

REPORT TO: East Lothian IJB

MEETING DATE: 18 December 2025

BY: Chief Social Work Officer

SUBJECT: Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2023-24

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report presents to members the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report for 2023-24. The report is attached at Appendix 1.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 IJB is asked to note the content of the 2023-24 Annual Report of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) and its implications for the provision of social work services in East Lothian and their role in assuring the safety and welfare of vulnerable children and adults across the county.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Section 45 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1994 sets out that every local authority should have a professionally qualified CSWO. There is a statutory requirement for the CSWO to produce an annual report about the activities and performance of social work services across the council and the Health and Social Care Partnership.
- 3.2 The format for the report follows the template as set out by the government's Chief Social Work Advisor:
- Governance and accountability arrangements
 - What our data is telling us
 - Key achievements
 - Challenges
 - Workforce
 - Resources
- 3.3 The report reflects the strategic and operational delivery of services across children's (social work) services, justice, mental health and adult social work services. It provides an overview of the professional activity for social work in East Lothian through the delivery of the statutory functions and responsibilities held by the Chief Social Work Officer.

- 3.4 The report reflects the impact of growth in East Lothian. There is clear increased demand in a number of key areas including adult social work and children with disabilities. As communities continue to grow, East Lothian's population increase will always include some people with a range of complex needs. Services with a duty to support and protect people are experiencing an increase in demand but also an increase in people's individual needs. There continues to be significant numbers of people who are struggling to manage following long periods of austerity and co existing factors including addiction, mental health problems, physical ill-health, disability and poverty. All services also continue to experience a growing number of people of all ages affected by domestic abuse.
- 3.5 This report is an opportunity to highlight the efforts of our social work and social care workforce who work tirelessly to protect people from harm and to support them to live safely and as independently as possible in their own homes and communities. Social work services have a wide range of statutory duties and continuing to meet these in times of extreme financial pressure remains a challenge. As CSWO, it is my job to assure Members about social work practice in East Lothian and be open about the significant challenges the profession faces as a result of growth, demand and national policy expectations. I am confident that we are prioritising the right evidence-based practice and strategic development to ensure we are in the best position to continue delivering high quality services.
- 3.6 At a time where nationally, fewer people are entering the social work profession and more people are leaving, it is more important than ever to showcase the life changing impact social workers are having and to celebrate and value our workforce. I am proud to have the opportunity to share some of the many achievements from 2023-24, particularly the positive results from the joint strategic inspections of both adults and children at risk of harm. The assurance we can collectively take from these fantastic inspection reports is testament to the commitment and resilience of our social work workforce and the support of all managers and leaders. I am endlessly inspired by our workforce who truly want to make a difference to people's lives and wish to place on record my sincere gratitude for their hard work and commitment.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct policy implications of this report. However, the report highlights areas of practice, service delivery and policy that will be affected by national policy developments.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – there are no direct financial implications arising from the report, however it does refer to the financial challenges facing the delivery of social work and social care services.
- 6.2 Personnel - None
- 6.3 Other – None

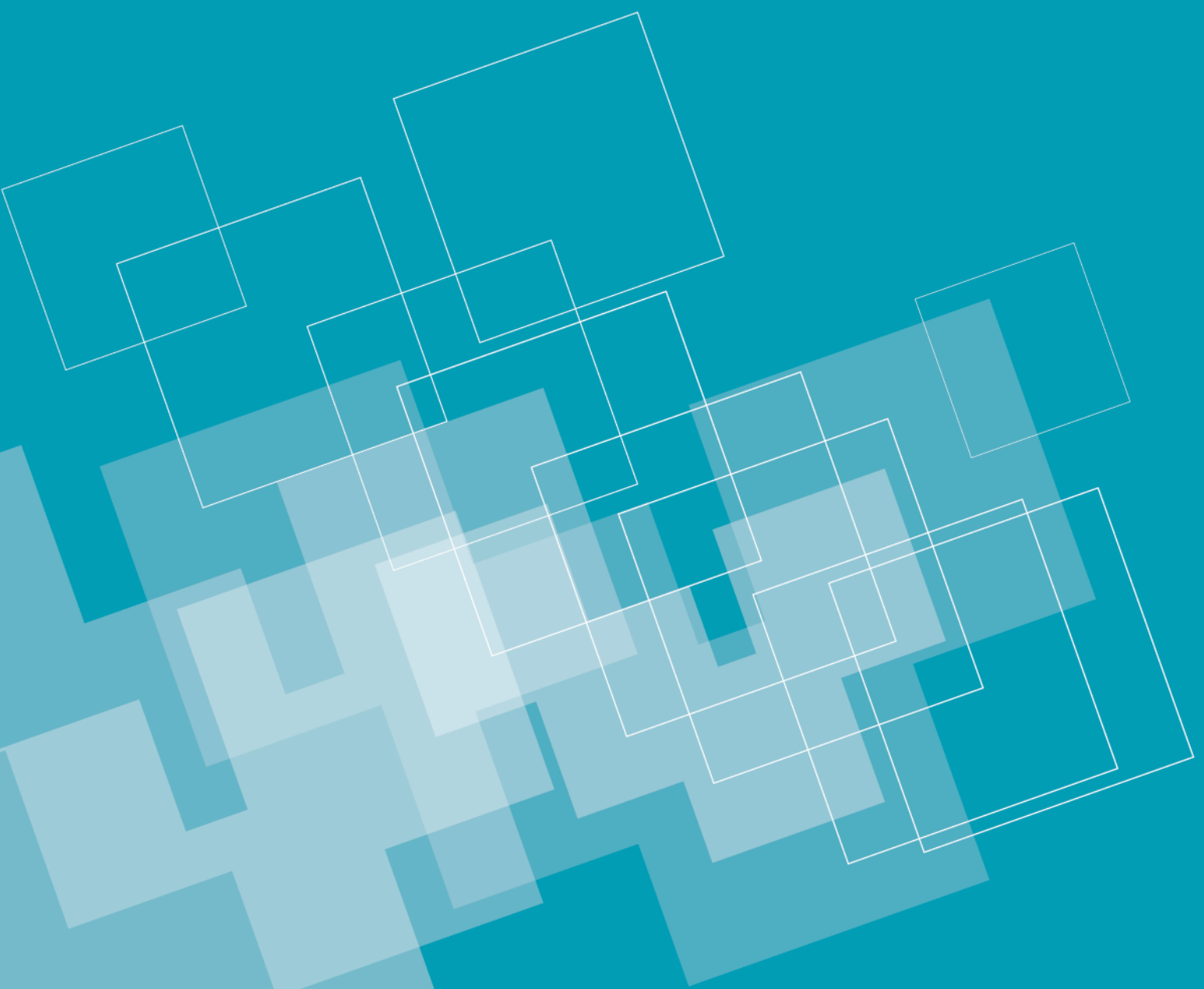
7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Chief Social Work Officer Report 2023-24 attached at Appendix 1

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CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER

REPORT 2023–24



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Introduction

I am delighted to introduce the chief social work officer (CSWO) report for 2023-2024. It is a real privilege to present this information on behalf of the social work profession in East Lothian. No report could ever fully convey the complexity, pressure and risk that our workforce navigates, nor the dedication, energy and heart it takes to be alongside people. We strive for positive outcomes, often in the most difficult of circumstances.

This report will reflect and present a large amount of data and information. Behind every statistic is real people, living real lives which have somehow brought them into contact with social work services. Something significant has happened that means they required support, care, resource or protection. This has been provided within the parameters of a wide range of social work legislation which places specific duties on social work professionals and the Local Authority.

It is important that we do not forget the people in amongst the data and that we understand the legislative basis for all the work we deliver. Social work is never an optional extra, it is a critical frontline service with responsibility for the care and protection of our most vulnerable citizens.

The level of need and complexity in our communities has never been higher. People face significant challenges that make day to day life increasingly difficult to manage, including the cost-of-living crisis, barriers to accessing mental health support and more people than ever facing poverty and disadvantage. Demand for social work services in East Lothian continues to be significant and we continue to strive for positive outcomes, often in very difficult circumstances.

The report will outline our key achievements and challenges while showing a wide range of service specific data that will provide insight into service demand and performance. It also includes social work case studies to give readers more insight into our work and how it can transform lives.

It is always beneficial to take time to reflect on our performance, explore and be honest about where we can improve and to make space to recognise our achievements. It brings the importance of the social work and social care workforce into sharp focus, and I never take for granted the skills and commitment of our staff who regularly go above

and beyond to meet the needs of the people we serve. I would like to take this opportunity to convey my gratitude to them, their relentless passion for the work that they do and for continuing to make East Lothian a place that can take real pride and assurance in our social work practice.

Governance and Accountability

Social work and social care services play a vital role in championing and addressing the impact of poverty, inequality and risks in the lives of vulnerable people. These services are well-placed to inform the prevention and early intervention agenda that is embedded in the key strategic plans for East Lothian. Most social work functions take place within the context of joint operational working, with colleagues within the health and social care partnership, council services and across key partner agencies, including the third sector. The CSWO is a member of the council management team, a non-voting member of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) and is a member of the following key strategic partnerships that lead and direct the work to protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people:

- East and Midlothian Public Protection Committee
- East Lothian Partnership Governance Group
- East Lothian Children's Strategic Partnership
- East Lothian Community Justice Partnership
- Midlothian and East Lothian Drug and Alcohol Partnership

As CSWO, I regularly meet and report to the council's chief executive. I attend the East Lothian and Midlothian Critical Services Oversight Group (chief officer group) for public protection in an advisory capacity. I am a member of the public protection committee and sub-groups for performance and quality improvement and learning reviews. I chair the Lothian and Borders multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) strategic oversight group (SOG). As CSWO, I am a non-voting member of the IJB and a member of the clinical and care governance committee. The latter provides an important opportunity for oversight and assurance of key service and practice achievements and risks across adult and justice social work services.

Role of the CSWO in social work practice

There is a statutory requirement for all local authorities to appoint a professionally qualified CSWO who is registered with the Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC). This regulation is set out in Section 45 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994. The role of the CSWO is to provide professional advice and guidance to Local Authorities, Integrated Joint Boards, Elected Members and officers in the delivery and associated risks of social work services.

As head of children's services and CSWO, it is necessary to balance the challenge of maintaining objectivity in line management and strategic decision-making, alongside accountability for professional practice standards and ensuring the safety of those who use our services. The human and financial impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis on council and IJB services continues to test this balance. It is essential for the CSWO to maintain a good understanding of practice, in order to remain connected to the core business and standards of assessing and responding to risk and need for vulnerable people. This is achieved through:

- The role of agency decision maker, endorsing decisions of the fostering and adoption panels.
- Authorising decisions about secure care placements and monitoring assessments and plans for young people whose liberty has been removed.
- Overseeing significant decision making in relation to resources and reviewing plans of children placed in external resources.
- Oversight of the performance and care governance framework in children's and adult services.
- Core member of multi-agency meetings (Large Scale Investigations and strategy meetings) to consider risks to service users in regulated care services.
- Strengthening the arrangements for oversight of local authority welfare guardianship applications.
- Single Point of Contact for Prevent¹;
- Monitoring of MAPPA business and co-chair of MAPPA 3 meetings.
- Member of learning review sub-group for public protection.

