 baby Peep sessions, 28 toddler sessions, 60 pre-school sessions and 61 mixed sessions. As well as PEEP sessions, 38 families accessed book bug sessions at our partner venue, Take A Bow to offer access to the wider community. Feedback from parents follows:

"It's good to have something on over the summer to enjoy and mix with other children. They mix up the experiences and I like the fact parents come too"

“The girls are super with our children and the parents too. Improves mental health for all the family.”

“I wish there were more sessions as enjoyed learning with the other mums “made me feel that it’s okay not to get it right all the time“.

“Great fun, enjoy this time with my child”.

“I like hearing other parents views and struggles and this helps me knowing I am not alone”

“My wee one is always asking is it Wednesday for Peep” Parent

Developing the Young Workforce

While the official Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations published in February 2025 identifies the percentage of school leavers from East Ayrshire (2023-24) in an initial positive destination as 95.2% ,of the 191 statutory summer leavers reported in the 16+ Data Portal, 176 (92%) were in positive destinations. As a cohort historically with poorer outcomes, there is clear progress in the work undertaken in school to deliver effective careers pathways for young people leaving in S4.

The opening of SL66 in Netherthird, Cumnock in October 2024 means that young people in the south of the authority can access a wide range of activity which complements existing delivery in Kilmarnock at SL33. This includes bespoke training and learning opportunities for school pupils at risk of disengagement and provision for economically inactive young people who undertake workshops and group sessions building soft skills through relationship development and practical activities. These interventions aim to increase confidence, improve communication, and develop teamwork, all of which are essential for entering any workplace.

To further raise awareness of opportunities in both local and national job markets, the annual ‘Pathways to Careers’ event took place in Ayrshire College in February 2025. The council’s employability team attended the event to provide guidance and advice to young people attending. With 60 employers and over 400 people registering from across East Ayrshire; the event gave attendees the opportunity to engage directly with employers and learn about career pathways, future opportunities and current vacancies within a range of industries.

Skills Pathways

East Ayrshire secondary schools continued to offer a range of vocational pathways in session 2024-25 which include provision of industry accredited courses such as the level 5 SVQ in Performing Engineering Operations delivered in school in partnership with Ayrshire College. Collaboration with DYW Ayrshire in the development of Innovative Projects has enhanced the workplace learning offer to learners across East Ayrshire with activity focusing on a range of areas including Engineering, Construction, Rural Skills, Hospitality and Early Years. Scottish Government funding for DYW Coordinators continued in 2024-25 with designated staff in our seven secondary schools and Park School working to support business engagement and highlighting opportunities for young people.

WG13 Café Employability Opportunities

WG13 is a vehicle addressing the lack of employment and training opportunities for vulnerable young people with additional barriers to employment in East Ayrshire. Set

in the heart of Kilmarnock, as a social enterprise WG13 aims to incorporate industry based best practice through our involvement in community development and support aspects of our service delivery. Our ability to move some of the most vulnerable young people in East Ayrshire into employment is testament to the success of our partnership approach. We pride ourselves on our cross-partnership approach to creating positive destinations and sustaining a close working link with the young people as we continue to create new opportunities for people with multiple barriers.

We are also involved in delivering peer led training and volunteering opportunities with a view to diverting young people away from crime and disorder. WG13 has given us the opportunity to offer a progression route for young people who have completed a Community Service Order

Many of the young people we work with may come from backgrounds where alcohol, drugs and associated crime featured heavily. By introducing them to training and employment opportunities within the hospitality industry we can begin to have conversations about responsible alcohol consumption and the impact on both their own and other people's lives of criminal activity while providing them with practical work experience and training.

Supporting Care Experienced Children and Young People in Education

Developmental milestones are inclusive of all children and young people, and Care Experienced Children are supported developmentally in accordance with assessment of needs.

The Care Experienced Framework has been further developed to encompass a spectrum of Additional Support Needs and in this way seeks to assess needs across both developmental and educational domains following best practice in terms of the least intrusive method of assessment. Guidance to support the use of the ASN and Care Experienced Framework has been developed.

The Assessment Framework is encompassed within our Relationships and Behaviour Framework, and education staff are able to access support to implement and analyse the data from the assessment to translate this into meaningful supports and interventions. This approach ensures we build capacity across the Education Service to best meet children's needs, aligned to the four key features of inclusion, namely present, participating, achieving and supported, the foundation of our approach to an inclusive education.

The implementation of the framework supported the establishment of year one of the Care Experience Lead Teachers' (CELTS) CLPL coaching and consultation programme. The framework has been an invaluable tool for monitoring the progress of care experienced pupils, informing interventions, helping staff get to know their community, identifying at risk pupils, and as a guide for next steps. Support can also be accessed by pupils identified as on the edge of care including those in informal kinship arrangements complementing the activity of designated Kinship Champions in schools.

