



# Children's Services Annual Report

2020 - 2021



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Fife  
Children's  
Services  
Annual  
Report  
2020/21

## Introduction

The past year has been a year like no other for children, young people and families across Fife.

Throughout this time, staff across the Fife Children's Services Partnership have continued to work together to promote, support and safeguard the wellbeing of all children and young people.

This Children's Services Annual Report describes how we have worked together to achieve this aim.

The report has been prepared by the senior leaders of the organisations that make up Fife Children's Services Partnership.

We would like to thank staff across all of our services for their commitment to our children and young people over this past year, and for continuing to make sure – in the most challenging of circumstances – that every child in Fife matters.



**Carrie Lindsay**  
**Chair, Children in Fife**

# Our Priorities for Improvement in 2020/21

## Priorities for Improvement

*Our main focus for improving outcomes for Fife's children, young people and families*

## Key Enablers

*What we need to do to better identify and appropriately support the needs of Fife's children, young people and families*



# Our Approach to Partnership Working in 2020/21

In the months leading up to March 2020, Fife Children's Services Partnership had been undertaking a review of its Children's Services Plan 2017-20. This included a review of outcomes for children and young people in Fife and a strategic needs assessment of the work that would be needed to improve outcomes further over the next three years.

This work had been undertaken as the basis for developing a new 3 year Children's Services Plan, to cover the period from April 2020 to March 2023. The work on developing this new, strategic plan was well under way when the Covid-19 pandemic struck and lockdown occurred in March 2020.

In response to the Covid pandemic, the Fife Children's Services Partnership published an Agile Action Plan, to support joint working for the period 2020-2021. This Plan was structured around four priorities for improvement, which had been identified through the strategic needs assessment undertaken prior to the pandemic, and the key enablers for work to support these priorities.

The Agile Action Plan has formed the basis for joint working throughout the past year. It has also been a focus for the sharing of evidence and experience at a series of Children's Services Development Sessions. These sessions have provided a forum for sharing and understanding emerging learning about the impact of the Covid pandemic, including:

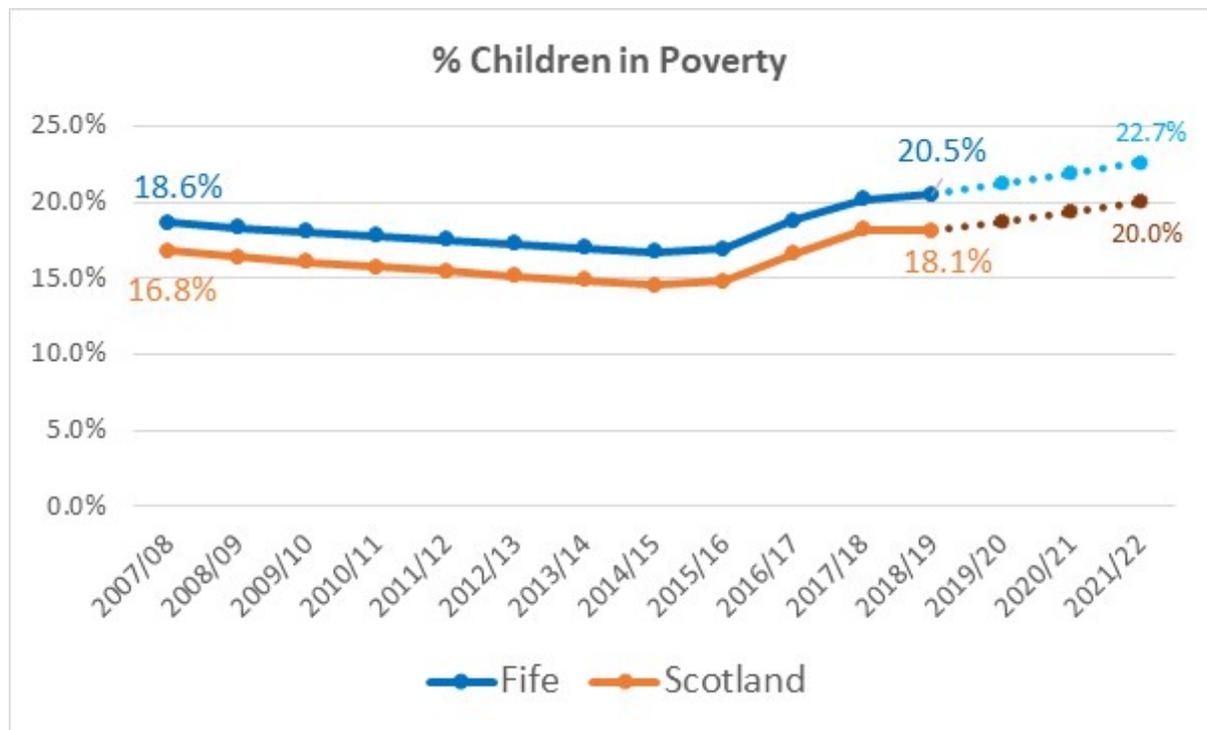
- Quantitative evidence from some established data sources that have continued to be updated over the course of the Covid pandemic;
- Evidence from a range of surveys gathered by partners in Fife, which have focused on the experiences of children, young people and families since March 2020;
- Qualitative evidence from practitioners, regarding the experiences of children, young people, families and staff;
- National sources which have synthesised a wide range of evidence about the impact of Covid on families, including surveys, qualitative evidence and academic research.

