

**Argyll and Bute  
Chief Social Work Officer  
Annual Report 2023/24**



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**Àrd-Oifigear Obair Shòisealta**  
**Earra Ghàidheal is Bhòid**

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# Chief Social Work Officers Report

## 1. Introduction

This is the annual Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) report for Argyll and Bute for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

On reviewing last year's CSWO report much of what was written then remains true this year.

At some levels there is talk of a recovery from the 'lockdowns' experienced during the period of the Covid 19 pandemic. Yet in Social Work and Social Care it is perhaps only now we are seeing the developing impact of that extra-ordinary period. The wearing of masks and physical distancing may have disappeared, but the social and individual impacts continue to reverberate. These consequences are of course intertwined with the impact of Brexit and cost-of-living increases. Combined they have affected our financial and human resources. It is hard to suggest that this is a recovery phase. Rather the wave of need and subsequent demand on services is continuing to ascend.

Social Work and Social Care are not immune to the challenges of the public sector more generally. There is an expectation of doing more with smaller budgets, of doing more while there is a crisis in recruitment and retention. There are vacancies throughout the Social Work and Social Care work force.

Commissioned services have also been impacted by the economic situation and challenges of recruitment. Several services in the third and private sectors have closed ranging from children's respite services, care at home and a care home. The exact circumstances have varied however not being able to recruit staff or having to run services at a financial loss have generally been significant contributory factors. Of note is the takeover of Kintyre Care Centre which followed a year long process involving significant investment in senior staff time, HR time and costs to purchase the centre. As a Local Authority, through the Health and Social Care Partnership, we have done what we reasonably can to offer supports although they have, in some cases, needed to be in other forms from those previously available.

Pressure also comes from the accelerating number of policy initiatives. Most, when taken individually, are to be lauded for attempting to better the lives of the people of Scotland. Whether, for example, meeting the Promise to our Care Experienced young people or reducing delayed discharge from hospital. Taken as a whole and with each one being seen as the top priority by its political sponsors, it leaves professional staff operating in a cluttered and exceptionally busy policy context. With finite resources, which of the top priorities are the top priorities and which top priorities are secondary? We cannot do it all.

Not least of these policy initiatives has been the National Care Service (NCS). Despite numerous consultation and engagement events the nature and detail of this generational re-organisation remains ambiguous at best. During the period of this report the place of Children's and Justice services remained unclear. The time swallowed by the NCS has been at the cost of other efforts. The ambiguity has detracted from the clarity of long-term strategic planning. The CSWO along with colleagues from the other 31 Local Authorities has been engaged in representing the profession in these debates. At times having to assert the role and worth of Social Work rather than have it subsumed into the more general term of Social Care. Both are vital and they are different. It is the hope that by the time of the next CSWO report there will be greater clarity however at this point it would be difficult for the CSWO

to offer advice on whether or not to support the NCS. As a profession we of course support all efforts to establish coherent person-centred services which are properly funded and organised.

It is to be noted that the myriad of consultations coming from Scottish Government or thematic reviews from the Care Inspectorate have put significant pressure on the 32 CSWOs as a group. There is an expectation that as CSWOs there is involvement in national projects. At times, even with extensive support from Social Work Scotland, it has been impossible for the profession to be fully represented in the entire breadth of national debate and development. The balancing act between the local role of the CSWO and the national demands has been impossible at times.

Despite the current socio-economic difficulties and the eternal challenges of geography, there have been significant developments which have been successfully actioned. Examples include: The Social Work Out of Hours service which has been embedded and the senior support for that strengthened. The role and function of first line managers, Social Work Team Managers, has been reviewed and strengthened. Work on delayed discharge has continued. A central Adult Support and Protection Team has been established.

Beyond these developments it is the positive impact on the lives of individual members of our communities where the worth of Social Work and Social Care is seen at its best. Whatever the challenges our people have continued to offer services which positively impact on the lives of those living across Argyll & Bute. This has often seen staff going above and beyond core duties and working long hours. Our staff are without doubt our main resource. As always in the CSWO report I take this opportunity to thank all of our Social Work and Social Care staff for their steadfast service over the course of the last year.

This year's report will be in the format shared by the Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor. The report will cover:

- Governance & Accountability
- Service Quality & Performance
- Resources
- Workforce

## 2. Governance and Accountability

There has been little change over the last year to the governance and accountability of the CSWO or Social Work and Social Care services.

As Chief Social Work Officer for Argyll and Bute, I am also Head of Children, Families and Justice. This portfolio includes direct responsibility for all social work services for Children, Families and Justice as well as all associated resources such as Children's Houses. Within the scheme of delegation deployed in Argyll & Bute my responsibilities also include health services ranging across CAMHS, Maternity, School Nursing, paediatric AHPs and Health Visiting.

As CSWO I am a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and have specific accountability for the delivery of Social Work and Social Care services ensuring that the statutory duties of the profession are delivered across children's, adult's and justice services.

Partnership working takes place with a wide range of multi-agency professionals including the Chief Officer of the HSCP, Chief Executive of the Council, Elected Members, managers and practitioners. There are regular meetings with the Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council and the Chief Officer of the HSCP. Importantly there are increasingly strong relationships with senior staff in Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue, Scottish Children's Reporters Administration and Third Sector organisations. As Head of Children, Families and Justice the strength of relationship with the Heads of Education facilitates joint working on strategy and ensures we are 'getting it right for every child' on a case by case basis as well as strategically.

There are emerging discussions on a Single Authority Model (SAM) similar to the Single Island Authority (SIA) being developed by Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and Orkney. As Social Work necessarily must work beyond organisational boundaries, any movement to ensure such boundaries are not obstacles has huge saliency. It is of particular interest for Children's Services as any move towards closer integration with Education, the largest universal service for children, can only be of advantage.

I am a member of various key groups and committees within the organisation. Clear governance and reporting arrangements are in place. The CSWO provides professional advice and guidance on all Social Work matters and provides assurance that Social Work services are being delivered to the best standards and within the required statutory and policy guidelines. Regular performance reporting around risk management is also provided with the CSWO specifically reporting through the Chief Officers Group for Public Protection. The CSWO is the MAPP (Multi-agency public protection arrangements) lead officer and is a member of the Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection Committees. The CSWO is part of the Community Justice Partnership. The CSWO, or those deputising, continues to have input into Care Home oversight. The CSWO further reports to the IJB on key changes and developments regarding the Social Work profession.

Over the period of this report an overarching issue of governance for the IJB, Council and NHS Highland continues to be consultation on and development of the National Care Service. During the period covered by this report it started to become clearer that there was a settled political view that the Lead Agency model in the Highland local authority area should not continue. (It has subsequently been included in the Bill that the Lead Agency model is not being supported to continue.) While this does not directly impact Argyll & Bute clearly there is the potential for a major upheaval in the structures of one of our key partners. There may be more to report on this in next year's CSWO report. The impact of the continuing uncertainty around the NCS is addressed in the introduction to this report. It

is to be hoped that a more consistent delegated structure across Highland and Argyll & Bute may offer the opportunity to simplify sometimes complex health governance.

The complicated health pathways and governance does impact Social Work. While part of NHS Highland, the vast majority of specialist pathways lead to services in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. In Social Work terms this has impacted forensic services for Justice Social Work, mental health pathways and the diagnosis / review of children with ASN. Work continues on Service Level Agreements; however this can be labour intensive and slow. It can feel that Argyll and Bute HSCP are the junior partner in these negotiations and Social Work only one small voice within the HSCP.

NHS Highland have not had a representative on the Senior Officers Group (SOG) for the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) throughout 2022-23. It is hoped it will be able to be reported that NHS Highland have resolved this by the time of the next CSWO report.

It is clear from discussion at a national level that there are a variety of models for the governance of Social Work. This is due to the variety of organisational arrangements the profession finds itself in. Dictated in large part by the various local schemes of delegation. Work has begun on developing the concept of a National Social Work Agency and with that perhaps an increasing expectation of consistency. During the period of this report the exact nature of the NSWA had not been clarified.

The Care Inspectorate have now indicated they will be undertaking a thematic review of Social Work governance in Scotland over 2024 - 25. Recommendations from this are expected by Easter 2025. These will be presented in next year's CSWO report.

The role, responsibility and governance of the CSWO within the eventual structure of the NCS is not clear.

As CSWO I am also involved in a number of national groups. These include: chairing Social Work Scotland's (SWS) Workforce and Resources Standing Committee and as such I am a member of the SWS Board, membership of the national steering group for the Scottish Child Interview Model, and membership of the Remote and Island CSWOs group. Importantly, these allow the issues of remote and island practice to be brought to bear on the national stage.

### 3. Service Quality and Performance

Service quality and performance is managed on an ongoing basis and in several ways. This is in line with the discharge arrangements of the CSWO and the requirement to manage the performance and quality of Social Work services being delivered.

The CSWO is an active participant in the key service performance and improvement meetings including Clinical and Care Governance, the Chief Officers Group for Public Protection, Child Protection Committee, Adult Support and Protection Committee and the Care Home Oversight Group etc. This is set out in detail in the previous section on governance.

As was conveyed in last year's report there are continuing efforts to further develop the Clinical & Care Governance structures within the IJB / HSCP. As all of Social Work and Social Care is delegated to the IJB / HSCP that inherently involves the governance of the profession. The complexity of this task has become clearer as work has continued. Of particular note is the work in mapping where the various multi-agency assurance groups sit. Groups such as CPC, APC, MAPPA, Community Justice Partnership and the COGPP. Also considering Health Board wide groups and how to ensure they report into the IJB, rather than inadvertently bypass it. Considering how we take advantage of the work which takes place in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and seek assurance about how the people of Argyll and Bute are served by that organisation.

As was noted above the Care Inspectorate have announced they will be carrying out a thematic review of Social Work governance, with a final report and recommendations around Easter 2025. It is to be expected the recommendations will impact Argyll and Bute's governance structures.

During the period covered by this report work began in anticipation of the full implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019. While Social Work is not covered by the Act, regulated services are. This includes the likes of the Fostering & Adoption Service, Care Homes, and Children's Houses. It is worthy of note that the Care Inspectorate already act as a regulator for all such services and as such where there are any issues of staffing these are currently dealt with through inspection activity and subsequent action plans. It is to be hoped that the Health & Social Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 offers added value and not only further reporting duties. The implementation and early experience of the Act will be reported in next year's CSWO report.

Within Argyll and Bute HSCP there is an attempt to deal with health, Social Work and Social Care complaints and incidents within an integrated process. There are regular Quality and People Safety (QPS) meetings involving all professional leads and senior managers. There continues to be significant reference to the Datix risk management system reports which Social Work and Social Care staff do not have access to therefore there can be a subsequent over emphasis on health-related issues. Over the last year there has been an evolution to cover more Social Work and Social Care issues – bringing complaints, learning reviews and incidents to the table for discussion. There has been discussion about opening up the Datix system to Council employed staff, however it is to be noted that it now appears that Datix will be replaced, and it is prudent to reconsider this direction once the replacement system is known.

Performance monitoring has also been thorough, and we have contributed to all statistical data requests from the Scottish Government. Variations between localities within Argyll and Bute have been recognised and reflected on. Data within an authority with a small population must always be treated carefully. A small variation in numbers can look significant when presented as percentages. Significant percentage falls or increases must be examined to uncover the complex human narratives which often lie behind the numbers. If we are genuinely committed to a human rights approach and we want to ensure individual choice where possible, reasonable, and safe we must guard against seeing people as chunks of data. Performance and planning require to give balanced consideration to the objective data and the subjective human stories.

The Eclipse case management system has been introduced over the last year. This has not been a smooth process. It would be true to state that the system continues to need development in order to ensure it is producing accurate data and is efficiently recording the necessary information. The workforce require to build trust in the system and improve their use of it. This is going to take investment or time and finance over the coming years.

Quality assurance necessarily requires the buy in of all our staff and service users. Along with this there needs to be a move to self-evaluation and truly reflective practice. As was noted last year we must continue to free our staff from the 'fear' of current audit and inspection models, support them to have a positive developmental experience and release their innovative potential. Child protection audit is an example where we are trying to move the model of scrutiny by deploying multi-agency file readers; Considering the outcomes with the staff who manage and staff the system; Setting expectations, but understanding why there is deviation; Bringing people together to drive standardisation. This a challenging process and requires courageous conversations on all sides.

Care Inspectorate activity remains challenging as the feedback is very much that people continue to feel 'done to' by the current inspection model rather than 'worked with'. The current model of inspection is not taking the context of a national staffing crisis, nor the aftermath of social problems associated with the pandemic or the UK's exit from the EU into consideration. As previously reported inspection experiences can be demotivating with people feeling blamed without the context within which they are practicing being fully acknowledged, understood and reflected through inspection reports. Inspections are marking services down against an absolute standard, whereas maintaining service at the standards being achieved is at times miraculous given the challenges. Senior HSCP staff are meeting regularly with local link inspectors to ensure a greater degree of partnership working in improvement activity.

