

COMMITTEE:	East Lothian Council
MEETING DATE:	17 February 2026
BY:	Chief Social Work Officer
REPORT TITLE:	Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2024-25
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents to members the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report for 2024-25. The report is attached at Appendix 1.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the content of the 2024-25 Annual Report of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) and assurance about the provision of social work services in East Lothian. Council is also asked to note the collective commitment to the protection and care 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, including:
- Governance and accountability arrangements
 - What our data is telling us
 - Key achievements

- Challenges
- Looking ahead

3.3 The report reflects the breadth and complexity of service delivery 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 statutory functions in relation to the care and protection of people. The Chief Social Work Officer is responsible for the governance of the profession in East Lothian and works closely with service managers to ensure they are in a position to offer assurance to Elected Members and the Chief Executive.

3.4 **Report Highlights**

3.4.1 The report, in keeping with previous years, reflects the impact of rapid growth in East Lothian. There is sustained demand in a number of key areas including adult social work where referrals have increased by 8%. The slight reduction in referrals to children's services marked the first reduction in four years. Unfortunately, this is not set to continue as current data shows this is likely to increase again in 2025/26.

3.4.2 As communities grow, East Lothian's population of people with care and welfare needs will also grow. Services with a duty to support and protect people will continue to experience an increase in demand. But they are also experiencing an increase in complexity, with many people having several co-existing issues that make day to day life extremely challenging. There continues to be significant numbers of people who are struggling to manage following long periods of austerity in what can no longer be referred to as a 'cost of living crisis'. A crisis suggests a temporary position, one that can be overcome, but for lots of people, there is no end in sight or hope of financial security in the future. This continues to shape how people survive and when coupled with factors including addiction, mental health problems, physical ill-health, disability and disadvantage, it is understandable that life can feel overwhelmingly difficult.

3.4.3 This annual report is always a welcome opportunity to highlight the efforts of our 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. It reflects the wide range of statutory duties involved in delivering social work and acknowledges the challenges in meeting demand while navigating extreme financial pressure and the ever-changing national policy developments.

3.4.4 As CSWO, it is my role to provide assurance to Members about the standard and safety of social work practice in East Lothian. I will continue to be open about the significant challenges the profession faces and ensure that the protection and care of people continues to be a critical

priority across the Council and with our partners. I remain confident that services prioritise evidence-based practice and target strategic development to ensure we are in the best position to continue delivering high quality services.

3.4.5 With the launch of the National Social Work Agency scheduled for February 2026, it is a good time to be showcasing the breadth of social care and social work and highlight the lifechanging outcomes that are possible. I welcome any opportunity to celebrate and value our workforce and I am proud to have the opportunity to share some of the many achievements from 2024-25. These include:

- The successful implementation of the Newly Qualified Supported Year, ensuring that all new social workers are given the right support as they enter their new career.
- The improvements in support for kinship carers as well as an increase of kinship placements in line with the strategic plan
- The introduction of the Single Point of Access for coordinating hospital discharge and early indication if improved processes.
- Improved social work governance and the introduction of an adult social work governance meeting.
- The delivery of a new core and cluster model for people with learning disabilities in Tranent.
- The Big Pick being delivered by People on a Community Payback Order and designed to tackle clothing poverty.
- Significant improvements in the delivery of mental health and guardianship services.

The assurance we can collectively take from our annual performance data is testament to our dedicated and skilled workforce who continue to operate under sustained pressure.

In a profession that can feel relentlessly heavy, I never doubt that our staff are our greatest asset. Alongside the challenges of service delivery, there are major strengths to celebrate, and I wish to express my genuine gratitude for everyone's hard work and commitment.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 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 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Finance: 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.

- 5.2 Human Resources: None
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None
- 5.4 Risk: None

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data

X

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 - Chief Social Work Officer Report 2024-25

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

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Head of Service Approval

Name	Lindsey Byrne
Designation	Head of Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Yes
Approval Date	29.01.26



CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER

REPORT 2024-25



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Introduction

I am delighted to introduce the chief social work officer (CSWO) report for 2024-2025. It is always a daunting task, yet a privilege to present this information on behalf of the social work profession in East Lothian. While the report covers a vast amount of information, I feel it can never adequately portray what it feels like to deliver social work and social care services. It is a job like no other, where complexity, risk and pressure come as standard. It can often feel like an uphill battle to deliver high quality services to a growing population with less resources available. Despite the challenges, our workforce is committed to improving the lives of people and protecting the most vulnerable from harm. It is truly inspiring to witness the dedication, energy and passion of our staff, who strive to get alongside people, endlessly striving to make a difference, often in the most difficult of circumstances.

As always, this report will present a large amount of data and information. Behind every statistic are real people who for a variety of reasons have been in contact with social work services. Something significant has happened that means they required support, care, resources or protection.

In 2024-2025, the level of need and complexity in our communities continued to increase. People in our communities face significant challenges that can make day to day life incredibly hard 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 all social work services in East Lothian continues to be significant and we continue to try to adapt services to manage the work in a challenging resource climate.

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

Governance and Accountability

East Lothian social work leaders are currently completing a new Governance and

Professional Assurance Framework which will form the basis of this section in future annual reports.

Governance arrangements are crucial for delivering safe, effective and high-quality social work and social care services and as CSWO, I have a key role in providing leadership and oversight of how we ensure high standards of practice locally.

As CSWO, I am accountable to the Council's Chief Executive, Elected Members and the Integrated Joint Board. I provide professional advice about how we discharge our statutory duties and support leaders across the organisation on a wide range of cross cutting issues.

I am a member of the Council Leadership Team, a non-voting member of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) and a member of the following key strategic partnerships that lead the work to protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people:

- East and Midlothian Public Protection Committee
- East Lothian Children's Strategic Partnership
- Midlothian and East Lothian Drug and Alcohol Partnership
- Learning Review oversight group
- East and Midlothian MAPPA strategic oversight group
- East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership Clinical and Care Governance group

In 2024-2025, services have continued to strengthen their approach to the governance of social work practice and there are now two dedicated groups (adult social work and children's social work) to oversee, and quality assure how we deliver our work. As CSWO, I co-chair both groups to ensure I am well placed to gain assurance about our practice and to direct any improvement activity as required.

Role of the CSWO in social work practice

It is essential that I maintain strong links to the delivery of social work practice in order to seek assurance about how services are assessing and responding to risk and need

for vulnerable people. This is achieved through:

- Endorsing decisions of the fostering and adoption panels as East Lothian's Agency Decision Maker.
- 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 and adults placed in external resources.
- Oversight of the social work governance frameworks in children's and adult services.
- Oversight of local authority welfare guardianship applications.
- Being the Single Point of Contact for Prevent.
- Monitoring of MAPPA business and co-chair of MAPPA 3 meetings.
- Being a member of the learning review sub-group for public protection

I support the role of the IJB chief officer in providing professional assurance for social work practice in the services delegated to the IJB. Regular meetings with social work managers across children's, justice and adult services provide important opportunities to discuss emerging issues, cross-cutting themes and feedback from national meetings such as the Social Work Scotland CSWO network. As CSWO, I support anti-discriminatory practice across all social work services by embedding inclusive policies, ensuring equality is woven into learning and development, and actively challenging discrimination throughout our local authority.