This Annual Report provides an overview of key messages taken from this evidence base. It identifies long-standing areas for improvement and challenges arising from the Covid pandemic, and outlines the rationale for the improvement priorities.

## Context: Child Poverty in Fife

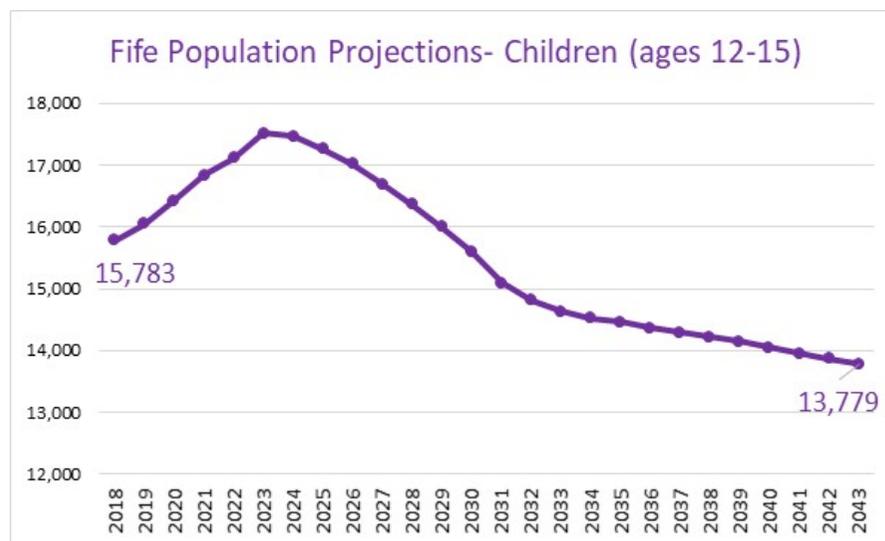
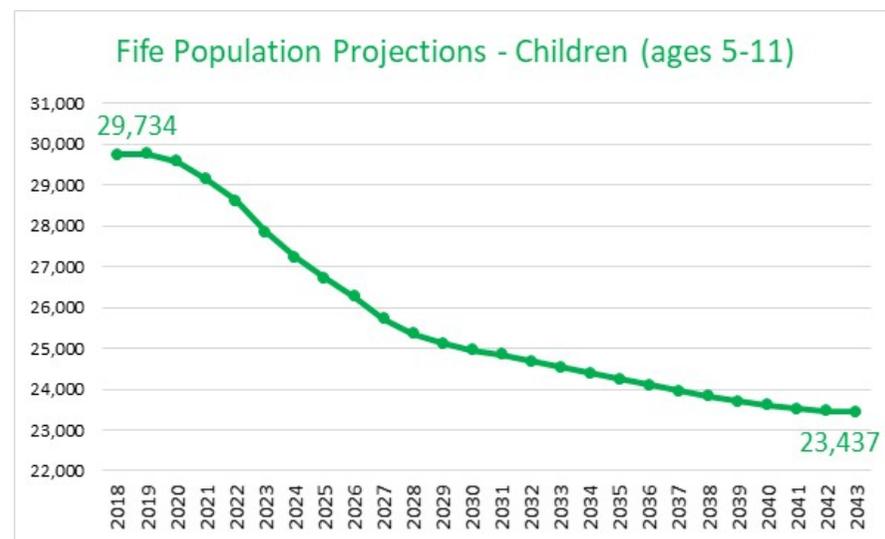
- Children growing up in poverty are not only restricted to workless households, but many are in low income working households.
- Fife's child poverty rates follow a similar pattern to Scotland overall, but Fife's rate has remained consistently higher than Scotland for at least the last decade.
- Across a range of measures of child poverty or disadvantage, Fife ranks 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> most deprived of Scotland's 32 local authorities.
- In recent years, the gap between Fife and Scotland's child poverty rates has started to widen, and this gap is projected to increase over the next few years.

An overview  
of the  
current  
evidence



## Context: Demographic Change

- Fife's overall population has seen continued growth over the last several decades.
- The most recent population projections from National Records of Scotland project that this trend will reverse from 2021-22 onwards.
- Fife's child population, has seen a reduction of 3% since 1998. It will continue to reduce in size over the next 25 years, with the sharpest drop taking place over the next decade
- Primary school age children numbers will experience the highest reductions, falling by over 20% in the next 25 years
- Whilst the population of secondary school age is currently increasing, this trend is projected to start declining after 2023.
- At an Area Committee level, South and West Fife, and Glenrothes, will see the largest reduction in child numbers over the next ten years, while Levenmouth and Kirkcaldy Areas will see smaller reductions.
- The main drivers of reducing child numbers include, record low levels of fertility, women having children later in life than in previous decades, net in-migration levels reducing, and a continuing reduction in the proportion of young working age people within the population.
- The projections summarised above were produced before the impact of Brexit or the Covid pandemic could be properly understood and do not take account of these factors. There is a risk that both Brexit and Covid will further exacerbate the main drivers of falling child numbers in future years (e.g. by further suppressing levels of migration).

