

## REPORT TO REPORT TO COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 3 DECEMBER, 2020

### CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

#### **1 Reason for Report / Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the Chief Social Worker Officer (CSWO) Annual Report for the financial year 2019/2020. The preparation of an annual report is not mandatory but is a recommendation in Scottish Government Guidance on the role of the CSWO.

#### **2 Recommendations**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- 2.1 Consider the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report for the 2019/2020 (Appendix 1) financial year in relation to Social Work Services and make recommendations to Full Council.**
- 2.2 Acknowledge the level of investment by the Council in Adult Social Work Services for the residents of Aberdeenshire.**
- 2.3 Acknowledge the commitment of social work staff in the consistent delivery of high performing services.**

#### **3 Purpose and Decision Making Route**

- 3.1 Council Committees and the Integration Joint Board receive reports throughout the year on the performance of social work as measured against a range of national and local indicators, and also receive reports on particular initiatives and issues.
- 3.2 In order to add value, the CSWO report attempts to avoid duplicating this information.
- 3.3 Rather, it draws on these reports to highlight particular overarching themes and trends, and also reports on key areas concerning the proper discharge of the social work function that may not have been addressed elsewhere, including those areas of decision making that require CSWO input.
- 3.4 This report will be also considered at the Integration Joint Board (IJB) and Communities Committee before being considered at a meeting of the Full Council.

#### 4 Discussion

- 4.1 The CSWO report describes a service that is performing well in most of the key areas upon which the report is focussed.
- 4.2 In those areas where improvement was required, timely and effective remedial measures have been put in place.
- 4.3 Currently there are no specific areas that require additional scrutiny of planning beyond that provided by Service, Council and IJB processes.

#### 5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 5.1 This report helps deliver Council Priority 4 - Work with parents and carers to support children through every stage of their development.

The report helps deliver Council Priority 8 – Work to reduce poverty and inequalities within our communities.

The report helps deliver Council Priority 10 – Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time

- 5.2 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	

- 5.3 An equality impact assessment is not required because all the projects and initiatives referenced in the CSWO report have their own Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate.
- 5.4 There are no staffing or financial implications.

## **6 Scheme of Governance**

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report 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 consider this item in terms of Section D.2.1 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance.

### **Iain Ramsay, Chief Social Work Officer**

Report prepared by Iain Ramsay, Chief Social Work Officer  
Date 18 November 2020

### **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Annual Report by Aberdeenshire's Chief Social Work Officer 2019/20

## ANNUAL REPORT BY ABERDEENSHIRE'S CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER 2019/20

### 1. Introduction

There is a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities to appoint a professionally qualified Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) who is registered with the Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC). The overall role of the CSWO is focused on the provision of effective professional advice and guidance to Local Authorities, Elected Members, and Officers in the provision of Social Work Services, whether directly provided or commissioned. The CSWO also has a responsibility for overall performance improvement, and the identification and management of corporate risk in so far as these relate to Social Work Services. Further information is available on the [Role and Function of the CSWO](#) on the Scottish Government website.

The role of Social Work in Aberdeenshire is to support, care for, and protect people from pre- birth to end of life. Social Work does so by providing, or commissioning, services designed to promote the dignity, safety, and independence of people who use these services, and to contribute to community safety by reducing re-offending. The Third and Independent Sectors are key partners in these endeavours. The Social Work Services workforce is diverse, and includes social workers, practitioners working in residential and day care services for adults and children, care at home and housing support staff, occupational therapy staff, mental health officers, and people working in child and adult protection and in criminal justice services. Social Work Services are provided 24 hours each day of the year. They are provided in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including people who use, or benefit, from them. National standards are required to be met, as is the achievement of best value. This Report uses the national reporting cycle first adopted in 2013/2014 and is concerned with the financial year 2019/20. The close of the 2019/20 financial year coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Therefore this report also encompasses reflections on social work and social care's response to the global pandemic, and provides an indication of the ongoing challenges and how Social Work services have responded, and will continue to respond, during the 'living with COVID-19' period. This report has been requested by the Scottish Government's Chief Social Work Advisor in order to assist with ensuring that, on a national basis key issues are highlighted, and information and learning is similarly shared. On receipt of 32 CSWO reports the Chief Social Work Advisor prepares a national overview. This year's report has been shortened considering the ongoing pressures on social work and social care services brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The overall approach of avoiding the duplication of information that has been reported to a range of Committees has largely been maintained. The author wishes to thank those who assisted in the production of this report.

There is always a requirement for the CSWO or designated deputy to be available. As Aberdeenshire does not have formal deputising arrangements, as in previous years thanks are due to colleagues from Children's and Adult Services who deputise, without recompense, for the CSWO during periods of leave.

## 2. Summary Reflections

It is custom and practice for this report to largely focus on a specific financial year, however under current circumstances it would be artificial and somewhat disrespectful to the immeasurable contribution of so many people to limit it only to a set period. Therefore, in collaboration with the Chief Social Work Advisor for Scotland and Chief Social Work Officers from across Scotland, we have collectively agreed to broaden the timeframe and scope of this annual report to include social work and social care's response to COVID-19, and cast an eye to the future, including setting out some key challenges and opportunities ahead.

It is difficult to fully comprehend the changes which have occurred in all aspects of society over recent months. In preparation for compiling this report it was important to reflect on the many changes and the impact these have had on so many. Social Work and Social Care Services provide support and offer protection to some of the most vulnerable groups in society: COVID-19 has fundamentally changed every aspect of day to day work and it is testament to the resilience and fortitude of social work and social care staff that the needs of so many people across Aberdeenshire have been met during this pandemic.

It is not yet apparent what the nationwide lockdown and the enduring uncertainty of living with COVID-19 will bring for the most vulnerable, but as society slowly adjusts to the long-term limitations which will exist until the virus is eliminated, it is clear the impact felt by those economically, socially, and emotionally is severe. Social work is a profession which strives to balance the rights, risks, and needs of both the individual and society: to do this effectively it requires sufficient resourcing. Social work is also a profession which is well-used to handling uncertainty and complexity: both of these factors have not been so apparent in society for many generations. Both now, and in the future, social work and social care staff will be asked to continue to support people with complex needs, many of which may be directly affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Staff across Social Work and Social Care Services have risen to this challenge and their willingness and dedication is commendable.

Social work and social care teams have an important professional role to play within the wider delivery of public services, and in Aberdeenshire we have well-established multi-disciplinary teams which include many other professionals, such as nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, and teachers. The multi-disciplinary approach has been particularly evident throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with health, social work, and social care professionals, independent providers, and the third sector pulling together to ensure a person-centred approach to support continued throughout.

The CSWO would like to thank Aberdeenshire Council staff who were redeployed into social care roles and provided much needed additional capacity to essential services during the pandemic, including support within Care Homes and Very Sheltered Housing. Thanks are also extended to the many others who volunteered, formally and informally, to support the most vulnerable in Aberdeenshire during the pandemic.

COVID-19 has had a particularly significant impact on the Care Home population of Scotland and supporting the needs of Aberdeenshire Care Home residents has been incredibly challenging. The efforts of all care home staff, both within the local authority and independent sectors, has been essential in ensuring residents were appropriately cared for, and their quality of life maintained throughout the pandemic. Residents, families, and staff within care homes have endured some of the most demanding circumstances during the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on these groups is immeasurable and cannot be underestimated.

To conclude, whilst this report describes social work and social care services across Aberdeenshire positively, it is important to acknowledge individual practitioners, wider teams, and services are continuing to contend with challenges associated with COVID-19; budgetary pressures; greater and more complex needs; growing complexity of legislative and statutory tools; maintaining professional identity; and greater use of thresholds and eligibility criteria. Within this landscape it is important the core principles of social work, such as social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities, are not compromised or undermined. The pandemic has shone a light on both the fortitude and resilience of society but has also highlighted aspects where change is necessary.

### **3. Governance and Accountability**

#### **3.1 Overview**

The CSWO is a member of the Council's Strategic Leadership Team and has direct access to Elected Members, the Chief Executive, managers, and frontline practitioners in relation to professional social work issues. The CSWO meets regularly with the Chief Executives of Aberdeenshire Council and NHS Grampian, which enables a wider understanding of social work matters that have traditionally been seen only within the realms of the local authority. This is a refreshing approach which enables discussion and consideration of a number of policy developments and their impact on social work functions. In addition, the CSWO has regular meetings with Aberdeenshire Council's Chairs of Education & Children's Services and Communities Committees, both have roles encompassing social work services. Again, this is an important arrangement which enables the discussion of both national and local policy changes impacting on social work services.