Staying connected to social work leaders is a critical part of the role and I am pleased to report that working relationships across all social work partners continue to be strong and effective in East Lothian.

Duty of Candour

All social work and social care services in Scotland have a duty of candour. This is a legal requirement which means that when unintended, or unexpected, events happen that result in death or harm as defined in Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016, the people affected understand what has happened, receive an apology, and that organisations learn from the experience and put in place improvements. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, there were no incidents in East Lothian where the duty of candour applied across children and adult services. The annual Duty of Candour Report 2024/25 which we are required to publish can be found here. https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210578/children_and_families/12653/duty_of_candour

Children's Services

Throughout 2024–2025, children's services continued in its commitment to keep the Promise. Our focus on helping children thrive within resilient, loving families has continued to shape both service delivery and ongoing improvements. The voices of children and their families have been central to our strategic, operational, and individual planning, and we have worked hard to embed children's rights into every aspect of our work.

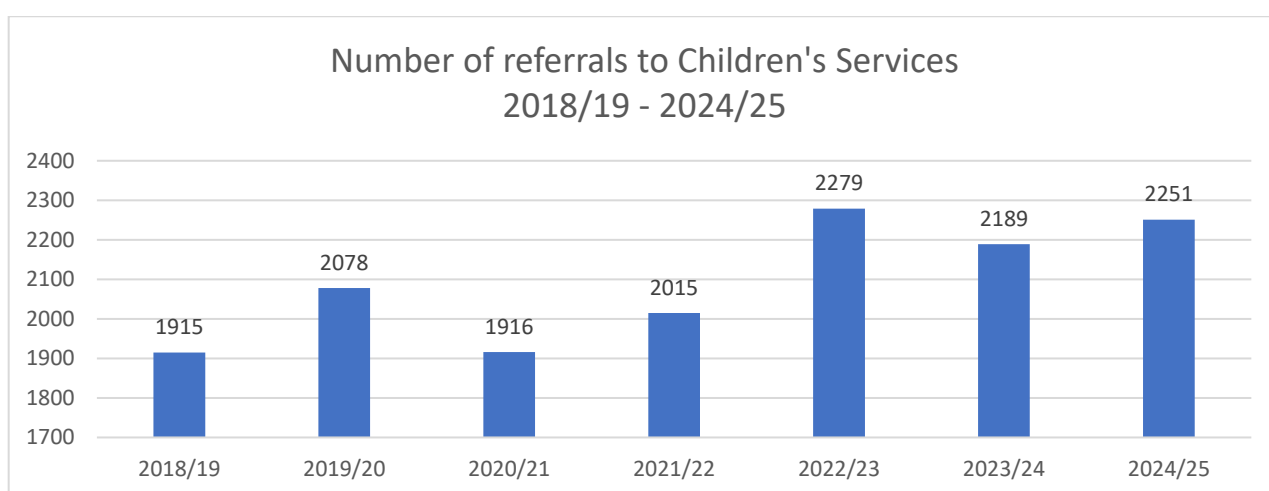
Our children's services workforce plays a vital role in safeguarding and empowering children and families. Our workforce prioritises relationship-based practice, which enables us to build resilience, and bring about positive changes in the lives of the children and families we work with.

Children's services are part of the new Children and Communities Directorate within East Lothian Council which includes education, housing and communities. This partnership delivers cross cutting support aimed at ensuring every child in East Lothian feels safe, supported, and included. Our services span from pre-birth through to age 26 for care-experienced young people, reflecting our dedication to providing holistic and enduring support.

What is our data telling us?

Referral activity data

Our data tells us that referrals to children's social work have grown during 2024-2025 with an increase of 162 referrals from 2023-2024. The rising child population in East Lothian, combined with the impact of child poverty, are key drivers behind the high referral rates. This data reinforces the importance of our partnership efforts in Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the delivery of whole family support at the earliest stage in children's lives.



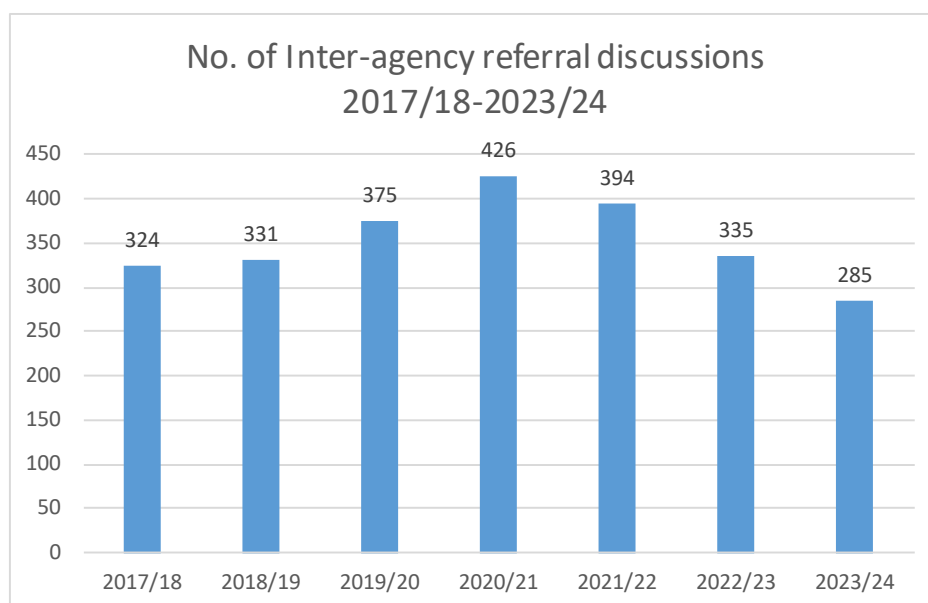
Interagency referral discussion

An inter-agency referral discussion (IRD) is the start of the formal process of information sharing, assessment, analysis and decision making where one or more of the core agencies (Health, Police and Social Work) assess that there is a risk of significant harm to a child up to the age of 18 years.

When an IRD is initiated, 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. We are confident that our IRD processes are robust with an IRD oversight group taking place fortnightly.

This multi-agency group reviews all IRDs to quality assure decision making and interim safety planning. Any learning or themes from IRDs are fed back to individual services and are used to inform learning and development and improvement activities.

During 2024-2025, there has been a slight reduction in the number of Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs) but this number will regularly fluctuate. Between 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 East Lothian had a decrease of 37, which equated to a 4.1% decrease in the rate per 1,000 children.