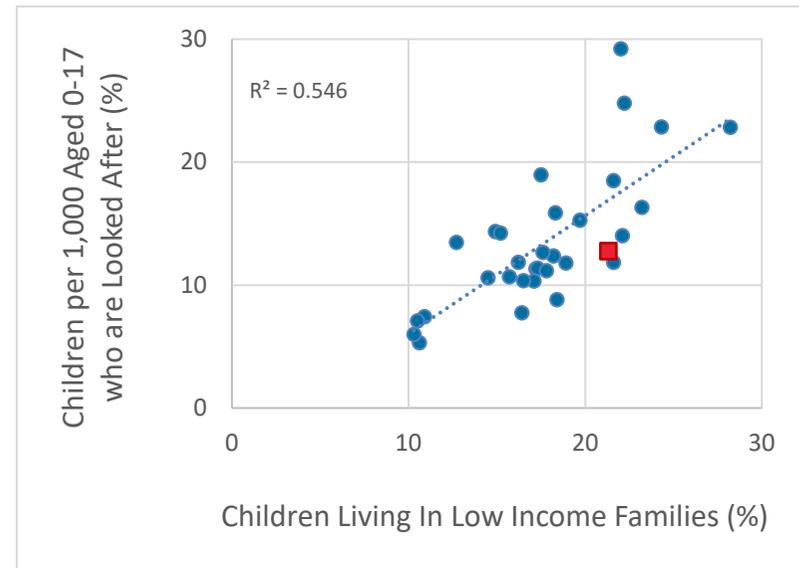


# An overview of outcomes for safety

The Fife Children's Services Partnership works with the **Child Protection Committee** – to ensure that children and young people are safe – and with the **Corporate Parenting Board** – to promote the interests of care experienced children and young people, and to improve their experiences and life outcomes.

## Key messages about outcomes

- A key priority for the children's services partnership is to develop a greater capacity for support at the intensive level, for Fife's most vulnerable families.
- Prioritising scarce resources to meet the needs of vulnerable families, through the mechanism of the Intensive Community Support Panel, has made a significant difference to the coordination of support for those requiring a high level of support.
- These changes are helping to address needs of – and risks faced by – children and young people in crisis.
- As a result, the number of looked after children in Fife has fallen and is significantly lower than the level expected, given levels of child poverty in Fife.
- For every 1,000 children aged 0-17 in Fife at the time of the 2020 July census, 13 were looked after. This was lower than the Scottish average of 14 per 1,000 aged 0-17.
- Furthermore, there is a significant correlation between the number of children who are looked after and the number of children who live in poverty, across Scotland's 32 local authorities. This is shown in the figure on the right. Given Fife's relatively high level of child poverty, Fife would expect to have 17 looked after children for every 1,000 children aged 0-17 years, based on this relationship.