The governance of social work services continues to be undertaken across two discreet structures. Children's Social Work Services remain within Aberdeenshire Council and are part of the Education and Children's Service's (ECS) portfolio. All other Adult Social Work and Social Care Services, including Criminal Justice, are part of the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and are overseen by the Integration Joint Board (IJB).

In 2019/20, Education and Children's Services appointed a Head of Children's Services following an interim period in post. The CSWO continues to work collaboratively with the Head of Children's Services which ensures consistent professional and operational leadership arrangements are maintained.

Previous reports have highlighted the potential risks associated with the social work function being dispersed throughout a range of governance bodies, albeit with each passing year it is clear there is a growing maturity. The governance landscape does inevitably create risks, and the themes of transitions and identity remain areas of focus. The author continues to witness a growing sophistication in the arrangements across ECS and the HSCP, which is leading to positive and progressive arrangements.

Whilst the operational arrangements across ECS and HSCP are now well embedded, there is ongoing work to build robust governance structures which provide the necessary level of assurance in relation to child protection, adult protection, and adult social work provision delivered within the HSCP. The single independent chairperson for both Child and Adult Protection Committees is providing the opportunity for consistency of approach and, ultimately, greater levels of assurance across these two critical areas of service provision.

The CSWO is empowered to provide and receive assurance from a number of formal and informal groups. Participation across these forums alongside the day to day interactions in operational matters enables the CSWO to scrutinise governance arrangements and ensure they balance the complex areas of need, risk and civil liberties. It is through participation across a range of governance, operational, and practice areas that the CSWO forms a clear understanding of the challenges requiring further scrutiny and also where best practice exists.

The table below illustrates the range of structures in which the CSWO participates.

Structure	Role
Council	The CSWO attends: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Leadership Team</li> <li>• Heads of Service meetings</li> <li>• Corporate Leadership Group</li> </ul>
Integration Joint Board	The CSWO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is a standing member of the IJB</li> <li>• attends Health and Social Care Management meetings</li> <li>• attends Clinical and Adult Social Work Governance Committee</li> </ul>
Children's Services	The CSWO is a member of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECS/IJB Group</li> <li>• Social Work Managers' Forum</li> </ul>
Public Protection	The CSWO is a member of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Group for Public Protection</li> <li>• Child Protection Committee</li> <li>• Adult Protection Committee</li> </ul>
National	The CSWO is a member of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Work Scotland's CSWO Group</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources and Workforce Standing Committee</li> <li>• Scottish Government's Social Work Education Partnership</li> <li>• National Health and Care Workforce Planning Group</li> </ul>
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As referred to in previous annual reports, the role of Lead Social Worker for Adult Services was created in May 2017. Since then, this role has continued to provide professional guidance and leadership for social work within the HSCP and has been the link to wider social work services within the Council. With a lead role for Adult Support and Protection, Self-Directed Support (SDS), Carers, and Learning and Development (across Children's and Adult Services), the Lead Social Worker gives assurance to the CSWO that there continues to be effective links and consistency of social work practice throughout Aberdeenshire.

### 3.2 Governance and Accountability Throughout COVID-19

The Coronavirus Act 2020 (the 2020 Act) introduced new measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures were introduced to ensure that during the emergency there was capacity to:

1. Focus on the most vulnerable in community.
2. Minimise unnecessary delays in hospital discharges, especially in adult services.
3. Increase the use of professional judgement – Social work in Aberdeenshire has a robust system of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working, including robust line-management and supervisory structures.

The 2020 Act allowed for an easing of social care assessment duties in relation to adult social care, carer support, and children's services in Scotland. The duty to provide services and support remained in place.

Areas of key priority remained as:

- Risk to life.
- Risk to a person's immediate health (both mental and physical).
- Child and Adult protection.
- Ability of carers to continue to provide care.
- Existing and new complex care arrangements.

Social work and social care teams across Aberdeenshire have always been adept at providing urgent care and support to people, however the impact of COVID-19 was expected to place additional pressures on services. The introduction of the emergency legislation provided a degree of assurance that where services were placed under unsustainable pressure, there was an option to reduce some statutory responsibilities. Fortunately, there was no requirement in Aberdeenshire to use the easing of assessment duties power.



### 3.3 Duty of Candour Statement for 2019/20

All social work and social care services in Scotland have a duty of candour. This is a legal requirement which means that when unintended, or unexpected, events happen that result in death or harm as defined in **Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016**, the people affected understand what has happened, receive an apology, and that organisations learn from the experience and put in place improvements.

An important part of this duty is the requirement for organisations to provide an annual statement detailing how the duty of candour is implemented across services. This brief statement describes how Aberdeenshire Council has operated the duty of candour during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, there were no incidents where the duty of candour applied. (These are unintended or unexpected incidents that result in death or harm as defined in the Act, and do not relate directory to the natural course of someone's illness or underlying condition.)

## 4. Finance

Social work services continue to be delivered within an increasingly challenging financial environment as the level of funding increases do not keep pace with the increasing demands on services. Aberdeenshire Council and the Integration Joint Board continue to invest in social work and social care services to meet current and anticipated increased levels of demand where many service users are living longer with increasingly complex needs. The gross expenditure on social work and social care services during 2019/20 was just under £39 million on children's services and just over £164 million on adult services.

Despite the continuing challenging financial climate, service users, carers, and staff continued to benefit from substantial financial investment in service delivery. In addition, both the Council and Integration Joint Board (IJB) have continued to support service redesign and re-provisioning in accordance with best practice. The ongoing development of Social Work Services and the associated achievements rely on the continued commitment to working in partnership with a wide range of external partners. The support and commitment of the Council's Elected Members across all groups is also recognised.

Social work and social care services commission resources from a wide range of independent, not for profit, and third sector providers. Services have access to independent care homes, including resources for older people and people with learning disabilities. They also have access to placements for children and young people across Scotland. Additionally, providers in Aberdeenshire operate across home care, day care, and supported living.

In terms of Children's Social Work Services, the main area of pressure for some time has been on externally provided residential and care provision. This is largely generated by the need for externally procured placements to meet the complex and changing needs of a particular group of children and young people. Enabling families to exercise choice and control over their own support as well as the provision of external fostering placements has faced similar issues.

The Aberdeenshire Integration Joint Board (IJB) and associated services delivered through health and social care services have experienced financial challenges across a number of social work and social care functions, including older people's care management and learning disabilities

services. These financial pressures are borne against a backdrop of greater emphasis on the use of eligibility criteria and service redesign. Whilst there is undoubtedly increasing demand on services across all user groups, the main reason is associated with increasing complexity of service users requiring support. This is particularly apparent when considering medical advances and the associated consequences of living with long-term conditions such as heart disease or respiratory illness. In addition, services are seeing a rapid increase in requests for mental health support for children and young adults.

In 2019/20 the IJB recorded an overspend of £5.6 million and required additional funds from Aberdeenshire Council and NHS Grampian. The commitment of both organisations in supporting the IJB is to be commended, especially at a time when all budgets are constrained.

As part of the IJB Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), programmes of work are ongoing to deliver more sustainable models of service delivery. A strategic and medium-term view of resources is essential if social work and social care services are to deliver their strategic priorities. This focus is challenging within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic but necessary to support the continued availability of services for the most vulnerable.

## **5. Workforce**

### **5.1 Workforce Demographics**

The Social Work and Social Care sector in Aberdeenshire includes a large variety of staff employed within the local authority (LA), independent providers, and voluntary organisations. Statutory duties under social work, across children's and adult services, continue to be undertaken by LA employed social workers, care managers, and Mental Health Officers (MHOs). Social Work and Social Care within the LA is located between Education and Children Services and the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Registered social workers make up 9% of the total local authority staff and 6.4% of the total workforce when considering independent providers and the third sector. Adult social work is a delegated function of the HSCP. The largest part of the workforce is in adult social care service provision, within a mixed economy of LA, independent, and third sector employers.