Of the 132 children supported across the year one schools, 43 (33%) had improved attendance across session 2024/25 and learners have stated they feel more involved

in the life of their school e.g. participating in clubs etc, developing friendships, improving their confidence, and have a better sense of belonging. Lead teachers have delivered Keeping the Promise Award (KTPA) training to 355 staff and further training has been arranged for the new academic session. Three of the schools have also enlisted staff as Promise Keepers and they too will carry out mentoring roles with identified care experienced learners in session 2025-26.

Improved outcomes for care experienced learners from East Ayrshire secondary schools was also evident in initial destination data from session 2023-24 published in February 2025. This cohort of 91 young people comprised leavers looked after at home; looked after away from home; and previously looked after. Of these leavers, 83 (91.2%) progressed into positive destinations from school. This is an increase of 4.2pp from the 2022-23 survey of initial destinations, published in February 2024 where, of the 78 identified care experienced leavers, 68 (87%) had progressed into an initial positive destination.

CASE STUDY

SL33/SL66 & Family Nurse Partnership - Joint working

At SL33 and SL66 one of our core pillars of support is parental employability support under Scottish Government Tackling Child Poverty employability funding.

In the four years we have been in operation in East Ayrshire, NHS Ayrshire and Arran's Family Nurse Partnership has been a valuable referral pathway into our parental employability programme, supporting us to make links with families who are not only at high risk of child poverty but also the most disconnected from Council services. In Scotland, a family nurse works for the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP), a voluntary programme for young, first-time mothers (aged 19 and under, or under 25 in some areas) to support them from early pregnancy until their child is two years old. They provide intensive, structured home visits to build a therapeutic relationship, helping mothers with their own health and wellbeing, as well as the health and development of their child. The role involves identifying strengths, supporting holistic change, and connecting families to community resources to improve their social and economic circumstances, in line with Scotland's children and young people policies.

Working together has proven to be a highly successful endeavour, providing meaningful and sustainable pathways into further education, training or employment for younger families, reducing risk and promoting early intervention.

See key highlights below:

- Sharing best practice about how to support young parents with their needs
- Strong communication links between FNP and parental employability staff to share key updates on shared clients
- Providing a sustainable outlet for FNP practitioners at the end of the parent's journey on the programme that provides progression into a positive destination
- Family Nurse Partnership staff have provided our staff with valuable CPD including Motivational Interviewing and Partners in Parenting Education (PIPE) activities which we continue to use in our practice.

- Many of the young parents on FNP programme are young people who are known to SL33/SL66 through our school or post-school employability offer. For active clients this ensures early intervention support pre-birth, and past clients feel at ease re-joining the service due to continuity of staff and existing positive relationships.

Case Study 2

Shannon's Story from SL33

<https://youtu.be/AGVuTBnI4VE?si=TV61RDW0ZKIGx8z7>

Priority 5: Our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is improving

Mental health problems in children and young people are increasing at a rapid rate. Research shows that around 1 in 6 to 1 in 4 children and young people struggle with mental health problems at any given time. At the same time, 50% of adult mental health problems start during adolescence and the impact of poor mental health in childhood impacts on learning, life outcomes and physical health.

Knowing that many children and young people will experience behavioural or emotional problems at some stage has resulted in schools and settings that work with children and young people being encouraged and supported to increase their capacity to prevent mental health problems from developing in the first place.

We said we would

- Support the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people of all abilities across East Ayrshire using engaging and creative approaches.
- Ensure all staff working with children and families are provided with access to appropriate training opportunities in mental health interventions.
- Support children, young people and their families to develop essential skills, habits and attitudes for building resilience

We Did – Key Delivery Examples

Young Carers

East Ayrshire Carers Centre Young Carers Service delivered extensive support between April 2024 and March 2025, including over 21,000 instances of one-to-one support, 137 new registrations, and 46 Young Carers Statements. Weekly respite groups were held across multiple locations, offering structured activities, meals, and emotional support. These sessions helped young carers relax, build friendships, and engage in creative and educational activities. The service also introduced specialised art and music groups to support mental health and resilience, culminating in a showcase themed “What Matters to Me,” which highlighted the carers’ personal values and experiences.

Respite breaks were a major highlight, with day trips to local attractions and residential stays at the Treehouse Centre. These experiences allowed young carers to unwind, build confidence, and form lasting friendships. Unique opportunities included flying experiences, theatre visits, and participation in STEM events. The Young Carers Festival and sailing trips further enriched their lives. The service also facilitated access to the “Time to Live” fund, enabling carers to pursue hobbies and enjoy short breaks with their families, contributing to their overall wellbeing.