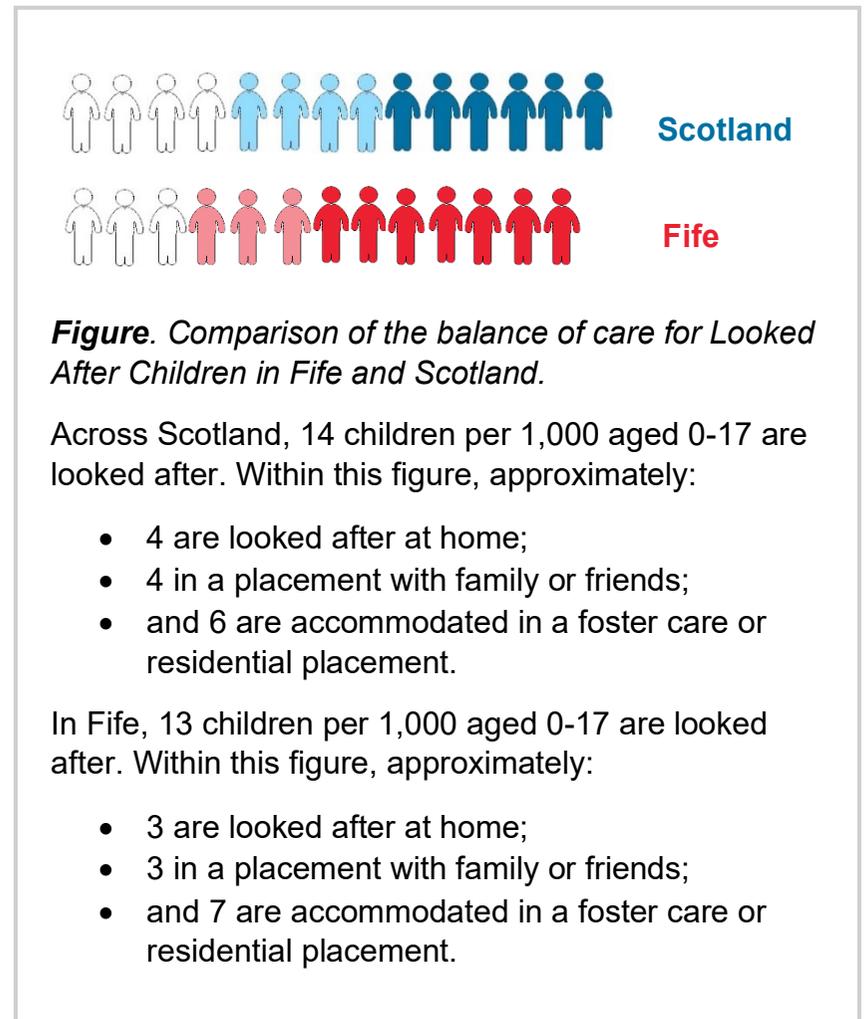


**Figure.** Correlation between children who are looked after and children living in low income families. The data for Fife is shown by the red square box.

- However, whilst the overall numbers of looked after children in Fife are low, the number of children looked after and accommodated in a foster care placement is relatively high. This can be seen from the figure on the right. Many of these are long term permanent placements, which will continue to be maintained.
- It should be noted that in addition to the data on looked after children shared with the Scottish Government, Fife supports around 450 children to live with Kinship Carers who are not 'looked after' through a Family Support Payment and in addition continues to support non-LAC kinship placements.

### Key lessons for our next steps

- A key focus for the Children's Services Plan 2021-23 is to maintain the overall number of children looked after away from home at a low level, whilst ensuring that more children are able to be supported safely at home or in a kinship placement.
- The Belonging to Fife strategy, an ongoing strategy led by the Children & Families Social Work Service, is integral to achieving this aim. It is helping to further embed the relationship based approach in Fife, ensuring effective assessment and coordinated support, to help build resilience and reduce risk for vulnerable families.
- The Children's Services Partnership has also begun a programme of collective work, supported by the 4DX improvement methodology, to help support this ongoing work.
- The Plan also aims to build on improvements in preventative working, generally, including a focus on Getting it Right for Every Child and pathways for early support, such as the Child Wellbeing Pathway.

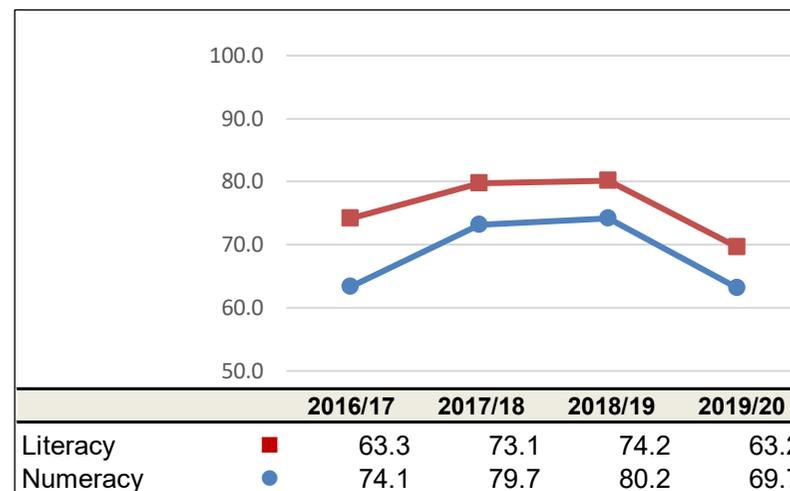


# An overview of outcomes for Opportunity

The Fife Children’s Services Partnership activity supports work to improve the life opportunities of children and young people. It also contributes to work to support opportunities for young people within the Fife local economy, through work in partnership with the **Fife Economy Partnership**.

## Key messages about outcomes

- Most children in Fife have a good start to life. Pre-school development outcomes and attainment in primary stage P1 are, generally, in line with or above the national average.
- Educational outcomes in learning within the primary sector remain strong, relative to national. However, there is some evidence of a relatively slow pace in learning, with the proportion of children achieving the expected level in the curriculum reducing between P1 and P4, and between P4 and P7. This decline reflects a national pattern.
- There is also some evidence (see figure top right) to suggest that: improvements in the progress of learning had begun to slow prior to 2019-20; and the Covid pandemic has resulted in a slower pace of learning for primary pupils than would otherwise have been the case.
- There was a general improvement in the educational attainment of school leavers in the period running up to the Covid pandemic. Attainment for the key skills of literacy and numeracy saw a particular improvement (see figure bottom right).
- This reflects a strong focus in Fife on improving literacy and numeracy for a number of years. This has been supported by improvement activity involving a range of partners, reflecting the cross-service nature of many barriers to learning; and