Child protection activity data

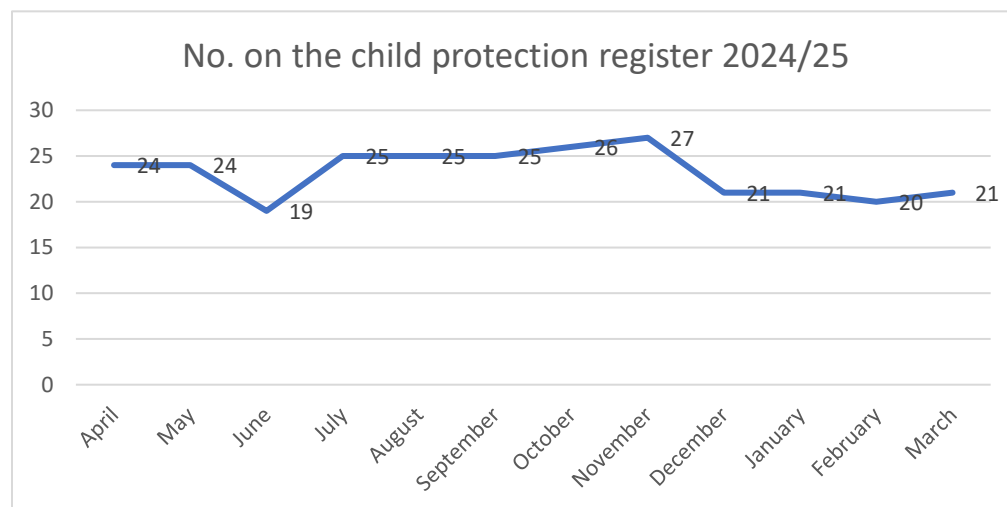
A child protection planning meeting (CPPM) is a formal multi-disciplinary meeting to decide whether a child is at risk of significant harm and devise a plan to reduce the risk. If a child is considered to be at risk of significant harm, their name may be placed on the Child Protection Register (CPR) which is a register of all children who are the subject of an inter-agency child protection plan.

The number of children on the child protection register remains consistent with a slight decrease from last year. The most common concerns identified at CPPMs were domestic abuse, emotional abuse, parental drug misuse, parental mental health problems and physical abuse.

In East Lothian there were 43 CPPMs in the year ending 31st July 2024. As a rate per 1,000 children, this is significantly below the national average. In discussion with partners, we have associated this reduction with robust interim safety planning (resulting in risk being reduced and CPPMs no longer being required), the Signs of Safety approach being well embedded and early intervention/preventative resources being more established. There is also association with increased use of other structured child protection responses such as use of the Vulnerable Young Person's Protocol.

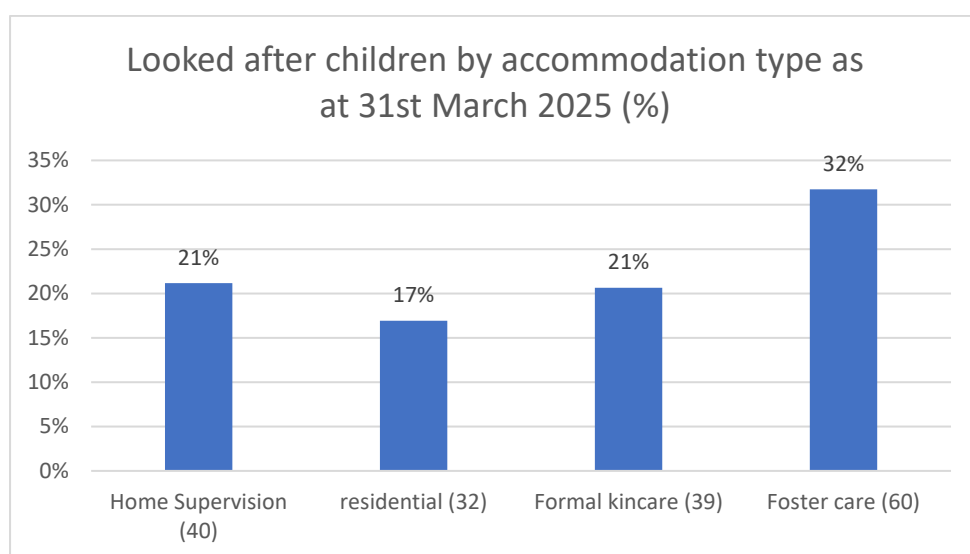
There has also been a reduction in the conversion of IRDs to child protection registration. We believe these are possible indicators of the partnership's strengths in information sharing and safety planning at the earliest stage.

The culture of involving families in child protection processes is well-embedded in East Lothian. Of the 31 families with a CPPM in the reporting period, at least one parent attended every Initial CPPM.



Looked after children (Legal term but not chosen language)

Our continued commitment to keep families together is reflected in the sustained reduction in the number of East Lothian children who are looked after, both at home and away from home. This reduction is in line with the national trend. We believe this decline does not necessarily indicate a reduction in the complexity of needs within our communities. This progress reflects our sustained commitment to keeping the Promise, demonstrated through our delivery of whole-family support, family group decision-making, creative care planning, and relationship-based practice.



External residential care

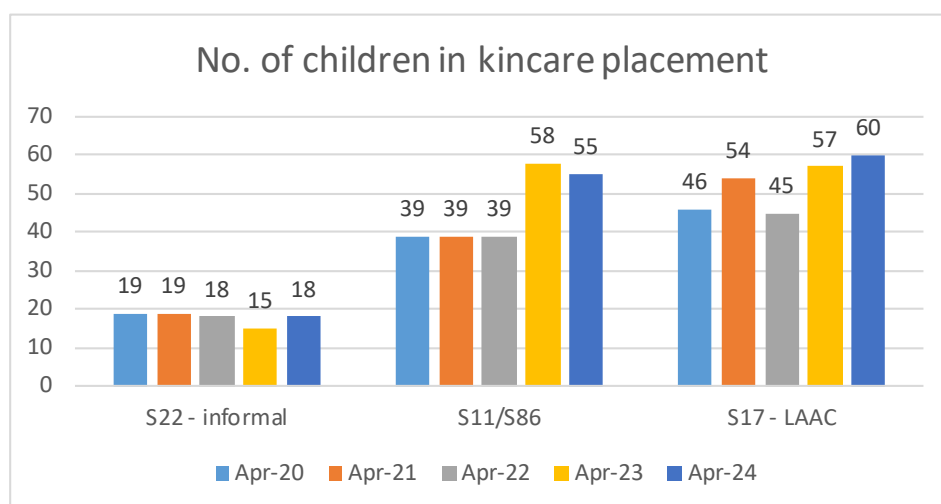
'Belonging to East Lothian' remains a key priority for the East Lothian Partnership. Children's services continue to work collaboratively with education, housing, communities and other key agencies to ensure children remain with their families and their local community. As of March 2025, 24 young people were living in external residential care as we were unable to meet their needs within local resources. Preventing further moves outside East Lothian remains a significant challenge for children's services and education. Our ability to keep children within the area continues to be impacted by limited internal residential capacity and ongoing difficulties in recruiting foster carers. This continues to be a key strategic focus in the children's services plan.

Fostering

Through 2024-2025, children's services continued to see a reduction in the number of new foster placements, as well as a decline in the use of independent agency placements. This shift aligns with the aspirations of *The Promise*, which prioritises supporting families to keep children safely within their own homes or extended family networks. Our fostering recruitment using social media campaigns and a monthly drop-in session has resulted in a noticeable increase in enquiries. The increase in our foster carer fees in April 2024 has also been beneficial in encouraging carers to foster in East Lothian.