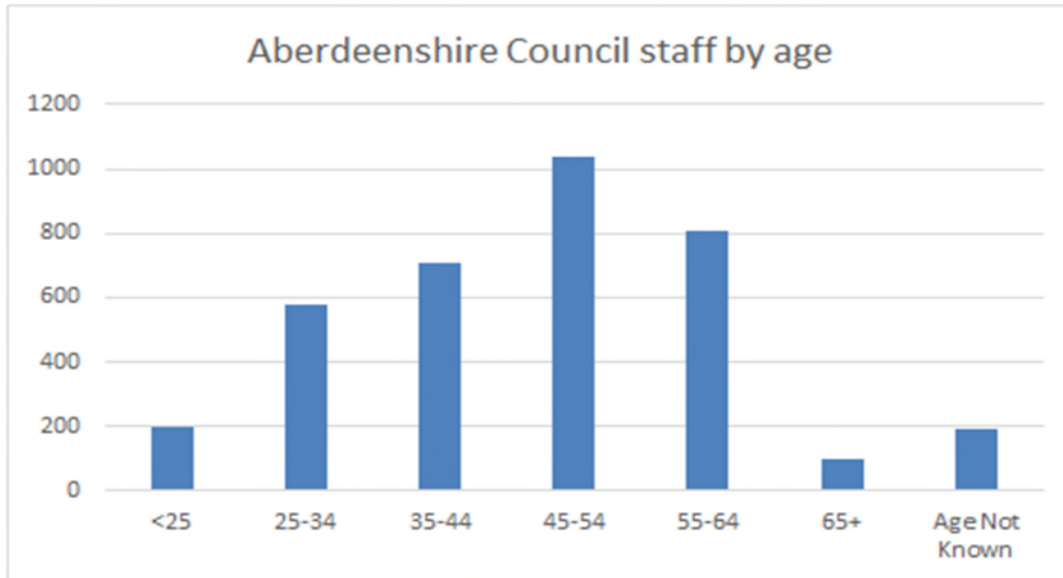
Throughout 2019/20 the workforce has been generally stable with low levels of staff turnover. It is positive to see relatively high numbers of staff taking up opportunities to progress their careers through progression to promoted posts. It is hugely encouraging to report that we continue to have many responses to applications to work in the organisation.

A total of 9640 people are employed in social work and social care, across the local authority, independent, and third sectors in Aberdeenshire;

- 3620 are employed by Aberdeenshire Council, across Adult, Children, and Justice Services, undertaking statutory social work and social care duties within the 138 registered care services, operated by the LA.
- Independent providers employ 4000 people across 433 registered care services.
- 137 registered care services, employing 1840 people, are in the voluntary sector.

There are 310 registered social workers, employed by Aberdeenshire Council, across all services. Frontline professional practitioners, engaged in assessment, case management, and protective work, remain a small proportion of the workforce. Most staff are engaged in social care support, with 47% of staff employed in a direct caring role, and a further 26% in a senior, or supervisory,

role within service provision. In Aberdeenshire, the proportion of workers involved in direct care and support increased slightly to 51%, this compares to 50.4% nationally.



More staff are over 45 than under, with a significant proportion of staff in the 55 to 64 age group (21%) and most in the 45 to 54 grouping. There is, however, a continued commitment within Aberdeenshire to ensure sustainability of service, and both Education and Children’s Services and the Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership regularly employ newly qualified social workers, many of whom have previously experienced social work placements in Aberdeenshire. This emphasises the importance of working alongside educational institutions to ensure social work services in Aberdeenshire are an attractive option for students and their experience when on placement is both educationally fruitful and provides a sound foundation to becoming a qualified social worker.

Evidence indicates that Aberdeenshire Council has a strong history of staff retention within social work and social care services. Indeed, there are staff who, over years, were supported from an unqualified position through social work training and post-qualifying development. Social work services have strong links with Robert Gordon University and have held assessment centres to promote recruitment of students in final placements looking for career opportunities. During the period covered in this report, 20 newly qualified social workers have been recruited, all were previously on placement in Aberdeenshire.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic staffing has remained relatively stable. Staff absence continues to be monitored regularly to ensure service capacity is directed at the most vulnerable. Within Children’s Social Work there has, at times, been 20% of staff shielding due to underlying health conditions, or through caring responsibilities for dependants during the pandemic. Staff have been able to continue working from home where possible, hence COVID-19 absence rates have remained low, equating to an average of 4% of the total workforce during March – September 2020.

The impact of virtual working has provided challenges for new members of staff as social work and social care are professions underpinned by forming relationships with service users and unpaid carers. All services have continued to visit and meet service users, albeit this has been limited to occasions when phone or video conferencing would not have been appropriate. Having the opportunity to debrief and discuss challenging situations with colleagues is an integral and valued

part of team working. This has required an innovative approach; however, the workforce has adapted, and new methods of supporting colleagues have developed.

## **5.2 Training and learning**

Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) remain committed to staff training and development and promotes a learning culture throughout all services. Practically, much of this is achieved through the efforts of the Workforce Development Team, located within the HSCP. This team supports the delivery of an annual training plan which incorporates training needs across all social work and social care functions. This includes the provision of Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) assessments, social work student placements, and employee development across adult and children's social work, and social care services. A range of training opportunities continue to exist for staff involved in the delivery of services, including post-registration support.

In 2019/20 and through into 2020/21, there have been increasing numbers of Foundation Apprenticeships, with 84 across social work and social care services. It is hugely pleasing to see such a large number of pupils choosing to gain social work and social care experience whilst still at school. The relationship formed with local Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is important in ensuring pupils and students have placement opportunities which are diverse and provide a true representation of work in this sector. All services view placements opportunities across Aberdeenshire as an important feature of workforce planning and future recruitment of staff.

From August 2019 to February 2020, thirty newly qualified professionals attended the one-year Social Work Professionals Support Programme (SWPSP). The programme provides an induction to, and familiarisation with, service expectations regarding good practice, and opportunities for reflection and discussion on challenging themes. Since May 2020, a further twelve newly qualified social workers have moved into post. It is anticipated that these, and any returning participants, will join the 2020/21 Social Work Professionals Support Programme when it resumes.

The provision of social work student placements has been seriously impacted by COVID-19. A significant number of issues around team capacity and home working, including maintaining confidentiality, effective professional learning opportunities, robust assessment, and meaningful team working have resulted in less than a third of the usual placement offers. Whilst the national focus is on matching final placement students, it is expected that numbers graduating in 2021 may be lower than normal. Services have been encouraged, wherever possible, to provide student placements as the projected impact of low final year placement opportunities will undoubtedly impact on service's ability to recruit in future.

The Social Work Support Scheme which assists selected colleagues to complete their social work degree has been under review and is anticipated to be open to new applicants in 2021. Currently three supported staff are nearing completion of their qualification.

## **6. Public Protection**

### **6.1 Overview**

Public Protection is a key aspect of the CSWO role. Statutory Social Work Teams are integral to the planning, delivery, and monitoring of public protection responses across children's and adult's services.

As a member of the Executive Group for Public Protection (EGPP), during 2019/20 and in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CSWO has observed an effective forum for considering key aspects of public protection, including the functions of the Child Protection; Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements; Adult Support and Protection; and Domestic Abuse. This group has had a central role in monitoring the Public Protection response to COVID-19 and in seeking assurance on key aspects of Public Protection during the pandemic. This has been an effective and well-functioning forum throughout.

Well-established processes are in place to mitigate increased risk through Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), Child and Adult Protection arrangements, and, more generally, a multi-agency willingness to work collaboratively. All child and adult protection duties have remained in place during the pandemic and existing policies and procedures are continuing to be followed.

During the COVID-19 pandemic additional measures, including training awareness raising and regular communication, have been put in place to ensure all partners, (including the Grampian Assistance Hub and ECS Hubs) have clear guidance on identifying and raising concerns. Public Protection awareness was increased through regular briefings.