**Figure.** Percentage of children in P1, P4 and P7 who had achieved the expected level of the curriculum.

Achievement of school leavers	2013-14 (%)	2018-19 (%)	Change (%)
Literacy & numeracy: SCQF level 4	85.8	90.1	4.3
Literacy at SCQF level 5	71.9	79.6	7.7
Numeracy at SCQF level 5	58.5	68.4	9.9

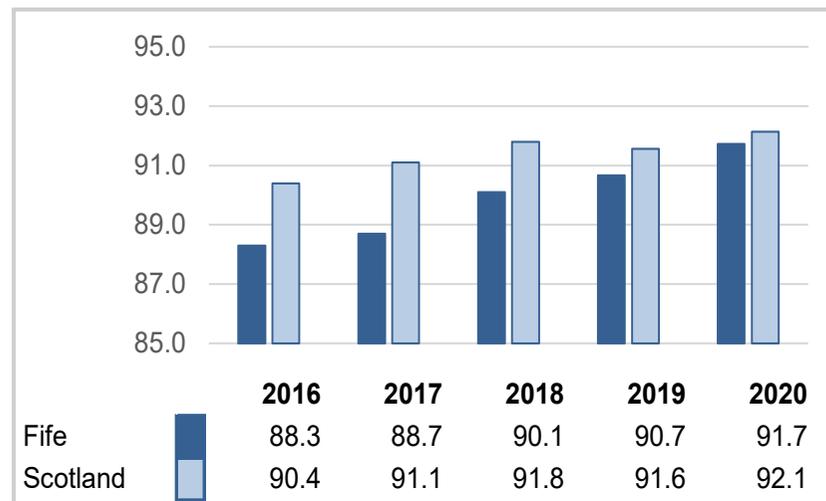
**Figure.** Achievement of awards in literacy and numeracy for Fife school leavers.

has been supported by CYPIC (the Children & Young People’s Improvement Collaborative).

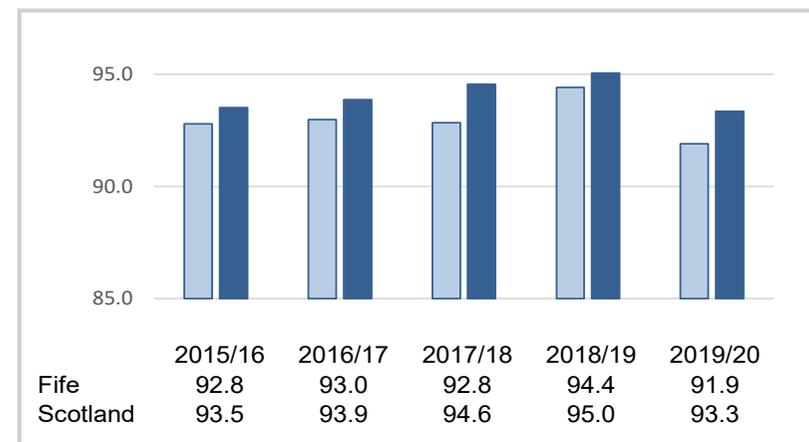
- It is not possible to make a like-for-like comparison of SQA attainment in 2019-20 with earlier years, as the process leading to qualifications was different. However, outcomes were broadly in line with comparable areas of Scotland.
- Significant progress had been made, before the Covid pandemic, in improving post school destinations for school leavers. There was a significant improvement in the participation of 16-19 year olds in the Fife local economy (see figure top right).
- Progress had also been made, pre-Covid, in supporting more young people into a positive destination when they left school. However, the Covid pandemic had a significant impact on the destinations of leavers in August 2020 (see figure bottom right) across all parts of Scotland.

### Key lessons for our next steps

- Significant progress had been made in improving outcomes and life opportunities for children and young people in Fife in the period leading up to the Covid pandemic.
- Evidence suggests that the Covid pandemic has had a negative impact on many outcomes for children across Scotland. It is also clear that young people will be entering a challenging economy in the near future.
- Work is underway across the Partnership to support a recovery from Covid. Supporting young people into active economic activity will be a key part of this work.



**Figure.** The percentage of 16-19 year-olds participating in continuing education, training or employment. NB – the most recent data relates to the year ending March 2020.