The CSWO supports the role of the IJB chief officer in providing professional assurance for social work practice in the services delegated to the IJB. Senior social work managers in adult services consult with the CSWO about practice issues. Regular meetings for social work managers across children's, justice and adult services with the CSWO provide important opportunities to discuss cross-cutting themes, feedback from national meetings such as the Social Work Scotland CSWO network and standing committees and an opportunity to reflect on practice challenges and dilemmas.

Children's Services

During 2023-2024, children's services continued its commitment to keep the Promise. Our desire to support children to thrive within resilient and loving families has remained a priority for service delivery and improvement. Hearing the voices of children and their families has continued to guide our individual, strategic and operational planning and we have worked to embed children's rights into everything we do.

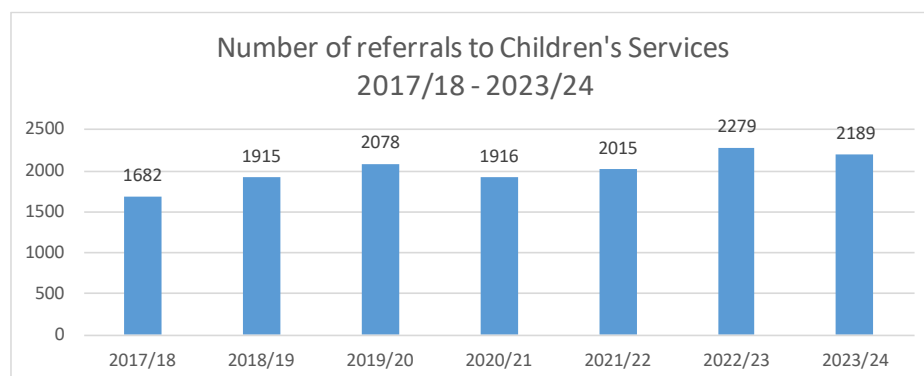
Children's services is placed within our education and children's services directorate. This is a well-established partnership, delivering an integrated service that seeks to get it right for all our children living, learning and belonging in East Lothian. Children's services provides support to children from pre-birth through to 26 years old for care experienced young people.

In October 2023, children's services relocated to a new office base. This move was a significant change for our social work workforce. Throughout the move, employee wellbeing and support was a priority. Children's services continue to be co-located within an open plan space enabling effective collaborative and partnership working across all social work teams including the senior management team.

What is our data telling us?

Referral activity data

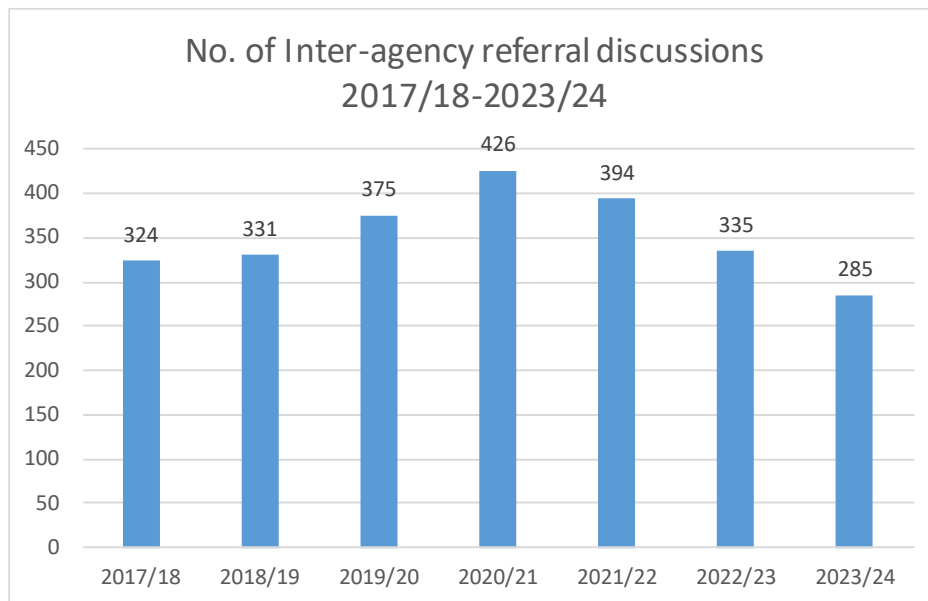
Our data tells us that referrals to children's social work have seen a slight reduction during 2023-2024. This is the first time we have seen a reduction in referrals in a four-year period. The forecast for the 2024 – 2025 would suggest referrals are set to increase again.



This data reinforces the importance of our partnership efforts in Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). Children's Services has continued to work alongside education, housing, finance, third sector and key partners to ensure families can access early support.

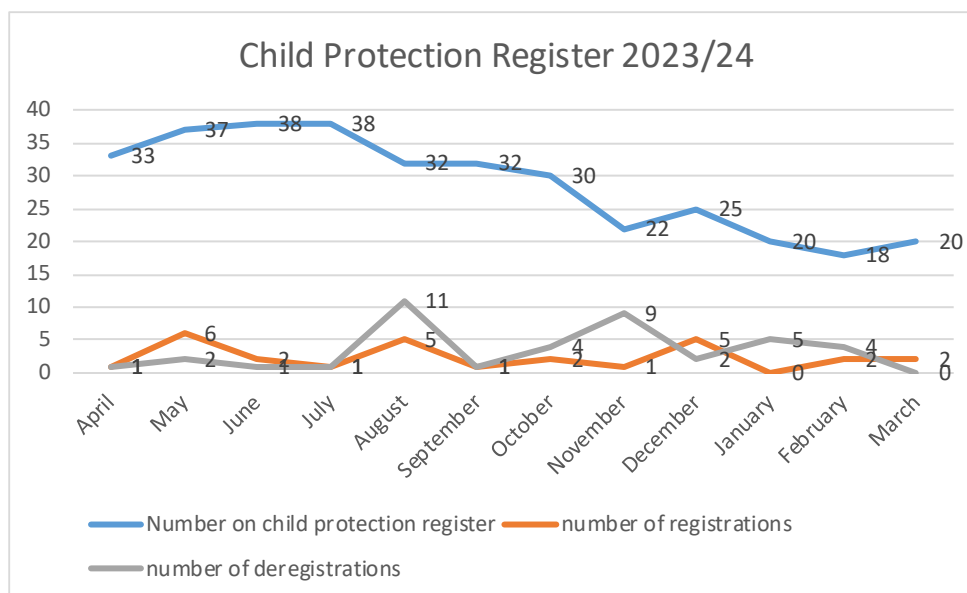
Interagency referral discussion

Due to the high-risk nature of child protection work, Inter-agency Referral Discussions (IRDs) are always the priority for children's social work services. IRDs involve senior officers from police, health and social work who jointly consider information that could indicate a child has been harmed or is at risk of significant harm. When information about a child potentially at risk of harm is received by one of the core agencies, an IRD is initiated within a shared electronic system (E-IRD). Each agency checks their own recording systems and shares any relevant information to help reach an agreement about the risk and what action is required. There has been a reduction in the number of Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs) in the last year but this number will regularly fluctuate. We are confident that our IRD processes are robust, with an IRD Overview Group meeting fortnightly to review IRDs and the interim safety plans and undertake quality assurance activity.



Child protection activity data

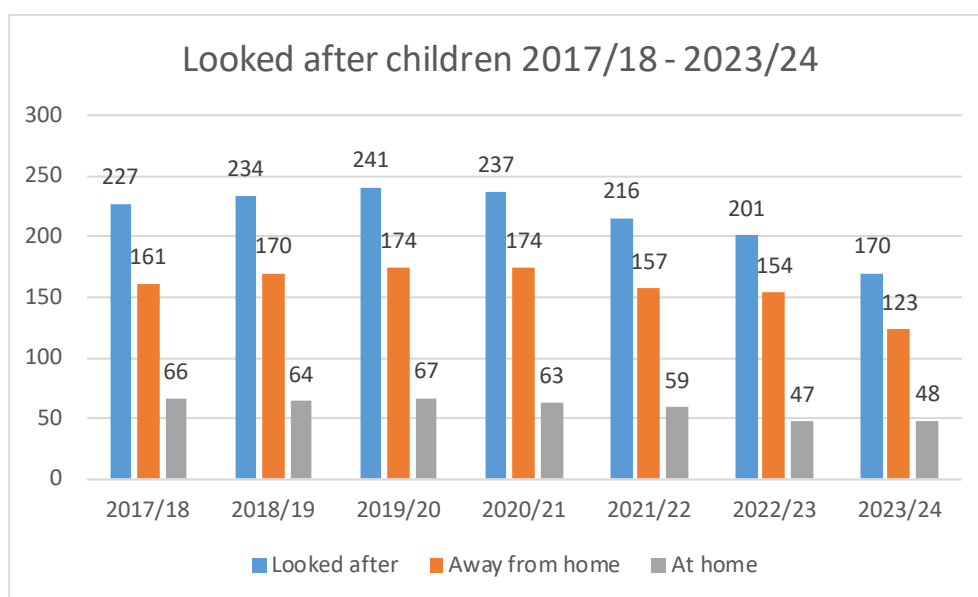
The number of children on the child protection register remains consistent with a slight decrease from last year. East Lothian has seen a drop in the number of children whose names are placed on the Child Protection Register over two Quarters in the period 2023-2024. The most common concerns at point of registration are parental ill-mental health, domestic abuse, and parental alcohol and drug use.



There has also been a reduction in the conversion of IRDs to Child Protection Registration. We believe these are possible indicators of the partnership's strengths in information sharing and safety planning at the earliest stage.

Looked after children

The overall number of East Lothian children who are looked after, both at home and away from home, continues to reduce. The number of children looked after in East Lothian in 2023/24 was 170 (this is a decrease of 15.4% from 2022/23). This reduction is in line with the national trend, and we believe this is related to our ongoing commitment to keep the Promise. Our leadership team encourage staff to think creatively about how to support families to stay together when it was safe to do so.