The CSWO has been engaging with senior staff within the Care Inspectorate. Along with other Board Members from Social Work Scotland, discussion is taking place to consider how practitioners and inspectors can work better in partnership with each other to drive improvements and development of services. The Care Inspectorate will be carrying out several thematic inspections over the coming year. Such thematic inspections are national by nature and do not concentrate on a single authority in the way strategic inspections do. It is anticipated there will be a thematic inspection of Social Work governance and separately Justice Social Work at some point in 2024.

There have been no strategic inspections during this reporting period.



## **Adult Services**

Adult services have two Heads of Service responsible for different aspects of Argyll & Bute's services. These are integrated management posts therefore also cover significant elements of health services in addition to Social Work and Social Care. Due to the all in nature of the integrated settlement in Argyll and Bute portfolios covered by Heads of Service are significantly wider than the equivalent in many other local authorities. For example, Argyll and Bute is the only Health & Social Care Partnership in Scotland where maternity services are delegated.

Currently both the adult services Heads of Service, along with the Head of Children, Families and Justice are qualified Social Workers and employed by the Council. Due to Argyll and Bute's scheme of integration all three Heads of Service could also conceivably come from health backgrounds. If this situation were to begin to emerge the Local Authority will have to consider how to ensure that at least one Head of Service is a Social Worker and Council employee to ensure there is someone able to take on the role of CSWO.

The two adult Heads of Service cover practice team Social Work and specialist teams such as Adult Support & Protection and mental health.

## **Adult Social Work**

Adult social work sits within locality or operational teams, managed by Area Managers. These area managers are responsible for services across their locality including social work, social care and health services. Like the Heads of Service these are integrated management posts and can come from either employer. Currently these posts are predominantly health employees. We are aware of the risks to Social Work supervision and management within this arrangement and have a degree of mitigation in place. This includes a professional Social Work advisor based in Adult Services, Newly Qualified Social Work Forums and a bolstering of the role of first line Social Work Team Managers. Nevertheless, there is a significant challenge in maintaining the 'golden thread' of Social Work accountability from main grade Social Workers through to the CSWO.

The work with Social Work Team Managers is of particular note. During 2023-24, their role and job description were reviewed and evaluated across all care groups. The complexity of the role and function were recognised. The job description is now consistent across all specialisms including adults, children & families and justice. A qualification in social work is viewed as essential.

A similar exercise was also carried out for Social Work Assistants resulting in a common job description across all specialisms and a common expectation of the work that is carried out. The Social Work Assistants Development Forum has continued to offer training and learning throughout 2023-2024. It is clear in Argyll and Bute that the work of a Social Work Assistant must be overseen by a qualified and registered Social Worker.

Topics covered during the forums have been good recording and report writing, the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013, Argyll and Bute HSCP Eligibility criteria and its application, Self-neglect and hoarding, medications management and the application of Sec 47 of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000.

The forum also works together to improve practice and has coproduced introductory visit and confirmation of visit letters for the use of all adult social work staff.

## **Adult Social Work Short Life Working Group**

This group was established in 2023. Key areas of transformation and priority were identified as:

- Evaluation of a centralised Adult Support & Protection team and a recommendation on the outcome of the preferred model of delivery of ASP.
- Review and evaluation of the current model of Adult Social Work delivery across generic / specialist teams and make recommendations on the preferred model of delivery of Adult Social Work.
- Agree the reviewing function of Adult Social Work and recommend a required staffing resource to enable reviews to be conducted within an agreed schedule.
- Develop the workforce/ learning and development plan to ensure sustainability of Social Workers by use of different models such as Grow Your Own / Traineeship programmes etc.

Over the course of this reporting period the group has brought a number of changes into practice:

- The Adult Protection Team was established as a core specialist team utilising recurring funding for adult social work. Work is ongoing to embed the interface with the specialist and locality teams.
- A review function framework for care homes was agreed in this group and implemented by the Collaborative Care Home Group and a reviewing Team Leader (Social Care) is currently in post and implementing the framework.

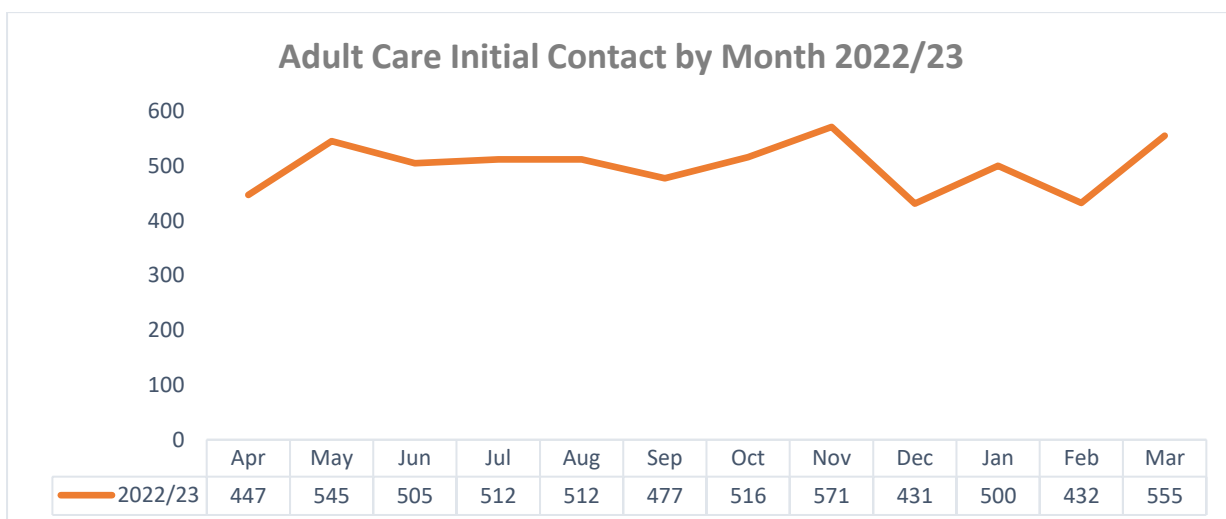
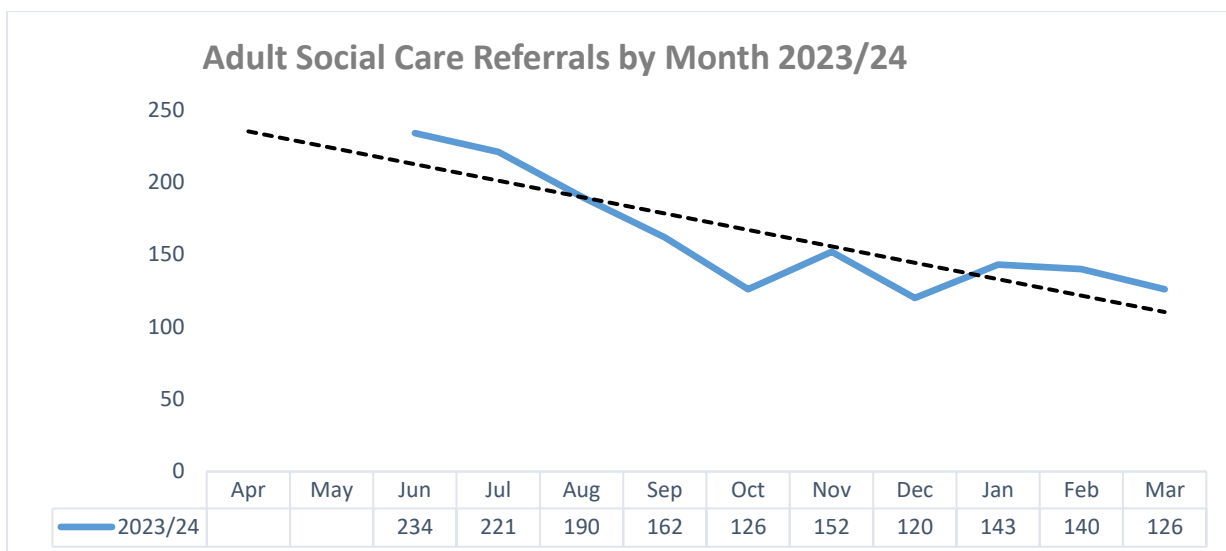
The short life working group continues to focus on the role and function of locality social work teams.

## **Adult Social Work Referrals**

The table below would appear to indicate a downward trend in referrals to our adult services. This requires to be read with some significant caution. This reporting period has seen the implementation of the Eclipse system to replace the previously used Care First. Categories and data processing are different this year from last, therefore last year's figures are only presented for reference and do not directly equate to this year's measures. A number of activities recorded last year within the scope of 'initial contacts' are not counting this year towards 'social care referrals'.

A downward trend in the level of need does not accord with the experience of staff. At the time of writing this report we are still examining the data to explain this apparent trend and there is continuing significant work going on with staff and the Eclipse development team. The trends appear to be linked with staff becoming more familiar with the categorisation of work than an actual decrease in work load. There are more categories of work within Eclipse than was ever the case in Care First. The team is working out what trends are the result of a change in recording practices and what reflects actual need. We will be reporting on this again in next year's CSWO report. Ensuring we have accurate data is essential to future planning of services. The Eclipse transition period has been challenging in this respect.

The increasing level of complexity in the needs of the people we support is not represented by these graphs.



(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

## Social Work Recruitment Processes

Throughout 2023-2024 recruitment to qualified social work posts has been problematic and work is underway to develop multiple pathways to support staff in paraprofessional roles to undertake formal Social Work training. These challenges are a constant vein throughout this CSWO report.

Enquiry sessions have been held for staff to offer a wider understanding of routes to becoming a qualified Social Worker across the specialisms. These sessions recruited 4 staff onto the BA Hons Social Work Programme and a further 2 onto the Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work.

An employee from a previous cohort of “Grow you Own” Social Workers successfully completed the Social Work degree programme and has since been successful in a Qualified post within Adult Services on Bute which is a difficult to recruit to area.

While there has been some success in recruiting staff from overseas the requirement for such recruits to prove that their qualifications have an equivalency to UK ones, and as such they can be registered with the SSSC, is somewhat torturous. For example, the candidate is required to provide a full translation of their course work and placement activity.

## **Older Adults.**

An older adult strategy is in development and will be implemented in 2024-25. All developmental activity in this area of practice will be co-ordinated within this strategy. The strategy is cognisant of the changing demography of Argyll and Bute.

The strategy has a focus on maintaining the independence of older adults and covers developments and sustainability in relation to:

- Community Hospitals
- Community Standards
- Care Homes and Housing
- Care at Home
- Dementia Care

There is a focus on how we promote flexible services and workforce on islands. For example, we are looking to use care homes as care hubs, offering key worker accommodation where possible within the home. There is potential to manage care at home services in parallel to care homes and reduce the duplication of management lines and roles.

### **Collaborative Care Home Group**

During 2023-24, the Collaborative Care Home Group was established after direction from the Scottish Government to move away from a purely clinical focused assurance function which developed during the lockdown period. It is a move to wider more holistic support for care homes. The group has concentrated on implementing the Health Care Framework for Care homes and a focus on activity funding to individual care homes to support residents. A successful care home managers forum is in place focusing on support and training.

Care Governance processes are being strengthened across the sector. Within Argyll and Bute there has been the introduction of a specific Care Home and Care at Home Clinical & Care Governance group. This meets quarterly.

Strategically care homes sit within the older adult strategy. In the short to medium term there is a focus on repairs within homes owned by Argyll and Bute Council. It is recognised that capital investment is required to ensure the estate is fit for purpose. This will not be insignificant amount of money.

There are 7 internal care homes and 9 which are externally commissioned. This is a reduction of one externally commissioned care home since the last CSWO report, due to the closure of a service in Bute. Social Work, Social Care and procurement teams provide support to families during this closure. The Care Home Closure Protocol was followed.

### **Care at Home**

Care at home has been under significant pressure coming out of the period of 'lockdown', with increasing demand and complexity of support for people in the community. This requires to be seen alongside a national shortage of staff.

A full survey of existing adults in receipt of care at home generated a high response rate. It was noted that most people were satisfied with the service.

A short project on recruitment was undertaken to ensure recruitment times were cut and processes were managed more effectively. This is now embedded and has seen some early positive results in reducing the time it has traditionally taken to get new staff on board. While investment in the social care workforce is welcomed, the national minimum wage remains too low to have had any significant impact on recruitment or retention challenges. This is starkly clear in parts of Argyll and Bute where the leisure and tourist industry offer significantly better wages. In Islay for example, it pays more to clean distilleries than it does to come into Social Care. The level of investment needed is far greater than that already offered.