Special events such as parties during Carers Week, Halloween, and Christmas brought joy and community spirit. The Christmas toy appeal was particularly impactful, providing gifts to 309 young carers and 111 siblings, thanks to generous donations. Young carers also participated in advocacy efforts, including a visit to the Scottish Parliament, and were recognised in the East Ayrshire Youth Awards. Employability initiatives, like the leadership academies in partnership with Columba 1400, helped

young carers build self-esteem and prepare for future careers, with many progressing to further education or employment.

Challenges remain, particularly in supporting neurodivergent young carers within group settings due to space and staffing limitations. The service is exploring more tailored one-to-one support and adapting group environments. Awareness-raising efforts continue through school partnerships, social work referrals, and national advocacy. Staff monitor wellbeing through detailed engagement tracking, and case studies illustrate the transformative impact of the service—from increased confidence and social skills to improved mental health and aspirations for the future.

School Counselling

School Counselling in East Ayrshire continues to be provided by the Exchange. Currently there are 14 counsellors in post, providing 192 hours of counselling/psychological wellbeing sessions per week.

The service continues to provide psychological wellbeing support for children under the age of 10 (Age 5+) This is in addition to the over 10 service which is funded indefinitely by the Scottish government. The under 10 service is extremely well utilised by all Primary schools in East Ayrshire and data gathered over the past 3 years shows the positive impact it is having in terms of early intervention and preventative approaches towards improving the resilience of younger children.

Over the past academic year, the service has supported/delivered:

- 1189 pupils
- 5789 Counselling Sessions

The Exchange provide 1-1 counselling, small group targeted interventions, support and advice for families, capacity building for staff and arms-length support for schools and families where needed. As well as 1-1 and small group supports, The Exchange also deliver a targeted transition programme designed to support children who are anxious about the move from Primary to Secondary school.

Impact Data

- 83% of secondary school aged pupils supported by the Exchange reported an improved outcome following their intervention using the YP-CORE assessment.
- 87% of all Primary pupils accessing support registered an improvement in their psychological wellbeing using the Child and Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)
- Following engagement with the Exchange 78% of pupils in Primary schools said they felt attending sessions has helped to improve their mental health and wellbeing.
- 69% of pupils in Secondary schools said they would recommend counselling to a friend.
- Benefits of counselling reported by C&YP include: ability to cope with problems/worries, ability to regulate emotions and increased motivation.

Children & Young People's voice/views:

"I'm more excited to go to school because I can express my feelings better."

"It helps me cope in school. I cope better at home too. I used to cry a lot. When I've seen the counsellor, I feel in a better mood. I feel like something is being done to help me with my feelings."

"It helped me talk about my feelings with my Mum and Dad. It helped me to not keep things to myself."

"Counselling has helped me be more expressive, it has helped me find myself. I was quite lost before, now I have my own personality."

"I literally wouldn't talk to any teacher in the school. But when I went to counselling she waited until I wanted to talk. She (Counsellor) played games until I felt I could open up. Now I can open up to friends."

"I used to do bad things to help me cope, I didn't want to talk to anyone about what I did. I was able to open up to the counsellor without being shamed. She wasn't judging me."

Kooth

Kooth has been available since 2022 and was targeted towards young people of secondary school age to help improve resilience and provide emotional wellbeing support at an early stage. Kooth offered a broad spectrum of support, including anxiety, depression, self-harm and managing relationships. Through Kooth data, the partnership identified a rising number of users, with 767 logins during the last quarter reported in 2025. The partnership had identified less uptake of Kooth by males and have been working with the local college to find ways to raise awareness and encourage male usage. 490 young people aged between 14-25 years have now registered with Kooth with a 10% increase in male usage subsequently evidenced.

School Nursing Service

School Nurses have continued to develop a plethora of available resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people whom they support in schools and community settings including their own home. Training has remained a focus for all staff with all School Nurse staff now trained in LIAM (Lets Introduce Anxiety Management). A smaller group of school nurses have also completed BBA (brief behavioural activation (support for low mood) (NES). They continue to work alongside children and young people to develop a plan of support that meets their individual needs.

School Nurse's use evidence-based tools to ensure the voice of our CYP are captured using platforms such as MOMO (Mind of my Own), Sand boxes within play therapy as well as using on line resources to support conversations around emotional health and wellbeing topics that our children/young people wish to discuss. Introducing these such resources are equipping our CYP with tools to support them cope with emotions and anxieties as they grow and develop.

Children's Workbook for Mental Wellbeing

Public Health worked with a primary school teacher and pupils to co-create an interactive [Children's Workbook for Mental Wellbeing](#). Pupil voice, thoughts and ideas directly shaped the content and presentation to ensure it was both engaging and appropriate. Broader consultation with additional school staff and pupils then helped ensure it meets the needs of a wider group of young people. Participation and

engagement work with children and young people will continue to be a focus for all services in line with UNCRC legislation.