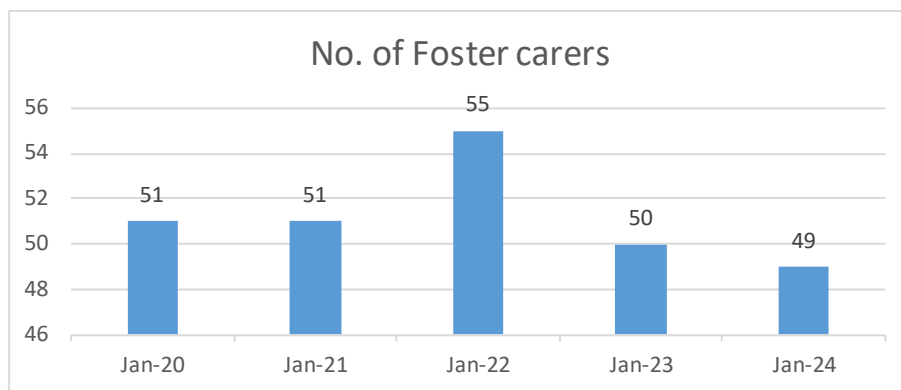
External residential childcare

Throughout 2023/24, we have continued to prioritise 'Belonging to East Lothian' and work in close partnership with education and key agencies to keep children with their families in their community. In March 2024, 20 young people were in external residential care. Our challenge remains in preventing other young people from moving out with East Lothian. Our internal residential provision and the fostering recruitment challenges has a significant impact on our efforts to keep children in East Lothian. We continue to review our internal resources with a view to increasing capacity, but this is particularly challenging within the current financial landscape.

Fostering

Our aim is to provide children who require foster care with a strong, loving care experience. Our fostering team continues to offer a high level of support and training to assist our foster carers in managing the daily issues they experience.

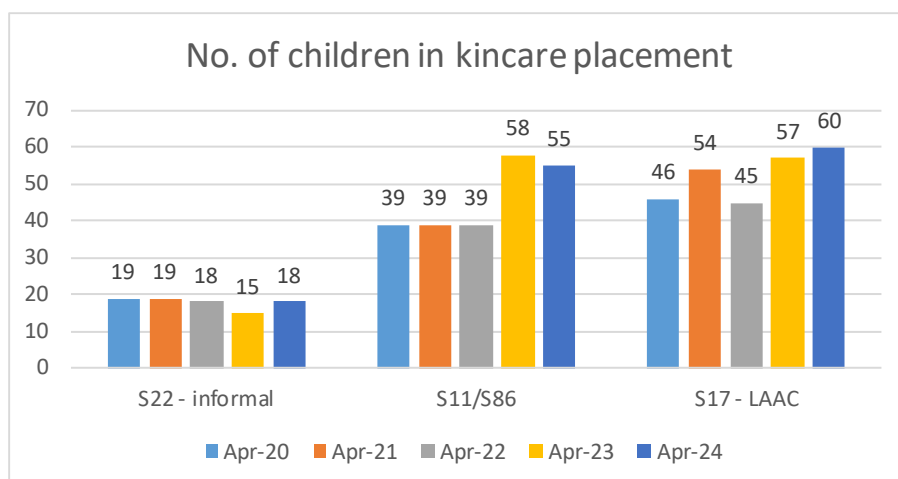
The number of children moving into foster care has remained lower than figures seen prior to 2020. There were 19 children requiring a care placement in 2023 – the same figure as in 2022. Between 2016 and 2020 this figure was consistently above 30. As stated in last year's report, the reasons for this are reflective of our increased efforts to support families to keep children at home (or within the extended family), in keeping with the aims of the children's services redesign and The Promise.



The fostering team has undertaken improvement work in preventing placement breakdown. Understanding the reasons behind placement breakdowns has led to improvements to the matching processes. In 2023/24, we have seen a reduction in the number of placement moves for children with five moves in 2023 as opposed to 19 in 2022.

Kinship care

Children's services commitment to keeping families together is reflected through our ongoing investment in kinship care. Kinship care is considered the first option when parents cannot provide the care and safety that a child requires. Our numbers of kincarers has continued to grow from 102 in 2022/23 to 115 in 2023/24. Again, this is in line with our strategic plan and in keeping with the Promise.



Adoption and post adoption support

The demand for post-adoption support continues to grow, reflecting the challenges for some adoptive families who are struggling to cope with and meet the particularly complex needs of some children.

Support to children with a disability

Children's services provided a high level of support to children affected by disability and their families in 2023/24. We support children who have severe and enduring disabilities using a self-directed approach. Our work can often involve child protection and statutory looked after processes. We have seen an increase in the number of referrals to this team and a significant increase in complexity of need.

Number of children with disabilities receiving support:							
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Direct Payment	45	47	57	70	89	95	125
Care at Home	30	35	33	36	16	7	9
Residential Respite in ELC	10	9	8	11	9	12	15
Residential Respite out with ELC	4	3	3	5	4	4	6
Children supported at home	113	132	135	117	148	176	180
Looked after away from home	10	8	5	4	4	10	9

Throughcare and Aftercare

The throughcare and aftercare (TAC) team works with young people in accordance with their developmental age and stage of their lives. Keeping the Promise, the team works to support lifelong connections between the young person and their family and beyond, to support them into adulthood.

As of 31st December 2023, there were 67 young people receiving an active aftercare service. 75 young people were assigned to the TAC duty service and can request support when they need to. Within the service, 28 young people have been supported to remain in fostering, residential or formal kinship care placements.

Young people seeking asylum

Children's services has developed its support and accommodation offer to unaccompanied and asylum-seeking young people. These young people may have been trafficked and arrived in East Lothian either spontaneously or via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which arranges the transfer of children throughout the UK.

As at March 2024, East Lothian is supporting 22 unaccompanied and asylum-seeking young people who are allocated with a worker from the throughcare and aftercare team.

During this reporting period, children's services recruited a dedicated Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) worker who is based within the throughcare and aftercare team. This post works alongside housing support workers and health practitioners to ensure UASC young people have access to emotional, practical, and financial support. This continues to be an area of significant growth for East Lothian and we are working collaboratively with other council services to expand our housing and support offer.

Wellbeing and justice

Children's services provide support and intervention for children and young people who are in conflict with the law, with the aim of preventing further offending. We support the national priority to keep under 18-year-olds out of prison, reducing the use

of secure care and using community alternatives where possible. We have strengthened our focus on Early Effective Intervention and carried out 40 initial visits, of which 27 young people agreed to support. Our team received 33 referrals for diversion from court suitability assessments and worked directly with 11 young people regarding their harmful sexual behaviour.

Key Achievements within Children's Services

Strategic inspection of children at risk of harm

During the period 2023/24, the Care Inspectorate led on a joint inspection of services for children and young people at risk of harm. The inspection took place over six months and involved surveys, focus groups for staff, children, young people and their families, case record reading, the submission of a collaborative position statement and a wide range of documents.

Inspectors found important and East Lothian received the grade of Very Good for quality indicator 2.1 – impact on children and young people.

The inspection reported the following key messages:

- Children and young people were safer as a result of staff's effective recognition and response to risks and concerns.
- Partners worked well together using inter-agency referral discussions to plan responses if children and young people were at risk of harm.
- Staff were confident in their ability to recognise and report child abuse, neglect and exploitation, and assess and analyse risks.
- Most children and young people experienced positive relationships with staff that had helped to keep them safe.
- The Single Point of Access had enabled many children and young people to receive effective support for their mental health and wellbeing.
- Children and young people with very high levels of risk and need were being well supported by multi-agency staff to remain with family or in care settings locally.
- Children and young people had a very good awareness of their rights.

- Children and young people were being well supported by staff to participate, share their views and contribute to decision-making.
- Leaders, operational managers and staff shared high aspirations and a strong value base for the delivery of services.
- Leaders worked well together through clear governance structures and reporting arrangements. Staff had confidence in their leaders.
- Staff felt well supported through supervision arrangements, peer support and the support of their managers.

Signs of Safety

Children's services continue to develop Signs of Safety as our practice approach within all areas of social work practice. Within the model, our workforce strives to build effective relationships and use a strength-based, family first approach to keep children living safely within their own families wherever possible.

Using the signs of safety approach, practitioners work to spend quality time with children and their families. They facilitate positive conversations through Signs of Safety tools including 'the three houses' and presenting information to children through words and pictures. An audit of our signs of safety practice surveyed the views of parents and carers. 33 out of 35 parents and carers reported that their social worker listens to them and wants to understand their family.

Trauma-informed practice and trauma-responsive practice

Our commitment to embedding a trauma-informed and responsive approach across children's services is evidenced through our leadership team. As CSWO, I am the trauma champion and our trauma lead for East Lothian Council.

The impact of trauma and building worker resilience on our workforce continues to be a priority for children's services. We continue to support team development days and are committed to reviewing our supervision policy to ensure a greater emphasis is placed upon employee wellbeing.

Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) implementation

In February 2024, children's services recruited a part time NQSW implementation lead to further develop our supported first year for newly qualified workers across children and adult services. As part of this work, we are developing a mentoring scheme for newly qualified workers as well as reviewing our induction and supervision guidance.

Realising children's rights

Children's services has worked with East Lothian Council departments to implement creative ways to uphold and promote children's rights. A council working group has been developing clear corporate and service level action plans that will support us in our next steps with the implementation of UNCRC. Children's services have been raising awareness of models of child participation and working to embed these within our individual, operational and strategic participation activity.

Participation, voice and listening

The East Lothian Champions Board is funded by East Lothian Council, NHS Lothian and Queen Margaret University as a partnership project delivered by Who Cares? Scotland. Through the board, care experienced young people themselves can influence improvements in the services and support available to them. Since it was first established, the Champions Board has employed seven care experienced young people into paid participation assistant posts. They have all since moved into further education or promoted employment.

During 2023/24, a total of 38 care experienced children and young people were supported by their independent advocacy worker from Who Cares? Scotland.

Children's Services continued to develop its use of Viewpoint as an additional tool for engagement with children. Partnership work with Who Cares? Scotland and education has informed a new survey for care experienced children. The fostering team also undertook a pilot of the Viewpoint MyStory app and plan to fully implement this with foster carers in 2024/25.

Family support

We provide outcome-focussed interventions to children and families, who require a longer-term social work service. The family support team starts working with families following a period of social work assessment. Family support time is a mix of parenting work, family time and individual work with children. Parents who have accessed family support have reported “I can see real improvement and it is so much better”. Another parent fed back “Things haven’t really changed”.

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM)

Our model for interviewing children changed to SCIM in June 2022. From this point until the end of July 2023, 60 joint interviews were undertaken using this model. The high disclosure rate evidences the benefits of the trauma-informed and responsive approach and the value of the preparation work to ensure children feel safe to talk to us. Every child can share their views on the process and their experience of the interview.

Share the Care

We successfully facilitated family activity days over Easter, Summer and October holiday periods supported by our Share the Carers. This work is delivered in partnership with the East Lothian Play Association, Active Schools, and the Arts Service to provide inclusive activities for all the family. Activity days have been a huge success for our children and families providing children with a disability and their families an opportunity to meet with other families. Feedback has been very positive with parents keen for us to find a way to continue delivering this crucial resource.