The care at home strategy is under development and will be available in 2024. Key will be the role and function of the internal care home service and access to viable and accessible training. Again, the governance of care at home is being strengthened.

As Scotland has dealt with cases of historical child abuse, it is inevitable that the demographics of the prison population are changing. Services, beyond Social Work supervision, are having to be developed for these people when they are released from prison. In Argyll and Bute numbers are low due to the relative size of the population and each situation is dealt with on an individual, case by case basis. Nevertheless, there will require to be strategic thinking on how we care for older people released from prison.

### **Day Services**

Day services for older adults provide a key role in offering respite for carers. It is recognised however that there is uneven coverage of these services across Argyll and Bute. A full review of day services and day supports is planned in 2024.

### **Adult Support and Protection:**

The focus of Adult Support and Protection (ASP) through 2023-24 has, perhaps obviously, continued to be on ensuring effective support and protection, for people at risk of harm. No apology is given for repeating that this is being achieved against a backdrop of workforce challenges, recognised across Scotland, particularly within Social Work.

Referrals rates have steadied following a significant increase as the country opened up again after the lockdown period. We note a decrease of referrals recorded between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 at 327 compared with 413 for the same period through 2022-23. This decrease is partly considered to be as a result of locality social workers being able to prevent formal ASP referrals, owing to early effective support and practical preventative actions, which were difficult to achieve during the lockdowns. However, we also note that referral rates from some agencies have dropped, and this is currently being further examined with regard to the promotion of these services.

The revised Adult Support and Protection minimum dataset has now been rolled out across Scotland. It includes terminology changes from the revised Code of Practice, pertaining to activities around 'Inquires' and 'Investigations'. The aim is to generate more robust, meaningful and comparable data.

The implementation of the Eclipse case management system at the same time as changes in national data requirements has inevitably meant additional challenges for data collection. The data on ASP referral numbers early in the year proved difficult to accurately ascertain and it is surmised that the number of cases has been under reported due to system errors. Work has been undertaken to ensure accurate data over the year and there has been significant improvement with the assistance of the Eclipse and Performance Teams.

Operational activities remain challenging despite the creation of a permanent centralised ASP team, tasked with undertaking much of the formal ASP activity.

Although the referral rate has stabilised, evidence suggests we are seeing increased levels of complex interventions with adults affected by, for example, trauma and adverse childhood experiences, substance dependency, homelessness and hoarding. In line with other areas of practice subjective observation would suggest a correlation with this increased complexity and the exacerbating impact of lockdown. It is now Social Work and Social Care services are being affected, ironically not during the time that Covid 19 virus dominated the lives of the population. It is to be wondered if there is a now a need to stand down some services to concentrate on acute need and offer extra financial support, the Covid consequential funding. In time there will require to be further research on this link.

Training on Chairing Case conferences and the role of the 2<sup>nd</sup> worker were updated and presented alongside the Council Officer and Council Officer Refresher courses. This training was provided throughout the year by a longstanding, experienced external trainer who retired in February 2024. We have since been appraising the options for ASP training at all levels going forward.

The Council Officer and Adult Support and Protection Forum has continued to meet quarterly to further learning and development in ASP subject areas.

The Lead Officer for ASP undertook a significant overhaul of the Argyll and Bute Adult Support and Protection Procedures. This is a substantial document which required lengthy revision and editing in line with the revised Code of Practice and the introduction of the Eclipse file recording system. This has resulted in entirely changed ASP recording templates. This work has finally been completed and the document has been presented at the Adult Protection Committee (APC) for adoption and implementation.

Through 2023-24 the Partnership undertook two Large Scale Investigations (LSI). The activity involved in these investigations was considerable and time consuming but nevertheless extremely valuable. Both investigations determined that no adults were found to be at risk of harm and learning was disseminated, across the multi-agency partners.

A reflective ASP file reading audit was completed across the Argyll and Bute in January 2024. Its purpose was to identify the quality of practice and recording in Adult Support and Protection cases following the Joint Inspection of Adult Support and Protection in Argyll and Bute, which was completed in September 2021.

40 separate ASP cases were audited. The cases involved people who had been subject to Duty to Inquire, Investigation and Case Conference. Some improvement was identified. Importantly pertinent to the correct appliance of the 3 point test and invitations to formal case conferences. The subsequently updated ASP Improvement plan continues to focus on the key improvements, prioritising that all adults at risk of harm have a risk assessment, which is comprehensive and that we have a consistent approach to preparing and recording chronologies.

The overall audit outcome was that a 'substantial' level of assurance could be taken. Internal control, governance and the management of risk was considered sound. The audit noted, however, there were minor areas of weakness which put some system objectives at risk. These weaknesses are currently being addressed as priorities again within the ongoing ASP Improvement plan.

The Adult Protection Committee (APC), fully supported by the Chief Officers Group for Public Protection, have focussed on addressing the challenges in driving improvements to the service as defined by the ASP National Implementation Groups and our audits. The implementation groups were set up to deal with issues on Chronologies, Self-evaluation and Learning, Advocacy and the voice of the service user – notably all areas recognised as requiring improvement within our plan. The APC have been committed to supporting and developing the service and fostering a continuous improvement ethos with the valuable assistance of our Care Inspectorate Strategic Link Inspector.

December 2023 saw the resignation of the APC's longstanding Chair, Alex Davidson. Alex has been an inspirational leader and a great support to the Service. We have recently appointed his successor, Karen Ralston.

Links with the Child Protection Committee continue to be cultivated, culminating in our annual Joint Committee meeting. Throughout 2023-24 we have undertaken joint working on learning reviews, transitions and missing people policy and procedures. APC staff have contributed to the recent Child Protection Committee self-evaluation and the Alcohol and Drug Partnership Action Plan 2023-24. There are links with the Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership and encourage participation from Adult Services in their "safe and together" and wider training opportunities.

Links with Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue (SFRS) service continue to be effective in protecting adults. The Lead Officer chairs the monthly Multi-Agency Forum sharing valuable information appropriately with established colleagues from these services and Health and Social Care representatives. We have introduced a protocol and guidance on the use of Interagency Referral Discussions, recognised now as a valuable asset to ASP Investigation, particularly at the early inquiry stages. The Lead Officer and Police Inspector from L Division Concern Hub jointly promoted the use of IRD's in Adult protection around the County. Additionally, The APC Chair and Lead were invited to comment on and contribute to the SFRS Learning Review Document recognising the interagency working essential to effective learning review recommendations.

Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Services have continued to play a positive and constructive role in relation to service user support in investigations, case conferences and monitoring of outcomes. Focus on how the voice of the Adult is heard and how best their contribution be prioritised remains an ongoing project.

The Lead Officer has contributed to and been supported by the West of Scotland Lead Officers Group and the National Lead Officer group in developing the national agenda priorities for ASP in Scotland. Additionally, they became a member of the Chronologies Sub-Group as the development of effective joint agency ASP chronologies was identified as a significant priority activity for ASP into 2023, as the new Eclipse IT recording system went live across the Partnership. National training materials are being developed and training is being rolled out across the social work teams.

### **Mental Health and Addictions**

Our services within Argyll and Bute HSCP continue to work in integrated health and social work teams across mental health, addictions and dementia services.

Argyll and Bute Mental Health Social Work teams are small and as such have vulnerability in the current model of delivery whereby recruitment remains a major challenge to the service particularly in the East. We have three Mental Health Officer vacancies currently. In the East of the county, we are competing against the large urban authorities for staff. We are also competing more recently with agencies who are paying an enhanced wages to MHOs. Notwithstanding this we have been successful in recruiting to all Social Work Team Manager posts.

Despite vacancies amongst MHOs, the MHO rota continues to run well across Argyll and Bute with one MHO on call at any time. Argyll and Bute have also developed a new Service Manager post who will have management and leadership over the mental health social work, mental health officer and adult support and protection team. This will bring greater co-ordination and assurance in this field of work.

Argyll and Bute were delighted to support two social workers in achieving the MHO award this year, and are taking forward the process to support candidates progressing for next year. As mentioned previously in this report, 'growing your own' appears to be the most successful recruitment strategy.

#### Mental Health Act Activity data

	Total
Assessment Order	1
Compulsion Order	4
Compulsion Order and Restriction Order	3
Compulsory Treatment Order	71
<b><i>Emergency Detention Certificate</i></b>	<b>17</b>
Hospital Direction	2
Interim Compulsion Order	3
Interim Compulsory Treatment Order	6
<b><i>Short-term Detention Certificate</i></b>	<b>72</b>
Treatment Order	1
Total	180

In 2020/2021 41 people were detained under an Emergency Detention Certificate and 62 people detained under a Short Term Detention Certificate.

In 2021/2022 30 people were detained under an Emergency Detention Certificate and 50 people detained under a Short Term Detention Certificate

In 2023/24 a reduction was noted in those detained under an Emergency Detention Certificate. This was down to 17. There was an increase, up to 72 people, detained under a Short Term Detention Certificate. Additionally, 71 people are under a Compulsory Treatment Order in Argyll and Bute

#### **Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000**

There is no waiting list for the completion of MHO reports requested for private or local authority guardianship orders. Given the context this is a major success.

During the period covered by this report, we had 182 Private Welfare Guardianship orders and 41 Local Authority Welfare Guardianship orders. This is a very slight increase from the previous year for private welfare and financial orders.



Comparison	2022	2023
Private Welfare and Financial Orders	174	182
CSWO Welfare orders	41	41

Under section 10 (1) (a) of the AWI act, the local authority has a duty to supervise welfare guardians. Assurance meetings with CSWO oversight have been established with the priority being to improve and monitor the supervision of guardians and ensure timely renewals.

In line with the legal requirements, the Mental Welfare Commission and the Adult are kept notified of the officer responsible for carrying out the functions and duties of the Chief Social Work Officer.

### **Learning Disability, Autism and Transitions, Sensory Impairment Services.**

Long term work continues on the repatriation of individuals who are currently placed out with the Argyll and Bute area. As has been reported over the last few years this is challenging as it brings with it the requirement for additional local specialist resources and provision which can take some years to develop. Key partners from the housing and third sectors include Affinity, Enable, Key Housing, Scottish Autism, Cornerstone, The Priory Group, Hub North and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde. Carr Gomm have been commissioned to review all the out of area placements and will hopefully have completed this exercise by January 2025.

Once again it requires to be reported that staffing pressures across the care sector have been undoubtedly the greatest barrier to full implementation of our Accommodation with Support proposals. Recently, in March 2024, there has been some improvement, and we moved to full occupancy at the 6 person Dunbeg service. While out with the time period of this report it is worthy to note increasing occupancy, now up to 3 persons, in the Sawmill site in Helensburgh was achieved in August 2024.

It had been hoped to advance a new specialist 6 person service in Rothesay, Bute with commitments given for completion by May/June 2024. Unfortunately, as reported last year the preferred developer withdrew from the project. Further scoping activity with Bute housing providers remains ongoing. This situation emphasises the long-term nature of this work and the lengthy lead in times.

We are continuing to work with the Argyll and Bute Council, Housing Options Group and are the preferred option with planning to develop a new-build service in Helensburgh. All efforts and considerations for service developments take full account of our ambitions with regards to the Coming Home report recommendations and we remain committed to support individual's safe and appropriate return from out of area placements as our new options become available. Skilled staff recruitment and retention will remain a major challenge.

Between October 2021 and June 2022, we undertook a root and branch review and redesign of our 5 in-house Learning Disability day services and 1 internal Supported Living unit. This was always going to be a long-term project, and work has continued through 2023 and into 2024. This has been fully embraced by staff, the people we support, carers and families. In the course of the year, we have further consolidated the service redesigns, successfully recruited to almost all our posts, and begun

to extend the service to increasing numbers. It is clear that we have a new dynamic and ambitions within the services and great foundations for meeting new and additional challenges.

Throughout 2023 we experienced significant staffing issues within our Sensory Impairment Team however we have successfully appointed 2 Rehabilitation Officer for the Visually Impaired posts and in Nov. 2023 we appointed to the Social Worker for the Hearing Impaired post and consequently the team is now fully staffed.

In the last CSWOs report it was noted that there was exploratory work on an Autism Strategy for Argyll & Bute. It was agreed that there should be a much wider perspective taken both in terms of looking at a wider neurodevelopment approach and also about looking at solutions for people across the lifespan, as opposed to having different approaches to children and adults. It was decided to recruit someone with a deep understanding of the subject and a consultant was appointed for 6 months. Whilst considerable scoping has been undertaken the consultant has left post in May 2024 and consequently Adult and Children and Families SW services and Health colleagues are taking matters forward referencing the Scottish Government objectives and in accordance with other significant national bodies and guidance.