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. The number of kinship carers has increased from 102 in April 2023 to 115 in 2024.



Support to children with a disability

Children's services support children who have severe and enduring disabilities using a self-directed approach. The service has seen an increase in the number of referrals to this team and a significant increase in complexity of need. The numbers of children accessing support through a direct payment has increased from 89 in 2021 to 144 in

2024. Families are unfortunately experiencing a lack of choice due to the limited care at home and outreach support options available to them in East Lothian. We have committed to undertaking a review of our disability service to ensure we can respond to the needs of increasing numbers of children.

Number of receiving support:								
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Direct Payment	45	47	57	70	89	95	125	144
Care at Home	30	35	33	36	16	7	9	4
Residential Respite in ELC	10	9	8	11	9	12	15	13
Residential Respite out with ELC	4	3	3	5	4	4	6	3
Children supported at home	113	132	135	117	148	176	180	177
Looked after away from home	10	8	5	4	4	10	9	8

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 2024, there were 51 young people receiving an active aftercare service. 73 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 continuing care within their foster home, residential care or formal kinship care.

Young people seeking asylum

Children's services have 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 2025, East Lothian is supporting 31 young people seeking asylum. Children's services have a small, dedicated service overseeing this support, based within the throughcare and aftercare team. 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 not only preventing offending, but also ensuring that they reach their full potential. We continue to support the national priority of keeping children out of secure care and we use creative community alternatives where possible. We have a strong emphasis on carrying out early and effective interventions and although there has been an increase of Court report requests, the majority have been remitted to the children's reporter. We have also continued to carry out direct work with young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour and increasingly are working with young people due to their harmful online activity some of whom have been referred to PREVENT.

Key Achievements within Children's Services

Stories of Change

Children's services created 'Stories of Change' which evidenced the progress we are making in 'Keeping the Promise'. 'Stories of Change' is made up of a series of case studies demonstrating the value of relationships in supporting children, young people and their families to build resilience, overcome challenges and bring about positive outcomes. You can access 'stories of change' through the QR code.



Newly Qualified Social Work implementation (NQSW) Year

Throughout 2024-2025, children's services developed our NQSW programme for newly qualified social workers. The process of implementing the NQSW supported year has been a positive one for children and adult services. Although it must be

acknowledged that the new requirements have placed an additional workload on supervisors and the service development & review team, the workforce have generally accepted this well. Initial feedback indicates that NQSWs have found their year to be supportive and have appreciated the mechanisms in place to help them develop through the year. By setting up structures and procedures which are proportionate to our size of organisation but still incorporate flexibility, we are now well prepared to continue taking newly qualified workers through the supported year programme.

Kinship Support Service

Children's services partnership with Children First to deliver East Lothian's kinship support service was further developed to ensure the service remains both accessible and responsive, it is delivered through a tiered model that flexibly adapts to the evolving needs of children and families. The model comprises three levels of support:

- Level 1: Information and signposting.
- Level 2: Light-touch support and access to group sessions.
- Level 3: Intensive, regular support for families with more complex needs.

This approach helps us ensure families receive the appropriate level of support when they need it most.

In addition to local support, all families have access to the Children First financial wellbeing service, offering guidance on income maximisation, debt management, and budgeting. They are also supported by the Children First support line, a year-round digital helpline providing whole-family assistance. This integrated and holistic model ensures that kinship families receive meaningful, accessible, and tailored support.

Realising children's rights

Children's services delivered bespoke sessions to our workforce on UNCRC implementation and its implications for social work practice. Our service is progressing our commitment to children's rights through the creation of opportunities for children to feedback on and participate in projects. A positive example includes

the co-design of a handbook for young people living in residential care. Children's services have also worked in partnership with the East Lothian Champions Board to create a new care experience questionnaire for children experiencing care. The questionnaire, 'My Voice Matters' was launched in February 2025.

During 2024-2025, children's services made a commitment to widen its advocacy offer to include all children allocated to a social worker. From April 2025, independent advocacy will be offered to children at risk of harm and children with a disability.

One council commissioning

Throughout 2024-2025, children's services strengthened our approach to joint commissioning and collaborative decision making about how we direct our resources. During this period, a commissioning board was established, and the commissioning strategy was extended to include education. Children's services also reviewed its processes for administering section 10 grants and set up of a lived experience panel to aid decision making for the 2024-2025 Section 10 grant allocation. This shift towards the inclusion of people with lived experience in grant-making processes is linked to both The Promise (2020) as well as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which seeks to involve voice and communities in local planning.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

In July 2024 we launched an in-house family decision making team. FGDM is a rights-based approach that empowers children and families to have a voice and to be involved in decisions that affect them. It draws on the strengths and resources from within the wider family group. Family plans are focused on ensuring that children remain safe and at home within their families, and that the rights of the children and families are upheld. Children's Services offers their FGDM service to families where children are risk of going into care, where children or unborn babies are at risk of harm and for children returning home from care. From July 2024 to March 2025, we received 47 referrals to the FGDM service.

Challenges within Children's Services

Population growth and complex social factors

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 2028-2029 for P1 to S6 pupils based on the 2020 census roll). This is the second highest increase in Scotland. We are also seeing a rise in children with a range of support needs, such as young carers, children affected by parental substance misuse or mental health issues and children experiencing neurodiversity. The cost-of-living crisis has increased child poverty and disadvantage amongst families, placing additional pressure on social services. This is exacerbated by the Council's ongoing significant financial challenges resulting in a difficult landscape when delivering services at all levels, but particularly around prevention and early intervention.

Workforce pressures

A national shortage of social work staff has continued to impact our recruitment resulting in teams often running at reduced capacity. Whilst our staffing numbers improved during 2024-2025, recruitment and retention challenges can often mean children experience changes in their worker and this can impact our ability to provide consistent, relationship-based support to children and families. Additionally, the introduction of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) supported year, while vital for professional development, has added to the workload of team leaders, further stretching our workforce resources and capacity.

We strive to keep social work caseloads at a safe level where meaningful relationships can be built with families, but this is only possible when we have sufficient staffing.

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 has driven 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.

Workforce highlights for children's services

Children's Services are sponsoring two practitioners to undertake social work qualifications, and the sponsorship pathway is expected to continue in 2025-2026. Three social workers completed the Child Welfare and Protection postgraduate course in 2025, with three more starting in September. Demand for professional courses remains high and we are keen to support as many people as possible to complete additional qualifications.

Four residential staff have been supported to complete HNC or SVQ Level 3 qualifications, and one completed a previously started course. Two employees are beginning SVQ Level 4 Management qualifications in 2025-2026.

Children's services have 15 qualified Practice Educators, with eight actively hosting student placements. Placement numbers have declined due to reduced university engagement. In 2023-2024, nine students completed social work placements and a further five completed placements in the period 2024-2025. The lower numbers of students coming to East Lothian for the placement has resulted in a pause to sponsorship of the Practice Education qualification.