What pupils think about the booklets:

- “They are nice and calming”
- “I feel they are good to help you relax and think about your emotions.”
- “The mindful colouring helps me calm down”
- “I like that it doesn't feel like work”
- “It's a nice way to take your mind off other things”

Children's 1st Family Wellbeing Service

Children's 1st offer support to families where there is a child/young person experiencing emotional distress and is impacting on health or learning. To promote family communication and improved relationships, using a trauma sensitive, whole family approach.

Family Wellbeing continues to connect with families with all levels of need and with an increasing trend in families experiencing Domestic Violence, Kinship, Disability (neuro divergence).

Children's emotional wellbeing, school/education, family relationships, disability and parental mental health continue to some of our top challenges for families. The complexities of the families means that Children 1st continue to work with families on average between 27-52 weeks.

There has also been an increase in the number of families experiencing domestic abuse with many families currently managing past or present coercion or gender equality challenges in the home. In response the whole East Ayrshire team has now completed the Safe and Together Model to support assessment and analysis of risk.

Occupational Therapy for Mental Health and Wellbeing (OTMHWB)

Over the past year the OT has provided a range of inputs with a view to improving the functioning of children and young people in East Ayrshire where issues such as anxiety have made it difficult for them to do the things that are important to them at their age and stage of development. This has included:

- **Facilitating targeted Emotional Wellbeing groups in some of the primary schools (James Hamilton, Annanhill, Lochnorris and Onthank).** Each group runs for 6 sessions and the pupils learn lifelong coping skills. 25 children from these schools have attended groups. The groups have reportedly had a positive impact on the number and appropriateness of referrals to the school counselling service. Evaluation showed the children have enjoyed the sessions, and staff and parents have reported benefits to attending including coming into school on their own, improved relationships with peers and better participation in class.
- **Providing advice and support to the Children's Houses around independent living skills and improving the transition pathways.** Staff have been putting some of the guidance into practice to support individual young people in their care.
- **Facilitating workshops for parents, carers and staff.** Workshops include Introduction to Anxiety workshops for NEST, foster carer workshops, sensory and regulation workshops and environment and transition workshops for ECC staff. All

workshops aim to increase skills and confidence of attendees around how they support their own children or the young people in their care. Feedback from all workshops has been positive. Those who have attended Introduction to Anxiety workshops have rated them as “Very good” or “Excellent”, stated that the information they learned was useful and they would be able to apply it to their own situation.

- **Providing universal and targeted support and advice to parents, carers and staff via the OT Advice Line, mailbox, drop-ins, face-to-face visits to ECCs, network locality groups and attending events.** By offering these supports we are able to support families at an earlier stage, often reducing the need for a referral into our service. Over 50 families visited the OT stall at the East Ayrshire National Play Day event and had the opportunity to try out resources, gain advice and strategies and take part in activities to practice skills required for daily living activities at home and school. Emotional support and advice was also given to parents around the challenges of parenting children with additional support needs or mental health concerns.
- **Joint working with other agencies, such as input to the ASN Peep sessions ran by the Home Visiting Teacher and a Young Carers ASN project; sharing resources with other services; and contributing to meetings, for example the School Counselling and Family support steering groups.** Feedback received has noted this to break down barriers, support parents at the earliest opportunity and indirectly have a positive impact on many children. The advice and support provided has been implemented into practice by other practitioners, ensuring children's holistic wellbeing needs are met.

Neurodevelopmental Programme Board

The Neurodevelopmental Programme Board has continued to meet regularly over the course of the last year. Chaired by Linda McAulay-Griffiths, Director of Education and Skills, the team have set up a variety of workstreams to support children, families and staff. The workstreams in operation are Family Support, Digital, Engagement and Workforce Development. Extensive work has been carried out in respect of holding events for parents, staff and families to support children with neurodiversity. Most recently, there has also been extensive engagement around training needs for staff. NEST have provided incredibly valuable support to the Board and we look forward to continuing to provide events and support across the Council in all settings.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CAMHS have realigned their services to deliver the National CAMHS Specification, developing a seven-day crisis intervention and intensive treatment service (CUAIT) for young people from the hours of 8 am to 8pm and developing the NeuroCAMHS team to provide assessment and treatment for young people with co-morbid mental health illness and neurodevelopmental concerns. A multidisciplinary assessment through Psychology, nursing, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Consultant Psychiatry, Pharmacy prescribers and a specialist GP meaning that young people are not being directed to other services for physical health assessment prior to commencement of medication if required.

CUAIT have been working closely with the wider team in East Ayrshire to develop service response for young people following an episode of treatment within hospital due to their mental health and also for young people who are in contact with the law.

