

Chief Social Work Officer's Annual Report 2024/2025



Table of Contents

	Page No.
1. Introduction	3
2. Purpose and Background	4
3. Governance and Accountability Arrangements	5
4. Service Quality and Performance	8
5. Resources	29
6. Workforce	29
7. Looking Ahead	30
8. Glossary	32

1. Introduction

Welcome to the Chief Social Work Officer's (CSWO) annual report covering the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. This is my second annual report that I have presented as Service Director Social Work Services (CSWO) and remain overwhelmingly honoured and privileged to lead the service and present this report.

Social Work and Social Care Services have faced ongoing considerable challenges and as previous years, for this period, 2024/25, has been no different in terms of national policy, legislation, budget restrictions, external scrutiny and increasing demand and complexity. We also have the ongoing staffing crisis within Social Work across Scotland and the wider United Kingdom with record numbers of vacancies due to social workers leaving the profession. However, we have remained focussed on delivering services within this very challenging environment.

Whilst there has been required budget efficiencies and savings, Dumfries and Galloway Council has invested in children's services by including funding to allow for the introduction of a dedicated Kinship Care Team and Intensive Support Outreach Team.

Although external and internal scrutiny have been challenging, the subsequent improvement plans are helping us to focus on areas that require to be developed. Whilst working across teams and services in our One Council approach, we strive to achieve better outcomes through more collaborative working with partners and our third sector organisations, which we recognise as key.

My reflection over the last year is one of many achievements across social work services as we focus on early intervention and prevention while continuing to carry out our statutory duties to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable within our communities against a backdrop of increasing referrals, pressures and work across all sectors.

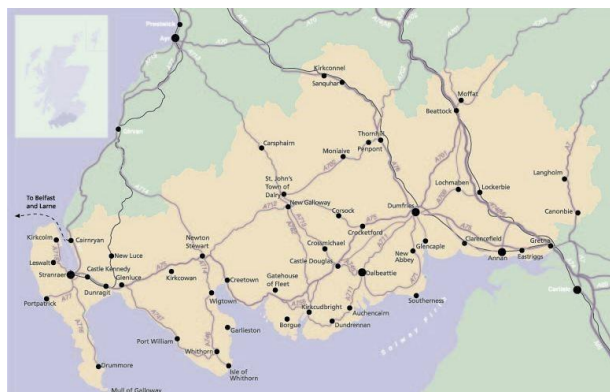
Lastly, I would like to thank you, our staff, despite the increasing challenges, you are our greatest asset, for your commitment and dedication of which cannot be overstated and once again I want to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to you all, so thank you.

Stephen

2. Purpose and Background

This report is produced to satisfy the requirement to prepare and publish a report in relation to the CSWO's role in professional leadership, oversight of practice, governance, values and standards as described in national guidance. The report also relates to the specific areas of decision-making and practice where legislation confers functions directly on the CSWO.

Profile of Dumfries and Galloway



Dumfries and Galloway population is just over 148,800 and has increased by 500 in the past year.

Population Projections – Between 2018 and 2028, the population of Dumfries and Galloway is projected to decrease from 148,790 to 144,575. This is a decrease of 2.8%, which compares to a projected increase of 1.8% for Scotland as a whole. Over the next 10 years, the population is projected to decrease by 5.8% due to natural change (more deaths than births). However, we have seen an increase of 500 in the past year. Total net migration (net migration within Scotland, from overseas and from the rest of the UK) is projected to result in population increase of 2.9% over the same period.

Economy - Earnings in Dumfries and Galloway are lower than the national average. In 2023, full time workers received an average of £580.80 per week compared with a Scottish average of £702.80, making it the lowest in Scotland.

Economic inactivity in Dumfries and Galloway is higher than across Scotland and Great Britain. 27.4% of the population aged 16 to 64 years in Dumfries and Galloway were 'economically inactive' in the year ending June 2023.

Unemployment is also higher in Dumfries and Galloway than across Scotland (3.5%) with an unemployment rate of 3.6%, however lower than Great Britain (3.7%).

Levels of child poverty in Dumfries and Galloway has increased over this period. 5,622 children and 24.6% of those aged 0-15 were living in relative low-income families, compared to 21.3% in Scotland. 19.6% and 4,488 children aged 0-15 lived in absolute low-income families (Scotland 17.1%).

3. Governance and Accountability

The role of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) is outlined in Section 3(1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, as amended by Section 45 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994. The role is undertaken by the most senior registered Social Work Manager and has responsibilities to promote leadership, standards, and accountability for all Social Work Services, including commissioned services.

Social Work Services in Dumfries and Galloway continue to play a lead role in supporting and safeguarding our communities. In Dumfries and Galloway, the role of CSWO currently lies with myself as the Service Director of Social Work Services, with the Head of Service for Children, Families and Justice Social Work deputising this role as required.

As CSWO, I have a key leadership role across our Council, including within the Health and Social Care Partnership and, as a member of the Senior Leadership Team of the Council reporting directly to the Chief Executive.

I represent Social Work within key strategic groups including the Integration Joint Board, the Executive Team of the Health and Social Care Partnership, and a member of the Collaborative Care Home Support Team (CCHST). This allows me to contribute and oversee progress on developments across partnerships and professional oversight to all delegated Adult Services within the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Public Protection continues to be at the forefront of all that we do to ensure those at risk of harm continue to be supported and protected. I maintain a key role in Public Protection as Independent Advisor to Chief Officers Group and work closely with the Independent Chair of our Public Protection Committee (PPC) who I meet on a regular basis and am a vice chair of PPC.

During the reporting period, there were no new Learning Reviews. The Public Protection Partnership received six Initial Learning Review Notifications: all for adult protection cases. None of the cases proceeded to Learning Review however some learning was identified within the Initial Learning Review Panel, therefore multi-agency and single agency improvement action plans are being developed. Self-neglect was a key theme throughout the six notifications and there was agreement that elements from each case would be considered within a thematic analysis and future self-evaluation work around self-neglect.

I am a member of the Southwest of Scotland Strategic Oversight group for the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) which allows me to ensure that all aspects of Justice Services delivery for our highest risk offenders are managed and monitored appropriately. I am also formally represented on the Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) and Community Justice Partnership (CJP) with Social Work services also providing chairing responsibilities of the CJP.

Nationally, I am the Chair of the Social Work Scotland's Children and Families Standing Committee and Digital Subgroup. I am also a member of the National Strategic Leadership Board for Digital and Data Transformation.

I continue to provide assurance on the quality of Social Work Services across three key committee structures – Full Council, Social Work Services Committee and the Council's Area Committees. Adult Services are reported through the Integration Joint Board and the Council's Area Committee structure.

I regularly report to Social Work Committee and the Clinical and Care Governance Committee of the Integration Joint Board on the outcome of external scrutiny of regulated services within Children and Families and Adult Services. I am supported by the Social Work Governance Group (SWGG) which brings together my Senior Officers including representation from the Integrated Joint Board, with

responsibilities for all Social Work functions across the region. The main function of this group is to support the CSWO to discharge statutory duties, covering the legal duties of social workers and the performance and improvement framework for social workers and social care services.

The SWGG supported the CSWO to develop a Governance Framework that explicitly described the arrangements in place to support and enable me as CSWO to carry out the role effectively.

The Social Work Leadership Group (previously known as the Social Work Services Tactical Group) includes senior management across the service responsible for the leadership and management of frontline staff, and therefore responsible for practice standards and the quality of services delivered, ensuring a shared ownership, understanding and approach to service delivery, improvement and development. My leadership of this group maintains the key link between operational practice, local and national policy and the strategic direction of my service.

Our new Council structure saw the Dumfries and Galloway Resettlement and Housing Options and Homelessness Services join our service.

In this reporting period the SWGG has led a range of improvement and assurance activity, evaluation and associated performance reporting, and service initiatives including responding to the ongoing demands, expectations and risks associated with living in the modern world.