In 2025, Children's Services established a Workforce Learning and Development Group to improve our strategic approach to staff development. The group has oversight of the workforce development plan and its implementation.

Adult Services

During 2024 - 2025, adult social work services (ASWS) remained committed to delivering early, person-centred, and outcome-focused support to individuals and their families across East Lothian. Our priority has continued to be supporting people to remain in their own homes and communities, preventing escalation of need and ensuring timely intervention. Hearing the voices of adults and their families has guided operational and strategic planning, and we recognise this as a continuous area for improvement.

Adult social work operates as part of East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership (ELHSCP) and as CSWO, I am responsible for the governance of social work functions supported by the practice lead. The partnership continues to develop following the leadership changes in 2022-2023, with strengthened collaboration and the introduction of new governance and assurance processes.

What is our data telling us?

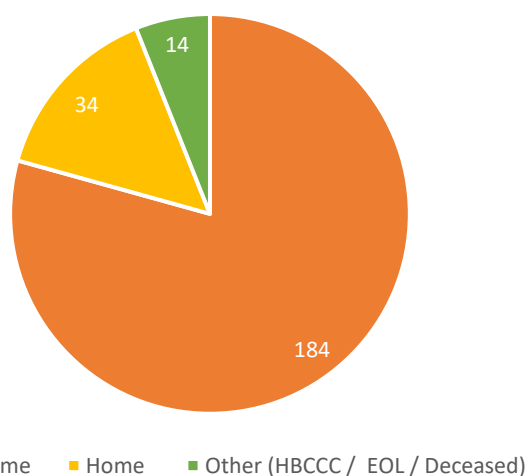
East Lothian's 'Home First' approach developed further in 2024-2025, with a continued focus on ensuring people were discharged from hospital to their home wherever possible. This approach is aligned to national priorities and our local aims are to support positive outcomes by:

- Enabling people to remain at home for as long as possible.
- Reducing unnecessary care home admissions.
- Making best use of available resources by preserving care home placements for people with the highest level of need.

In 2024, staffing capacity within the social work hospital discharge team was increased with the transfer of two posts from the main social work team. This increased capacity to plan complex discharges and brought enhanced skills and knowledge of community provisions, which contributed towards the team being able to support more people to return home.

Out of the 232 referrals received, 34 (14%) were discharged home, 184 moved into long term care and 14 received end of life care or sadly passed away.

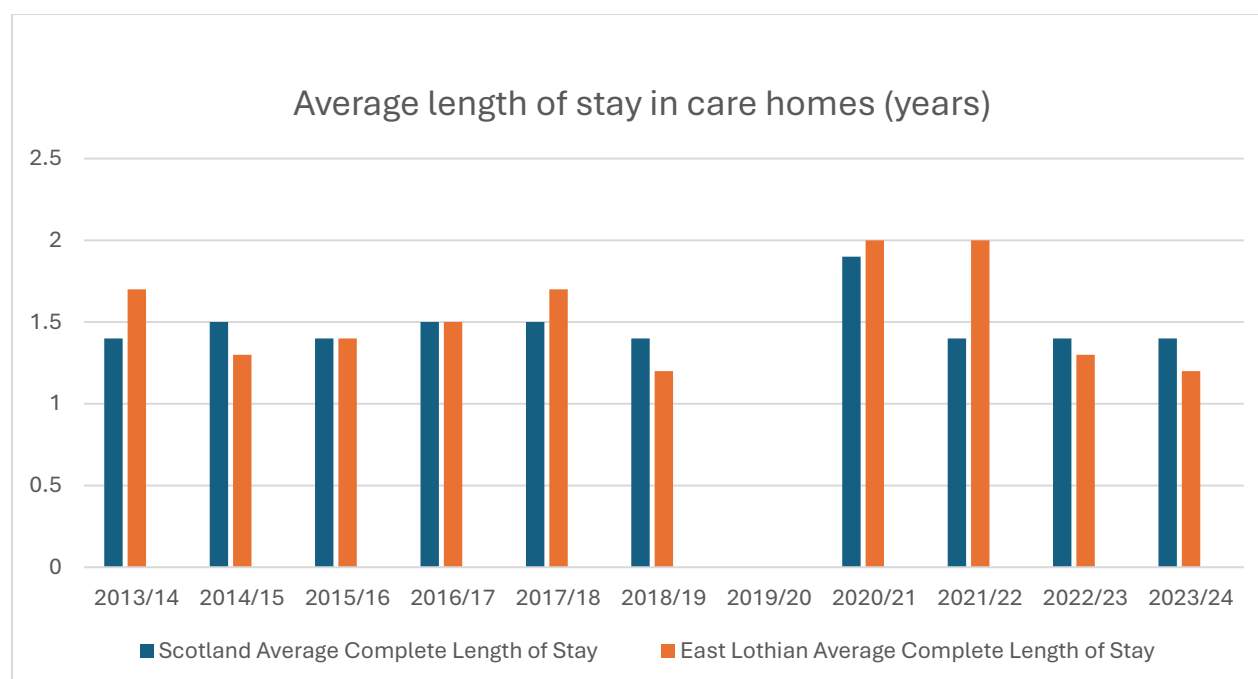
1st April - 31st March 2025 - Discharge Destination



Key elements in supporting a responsive hospital discharge approach have been:

- Maintaining strong links with patient flow and in-reach teams as well as ward staff, helping with early conversations.
- Early social work intervention through positive working relationships with ward staff, attendance at key decision making meetings with families and at regular ward meetings. This also helps families consider alternatives to care home placements, where appropriate, at an earlier stage.
- Increased capacity to look at complex discharges home.
- Continued good working relationships with care homes to minimise vacancies.
- Prioritisation of care home admissions from the community, balanced with the need to ensure patient flow out of the hospital.
- Advice and guidance to hospital staff about social work processes.
- Continuous focus on Home First and keeping assessments up to date as people progress through the hospital system with changing needs and circumstances.
- Participation in twice daily hospital huddles to ensure a joined-up approach with early intervention in hospital admissions.

The impact of this work can be seen in the reduction in average length of time older people in East Lothian live in care homes. (Figures below from Public Health Scotland)



As well as hospital discharge work, the team continued to work directly with care homes providing a social work service to residents. This included responding to Adult Support and Protection concerns, undertaking routine annual reviews, responding to incidents and mediation to prevent placement break down. The team also oversaw the successful relocation of residents from Belhaven and The Abbey care homes which were closed.

Home First – single point of access

In 2024, the ELHSCP developed a single point of access (SPOA), underpinned by the principles of Home First, for professionals to seek advice and refer for supported discharge. It is delivered by social work, rehabilitation and flow team staff.

Daily multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings involving SPOA staff, social work, reablement services, and home care coordinators ensure decisions are made collaboratively and care resources are directed to those most in need. This has contributed to a reduction in unnecessary admissions and improved flow through the

system. Feedback from staff and partners has highlighted better communication, clarity of roles, and more timely allocation of cases as key benefits of this integrated approach.