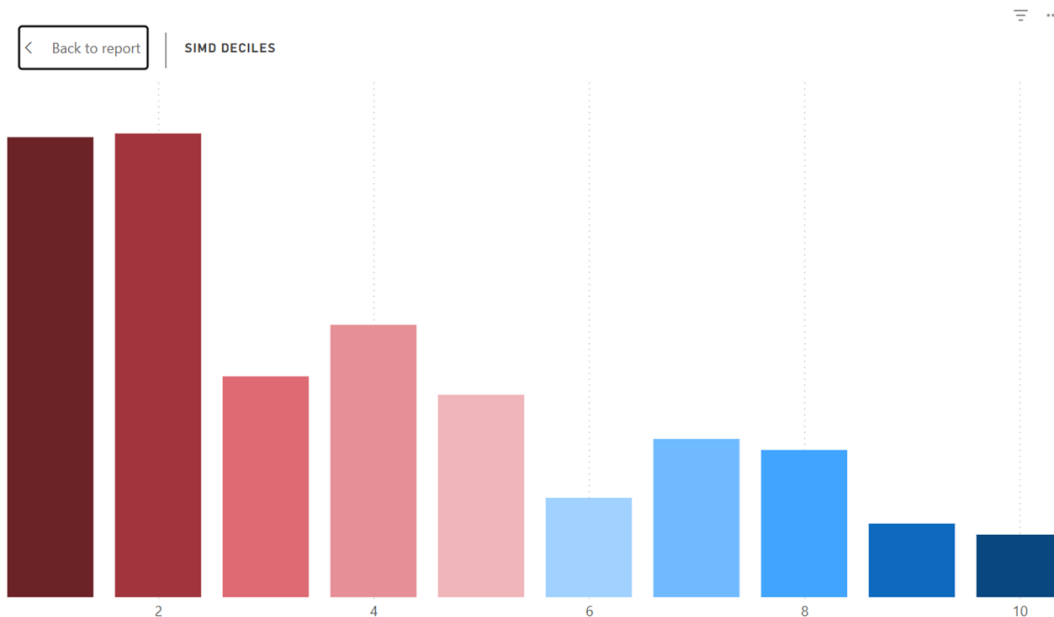
The implementation of the CAMHS specification has improved access for young people who are experiencing mental health concerns moving from 12 to 18 weeks for assessment to an assessment being provided within 4 weeks and an urgent assessment within 5 days (usually same or next day).

The following graphs highlight the number and reasons for current CAMHS referral as well as the links to locality and deprivation breakdown.

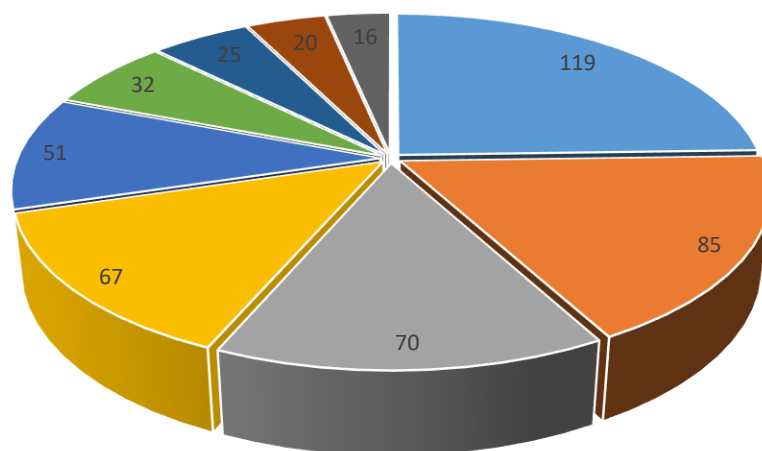
Between August 2024 and July 2025, there have been 613 referrals from East Ayrshire to CAMHS.

114 referrals have been received that are for a Neuro developmental Assessment, without a comorbid mental health concern and did meet the Scottish Governments CAHMS National Specification.

SIMD of East Ayrshire CAHMS Referrals from 1st Aug- 31st July.



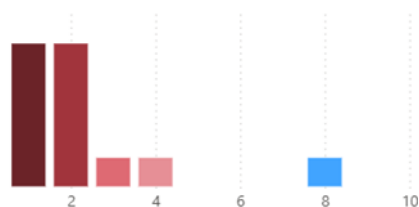
Main Referral Reason - East Ayrshire CAMHS Referrals 1st Aug 2024 - 31st July 2025



- Anxiety
- Mood Issues
- Self Harm
- Suicidal Ideation
- Behavioural Problems
- Neurodevelopmental
- ADHD
- ASD
- Emotional Dysregulation