Life Story Therapy work

Children’s services is committed to embedding life story work into its fostering, adoption, kinship and residential care work. Life story work can be a therapeutic approach that helps children make sense of their past experiences, understand their identity, and develop a coherent narrative of their lives. Some children and young people who have experienced challenges and adversity may need a more intensive piece of work, and this is what we refer to as the Richard Rose Model of Therapeutic Life Story Work (TLSW). Through carefully guided sessions, children are encouraged

to explore their personal histories in a safe and supportive environment, enabling them to process trauma, build resilience, and foster a sense of belonging.

Throughcare and Aftercare support

Our young people have benefited from the following supports from the team and partnership agencies:

- Midlothian Young People's Advice Service (MYPAS) is a local third sector substance misuse support agency, which has worked in partnership with the TAC team to support young people to access substance misuse education and counselling.
- The TAC nurse who provides advice, guidance, and support to young people with all matters related to their health and wellbeing. They connect young people with the appropriate universal and targeted health services in the community.
- A monthly education, training and employment oversight meeting, with our partners, reviews individual young people and identifies opportunities tailored to their support needs and interests in line with the *No One Left* behind agenda. This also enables our partnership team to identify gaps in provision for education, training, and employment.
- All young people have a plan for leaving care that includes accommodation and support. The service works closely with housing colleagues to plan for appropriate housing options and to forecast future needs. However, the significant shortage of housing in East Lothian can impact this particular group of young people.

Youth justice and wellbeing

Our approach to young people with harmful sexual behaviour has expanded and we offer monthly consultation sessions to anyone who has concerns about the sexual behaviour of a young person they are working with. A new aspect to our work since April 2023 is carrying out custody reviews for young people under 21 in Polmont, we work alongside the prison and adult justice services to ensure the young person's wellbeing is promoted in a developmentally appropriate way.

One council commissioning

Throughout 2023/24, children's services has been strengthening our approach to joint commissioning and collaborative decision making about how we direct our resources. During this period, a register of commissioned services for children has been established. A commissioning process model was also developed with the aim of minimising the risk of duplicating spend of non-recurring funds across a range of services and recognising opportunities for collaborative working. Children's services also reviewed its processes for administering section 10 grants and is committed to setting up of a lived experience panel to aid decision making for the 2024/2025 Section 10 grant allocation.

Challenges within Children's Services

Population growth

East Lothian has a rapidly growing population and is one of only a few Scottish local authorities with an increasing child population (a forecasted increase of 17.1% by 2028/29 for P1 to S6 pupils based on the 2020 census roll). This is the second highest increase in Scotland. The Council's ongoing significant financial challenges and a growing population within East Lothian have created a challenging landscape when delivering services at all levels, but particularly around prevention and early intervention.

Workforce recruitment and retention

A national shortage of social work staff has impacted our recruitment and has resulted in a number of teams running at reduced capacity. Recruitment challenges continue to impact our ability to fully implement the redesign of our intake and assessment work.

Capacity within our internal provision

Our financial pressures are primarily driven by high-cost external placements for children whose needs cannot be met within East Lothian resources, compounded by the national and local fostering crisis. External placements result in significant and unsustainable budgetary pressures, and we know that most children who move out with East Lothian do not achieve the best possible outcomes. This is driving our changes in practice and culture and our aim is to meet the needs of children and young

people within their own communities. We continue to review our internal resources with a view to increasing capacity, but this is particularly challenging within the current financial landscape.

Foster carer recruitment

Like the national picture, foster carer recruitment has continued to be an area of challenge during 2023/24. Despite having significant number of enquiries, only four progressed to the 'Skills to Foster' training. However, they all moved on to be assessed as foster carers in 2024. For the first time, we used radio campaigns to generate interest in fostering with East Lothian. This is a costly method of recruitment, which did not yield the numbers of enquiries we had hoped for but did nevertheless raise the profile of foster care

Self-directed support options for children with a disability

Children's services has seen an increase in the number of referrals to the disability team and an increasing complexity of need. We know the impact of caring for a child with disability can cause significant pressure for families. The support provided by the team has led to improved outcomes for many children, including their ability to remain cared for within the family home.

The service's ability to meet the needs of children with disabilities has been significantly impacted by the lack of availability within care at home providers in East Lothian. Care at home providers who are on the East Lothian Council framework have been unable to accept new referrals for children who live at home throughout 2023/24. This has resulted in a shift away from care at home provision and towards direct payments so that the families can employ their own support via personal assistants. There is a concerning lack of balance within this support system that is resulting in a lack of choice and in some cases, an absence of support when it is most needed in the family home.

National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

The mandated NTS has resulted in higher numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children living in East Lothian. As of March 2024, the Council is supporting 22

unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. With existing resources operating at capacity, it can be challenging to find suitable options for all children referred to us via the scheme. There is a risk we will reach a point where we are not able to comply with the NTS and we are working closely with housing and finance to increase our tenancy and support capacity as a matter of urgency.

Workforce highlights for children's services

A key priority for the children's services plan is to ensure we have a sufficient, confident, skilled, and supported workforce. The service has made a strong commitment to engaging with the frontline staff around their wellbeing and supporting long term solutions to maintain a strong, passionate and trauma-informed workforce. The following examples of investment in our workforce demonstrates our commitment to developing our workforce:

- Children's services sponsored two family support workers to complete their social work qualification through the Open University.
- Three candidates were sponsored to attend the post graduate Child Welfare and Protection course in September 2022.
- Two practitioners completed the post graduate practice educator course in January 2023.
- Child Protection Level 1 training has been delivered to 50 multiagency professionals across East Lothian between October 2023 and September 2024.
- 64 practitioners were trained in the four day Safe and Together approach and seven trained in the supervision element.
- In 2023, three social workers successfully completed the Child Welfare and Protection post graduate course and children's services have sponsored a further three who started in September 2024. There continues to be a high demand for professional courses across the service.
- Children's services currently have 15 qualified practice educators and one currently undertaking the course. Between 2023/24, nine students completed their placement within children's services. Two of those students have gained

permanent social work posts within children's services and we are currently supporting them through the early implementation of the NQSW supported year.

Children's services' resources

Children's services continue to face significant financial challenges which contributes to the magnitude of the financial pressures being faced by the Council as a whole. It is incredibly frustrating for the leadership team who are confident that we have created the right social work model to improve outcomes and reduce spend.

The total service budget for children's services during 2023/24 was £19,532,669 and out total spend was £21,585,61 resulting in an overspend of £2,052,943.

The financial pressures are primarily be driven by:

- High-cost external placements for children whose needs cannot be met within East Lothian resources.
- The national and local fostering crisis.
- The impact of the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children.

In this incredibly difficult financial climate, it is certainly a challenge to lead the service with such a considerable overspend and being acutely aware that this adds to the pressures that the wider Council are facing.

As CSWO, it is my role to provide assurance about social work practice and the management of risk in East Lothian. As Head of Children's Services, it is my role to provide financial assurance and deliver a balanced budget. At this time of significant demand and complex risk, these roles can be in conflict. We continue to make extremely complex decisions about what resources are required to mitigate risks to individuals and communities.

Adult Services

During 2023/24, adult services continued its commitment to provide early help to those requiring support. The priority has been to support people in their own homes and communities while ensuring that needs are identified quickly to avoid long waiting lists and potential escalation in concerns. Hearing the voices of adults and their families has continued to guide individual, strategic and operational planning and we recognise this as an area of improvement.

Adult services is part of the IJB with the CSWO holding responsibility for the governance of all adult social work functions. The partnership is well-established and after a significant change in leadership in 2022/23, relationships are effective and a range of initiatives to provide governance and quality assurance have been introduced.

In October 2023, adult services relocated to a new office base. The service continues to be co-located within an open plan space enabling effective collaborative and partnership working across all social work teams including the senior management team.

What our data is telling us?

Home First

A new 'Home First' Project started at the end of 2023, with the aim of increasing the proportion of people discharged home from hospital, as opposed to being discharged to a care home placement - reflecting the 'Home First' principles. The project is based on the need to ensure that available care home places are used for people with the highest level of need. Although this approach is in part driven by the need to deliver financial savings, it also results in better outcomes for individuals and reflects the desire for people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

The early stages of the project (December 2023 to March 2024) delivered a 5% reduction in people requiring care home places, reflecting our efforts to keep more people in their own home.

Quality Improvement Support to Care Homes

Early intervention and building trusting working relationships with providers has been key to supporting improvement work within care homes.

The 'Care Home Huddle' is a multi-disciplinary partnership that meets every two weeks to share information, monitor quality and support improvement work within East Lothian's registered care homes. Working alongside care homes to deliver support, education and training has improved engagement and ultimately support for residents. The number of Large-Scale Inquiries are beginning to reduce, and grades in East Lothian care homes are improving, with 82.5% of care homes graded 4 and above.

Proportion of care services graded 'good' (4) or better in Care Inspectorate inspections:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
East Lothian	84%	85%	86%	77%	77%	82.5%
Scotland	82%	82%	83%	76%	75%	77%

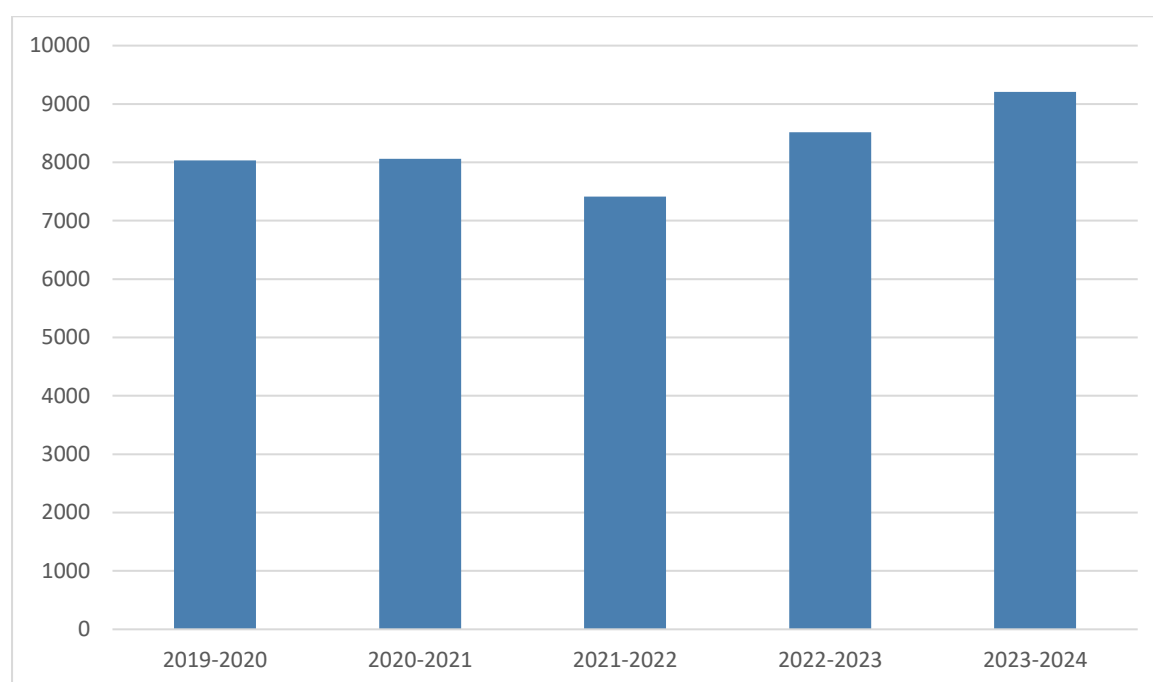
In 2023/24 social work played a key role in undertaking assessments and supporting families and residents during the closure programme of Eskgreen, The Abbey and Blossom House care homes. Social workers assisted people to understand and exercise their rights within the process and ensured residents and families had the information they needed to make informed decisions and choices about where their future needs could best be met.