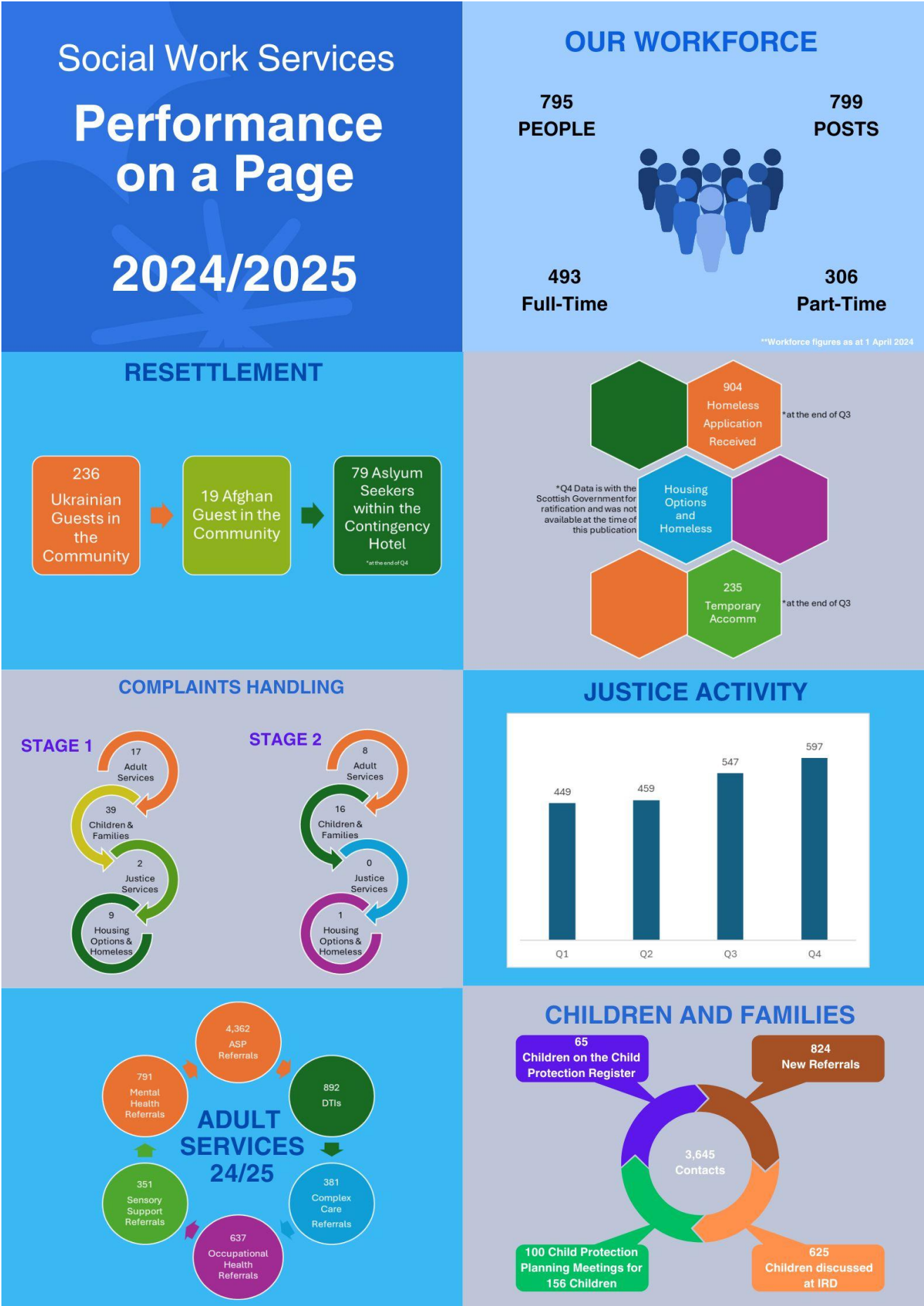
A few examples include:

- In October 2024 we held our first Annual Social Work Services Conference since Covid where we celebrated the success of the work across our services. The day saw over 100 of our staff attend with an opportunity to see their success celebrated in our stalls village; along with guest speakers from Social Work Scotland, Scottish Association of Social Work, Deputy Chief Social Work Advisor, Homeless Network Scotland, Convenor of Social Work Scotland and Mindfulness Based Living.
- Introduced a six-monthly report setting out activity for Adult Services, Children and Families Services, Justice Social Work, Resettlement, Housing Options and Homelessness Service, Comments, Compliments and Complaints, Workforce and Finance allowing me to identify and review specific trends relating to the data that we provide as we move through 2025/26.
- In December 2024, Social Work Services committee approved our new Children and Families commissioning strategy to ensure we are securing better outcomes for children and young people in Dumfries and Galloway enabling us to progress the delivery of commissioned services through targeted support, increasing opportunities to collaborate with third sector organisations together with the development of quality assurance framework to give us assurance that our commissioned services are providing high quality care and support on a consistent basis.
- In recognition of our commitment to digital innovation and transformation, the Care Call Service was awarded the Bronze Digital Telecare Implementation Award by the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government.
- Creation and introduction of a dedicated Kinship care team to better support kinship carers to help children remain with their family – the new kinship team is fully established and is currently supporting 300 kinship families.
- Introduction of Intensive Support Outreach Team to support families who are in crisis or approaching crisis to avoid the need for alternative accommodation – the new intensive support team is fully established and is currently supporting 35 children, five of these in out of region placements with a view to supporting these children back to the region. To date we have avoided the breakdown of four families, though work continues with each family, with a cost avoidance of £23,838 per week.
- The ASP Team successfully piloted AI Software (Magic Notes) which supported staff to record visits and phone calls creating a transcribe of the meeting to support their assessment, allowing reduction of staff time to write up visits and enabling for more time to collaborate with people.

- Successful pilot of the Out and About Project, led by our Sensory Support Team, designed to reach and support individuals in rural and hard-to-access areas.
- The Prison Based Social Work (PBSW) Team based within HMP Dumfries, has experienced a significant increase in workload linked to the prison population and the complex needs of prisoners. Although this presents its challenges, an excellent HMIPS inspection report from January 2025 evidences the dedication, care and compassion shown by Social Work staff to support those in custody.
- The multi-Agency Adult Support and Protection guidance was launched on 30th January 2025 following extensive work by members of the public protection team, the ASP social work team and other key multiagency colleagues from health, police and other partners.
- We welcomed the addition of Resettlement and Housing Options and Homelessness Service into Social Work Services following the Chief Officer's Restructure.
- Continued to deliver on #OurPromise for our care experienced children, young people and care leavers. An underpinning principle of The Promise is that our children's voices are at the centre of all that we do and is integral to our service design and work planning. Our newly refreshed Corporate Parent Plan has been developed alongside our children and young people, as well as further engagement through the Bright Spots Programme, our annual We Care Event and 10,000 Voices. This has ensured that at every opportunity, we have included the Voice of our children.

These are just a few of our achievements over this reporting period, I have captured many more throughout my report.

4.Service Quality and Performance



Care Call

The Care Call service continues to play a vital role in supporting the safety, independence, and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable individuals across Dumfries and Galloway. Operating 24/7, the service manages approximately 4,000 active connections, responding to emergency alarm activations and providing reassurance calls. Our Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) is staffed by a dedicated team of trained operators who work in collaboration with our field-based assessors and installers to ensure a rapid and person-centred response. The Care Call team also cover the Council's emergency Out of Hours line evening and weekends all year round.

In 2024/25, the service handled over 160,000 alarm calls and has maintained an uptime of 99.99%, ensuring reliable contact for those relying on the technology. This period has also seen a continued rise in demand for more tailored solutions, reflecting the increasingly complex needs of our population and the drive to support people to remain at home safely for longer.

A key focus this year has been the ongoing Analogue to Digital Transition Project, a critical programme aligned with the national requirement to convert all analogue telephony connections to digital by the end of 2025. Dumfries and Galloway is delivering this transformation through a structured rollout plan, which includes proactive engagement with service users, families, and partners to ensure continuity of support. Over 90% (3,300) properties have been upgraded to date, with full completion expected by mid-2025. In recognition of our commitment to digital innovation and transformation, the Care Call service was awarded the Bronze Digital Telecare Implementation Award by the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government in 2024.

Social Work Out of Hours

Throughout the reporting year Dumfries and Galloway Social Work Out of Hours (OOH) Service has continued to respond to concerns about vulnerable adults and children 365 days a year.



The OOH quality assurance framework records the improvement work we have undertaken on the new Out of Hours Homeless Referral Form and is now on our business system Mosaic. The development of OOH data through Power-bi has allowed us to report on the work covered and identify peak times.

A significant part of “what matters to us” are our relationships with public protection partners working together to provide vital access and support to social issues. This can be advice, signposting or an immediate response to vulnerable adults and children at risk of harm. There are challenges in ensuring a balance between addressing urgent needs across a large rural area. This has been helped by the development of a weekend standby service in the West of the region and effective collaboration with public protection partners to respond and improve the overall wellbeing of vulnerable citizens.



Throughout the week we find ways to respond to requests across the West and other rural localities, involving our communities is key to strengthen the core values of an inclusive Council. A request for a food parcel was provided by a local shop with no charge. These informal arrangements highlight the assets in our local communities.

Staffing pressures through absences required a change in shift patterns to ensure a safe service, these pressures led to increased work to existing staff members. We are extremely fortunate to have a robust casual staff group who have assisted in the smooth running of the service and recognise the time was right to review the service as an entire system.

Children and Families

It was another busy year within our children and families service, during this period there were 3,645 contacts with 824 referrals to the service in which we continually deal with some very complex and challenging areas of work.

At this point last year, we were newly into the redesign of our service which changed us from a locality model to region wide teams. As planned, we undertook a review of the redesign in October 24, feedback from staff informed that some aspects of the redesign had worked well such as improved relationships across the region, but other aspects had not achieved the intended outcomes. We have taken onboard feedback from staff and consequently plan to retain working in region wide teams for Children with Disabilities, Youth Justice, Transitions, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Intensive Support, Kinship Team and Fostering and Adoption and resume the locality model for other areas.

In 2024/2025 the number of children referred into the Children's (MASH) increased by 21% compared to the previous year and 7% above the 5-year average. A total of 1,050 children were referred into Child MASH with 625 children discussed at Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD). A total of 353 children were subject to a Child Protection Investigation resulting in 100 Child Protection Planning Meetings for 156 children; a decrease of 9% compared to that of 2023/24.

Like ASP, timeframes to hold child protection planning meetings within 28 days of IRD were low. Social Work commenced a review of Child Protection Planning Meeting processes, with a pilot to extend the length of time to complete Child Protection Investigation (CPI)s from five days to 10 days from early 2025. This should allow for more time to work with families and development of the safety plan in preparation of a planning meeting. The impact of this change will not be realised until 2025/26. Multi-agency self-evaluation of child protection planning meetings alongside adult support and protection case conferences in June 2025 will provide further understanding on how social work and partners work with adults, children, and their families to support them to be and to feel safe. This will be the first joint self-evaluation tool developed and implemented for adult and child protection and will be undertaken on an annual basis moving forward under the Public Protection Performance, Quality, and Improvement Subcommittee (PP PQ&I SC) Self Evaluation Calendar.