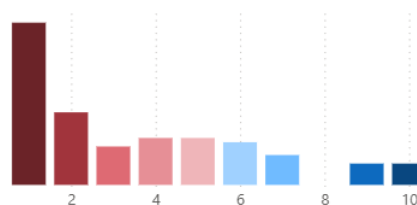
Doon Cluster – 13 Referrals

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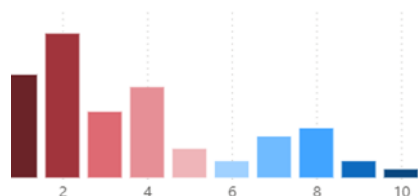
Grange Cluster – 117 Referrals

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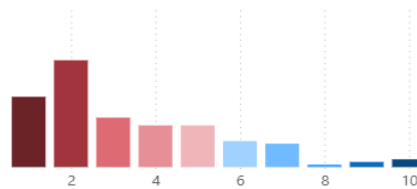
Kilmarnock Academy Cluster – 144 Referrals

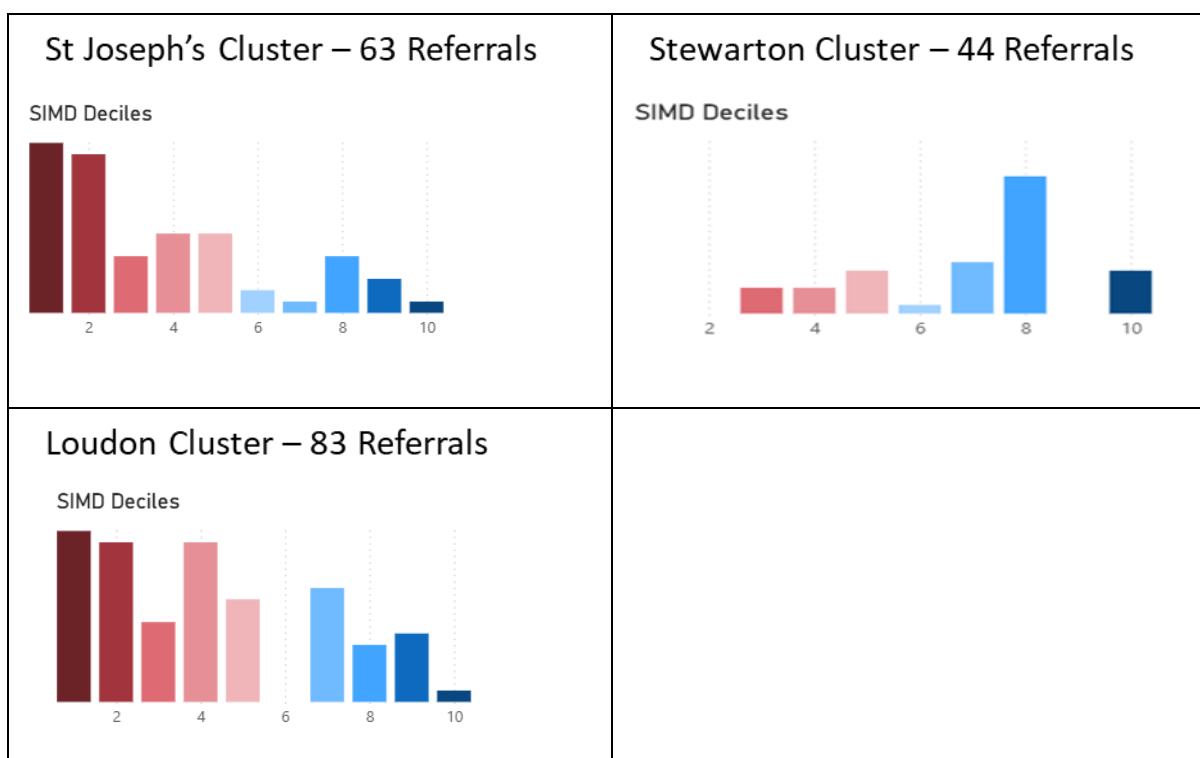
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Robert Burns Academy Cluster - 149 Referrals

SIMD Deciles





CASE STUDY

A Young Carer cares for her mother, father, and sister due to physical disabilities, mobility issues, and autism. She assists her parents with physical tasks like tying shoes, washing and dressing, and cooking. She also helps with shopping and provides emotional support. She takes her sister out to give her parents a break, assists with her personal care, feeding, and pushing her wheelchair when her parents struggle with it. She offers practical support and distracts during transitions to prevent autistic meltdowns. Despite her caring responsibilities, she appears to cope well with her role. However, her autism affects her relationships and friendships outside of her caring duties.