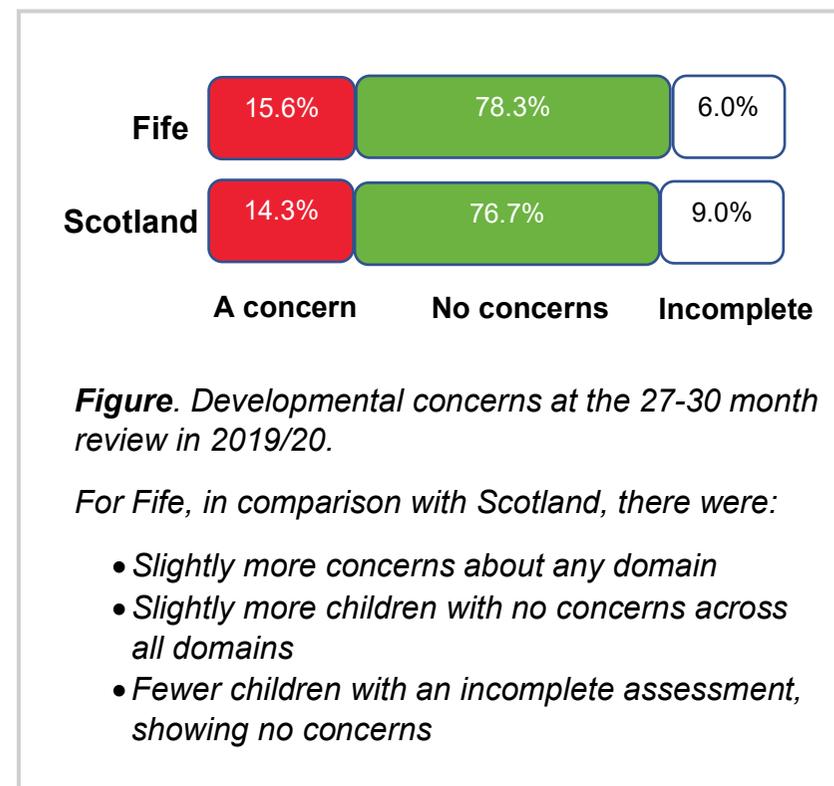
**Figure.** The percentage of school leavers entering a destination in continuing education, training or employment

# An overview of outcomes for wellbeing

The Fife Children's Services Partnership works collectively to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families across Fife. This will contribute to delivering the **Plan 4 Fife**, Fife's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan. In particular, it will contribute to achieving the ambition to reduce levels of preventable ill health and premature mortality across Fife's communities.

## Key lessons for our next steps

- In terms of early child development, the 27-30 month review by the Health Visitor is a key milestone in assessing developmental progress. Data for 2019/20 shows outcomes in Fife were similar to those seen nationally.
- The primary immunisation uptake rates in Fife by 12 months for the last year are – 95.8 % for the 5in 1/6 in 1 immunisation; 96.2% for Meningitis B; 96.4 % PCV and 94.8% Rotavirus. The uptake rates are slightly lower than the Scotland wide rates. Immunisations for under 5's continued even during the lockdown period of the Covid pandemic, as this is regarded as critical aspect of public health.
- Primary 1 weight and Body Mass Index checks have been impacted by the Covid restrictions, with schools being closed and limited access to schools. The figures available for 2019/20 showed 75.1% of children with a healthy weight; 12.1% are at risk of being overweight; 11.7% are at risk of becoming obese and 1.1% are at risk of being underweight. BMI trends since 2016/17 have been relatively steady.
- In terms of infant feeding, approximately 40% of infants in Fife were being breast fed and 60% formula fed at 6-8 weeks (August 2020). Across Scotland breast feeding rates at 6-8 weeks is 44%.



- The pandemic has had a negative impact on the opportunities for children & young people to play and be physically active.
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health were a significant concern for young people before the pandemic, as was the negative impact of work-related stress on staff. These were in a number of periodic surveys of children, young people and staff undertaken by partners.
- The pandemic has further increased the stresses on young people and staff. A range of ad hoc surveys undertaken during the Covid pandemic have also highlighted these as areas of concern.

### Key lessons for our next steps

- The Covid pandemic has placed significant stresses on children, young people, families and staff. It has also, often, limited the opportunities for play and physical activity.
- Supporting the emotional and physical wellbeing of children, young people, families and staff is a priority for the recovery period.
- The Fife Partnership had developed the **Our Minds Matter** Framework to ensure that children and young people in Fife receive good, broad pastoral care around them and a means of support if they experience difficulties. This will provide an established framework for further developing support emotional wellbeing during the period of recovery from Covid.



# An overview of progress in mitigating the impact of Poverty

Fife Partnership works collectively to tackle poverty across Fife's Communities. The **Fife Child Poverty Action Report** provides a focus for the Partnership's collective action to address the immediate impact of poverty on Fife families, by: improving income from employment; reducing barriers caused by the cost of living; and increasing income from social security and benefits in kind.

The Children's Services Partnership both leads and contributes to this work. Further evidence about progress can be found in the **Fife Child Poverty Action Report 2020/21**.

The Children's Services Partnership also works to improve the opportunities and life chances of children and young people living in poverty, by reducing the equity gap in outcomes for our most disadvantaged, particularly those facing multiple forms of disadvantage.