Over the last 18 months it has become evident that Transitions for children and young people moving from education and youth based services to post Education opportunities has not been as successful as hoped so further discussions will be progressed between SW, Health and Education to re-institute the Disability Transitions Group process.

### **Children & Families and Justice Social Work**

The Children & Families Service includes Social Work, Youth Justice, Children's Resources, Child Poverty, Child Health, Paediatric Allied Health Professionals, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) and Maternity Services. Within the organisational structures of the Argyll and Bute's HSCP, Justice Services, Community Justice and Violence Women and Girls also sit within this same department.

### **Justice Services**

Justice Social Work continues to provide statutory supervision to offenders via Community Payback Orders (CPO) and assists community reintegration and rehabilitation from prison via post release supervision. The service also provides assessment reports to the Courts and Parole Board and participates in the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) which aim to manage the risk posed by violent and sexual offenders. The service works with other agencies, both within the HSCP and beyond, including Police Scotland, the Scottish Prison Service, NHS Highland, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde and a range of third sector providers.

Justice Social Work has continued to see a year on year increase in workload across all areas of Justice Social Work business. Whilst there remains a national backlog in Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service business due to the 'lockdown' period, this increase was not unexpected, however taken in the context of a flatlined budget settlement for Justice Social Work, the increase in workload has placed unprecedented pressure on the small workforce. As well as an increase in the volume of work, there has been a rise in the complexity of cases that the service is responsible for. The cost of living crisis and housing emergency declared by Argyll & Bute during 2023 is impacting significantly within the Justice Social Work Services client group causing additional barriers and challenges.

As evidenced in the data below, the area of work where there has been the largest increase (+36%) has been in the number of Justice Social Work Reports (CJSWR) submitted to the Court. This may or may not be in part be due to Argyll & Bute having two new Sheriff's covering Dunoon, Oban and Campbeltown Sheriff Courts. Due to the short timescales from report request to submission (average 12 working days) this has placed high levels of demand on staff.

<b>Annual New:</b>	2022/23	2023/24*
CJSWR submitted	319	435
Prison Reports submitted	44	40
Bail Supervision	4	15
Structured Deferred Sentence	22	25
Diversion	75	69
CPO	169	197
Statutory Throughcare	17	31
Voluntary Throughcare	1	0
DTTO	0	4
MAPPA (Managed by JSW as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March)	29	31

\*figures still to be ratified in Annual Aggregate Return

The national change of ViSOR use by Justice Social Work continues to present a number of challenges over this reporting period with Police Scotland indicating they were no longer able to input Justice Social Work information onto ViSOR. The level of vetting social work staff require in order to use this shared IT system remains unresolved nationally. Use of ViSOR requires a higher level of vetting than we require our staff to have as Social Workers. Nevertheless, we now have a small number of staff vetted and procedures in place to input a revised data set for MAPPA managed offenders. Whilst the changes brought about by the Chief Constable's instruction to no longer input ViSOR data for Social Work have impacted working practices, relationships between key personnel in Argyll & Bute Justice Services and L Division, Police Scotland have remained strong.

It should be noted the ViSOR system itself will be replaced by a new system MAPPs in the coming few years. The vetting issue remains however there is some hope the new system will be more flexible.

Key areas of work over this reporting period have been further embedding supervised bail, electronic monitoring, structured deferred sentences and Throughcare, Aftercare and Release Licence (TARL) processes. In December 2023, the service implemented the new Justice Social Work Report template, which has been welcomed by both staff and Sheriff's. The new report format reduces duplication, is more risk /need focussed and allows for more in-depth analysis and risk formulation. Although the service has seen an increase in bail supervision cases, as with other local authority areas, Argyll & Bute continues to experience a low conversion rate for bail supervision orders from assessments undertaken. The reasons for this are under constant review and scrutiny but the majority are from Courts having already dealt with cases prior to reports being submitted. This situation is further exacerbated in Argyll & Bute as staff often do not have direct access to service users to complete bail assessments due to them appearing in Courts out with our local authority area. There is a reliance on the goodwill of Geoamey staff allowing telephone access to undertake assessments.

Argyll & Bute Justice Services continue to develop practice and improve assessment and interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse. This links with the Equally Safe and Violence

against Women and Girls strategies which outline the requirement to deliver robust, high quality and evidence-based interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse. It is hoped that this will act as preparatory work for the national rollout of Caledonian Programme by Scottish Government, however this will be dependent on additional funding being made available to the service. Justice Social Work remains a key partner in Argyll & Bute's Violence against Women and Girls Partnership, with the responsibility for this area of work being in the portfolio of the Senior Manager, Justice. MARAC continues to be embedded as a practice model within Argyll & Bute and the Senior Manager, Justice attends Police Scotland L Division MATAAC meetings. The service is also involved in local Decision-Making Forums around DSDAS referrals. The work undertaken in Justice Social Work around gender-based violence is a key element of Argyll and Bute's Transforming Responses to Violence Against Women and Girls Project which aims to implement the Safe and Together Model across the local authority.

The profile of offenders that Justice Social Work is dealing with is changing. There is greater detection and conviction of people in relation to historic crime. The Scottish Prison Service is being required to meet care needs that would once rarely have been their responsibility. It does inevitably mean a larger number of elderly offenders eventually being released into the community. Building the care structures to meet their needs is challenging.

Capacity within the Justice Social Work Team is challenging. The increase in overall workload, combined with the changing nature of the work, including an increase in complex cases which require additional contact levels alongside the ever-increasing impact on service users facing poverty is placing increased demands on the small workforce.

### **Community Justice**

In Argyll and Bute, during 2023-2024, the Community Justice Partnership focussed on creating a strategic and operational baseline, across the 4 national aims and 13 priority actions contained within the refreshed National Strategy for Community Justice. Whilst developing our draft local action plan, the Community Justice Partnership has implemented a range of local multi-agency engagement and activity across most of the national aims and actions. The associated supporting national documentation was reviewed and embedded as it was published, mainly towards the end of 2022-2023 and into 2024-2025.

This report on Community Justice and Justice Social Work demonstrates clearly the strong local relationships between the Local Authority staff and Police Scotland.

This area of practice is fully reported through Community Justice routes however the following key areas are offered within this CSWO report:

#### **Aim 1: Enhance intervention at the earliest opportunity by ensuring greater consistency, confidence in and awareness of services which support the use of direct measures and diversion from prosecution**

- Completion of a draft Strategic Needs and Strengths Assessment for Diversion. Now awaiting further information from the Scottish Government Diversion Working Group, established in response to the national *Thematic Review of Diversion*, in order to progress
- Justice Social Work undertook a review of Diversion for 16-17 year olds. Interestingly over the previous five year period there were @90 young people referred to Justice Social Work for diversion. Only one case, and that was a murder charge, was not diverted by the PF.
- Improving identification of underlying needs within Police Custody Suite, was impacted by delays due to national information sharing discussions between Police Scotland and the

Scottish Information Commissioner. At the latter end of 2023-2024, some initial work was undertaken by Argyll & Bute representatives from Community Justice and Drug and Alcohol Partnerships with Police Scotland L Division and Custody Suite representatives, where discussions on potential improvements took place late and these continue during 2024-2025. There is a national Police Scotland estate rationalisation consultation underway, and this could obviously impact those detained and how Social Work practices.

**Aim 2: Ensure that robust and high quality community interventions and public protection arrangements are consistently available across Scotland**

- Bail Supervision, delivered by Justice Social Work, is affected by the geographical locations of courts and a number of system-focussed changes were identified during 2023-2024. Justice Social Work have been increasing their presence in courts, receiving bail opposed information to assist identifications of potential Bail Supervision opportunities.
- Argyll & Bute wide Electronic Monitoring numbers were unknown at a local level (until May 2024). Only those included as part of a community sentence could be identified. The application of this option presents geographical delivery challenges to those organisations responsible for fitting and monitoring, which may be one of the reasons for its underuse as a sentencing option. This will be further reviewed during 2024-2025
- The intertwined nature of Justice Social Work delivery and the Community Justice improvement framework is of course inevitable and was a key area of review during 2023-2024 and this continues into 2024-2025. The Community Justice improvement framework contains a significant number of asks in relation to Justice Social Work delivery and continuous improvement. These cannot be disentangled from the ongoing national discussions around Justice Social Work funding model, the National Care Service or the increasing workload and demands on their services. Developing Justice Services as required by developing guidance and policy will be a budgetary and human resource pressure going forward.

**Aim 3: Ensure that services are accessible and available to address the needs of individuals accused or convicted of an offence**

- The commissioning by the Community Justice Partnership, and the associated staff recruitment, of a third sector independent advocacy service to provide rights-based voluntary throughcare approach, within Custody to Community pathway, was completed during 2023-2024. The Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service (Community Justice Advocacy) became operational in March 2024.
- Justice Social Work have been enhancing a number of partnership arrangements as part of their core business during 2023-2024, community justice scoping has identified a number of collaborative opportunities in relation to increasing access to skills, employability, etc to support community integration. Justice Social Work will review during 2024-2025, identifying what is achievable for them and what is not, this will inform Community Justice Partnership's future strategic planning and expectations of achievable improvements.

**Aim 4. Strengthen the leadership, engagement, and partnership working of local and national community justice partners**

- Argyll & Bute Community Justice Plan development and engagement activity scoped a range of statutory and third sector partners and forums to highlight the new national documentation, local requirements and general direction and detail of improvement activity being proposed. The community justice collaborative approach was well received, although the realities of our collective ability to deliver improvements equitably across Argyll & Bute was consistently noted as a key challenge. It was through these engagements and

discussion that future community justice strategic planning needed to be informed from a place-based perspective to ensure resources, needs and capacity are better understood

- The collaboration between the Community Justice and Violence Against Women Partnerships to fund research on the local impacts of domestic abuse in Argyll & Bute, resulted in the submission of a comprehensive insight during 2023-2024. Informed by contributions from survivors and multi-disciplinary workforces (statutory and third sector), considerations continue into 2024-2025, across statutory forums, on the most appropriate and effective way to develop our responses.
- Collaborations between the Community Justice Partnership and Alcohol and Drug Partnership continued throughout 2023-2024. Areas within ADP forums where community justice improvement activity scoping were progressed includes: Residential Rehabilitation Group; Drug Death Review Group (under review); Alcohol and Drugs Partnership; and, RADAR Group. The overlapping nature of justice and addictions work is one which is well documented, the Partnerships will continue to collaborate, making wider public protection connections via the Chief Officers Group for Public Protection, where all have governance arrangements for reporting.
- The Community Justice Partnership continued during 2023-2024 to engage with Community Justice Scotland on a wide range of issues at their quarterly meetings, and in between. Some concerns developed early 2024 around the national commissioning model for voluntary throughcare, those continue to be discussed during 2024-2025. Whilst the preferred multi-partnership approach (minimum of five organisations

Despite the volume of work being undertaken there remains significant challenge. Of particular note:

The current national community justice direction takes a general approach to populations however does not reflect the needs of delivering to remote, rural and island communities. Cognisance should be given to the Islands Act and the requirement for an Island Community Impact Assessment to ensure national policy and initiatives do not inadvertently adversely affect those communities.

The delivery of the significant community justice improvements expected, alongside core funding and workforce challenges, is an area of concern that will be closely monitored by the Community Justice Partnership. Whilst there is undoubtedly a strong commitment to continuous improvement, how many we can deliver within the current landscape challenges remains uncertain.

## **Children & Families**

The Children and Families Management Team model aligns management, professional and clinical leadership and strengthens oversight of the services and the accountability of managers and staff. The service is underpinned and delivered in line with the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Framework and The Promise. There has been considerable investment in promoting a trauma informed approach.

The Children & Young Peoples Planning process continues to evolve. The 2023 – 2026 plan has been published and staff from across the multi-agency partnership are actively working on the specific actions. (The plan has previously been ratified by Council) There was a recognition that the main working group, Argyll and Bute's Children, was large and while appropriate to ensure the efficient development and actioning of the plan, there was a need for strategic leadership. Since the end of the last reporting year, of the Children and Young People's Service Plan for 2023-26, Lead Officers with responsibility for workstreams within the plan have been working closely with Performance and Planning to facilitate reporting against performance indicators and progress against outlined

outcomes. A strategic group was constituted of senior staff from Police Scotland, Social Work, Education, Health, Third Sector and Child Protection Committee. Co-ordination with the various initiatives including Corporate Parenting, Child Poverty Action Group and Violence Against Women and Girls remains important. Meeting 'The Promise' remains central.