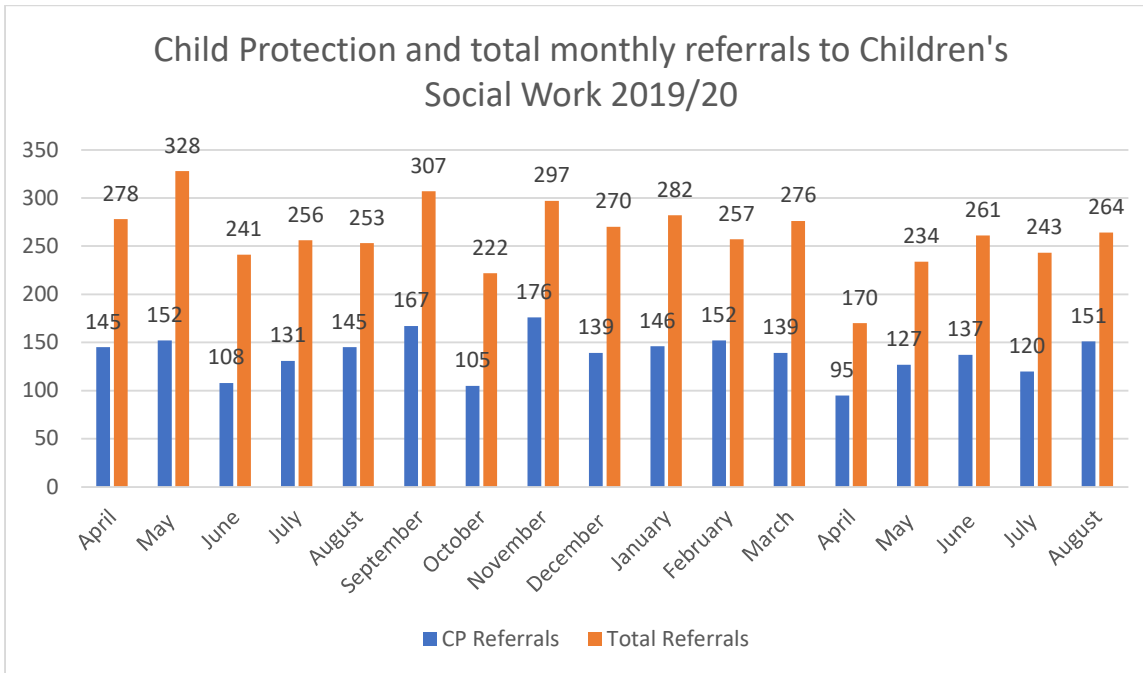
All adults at risk and children on the Child Protection register were actively monitored and reviewed during the pandemic and will continue to be as we move through each phase of the pandemic. New referrals were investigated under existing policies and procedures, albeit using virtual meetings and social distancing as far as possible. Prior to any face to face visits, a rigorous risk assessment were undertaken to ensure the safety of both staff and service users.

The Child Protection and Adult Protection Committees continued to meet virtually during the pandemic and on a more frequent basis. COVID-19 risk registers were created and implemented, monitored, and reviewed, and remain in place. The Child and Adult Protection Committees continue to have the same independent Chairperson who attends the Executive Group for Public Protection to ensure identified risks and actions are shared and monitored on a multi-agency basis.

## **6.2 Child Protection**

There were over 400 Looked After Children in Aberdeenshire in 2019-20 with most children placed in Foster Care provided by the Local Authority (39%). Almost a quarter (24%) were with friends and family, 20% were at home, 5% were with prospective adopters, and 5% in residential units. The remaining children were either in Foster Care commissioned by the local authority, or in another community setting.

The number of children and young people on the Child Protection Register remains at an average of 100 each month, which is below the national average. Children's Services participate in the Child Protection Committee quality assurance activities including a bi-monthly audit of Initial Referral Discussions (IRD) with partner services.



Critical activities have continued with reporting to the Scottish Government on undertaking physical contact with children on the Child Protection Register, and contacting children/young people with a multi-agency plan and young people eligible for aftercare support. Challenges remain in recruiting foster carers and prospective adopters to ensure there are sufficient placements within Aberdeenshire. There continue to be children and young people placed out of authority due to a lack of local placements.

The availability of mental health support for children and young people continues to be an area of concern, with care-experienced young people facing delays in accessing specialist support. Work continues with educational psychology and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) colleagues to ensure children and young people receive appropriate support.

### 6.3 Adult Support and Protection (ASP)

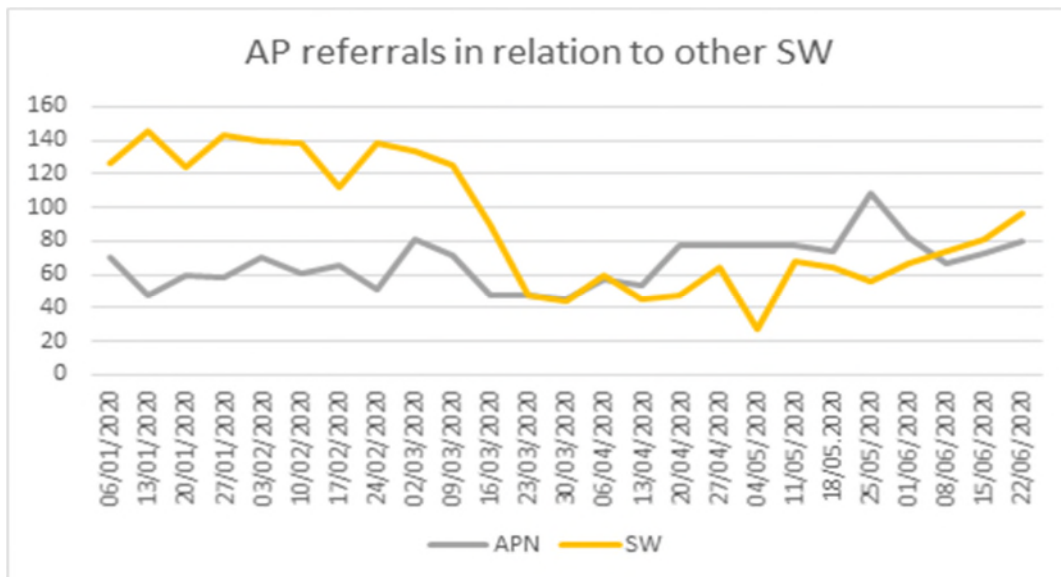
During 2019/20 the service has continued to progress the practice improvements identified in the [Aberdeenshire Adult Protection Committee Action Plan 2018-20](#). It is encouraging to report that 27 of the 29 actions identified have been fully complete. The 2 remaining actions, which are partially completed, were paused due to the impact of COVID-19.

The Adult Protection Network (APN) continues to act as a single point of contact for all ASP concerns. Adult protection referral numbers have increased year on year since the introduction of the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 and, prior to the pandemic, the APN, on average, carried out enquiries into 60 to 70 referrals weekly.

The introduction of a formal Initial Referral Discussion (IRD) process, involving police, social work, and health partners, has been crucial in ensuring rapid information sharing, decision making, and support being available to adults at risk of harm. Investigation times have improved, but do not consistently meet the 4-week timescales. There has, however, been positive progress, with the average time for an investigation significantly reducing.

It is encouraging to note that in the 2-year period between March 2018 – 2020, collaborative work with advocacy partners has increased, with a rise of over 200% in ASP related referrals. The

inclusion of a facilitator from Advocacy North East in the Adult Protection training programme has increased awareness of the importance of service user access to independent advocacy. Small changes, such as to paperwork which prompt practitioners to discuss advocacy with service users, has made a tangible difference. This is a good example of the improvements associated with multi-agency working and the subsequent benefits for service users.



Unlike wider social work, adult protection referrals did not fall below the average rate of those recorded during the same period in 2019. Since then, numbers have continued to rise and the average weekly referral rate to the APN, in July 2020, was 85. There has also been an increase in the number of referrals from outwith the statutory sector.

The restrictions associated with COVID-19 and, in particular, the changes made to service delivery, provided additional risk for vulnerable people and in particular those at risk of harm. As COVID-19 became more prevalent and the country entered lockdown a number of services were paused, or reduced in scale. This subsequently led to a tension between introducing suitable measures to reduce risk associated with vulnerability, and the need for social distancing. There was intense work undertaken to mitigate risk to individuals: furthermore, these issues were escalated on a number of occasions through governance structures, including the Executive Group for Public Protection (EGPP) and Adult Protection Committee.