Adult social work referrals

During 2023/24 approximately 9200 referrals were received to adult social work. This is an increase of 8% from 2022/23. The graph below shows a five-year trend for

referrals. As noted in the CSWO Report 2022/23, the significant rise (15%) in 2022/23 is linked to the dip in referrals in 2021/22 during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, comparison between 2019/20 and 2023/24 shows an overall rise of 13%. This is indicative of increasing service demands, resulting from population growth in East Lothian and the growing proportion of the population with increasingly complex needs due to disability and / or older age.

Adult social work referrals received

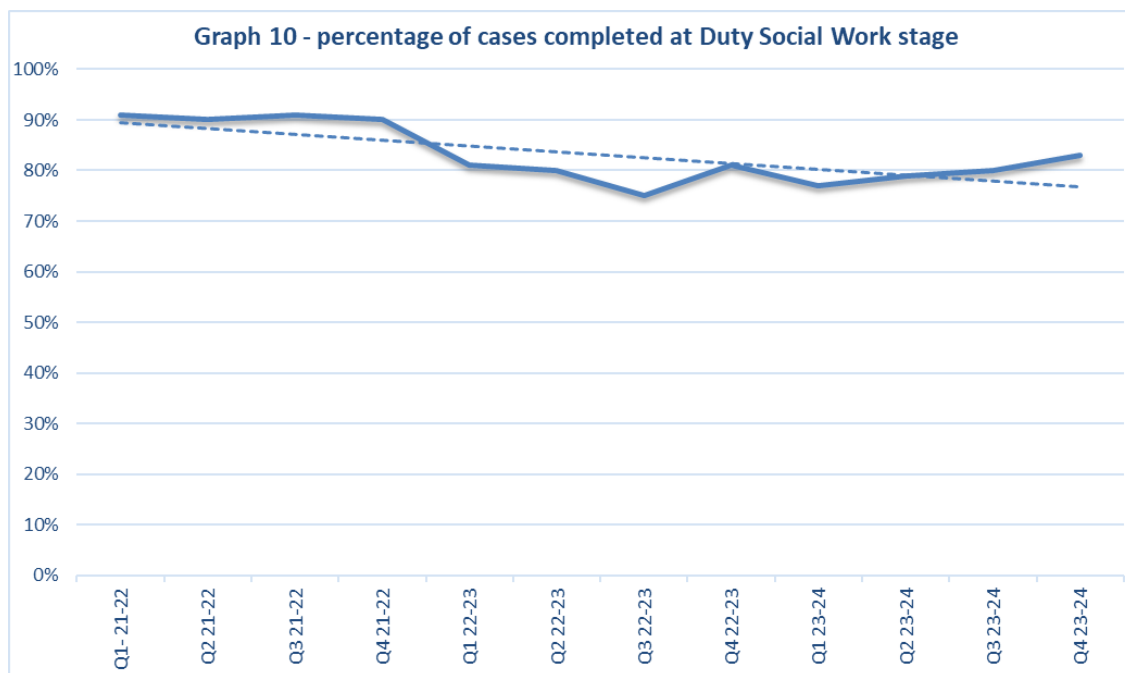


Early intervention and prevention

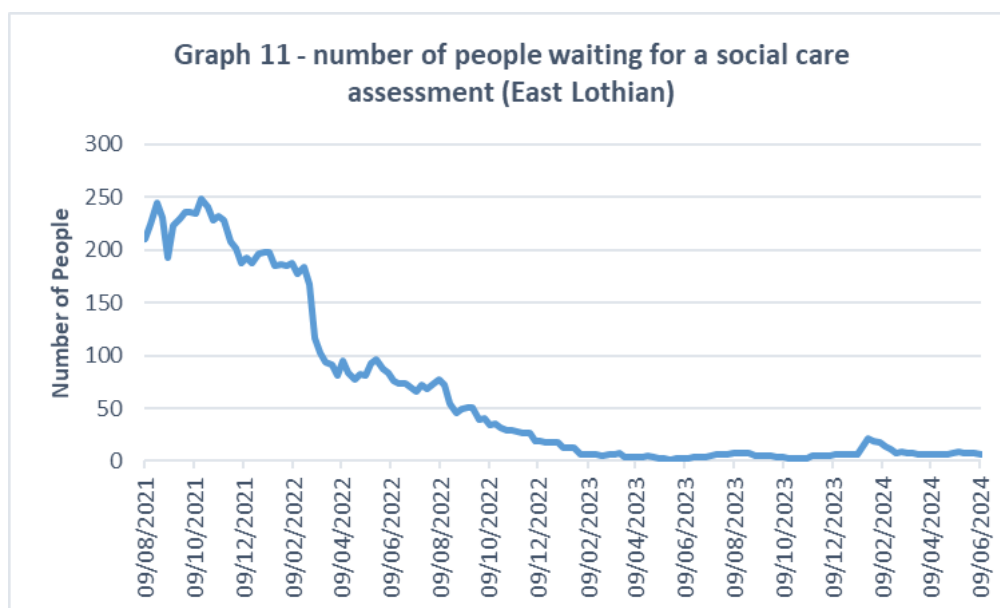
In 2021, the adult social work duty system was redesigned to focus on early intervention and prevention. This involves supporting as many people as possible at 'first point of contact' rather than using waiting lists for assessment. This approach keeps waiting times short and results in better outcomes for individuals by preventing situations deteriorating or a crisis emerging.

Where a more in-depth response is required, progression to allocation is taken forward within two weeks. Prompt allocation provides continuity of service and can reduce and prevent crisis.

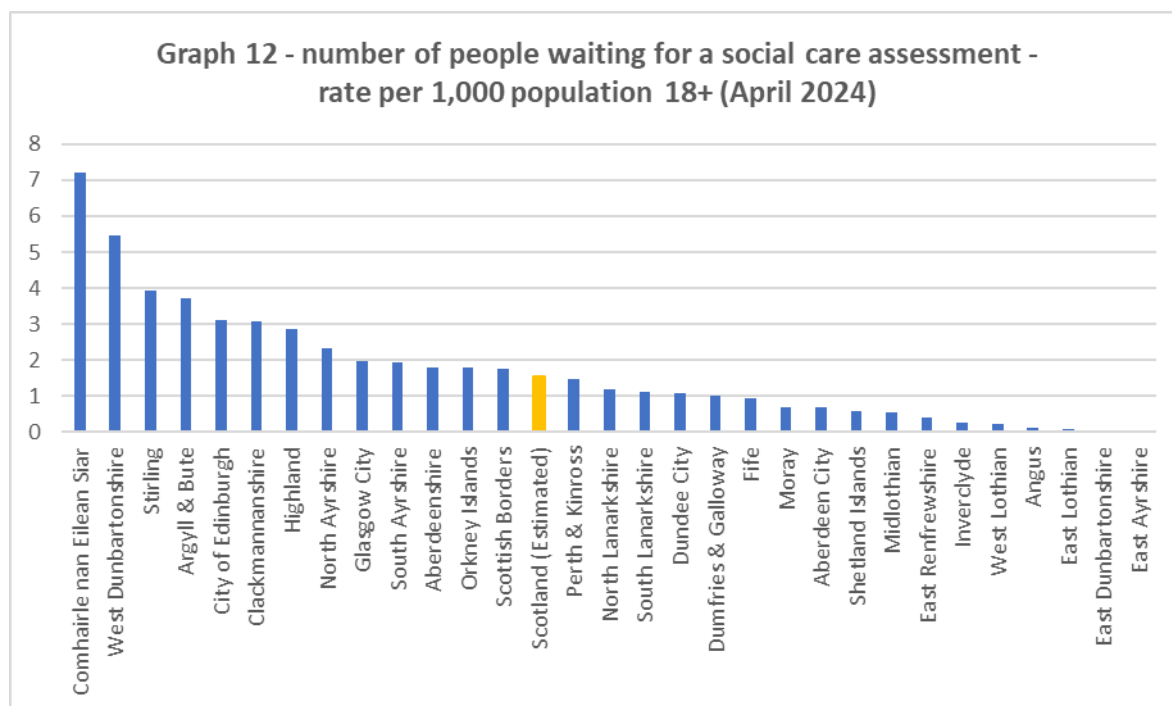
The graph below shows consistently that a high percentage of referrals are managed at first point of contact thus preventing unnecessary delays for assessment. During 2023/24 this rose from 77% at the start of the year to 83% by the end of quarter four.



The graph below shows a sharp reduction in the waiting list for assessment from the introduction of this model in 2021, with this being sustained throughout 2023/24.



Comparison across Local Authority areas is shown in the graph below, highlighting the strength of East Lothian's social work performance in a Scottish context.



Adult Support and Protection

We continue to develop our approach to performance management and improvement in relation to Adult Support and Protection (ASP) services during 2023/24, this included:

- Implementing updated Adult Support and Protection Procedures, ensuring alignment with the Scottish Government's revised Code of Practice.
- Developing our approach to data in compliance with revised national data requirements.
- Ongoing improvements to recording templates to ensure that the right information is captured to support evidence-based risk assessment.
- Carrying out a range of audit activity to feed into the continuous improvement cycle.
- Participating in a joint inspection of adult support and protection.