With implementation of the UNCRC being a key foundation required to underpin the ambition of The Promise, a core workstream within the C&YPSP led by Children and Families officers has been the UNCRC development group. The group has worked alongside the Scottish Government Improvement Service in using the *Getting Ready for UNCRC Incorporation Framework* to ensure that local public bodies will be ready for incorporation of the Act in July 2024, following the successful passing of the bill in December 2023. The group consulted across children and young people's participatory groups to inform what became a successful funding bid to the Corra Foundation in December 2023 on work to support Incorporation. Work is underway, led by the Children's Voice group, and with participation of children and young people's groups across the authority, on planning a series of events celebrating diversity, promoting understanding and practice developments to support Incorporation during 2024-25.

Last year we piloted a revised model for children's reviews, which responded to feedback from families and children and is based on trauma informed principles. Initial feedback indicated that families find the approach more inclusive and less threatening. Work has continued to develop the model further, with a view to rolling out across the authority in the coming year. We have begun to explore other asset based approaches to family support and protection, including reviewing research on Signs of Safety, and we have begun discussions with a third sector partner on developing a Family Group Conferencing model. This work will be further progressed in 24-25 and is clearly in line with preventing longer term difficulties for individuals and the down the line costs of such things as external placements. It would lack transparency not to acknowledge such development are to a great degree reliant on financial investment.

The CSWO has continued to be involved in the national roll out of the Scottish Child Interview Model. (SCIM) Continuing to attend the national steering group and being involved in debate through the CSWOs group and Social Work Scotland.

In partnership with colleagues in West Dunbartonshire Council, and Police Scotland L Division, Argyll and Bute has completed initial implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model, having launched in May 2023. Developing adequate capacity across the partnership to ensure the ambition of offering SCIM as the default method of joint interviewing remains challenging, given the limited capacity of the National SCIM team to offer training, and the demands of the training on service capacity and individual trainees. We now have a second social worker trained in the model who has begun to practice in March 2023. In 24-25 the plan is to increase capacity within L Division initially and thereafter look to recruit a further 1-2 social workers to ensure capacity for almost all joint interviews to be undertaken using the model.

There was mention in last year's report on the implications of the Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019. (ACR) The age of criminal responsibility in Scotland now being set at 12 years of age. Through this Act we are required to consider how we interview children under the age of 12 years old who have committed a serious offence. There are processes in place however there have been no ACR interviews in Argyll and Bute in the year 2023-24. It is to be seen whether this will change if the age of criminal responsibility is raised in the coming years.

Recruitment to Children & Families Social Work posts had been somewhat more successful than other specialisms in Argyll & Bute, up until September 2023. There have been international recruits and a number of Newly Qualified Social Workers have joined us. Developing the programme of support for NQSWs has been a key focus through the year. There has been a flexibility in recruitment with, for example, final year students being appointed into Social Work Assistant roles until such time as they pass their qualification. In the later part of year we have begun to experience the same challenges in recruitment and retention of staff experienced by other specialisms in Argyll and Bute, and by neighbouring local authority children and families services. At some points in the year particular Children and Families practice teams have been as low as 50% of their establishment. There has been no temporary cover for the likes of maternity leave.

At the management level, a review of the previous Practice Leader job description identified that existing responsibilities were not covered within the job specification. This resulted in a re-evaluation of the job description and grade, with first line managers regraded to LGE13 and the job title updated to Social Work Team Manager to reflect. This has seen an increase in suitably qualified applicants for management posts from outside Argyll, and recruitment to any available posts has been successful. A similar review of the job descriptions for the two Area Manager posts resulted in a re-evaluation of those posts to LGE14 and a new title of Service Manager. This will better support the service and hopefully any future recruitment going forward.

It is hoped in 2024 – 25 we will address the role of social workers. Benchmarking salaries to other authorities. Looking at the role of those involved in advanced practice – the likes of SCIM trained Social Workers or Mental Health Officers.

Feedback from Social Workers continues to suggest that attendance at Children’s Hearings is being perceived as increasingly stressful and, in some cases, traumatic for them. This has particularly been the case for less experienced workers. There has been a sense of the Social Worker being on trial especially when lawyers have dominated proceedings. This is of course at odds to the founding principles of the system set out in the Kilbrandon Report in the 1960s. Children’s Hearing were designed to take children out of legalistic forums, however in recent times they have become more litigious in nature with lawyers having an increasing role. Work is ongoing with SCRA and Children’s Hearing Scotland to ensure the professionalism of Social Workers is respected and our staff feel safe in the tribunal setting. The national review of Children’s Hearings is to be welcomed and will be reported on in next year’s CSWO report.

Over the course of 2023 – 24 we have noted an increasing number of young people requiring to be considered for external placements, predominantly in residential schooling. Despite the upward trend in such need the numbers of young people involved remain small and it is important not to make sweeping conclusions on the basis of ten to twenty young people. Nevertheless, it is hard not to hypothesise given these are predominantly children who transitioned from primary to secondary school during the lockdown period. It seems relatively clear that those who may already have been vulnerable were made even more so over the extraordinary period between 2020 and 2022. In effect the experience of lockdown has been an Adverse Childhood Event (ACE) for many. No one in social work or wider children’s services could have anticipated the Covid 19 pandemic or the impact public health responses would have in the long run. As mentioned elsewhere in this report there is a sense we are now experiencing an ascendancy of need at a time when much of the pandemic supports have been withdrawn.

In last year’s CSWO report we noted a very challenging inspection of one the Children’s Houses. This house had been dealing with the first wave of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) sent



to Argyll and Bute under the Home Office's mandatory National Transfer Scheme. (NTS) There has been significant work carried out in the intervening time, including improvements in the care planning process, quality assurance, the physical environment and in how we address the demands of the NTS. It has taken considerable time and effort to address the dip in morale caused by the Care Inspectorate's report. A further inspection has subsequently recognised the improvements.

Staffing the Children's Houses has been problematic. Two of the Children's Houses have not reached their staffing compliment at any point in this reporting period. For reasons of consistency of care as well as financial prudence there has been an attempt not to use 'agency staff'. However, this has effectively meant having to rely on existing staff working beyond their hours. The Care Inspectorate were clear we should be looking for agency staff to fill the gaps. This was tried however even the agency route was not allowing for full staffing. In order to ensure an appropriate staffing ration we have plans to drop the capacity of two of the Children's House from 6 to 5 or even 4. This is the right thing to do however it is recognised will cause resource strains elsewhere.

As mentioned above the NTS has been a significant challenge. Argyll and Bute are required to take 14 young people under the age of 18 years old. Initially we had accommodated UASC within our Children's Houses, however it was clear there was not the capacity to make this model sustainable. At one point in 2023-24 over one third of those accommodated in Argyll and Bute's residential estate had come through the NTS the equivalent of an entire Children's House. Following several strategic meetings involving Council resettlement staff, Social Work and social housing providers a new model has been developed and was being initiated during the time frame of this report. Any UASC aged 16 or 17 years old referred through the NTS is now supported in an 'intensive resettlement pathway' in shared tenancy. Support is shared jointly by Through Care and After Care Social Workers and the resettlement team. The aim is to integrate the young people into established communities. It is worthy of note that once a young person reaches their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday the financial support from the Home Office drops dramatically and the young person no longer counts towards our 'quota' of 14 UASC.

Argyll and Bute has not been immune to the national shortage of foster placements. It is a continued struggle to recruit foster carers and demand for placement regularly outstrips availability. It is to be noted that a national minimum rate for fostering fees has now been agreed. It will have little or no impact in Argyll and Bute as we already paid more than the agreed national rate.

A decision was made to revert to an independent chair of the fostering and adoption panel. Senior Social Work staff have chaired the panel for the last few years. Despite this being an increase in cost, the professional arguments for the independence of the chair were irresistible. The independent chair should be in post in the next financial year.

There will be a wide ranging review of the models of care in 2024 – 25. The eternal dilemma remains of how we invest in early intervention designed to avoid the need to accommodate young people, while still having to care for those who have not enjoyed such interventions. This is exacerbated by the unforeseen and on going costs of lock down and the demands of the National Transfer Scheme. This is going to take significant generational investment to achieve. Short term cuts in children's budgets will result in long term costs.

The Through Care, After Care & Continuing Care team are supporting an increasing number of young people. Last year we reported numbers of around 100 care experienced young people being supported by the team. This year numbers supported are approximately 120 young people. This includes an ever increasing number of UASC who are in our care.

The shift in developing a new resettlement pathway for our UASC's has not only led to a more needs led and appropriate service, but has also freed up capacity within the throughcare and aftercare service. We are continuing to support our young people in their journey to independence, either through supporting them to access continuing care, move onto further and higher education or transitioning to living independently in their own tenancies/in the community. We continue to work closely with our housing partners, ensuring that all eligible care experienced young people access the maximum housing points and that there is more flexibility in the housing allocation policy. This has worked well despite the housing emergency declared by Argyll & Bute Housing Service in the summer of 2023.

Identifying the need for a greater range of housing options has been key over 2023/24 to better meet the wide ranging needs of our throughcare client group. We have developed additional Supported lodgings placements and have identified a property in Helensburgh which will act as 'step down' accommodation for young people who are keen to move on from a children's house, but lack the necessary skills to move directly into their own tenancy. This will act as a test of change during 2024/25 and if a positive experience, properties will be secured in other areas of Argyll & Bute and the scheme expanded. Expanding the range of housing options for Care Experienced young people in the midst of a housing crisis is clearly challenging.

The issue reported last year around the right to continuing care remains. While the principles which are the foundation of a young person being able to stay in their placement until the age of 21 years old are good the practicalities are fraught with difficulties. Firstly there are not the placements to accommodate younger people in need and allow older youngsters to remain in placement for a lengthier period of time. Secondly either directly or indirectly by displacing another young person into an external placement. The extra resource needed to fully realise this policy initiative is not being provided.

### **Child Protection**

During 2023 significant work was undertaken by Argyll and Butes' reviewing officers (CARO) to re-establish in-person child protection meetings with families across Argyll & Bute. Face to face meetings are always challenging due to Argyll & Bute's geography, however, the meetings are well evaluated and where necessary hybrid meetings take place to ensure professionals who may have to travel a distance are able to attend.

Child Protection data continues to be monitored on a regular basis. As with all data in relation to services covering a small population there requires to be caution in interpreting percentage rises and falls as the number of young people involved can be small. The national child protection minimum data set Version 1 is well established and interrogated by the Performance & Quality Assurance Sub-group to identify patterns, trends which may require more in-depth review. During 2023 work was ongoing to enhance our data reporting and colleagues from police, health and education have developed data sets which are now incorporated into the CPC management report. This additional information has been helpful in identifying differences in locality activity and greater understanding of child protection activity within these organisations.

It has been recognised that the introduction of the new case recording system, Eclipse, has been challenging. Work has continued throughout the year to ensure issues are raised and solved. This work continues.

With the launch of the National Child Protection Guidance (2021) (revised 2023) significant work was undertaken during 2023 to develop and launch local multi agency child protection procedures.

Locality in-person multi agency workshops were delivered across Argyll & Bute including the islands and these were all positively evaluated. In total 12 locality based sessions were held and a total of 271 staff attended from across all partner agencies. Additional sessions were held with education, health and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners. The aim of the workshops were to ensure all practitioners:

- had a clear understanding of the national guidance and Argyll & Bute's child protection procedures.
- are skilled and confident in accessing and navigating the procedures and have full knowledge of the child protection process.
- have a consistent approach to the identification and assessment of concerns by using the structured frameworks and toolkits attached to each stage of the procedures.

The online procedures went live on 18 September 2023 and are available to all partner agencies and the third sector partners. This work supported the review of existing policies and guidance ensuring they were compliant with local and national guidance.

Argyll and Bute took part in the CELCIS return regarding the implementation of the national child protection guidance. A small multi agency group oversaw the process, and while this was a significant activity, the self-evaluation process was helpful in identifying our strengths and areas that required further development and provided a base-line to evaluate our progress going forward.

The CPC Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD) audit group continued to meet bi-monthly to review the quality of IRD decision making and interim safety plans. The group have a robust cycle of learning attached to the process with feedback to practitioners and managers. Processes continue to evolve through practice experience and the group delivered local training in 2023 to support practitioner learning while we await the roll out of the National IRD training programme. The majority of IRD's continue to score "good" or above and this is very encouraging.

As part of our self-evaluation activity during 2023 and audit was undertaken of cases that did not progress to Initial Referral Discussion (IRD). The audit provided evidence of agency thresholds and child protection decision making. This was a helpful exercise and will form part of Argyll & Bute's self-evaluation activity.