## 6.4 Domestic Abuse

The Aberdeenshire HSCP is a key partner of the Aberdeenshire Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP). This year the VAWP developed and launched the [Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2021](#), and, in addition the [Domestic Abuse Assistance in Aberdeenshire](#) was published in January 2020. This guide is a practical resource for those people experiencing, or have been affected by, domestic abuse, and professionals working with adults and children affected by domestic violence and abuse. The guide provides information on the support which is available to those affected by domestic violence and abuse in Aberdeenshire.

As a result of measures to reduce social contact and the spread of COVID-19, there was an expectation that household domestic abuse would increase. The strict lockdown measure in spring/summer were expected to increase isolation, meaning victims' usual support mechanisms and risk management strategies were not available. Alongside existing multi-agency working, the

Executive Group for Public Protection receives regular information regarding the prevalence of domestic abuse in Aberdeenshire, including any noticeable trends or patterns developing.

## 7. Service Quality and Performance

Service quality, performance management, and reporting are intrinsic parts of the duties of the CSWO. Social work services utilise regular performance reporting to inform delivery against strategic objectives, highlighting areas of progress and subsequent approaches to continuous improvement.

The Care Inspectorate (CI) continue to regulate and inspect all registered services (local authority, independent, and third sector providers) across Aberdeenshire and undertakes planned and unannounced inspections. Inspections do not assess all quality themes in every visit; however, areas of focus are selected from a range of “intelligence” sources, including self-evaluations. Social work and social care services consider CI reports individually, and strategically, in order to highlight any concerning, or positive, themes.

Detailed inspection reports for all services can be viewed online here: [Care Inspectorate](#).

### 7.1 Partnership Working with Service Providers

The independent and third sectors are critically important in the delivery of social work, social care, and criminal justice services to many thousands of people across Aberdeenshire and beyond. In all areas of provision there is a “mixed economy” of providers which offer care and support to service users with a range of needs. The majority of services are commissioned through flexible spot purchase arrangements, or pre-set contracts which set out the specific care and support required. Whilst these services are commissioned on a formal basis with the necessary legal and contractual stipulations, there is strong emphasis on collaboration and partnership working. The CSWO recognises that the needs of all service users and people in receipt of services are enhanced if agencies work in partnership and maintain a person-centred approach. All providers of social work and social care services are profoundly important: the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of whole-system working which is built on a sense of collective responsibility.

### 7.2 Children’s Services

Children’s Social Work Services continue to engage with over 2,000 children, young people and their families. The Service’s *Future Delivery Plan* defines its approach to continuous improvement and outlines the 3 priority areas for the service:

1. Safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children, young people and their families.
2. Improving and modernising service design and delivery.
3. Developing a competent and confident Children’s Services workforce.

The Children’s Services Plan 2017-2020 came to an end on 31 March 2020. The new Plan 2020-2023 was published on 30 September 2020 and reflects the significant progress made over the



last 3 years across a number of priority areas: Corporate Parenting, Substance Misuse, Children with Disabilities, Mental health & Wellbeing and Early years.

The Independent Care Review launched “The Promise” in February 2020. It challenges local authorities and partners to redesign the system to focus not just on improving the experience and outcomes for care experienced young people, but to also concentrate on early intervention to prevent children requiring to become looked after. Work will start in 2020 to begin two pilot projects and the author looks forward to reporting on progress.

Inspection reports for all Children’s Homes highlight consistent good practice. Children and young people participate using wellbeing surveys that inform individual care plans across all children homes.

Aberdeenshire continues to have very low numbers of children and young people accommodated in secure placements. For most young people who were placed, they experience self-harming behaviours associated with a diagnosis of autism. The challenge of provision and access to health services and appropriate accommodation/care to support those young people in distress was a significant factor in all cases and an area the CSWO intends to explore further with the Service and partner agencies.

The participation of children and their families has been a challenge during the pandemic. This has required support from practitioners in ensuring both practical, and emotional, support for children, young people, and their families. This has included providing a physical space so that a family can be supported to access virtual meetings. The facilitation of contact for families where the child/young person is placed away from home has also required considerable planning, including practicalities of transport, suitable venues, and supporting virtual contact. Foster Carers recognised where children have been able to settle into placements with reduced contact due to lockdown. They have also assisted in the practical arrangements of transporting children and mixing with other households to ensure family contact takes place.

The ability to access mental health services remains critical and ongoing work with NHS and Education colleagues continues to ensure children and young people are receiving the care and support they require. COVID-19 has led to some delays in accessing assessment and support services. In addition, transition arrangements for children and young people have been delayed due to COVID-19 related restrictions. Families have required continued help, and adaptations have been made to individual children and young people’s plans to ensure appropriate support is in place.

With the increased amounts of information and guidance for practitioners and service users throughout the pandemic, being able to remain informed and up-to-date has been a significant challenge. The use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is just one example of the continuing challenges associated with ensuring the safety of the workforce and service users.

The reopening of Family Centres for re-establishing contact is a key priority, and has required a coordinated and measured approach to ensure risks are managed appropriately. The priority has been the use of outdoor spaces and now includes moving to look at how the service continues key assessment tasks to support plans for children and their families by utilising indoor space. For children with additional support needs, Children’s Services have triaged support with Education colleagues (including the Head Teachers of Special Schools) and private providers to ensure individual care plans continue to meet the outcomes for those children. Packages of care have been adapted quickly to respond to changing needs during lockdown, for example with reduced respite care.

Aberdeenshire Out of Hours Service (OOHS) provides a response to the most vulnerable children and adults who are in crisis outwith normal office hours. Staffing consists of 2 Social Workers, 1 Mental Health Officer, and a Team Manager all working on a rota basis. The service is currently going through a transitional period with call centre support moving to a new provider.

The out of hours core tasks include:

- Child protection concerns and investigations, which are referred out of normal office hours.
- Undertaking risk assessment and risk management which may involve direct contact with a service user and/ or family.
- Arranging material, domiciliary or residential resources for individuals at immediate risk.
- Ensuring the welfare of vulnerable adults.
- Mental Health Officer duties.
- Liaising with other agencies and services e.g. Police, doctors, health visitors, community psychiatric nurses, benefits agency.
- Complying with the Detention of Children and Young People Protocol in liaison with Police Scotland.

This service has been particularly important throughout the pandemic with a rise in calls relating to mental health support, homelessness, and food parcels.

### **7.3 Learning Disability Services (Adults)**

There are estimated to be 1,233 adults with learning disabilities in Aberdeenshire; of whom 998 receive support from Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Of those in receipt of support, 362 are living in residential care, or supported living settings. 14.6% of adults with a learning disability in Aberdeenshire have an autistic spectrum diagnosis compared with the Scottish average of 13%.

A key focus of learning disability services during 2019-20 has been to develop options for day opportunities. The services, based around Aberdeenshire, are designed to build on people's abilities, and support them with making choices and developing skills. Each service offers a different selection of community-based activities depending on local opportunities.

People with a learning disability are three times more likely to experience difficulties with respiratory illness than others. This makes responding to the COVID-19 pandemic particularly challenging for this group. The service has been acutely aware that throughout the pandemic there has been a need to maintain some level of building-based support for a small group of service users with particular needs. A re-start of all services during the pandemic has not been possible, hence the service continues to promote the benefits of Self-Directed Support (SDS) packages which allow for safe and more individualised services.

In March 2020, there was the launch of the learning disabilities strategy 'Be All You Can Be 2020-2025'. The strategy was launched at a Spring fete event held at Woodhill House which was attended by many Day Services and third sector organisations who hosted pop-up stands, inviting people to buy crafts and home bakes, and find out more about the services provided in the area. Throughout the development of the strategy, the service was keen that extensive engagement and consultation took place to ensure the document accurately reflects the views of the learning disabilities community. The strategy launch was an example of a commitment to ensuring the delivery of the strategy is a collaborative effort between the HSCP and service users. This will remain the ethos throughout the lifespan of the strategy and will be supported by HSCP staff attending self-advocacy groups to ensure a two-way conversation is maintained.

Building on the national strategy 'The Keys to Life', the Aberdeenshire strategy consists of 4 main strategic principles; that people with a learning disability will feel well, involved, valued and supported, and aims to ensure that Aberdeenshire is a great place to live. Work has started on the initial Projects identified within the delivery plan.