As of 31st March 2025, there were 65 children on the Child Protection Register, an increase of 27% compared to last year. The most prevalent risk factors being neglect, emotional abuse, domestic abuse and children affected by parental mental ill-health.

We saw a small number of re-registrations within a two-year period of registration, consistent with the numbers seen in the previous reporting year. This was explored by Senior Social Work Managers who found that similar and new concerns brought the children back to registration.

We have progressed with plans for children subject to legal orders to support them to achieve their permanent destination. On the 31st March 25 we had 261 children subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO), with 108 new CSOs and 82 terminations of CSOs which evidences the work that is being completed by our Child Protection/Permanence teams, with a number of children having achieved permanence through adoption or permanence orders.

We have had a period of high numbers on the child protection register. This impacts the pressures faced by the service, and we recognise there is an unusually high number of children on the child protection register in a specific area of the region which has presented us with some challenges with

regards to our current staffing situations. The high numbers of child protection cases have impacted on MASH leading to some delays in timeframes for IRDs, CPIs and consequently ICPPM's. This has led to discussions regarding thresholds with partners.

A total of 52 children affected by domestic or sexual abuse were newly registered under child protection in the current year, an increase of 4% compared to the previous year, alongside an overall increase in the number of children and young people newly registered.

MASH Managers meet on a weekly basis to resolve any issues in a timely manner and to inform child protection development work. We have undertaken a number of tests of change to improve capacity, quality of work and timescales including Agreement for emergency core group as an outcome from IRD; Extended timescales for completion of CPIs and Chronologies completed for all CPIs.

We are about to trial a new multi-agency child protection report which will be completed by agencies following commission of a CPI. We are also reviewing how we undertake Child Protection Planning meetings.

Over the last year the quality of Child IRDs has been in the majority (86%) good and above, compared to 83% the previous year. Recommendations from IRD were clearly linked to the identified needs and risks in 88% of those audited, with consideration given to safety planning where concerns were identified for other children.

To date, the tripartite review of decision making at CPI found 90% of CPIs assessed the quality of decision making as good or above, compared to 94% last year.

Decision making was proportionate to the harm identified with clear direction provided on the next steps. Audit findings continue to form part of the feedback to the Child MASH staff group as well as individual staff via MASH Staff Operational Managers.

A focus of our work has been to maintain children within their families and communities. To further achieve in this area of work, we have implemented an Intensive Support team whose specific role and remit is to support children/young people to remain at home with their families, and to return children/young people in out of region placements back to Dumfries and Galloway. There are some examples of early success, including cost avoidance, with the work undertaken by this team which we plan to build on.

Throughout this period, specification for the new Intensive Support Team has now been developed and full establishment of staff in place. Through research and engaging with other local authorities who have implemented similar services, aimed at supporting children/young people on the edges of care to remain at home and to support children who are placed out of region to return home, service delivery model and criteria has been developed. This model has been cascaded to other teams across Social Work Services and the team are now working with team managers identifying priority cases and the supports/training staff will need to ensure we have the additional capacity to deliver the intensive and targeted support, maximising the impact on reducing the number of children requiring alternative care and high-cost placements.

The Youth Justice team has undertaken some successful multi-agency preventative work alongside police and youth work services in Dumfries town centre, leading to intensive work with families and group work with young people and parents, 'The Nithsdale Challenge'. It is hoped to replicate this model in other parts of Dumfries and Galloway.

The team has also been working with schools and undertaking some group work with young people who are at risk of exploitation and coming into conflict with the law. We have recommenced the Youth Justice partnership and are currently exploring the possibility of youth courts in Dumfries and Galloway.

Our Transitions team volunteered to take part in a Thematic review of the service alongside the Care Inspectorate. The feedback from young people was that they felt well supported by staff, they had good relationships with staff and were more familiar with their rights. Holm Park view was commended as a good resource to support young people in their transition to independent living. We have recently appointed a Social Worker and Senior Family Support worker to work alongside Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and recently secured accommodation where UASC are able to live independently with support, this is working really well with the young people all attending full time education.

Our Children with Disabilities team also took part in a Thematic review of the service alongside the Care Inspectorate. The feedback was positive in relation to the quality of assessments, involving children, parents/carers in assessment and planning processes and children were listened and supported to make informed choices about their lives. There was also evidence that plans were reviewed regularly. We have identified two family support workers to undertake initial self-directed support assessments, this is a test of change which has been running for three months. We will be reviewing if this is the best way to support families requesting self-directed support packages.

We have been successful in being chosen as one of two Local Authorities who will pilot the Safe and Together model alongside Multi-agency, Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC).

Implementation of Scottish Child Interview Model has progressed with the last two quarters achieving over 90% of all Joint Investigative Interviews (JII) being undertaken using this trauma informed model with a commitment to reach a target of 100%.

We are an affiliate partnership with Scottish Government for implementation of Bairns Hoose. This is an exciting opportunity, and we have now identified accommodation for our Bairns Hoose with Scottish Government funding approved for 25/26 which will be utilised to complete renovations of the accommodation to meet Bairns Hoose Standards. Funding issues and timings have created challenges to our recruitment and progression of Bairns Hoose implementation however we continue to progress this and are currently considering alongside our colleagues in youth work services how we involve children/young people with lived experience in the design of our Bairns Hoose.

Family support teams were created across Dumfries and Galloway when we undertook our redesign in January 2024. This supported creation of closer working relationships with partner agencies and local providers. The team have undertaken high levels of support with children, young people and their families to prevent crisis and reduce the number of children subject to child protection processes or legal orders.

Through additional Council investment we have introduced our dedicated kinship care team to better support kinship carers to help children remain with their family – the team has now been established with all approved kinship carers allocated a senior family support worker.

Our Senior Family Support Workers are making good progress in relation to meeting their allocated kinship families. Positive relationships are being formed, and feedback has been received with regards to the positive impact the team has had on kinship carers. Feedback from carers:

'As a family we have never had support like this before- thank you so much, it is nice to know there is support out there now'

'I have been a kinship carer for 14 years. It has not been easy some days. However, with the support and kindness of not only my worker, but the kinship care groups, I am getting all the benefits of supporting and caring for my child'.

'I love having someone at the end of the phone to talk to. It is nice to know that as carer, I am important too'.

As part of this work a Kinship Support Group has been set up in central Dumfries. This is now well underway and is growing in attendance every week. The group has highlighted the enthusiasm and passion there is to create greater awareness of what kinship means. We plan for this collaborative working to continue to strengthen our Kinship Community. The kinship team are looking to expand these support groups to various locations throughout Dumfries and Galloway, with the first kinship group in the West being introduced in January 2025.

One of our support groups in Dumfries was attended by the Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland (KCASS). Discussions were had around what KCASS do and how they can support carers in Dumfries and Galloway through their kinship journey. Our kinship team are continuing to work with KCASS to ensure that we continue to raise awareness of kinship care in the local community.

The team will continue to form positive relationships with all kinship carers in Dumfries and Galloway ensuring that they have access to all the relevant support required with a focus on building a kinship community where carers can attend well-established support groups across the region and ensure that awareness is raised across the region around what the term kinship care means as well as the service the team provide.

My service has seen considerable growth, especially in relation to the need for alternative homes for children and young people, including foster care children's houses operated by organisations out with the council and often out with the region, complex care arrangements and the requirement for an increased number of secure care placements. I have switched on a programme of work to alleviate some of the pressures, including the mitigating measures from the recently introduced Outreach Team, Kinship Care Team and currently developing a business case for the provision of a new model for Dumfries and Galloway Council's children's residential care provision on a medium to long-term basis.

The Fostering and Adoption Services continue to work with the Care Inspectorate following the inspection in 2023, and steady improvements have been recognised.

Through our commissioned services and grant payments, we continue to support our most vulnerable young people with Elected Members approving an outcome-based Children and Families Commissioning Strategy for 2024/28.

Services for Adults

Adult Care functions, except for the Mental Health Statutory Work, Out of Hours Social Work delivery and part of the Single Access Point, are delegated to the Integrated Joint Board for delivery through the Health and Social Care Partnership.

In 2024/2025 the number of referrals into the service's ASP Teams decreased by 36% compared to the previous year. Triaging processes reviewed at the end of the previous reporting year saw a return to expected ASP referrals into the ASP Team compared to the 5-year average. A total of 4,362 adult protection concerns were referred into the ASP Team which led to 892 Duty to Inquire (DTI). The most prevalent risk factors identified as part of the adult's protection plan were self-neglect, psychological and financial harm. We conducted 228 Adult Protection Investigations resulting in 44 Initial Adult Protection Case Conferences and 60 Adult Protection Case Conference Reviews.

Despite a reduction in the number of referrals received by the ASP Team, the percentage of ASP DTIs started within two working days remained low. The ASP Team continued to have staffing challenges, however the additional of two social workers in December 2024 saw an improvement in DTIs starting

from 47% within timescale at quarter end 2024/25 compared to 24% for the same period in the previous year.