It was recognised that the lockdown period had impacted our self-evaluation activity and towards the end of 2023 work commenced to plan a child protection audit in early 2024. It was recognised that the audit required significant planning, and a multi-agency oversight group was established to progress this work. Work focussed on planning a case file audit, developing a practitioner questionnaire and agreeing mechanisms for feedback from children and families.

The CPC monthly "chat" sessions continued during 2023 and were well received by practitioners with attendance from all partner agencies and the third sector.

During 2023 Argyll & Bute established a multi-agency Learning Review Strategic Group which oversees all requests for learning reviews. Joint child and adult protection Learning Review Guidance was written and implemented by the Child Protection Committee and provides the framework for all learning review activity in both children and adult services. During 2023 one learning review was commenced and the guidance helped in setting out the process for all personnel involved in the review. Work is ongoing to develop a learning package of resources that will support the dissemination of learning within and across services.

During 2023 the CPC guidance "Multi Agency Reflective Practice" was implemented and all partner agencies disseminated the guidance within their organisations. The guidance was initially used in two

specific cases where the Team Around the Child came together to explore the challenges and to work together to progress the child's plan. This practice guidance sits within Argyll & Bute's Learning Review Framework and has been positively used by practitioners to support learning.

In November 2023 we held for the first time since the Pandemic our multi agency practitioner self-evaluation event in Arrochar. We had forty practitioners in attendance and the focus of the day was to hear from practitioners about what was working well, what we could do differently and how that might be achieved. Practitioners participated in three workshops looking at the needs of older young people at risk, GIRFEC and risk assessment. Practitioners valued the opportunity of coming together in-person to reflect and share practice. The findings from the day informed the development of the CPC's 2024/25 Improvement Plan.

The new Child Protection Training co-ordinator came in to post in October 2023. It was recognised that there had been a 'gap' in the provision of child protection training during 2023 due to the previous training officer leaving post. The initial task was to identify, update and adapt, where possible, existing training courses for future delivery and also to design and develop further opportunities for training for all agencies, managers and designated CP officers in 2024. All training mediums were considered and moving forward, the focus was on providing increased opportunities for face-to-face training across the authority for all agencies. In addition, it was agreed that in order to evaluate current CP processes and procedures, and to inform future training needs, an internal audit was planned for spring 2024.

The implementation and development of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) is dealt with earlier in this report.

Work continues in Argyll and Bute to consider how we can develop the Bairns Hoose standards to meet the needs of children in the county. Unfortunately, with the geographical context of Argyll and Bute it is not as simple as having a Hoose as no matter where we sight it, it will involve significant travelling distances for the bulk of the population. There is a determination that what is settled on is not seen as a work around but is Bairns Hoose +. There needs to be equity of provision for our vulnerable and traumatised children, and they should not be disadvantaged by living on the geographic periphery, away from the central belt.

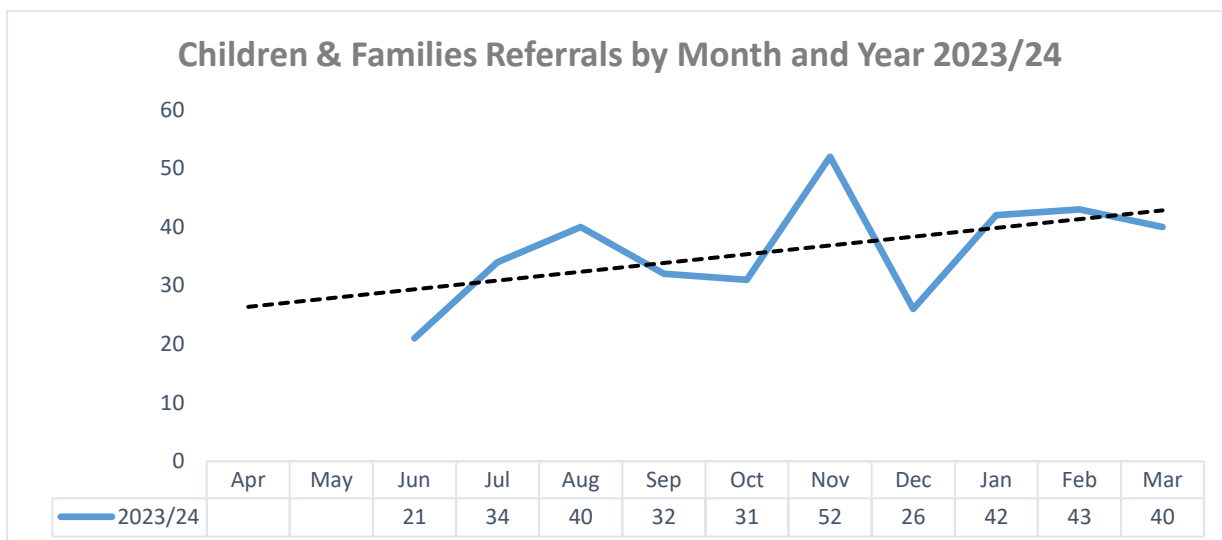
### **Service Quality and Performance Statistical Data 2023/24 Update– including delivery of statutory services.**

A sample of the available data is offered here to give a sense of the social work and social care activity over the reporting period of 2023/2024, this is compared with the previous year to give context for performance and activity trends. With regards to variance in some data the move to Eclipse from Carefirst in June 2023 has meant that previous year on year comparisons are not wholly possible against some data elements. Caution has to be taken when interpreting data trend for those data elements effected. This data will also reflect the process of embedding Eclipse in staff practice. Staff are still coming to terms with using and developing confidence in a new system and different ways of working.

### **Children & Families Services**

#### **Social Work Contacts**

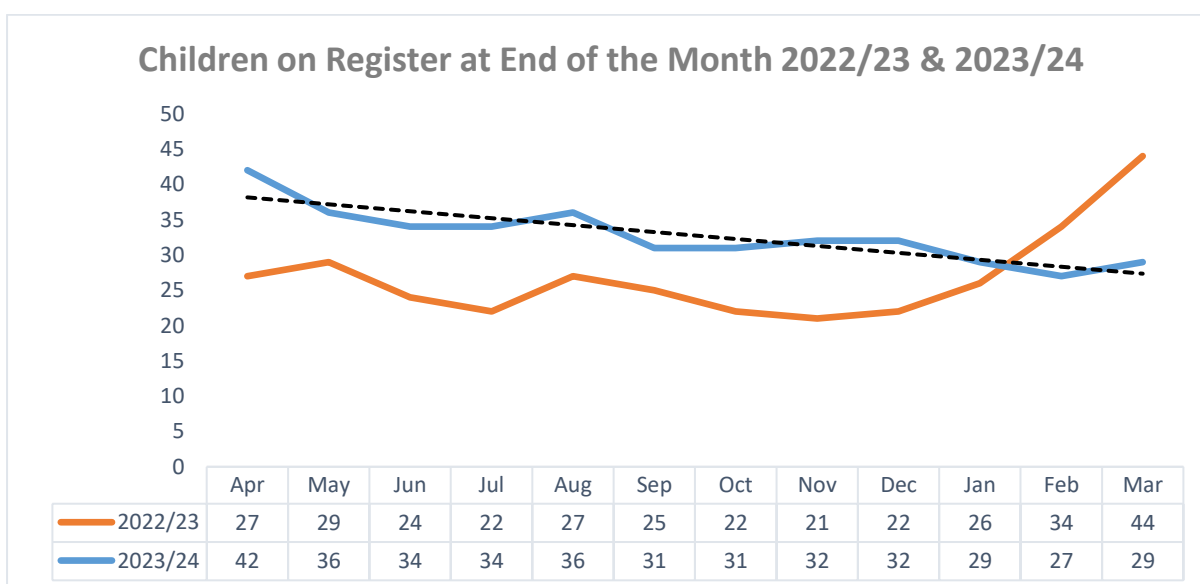
In June 2023, Children & Families Electronic Care Management System migrated from Carefirst to Eclipse. Since migration the number of C&F Child Referral worklists started across 2023/24 reports increasing trend with a peak recorded in December (52) and a monthly average of (36).



(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Child Protection

Monthly numbers of children on the Child Protection Register for 2023/24 notes a continuously decreasing trend, with a peak in April 23 (42) falling to (29) at year end. This reflects a 30% reduction across the reporting year. With regards to average monthly numbers of children on the register, 2023/24 notes (33) which is 22% above 2022/23 average (27).

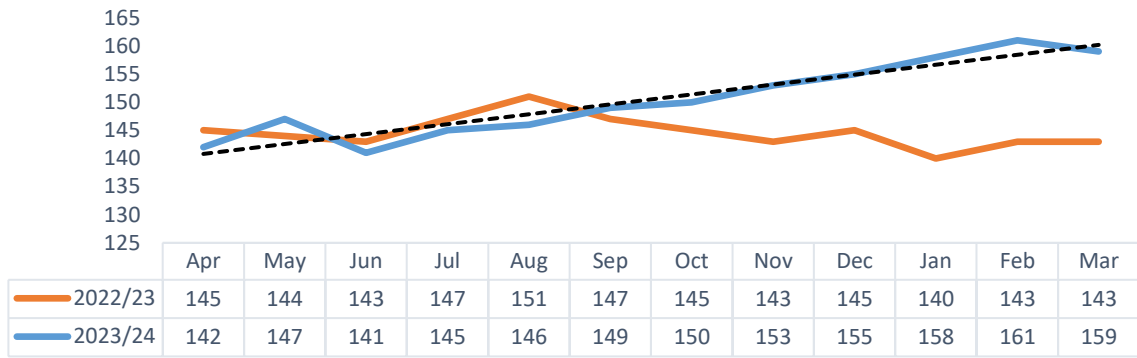


(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Care Experienced Children

Trend analysis across the year identifies an increasing trend for 2023/24, with March 2024 noting (159) against April 23 (142). This reflects a 12% increase across the reporting year. The overall average monthly numbers of care experienced children also notes a 10% increase for 2023/24 (163) against (148) for 2022/23.

### Number of Care Experienced Children 2022/23 & 2023/24

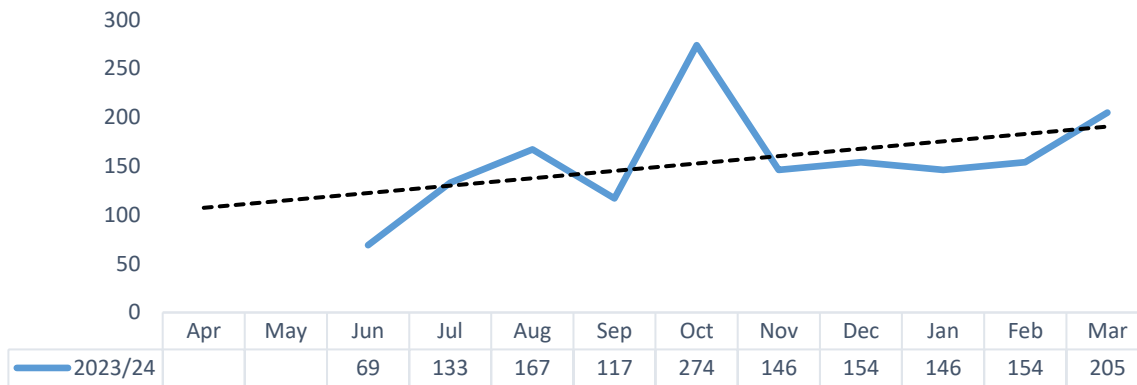


(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Child Assessments

In June 2023, Children & Families Electronic Care Management System migrated from Carefirst to Eclipse. Since migration the number of C&F Worklists started across 2023/24 reports increasing trend with a peak recorded in October (274) and a monthly average of (156).

