

**REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE –  
3 DECEMBER 2020**

**ANNUAL REPORTS FOR ABERDEENSHIRE'S CHILDREN'S HOMES – 1 April 2019  
to 31 March 2020**

**1 Reason for Report / Summary**

- 1.1 The Report is a combined report from the annual reports of the three Children's Homes in Aberdeenshire, providing an overview of the Homes' activity between 1 April 2019 to the end of March 2020.

**2 Recommendations**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the update contained within the Annual Report; and**
- 2.2 Continue to support best practice to ensure Care Experienced Young People receive the right support at the right time.**

**3 Purpose and Decision Making Route**

- 3.1 This report is coming before Committee to keep Members apprised of the key issues/events in our Children's Homes. All Local Authorities are Corporate Parents and as such, are expected to keep themselves aware of the progress of their population of Looked After Children.

**4 Discussion**

- 4.1 The practice of Aberdeenshire Council's Residential Children's Homes, located within Children's Services, is underpinned by the core components, values and principles of GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child). These are enshrined within the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.
- 4.2 Aberdeenshire has three Children's Homes which can accommodate sixteen Looked After young people: two 6-bedded Homes in Inverurie and Fraserburgh, and one 4-bedded Home in Peterhead.
- 4.3 The Children's Homes are committed to providing high quality care to Aberdeenshire's children and young people who require to be looked after in a residential children's home. The young people looked after are between 12 and 18 years old and have often experienced traumas in their childhood which can in turn lead to them exhibiting social, educational, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Subsequently, they are unable to remain in their family home and require support and care to help them through their adolescence. Some young people return to

their families after a period, and others are supported onto independence when the time is right and they are ready to move on.

- 4.4 The Homes are committed to creating a supportive, safe and nurturing environments where relationships are key whilst the young person is resident and beyond. They are also committed to working closely with family members and communities to support and develop positive relationships with the young people as they grow and develop to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
- 4.5 The Service aims to ensure they are **Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible** and **Included**. The Service believes that living in a Children’s Home is the preferred/best option for some of our adolescents and promote it as a placement of choice.
- 4.6 The Children’s Homes are regulated by the Care Inspectorate and required to provide an annual report against a set of key criteria. Given the small numbers of children and young people being cared for in the Children’s Homes, the annual reports have been combined into one report to ensure confidentiality which is available as **Appendix 1**.

## 5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 5.1 This report helps deliver Council Priorities: Our People: Education and Health & Wellbeing, having the right people, in the right place, at the right time.
- 5.2 This report helps deliver against Aberdeenshire Children’s Services Plan Priorities – Corporate Parenting and Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing.
- 5.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities			X
Fairer Scotland Duty			X
Town Centre First			X
Sustainability			X
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing	X		

- 5.4 An equality impact assessment is not required because the report is an annual report and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 5.5 In terms of impact on Children’s Wellbeing, Aberdeenshire’s Children’s Homes have a positive impact on the Wellbeing Indicators: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included.

- 5.6 There are no staffing and financial implications identified as relevant to this matter.
- 5.7 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

ACORP005 - Working with other organisations  
ACORP006 – Reputation management  
[Corporate Risk Register.](#)

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- ECSSR003 – Embedding GIRFEC; and
  - ECSSR004 – Support inclusive, vibrant and healthy communities.
- [Directorate Risk Registers.](#)

## **6 Scheme of Governance**

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the [Scheme of Governance](#) and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to take a decision on this item in terms of in terms of E.2.1f of Part 2A List of Committee Powers of the Scheme of Governance, as the committee have responsibility for the functions of the Council in relation to children and young people under Part 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

### **Laurence Findlay, Director of Education & Children's Services**

Report prepared by Kirsty Theodoreson  
Date 04.11.2020

### **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Annual Reports for Aberdeenshire's Children's Homes - April 2019 to March 2020

## ANNUAL REPORTS FOR ABERDEENSHIRE'S CHILDREN'S HOMES

April 2019 to March 2020

### INTRODUCTION

Aberdeenshire has three Children's Homes which can accommodate sixteen Looked After young people: two six-bedded Homes in Inverurie and Fraserburgh, and one four-bedded Home in Peterhead. The young people looked after are usually between 12 and 18 years old and have often experienced traumas in their childhood which can in turn lead to them exhibiting social, educational, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. They are unable to remain in their family home and require support and care to help them through their adolescence. Some young people return to their families after a period in a Home, and others are supported onto independence when the time is right, and they are ready to move on.

The Homes seek to provide a supportive, safe and nurturing environment where relationships are key whilst the young person is resident and beyond. Residential Care is a positive choice for our young people and their families. The Homes are also committed to working closely with family members and communities to support and develop positive relationships with the young people as they grow and develop to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens.

To do this, we aim to ensure they are **Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included**. We believe that living in a Children's Home is the preferred/best option for some of our adolescents and promote it as a placement of choice.