A 'Market Position Statement' for Learning Disabilities, detailing the accommodation needs in Aberdeenshire, has been produced and was launched along with the strategy. The service is hopeful this will create positive market conditions to support organisations to build accommodation in Aberdeenshire. There are continuing challenges in accessing sufficient, suitable accommodation and support options to meet the growing demand.

Below are examples of creative work undertaken throughout 2019/20:

- **The Pitscurry Project** in Pitcaple provides craft and work activities for adults with learning disabilities and produce 190 hanging baskets every year for Inverurie town centre – a key factor in Inverurie winning the Beautiful Scotland Medium Town Gold Medal in 2018.
- Banff Day Opportunities offers **Dramarama** which uses dance and drama to help group members to make a personal statement about their feelings through movement.
- Ellon Day Opportunities offers the **Benchmark Woodwork Project** where adults with learning disabilities manufacture wooden items, such as garden furniture, made to the customer's requirements.
- **ASDAN** (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) provide evidence-based activities whereby individuals achieve an award for various subjects. In the past year, 46 people who attend Forest View Day Centre were supported in completing 102 ASDANs between them, on a range of topics including Performing Arts, Out in the Community, Independent Living, Using Computer Technology, Relationships, Creativity, and Self - Advocacy.

#### 7.4 Mental Health Services

There are three Community Mental Health Teams in Aberdeenshire, covering North, South and Central Aberdeenshire respectively. These areas broadly aligned to the HSCP six defined localities. The teams consist of Social Workers, Mental Health Officers (MHOs), Senior Community Coordinators, and Local Care Coordinators. The referrals to the teams are increasing and the complexity of referrals rising. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the service anticipated, and is now witnessing, an increase in demand for mental health services. both in the adult and older adult population. The service is working creatively with increased use of technology to meet demand, however the impact of COVID-19 and the associated impact on employment and relationships will undoubtedly lead to a sustained growth in demand across all ages. Going forward, it is important services adapt to reflect the changing needs of communities, to do so, there must be a willingness to work beyond current service boundaries and move to a truly holistic approach to supporting people.

In October 2019 the Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024 and Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy: Delivery Plan 2019-2021 were launched. Throughout the development of the strategy, extensive engagement and consultation took place to ensure the document accurately reflects the community's views.

The projects identified in the Delivery Plan are:

- **Prevention & Self-management:** People are supported to maintain and improve their mental health.
- **Access:** People have access to the right treatment, care and support at the right time.
- **Person Centred:** We deliver person-centred, recovery focussed services, that promote choice and control.
- **Mental Health Inequalities:** We reduce the negative effects of mental health inequalities.

Several key projects from the Delivery Plan have had project groups established and have begun to implement the Delivery Plan, including the delivery of self-management groups in partnership with various Third Sector organisations. and a review of personal outcomes measurement tools.

### **Working together – The Shared Governance Council**

The Shared Governance council works together on projects that aid those living with mental health difficulties. The North Aberdeenshire Lights Council was formed in October 2019. It is the first Shared Governance council to have those working for the NHS and Local Authority involved. The first confirmed project was winter kits. These were made up of various items including; Lip salve, drawstring bag, hot chocolate, warm socks, gloves, mini hand creams, tissues, hot water bottles, torches, shampoo and body wash and helpful information around mental health and useful contact numbers for those struggling. These were distributed out to service users in the community. The Shared Governance council is now working on the next project which they hope to be COVID-19 wellbeing packs, which will be personalised to the service user's needs.

## **7.5 Mental Health Officers (MHOs)**

Section 32 of the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 requires Aberdeenshire Council to appoint sufficient numbers of Mental Health Officers (MHOs) to discharge the MHO function under the 1995, 2000, and 2003 Acts. MHOs are Social Workers who have successfully completed post-qualification training across these Acts and who are designated Mental Health Officers by the CSWO on behalf of the Council. Only MHOs can undertake certain statutory responsibilities.

Under legislation a court can appoint a “Welfare Guardian” if an adult is unable to make decisions, or take necessary actions, to safeguard their own welfare. “Financial Guardianship” arises where there is impairment to an adult’s capacity to safeguard their property, or financial affairs. In both areas, MHOs have a key role in assisting the court and supporting the individuals involved. Demographic changes, including the increasing prevalence of dementia, have continued to contribute to the increasing orders granted.

Aberdeenshire Council are one of the few Local Authorities who do not operate a waiting list for MHO Services. Flexibility and responsiveness across functions continue to make this possible. During 2019 (calendar year) there were a total of 213 assessment call outs for MHOs across Aberdeenshire: this was a 1% decrease in comparison to 2018. A 40% increase has since been experienced from January to May 2020. At the time of writing, 165 assessments have been completed in 2020, which is significantly higher than the same period in 2019. In 2019 35% of all

detention related activity was for people aged 65 and over. During the first seven months of 2020 there has been a 5% swing towards more under-65 related MHO activity. It may be that this age group have experienced a greater impact from COVID-19 restrictions.

## 7.6 Care Homes & Very Sheltered Housing

Aberdeenshire is an area with a high proportion of Older People. Last year's CSWO report reflected upon progress in promoting an enabling approach to supporting people in their own homes, including residential and supported living resources. For many older people a Care Home or Very Sheltered Housing (VSH) placement is the right option to ensure they are well supported. These facilities support people with high level needs and often complex conditions, including those living with dementia.

Aberdeenshire has care homes across a wide geographical area which meet the needs of the local population. There are 8 local authority care homes and a further 6 Very Sheltered Housing (VSH) establishments within the HSCP. There are a further 36 independently owned care homes commissioned under the National Care Home Contract (NCHC). Care homes operated by the HSCP reported a stable position in relation to Care Inspectorate grades.

### Working together during COVID-19

"This year it has been a challenge for everyone within the care home but there have been many positives along the way. We have been very fortunate that staff have been redeployed to the service from Live Life Aberdeenshire, Day Services and the Community Learning and Development team. It has been a great experience working with other teams and working in partnership. Residents have enjoyed new activities, such as a poetry group and exercise classes delivered virtually. Some of the redeployed staff have chosen to join the team permanently and they are very keen to adapt and learn within the care home.

In addition, some existing domestic staff within Edenholme who were keen to try a caring role were upskilled and have now been successfully recruited to care assistant posts."

Edenholme Care Home

## 7.7 Professional and Clinical Oversight Group for Care Homes

During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been substantial scrutiny of the care and support provided to Care Home and Very Sheltered Housing (VSH) residents and tenants. The response to the pandemic raised a number of questions regarding the care home sector, and in particular the use of protective equipment and infection, prevention, and control procedures. From 18 May 2020 each area was directed to put in place a multi-disciplinary team (Oversight Group) comprised of nursing, public health, social work, and clinical representatives. The Oversight Group's remit includes daily discussions about the quality of care in each Aberdeenshire Care Home and VSH, with the particular focus on implementation of infection prevention and control measures, and the provision of expert clinical support to residents. The Oversight Group have deployed members of the wider multi-disciplinary team to care homes and VSH to support providers to address issues of concern. This has been welcomed by providers, especially those with challenges regarding

infection prevention and control, and those with recommendations and requirements following a Care Inspectorate inspection.

The role of the CSWO in this group has been important in ensuring residents and tenants' human rights have been considered throughout the pandemic. To date, there has rightfully been a focus on preventing COVID-19 entering care homes and, where it is present, taking action to avoid its spread. This has ultimately changed the focus towards a more clinical environment with far greater emphasis on the wearing of PPE, and infection prevention and control processes. Visiting has been restricted to minimise the opportunity of infection, however this has caused significant stress and anxiety for both residents and families. This continues to be an area of much ethical and moral debate in which the CSWO continues to offer advice.

### **Celebrating Special Moments – Jarvis Court Very Sheltered Housing**

A Jarvis Court tenants recently celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and staff made sure the pandemic did not spoil the fun. The support staff worked hard to provide a day to remember including socially distanced family visits, a socially distanced meal with friends in the complex and a bagpipes display. The care staff described how important it was for them to do something special and therefore coordinated a birthday video with special messages from friends, family and other tenants, which was greatly appreciated by the tenant and her family.