Completion of DTIs within seven working days continued to be low, with those held out with timescale due to staff capacity and social work meeting with the adult at best time for the person. Senior Social Workers continued to review cases and evidence manager oversight. The ASP Team undertook an exercise in December 2024 with a focus on screening ASP Investigations out with timescale. This proved successful and supported a 47% reduction in adults with an open ASP protection plan open at year end compared to the same period last year. A repeat exercise in early 2025 extending to ASP DTIs saw a 49% reduction in open and allocated DTIs at the end of March 2025 compared to the same period last year. Monitoring activity has been built into standard screening and oversight practice.

The number of adults with a newly started adult support and protection plan increased by 14% in 2024/25 compared to last year, with a total of 227 adults with a multi-agency ASP plan. An increase in open plans aligned to staff feedback that they are seeing an increase in the complexity of cases coming into ASP. This was an area of focus nationally for ASP under Workstream Four - *Development and support for complex cases and self-evaluation*. Dumfries and Galloway were formally selected to participate in a joint self-evaluation of adult support and protection via a supported self-evaluation with emphasis on support, early intervention, prevention, and trauma informed practice. This self-evaluation was co-designed with the Care Inspectorate with findings expected by September 2025. This will provide an opportunity locally to understand how our early intervention and escalation processes through Adult MASH are working to support our most vulnerable adults at risk of harm.

In 2024/25, there were 127 inquiries conducted under adult support and protection for women affected by domestic or sexual abuse, a reduction of 2% compared to the previous year. Of the 127 inquiries, 76% required the use of investigatory powers by a council officer in social work compared to 65% in the previous year. As stated earlier, this reflects increased complexity in concerns coming into social work that require further support and protection.

The ASP Team was selected to pilot AI software called Magic Notes from October 2024, which enabled staff to record visits and phone calls, creating accurate notes and reports for review. This software aims to reduce staff time to write up visits and meetings and allow for more time to collaborate with people. Frontline managers will also use this software to support staff supervision, enabling increased engagement. Feedback has been positive with staff spending on average 6 hours per week less on paperwork. They also report improved relationships with citizens due to being more present and not having to pause conversations to take notes.

Home Teams have brought together several professions within the existing Health and Social Care Partnership workforce, such as community nursing, patient flow, reablement, public health, allied health professionals, along with social work which encourages and supports people to lead an independent and healthy life and live at home. Family, friends, carers and community services can be part of that support. We have eight Home Teams across the region and each Home Team is linked to a GP Surgery.

We have updated several social work processes to work collaboratively with colleagues in health, this is especially around how we can support people to be discharged from hospital in a timelier manner. We are involved in daily discharge huddles, working closely with patient flow colleagues together Home Team Leads.

The Learning Disability and Complex Needs Implementation Plan (2023 – 2026) has still been the focus of work for the Complex Care and Support Team in this last reporting period. Significant progress has been made on key priorities identified in the plan.

An evaluation and performance plan has also been developed in relation to the above Complex Needs Plan to measure outcomes and including how the voice of people who use services and their carers has and will shape the ongoing implementation of the plan.

Examples of other opportunities and challenges throughout the year included

- The Adult Supported Accommodation and Residential Placement Panel (ASARPP) process has been fully reviewed with amended process implemented in early 2024. This has led to better information sharing, collaboration and more timely progress of nominations to specialised supported accommodation.
- Risk Enablement Management Group (REMG) was established in the Complex Care Team in 2024 for all new packages of care or for any unusual/complex requests to be discussed and agreed with the management team.
- Due to a lack of specialist supported housing provision within Dumfries and Galloway, we have had to place some adults with complex needs out of region which can be very high cost compared to our own services. This can also lead to our adults being delayed in hospital awaiting suitable housing and support to be available.
- The Dynamic Support Register and the Coming Home Implementation Report (Scottish Government, 2021) has helped bring the strategic focus to our adults who are in Out of Area placements or delayed in hospitals and highlighted the gaps in our resources and service development needs.

Dumfries and Galloway has the second highest number of care home residents per 100k population (672). There are 31 services registered as adult care homes across the region. This comprises of 29 adult care homes (providing total of 1,602 beds) as well as 2 short break services (providing x beds). 30 of the 31 services (96%) are operated by the private sector, the 1 exception is a Local Authority 3 bedded short breaks facility for younger and older adults living with learning difficulties. The geographical landscape of D&G means that several of the adult care homes are in remote locations, with associated challenges accessing transport links or community resources, and can also affect recruitment.

Annual assurance monitoring visits are undertaken by Care Home Tactical Team and Commissioning Team, with follow up support as necessary. RAG status of each care home is determined collaboratively with the care home manager during the visit and is also reviewed as a minimum quarterly by CHTT and Commissioning Team out with this. The purpose of the RAG is to identify where support is needed the most, and to effectively target Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) resources, with a tiered approach in place.

8 care homes have received intensive support from the HSCP during the reporting period, 5 Improvement & 3 Support Plans, with increase in CI grades either achieved or imminently expected to be achieved pending CI reinspection.

Our Adults with Incapacity (AWI) applications to safeguard those adults who have been formally assessed as lacking capacity in relation to Welfare and/or Financial Guardianship, continue to increase year on year, reflecting the national trend. Dumfries and Galloway continue to be one of the three regions across Scotland which have the highest per capita rates of granted AWI Guardianship applications.

Dumfries and Galloway had undertaken 168 new guardianships application that were awarded in 2024. The number of local authority applications remained static at 42, indicative of increased success in securing the lesser restrictive outcome for adults of having a private guardian manage decision making. This is a break in the trend of year-on-year increase in numbers of local authority applications since 2018.

Dumfries and Galloway continue to be a national leader in the provision of MHO assessment for emergency detention. In 81% of emergency detention assessments an MHO was consulted compared to the national average of 36%

To ensure improved outcomes and autonomy for individuals being treated under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, Dumfries and Galloway have successfully doubled the number of individuals supported to complete an advanced statement for the mental health treatment.

In relation to Mental Health Officer core functions under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, there has been an increase in relation to detention assessments for both Emergency Detentions and Short-Term Detention Assessments since 2023. Short term detentions for the year of 2024 were 171 rising from 130 STDC assessments in 2023. A more marginal increase was noted in the number of Emergency Detentions rising from 101 in 2023 to 110 in 2024. For longer term orders, Compulsory Treatment Orders, there was a modest reduction from 65 applications in 2023 to 54 applications in 2024.

Staffing pressures has shaped service delivery in the team in the last year. To support the workload, there is currently ongoing development and tests of change being implemented across the team's duty function aiming to streamline service delivery at the point of contact with the team, through continuity of workers, clearly defined role, responsibility and function of the duty worker and clearly defined prioritisation of individuals requiring a long-term worker from the team. These changes will support to build resilience into a small team, minimising the impact of any variation in staffing level and promoting interventions that are prioritised, proportionate and safe when individuals present in need.

The team are active participants in monthly mental health collaborative meetings with CMHT services across the region, this facilitates good working relationship and multi-agency response to individuals that are presenting to single services but there is value in progressing a multi-agency response.

Our in-house Learning Disability Service for adults comprises of six Activity and Resource Centres, two Housing Support Services with Care at Home, and a Respite/Short Breaks service. Focussing on the key quality themes within the Care Inspectorate's Quality Frameworks of Wellbeing, Leadership, Staff, Setting, and Care and Support, services use self-evaluation and improvement processes to support people to develop confidence, independent living skills, meet their personal outcomes and be included as active citizens within local communities.

Our Activity and Resource Centre (ARCs) provide both building and inclusive community-based day opportunities and are located in Annan, Dumfries, Kirkconnell, Castle Douglas, Newton Stewart and Stranraer, with services supporting thirty to sixty people per day. Activities are planned around each individual, with feedback used to measure outcomes and improve and develop service delivery.

Housing Support/Care at Home services provide care and support at times to meet individual assessed needs. Our Dunmuir Park is a purpose-built development in Castle Douglas of accessible, two-bedroomed homes. Supporting ten adults and with a communal area and staff base, assistive technology is in place to support more complex care and support needs.

The Dunmuir Park development includes two adjoining bungalows known as "The Rowans", registered to provide respite services/short breaks for up to three people in addition to a staff base. Whilst most respite/short breaks placements are pre-planned, this service has also demonstrated its flexibility throughout the reporting period to respond to short notice placements at times of crisis.

The Castle Douglas Community Support Service offers community-based support to people primarily within the Stewartry area in their own homes and delivers a mix of long-term planned support and short-term support to help prevent and respond to crisis situations.

To mark Scottish Learning Disability Week, a user-led **Learning Disability Conference** was held in Dumfries to showcase how Digital Inclusion is promoted and supported within services, attended by over ninety people, an exceptional range of examples was demonstrated of how lives are being enhanced and skills developed in the use of digital technology. Examples included use of digital inclusion to promote personal independence and safety, both at home and in the community; and develop skills and abilities, for example in the creative production of music or short film to overcome physical challenges and to offer opportunities for self-expression.

CASE STUDIES

A has poor mental health, lives alone and can become extremely anxious around people coming to her door. The service worked in partnership with Community Police to advise and reassure and a ring doorbell was fitted. A was able to tell her support team that she now feels 'much safer and not so worried when answering the door'.

B was anxious about her finances and being targeted by 'scam' telephone calls. The service and staff from the local bank worked together to provide guidance and advice and put measures in place to help B safely manage her finances.