### STAFFING STRUCTURE

Each of the Homes has a full time Manager and a number of full-time permanent Residential Social Workers who work shifts to provide 24-hour care of the young people. The bulk of our residential staff hold a Social Work qualification, with only three of our staff being Social Care Officers. One of our SCOs is currently midway through training to become a qualified Social Worker. There remains an expectation that there will be a national policy for all residential childcare staff requiring to be Social Work qualified in the near future, and we will be well positioned at this time to manage the transition. All the teams also have a number of relief staff who cover staff sickness and holidays – we try to ensure all relief staff are used on a fairly regular basis to ensure they remain familiar to the young people and understand their needs and plans.

Two members of staff are on shift at all times, including two staff sleeping over in each Home every night. This level of staffing therefore needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about new young people who may be moving to our Homes – the staffing levels and need for young people to manage mainstream education mean that alternative resources need to be considered for young people with more complicated needs.

## **ADMISSIONS/DISCHARGES**

During the period of this report nine young people moved into the Homes. Seven of these admissions were planned and two young people required to be cared for on an emergency basis. In the same period, nine young people moved on from the Children's Homes of which two happened at short notice and would be deemed as 'unplanned' moves whilst the others were all planned departures.

As far as possible we will aspire to planned admissions and discharges, as young people benefit from being positively engaged with their plans and taking responsibility for their next move. We will aim for young people and their families to have visited the Homes prior to moving in and to have established a link with the staff and have seen their room so they can think about what they want to bring with them. Young people who are planned into our vacancies tend to settle better and experience less trauma from the move. Our unplanned discharges tend to be as a result of a young person exposing other young people to risk of harm, and where we have to make a quick decision to ensure young people are not exposed to abusive behaviour from others.

## **MISSING PERSONS**

Staff in the Children's Home use our Missing Person's Protocol to assess and act when any young person is deemed to be missing from their placement. During the year, we had seven occasions when the Homes reported young people as missing from their care. Whilst even this may sound like a high incidence, this does not equate to seven children with significant issues relating to absconding. It relates to the number of occasions young people have been reported missing across the three Homes. It is very rare for us to have young people go missing for a significant period – nearly every one of these incidents were around young people not returning home at their specified time, but actually returning by the end of the day. The figure of 7 missing reports compares with 29 such reports in the previous year. Rates of reporting missing children can fluctuate greatly between years, and dependent on the issues for our residents, but a reduction in reporting would seem to indicate settled young people in the main who are managing their social time effectively.

When a young person has been reported missing both the Police (Return Home Welfare Officer) and the staff in the Home will take time to speak to the young person on their return. This will be to ensure we understand where they were, who they were with, why they failed to return, and to assess if they were at risk whilst missing. Staff also would regularly remind young people of the importance of us knowing where they are when they are out of the building. All staff are familiar with the needs to always consider the possibility of child sexual exploitation when assessing a missing person incident and would take appropriate action should such concerns arise.

The majority of our missing young people are with friends and want to stay out longer than the return time staff have given them as opposed to running away from the Children's Home or feeling unhappy in our care.

## TRAINING

All staff who work in the Homes require to be on the Residential part of the Scottish Social Services Council Register. To remain on the Register, staff must ensure they complete the equivalent of five days training per year as a minimum to demonstrate Continuing Professional Development. The bulk of staff training is accessed via Aberdeenshire Council's training calendar and a lot of it will be skills-based around working with young people. However, staff in Children's Homes also need to undertake/remain up to date with some mandatory training including Food Hygiene, Fire Safety and Accident and Incidence Reporting.

All residential staff are also trained to use CALM (Crisis and Aggression Limitation and Management) which is a model to manage difficult situations/behaviours. The emphasis is on de-escalation and safe management of potentially aggressive and violent situations. Staff are also trained in the use of physical restraint as part of this, but this would only ever be used as a last resort when a young person is physically placing themselves or others at risk. During the reporting period, there were **no** incidents of restraint being used in any of the Homes, but our Registration requires us to ensure staff are trained in all elements of CALM and that they regularly update their training as well as practice CALM holds.

## FEEDBACK

The Homes will seek feedback about their service in a number of formal ways: Annual questionnaires are sent out to parents/carers, Social Workers and ex-residents. All the young people in the Homes are encouraged to complete a Well being survey at regular intervals to help them think about how they think they are getting on and to identify what areas they need to work with their Keyworker on.

Whilst not all questionnaires are returned, the majority of feedback received is positive. The questionnaires ask the respondent how they think the staff in the Homes meet the young people's needs in terms of being safe, health, achieving, nurtured, active, respected/responsible and included rating them from very poor to very good.

This year, the number of returned questionnaires from parents was good across all three Homes, and with some parents thanking staff for helping their children return to the family home.

A sample of comments from parents/carers:

*'We know that staff work hard to support B'*

*"Staff are committed to the welfare of all children there."*

*"Medical needs are well met."*

*"My son is listened to and can go to staff if he needs anything."*

*"My son has been encouraged to be active but chooses not to."*

*There is no provision for mental health care at CH, but all other health care needs are met. This is not a reflection on staff as they all support B well'.*

Feedback from social workers was also positive with a high percentage of forms returned. Again many of them rated the service highly on the care provided to the young people.