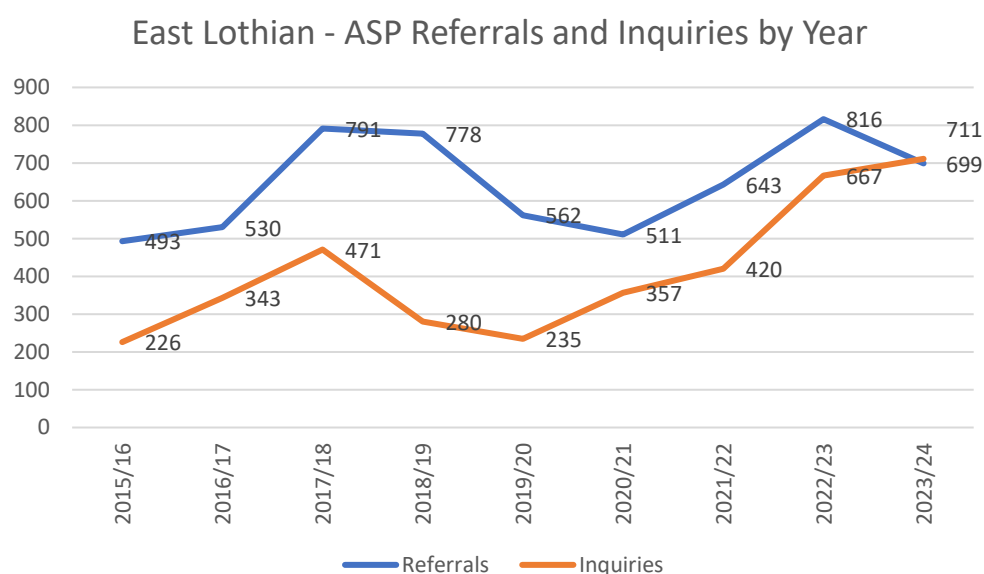
National minimum dataset

The National Minimum Dataset (NMD) for Adult Support and Protection was introduced nationally in Quarter 1, 2023/24. East and Midlothian Critical Services Oversight Group delayed implementation by one quarter, due to the need to make significant changes to social work recording systems, and the demand of the Joint

Inspection of Adult Support and Protection. The NMD was implemented in East Lothian in Quarter 2 (from July 2023). Prior to the introduction of the NMD, local indicators were in place to monitor patterns of referrals, inquiries, multi-agency attendance at case conferences and timescales for progression of work. These local indicators provided assurance to The Public Protection Committee and The Health and Social Care Partnership that arrangements for Adult Support and Protection work were keeping adults safe through timely intervention and support.

Activity levels 2023/24

A total of 711 Adult Support and Protection inquiries were completed in 2023/24, compared to 677 the previous year which is an increase of 34. For the first time the number of inquiries (711) undertaken under Adult Support and Protection in East Lothian exceeded the number of referrals (699) by 12. The number of referrals reduced from 2022/23 by 117.



We have observed positive cultural change over recent years in moving away from managing risk through a welfare approach towards more consistently utilising Adult Support and Protection inquiry as the most appropriate response. This approach is supported through increased operational oversight of Adult Support and Protection work generally which provides an explanation for the continued increase in the number of inquiries year on year.

The screening process has also been strengthened over the last two years, and we know from audit information submitted through the Adult Social Work Governance Group and Public Protection Performance and Quality Improvement Sub-group that it is robust and carried out in a timely manner. Operational managers report that discussions in supervision, and oversight of Adult Support and Protection work has increased confidence amongst team leaders and council officers in relation to decision making. This was evidenced within the inspection which noted that referrals dealt with by the duty system were handled in a timely manner and “all inquiries were completed in line with the principles of the legislation”, with “management oversight evident for almost all inquiries completed.”

Most inquiries related to adults living in their own home and the three most common types of harm which required investigatory powers were financial harm, self-harm and physical harm.

In 2023, the social work recording system was updated to improve the recording about a person’s wish to receive independent advocacy. The inspection recognised the work that had been done to actively promote advocacy.

Key Achievements within adult services

Adult Support and Protection Inspection

The joint inspection of adult support and protection took place in 2023 concluding with the publication of the report on 20th June 2023.

The inspection reported strengths in:

- The partnership’s robust approach to adult support and protection inquiries.
- Evidence of person-centred engagement and consultation with the adult at risk of harm throughout the delivery of key processes that supported effective consideration of risk.
- Effective social work management, support and supervision was consistently recorded and contributed to the effective delivery of key processes.
- Almost all adults at risk of harm who required a risk assessment had one completed. The quality of risk assessment had improved significantly following

the implementation of the TILS framework (type of harm, imminence, likelihood and severity of impact).

- The partnership's response to the demands of the pandemic.

The inspection highlighted the following priority areas for improvement:

- Procedural updates had not kept pace and should be updated as a priority.
- Findings from adult support and protection audits and improvement actions about risk management and chronologies should be fully implemented.
- A multi-agency approach to audit would strengthen joint improvement work. This should involve frontline practitioners from across the partnership.
- Relevant professionals should engage more collaboratively with critical processes. This includes attendance from police and health at case conferences and the consideration of second workers from all agencies.
- Strategic planning and improvement work should include feedback from, and engagement with adults at risk of harm with lived experience. This should be progressed as soon as possible.

This improvement activity is overseen by the social work governance group which reports to the clinical and care governance group under the IJB.

Social Work Governance Group

In 2023, we established a social work governance group within adult services to strengthen governance and quality assurance. The work plan of the group has involved:

- Development of a governance and quality assurance framework to ensure standards, systems, and processes are in place to monitor practice, and provide assurance that social work statutory duties are being delivered effectively.
- Collating data and intelligence to support performance and improvement work and monitor outcomes for those we support.
- Development and implementation of a social work risk register that regularly tracks existing and emerging risk and seeks to provide actions to mitigate concern.
- Self – evaluation against national standards.
- A programme of audits.

- Setting performance targets to support monitoring of statutory responsibilities e.g. justice, Mental Health Officer and adult protection statistics.
- Utilising feedback to inform service improvement e.g. from people in receipt of support, complaints and compliments.

Challenges within adult services

The Scottish Social Services 'Codes of Practice' set out the standards of practice and behaviour of everyone who works in social services in Scotland. As part of professional registration, social workers are required to work to these standards and continued registration requires evidence that they are being followed.

The principles within the legislative framework that social workers are required to work to and the Code of Practice they must follow are being challenged within the current financial and resource climate.

There are concerns about the impact of having to make further savings and efficiencies on the services provided for the people we support. Further resource challenges may:

- Reduce our ability to keep adults at risk of harm safe, protected and supported.
- Reduce preventative work that addresses risks proactively allowing early support to keep individuals safe, promote positive outcomes and thus reduce overall costs of social work delivery.
- Place an increased and imbalanced focus on crises intervention work.
- Potentially increase the use of interventions under legislation as risks escalate which is not in keeping with least restrictive principles social workers should be following.
- Cause delays and a reduction in the quality of social work interventions with a resulting impact on outcomes and staff morale.

Provision of care at home remains a challenge within East Lothian. We are aware of the additional pressure this will place on families who are caring for relatives and are

proactively trying to address this through our 'Home Care Change Board.' In 2024, daily multi-disciplinary meetings were established to maximise use of our home care resources and target those in most need. This has improved collaborative working, information sharing across agencies and shared capacity within internal and external provision, prioritising those in most need and reviewing and maintaining oversight of those awaiting care.

Developing the adult services workforce

Achieving good outcomes for people depends on having a skilled, confident, competent, and valued workforce of effective frontline practitioners that can deliver safe and personalised support via social work legislation.

In 2023 we established The Adult Social Work Learning and Development subgroup which seeks:

- To maintain strategic oversight of capacity to deliver services in line with legislative requirements.
- To ensure services are delivered by a skilled, knowledgeable, experienced, confident, motivated, and valued workforce. This has a focus on recruitment and retention, celebrating success, promoting standards, achieving practice improvement, and demonstrating continuous learning.
- To strengthen social work professional leadership and ensure staff are supported to access a range of training which maintains skills and competencies.
- To implement trauma-informed approaches that support the wellbeing of the workforce and contribute to improving the lives of those we support.
- To influence and shape policy and legislation relating to social work and integrated working.
- To use research and evidence informed approaches within our work.
- To promote the role, values, and contribution of social work within partnerships.
- To ensure processes are in place for sharing learning from national and local reports.

The work of this group has included:

- Development of a new supervision policy with a focus on maintaining wellbeing within the workplace.
- Embedding protected learning time within practice.
- Monitoring and ensuring professional development reviews are completed for every member of staff and mandatory training is up to date.
- Promoting the role values and contribution of social work within partnership working.

There is good representation from adult social work staff on national forums and working groups including the Social Work Scotland Standing Committee

Self-Directed Support

In 2024 we held two Self-Directed Support (SDS) workshops within adult services to enhance worker knowledge and skills and to promote practice in line with SDS values. Both workshops were well attended and open to workers across social work and social care.

SDS is now embedded within our social work training plan with further work on relationship-based practice being taken forward to enhance worker skills, practice, and autonomy. We have also updated our recording systems to support the use of SDS legislation, particularly around relationship-based practice and outcome-focussed work. We have reviewed and increased our public facing literature around direct payments to ensure people who need social care support have information to help inform their SDS choices and understand their rights.

Systems have been put in place to ensure the principle of choice is supported in hospital discharge planning and individuals are accessing their preferred option. Direct payments were previously being pursued as a means of expediting people moving out of hospital when there was no alternative care provider available. The service is now more person-centred and there is recognition that space and time is needed to consider the implications of taking on a direct payment and awaiting hospital discharge is not necessarily the most appropriate time to consider this.

Adult services' resources

Adult services continue to face significant financial challenges. The total service budget for adult services during 2023/24 was £70,024,505 and the total spend was £73,146,368 resulting in an overspend of £3,121,863. The £3.122m deficit was met by the use of earmarked reserves of £1.188m and general reserves of £1.934m.

2023/24 saw an increase of 8.24% on net spend since 2022/23 (from £67.578m to £73.146m).

The financial pressures are primarily be driven by the increase in:

- The population of older people.
- Levels of need and complexity.
- The cost of packages of care.
- The number of young people transitioning to adult services.

Social workers within adult services recognise their responsibilities to work within a balanced budget and in the past year have taken several actions to secure the financial position and provide sustainable services. Continued efforts will be made to ensure efficiency in service delivery but any further pressure to reduce services, may reduce the ability to achieve positive health and wellbeing outcomes for people who require services. Programmes of financial recovery must be balanced carefully with the delivery of statutory requirements or the ability of social care staff to meet practice standards and work in line with their Codes of Practice.

The focus for social workers will continue to be providing early support and maximising the independence of individuals and carers living in East Lothian whilst supporting their well-being and ensuring they are protected from harm as far as possible.

Justice Services

In 2023/24, justice social work delivered their service plan 2024/27, which sets out clear expectations to 'balance the risks and needs of people on the justice pathway to promote public safety and social parity'. The outcomes and priorities are:

1. Greater equality of opportunity.
2. Delivering engagement and interventions that address offending behaviour.
3. Promoting early intervention and prevention activities.
4. Offering robust community sentences that hold people to account for their offending behaviour and provide sentencers with alternatives to custody.
5. Through partnership arrangements, support service user transitions into, through and out of the justice system to enable independence.
6. Work across disciplines to assess risk of serious harm and delivering risk management strategies and plans that protect the public.