## **7.8 Internal Care at Home Service**

The service has reshaped the care and support provided by introducing a four pillars model: complex care; end of life care; rehabilitation and enablement; and rapid response. The implementation of the model has encountered some challenges, particularly in rural areas where there are limited alternatives to the internal home care service. However, there has been significant progress and benefits in terms of integrated working and achieving positive outcomes for people. Home carers have become more integrated within multi-disciplinary teams and benefit from working alongside local district nursing teams to provide palliative and end of life care. This integrated model has proved crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic where teams have worked together in different ways to meet the needs of service users.

## **7.9 Criminal Justice**

During year 2019/20, the Criminal Justice Social Work Service continued to develop a delivery approach to meet the increase in community sentences, as a result of the introduction of PASS (Presumption Against Short Sentences) of 12 months or less. A Community Payback Order (CPO), as opposed to a short custodial sentence, provides an opportunity for a person-centred intervention to address the underlying need often linked to offending behaviour. The diversity of need presented by people who are made the subject of a CPO is very wide, often relating to physical and mental health difficulties, problematic drug and alcohol use, and social instability. Readiness to undertake the unpaid work component of a CPO presents many people with a huge challenge which subsequently presents as non-compliance. This ultimately can result in "breach proceedings" and potential custody. The Higher Support Needs Team was established to work with people who require individual support to attend unpaid work opportunities. The Team follow an outreach approach, building a relationship whilst providing direct support to resolve any issues before then supporting the person to attend a sheltered unpaid work placement. Service user

engagement with the Team, and increased attendance at unpaid work, has been very positive, which evidences the effectiveness of this approach. Aspects of this work are now being embedded into the “mainstream” unpaid work system which is bringing about further changes in how criminal justice manage unpaid work orders.

Aligned to the national and local Community Justice priority relating to Early Intervention has been the investment in a dedicated social work post to enhance all aspects of development and practice around “Diversion from Prosecution”. Close working relationships exist with key partners in the Procurator Fiscal and Court Service through the Community Justice - Alternatives to Remand and Early Intervention Sub-Group. Targeting the use of Diversion for young people has, for many years, been integral to the Whole Systems Approach within criminal justice. The dedicated social worker post has enhanced this work, developing a range of programmatic interventions to respond to the varying needs and risks presented by young people who have been involved in offending behaviour. The resources and partnership developments within this Diversion work is now widening across other people who present at the earlier stages of the justice pathway.

Again, in response to the priority to reduce the use of remand, the dedicated social worker posts established in year 18/19, and aligned to police custody suites providing immediate contact at the next day Court appearance, have significantly enhanced the use of bail supervision in Peterhead and Aberdeen Sheriff Courts. Early engagement to address immediate need contributes to improved compliance throughout the Court process. It also begins the work at a much earlier stage to stabilise a person’s situation and begin to address those risk factors which are associated with further offending.

The Aberdeenshire Criminal Justice Women’s Service has established further groupwork and drop-in provision which are tied into the Integrated Drug and Alcohol Service. Women who have disengaged from drug treatment, then have trouble re-engaging. The new chaos and adversity related to increased drug use is a significant barrier to attending referral appointments. The opportunity which a “one-stop shop” approach provides is more effective than different services offering appointments at different times. Physical health and well-being checks can also be undertaken at the same time as induction assessment into drug treatment.

Aberdeenshire Criminal Justice Social Work Service have continued to deliver the Caledonian System in response to men who are convicted of domestic abuse related offences. Members of the Criminal Justice Programme Delivery Team have become accredited in the delivery of risk assessment training. These skills have been used to establish training and support networks to ensure guidance is available to social workers and support workers involved in the delivery of this work.

## **7.10 Community Justice**

Throughout 2019/20, the Aberdeenshire Community Justice Partnership has continued to establish and deliver a range of collaborative and effective initiatives in response to the Local Community Justice Outcome Improvement Plan.

The key achievements include Prevention and Early Intervention – Aberdeenshire Safer Streets Initiative. The purpose of the initiative is to provide high visibility joint patrols to identify and disrupt those who are suspected to be involved in antisocial behaviour, disorder, or violence. The intention is then to divert people from crime and disorder and minimise the effects of excessive alcohol consumption, to provide advice, guidance and support to individuals displaying

vulnerabilities, and to provide referral on for follow up contact from support services. The initiative also allows for arrest referral work to take place where people have been held in police custody during the evening of the Safer Streets Initiative. Follow-up intervention and onwards referral into services can then take place through Criminal Justice staff who attend Court. Additionally, there is an opportunity to carry out 'Safe and Well' checks on Criminal Justice and Community Substance Misuse service users who are identified as vulnerable due to a range of factors, which could include alcohol / substance misuse, relationship issues including domestic abuse, or transitioning from custody to community. This provides a further opportunity to enhance existing support and increase visibility of partnership working.

A further initiative relates to the continued work in response to the impact of "County Lines and Cuckooing". County Lines refers to drug dealers from large cities who expand their operations into smaller towns. They endeavour to exploit young and vulnerable people to sell drugs, carry cash and weapons. They may also take over a vulnerable person's house which is known as "cuckooing". The joint Police and Community Justice initiative, Operation Corner, in October 2018 took place in response to the significant impact of county lines activity in the communities of North Aberdeenshire. During 2019/20, the Community Justice Substance Misuse Worker continued to assist in the delivery of joint 'Cuckooing' visits with Police Scotland and Housing colleagues. Levels of engagement with services following these visits varied, with just over a third of individuals engaging most, or all of the time, and just under half of individuals engaging some of the time. On the anniversary of Operation Corner (October / November 2019), community justice partners undertook a smaller, week-long joint operation which included targeted enforcement activity, a media launch, community access to the NHS Grampian Health Bus, access to additional support from Criminal Justice Social Work within the Police Custody and Court cells, access to support from Clinical Substance Misuse Services, and further joint 'cuckooing' visits involving Substance Misuse Service, Housing and Police Scotland.

The involvement of Community Justice Substance Misuse Services in cuckooing work has enabled quicker access into services for individuals. For example, the involvement of the Community Justice Substance Misuse Worker in the anniversary activity in October / November 2019 led to assessments for substance misuse services being completed at the same time that warrants were being executed, resulting in most individuals who wanted support having access to same/next day Medication Assisted Treatment. These clinical pathways are now well-established and embedded into local practice which is in line with the evidence-based strategies set out by the national Drug Death Taskforce.

Working alongside the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has further enhanced Prison Discharge protocol and multi-agency involvement in the SPS Case Management Board. The revised and updated processes within Aberdeenshire have continued to work well during 2019/20, with regular attendance from Housing Services at the Case Management Board (CMB) meetings within HMP & YOI Grampian, and homeless / housing applications being taken and specific housing referrals being made. Aberdeenshire Council (Housing Service and the Criminal Justice Social Work Service) are signed up to the Information Sharing Protocol with the Scottish Prison Service, and continue to receive information concerning admissions, releases, and transfers across the prison estate. This information has been particularly useful in recent months, in relation to planning for early releases from custody in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of established practice, all forthcoming releases from the prison are discussed at the Case Management Board six weeks prior to release. This is a multi-agency approach involving Department of Work and Pensions, voluntary throughcare support services, NHS Grampian, and Housing partners.



## 7.11 Substance Misuse

During 2019/20, the integration of the clinical and social work drug and alcohol services within Aberdeenshire further developed in terms of their agency identity and service delivery. The Stepped Care Framework introduced in 2018 has contributed to clarity around when statutory services should become involved in a person's treatment and support. The risk factors and areas of complex need, which the stepped care matrix identifies, ensures that people referred into drug and alcohol services are allocated to the correct service which can provide the most appropriate level of care and supervision. This has further introduced more collaborative pathways into mental health services and children services where adult protection and child protection risk factors exist around the adult's drug or alcohol use. Third sector colleagues work in partnership within the stepped care framework which strengthens working relationships and improves transfer of care between services, ensuring that people can be moved out of statutory provision in response to positive change and a reduction in risk.

During 2019, work began on the development of an integrated assessment tool. The tool incorporates new factors of risk such as vulnerability due to the impact of cuckooing, in addition to improvements around the way services assess the impact of substance use on children and young people. The consultation process and development of a shared recording system was taking place when work was interrupted due to Covid 19. This work is due to recommence and conclude in the later stages of 2020, and will complement the introduction of the national recording system "Daisy". The CSWO welcomes this integrated approach to assessing an individual's vulnerability and looks forward to providing updates in future reports.