She doesn't have much free time, except for Young Carers, which has helped her considerably to develop her confidence. This confidence boost has inspired her to consider a hobby that she can engage in to provide her with a regular break at home. She was supported to apply for Time to Live for an electric drum kit, as music is her passion. She explains that music provides great relief from the stresses of her caring role. She had access to the kit at the local arts centre, but her ability to use it depended on her caring responsibilities. Having one at home allows her to enjoy her hobby and improve, but most importantly, it provides her with a vital source of stress relief and an escape whenever she needs it. This also strengthens her relationship with her family by allowing her to prioritise her own needs for the first time.

CASE STUDY

Kooth

Background

Nicola has accessed Kooth intermittently over the past couple of years, primarily to seek support in managing persistent suicidal ideation. Although Nicola had not acted on these thoughts, she expressed concern about their intensity and her capacity to

cope alone. At the time of initial engagement, Nicola was not attending school regularly but had maintained limited contact with peers and was taking part in a couple of weekly art classes. Over time, she gradually re-engaged with education and is now attending school part-time with some tailored strategies in place to support her, including early lesson exits and a private space for lunch.

Risk and needs

Nicola has consistently presented with a high level of emotional distress and suicidal ideation, often triggered by school-related stress. Her expressions of wanting to “end it” have occurred periodically, particularly during difficult academic periods. While she does not always reach out during these times, she has developed a level of insight and has worked with practitioners to articulate her needs and set clear boundaries around support.

Engagement

Nicola has utilised multiple aspects of the Kooth service, including live chats, messaging, journals, and discussion boards. Initially, engagement was primarily via journals, where she shared thoughts and feelings but rarely responded to practitioner follow-ups. However, her willingness to communicate gradually increased, and she began to make use of both messaging and live chat features. Throughout her time with Kooth, Nicola has preferred a flexible, drop-in approach, contacting the service only when she feels she needs support, often during periods of emotional deterioration. While this has led to long periods of non-contact, it aligns with Nicola’s stated preference and sense of autonomy in how she manages her mental health. At one point, engagement was complicated by the need to involve emergency services when Nicola was unable to confirm her safety, which caused her distress and confusion. Despite these challenges, she later shared her personal information with Kooth, enabling appropriate safeguarding actions and liaison with her CAMHS team. Nicola also engaged in the development of a personalised safety and wellbeing plan to support her in moments of crisis.

6. The Last Word

Over the last year in my time as chair of the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Cabinet, I have had the absolute pleasure to work alongside many incredible young people from all over East Ayrshire who are a credit to their school and their communities. I have also had the opportunity to work hand in hand with many Council Officers and wider partners who have been great to work alongside and are a testament to work of their organisations that strive to improve children services in East Ayrshire.

This last year, I have been truly inspired by the incredible group of young people that make up our East Ayrshire Children and Young Peoples Cabinet. Despite their ongoing busy lives away from the Cabinet, they all work tirelessly to ensure the lives of our young people can be improved and that the obstacles they face can be overcome to have an input on the Council's decision-making process.

Throughout 2024/25, our chosen campaigns were **Mental Health**, **Road Safety** and **Skills for Life**. Some of the focuses for each of these themes include:

- **Mental Health** - Trying to reduce and retract the stigmatisation around counselling services and raising awareness of available supports.
- **Road Safety** - Highlighting safe walking routes for children and young people to get to their schools which also tied into the "Shoot to Saturn" (previously Journey to Jupiter) climate change focused active travel initiative
- **Skills for Life** - Basic life skills including budgeting, cleaning, taxes, CVs and cooking which we were able to implement in partnership with Education in one of the secondary schools.

We helped co-design workshops at the yearly Junior Youth Conference that was hosted by the Young People, Sport & Diversion team from Vibrant Communities and these had a dedicated focus on these campaigns and had over 200 young people participating.

In 2025, the Cabinet codesigned and co-hosted the East Ayrshire Youth Awards and it was a fantastic evening that showcased the positive contributions that young people are having in their communities. As co-host for the evening, I was humbled by the amazing stories of how each and every young person nominated has gone above and beyond to show passion and commitment to helping others, and at times while dealing with their own adversity. That evening was a demonstration of what young people can do.

For 2025-2026, the Cabinet have decided to refocus the campaigns to issues that are prominent within the community that impact on young people and working together to identify solutions that could make the most positive impact on these issues at this current time. We have identified a theme that we are also passionate about that will positively compliment the other two themes. This year, our campaigns include:

- **Skills for Life** – continuing from last year and looking at increasing young people's awareness of voting.

- **Youth Image and Recognition** - Highlighting and recognising youth achievement along with the many good things that young people are doing to contribute not only to their own development but their community.
- **Intergenerational and Community** - we would love to develop intergenerational work by showing that young people and elderly residents can bond and that there are many things that can be done to create these relationships and show that young people are also caring individuals who would like to improve the lives of others.