Justice social work service activity

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Community Payback Orders (supervision)	78	95	102	113
Community Payback Orders (all requirements)	92	126	163	173
Community Payback Orders (unpaid work hours)	7226	11,371	13,710	10,942
Justice Social Work Reports (submitted)	128	170	241	280
Diversion from Prosecution Reports (submitted)	43	34	43	91
Supervised Bail and/or Electronic Monitoring	N/A	N/A	8	8
Structured Deferred Sentences	N/A	N/A	1	5
Statutory Throughcare (community/custody)	58	55	61	62
Voluntary Throughcare (custody/community)	24	46	42	28
Registered Sex Offenders (in the community)	11	19	32	25

MAPPA Category 3 (violent offences)	2	0	0	0
Caledonian Orders (domestic abuse)	16	23	30	20

The early intervention and prevention activity is increasing across justice social work. This is in keeping with the policy direction to keep people out of the justice system by delivering alternatives to prosecution, using structured deferred sentences and increasing the use of supervised and/or electric monitoring as an alternative to remand.

There is a continuous increase in the number of domestic abuse offences taking place in East Lothian. The courts continue to use reparative measures, for example standalone unpaid work requirements without the option to deliver offence-focused interventions to support behaviour modification or change. The gendered nature of domestic abuse needs to be a primary consideration when sentencing, so the use of behavioural change programmes can be supported.

Presumption against short term sentences (PASS) actively discourages the use of custodial sentences of 12 months or less. Of the East Lothian cohort of men in the Scottish Prison Service, those on short term sentences have ranged from 2.2% to 7.9% of the prison population.

Key achievements within justice social work

2023/24 has been a creative and exciting year for justice social work with a number of key service strengths that have delivered positive outcomes for service users, communities, families and victims.

Staffing

The team now has an excellent staffing mix with professional and paraprofessional staff delivering on risk and needs-based interventions. The impact of an increase in

senior practitioner and social work assistant resource has been of significant, allowing for co-working and mentoring options and a greater chance to address inequalities.

Resilience

Throughout 2023/24 there have been changes in expectation and demand as well as periods of staff disruption. This has required all team members to take on additional activities and undertake tasks not normally within their primary area of expertise, with the goal of improving outcomes.

Reporting

The service has robust reporting mechanisms in place and provides assurance on a quarterly basis to relevant senior leaders and forums. The service consistently performs well against the national data picture and has developed a range of mechanism to bring service user voice into the outcome focussed data sets.

Learning through practice

The service has engaged meaningfully with the Care Inspectorate expectations of practice review and practitioners are well attuned to the requirements for submitting Significant Incident Reports (SIRs) when required. The service submitted six SIRs in the reporting year which indicates the learning culture and respect for external scrutiny within the service.

Single points of contact

Within the themes of early intervention and prevention, community sentencing, custody/detention (non-statutory), statutory throughcare and delivering unpaid work/other activities each have a single point of contact. This allows colleagues, partners and senior leaders improved access to an individual with dedicated knowledge and skills.

Drug Testing and Treatment Orders (DTTO)

This service was previously delivered by colleagues in City of Edinburgh and following a number of challenges they closed their service to new referrals during 2022/23. This, in conjunction with the rollout of the Medically Assisted Treatment standards was the catalyst for a DTTO review within East Lothian. Following engagement with Scottish

Government, the Bar Association and Scottish Court and Tribunal Service, East Lothian chose to deliver an alternative form of drug treatment, through the Community Justice Outreach Nurse. Early indicators show this is better meeting the needs of local service users who require support with their substance use.

Key service developments and service user voice

The service introduced the *Justice Outcome Star* which is used with everyone who receives a service within the team. We are developing a reporting mechanism, so we are able to measure 'distance travelled' from the start to the end of any justice intervention(s). The service has introduced a Community Justice Outreach Nurse who is co-located with the justice team. They deliver substances related support including assessment and treatment planning, substitute prescribing including testing, psychosocial and education support, mental and physical health support and signposting for other services:

The service has been developing mechanisms to measure service user outcomes. The following data was generated from exit questionnaires for service users subject to statutory interventions, either Community Payback Orders or post-release orders and/ or licences. In 100% of cases the service user said:

- They were treated with respect and courtesy.
- They were seen on time and made to feel welcome.
- They understood their order.

In 95% of cases the service user reported their individual circumstances were fully taken into account. Of the people who had supervision, 87% reported completing offence focused work.

38% of all service users reported contact with other agencies for example:

- Heavy Sound (peer mentoring)
- Access to Industry (employability)
- Alcoholics Anonymous (and other 12 step programmes)
- Safe Families (parenting and relationship activities)
- Psychological Therapies (mental and emotional wellbeing)
- Occupational Therapy (physical support and wellbeing)

- Citizen's Advice Bureau (welfare support)

Of the respondents who completed unpaid work/other activity:

- 68% reported learning new skills
- 81% felt they had helped their community
- 74% felt they had given something back
- 71% said they had learnt from their mistakes
- 61% believed they had changed their behaviour and their life

This is good evidence of positive outcomes for families, community, victims and perpetrators, with individuals promoting their self-management and developing techniques or skills that can be used to promote future change and progress.

Challenges within justice social work

Increased austerity throughout 2023/24 resulted in service users with greater need and reduced internal resilience, often related to their trauma. This has resulted in practitioners experiencing increased symptoms of vicarious trauma which is a key risk in frontline social work roles. Arrangements were made to create a trauma-informed space which could be used for both service user meetings and reflective supervision sessions.

East Lothian's court services continue to be hosted by City of Edinburgh justice services, so there are some limitations in the influence and control East Lothian have during engagement with key partners. This can impact our timeous access to information relating to the use of remand and our paraprofessionals' ability to assess and recommend alternative options to sentencers. We continue to monitor this and explore how we can improve relationships and processes.

Mental Health Officer (MHO) Service

The statutory functions of an MHO are:

- The provision of reports for guardianship applications, guardianship renewal applications and intervention order applications under the Adult with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, where orders relate to the personal welfare of adults.

- The provision of consultation, assessments, investigations and other legal duties under the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) 2003 Act, in relation to detentions, namely emergency and short-term detentions and Compulsory Treatment Order applications, the provision of social circumstances reports and applications for removal orders and warrants.
- Public protection in relation to mentally disordered offenders under the Criminal Procedures (Scotland) Act 1995 and 2003 Act, for example in relation to Compulsion Orders and Restriction Orders.

The MHO service provides a quarterly assurance report to the CSWO. This focuses on areas of strength and improvement along with critical data providing a service overview. Given the specialist nature of MHO services, the following is a summary of key activities to illustrate the work of the service during 2023/24.

Service Area	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
LA Guardianship (granted)	12	17	34	21
Private Guardianship (granted)	18	47	63	42
Extant Guardianships (31/03)	188	214	240	252
Emergency detention	39	37	76	56
Short term detention	92	89	109	119
MHO waiting list	26-34	11	0	0
CTO (Community – 31/03)	N/A	N/A	25	16
CTO (Hospital – 31/03)	N/A	N/A	18	45

Oversight of Private Guardianship

Following on from the success of the Adults with Incapacity project, throughout 2023/34 the service has focused on improving management and oversight to private guardians. Reviews for all indeterminate orders and those that have been active for ten or more years have been completed. A dedicated email address has been set up

which allows private guardians to access support and information to support them in the delivery of their duties. There have also now been in person engagement sessions with private guardians, linking in with Carers of East Lothian.

Waiting lists

Throughout this year the service has managed to meet the target of no private guardian applicant waiting more than six weeks for an MHO to be allocated to their case. This has been a huge achievement that has been recognised nationally, and impacted positively on team culture, eradicating the associated anxiety that waiting lists can have on team performance.

Practice forums

In December, the MHO team set up four weekly drop-in practice forums to support social work colleagues in the Learning Disability and Care Home Assessment and Review Team in their management of Local Authority guardianship orders. These forums provide the opportunity for social workers to discuss challenging cases and access peer support.

Mental health assessments

There has been a significant improvement in performance in relation to the completion of Social Circumstance Reports (SCRs) in East Lothian over the past few years. The completion rates have increased from 10% in 2020/21 to 35% in 2022/23, which is slightly higher than the national average of 33%. An audit of SCRs undertaken in East Lothian between May 2023 to September 2023 was concluded in October 2023 to gain a better understanding of our performance and identify possible barriers to further improvement.

Looking Ahead

2024/25 will continue to bring significant challenges for delivering social work and social care in East Lothian. The leadership teams across all sectors of social work are confident that we are prioritising the right evidence-based practice and strategic developments to ensure we are in the best position to deliver high quality services. The people we serve will remain at the heart of

everything we do.

We continue to find strength in collaboration with a wide range of partners and consistently seek ways to improve efficiency whilst constantly striving for the best possible outcomes.

As the forecast for public service finances remains challenging, the sector is deeply concerned about the impact to local resources. We will continue to focus on delivering services safely and meeting our statutory duties with professionalism and integrity.

It is critical that we remain focused on our workforce, recognising them as our greatest asset and ensuring they receive effective supervision, training and support to carry out these challenging roles. Creating a reflective learning culture is a shared priority across East Lothian Council and the East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership and we remain dedicated to continuous development of staff at all levels of the organisations.

Our priority remains to support people across all services to receive the support they require at the right time, within their homes and families wherever possible.

In children's services we will:

- Diversify our approach to attracting and retaining skilled people who wish to foster for East Lothian Council.
- Review and increase the capacity in our internal resources to reduce the risk of children requiring care out with East Lothian.
- Introduce additional resources to support families in crisis and at risk of breakdown and to prevent children and young people from becoming accommodated.

In adult services we will:

- Continue our focus on improving early intervention and preventative approaches at our first point of contact with people.
- Increase our use of community and universal supports to reduce the number of people who need to receive statutory social work services.

- Embed Keeping People Safe as a new strategic priority for the IJB to allow for greater strategic oversight and scrutiny around Justice Social Work and Adult Support and Protection.

Despite incredibly challenging conditions, social work and social care services, together with partner agencies and unpaid carers remain committed to providing high quality care that supports and protects the most vulnerable people in our communities. In this reporting year we have been subject to two significant periods of external scrutiny which provides important assurance about how effectively we protect children and adults from harm in East Lothian.

I wish to place on record my thanks to all members of staff for the scale of the hard work they undertake. All staff should feel incredibly proud of the difference they make to individuals, families and communities and know they are recognised and hugely valued for all they do.

Lindsey Byrne

Chief Social Work Officer

Appendix 1

Reporting on outcomes through case studies

Case study 1 - initial assessment

The intake and assessment team received a referral for a mother, K, aged 17, who was care experienced. There were concerns around how she was adapting to motherhood, and she might have been struggling to care for her seven-month-old son, N.