From social workers:

*'A can be reluctant to take part in any activities that means she has to be active. However, with persuasion and encouragement she is taking part in sessions with Active Scotland. She has also been encouraged to attend groups in the evening which she greatly enjoyed but needed prompting to go to.'*

*"Of all the desired outcomes (getting young people back into education) is where CH have excelled for both of the young people that are placed at CH. Clear boundaries and routines are in place."*

*"Staff provide a variety of different activities for young people to try and most importantly they persist."*

*'You did very well with him. There was nothing else you could have done. He was in a bad place and still is in a bad place'.*

Responses from ex-residents tend to be very limited, but many of our young people have further contact later on with the Home they lived in and are often able to provide feedback more informally than in discussion with staff, and reflections on what helped and what could have been done better. One particular ex-resident regularly helps with staff recruitment and provides a vital voice with lived experience in terms of the selection process.

## **WELLBEING SURVEY**

These surveys were set up electronically in 2016 in an attempt to develop something more user-friendly and which young people would be willing and able to engage in. As above, the questions are all based on the Shanarri well-being indicators and ask the young people to think how safe, healthy, active etc they would rate themselves, as well as giving them the chance to provide comments. They provide 'scores' for the young people against the different areas so staff can identify if there are areas where young people are developing in, as well as areas where the young person may need to have some targeted work done with them.

From young people:

*'I think I am good because I go to my appointments and hygiene is good. I could eat more healthy and go out to do more activities.'*

*"I passed everything at college and am delighted. And I am trying to get a work placement or apprenticeship. I am keeping my options open in what I want to. "*

*"When I was getting in trouble, they made sure I saw what the issue was and why what I did was wrong. Helped me with schoolwork by home schooling me."*

*"They supported me with my feelings and family issues."*

*"Activities Staff helping me with my weight"*

*'I get my needs met but they make decisions (based on) what you say. This can sometimes be over the top.'*

It is noticeable in all three of our Homes this year that our young people have reported feeling safe and cared for. This is also an area that the Care Inspectors look at and they independently confirm this feedback from young people.

## **CARE INSPECTORATE REPORTS**

All our Homes are independently inspected by the Care Inspectorate annually with the results published on their website. They are usually inspected under two areas of the Care Standards (establishments will be more widely assessed when there have previously been significant areas of concern, but for a number of years now our Homes have all routinely been assessed in two areas).

This year all three were inspected on Quality of Care and Support and all three were rated at 5 (Very Good) in this area. Two of the Homes were inspected on Quality of Staff and again both were rated at 5. The other Home was inspected on How well is our care and support planned and was also rated at 4 in this area (Good).

Whilst Care Inspectorate Reports tend to be short, all three establishments receive considerable verbal feedback from the Inspector and use this to then identify areas for improvement with their Teams.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

- A number of the young people who became Looked After in our Homes this year had either very poor or non-existent school attendance, but all resumed attending education during the course of their residence with us. We still have some young people who struggle in their school and require additional or flexible support, but we have a well-established culture in each of our Homes that young people are expected to engage in education.
- Four of our young people were supported to attend, and complete, college courses (despite Covid19 resulting in the studying becoming virtual for the final term).
- Two young people who had previously been identified as possibly requiring care in an external Residential School were successfully supported via our Children's Homes and were able to remain in their local community.
- One young person successfully transitioned from a Residential School to one of our Children's Homes bringing her closer to her family and re-establishing her in an Aberdeenshire community.
- A number of the young people have been supported over the year to take part in community groups eg music lessons, mixed martial arts, army cadets, sports activities etc
- Many of our young people engage in an Independent Living Programme covering such things as cooking one day a week for themselves, budgeting skills, learning how to use public transport, etc. In addition the young people from the Homes have taken advantage of the Resource Properties we use for preparation for independent living. The young people are provided 'taster' opportunities for living in their own accommodation and will stay a number of



days (up to three weeks), managing on the budget they will have when they become independent and practicing living alone and managing their accommodation. This gives the young people an idea of what they may find challenging when they move on from the Home, and allows us to identify what areas they need to develop further skills in.

- The teams also work hard with families to help them address relationship difficulties. Often, we need to support parents to set clear and consistent rules and boundaries for their young people, and in turn, the teams work with the young people to help them accept these. Working together around such issues means some of our young people can return to the family home, complete their education and re-establish positive supportive relationships with their parents, which in turn gives them a stronger start into the world of adulthood.
- All the Homes work hard to maintain positive and collaborative relationships with the local services in their areas – particularly schools, Health colleagues and the Police so we can ensure that they too are on board in terms of helping our young people achieve the best they can.

## **CONCLUSION**

This has been a largely positive year for all three of the Homes. The majority of our young people have been supported along with their families to make and sustain significant changes in their lives. Our staff are committed to continue to build strong relationships with our young people to enable them to be the best they possible can and to have the same opportunities as their peers. Our teams will always aspire to establish good relationships with parents and to engage them in their child's plans, even if it's accepted the young person will not be returning home.

All three children's homes continue to ensure that the voice of young people and their families inform their improvement journey to ensure that we are 'getting it right for every child.'