In doing this and focusing on these campaigns we hope to, along with the support and endorsement of the Council and wider partners, make a lasting positive impact on our community and, as always, integrate youth voice into important decision making that impacts on children and young people across East Ayrshire. We will achieve this with the ongoing support and endorsement of the Council and partners which we hope will continue again this year to make sure our new campaigns and all the work that we are involved in can be as impactful as possible.

My personal journey and the confidence gained as chair of the Cabinet and will assist me in years to come and I am grateful for all who supported me and who continue to support our children and young people every day. I know if the future of our country is in the hands of our young people we really are in safe hands.

Aimee Sharp
CYP Cabinet Chair (2024/25)

Appendix 1 – Children’s Services Plan 2023-2026 – Performance Framework

Priority 1: Our Children and Young People feel respected, listened to and influence change	2023/24 Report	2024/25 Report
% of projects with a children and young people focus that applied for Participatory Budgeting funding	11.5%	Due to budgetary issues the HSCP did not conduct a PB event in 2024-25 and as a result we are unable to submit a value for this PI for 2024-25.
Number of children / young people who engaged with youth led change projects in East Ayrshire	916 (2023/24 result)	tbc
Number of youth led change projects in schools and communities	4 (2023/24 result)	6 (2024/25)
Priority 2: We are working collaboratively, reducing the impact of social and economic poverty on our children and young people	2023/24 Report	2024/25 Report
% of schools with active Cost of the school Day / Poverty Proofing action plans	80%	90%
% reduction in the authority’s poverty related attainment gap – P1 to P7: Literacy	4.1%	-2.3% (widened), overall attainment risen by 6% Whilst there has been a widening of the gap, attainment of children who live in Quintile 1 has improved but so has attainment of children who live in Quintile 5. Attainment of children who live in Quintile 5 has

		improved at a greater rate hence why the gap has increased.
% reduction in the authority's poverty related attainment gap – P1 to P7: Numeracy	4%	-0.7% (widened), overall attainment risen by 3% See comment above, this applies here too.
% of children living in relative poverty (after housing costs)	27.9% (for the period 2022-23)	23.6% (for the period 2023/24)
% of school age children registered for free school meals: Primary School	76.8%	76.8% (2023/24 result)
% of school age children registered for free school meals: Secondary School	18.6%	18.6% (2023/24 result)
% families receiving school clothing and footwear grants: Primary School	31%	31% (2023/24 result)
% families receiving school clothing and footwear grants: Secondary School	24.7%	19.4% (2023/24 result)
% of households <i>with dependent children</i> which are workless	11.2%	6.4%
Level of income generated for families as a result of Financial Inclusion Team support within schools and pre-5 services	£2,766,405	£1,296,316
% of children in low income families (before housing costs)	21.1%	20.1%

Priority 3: Our Children and Young People feel safe	2023/24 Report	2024/25 Report
No. of referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration on 'Lack of parental care' grounds	102	94
% of children re-registered on child protection register within 12 months	4.5%	3.1%
No. of children appropriately placed on Child Protection register where 'Domestic Abuse' is noted as an area of concern.	32	53
No. of Trauma Informed Contact and Care (TICC) concerns received from the Police	86	73
% of P6 children reporting increased safety awareness through our annual Danger Detectives Partnership Programme	85%	85%
No. of HSCP staff who completed child sexual exploitation training	20	14
% of EEI (Early and Effective Interventions) referrals and Children's Hearings being convened for 'offence grounds'	24%	
Percentage of all referrals to SCRA based on offence grounds	51.8%	31.1%
Priority 4: Our Children and Young People have the best start in life and achieve their potential	2023/24 Report	2024/25 Report
% of babies born a healthy weight	83.75%	80.6%
% of P1, P4 and P7 children achieving expected CfE levels in literacy	71%	71%
% of P1, P4 and P7 children achieving expected CfE levels in numeracy	78.5%	78.5%
% of school leavers attaining 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 4 on leaving school	97.3%	96.5%
% of school leavers attaining 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 5 on leaving school	85.6%	84.3%
% of school leavers attaining 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 6 on leaving school	60%	60.4%
% of annual participation (in education, training or employment) – 16-19 years	91.8%	93.5%
% of school leavers in positive destinations	95.1%	95.2%

% of Looked After Children in Positive Destinations	80%	78.1%
% of children and young people residing within our Children's Houses who have participated in community activities supported by Vibrant Communities	75%	Not Reported
Priority 5: Our Children and Young People's Mental Health & Wellbeing is improving	2023/24 Report	2024/25 Report
% of Primary School pupils achieving the age and stage appropriate CfE HWB level	93.2%	94.7%
% of Primary School pupils undertaking biannual Wellbeing profiles	37.4%	74.9%
% of CAMHS referrals that were appropriate	76.5%	57.9%
% of young people actively using Kooth online mental health supports	2.3%	N/A