K's background revealed numerous traumatic events. A strength in K's life was her weekly visits to a local youth service. K's social worker reached out to meet her there. Applying a trauma-informed lens, the worker linked in with K's youth worker and it took several weeks to gain her trust. They made sure that they were reliable and trustworthy, keeping to the agreed tasks, being transparent and offering choices whenever possible. The worker made it clear that she had a choice to partake in the assessment but assured the process would collate all the strengths and explore areas where she would benefit from some support.

Over time, K's trust in the social worker grew, and meetings take place at K's home. They take time to discuss life events and parenting strategies. K's confidence and self-care has improved. She now attends weekly CAMHS appointments. Little N is benefiting from their improved attachment which is greatly influenced by K feeling valued and her parenting strengths recognised.

Case study 2- child protection

R gave birth to her third child, who was initially on the child protection register. R's mental health remained stable throughout her pregnancy and continues to be stable.

When the social worker started working with R, they were aware of her previous difficulties with social services. She had felt unheard and perceived that people only saw only her trauma and mental health diagnosis. R struggled with people who she felt had authority.

To address this, the social worker emphasised R's rights and ensured she knew her engagement with social work was voluntary. The worker recognised her anxiety towards children's services and focused on promoting mental wellbeing rather than illness. The team around R were also encouraged to adopt this language to avoid retraumatizing her. Additionally, R was continually encouraged to share her views and she was offered advocacy.

By changing the language used and approach taken, R and her baby had a positive outcome. At nine months old, R's baby is no longer on the child protection register, and social work are moving towards closing the case.

R's significant personal work, combined with the trauma-informed practice, highlighted the importance of language and attitude when working with individuals who have experienced trauma. These circumstances show the impact of supportive, and empathetic practice in achieving positive outcomes.

Case study 3 - residential care

C is a young person in residential care. C was struggling to accept support from school, social work, and support agencies. Over the past year, he experienced separation from his siblings, moved home, and suffered the loss of two significant family members. Additionally, his social worker had recently changed, further destabilising his support network.

When he first met the residential worker, C was extremely shy and had low confidence. His traumatic experiences had left him feeling isolated and unsupported. Building a trusting relationship was crucial to help him re-engage with his education and support systems.

The worker focused on building a positive relationship with him. This involved listening and providing time and space for him to voice his thoughts and feelings and encouraging him to overcome challenges. They engaged in activities he enjoyed and he was given choices to foster a sense of control and autonomy. Allowing time for reflection and discussing topics that mattered to him, including bereavement, was also key.

Working closely with his new social worker and education providers, they created a wrap-around support system. They developed an education plan tailored to C's needs, which he felt comfortable with and happy to follow.

Since returning to school, C has made significant progress, passing National 4 subjects. He now sees his siblings regularly and continues to meet with his social worker, having a safe space to express himself and feel valued.

Case study 4 - post adoption support

J is a child with a diagnosis of autism. J has faced significant challenges in accessing mainstream education. His anxiety often led to highly dysregulated behaviour, including increased risk-taking, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and physical and verbal aggression towards his parents. This situation was distressing for the entire family.

The work with J and his family involved using a Self-Directed Support (SDS) approach. The family was provided with a personal budget through a payment card, allowing them to use the funds flexibly to support J. The key was to ensure that the outcomes for J were positive, focusing on relaxation and regulation.

The SDS budget covered the costs of horse-riding sessions at a specialised riding centre. This activity proved to be therapeutic for J, who found comfort and calmness in being around horses. The family experienced a more settled home environment, with J remaining at home and within his community. There were notably fewer incidents of self-harm or harm to others, demonstrating the effectiveness of the support provided. This case study highlights the importance of tailored, flexible support systems for children with complex needs, ensuring they can thrive in their home and community environments.

Case study 5 - supporting an unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person

S had been trafficked to East Lothian. S had travelled for several months across Europe from Iran/Iraq, fleeing conflict and persecution. S's parents were deceased and he became estranged from all other family members and friends due to displacement. S experienced physical and mental harm and was in forced labour situations.

S had no recourse to public funds while seeking asylum. He required support with accessing accommodation and a range of practical resources. The allocated worker supported S to access temporary emergency accommodation. S spoke no English and he was supported to access community support and college. The worker also supported S to visit places of worship, cafes where he felt safe, and meeting others who shared his language and dialect. S was supported to register with health services and access talking therapy for his sleeping difficulties and panic attacks. The worker played a role in advocating for S to ensure he received appropriate services.

After five years in the UK, S has gained asylum and indefinite leave to remain. He has a permanent tenancy and has navigated the pandemic's impacts on his income and isolation. S has passed his driving theory and practical tests, obtained a driving license, and is in work. He has friends and a girlfriend in the local community and is saving up to buy a car. S reports sleeping better since gaining indefinite leave to remain and has a better understanding of the impact of his experiences on his mental and physical health. He has offered assistance to homeless young people and feels secure and stable enough to do so. S plays football with young people from various nationalities, beliefs, and backgrounds and sometimes offers support to new arrivals in East Lothian, providing reassurance and guidance on progressing issues related to identity, safety, and belonging.

Case study 6 - continuing care

A 21-year-old female called M grew up in kinship care. M is passionate about the arts she actively participated in dramatic productions in East Lothian. M was supported with all areas of pathway planning including accessing college accommodation when she began studying theatre and drama at university. Her continuing care placement was maintained, allowing her to return home during holidays and weekends, and continue working in her local area. M has now completed her degree and has moved into a shared private rental with a friend. As she is now 21, continuing care is ending. M is being supported to apply for permanent accommodation in East Lothian for when her course ends. This support, along with the care leavers bursary, continuing care, rent assistance, and college and university support has enabled her to achieve success and reach her full potential.

Case study 7 - aftercare

B is an 18-year-old living in supported accommodation. He has faced significant challenges throughout his life. His father passed away when B was 9. B started using cannabis daily and his behaviour at home was challenging. B's school attendance dropped, and he moved to a placement within external residential childcare. At 16, B returned to East Lothian to live with his family, but this arrangement was unsustainable. He spent some time in B&B's before securing supported accommodation.

B struggled with feelings of rejection from his family and the frequent changes in his support workers. His aggression towards members of the TAC Team raised concerns about his ability to remain in supported accommodation. It was clear to his worker that his aggressive behaviour was often a response to feeling vulnerable and ashamed. B's pride made it difficult for him to ask for or accept help.

Over the past year, the TAC Team has collaborated closely with the accommodation providers to help B build trust with his new workers. A trauma-informed approach has been crucial in understanding B's behaviour. By maintaining clear boundaries and developing a personalised pathways plan, B has successfully remained in his supported accommodation. Recently, he moved into a self-contained flat in the accommodation. This positive development has led to an improvement in B's mental health, and he is increasingly accessing the support available to him. This case demonstrates the importance of building strong, supportive relationships.

Case study 8 – justice and wellbeing

A is a 15-year-old male who has been working with his social worker for eighteen months. A moved to residential care due to his experience of neglect as a result of his parents' mental health and substance use issues. A exhibited distress through substance use, absconding, and antisocial behaviour.

A's parents were supported to make major changes to their lives and were managing much better. A attended Heavy Sound, which provided a safe and supportive environment. The worker spent time with A, listening to him, talking about his distress at not being home. It seemed that much of his antisocial behaviour was fuelled by a

need for belonging and feeling disconnected from family, so he associated with other young people involved in antisocial behaviour.

Direct work was done with A and his parents with the aim of A making safer choices. A was also linked into MYPAS who supported him with his substance use. After a period of assessment and support, it was safe enough for A to return home with intensive support and he also participated in offence focussed work. A went back to mainstream school, is no longer subject to compulsory measures of supervision and is managing well at home with their family.

Case study 9 – discharge from hospital

A key skill in social work is building relationships with people at times of great stress in their lives.

D was referred to adult social work for discharge planning having been admitted to hospital. It was likely he needed more care than could be provided within his own home.

Discussions about long term care have major implications for individuals involved and their family. Spouses often have to come to terms with their loved one's illness and disability but also the possibility of living apart after decades of marriage. The costs of long-term care can also have significant financial implications for many families.

D had been a fit and active 80-year-old. A fall downstairs at home resulted in a severe injury and unexpected change in his life, and that of his family. Most significantly, the trauma experienced by his wife was pronounced. The social worker supported D, who was now significantly cognitively impaired, and his wife, with regular meetings, assessment, and case management for discharge planning. D's wife was the main contact for the social worker to liaise with. Along with the enormity of the decisions she was making, D's wife was living with the grief, loss, and trauma of this life changing event.

The social worker used trauma-informed practice, empathy led conversation and carer-focused support, to ensure that D's wife's needs were also supported. This included signposting and referrals to multidisciplinary colleagues, including benefit maximisation (following the unexpected loss in her shared income), referral to Carers of East Lothian(COEL), for emotional support, and signposting to community groups.

D's wife has since linked in and attended arts and crafts groups with other carers and has engaged with Welfare Rights and COEL for continuing support, where a carer's support plan was undertaken.

D was understandably unsettled on his admission to a local care home, and this caused his wife considerable anxiety. D's wife was supported by the care home with regular phone calls and meetings with the social worker and is now a regular attender at group family meetings in the home and an active volunteer. D is managing much better in his new home environment with family support being key to the success of the placement. Recent discussion with the care home evidences a positive outcome to this situation and the therapeutic benefit of social work input during times of trauma and loss.

Case study 10 – discharge from hospital

E had a history of non-engagement with professionals and was referred to adult social work. E's background was both chaotic and traumatic; she had a history of substance use and experience of domestic abuse. E's children were in the care of the Local Authority with one hour of supervised family time per week at the point of referral.

The social worker armed with the knowledge that support and intervention was likely to take time for the person to accept, persevered and was consistent in trying to make contact with E and did not close the case. The social worker was eventually able to undertake an initial home visit to meet with E. This visit was successful and over time E began to place trust in the social worker. This led to acceptance of an assessment, a referral to a specialist support provider and engagement with other professional agencies including the GP, MELD, the Community Mental Health Team, and Woman's Aid.

Sensitively over time, services gained important information about how to positively engage with E. As a result, through her positive experience with the social worker and access to services, E was able to address her substance use, whilst improving both her lifestyle and mental health. The positive changes E was able to make in her life impacted herself and her children, whom she now has increased contact with.

E continues to engage positively with services, taking part in regular reviews, seeking support and guidance when required. She has not returned to her previous lifestyle and for the first time in 10 years adult social work have not received a Police Concern Form in over six months.

E's story highlights the importance of relationship building, trauma-informed practice and understanding not only where a person is in their lives, but also the experiences they have had and the impact upon them.



Versions of this leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print, audiotape or in your own language. Please phone Customer Services if you require assistance on 01620 827199

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