Social workers work in close partnership with health colleagues, hospital discharge teams, and community-based services to identify and activate the most appropriate support pathways. This includes rapid mobilisation of reablement services, home care, or third sector interventions to enable people to remain safely at home or return home quickly following a hospital stay.

The SPOA has significantly enhanced our ability to prevent unnecessary admissions, reduce delays, and identify risks early.

Improving social work assessment

Significant progress was made in 2024 - 2025 to improve the quality and consistency of social work assessments, with a renewed focus on person-centred and strengths-based approaches. Building on local training, audit findings, and national best practice, adult services revised assessment templates and practice guidance to embed the principles of empowerment, choice, and collaboration. MOSAIC forms are currently being developed to support this approach and are due to be implemented in Autumn 2025.

Social workers now use shared tools to ensure that every assessment:

- Recognises and builds upon personal strengths, informal supports, and community assets.
- Aligns with Self-Directed Support (SDS) options to promote choice and control.

As part of ongoing quality assurance, assessments are now regularly scrutinised through various channels such as the resource panel. A new suite of performance indicators will be introduced in 2025-2026 to strengthen monitoring and drive continuous improvement.

The alignment of the duty system with Home First and SPOA, and the enhancement of assessment practice, is demonstrating a clear commitment to early help and prevention, and delivering high-quality, person-led social work.

Adult social work referrals

While referrals to adult social work have increased over recent years, a modest reduction was observed in 2024 - 2025. This trend can be attributed to several positive system-level developments. The SPOA is working to streamline, triage and improve signposting to appropriate services at an earlier stage, preventing unnecessary escalation to statutory social work intervention.

Strengthened partnerships with third sector organisations is expanding community capacity and enabling a greater proportion of individuals to receive support directly through non-statutory services.

In addition, improved collaboration at the front door, enhanced public information, and clearer access routes are designed to empower individuals and families to navigate the system more confidently.

The increased use of multidisciplinary early intervention, particularly via Home First and community-based MDTs, allows for alternative responses to emerging need before social work thresholds are met. Together, these developments reflect a maturing system focused on prevention, proportionate response, and enabling individuals to live well with the right support, at the right time, in the right place.



Adult Support and Protection (ASP)

Our work in ASP has continued to evolve, with a further focus on embedding robust quality assurance arrangements, improved data use, and stronger operational oversight from our ASP operational lead. We have built on the strengths identified in the 2023 joint inspection and acted on areas for improvement.

The service has also benefited this year from the appointment of a dedicated ASP quality assurance lead who has created the foundation for future reporting, bringing consistency of approach and supporting Scottish Government requirements.

Reporting into both the social work governance and clinical and care governance committee, the ASP operational lead and quality assurance lead have delegated accountability for ASP performance and improvement with operational oversight of all ASP activity.

Audit work has evidenced a high standard of ASP practice across the service.

There were 509 referrals categorised as ASP in East Lothian during 2024 – 2025, a decrease of 23% from the previous year, but slightly above the 2023 - 2024 rate (by 4%).

Key Achievements

Highlights during 2024-2025 included:

- Continued work with the adult protection officer, Police and NHS to audit and oversee all IRDs.
- Enhancement of the ASP management screening decision, using a dedicated tool to provide rationale, evidencing defensible decision making before moving a case through the social work duty system.
- Continued audit activity with regular 'dip' audits, peer audits and focussed audits in relation to screening of police concerns. The finding feed into a continuous improvement cycle.
- Full implementation of the revised ASP Code of Practice.
- Strengthening the use of chronologies and SMART risk management plans.
- Continued strong performance in timely inquiry completion.

Self-directed Support (SDS)

In 2024-2025, we launched a service-wide self-evaluation of SDS, following the publication of the Scottish Government's national SDS review. This reflective process involved staff, service users, carers, and partner organisations, and is guiding our next phase of implementation and improvement planning.

We continue to have local representation on national forums to ensure we are implementing best practice in line with guidance.

Key developments this year have included:

- Clearer alignment of assessment to SDS options at the point of discharge, ensuring informed decision-making and continuity of support.
- Ongoing development of updated public-facing materials to demystify SDS and increase accessibility.
- Expansion of direct payment options for more flexible and personalised support.

The findings from our self-evaluation will directly inform a refreshed SDS action plan, due for implementation in early 2025-2026. The rollout of revised, strengths-based assessment tools will promote genuine choice and control.

Financial management service

This service supports around 135 people who require Corporate Appointeeship to manage Department of Work & Pensions or Social Security Scotland benefits. In 2024-2025, every new applicant was screened to ensure they met the criteria and 100% of reviews were completed ensuring this service was utilised for those people most in need.

Adult social work governance group

Initially established to strengthen oversight and quality within adult social work practice, the adult social work governance group has evolved into a central mechanism for assurance, peer reflection, and strategic insight. It brings together data from governance audits, feedback from lived experience, and progresses quality improvement projects.

Now entering its second year, it has continued to grow in influence and impact with clear lines being established between operational practice and strategic decision-making. The work of this group feeds directly into the wider H&SCP's professional assurance framework with key members now contributing directly to IJB planning forums and strategic working groups. This ensures that social work values, evidence, and learning are embedded into broader system priorities. Recently, the group has:

- Broadened and expanded audit coverage, including thematic audits across ASP, SDS, justice social work.
- Completed self- evaluation against national standards.
- Reviewed and updated risk management functions, enabling early identification and escalation of operational risks.
- Improved visibility of social work performance through newly developed dashboards with planned regular reporting to senior leadership.
- Built in feedback loops, piloting new methods for adult service users and families to inform practice development.

- Strengthened and further developed processes to support our duty of candour.
- Standardised adult social work policies with set review dates.
- Implemented our 'Person at Risk Database' and utilised it effectively during severe weather conditions.
- Undertaken regular professional discussions which have included adult protection learning review findings and challenges faced in working to codes of practice within the current financial climate.

Developments in this group have embedded a culture of reflection, accountability, and improvement across adult services. The priorities for next year include:

- Strengthen lived experience engagement in service improvement.
- Expand audit and quality assurance systems and deliver improvement actions.
- Build workforce capacity and retention.
- Maintain our focus on early intervention and independence.
- Embed robust performance monitoring aligned with the IJB's strategic objectives.

Workforce development

The adult social work learning and development subgroup supported professional growth, workforce resilience and well-being in 2024-2025 through the following work:

- Representation and engagement in national forums/groups.
- Promotion of the social work profession within partnerships.
- Implementation of learning from national and local reviews.
- Ongoing workforce analysis and monitoring.
- Implementation of a new supervision policy with a focus on supporting staff well-being.
- Embedding of protected learning time and as a result improved mandatory training compliance of 93%.
- 98% of social work Personal Review and Development Plans (PRDs) completed.

- Increased staff safety - lone worker alarm devices implemented.
- Implementation of 'absence clinics' to support managers to review and reduce staff absence.
- Practice assessors financially compensated for the role.
- Implementation of trauma-informed approaches.
- 'Setting the bar' used as a guide in terms of social work caseloads. Case load management tools in place.
- Fed into the national child abuse inquiry.
- Successful event held to celebrate World Social Day.