### Children & Families Worklists by Month 2023/24

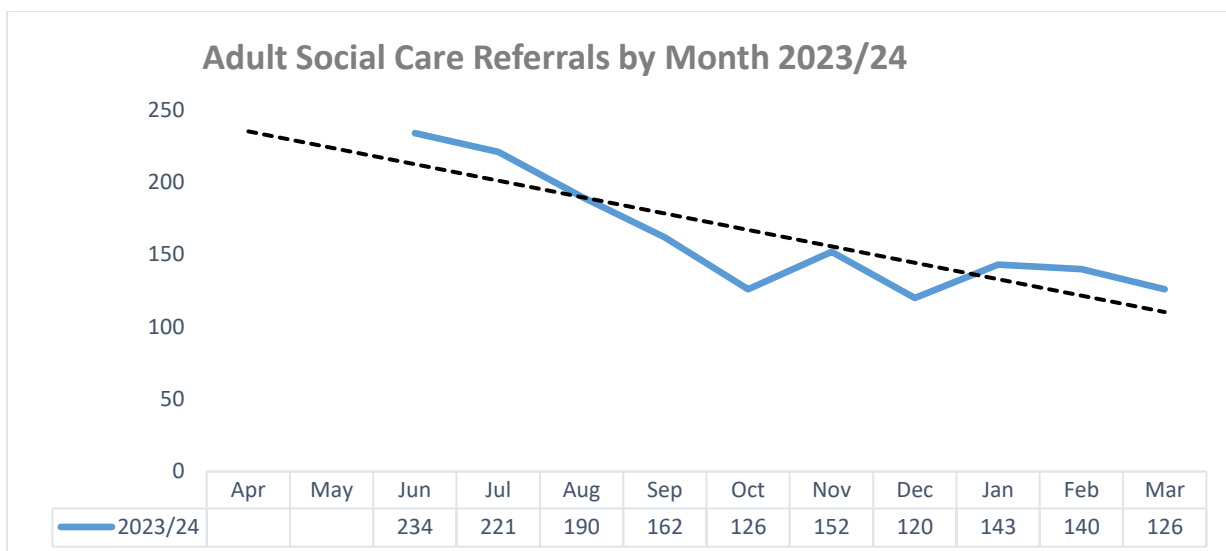


(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Adult Services

#### Social Work Contacts

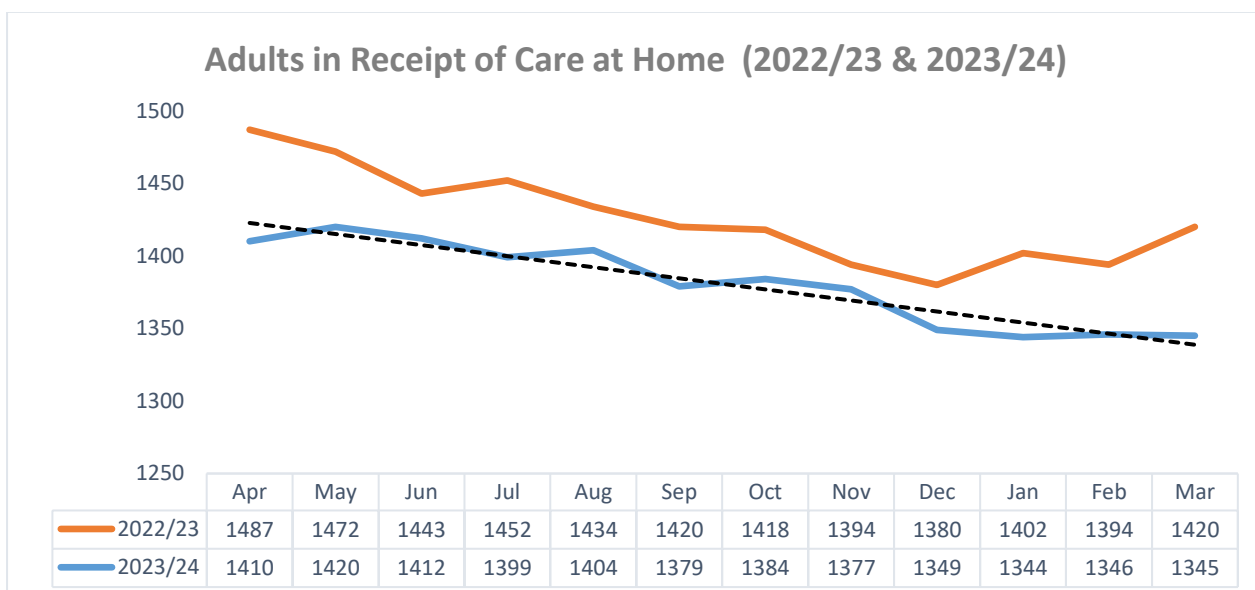
In June 2023, Adult Services Electronic Care Management System migrated from Carefirst to Eclipse. Since migration the number of Adult Referral worklists started across 2023/24 reports decreasing trend with a peak recorded in June (234) and a monthly average of (161).



(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Care at Home

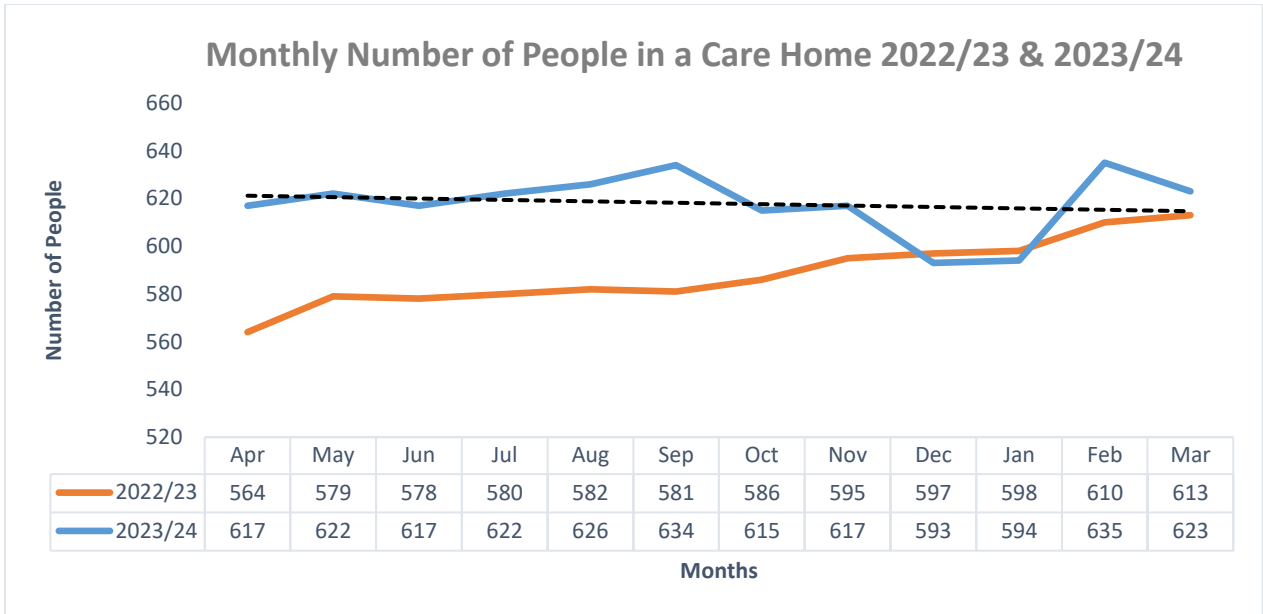
Average monthly number of Adults in receipt of Care at Home notes a 3% reduction for 2023/24 (1381) against the previous year 2022/23 (1426). The trend across both years notes a similar reducing activity, with only a slight variation noted with regards to plateauing levels noted across the period December 23 to March 24. This could be attributable to winter pressures and local service response.



(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Residential Care

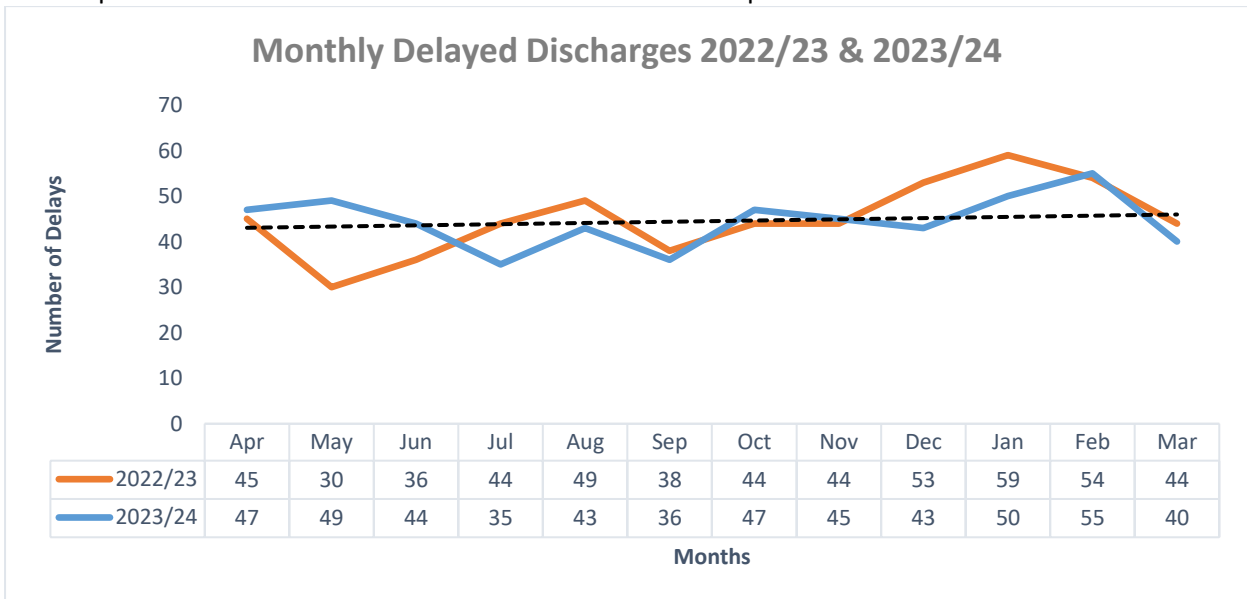
With regards to the average number of people in residential care for 2023/24 (618), against the previous year 2022/23 (589), there has been a 5% increase. Trend analysis for 2023/24 notes consistently sustained monthly data apart from a slight reduction between October to January with a low in December (593). Increased utilisation of interim care home placements across this year as part of the management of winter pressures may have contributed in part to the sustained monthly increases.



(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

### Delayed Discharge

Delayed discharge data for April to March 2023/24 notes consistent monthly average (45) against data for the previous year 2022/23 (45). The highest number of delays is noted in 2023/24 in February (55), this is slightly below the 2022/23 peak noted in January 2023 (59). Increasing activity for 2023/24 from September onwards is indicative of seasonal and service pressures.

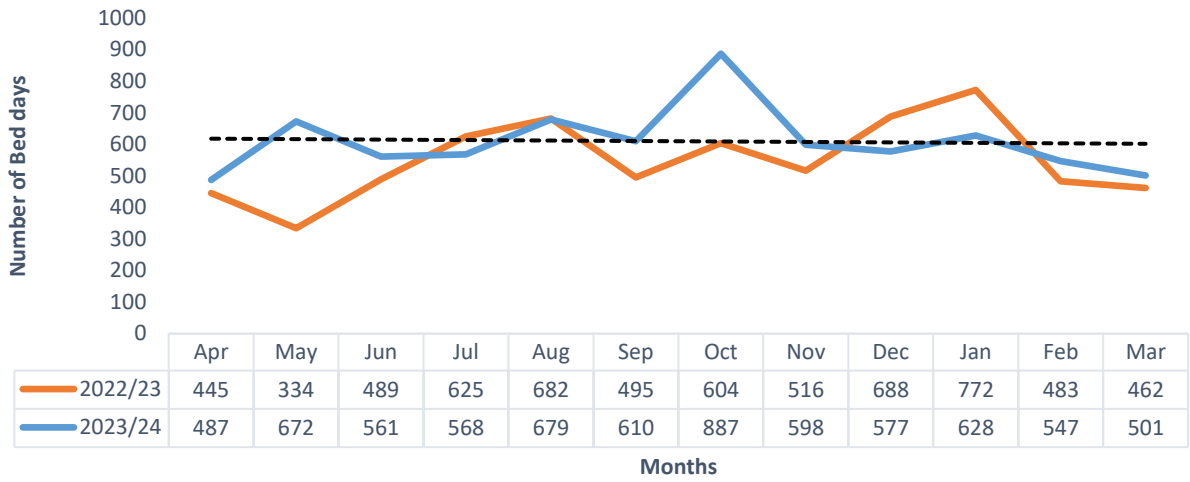


(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

Average Bed Days data across both years notes an overall increase of 10% with (610) in 2023/24 against previous year (550). For the most part the increase bed day trends for 2023/24 is associated with an increase in the numbers of delays in the month. October 2023/24 notes the highest number of bed days (887), this is a 15% increase against 2022/23 peak (772) noted for October 2022/23.



### Number of Bed Days in the Month 2022/23 & 2023/24



(Data Dashboards 2022/23 & 2023/24)

## 4. Resources

In Argyll and Bute the entirety of Social Work and Social Care are delegated to the Health and Social Care Partnership. As such the financial resources for Social Work and Social Care are intrinsically intertwined with the overall HSCP position. The financial year 2023-24 saw a balanced budget for the HSCP as a whole and indeed we reported an underspend of just over £2.9m.