C elects not to speak; this can make ordinary daily activities very difficult for him. C was supported to learn to use his iPad to order his fish supper from the local chip shop on a Friday night. While C cannot verbally tell his team what difference this has made to him, he was extremely proud to demonstrate to conference participants how he can use technology to order his fish supper independently – and never misses an order!

D has learned how to use her mobile phone to let support staff know when she will be arriving at the ARC. This enables D to make her way to the ARC independently and for staff to look out for her.

Quality Focus sessions were introduced within the Service from January 2025, bringing together representative staff and managers from all services to focus on areas for improvement following external inspections. These face-to face sessions are providing an opportunity for staff at all levels and in all services to come together, assess improvements, share ideas and good practice, develop and test and review improvements.

In February, Kirkconnell ARC celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with an event for ARC members, families, staff and stakeholders in the Miners' Hall, Kirkconnell. ARC members co-led the event, introducing guest speakers and helping with the event. Long service awards for fifty years were presented to four people, with many tributes and compliments to the service recorded by families and guests, followed by an afternoon of music. This was a truly wonderful and memorable event, enjoyed by all who took part.

Our Dumfries and Galloway Council Sensory Support Team provides essential services for individuals who are deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, deafblind, or have a visual impairment.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is fortunate to have such a comprehensive support system in place, making a meaningful difference in the lives of those who are deaf, deafblind or visually impaired.

Referrals to the team continue to rise, reflecting demographic shifts in our region, particularly our ageing population. We actively promote the sensory support team through advice and guidance

sessions at various local events, including retirement clubs, education roadshows, library gatherings, day centres, and meetings with third sector and community groups.

Our expertise is frequently sought both within the Council and externally, as colleagues and partners regularly reach out for advice on accessibility and equality. By fostering engagement across the council and in the wider community, we ensure that individuals and organisations receive the support they need to promote inclusivity.

In 2024, staff developed guidance for the wider workforce on working with BSL interpreters and translators, with a strong emphasis on equality and accessibility. As part of this initiative, we created an informational leaflet, which was distributed to every council employee via email.

Following this, we received an increased number of referrals from individuals facing challenges in the workplace due to deafness, highlighting the continued need for accessible communication and support.

Partnership working and collaboration are at the heart of the sensory support team's approach, ensuring we can effectively support the community we serve. We have established strong connections with NHS Audiology and NHS Eye Care services, as well as key partnerships at the local hospital and Visibility Scotland. Additionally, we collaborate with a range of local organisations, including the Hard of Hearing Group, Solway Sound, and Galloway Talking Newspapers, to enhance service accessibility and engagement.

Working closely with Visibility Scotland, we developed and co-funded the Out and About project using See Hear funds. This initiative was specifically designed to reach and support individuals in rural and hard-to-access areas. By combining our expertise and resources, we successfully piloted the project in the west of the region, where it was met with great success. As a result, the project has now expanded to cover the entire region, demonstrating the effectiveness of collaborative working in addressing gaps in service provision.

The Out and About project stands as a testament to the power of partnership, bringing together organisations and lived experiences to create meaningful and lasting impact. The following testimonials further highlight the success of this:

"I was delighted that someone not only took my condition seriously but also took a holistic approach to other conditions such as my deafness. We have become used to waiting, sometimes for ages, to get any action on requests for help but the response from Visibility Scotland was within a couple of days. I was also delighted that Visibility Scotland work with Dumfries and Galloway Council Sensory Support Team, thus avoiding duplication of effort. The inputs I have had so far have made life easier, given me more confidence and it is good to know that there are people out there who will help when I need it. Thank you again."

"Thank you so much for your kindness and support, I really appreciate the time you took to listen to our story. I am also grateful that you have the networks and knowledge to signpost us appropriately, as we were unaware of the support and services available, when we received E's diagnosis. This has helped with our feelings of isolation and anxiety around the whole situation. We are feeling more positive about our situation now !"

Sensory loss is often referred to as a hidden loss because practitioners may prioritise other health issues, such as dementia or learning disabilities, during assessments. As a result, the impact of sensory impairment can go unnoticed, leading to gaps in support and care. This ongoing challenge is something the Sensory Support Team actively addresses, working to raise awareness among colleagues. By highlighting the importance of recognising sensory loss, advocating for more comprehensive assessments that consider all aspects of an individual's well-being.

Keeping up with advancements in technology remains a constant challenge, as there is an ever-expanding range of assistive devices available for deaf, deafblind, and visually impaired individuals. We believe that ongoing training in this area is essential, yet it continues to be an unmet need given service pressures.

Additionally, as assistive technology continues to evolve, the cost of equipment steadily increases. However, annual budget for equipment of £20,000 has remained unchanged for several years, creating significant financial constraints. This disparity makes it increasingly difficult to ensure individuals have access to the most effective and up-to-date tools to support their independence and inclusion.



The sensory support team provides invaluable specialist support, ensuring equipment provision, accessibility and inclusion for those who need it most. In a typical week, our team undertake home/school visits, assesses, and supports individuals across the region and keen to highlight the need for greater integration within governance frameworks to ensure sensory support remains a priority within local services.

As of 1 April 2024, the Council's responsibility for the delivery of Resettlement and Housing Options and Homelessness Service became part of my Directorate under the new Chief Officer structure.

Housing Options and Homelessness Service staff have now co-located to Social Work offices, with key focuses on homeless applications, temporary accommodation, homelessness prevention and housing support, working in collaboration with the wider social work teams.

A review of the resettlement activity across the region has been ongoing during this period which sets out the needs and resources required to meet these. The conclusion of this review enabled the resettlement staff to join the Directorate, we will continue to monitor the local need and resource required to meet this appropriately. Dumfries and Galloway are currently supporting a number of individuals and families through: the Afghan Assistance and Relocation Policy (AARP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme (VPRS), Homes for Ukraine and Super Sponsor Schemes, and the Home Office Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme and the use of Contingency Hotels. The UK and Scottish Governments play a key role in the global response to humanitarian crisis and Dumfries and Galloway are committed to ensuring that all of those that are displaced, are welcomed into our region.

Justice Social Work

The pressures and demands on Justice Social Work have continued consistently throughout 2024-2025. Demands on our services continue to rise, reflecting the pressure faced by prison numbers at capacity and over, and the national agenda to shift from custody to community; the constant legislative changes which require national and local implementation considerations and actions, and the continued challenges across the justice system to deal with the delays in processing justice dating

back to the Covid19 pandemic. As with other areas of social work, we face ongoing recruitment challenges, and ongoing pressure on resources required to address demand.

Despite this context, Justice Social Work staff have continued to work tirelessly to continue to offer a high standard of service throughout Dumfries and Galloway. Examples are given below which reflect this across the functional areas of the service.

Justice Social Work are now fine tuning our performance framework and have begun the detailed work around the projects and development work needed to meet the Strategic outcomes identified in our Justice Social Work Strategic Plan 2024-2028. The introduction of two new Team Manager positions for the service has certainly been very welcomed. The new positions will contribute enormously to creating the capacity the service needed to support service development and implement a raft of new Scottish Government guidance and services proposed for the summer of 2025.

Justice Social Work continues to manage the effects of Scottish Government aim to have less people in prison. This in turn has created an increased workload, particularly for our Community Supervision Teams and Unpaid Work Team. To mitigate those effects, we have worked hard to analyse workloads, practice and resources in order to meet demand in an efficient and effective manner.

The Prison Based Social Work (PBSW) Team based within HMP Dumfries, has experienced a significant increase in workload linked to the prison population and the complex needs of prisoners. Although this presents its challenges, an excellent HMIPS inspection report from January 2025 evidences the dedication, care and compassion shown by Social Work staff to support those in custody. However, overcrowding remains a significant issue and requires ongoing planning and forecasting to maintain the high standards recorded, whilst also prioritising the transitions of those being released back into the community. To this end the implementation of the Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill 2024) has changed the point at which some short-term prisoners are released from prison to 40% of their sentence.

On this basis PBSW continue to work with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) and partner agencies under the local Multi Agency Community Integration Board, developing the means to creating positive pathways for prisoners' reintegration and resettlement back into their communities, whilst also implementing risk management strategies under public protection arrangements. One example of this practice evidences the ongoing work undertaken by SPS, Social Work, Police Scotland, Health and Housing to co-ordinate a multi-agency response to the support of prisoner releases immediately from HMP Dumfries. Although longer term analysis of the practice needs to be undertaken to determine the impact of re-offending rates and compliance/engagement with statutory provisions in place, the co-ordinated approach allows for some prisoners' to be accommodated immediately on release, register with GP Practice, offered the support of addiction/mental health services and in some case immediately meet public protection arrangements through the requirement for Sex Offenders to register an address with the local Sex Offender Policing Unit. Although these practices are well established, the increase pressure placed on services means a co-ordinated approach is critical to service delivery.

Service user feedback - Below from a very happy justice service user (on parole licence) who has massively appreciated help from point of release

CC is looking very well. Her home is lovely, and she has been doing this up since release last year with housing first help 7 support. No drug use reported since release and engagement with all services has been exemplary. CC advises that she is incredibly proud of herself for leaving illicit drugs behind. She was emotional and stated she is proud she has given housing and social work a chance on her release as their support and input has been life changing. CC expressed her gratitude especially for housing first and stated that it has been incredible, and she could not of done this without people giving her this chance. I don't think we realise our impact on people. CC has external stresses with her family and her children, she feels that she has caused a lot of this with her choice of lifestyle. Expressed to CC that this is insightful but she cannot beat herself up about this forever. She is here now and rebuilding not only her life but also attempting to make things up to her two daughters, three grandchildren and now has a supportive partner. CC has another reporting session before the end of her licence but this ends in April. She became very emotional and stated that she cannot express how much that our working relationship has helped her. She reported that she hated social work and services, but this has helped her heal and treat the service at face value. CC remains abstinent from illicit drug use. She will continue to work with Lochfield and housing first.