## Key messages about outcomes

- Many children & young people face a significant disadvantage in terms of their development, outcomes and life opportunities.
- There is a significant equity gap across a range of outcomes, including: pre-school development, educational attainment, and destinations on leaving school.
- The equity gap seen in outcomes in Fife reflects an equity gap seen across the rest of Scotland, and in many other countries.
- Significant progress had been made in closing equity gaps in outcomes for different groups in Fife over a number of years. There have been clear improvement trends in many outcomes for a period of up to ten years.
- However, progress had appeared to be slowing in the years immediately preceding the Covid pandemic. This may have reflected the fact that our partnership working was not as effective at engaging all families, children or young people.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>Literacy</b>				
SIMD Quintile 5	76.1	82.7	83.0	76.3
SIMD Quintile 1	53.1	64.2	64.5	50.4
<b>Attainment gap</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>25.9</b>
<b>Numeracy</b>				
SIMD Quintile 5	83.9	88.1	88.2	80.2
SIMD Quintile 1	66.2	72.2	71.8	57.8
<b>Attainment gap</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>22.4</b>

**Figure.** The percentage of children in primary stages P1, P4 and P7 who had achieved the expected level of the curriculum.

Data shows the attainment gap between children living in the most and least deprived communities in Fife (SIMD Quintile 1 and SIMD Quintile 5).

- There is also evidence that the impact of the Covid pandemic has led to a widening in the equity gap for many measures.
- The figure on page 14 shows data relating to the progress of learning in schools, but reflects a pattern seen across other outcomes. It shows the end of a period of sustained improvement, and the impact of the Covid pandemic in 2019/20.
- Key groups achieving poorer outcomes include: looked after children, those living in more deprived areas as measured by SIMD (in particular, SIMD quintile 1), those registered for free school meals, those with additional support needs (see figure top right).
- It is also clear from available data (see figure bottom right) that those facing multiple forms of disadvantage, and multiple barriers to development, have the poorest outcomes.

### Key lessons for our next steps

- A key focus for improvement during the recovery from the Covid pandemic will be closing the equity gap in outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
- Data suggests that, although significant progress had been made in closing equity gaps before the Covid pandemic, those facing multiple forms of disadvantage had benefited least from these improvements.
- These groups will be a particular focus for targeted support during the coming two years,

	Numeracy	Literacy	Number of pupils
<b>All P1, P4, P7 pupils</b>	<b>69.7</b>	<b>63.2</b>	<b>12586</b>
Speakers of other languages	65.4	54.8	673
Living in SIMD Quintile 1	57.8	50.4	2984
Registered for free meals	49.6	42.4	2461
Children with ASL need	45.3	35.6	2271
Care experienced children	37.8	30.1	196

**Figure.** The percentage of children in primary stages P1, P4 and P7 who had achieved the expected level of the curriculum.

Data shows attainment for a number of groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people.

	Numeracy	Literacy	Number of pupils
<b>Non-care experienced</b>	<b>70.2</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>12387</b>
Not in any other group	81.1	76.0	6838
In 1 other group only	62.6	54.6	3429
In 2 other groups only	49.7	41.4	1682
In 3 or more other groups	37.7	29.0	438

Data shows how the attainment of non-care experienced children and young people varies with the number of disadvantaged groups to which they belong (living in SIMD Quintile 1 and/or being registered for free meals and/or having a need for additional support with learning and/or speaking a language other than English).

# The views of our children, young people & families

## Overview

The Children's Services Plan 2017-20 outlined our approach in Fife to improving outcomes for children, young people and families within the context of the Getting it Right in Fife Framework and the Child Wellbeing Pathway. This guidance continued to remain relevant within our 2020-2021 Agile Action Plan and underpins practice across the partnership.

We continue to strive to ensure services work collaboratively to deliver effective outcome-based services. The development of a common practice approach in Fife through agreed principles and a shared language has ensured children and young people's wellbeing needs and concerns are at the heart of service delivery. Involvement of children, young people and families in decision making has been strengthened through a focus on children's rights, family involvement in decision making within the context of the child wellbeing pathway and effective multi agency planning.

Through the work undertaken by the Children's Rights Strategy Group and its predecessors a clear framework, with a suite of resources, were created to support all services to realise Children's Rights and ensure their voice was heard. Prior to the first lockdown, significant consultation took place with a large number of our children and young people, including a range of vulnerable groups, to listen to what they felt was supporting or challenging their wellbeing, both in school and across the community. Time was also taken to identify what would help improve health and wellbeing and who should be responsible to ensure this happened. These consultations helped inform our priorities within our Agile Action Plan.

Throughout the Covid pandemic, including the periods of lockdown, all partners have continued to engage with children, young people and the families who were involved with their service. Ways of working changed and new approaches were adopted to ensure this continued to remain a priority. Whilst this was not undertaken as a partnership, time was spent during our development sessions sharing feedback across services and reflecting on how this would continue to inform the work we undertake. Services completed and shared Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA) which supported the work further.

Prior to lockdown, Children's Services Partnership had begun to work and consult with wider services to ensure that consideration was explicitly being given to considering Children's Rights in the work they do. Changes were made to our Equality and Impact Assessments to reference CRWIA's and ensure consideration was given to these also being completed for any policy change. This is a renewed area of focus for the Partnership. Work is also underway to ensure all our practitioners ensure they are considering children's rights, linked to wellbeing, across every service.