Service	Actual £000	Budget £000	Variance £000
Social Work Services	93,677	92,060	(1,617)
Health Services	265,718	270,224	4,506
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>359,392</b>	<b>362,284</b>	<b>2,889</b>

The budget and spend on Social Work has largely remained the same as in 2022-23.

The overall HSCP budget for 2022-23 included a savings target of £8.9m. During the year £7.4m of the target was delivered.

As was the case last year the overall underspend is predominantly accounted for by non-recurring savings. Much of this is made up of vacant posts.

The Provisional Year End report to the IJB noted:

*“The IJB is reporting an underspend against its budget and the resources available to it and therefore an increase in the reserves it holds. The IJB is therefore in an improving financial position and will carry forward funding in reserve to enable it to progress key transformation projects and investments and help fund its anticipated budget shortfall in 2024/25. A number of factors contributed to this improved position including effective delivery of savings, improved financial management and governance and additional funding allocations from the Scottish Government. Some of the general reserve had to be used to support spend on social care services which exceeded the funding provided by Argyll & Bute Council. This was primarily driven by higher demand for Older People services including care at home and residential care placements.”*

It is clearly important that wherever possible investment is actualised and reserves are not simply swallowed by savings targets in subsequent years.

A significant and increasing cost pressure is external placements. For example: in children’s services external placements remain hugely expensive with some placements costing the equivalent of a third of a million pounds and upwards per child per year. It is to be noted that The Promise dictates that no one should be making money out of Care Experienced young people, however that is exactly what is happening. There is a thriving private sector of providers who are making a profit from publicly funded placements.

Additionally internal residential resources have been severely stretched due to the mandated Home Office National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. One third of the children and young adults cared for in our own residential units have come through that scheme. The scheme funding while adequate to cover costs for those young people under 18 years old, is wholly inadequate for any young people still in our care over that age.

As will be re-iterated in the next section of the report the main restriction in service delivery and development is not money, but people. In almost all specialisms and geographic areas there are vacancies.

## 5. Workforce

The Social Work and Social Care workforce are by far our biggest asset. Without their commitment and hard work the people of Argyll and Bute would not be receiving the standard of services they currently do.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to change much that was written in the CSWO report for 2022-23 regarding the workforce challenges. Staffing remains the major constraint in maintaining current services and developing new ones. This is mentioned on a number of occasions throughout this report. There are instances of jobs being advertised without a single candidate coming forward. Argyll and Bute are not alone in this with Local Authorities throughout the country reporting high vacancy rates.

There are teams that have not been fully staffed at any point during the time period which this report covers. Where the vacancies lie may change month to month or year to year however the staffing shortage overall continues. For example, within Children and Families, the Helensburgh Social Work team has at times over the last year had under 50% of its establishment of staff. Our Children's Houses in Oban and Helensburgh have at no point in the year 2023 – 2024 been fully staffed.

Third Sector organisations have not been immune to these issues. Being able to recruit staff at a viable level was the main factor in the closure of the Sense service in Helensburgh. Indeed, laterally they were having to bus staff in from Glasgow at significant extra cost.

Local Authorities have responded in various ways to these shortages. Unfortunately, necessary short-term solutions such as employing agency staff are enormously expensive. For example, the rate for agency Mental Health Officers is @£50 per hour. Other Local Authorities, particularly in urban areas, have raised wages for Social Workers. This of course does not address the national shortage of Social Work and Social Care staff. At a national level it could be argued that each successful recruitment process is more a case of moving around where the vacancy is, rather than increasing the overall workforce.

It is noted that at times agency staff are described as supplementary staff. Caution needs to be taken with such descriptions. Agency staff are undoubtedly temporary however more often than not they are covering essential core roles. 'Supplementary' gives a sense of 'extra'. They are anything but that. Anecdotally it is reported that a significant number of agency workers are not seeking temporary roles until they secure a permanent job but are in fact actively choosing to practice in this way. It could be the nature of the workforce is changing and it will be essential to monitor this dynamic in the coming years. Is Social Work and Social Care developing a 'gig economy'?

During the period covered by this report discussions were starting on the potential for a National Social Work Agency. Bolstering the governance and influence of the profession within and parallel to the proposed National Care Service. This will hopefully be reported with greater clarity in next year's CSWO report. One element of this discussion has been the potential to move Social Work onto national pay and conditions as is the case for nurses or teachers. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and others will be campaigning on this point in the coming year. While it is recognised that this creates complications within the current local government model, the potential to even the Social Work and Social Care playing field amongst Local Authorities should also be considered. It is also to be wondered if those staff working in our remote and island areas would

benefit from the equivalent of the 'distant islands allowance' enjoyed in Comhairle Nan Eilan Siar, Orkney and Shetland.

The review of job descriptions and roles of Social Work Team Managers and Social Work Assistants has now been completed and embedded. There is now a consistency throughout the Social Work specialisms across the Local Authority. This has also acted to strengthen the Social Work Out of Hours senior rota. In the coming year there requires to be exploration on how we recruit, support and retain our advanced practitioners: the likes of Mental Health Officers and Scottish Child Interview Model trained staff.

As reported last year posts are often being filled by Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW). These newly appointed professional staff are hugely welcome into the ranks of the profession and into Argyll and Bute. There is a confidence they have the potential to develop into the experienced staff that are so badly needed, however there also needs to be recognition of the short term pressure on experienced staff and Social Work Team Managers. NQSWs cannot practice fully, for example, in child or adult protection.

Research has shown that within Social Work there is a high attrition rate in the first five years following initial qualification. This is recognised and there is a constant effort to support NQSWs here in Argyll and Bute. There is individual support and supervision from Social Work Team Managers, there is a NQSWs forum and there are protected caseloads. In the next year the SSSC will offer strengthened guidance on expectations in the first year of practice. This to be welcomed, however it is unclear how it is to be resourced.

Argyll and Bute have also been successful in international recruitment which has helped to alleviate acute shortages. This is not necessarily an easy route for candidates or the organisation. The onus is on the candidate to prove their qualifications have an equivalency to UK ones before they are allowed to register with the SSSC. This process includes, for example, providing a translation of their course materials. It is both a costly and time-consuming process. The cost of obtaining a work visa is more expensive if a candidate wants to work in children or justice services than if they are going to work in adult services. This includes an employers contribution to the work visa.

As mentioned earlier in the report we are running a 'grow your own' programme to allow unqualified staff to have a supported route into the profession. This will undoubtedly be advantageous in the medium to longer term. Candidates are people who already have roots in our communities and as such are more likely to remain committed to Argyll and Bute. In the short term these efforts are not without cost: while course fees are covered by the authority there are no replacement budgets for the period when candidates are on extended practice placement elsewhere. This in the short term leaves a gap in their teams. While this is painful in the short term it can best be seen as an investment in the future.

Specific job-related training continues. For example, within child protection, we are expanding our pool of interviewers trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model and planning reflective practice events for those managing these processes. There is a recognition that social work practice in such areas does not sit within a professional silo and these developments are closely co-ordinated with Police Scotland, NHS Highland Child Health and Argyll and Bute Council Education colleagues.

Despite the significant challenges the workforce face, staff still generally consider Argyll and Bute a good place to work. The NHS iMatters staffing survey is available to all HSCP staff no matter the employing organisation. Year on year the level of returns is improving and they continue to demonstrate a good level of satisfaction with the HSCP as an organisation.

In the research commissioned by Social Work Scotland, titled 'Setting the Bar', the number one reason given for leaving the profession was 'paperwork'. In the last year Argyll and Bute HSCP have introduced a new case management system, named Eclipse. This introduction has not been without significant challenges and has probably caused an upturn in the amount of time spent recording and dealing with case files. Currently we are having to invest extra time in system support and developing staff understanding of how they interact with the system. There are certainly short-term risks in ensuring we have consistent management information, that case file recording is accurate and that we can provide the data we and Scottish Government require. This is perhaps to be expected during the period of introduction of any such system, however assurance can be given that significant effort is being expended on both long-term solutions and short term 'work arounds'. The system support team and practitioners are working hard to move to a point where it can be reported Eclipse is embedded and is reducing the time practitioners spend on 'paperwork'.

At the end of the time frame relevant to this report discussions were starting to take place on the potential use of AI in Social Work. It will be fascinating and essential to engage in these developments as the direction of change appears to be inevitable. The potential to cut routine administration type 'paperwork' is huge.

By the time the CSWOs report is presented next year the Health & Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 will be in force. During the time period covered by this report the impact and requirements of the Act were not yet clear, but further guidance was anticipated. It is important to note that staff in registered services will be covered by the duties of the Act, however Social Workers will not be.

Several elements of last year's CSWO report remain directly relevant and as such they are repeated here:

- The rates of pay for many Social Care staff do not match those that can be obtained in the hospitality and leisure industries in Argyll and Bute. It continues to pay more to clean distilleries and hotels than it does to care for people. While the overall cost to the Scottish Government of some £240m appears large the actual impact on the pay packet of individual staff is relatively minimal and the impact of improving the staffing situation negligible.
- There remains uncertainty and concern amongst Justice Social Workers about the enhanced vetting required to use the ViSOR system. As referred to earlier in this report Police Scotland made a decision to no longer input MAPP data for Social Work, thus forcing Local Authority staff to have to interface with ViSOR. As such Justice staff and their administrative support staff have to undergo vetting beyond that of other Social Work employees. There is a sense the demands to vet the individual more deeply and to vet their wider family and loved ones is unacceptably intrusive on their right to privacy. This could impact recruitment and retention into Justice roles. A new system, MAPPs is being developed, however that will not change the vetting issues.
- Elements of Scottish Government funding remain problematic. Short-term ring-fenced grants leave us attempting to recruit to fixed term contracts and in some case part time fixed term contracts. Relatively small discrete grants are being made, yet the aim is for systemic change. The lack of assurance about the recurring or non-recurring nature of these grants leaves significant uncertainty. The grant applications and subsequent reporting can be onerous and often it is Heads of Service who require to carry out these tasks.
- Argyll & Bute have more inhabited islands than Orkney, Shetland or Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar however in relation to funding we do not receive the island weighting the other organisations do. This leaves our island services at a disadvantage.

- In Argyll and Bute there are the added complications of a lack of affordable housing and a relatively expensive cost of living particularly in our most remote and island areas. Fuel poverty is high in our area. For those living on islands the unreliability of ferry links, which have been particularly troublesome this last year, are adding to the uncertainty of life in general and the inconsistency of services.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It has become clearer over the course of 2023 and 2024 that the responses to the Covid 19 pandemic have had a significant impact on the level and type of need our services are attempting to meet. The individual and collective social and emotional impact of the 'lockdown' period is starting to emerge. Far from being in a recovery phase from these extraordinary events, it feels that need is rising. This coincides with a time when budgets are constricting, costs are rising and the workforce is harder than ever to source. The policy context is becoming ever more crowded and the list of 'top priorities' cluttered. More than one member of staff has uttered recently, 'we can't do it all!'

A stage has been reached, even when there is short term funding being provided it does not guarantee progress, it does not guarantee the people will be available. If core services are not adequately resourced, the foundations will not be firm enough for systemic change. No amount of political exhortation will force progress without long term secure funding and workforce development.

There is a need to be transparent. It is not possible to keep offering Social Work and Social Care services to our communities in the way we have become used to. Increasing need cannot be met in traditional ways with less money and less people. What are the top priorities? What do we keep doing? What do we do differently? What do we stop doing? What are the actual issues we need to focus on? A tremendous amount of time and effort has been spent debating the National Care Service. Whatever the bureaucratic structures these questions will still require to be answered. Communities will require to be engaged with and consider different forms of provision.

Despite perhaps the most challenging period in the working career of many staff, in Argyll and Bute we are continuing to offer support to our communities. Perhaps the continuity of care that has been achieved through this tumult is the greatest testimony to the commitment of our Social Workers and Social Care staff. Simply keeping services going is a huge success by itself. We are reviewing and transforming the roles of staff and considering the shape of future developments. We recognise that transformational effort will not only need to continue but accelerate. Considering more radical solutions. There are no easy answers, but assurance is given that in Argyll and Bute no effort will be spared in exploring those solutions.

### **David Gibson – Daibhidh MacGileabairt**

Chief Social Work Officer - Àrd-Oifigear Obair shòisealta

Head of Children, Families & Justice - Ceannard Cloinne, Theaghlaichean & Ceartais

Argyll & Bute Health and Social Care Partnership - Com-pàirteachas Slàinte agus Cùram Sòisealta

Earra Ghàidheal is Bhòid

Kilmory - Chille Mhoire

Lochgilphead - Ceann Loch Gilb

Argyll - Earra Gàidheal

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