Within our Community Supervision Teams, we have developed a model of practice using service users in our recruitment. This has proved to be successful and a policy and procedure around this is in process.

One focus of quality assurance has been the introduction of the Case File Audit Tool. This is currently being undertaken by the members of the management team on a quarterly basis. The purpose of this is to be reassured that case management work is of the necessary standard alongside the identification of themes and patterns which will allow us to develop practice.

Justice Social Work are enjoying improving relationships with Court, particularly in the East of the region with regular meetings being established with both Court Administration and Sheriffs. This allows us to have a forum to focus on information sharing and key practice areas.

Regular assessment meetings are now established in the East of the region. This gives a forum for discussion regarding assessment and recommendations to Court. There is a quality assurance function to this, ensuring shared thresholds and understanding. Unpaid Work are now in regular attendance which has proven to be a helpful development towards our One Service Approach. We are looking to roll out this model of practice in the West Community Team in the coming year.

There are some barriers identified with accessing assessment/intervention for DTTO/ATR. The drug and alcohol project continues to focus on this as an area for improvement and the Locality Manager is part of the National Working Group.

The Early Interventions Team has continued to deliver in the areas of Bail Supervision, Structured Deferred Sentences (SDS) and Diversion from Prosecution. In correlation with national legislative changes, namely the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023, there is increased demand in community-based alternatives to custody. Bail Supervision has continued to prove effective, with the Early Interventions Team in Dumfries and Galloway ahead in terms of practice development.

Locally, we have already developed a local Bail screening practice and proforma to progress assessments for the Court at the earliest opportunity. This approach is now being piloted nationally with a triage proforma. Additionally, in Dumfries and Galloway, we have introduced an Additional Information proforma to Court, with concise and up to date information enabling an informed decision which considers risk balanced with the needs of the individual in custody.

Fundamental to establishing these processes, has been the positive relationship with the Court and Sheriffs which has been significant in building trust and facilitating good communication, ultimately leading to effective and responsive risk management beyond Bail Supervision. Justice Social Work has had feedback from Sheriffs who state they feel the service provided by the Early Interventions Team and Justice Social Work is “a gift” and they find the quality and level of communication and information provided, hugely beneficial.

Early Intervention Case Study

Pam (not her real name) was made subject to two separate Community Payback Orders (CPO) with a combined 80 hours of Unpaid Work. She quickly completed her hours of unpaid work.

Pam experienced trauma in her childhood and as an adult was diagnosed with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder, using substances cope. This affected her ability to developing trusting relationships with others including unhealthy relationships with others and involvement in offending behaviour. Pam’s engagement with other support services to date had been limited and inconsistent.

Working with Pam required her JSW worker to take a direct, transparent, open, honest and consistent approach. In turn asking her to be open and honest as well, modelling and examples of how she can achieve this. The consequences of not engaging were clearly explained and reinforced regularly in a matter-of-fact way. This allowed me to challenge and address issues when Pam didn’t keep to agreements or supervision appointments.

Together they developed a case management plan that included the appropriate agencies to support and address her needs. Additional support was needed to help her attend and engage with specialist drug and alcohol services adopting the same approach. The plan involved regular communication between Pam, her JSW worker and the other services to keep on track. This approach also helped Pam to feel safe and confident and direct her own treatment goals.

Pam's poem, below, provides a first-hand account of her journey and the impact that involvement with Justice Social work has helped her engage with support agencies and achieve her goals to build a better life for her which includes motherhood and caring for her child. We are grateful to her for agreeing to share her poem.

*My life was propelled on a journey out with my control
Things happened in my childhood that no child should have to go through at all
That lead me down path of drugs and jail
Something happened that led me to being arrested and put on supervision bail
I was resistant to sticking to my order
That led to me breaching it and given another
I couldn't come to terms with what I had to stick to
As I was going through an episode and wanted to be left alone was all I wanted to do
After months of fighting against my order I finally gave in
And as time went on and accepting help, I started to feel like Pam
I was given the most caring but firm social worker
I usually find it difficult to build relationships with new people, but it was easy with her
Over this year of my order, there have been many ups and downs
The thought of it coming to an end starts to make me frown
Over this year I've been able to get drug free
After a few months I found out I was having a baby
I couldn't have gotten stable without the help from everyone
I've appreciated everything everyone has done
Opening up and being willing to do my order was the best decision I made
Things started to turn around when started to behave
I've come so far in such a short period of time
That in just a few months I will leave this life behind
This order has benefitted me in so many ways
That I wake up in the mornings and look forward to my days
My life is so much more positive and I can see myself having a future
I'm thankful for all the help and respect I was given, that now I can't wait till February to meet my daughter.*

Unpaid Work is as a requirement of a Community Payback Order continues to be a very popular Court disposal in Dumfries and Galloway. At the end of March 2025 there were 285 individuals subject to a CPO with an UPW requirement; in total they had 54,455 hours of unpaid work imposed by the Court. In response, staff across the service have worked hard to help individuals fulfil the requirements of their unpaid work orders. Operating over a 7-day week, careful planning is required to promote compliance and equal opportunities for individuals to attend. In addition, to ensure a variety of meaningful unpaid work projects are available, much focus has been given to our relationships with local partners. The benefits of these efforts are evident in the positive feedback received from education services following various offers of assistance to local schools. These include the making and restoration of playground equipment, with headteachers commenting on a 'team of stars' and 'the pupils being thrilled' with the work undertaken. Similar feedback was received from local community groups, with notable projects at Clark's Little Ark, Riding for the Disabled, Lockerbie in Bloom Community Gardens, and Incredible Edible Stranraer. Encouragingly, feedback from those attending unpaid work also reflects the efforts of the team to provide a range of opportunities and projects. One individual commented that 'doing woodwork has helped my skills get better to use at home' and 'working with others has helped me bounce ideas rather than try to do everything myself'. An analysis of exit interviews also showed that 96% of those attending unpaid work felt that staff treated them with dignity and respect.

The use of personal placements has continued to develop, again with notable benefits for local partners and individuals attending. At one placement with YMCA, the individual completing unpaid work has been involved in food preparation and administrative jobs. Despite significant anxiety (with no previous offences), this particular individual commented on the inclusive nature of the placement and how it helped regain some confidence within society.

In terms of facilities, the hard work and planning at our Annan base (over the past 2-3 years) has come to fruition - with a poly tunnel full of plants and produce that will soon be shared with local groups within the community. In reaching this stage, many individuals have developed a new awareness and appreciation for the world of horticulture. Building works have also been started at our Dumfries base, with the installation of a new 'training' kitchen and 'other activities' room. While other activities can only account for a small percentage of unpaid work hours, we are keen to expand the opportunities for individuals to develop essential life skills as a feature of their unpaid work requirement.

Below is an additional small range of projects undertaken this year with examples of feedback from the beneficiaries.

At **Sorbie Parish Church**, assistance has been given with ongoing grass cutting and various ground maintenance tasks. Unpaid Work squads have also assisted clearing up following storm damage, including fallen trees. This timber was then used to supply firewood to older people across the community.



Unpaid Work have a number of projects with schools across the region, typically building and restoring play equipment



A bus condemned by local school was restored in the workshop (much to the joy of the school kids)

Unpaid work was undertaken to assist **Incredible Edibles Stranraer**. We are grateful for the feedback received.

*"It's lovely to eventually have the bus stop beds planted up again!
Big thanks to the Community Payback team who uplifted the old ones (preserving the plants in them), built the new ones and put them in place. We couldn't have done it without them!
They are both filled with various herbs – thyme, chives, marjoram, rosemary, oregano, parsley and green onions along with some wee alpine strawberries as ground cover.
The beds took a lot to fill – bags of horse dung, wood chips and compost.*



The Justice Social Work in Dumfries and Galloway continue to deliver the Caledonian Service across the region. This is an integrated programme comprising of a behaviour change groupwork programme for men convicted of domestic abuse offences, a Women's service which offers support to the (ex)partners of the men, and a Children's Service which ensure the experiences of their children is not forgotten.

Caledonian Women's Service Case Study

Jane (not her real name) had reported her ex-partner for domestic abuse which led to a trial at High Court where ultimately, he was convicted of lesser offences, leaving Jane feeling let down by the justice system.

Prior to her ex-partner being sentenced, the Caledonian Women's service worker met with Jane, and they talked through sentencing options, including the Caledonian Programme, and the support that would be available to Jane through this. They discussed the (pre-sentence) Court report process and the worker contacted the High Court and put Jane's views forward in terms of a NHO (non-harassment order) and requested consideration be given that he could not contact nor approach her, explaining that Dumfries is a small town. She also requested that her address was not specifically part of the NHO in order to respect her privacy and on-going safety.

Support was given on the day of Court as Jane was struggling emotionally; this ensured Jane was supported when the High Court advised Jane of sentence.