Challenges within adult services

The 2024-2025 financial position continues to reflect rising demand, complexity, and cost pressures where we continue efforts to align budgets with statutory duties and positive outcomes.

The current fiscal climate poses increasing pressure on adult services. Key risks include:

- Reduced ability to deliver preventative and early intervention work.
- Delays in service response times.
- Escalation of risk leading to increased statutory interventions.
- Rising demand and complexity amid workforce pressures.

The availability of care at home remains a system-wide issue. Our home care change board and daily multi-disciplinary coordination meetings have helped us target limited resources more effectively, but challenges remain.

Learning Disability Service

The learning disability social work team was established in June 2021, initially taking responsibility for case management, transition assessments and SDS assessments of all service users with a diagnosed learning disability in East Lothian. The service supports all adults with a learning disability from the age of 16 onwards.

The team now have responsibility for all learning disability work for adults. This includes taking on sole statutory responsibility for all ASP work as well as management of all Local Authority Welfare Guardianships under the Adult's with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. The team also operates a duty system, screening all referrals for people with a diagnosed learning disability. This coordinated care approach has improved the outcomes for people with a learning disability as the resources are shared across the services and there is an ongoing approach to multi-disciplinary working.

Further to this, the learning disability team have undertaken all review work for people with learning disabilities. Since 2022, there has been an ongoing project to focus on reviews to ensure they are up to date.

The learning disability social work team is part of a wider enhanced learning disability service which includes our health colleagues in the Community Learning Disability Team and our community resources team. The team maintains close working links with partners in the mental health team, Care Home Assessment and Review Team (CHART), children's services and adult social work.

The team continued to work closely with colleagues in East Lothian Council's housing department to ensure that service users are appropriately matched to housing. This is focussed on identifying new housing stock that can be utilised under a core and cluster model. Over this last year, a new core and cluster was established in Windygoul, Tranent supported by Carr Gomm.

Over the next year it is anticipated that we will establish another core and cluster in the Tranent area. Service users have already been identified to move into these properties once a support provider has been identified. This will support people with a learning disability and mental health issues.

Transitions

Planning for young people's transition from child to adult services is already well established in East Lothian, with transition referrals made at an early stage and multidisciplinary meetings taking place on a regular basis.

The learning disability team has been leading on the development of a transitions policy and procedure document which is awaiting sign off from the appropriate governance groups before implementation. The document is anchored in the 'Principles of Good Transitions' from the Scottish Transition Forum.

For 2024-2025, the team had 10 referrals from children's services, including two Looked After and Accommodated Children (legal term and not chosen language). All young people have planned support identified including a mix of centre-based support, respite, universal services and staying in school. Ongoing work with partners in education and children's services is planned to ensure a shared understanding of eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria can differ in adult services from children's services and managing expectations is important to support a smooth transition and avoid disappointment.

For 2025-2026 onwards it has been agreed that adult social work will now take full ownership of transition referrals for young people without a diagnosed learning disability.

Justice social work

What is our data telling us?

Service	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Community Payback Order (supervision)	95	102	113	101
Community Payback Orders (all requirements)	126	163	173	168
Community Payback Orders (unpaid work hours)	11,371	13,710	10,942	14,527
Justice Social Work Reports (submitted)	170	241	280	270
Diversion from Prosecution Reports (submitted)	34	43	91	82
Supervised Bail and/or Electronic Monitoring	N/A	8	8	15

Structured Deferred Sentences	N/A	1	5	10
Statutory Throughcare (community/custody)	55	61	62	66
Voluntary Throughcare (custody/community)	46	42	28	42
Registered Sex Offenders (in the community)	19	32	25	22
MAPPA Category 3 (violent offences)	0	0	0	0

Data shows that East Lothian has a consistently higher number of people on remand than the average across Scotland (circa 25%) with a high of 38.5% in February 2025 for adult men. The female incarcerated population remains low with less than five at any one time, however, of these at least 50% are on remand. There are high numbers of individuals in custody who are identified as 'No Fixed Abode' and a number of these are believed to be non-UK nationals potentially arrested and charged at premises in East Lothian or on the A1, and remanded due to their immigration status.

During 2024-2025 we have received an increase in requests for reports relating to domestic abuse offences, with the perpetrators overwhelmingly being men. Of the more than 400 reports requested, 94 related to domestic abuse with justice social work managing 66 Community Payback Orders (with supervision) for domestic abuse offences at the end of the last quarter in the reporting year. The service has continued to deliver the Caledonian Group Programme alongside securing training opportunities for newer staff members to protect our ability to deliver individual sessions to support women and children.

The justice social work service has promoted early intervention and prevention to meet the needs of those with low-level offending behaviour or a history of non-compliance by increasing access to Diversion from Prosecution, Structured Deferred Sentences and Bail Supervision. The data chart shows the increase in Bail Supervision and Structured Deferred Sentences, with the incidence of Diversion from Prosecution remaining high, albeit lower than the unprecedented number for 2023-2024.

Achievements in justice social work

The Community Payback Work Team (CPWT) introduced The Big Pick in June 2024. The project helps to address clothing poverty throughout East Lothian. It is delivered by service users on Community Payback Orders, completing unpaid work in the community as an alternative to a custodial sentence. They are supported by the CPWT supervisors to collect clothes that are donated by members of the public from various clothes banks and events throughout the local area. These are then sorted into different categories – men, women and children, as well as accessories. The clothes are sold by the kilo with all school clothing given out for free. Any profits made from these events is donated to local charities suggested by service users. Since starting The Big Pick, there have been more than 15 events, run at various community buildings throughout East Lothian. Having a spread of venues has allowed for good community access and reach, for example Port Seton Centre, Pennypit Centre Prestonpans, Corn Exchange Haddington, Fraser Centre Tranent and the MECA Centre in Musselburgh. In this reporting year, The Big Pick has donated £2750 to various charitable organisations throughout East Lothian, including the Musselburgh Breakfast Club, The Bridges Centre, Hollies Community Hub, Community Kitchen Pennypit, SSPCA, First Steps and the Midlothian Cat Rescue.

As part of the 'Model for Change' being delivered by the Community Payback work team, the focus for 2025 is on developing the gardening project. This will develop unused and fallow land across East Lothian to be fit for fruit and vegetable planting so that local communities can improve their access to fresh food and, if possible, supplement the growing use of foodbanks across the county.

Apex Scotland delivers an arrest referral service for East Lothian residents who have been arrested. A worker was recruited on a 21 hour a week contract and completed Police vetting in April 2024. People can be quickly signposted to housing/homelessness services, substance use services, mental health support, counselling and benefits services. There is also an offer of time limited support around motivation and action planning. APEX now have a physical presence in St Leonard's

Police Station one day a week and Edinburgh Sheriff Court another day in the week. APEX have been contracted to provide the East Lothian arrest referral service for another twelve months from April 2025.