# Feedback from services about the Covid experience

The Children's Services Partnership holds a regular cycle of **Children's Services Development Sessions**. These events bring together those involved in the strategic planning process at all levels of working, ensuring that there is a real understanding of the impact of our strategic planning and a chance to keep work at all levels of the Partnership strongly aligned to our strategic goals.

Since the start of the Covid pandemic, these sessions have been undertaken online. They have provided an opportunity for leaders and staff across services to share insights about the impact of the pandemic on families, staff and service delivery, and to discuss how learning from the Covid pandemic might inform a better approach to service delivery in the future.

Key issues highlighted during the discussions over the past year are summarised below:

- The Covid pandemic led to a shift in the way that Children's Services have been provided in Fife, with an increasing use of online delivery, including support for learning at home, and online meetings between families/young people and professionals for health and care purposes. There has also been an increase in the provision of online support and guidance for families.
- These changes have been seen favourably by some children, young people and families. This includes: individuals and families that have been more at ease with online opportunities; those with a greater experience of using online platforms for work; those with an established pattern of support through established use of social media, etc.
- Others have found the changes to service delivery to be an isolating and alienating experience. This includes: individuals who prefer or benefit from in-person social interactions; those who have found the range of online tools/sources offered overwhelming; those with limited online networks of support.
- There has a recognition that a lack of direct interaction between practitioners can limit the basis for undertaking certain tasks and presents significant barriers to assessing risk.
- An increased use of online working with families in the future may have significant benefits. However, this should recognise the individual needs and (in so far as appropriate) preferences of the children, young people and families concerned.
- It will be important to ensure that services are easy to access and do not present avoidable barriers. It will be important to consider the range and type of platforms, etc, with which a family might need to engage,

Our  
Partnership  
Priorities for  
2021-23

## Key lessons from our review of the evidence

- Generally, outcomes for children and young people in Fife are broadly similar to those seen across the rest of Scotland for “the average child”. This is true across most aspects of wellbeing.
- However, outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people are significantly worse than “average”. This is not only true for Fife; equity is a major challenge across Scotland.
- Outcomes for the most vulnerable (e.g. the care experienced) and those facing multiple forms of disadvantage are often the poorest outcomes for any group.
- The Partnership made significant progress in closing the equity gap before the start of the Covid pandemic. However, there is evidence that it was becoming increasingly challenging to close the equity gap.
- There is evidence that the Covid pandemic has had a measurable impact on a range of outcomes, including the progression of learning for primary aged children and the post school destinations of young people. There is also evidence that the equity gap has widened for these outcomes.
- The children’s services partnership has developed a greater capacity for support at the intensive level, for Fife’s most vulnerable families. This has helped to reduce the number of children who are looked after and the use of residential placements. However, we are still not supporting as many children safely at home as we would want.
- Across a range of measures of child poverty or disadvantage, Fife ranks 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> most deprived of Scotland’s 32 local authorities.
- In recent years, the gap between Fife and Scotland’s child poverty rates has started to widen, and this gap is projected to increase over the next few years.

# Our Priorities for 2021-23

It is clear from the available evidence that, before the Covid pandemic, significant progress was being made both in improving outcomes overall and in closing the equity gap between outcomes for the most and least disadvantaged. However, there is evidence that Covid pandemic has led to a setback in the progress made in improving many of these outcomes and a further widening of the equity gap for a range of measures.

This evidence is in broad agreement with national research on the impact of the Covid pandemic and highlights the importance of a number of key issues for the coming period of recovery:

- The need for a targeted response, with a focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people.
- The value of trauma-informed and nurturing approaches, recognising the particular needs of vulnerable children and young people.
- The importance of friendship and relationships, of enabling children to re-establish and further develop their networks of support, and of supporting staff wellbeing.
- The role of choice and participation, recognising the varied needs of children and young people, and allowing them greater voice in identifying how their needs are met.
- The need to mitigate the impact of poverty, recognising that the Covid pandemic has had a negative impact on: overall levels of poverty; and specific issues like food poverty and inequalities in digital access/opportunity.

Our priorities for improvement seek to address these challenges, and to support key national policies during the initial period of recovery from April 2021 to March 2023. They are:

- **Delivering the Promise**
- **Supporting Wellbeing**
- **Closing the Equity Gap**
- **Promoting Children's Rights**

The Fife Children's Services Plan 2021-23 sets out the actions that we will be taking as a partnership to address these priority areas for improvement. It can be found at: [www.fife.gov.uk/fifeCSplan](http://www.fife.gov.uk/fifeCSplan).



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**Fife's Community Planning Partners:** Fife Council • NHS Fife • Fife's Voluntary Sector • Police Scotland • Scottish Fire & Rescue Service  
• Fife College • Scottish Enterprise • St Andrews University • SEStran • Skills Development Scotland • Scottish Government  
**Working together to deliver our Community Plan and strengthen Fife's future** [www.fifedirect.org.uk/communityplanning](http://www.fifedirect.org.uk/communityplanning)