When Jane met again with the Caledonian Women's Worker a few days later Jane spoke about "feeling heard" by the support of the Caledonian System. Despite having given a victim statement that we know was read in Court, she felt that the Caledonian process carried her voice even further and that the sentence given was the best possible outcome for a community disposal.

Caledonian Support continued throughout the duration of her ex-partners CPO with a requirement to complete the Caledonian Men's Programme and Jane has progressed very well in terms of her safety planning that has been put in place, and she feels that she can start to begin to live freely again.

In recognition of The Caledonian System reflecting the best practice standards for addressing men's domestically abusive behaviours, representatives from JSW's Programme Delivery Team were invited in October 2024 to share their knowledge and experience at an international domestic abuse conference hosted by École Nationale D'Administration Pénitentiaire (ÉNAP) in Agen, France. It was a generous and enjoyable opportunity and highlighted the high quality of work being undertaken by all Justice Social Work staff involved in the Caledonian System across Scotland.

Community Justice Partnership

Justice Social Work have continued to be an integral partner within the local Community Justice Partnership over the reporting period; indeed, it is recognised that all of the work we do as a service can be mapped across to community justice aims and objectives both nationally and locally. Mapping of the JSW Strategic Plan and CJOIP has taken place to ensure alignment and avoid duplication. This also helps clearly evidence the part that JSW plays within our local partnership in achieving local/national community justice outcomes.

A new Community Justice Multi Agency Safeguarding from Custody Policy and Procedure document has been developed and agreed by the partners involved in the pilot in 2023/24. Following testing changes were made to make the process more robust. This process has been identified as best practice with partners stating it has provided clarity, saving time for both services and people following release from custody.

JSW continued to provide funding for two Peer Mentor positions for people with experience of justice in both East and West of the region. This underpins many of the local community justice outcomes and contributes to the Public Protection strategic priority of Lived and Living Experience.

Public Protection

The Public Protection Strategic Plan 2024-2027 was published in April 2024 along with and aligned to an approved Performance and Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF). The Performance Framework merged with our existing Quality Assurance Framework and complimented one another in supporting

our cycle of improvement, providing an effective way to measure both our performance and quality assurance together. The framework, being the first of its kind in Scotland, is a strategic tool used to monitor and report progress regarding the delivery of the strategic plan.

The care Inspectorate, Scottish Government and National Public Protection Leadership Group (NPPLG) are already taking a strong interest in this approach.

The NPPLG have recognised, moving into this year, the initiative-taking approach taken by Dumfries and Galloway for performance and assurance and recorded much of the activity in their workplan as best practice for Scotland.

Performance Indicators outlined in the PQAF formed the core data included in the review of performance and are monitored with exception reporting available monthly to Chief Officers Group (COG), and on a quarterly basis for PPC to consider as appropriate.

The first Public Protection Annual Performance report was produced for 2023/24 with an overview of performance activity which specifically crossed over the three themes across public protection. The report drew on the analysis within quarterly minimum dataset reports and quality assurance underlined by emerging themes, risks and challenges and the actions taken forward to address these by PPC. This report provided PPC with a holistic view and analysis of activity.

The Public Protection Performance Quality & Improvement subcommittee Self Evaluation Calendar has biennial quality assurance of child and adult protection, however there was no dedicated self-evaluation under the Violence Against Women and Girl's (VAWG) agenda. It was agreed by PPC in February 2025 to update PQAF from 2025/26 to include regular self-evaluation activity with a specific focus on VAWG. A move from a two-yearly cycle of self-evaluation activity for each of the public protection areas to a three yearly cycle would allow for self-evaluation of VAWG to be added to the self-evaluation calendar alongside CP and ASP. This would also provide more time to embed and review improvement planning actions. Planning for a VAWG self-evaluation will take place in early 2025/26 with audit activity later in the year.

A multi-agency child protection self-evaluation has been completed this year which identified key strengths:

- The quality of our initial response to concerns has remained high, with a slight increase in those graded as very good.
- The quality of our assessments of risk remains at a high standard in the majority, we still have some work to ensure that this is consistent.
- The quality of chronologies, both single-agency and multi-agency has improved, although we know there is work being taken forward by the Strategic Priority Group it is encouraging to see a shift towards a positive position.
- The quality of individual's plans to address risk also indicates some improvement, however again there is work required to ensure a high standard is met for all.
- The quality of involving/listening, hearing and including children shows mixed results in 2024 activity, however again there were some very good examples of this.

The Multi-Agency Child Protection Self-Evaluation Group continue to meet to identify and progress improvement areas.

As indicated in the previous reporting period 2023-2024 the ASP multi agency self-evaluation commenced autumn 2023. The results and themes of this piece of work were reported to PPC in June 2024 and COG in August 2024. Findings were largely reassuring and evidenced continued effective ASP arrangements in Dumfries and Galloway. Areas of strengths remain in our screening and triaging processes. The self-evaluation recognised the need for ongoing improvements in some areas

along national themes, for example the development of multi-agency chronologies. This has informed our Strategic Plan and the narrowing down to our four priorities for 2024-2027.

Only one indicator graded as Adequate, in relation to *'carrying out competent, prompt, multi-agency, in-depth investigations into adult protection concerns that correctly identify the way forward. These are timeously and fully recorded'*. While we were assured that quality of these Investigations was good and above, we could not give this an overall grade of Good/Very Good due to the issues identified in terms of meeting timescales. We know that the Adult Social Work restructure had impacted on timescales and that this reflects the pressures on our ASP Team at the time.

The development of the Public Protection three-year strategic plan, data dashboard, Performance and Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) and the self-evaluation calendar, supports us to take stock of challenges and focus resource where it is most required. As such, in November 2024, a multi-agency self-evaluation took place across child protection; pre-birth, to establish the impact of referral processes which have recently been aligned in accordance with all other referrals received by the Single Access Point (SAP); and domestic abuse, to measure improvement and identify areas for development.

The self-evaluation of our domestic abuse practice focussed on the use of the Safe and Together model. The model was introduced to develop competency and confidence when working with families affected by domestic abuse. The model reflects a trauma informed, relationship-based approach and aims to ensure that the experience of children affected by domestic abuse and coercive control is captured and that all work with perpetrators is focussed on their pattern of behaviour and holds them to account regarding their parenting choices which are impacting on their children. Partnering with the victim of domestic abuse is crucial in recognising the efforts they have made to keep their children safe. It is these elements that were concentrated upon to ascertain how well we are supporting children and families and ultimately achieving better outcomes for those who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Social Work staff continue to be fully involved in the development of the national minimum dataset for Adult Support and Protection as our region is one of five learning partners. IRISS rolled out phase two of the national Adult Support and Protection Minimum Dataset to all 32 local authorities from April 2024.

Social Work data has already supported local and national development with Dumfries and Galloway continuing to be a vital partner in the continued development of the national minimum dataset in 2025.

IRISS shared the first annual report of the National Adult Support and Protection Minimum Dataset for 2023/24 and a further midyear report in 2024/25 for management information purposes only. Despite reports being unpublished, areas were encouraged to use the data to inform local scrutiny, with the first full year's data for Dumfries and Galloway reported to PPC against our comparator authorities. Appetite to understand the context of this data by ourselves and other areas has begun with an initial meeting held with Lead Officers for ASP in March 2025. Work is ongoing to explore how we use the data and understand what this tells us in a wider context and share learning.

Dumfries and Galloway continue to report and present the child protection minimum dataset to PQI and PPC, as part of a well-established scrutiny process. Initial benchmarking of Vulnerable Children and Families Monitoring data has supported scrutiny of trend data and local understanding of children registered under child protection in Dumfries and Galloway compared to other areas across Scotland.

We were proactive in seeking formal agreement this year for PPC/CPC areas lead by Dumfries and Galloway to facilitate and share child protection data with comparator authorities to enhance benchmarking and our understanding of activity against wider minimum dataset indicators.

Requests have been made for guidance and support has been given to the National Public Protection Leadership Group (NPPLG) to assist in the implementation of a National Public Protection Dataset,

under Workstream Five of their national workplan. Such approaches from other areas demonstrates that Dumfries and Galloway are at the forefront of developing and informing national thinking.

Funding for Safe and Together was extended into 2024/25. This allowed there to be additional training for staff from Social Work and other agencies. The aim of the training is to support staff to be more domestic abuse informed and work with victims of domestic abuse in a supportive way, recognising the work that they do to keep their children safe.

Work has commenced under the Public Protection Partnership's Self Neglect Priority Steering Group with the review of the Self Neglect and Hoarding Protocol. A Self Neglect Toolkit has been developed and has been tested, with workshops with Home Team Leads and Managers in January 2025. This toolkit will be incorporated into the Self Neglect and Hoarding Protocol with research and evidenced based information advising staff at all levels as how to recognise and respond to self-neglect. This work is in its first year, led by Chief Officers, and underpinned by the Public Protection Strategic Plan 2024-27.

Financial harm continues to be a challenge across Scotland and an area of focus for the National Adult Support and Protection Day in early 2025. Work continues locally to embed the financial harm strategy and work with colleagues nationally to influence improvement activity.

As part of our Public Protection Partnership – Public Protection week, I was fortunate to attend our Chief Officer's Group Conference - Working Together; Shaping the future of Public Protection

The conference focused on the work happening to shape the future of Public Protection locally, and how we work together across the different agencies involved.