Collaborative practice has further developed through the establishment of weekly "Hub" meetings taking place in each locality. These comprise of workers from each part of the drug and alcohol system including psychology, medical staff, and pharmacy, in addition to relevant multi-agency partners in housing, criminal justice, and mental health. Hub meetings provide a supportive environment where practice can be discussed around difficult and complex cases, where decisions to transfer care can be agreed, and treatment/support plans can be shaped into a truly collaborative system of care.

Evidence is available regarding the risks and vulnerabilities of people who continue to use illicit drugs. An upward trend has been observed in the number of people in their middle years who are being referred because of problematic drinking, but also increasing cognitive impairment. The person's age and lack of diagnosis often leads to difficulties accessing the most appropriate services because the person does not necessarily meet eligibility criteria. The knowledge and skills required by practitioners is extensive and involves a great deal of time to navigate across services. During 2019/20, there has been investment in a dedicated social work post to work specifically with people presenting with suspected Alcohol Related Brain Damage. This post ensures there is coordination between services, including Care Management, Mental Health, Adult Protection, Psychology, Psychiatry, and the Drug and Alcohol services. This post has led to a reduction in unmet need and promotes the delivery of holistic person-centred support.

## 7.12 Sensory Impairment Services

Services for people with a sensory impairment in Aberdeenshire include ophthalmology, audiology, optometry and visual impairment rehabilitation. In addition, there is sensory support in schools and specialist support to adapt to, and manage, sensory loss, with the aim of promoting independence in daily living. There is no dedicated social work service for visual impairment,

although the visual impairment support groups and rehabilitation services are facilitated from within social work and occupational therapy services.

Adults and children with a sensory impairment have access to self-directed support packages and occupational therapy equipment/adaptations from care management and children with disability resources. Work has been undertaken in 2019/20 to modify assessment paperwork to highlight all sensory issues which may not have been identified previously.

Services are delivered collaboratively by the statutory, third, and independent sectors, with oversight from the Aberdeenshire See Hear Implementation Group, which was established to drive the implementation of "See Hear – a strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland". The CSWO reported in the 2018/19 annual report that the implementation of the strategic framework was in progress, however this has been paused as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that future work reflects the impact of COVID-19 on individuals with a sensory impairment, and in particular the effect of social distancing measures and self-isolation.

## **8. Commissioned Services**

Social Work teams continue to work closely with independent and third sector partners in ensuring a range of holistic support options are available. Work has continued in developing a revised care at home framework in 2019/20 with a focus on outcome-focused commissioning.

The approach to managing risk relating to care home and care at home services during the COVID-19 pandemic has been to look at the circumstances of individual service users and residents to ensure suitable support is available to meet needs. To maintain sustainability of provider provision, services have also monitored risks in relation to provider capacity, continuity of support, finances, and infection procedures through the submission of daily service reports to the HSCP. Delivering safe care services has been a key objective throughout the pandemic, with a particular focus on ensuring the availability of suitable PPE. This involved development of a new process for the distribution of PPE across all care sectors, and training to ensure all staff were fully trained. Individual providers have well established procurement processes, however, where providers encounter challenges, the HSCP provide equipment, including PPE, from its Joint Equipment Centre (JEC) in Inverurie.

### **Thinking creatively to meet emotional needs during COVID-19 (Burnside Care Home)**

Burnside Care Home is an independent sector Care Home in Laurencekirk. As with all Care Homes they have been required to ensure the safety of residents through the use of PPE. They also recognised the emotional strain that was experienced by residents going for long periods without physical contact with family members. They have worked together with public health colleagues to introduce the 'cuddle curtain'. This device enables residents and family members to have physical contact with one another whilst ensuring they are also fully protected.

## 9. Unpaid Carers

Last year's report described the significant work which had taken place to implement the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 which came into force in 2018. The Service continued to develop support to Carers in 2019/20, including a re-tendering process for a combined [Adult and Young Carers Support](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions have been particularly challenging for unpaid carers. Quarriers continue to maintain contact with registered unpaid carers and a member of staff has been assigned to providing support to people who are suffering from anxiety related to COVID-19. Despite the change in legislation relaxing the legal duty, Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements are still being progressed, and staff are also continuing to receive Creative Break applications which are being fulfilled with alternative types of breaks for carers, in line with current restrictions.

The service has produced extra newsletters and will continue to do so on an ad-hoc basis throughout the pandemic. There was also an additional newsletter for unpaid carers who had children at home when schools were closed, providing support and suggestions as to how unpaid carers manage their caring role, being a parent, and teaching with suggested activities and tips.

Following receipt of national guidance on use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for unpaid carers, all unpaid carers registered with Quarriers were advised how to access PPE from the HSCP. Carer Practitioners, who support unpaid carers in receipt of their own Self-Directed Support (SDS) budget, have been making contact to ensure people have access to support needed to continue in their caring roles. These discussions have, in some cases, resulted in temporary changes to how unpaid carers use their budgets to meet their outcomes. An example of this is carers using budget previously used for holistic treatments for relaxation to purchase items to achieve the same outcome at home.

## 10. Looking to the Future

Both living with, and recovering from, COVID-19 is expected to increase the number of individuals requiring support under social work legislation. The likelihood is there will be a continued increase in the number of people presenting as at risk of harm, or experiencing stress and distress, whose age, disability, or health needs do not fit easily into current ways of working.

Services are evidencing the following:

- continued increase in Adult protection and Mental Health Officer (MHO) referrals.
- increase in psychological and social support needs across all areas of society.
- increased identification of substance misuse.
- increased unpaid carer stress.
- individuals needing support from more than one specialist service.

The recent Community Impact Assessment (CIA) undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council painted a consistent picture. Communities have highlighted themes of alcohol and mental health as areas of particular concern: this emphasises the need for services to be flexible and progressive in the way they are delivered. Positively, the CIA also indicates that COVID-19 has led to increased community cohesion which has been noticeable throughout the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the need for social work and social care to change how support is provided. Increased digitalisation has provided opportunities for working more creatively with service users, unpaid carers and partners. Within Children's Services, some young people report finding virtual meetings much easier to participate in without feeling 'in the spotlight'. Young people have virtually engaged with practitioners through a variety of methods, including face time, text messaging, and phone calls. This has reduced the need to travel which is an important consideration when delivering services in a rural setting. Within Adult Services, there has been a rapid increase in the use of Microsoft Teams and 'Near Me' to facilitate contact with service users and enable participation in assessments. The CSWO is eager that services learn from the feedback of young people and adults who have been supported through increasingly digital means during the pandemic. This will undoubtedly play an important part in future service delivery, however this must be done proportionately and not replace the necessity for face to face interactions in many instances.

Social work has for many years become fragmented into "specialist" areas with the majority of work undertaken within teams with a functional identity. As society has changed and social work's response to an ever complex legislative and regulatory framework has developed, social work has responded by moving away from generic practice in preference for functional teams. Social work has always been identified with viewing service users holistically and not in terms of diagnosis or age, however there exists a continuing tension between delivering a truly holistic approach when working in functions defined by pre-determined categories. COVID-19 has changed so many aspects of society and there is subsequently a need to consider how social work and social care services maintain a truly person-centred approach. In addition, it is more important than ever to reflect on the principles and intent of GIRFEC and Self-Directed Support. In summary, social work and social care in Aberdeenshire must maintain a focus on the individual, and consider their outcomes, rather than focus on service provision.

During the 2019/20 period the CSWO was pleased to witness many positive developments across all social work and social care services. The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, its impact is felt across all communities, including those already marginalised where the impact will be felt more acutely. The CSWO is particularly concerned about the immediate and subsequent impact COVID-19 is having on the well-being of individuals and communities. This includes social work and social care staff across all sectors and organisations, who are not immune to the personal and professional challenges which exist during a pandemic. However, this report describes services which are adept at evolving to meet the changing needs of society, therefore social work and social care services in Aberdeenshire continue to be well positioned to respond with professionalism, empathy and kindness.

**Report prepared by Iain Ramsay, Aberdeenshire Chief Social Work Officer**

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