In the financial year ending 31 March 2025, a total of 42 men and women were discussed at the transition group. The group meet monthly to discuss those due to be released from prison in the next six months and again three months post release, to monitor outstanding needs and engagement with relevant services. It is a multi-agency group including justice services, housing, police and health. The majority of those discussed were going to require accommodation upon release. Being in a position to discuss what area/s within the region would best suit an individual's needs and reduce risks, was useful for the service user and local communities. Meetings were also helpful to ascertain who required support with substance use so communication could be had with the medical team within the prison to ensure prescriptions were accurate and available upon release. The group has also been successful in supporting people who are in prison longer than 12 weeks to continue having their rent paid, which has prevented homelessness on several occasions in the last year.

There continues to be challenges in justice services relating to the prison population and we continue to work closely with partners to ensure we can respond proactively to the early release programme.

We also continue to seek additional opportunities for unpaid work to ensure we can offer a range of diverse activity to support a successful restorative model.

Highlights for justice services

The evaluation work undertaken in 2024-2025 identified a number of strengths:

- Spot case audits, arranged as follow up to scheduled audits, evidenced improved practice in timeous completion of risk assessments.
- Within the CPWT there is a consistently high level of management oversight and high level of service being provided.

- Work being completed by social work assistants is always of a high standard. Assessments are thorough and reflect excellent information gathering and liaison with other professionals.
- Offence focused work is being completed in all cases reviewed as part of a spot audit.
- Accredited programmes (such as Caledonian) are being delivered in accordance with programme manuals.

Mental health social work

What is our data telling us?

The number of Private Guardianship granted is increasing year on year and it is expected that this will continue into 2026 and beyond. East Lothian is the second fastest growing local authority in Scotland and has an expected increase of in excess of 35% for the over 75s – this would indicate there will be an ever-growing cohort requiring both social care and support, especially where there are issues of capacity to be considered.

Service Area	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
LA Guardianship (granted)	17	34	21	
Private Guardianship (granted)	47	63	42	
Extant Guardianships (31/03)	214	240	252	
Emergency detention	37	76	56	
Short term detention	89	109	119	
MHO waiting list	11	0	0	
CTO (Community – 31/03)	N/K	25	16	
CTO (Hospital – 31/03)	N/K	18	45	

Within the Mental Welfare Commission's end of year report, East Lothian's delivery of Social Circumstances Reports for Short Term Detention Certificates increased throughout 2023-2024, achieving above the Scottish average. Data indicates we are the best performing Local Authority within NHS Lothian in this area.

Key achievements

The Adults with Incapacity project was implemented in October 2024 and is progressing well. A private guardian project lead officer was appointed with the goal of improving service delivery in this area. This post allowed the service to complete all outstanding reviews and implement a pathway for future supervision and support for private guardians in line with legislative requirements.

Challenges

The continued local and national focus on addressing delayed discharge to reduce hospital waiting times has impacted the service. The H&SCP has requested that all those in hospital whose discharge cannot be progressed due to an issue of capacity be prioritised for allocation to a Mental Health Officer (MHO). As a result, we need to balance the needs and risks of those in the community versus those in hospital and this can lead to competing resource demand.

There continues to be a high number of local authority Guardianship Orders (LAGOs) managed within the MHO service. This will continue to impact service delivery across adult social work until we can increase capacity in the learning disability and CHART teams.

Workforce development

There is now a permanent, full-time social worker to deliver on the oversight and management of Private Guardians which will improve practice in this area considerably.

There is a new satellite MHO who has a fortnightly duty commitment. We have committed to sponsoring another trainee for the next intake on the MHO award programme (2025-2026). Discussions are underway with social work managers to consider supporting those with the MHO qualification to undertake MHO satellite work. The development of a bank of MHOs will be critical to the services long term success in managing the changing patterns of both Adults with Incapacity and mental health activity.

In quarter four, the service employed an agency worker to focus on completing Private Guardian Order reviews. The funding was provided through the carer's budget which had a slight shortfall, and it was agreed that supporting guardians would be an appropriate service. There has been significant progress in relation to the delivery for private guardianship order reviews with 95% of all orders having been reviewed or have a review scheduled. This was a significant development, and the social worker embedded in the MHO team will help sustain the improvements made in this area.

Looking ahead

2025-2025 will be another challenging year for social work and social care in East Lothian. While we continue to be confident that services are focusing on the right strategic and practice developments, the demand for services continues to increase at a rate that risks overtaking available resources. The workforce remains committed to delivering high quality services and will continue to balance the rights and needs of the people we serve whilst trying to work within budget.

It is accepted that the forecast for public service finances remains challenging, and there are concerns within the social work and social care workforce about our ability to meet the codes of practice and statutory requirements. As CSWO I will support the difficult discussions across services about how we can uphold our standards and keep people safe despite the many barriers we face.

Alongside senior leaders, I will continue to promote our workforce as our greatest asset while ensuring support, supervision and training is a priority and understood as a crucial element of a happy and committed workforce.

Our priority will always be to work alongside people to ensure they receive the support they require at the right time, within their homes, families and communities wherever possible.

In children's services we will:

- Continue to find creative ways to collaborate with the people who use

social work services to ensure their voices genuinely shape social work practice. This includes ensuring we consider all voices – including those who are easy to ignore.

- Review and learn from the feedback from our first 'My Voice Matters' survey to learn from the experiences of care experienced children and young people to help inform service priorities.
- Access suitable training and development opportunities to ensure the workforce is equipped to understand and support the complex behaviours and risks facing children and young people in the modern world. This includes new risks from the dark web, exploitation, sexual harm and radicalisation.
- Alongside the Belonging to East Lothian strategic lead and other services, continue exploring ways to increase resources and capacity to ensure we are in the best possible position for children and young people's needs to be met within East Lothian.

In adult services we will:

- Continue to align our reports with the national dataset requirements.
- Commence a comprehensive self-evaluation aligned with the Care Inspectorate's Quality Framework for ASP which will help us to critically reflect on our practices, systems, and impact.
- As part of our developing approach to communication, we will engage with partner agencies and local communities to promote Adult Support and Protection as everyone's responsibility.
- Develop a caseload management system and assurance framework for MHOs that will maximise efficiency and improve our compliance with legislative duties.
- Work alongside NHS colleagues to ensure justice service users can access speech and language and / or occupation health as required. This will complement the work of the community justice outreach nurse and give

service users specific support to decrease the risk of antisocial or offending behaviours.

- As part of our responsibility to addressing climate change, the Community Payback Work Team will stop using their diesel vans for group projects and start leasing fully electric vans with which to service work projects across the county.

This report has shown that throughout another challenging year, the social work and social care workforce have worked hard to provide critical services whilst continuously seeking to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable people in East Lothian.

I am endlessly inspired by the commitment of social work and social care staff, together with partner agencies and unpaid carers who strive every day to provide high quality care to support and protect the people who need services the most.

I wish to extend my genuine thanks to all members of staff who make such a difference to the lives of others. This report is recognition of their hard work and highlights the crucial role they play in public services.

Appendix 1

Children's Services Stories of Change



Appendix 2

Adult Services Stories of Change





Versions of this report can be provided in Braille, large print, audiotape, or your own language.

For assistance please call: **01620 827 827**

British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact us via **www.contactscotland-bsl.org**

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