Public Protection Training Calendar - Over the last 12 months Social Work staff and multi-agency colleagues have benefited from the public protection partnership being able to deliver a varied multi-agency training calendar having a good balance of in person and online training. Since April 2024 we have managed to have a full training calendar which includes Trafficking; Neglect (Child Protection); Introduction to Infant Mental Health; Self-Neglect; two Day ASP Multiagency; One Day Transforming Connections Trauma Training; Getting Our Priorities Right (GOPR); Missing Person Awareness (Missing Adults); Missing Person Awareness (Missing Children); Safe and Together Overview; Safe and Together, four Day Core Training; Injuries to Non-Mobile Children (In Person).

The training offered continues to be reviewed to identify any possible areas for improvement. Multi-Agency training does receive positive feedback. For example, the most recent Self-Neglect training (self-neglect being one of the key strategic priorities of the Public Protection Partnership) had the following positive feedback.

"Overall, a very good day of input and I enjoyed all elements"

"Good mixture of presentations and discussion/ ability to ask questions etc"

"Good to see a range of people from different organisations present, nice opportunity to network"

The multi-Agency Calendar also includes training opportunities not directly co-ordinated by the Public Protection Partnership to help the wider partnership promote its training; due to the reach the calendar has. For example, we have included Lunch and Learn: Introduction to Psychological Trauma co-ordinated by the NHS. We have also seen the review and launch of the Public Protection Learning and Development Strategy and Training Charter.

5.Resources

Service budget for financial year 2024/25 was £151m this includes additional corporate assistance funding and multiple in-year funding streams.

Year on year I recognise the current and forthcoming period as enormously challenging due to the extent of public sector pressures and demands across all service areas, again with no recognition on budget uplifts from Government. This necessitates essential services to be stretched further, while maintaining service quality, standards and coping with increasing levels of complexity and need.

6.Workforce

Across services there have been many challenges due to the environmental and social pressures we have all faced with ongoing demand on social work services amidst a backdrop of staffing and resource shortages. Despite this, we have continued to work creatively using a relationship and strengths-based practice approach to support families to become more resilient and enabled to move forward with strengthened support networks.

The activities within my workforce plan fall within the following themes:

- Providing a Positive Experience
- Developing Our People
- Engaging Our People
- Supporting Our People
- Recognising Good Performance
- Creating a Positive One Team Culture

A refresh is currently being undertaken on our plan and work activity is reported to our Social Work Governance Group. Our achievements throughout this period include:

- The provision of dedicated wellbeing days for staff working in Adult Support and Protection
- The delivery of dedicated team development workshops within Children and Families where games and wellbeing focussed sessions are held in addition to focussed sessions celebrating good practice
- The continuation of signs of safety and safer together training to promote a relationship and strengths-based practice model of practice across the region
- The implementation of an improved induction framework for children and families social work services including a standardised training programme and workshops for new starts
- The delivery of trauma informed training to staff utilising the skills of our Council's Trauma Information Practice Lead Officer
- A range of flexible working arrangements have been introduced across Services to promote an improved work life balance
- The piloting of Magic Notes to reduce work pressure for front line workers with the roll out taking place across all social work services during 2025/2026
- The implementation and continued development of NQSW supported first year of practice
- The successful matching of 10 social work trainees into social worker posts in Dumfries and Galloway

We continue to work closely with the SSSC and partner agencies to embrace the ethos of shared responsibility of building a sustainable and resilient workforce. Dumfries and Galloway are working in close collaboration with UWS to develop a new career pathway into Social Work through the

Graduate Apprenticeship Scheme in Social Work. This will enhance the current social work traineeship programme currently being delivered. Following an information session held to promote the social work traineeship, which was attended by over 40 staff across DGC, further work will be progressed to consider how we can support staff to gain the entry qualifications onto Stage Two of the degree programme.

Attendance at national workshops is providing valuable insight into work being progressed by other Local Authorities to attract and retain staff into the social work profession. Some of these ideas will be included in our refreshed workforce plan.

Over the last year, we have been implementing the new approach to employer support for NQSWs which is mandated by the SSSC and reflected in the Codes of Practice for Employers. We have a programme of supports for NQSWs that contribute to this, including structured Support and Development sessions for NQSWs to help them navigate their mandatory learning as part of their CPL. We have worked closely with the SSSC and other Local Authorities to understand the new requirements for NQSWs and how best we can support our NQSWs locally.

We have a system in place for recruiting peer mentors for NQSWs, as this forms a key part of the supported NQSWs year. The SSSC have also stipulated that all NQSWs must have a protected caseload and should take up to half day a week of protected learning time, which is negotiated with their line manager. We continue to monitor the effectiveness of this and strive to understand the experience of each NQSW so that we can think about how we overcome any challenges that the NQSW might experience in their first year of practice.

Practice education is a crucial part of our student's journey and often becomes the foundation of their approach when they move into practice. I do not underestimate the importance of the delivery of practice teaching to our students on placement. This has become a more challenging picture nationally due to workloads and pressures within teams impacting on the availability of trained practice teachers combined with the challenges of balancing this with the new requirements of the supported first year of practice for newly qualified staff. We are progressing our PDapl inhouse to mitigate some of these challenges.

Further work is planned to review and develop induction programmes and to implement an improved learning and development framework together with working in partnership with HEI's.

Staff wellbeing is of paramount importance within my service. To support staff, we have introduced our health and wellbeing steering group, made up of representatives from across all service areas. Some examples of activities / approaches we have introduced to support staff morale, resilience and wellbeing - wellbeing afternoons, introduction of an eight-week mindfulness course, focused trauma informed training to build and enhance practitioners' skills and confidence, blend of work life balance working hours introduced.

The introduction of service-wide Quality Focus sessions and monthly online team meetings for staff are providing opportunities for staff to work together, support each other and feel heard, with their views incorporated into service developments: from feedback, this appears to be having a positive impact on staff wellbeing, support and job satisfaction.

7.Looking Forward 2025/26

Looking forward to 2025/26, it is certain the increase in demand for services will put significant pressures on financial and other resources. Adult social care is the biggest challenge due to demographic changes and increases in complexity of care required. The HSCP and IJB are leading work to address these issues and regular reporting to Social Work Services Committee is planned for

the year ahead. In Children's social work, placements for children in foster care and residential care is likely to continue to be challenging. Staffing challenges are likely to remain and we are likely to see an increase in unmet needs. This will continue to impact budget, pressure on staff and our abilities to work with individuals and families. The range of developments detailed above will contribute to a solution, however continued mitigating measures / risk management for example on our residential placements including our current work around delivering a new model for children's houses and our approach to workforce capacity building, will support the scale of the challenge.

Looking ahead, we will focus on improving service user experience through smarter integration with our partners, expanding the range of digital peripherals available, actively promote and grow the Telecare service, increasing awareness among health and social care professionals and the public, and extending support to a broader range of individuals.

Although resource and capacity challenges determine how quickly improvements can be implemented, by empowering staff at all levels to be involved, promoting and supporting leadership and by making best use of technology, improvements are happening at a steady pace.

This report demonstrates the significant work being delivered by social work and social care professionals to ensure the most vulnerable residents of Dumfries and Galloway experience services that respect their rights and wishes, empowers and values them as individuals, as members of a wider family and community and believes in and promotes social justice. This report does not capture the significant contribution social work makes to wider partnership arrangements but acknowledges the importance of social work in the wider context and the support CSWO receives from a range of people to effectively discharge his duties.

Glossary

AARP	Afghan Assistance and Relocation Policy
ACRS	Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
ADP	Alcohol and Drug Partnership
ARC	Activity and Resource Centre
ASARPP	Adult Supported Accommodation and Residential Placement Panel
ASP	Adult Support and Protection
ATR	Alcohol Treatment Requirement
AWI	Adults with Incapacity
BSL	British Sign Language
CCHST	Collaborative Care Home Support Team
CHTT	Care Home Tactical Team
CI	Care Inspectorate
CJOIP	Community Justice Outcome Improvement Plan
CJP	Community Justice Partnership
COG-PP	Chief Officers Group – Public Protection
CMHT	Community Mental Health Team
CP	Child Protection
CPI	Child Protection Investigations
CPL	Continued Professional Learning
CPO	Community Payback Order
CSO	Compulsory Supervision Order
CSWO	Chief Social Work Officer
DTI	Duty to Inquire
DTTO	Drug treatment and testing order
GIRFEC	Getting it Right for Every Child
H&SCP	Health and Social Care Partnership
HEI	Higher Educational Institution
ICPPM	Initial Child Protection Planning Meeting
IJB	Integrated Joint Board
IRD	Interagency Referral Discussion
IRISS	Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services
JII	Joint Investigative Interview
JSW	Justice Social Work
KCASS	Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MARACs	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences
MHO	Mental Health Officer
NPPLG	National Public Protection Leadership Group
NQSW	Newly Qualified Social Workers
OOH	Out of Hours
PBSW	Prison Based Social Work
PDA pl	Practice Development Award practice learning
PPC	Public Protection Committee
PPP	Public Protection Partnership
PQAF	Performance and Quality Assurance Framework
PQI	Performance, Quality and Improvement (sub-committee)
REMG	Risk Enablement Management Group
SAP	Single Access Point
SAS	Scottish Ambulance Service
SCIM	Scottish Child Interview Model
SDS	Structured Deferred Sentence
SOLACE	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Management
SPS	Scottish Prison Service
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council
STDC	Short Term Detention Certificate
SWGG	Social Work Governance Group
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
UPW	Unpaid Work
UWS	University of West of Scotland
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VPRS	(Syrian) Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme