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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

4 June 2024

## Cabinet

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**Title:** **Brighter Pathways : Remodelling Care Options**

**Purpose:** To ask Cabinet to note the programme of work and current pressures on placement availability and alternative care for any child and young person in the looked after system. These challenges are not unique to North Ayrshire and compounded by a number of factors outlined in this report.

**Recommendation:** Cabinet are asked to :-

1. Endorse the Brighter Pathways programme of work and proposals to address the pressure areas with service developments and alternative resources to prevent high cost residential resources for children and young people.
2. Note the intention to build capacity and provide more local resources and choice to young people who require to be looked after with increased family based care and alternative options for young people leaving care.
3. Note the review of current service provision to ensure it meets current context, changing landscape of the care system and the demographic young people and families.

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The HSCP have embarked on a programme of work to address the current challenges associated with resources and accommodation for looked after and care experienced young people. A Programme Manager has been appointed and will work alongside a Planning Manager and Senior Management, to deliver and support the transformational change over the next two years. A Programme Board has been established and chaired by the Chief Social Work Officer, Scott Hunter with membership from key stakeholders and Corporate Parents, to provide strategic leadership and governance to support the workstreams and allocate resources where required.
- 1.2 There are consolidated evidence-based messages from local authorities that there is significant challenges and pressures across the system which has been growing for some time prior to the mandating of the National Transfer Scheme in 2021. Indeed, there is a clear message that whilst the volume of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking (UAS) children and young people arriving has increased the pressure on the system, it has not in isolation caused today's significant pressures in care.

1.3 The work of the Brighter Pathways programme board will be closely aligned with The Promise development plan and the work of the Corporate Parenting Steering Group which is responsible for overseeing the six Corporate Parenting duties and each corporate parent upholds the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of Care Experienced people. There is a collective responsibility, ownership and commitment across services and agencies to develop solutions to our challenges, and shared goal of achieving the best possible outcomes for care experienced young people in North Ayrshire.

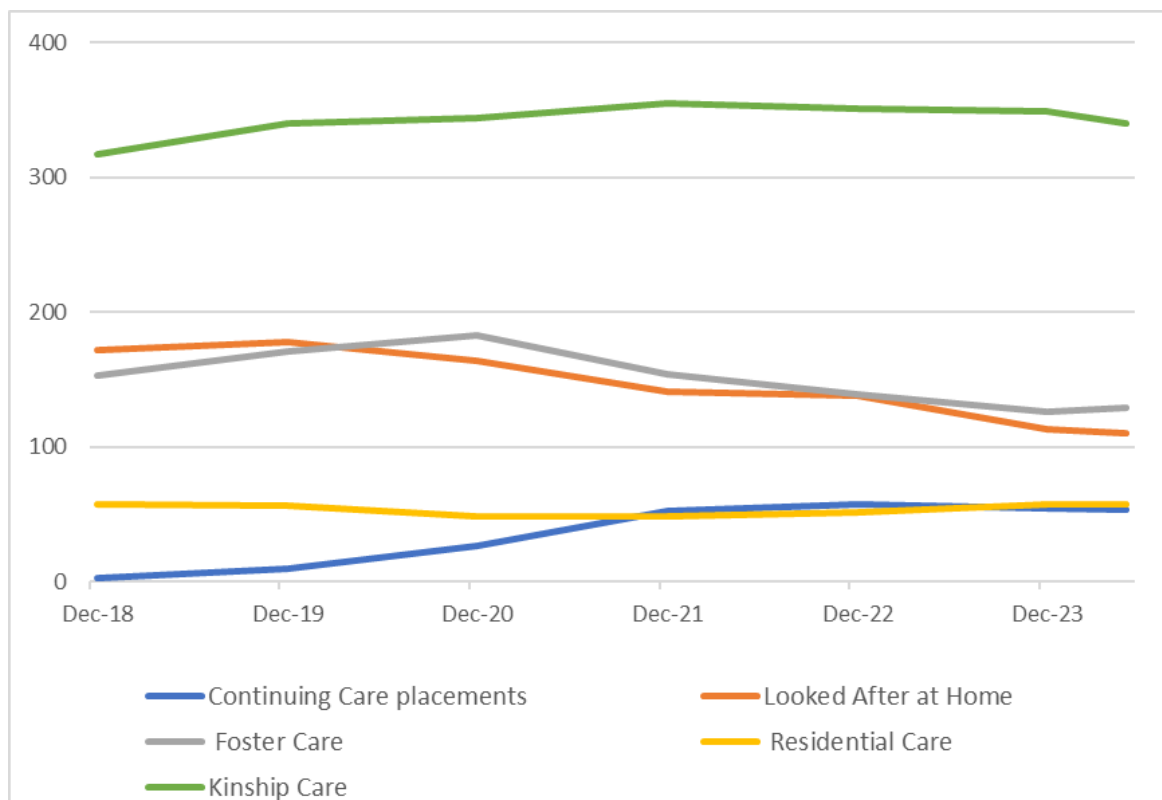
It is proposed the transformational change and service developments will be delivered through establishing focussed workstreams on the following areas:

1. Housing and Throughcare
2. Fostering and Kinship
3. Education including Residential School Placements
4. Internal Children's Houses – Model of Care
5. Early Intervention and Crisis/Intensive Support Pathways
6. Strategic Needs Assessment/Data/Workforce
7. Best Practice Models and Research

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Children's Placements

Overall, the number of Looked After Children has steadily reduced over the last few years but the numbers in residential care have not followed the same trend, and the number of requests for Continuing Care has increased significantly. Positively the number of Kinship placements has increased over the same period. The graphs below illustrate the movement/trends since 2018.



## 2.2 Residential Care

At present within North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership there is a significant overspend associated with Children's Residential Placements, over £5m across the HSCP and Education. The overspend predominately relates to costly External Residential Placements.

We started 2024 with 32 external placements. These placements are costly and do not always deliver the best outcomes for children, young people, and their families. Overall, the number of Looked After Children has reduced over the last few years but the numbers in residential care have not followed the same trend, and the number of requests for Continuing Care has increased significantly, at present we have 53 Children and Young People in Continuing Care, it is predicted that the number of Children receiving Continuing Care will continue to rise, resulting in older children staying longer within Residential Care settings. The HSCP acknowledge that some children will always require more specialist resources due to their needs and complexity and in some situations an external residential placement will be unavoidable.

There are a number of factors leading to this challenging position:

- We have 32 places available in our internal children's houses, due to demand these have been over occupancy for some time, at points in the last year we have had 39 young people within the houses, leading to increased use of external placements where residential care is required.
- We have limited availability of alternative care provision and community options, supported carers or supported accommodation options within North Ayrshire.
- Acute crisis in recruitment and retention of foster carers within North Ayrshire which has created capacity issues and limited family-based options for children and reliance on external fostering providers or residential care.
- The requirement to support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) under the National Transfer Scheme and to support trafficked young people who have been identified in North Ayrshire. We currently have 31 young people living within North Ayrshire, across both our residential houses and semi-independent living who have come to us through these routes.
- A number of young people in residential care have requested Continuing Care, whereby a young person can remain in their placement until age 21.
- Where appropriate young people are placed to meet their educational needs, the cost of Residential School Placements in most cases is shared 50/50 with Education services.

The landscape and demographic of young people in residential care has shifted with an increase in young people aged sixteen and above with a high number requesting continuing care which supports them to remain in residential houses until they are aged 21. This changing landscape is a result of Continuing Care legislation and Staying Put Guidance for Local Authorities and other Corporate Parents which promotes supporting looked after children and young people to remain in care, as part of a staged transition towards adulthood and greater independence.

## 2.3 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children/Trafficked Young People

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and separated migrant children under the age of 18 who have been trafficked to Scotland, are looked after and accommodated by local authorities as children in need under Section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Over the last few years there has been an increase in young people coming to North Ayrshire through the mandation of National Transfer Scheme in 2021. There are currently 12 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Trafficked Young People in residential care and 19 who are supported in the community in shared tenancies, 1 in supported care. There has also been an increase in Trafficked Young People, 7 have been supported and provided accommodation in residential care. Trafficked young people are spontaneous arrivals and the local authority is required to identify appropriate accommodation for these young people at short notice as the notification is usually through out of hours social work and there is lack of opportunity to plan and resource accommodation options.

North Ayrshire receives funding from the Home Office for young people placed via the National Transfer Scheme, this is set at £1,001 per week for young people under 18 and £270 per week for young people over 18. The HSCP receive a lesser payment of £798 per week for a child who presents spontaneously (trafficked child) in the area. Funding from the Home Office falls far short for the costs associated with residential care for young people under 18 and is significantly lower for young people who remain in residential care under continuing care post 18.

North Ayrshire is proud of the support that we offer displaced and disadvantaged young people and we are committed to supporting these young people into adulthood and support their asylum process, educational needs and their transition from residential care to semi-independent or independent living.

North Ayrshire is not alone in facing these challenges, the Scottish Government recently undertook a scoping exercise working with areas across Scotland to better understand the pressures on the care system and the impact of responding to the needs of UASC. The report highlighted the significant lack of placement availability, which is compounded by the number of children arriving, the impact of continuing care, a decline in the number of foster carers, reduction in internal residential capacity, restrictions on residential capacity, growing pressures on stretched social work teams and a lack of suitable move on accommodation due to housing pressures. This often leads to extremely high costs due to increased use of costly external placements.

## 2.4 Family Based Care

### Kinship Care

There has been significant progress and increasing numbers of children in kinship care in North Ayrshire and this is being explored at an early stage with families which is supported further by the Signs of Safety approach, kinship care is the preferred and first option for children who require alternative care which aligns to the HSCP Kinship Care Strategy and the ethos of The Promise. Kinship options are being explored and are continually considered throughout a child/young person's care journey and before a permanence plan is agreed.

There are currently 340 children in kinship care placements supported by the HSCP.

### Foster Care

As at 31 March 2024 the fostering service had 72 fostering households who care for 131 children, the service has approved 5 family and friends' carers and 11 short break carers who offer support to the main foster carers.

There are also 9 children placed with external fostering providers.

During the period from 2019 until 2023, there were 16 interim carers approved by the fostering services, in the same timescale 31 carers were de-registered.

The acute crisis in foster care recruitment and retention has been widely documented and the significant shortfall of foster carers is having an impact on Independent Fostering Providers and Local Authorities across Scotland and the UK. Within North Ayrshire there has been more de-registrations than approvals of new carers which has created pressures resulting in fostering being a diminishing resource for children of all ages. As result of continuing care young people are choosing to stay with their foster carer until aged 21 which prevents them from caring for any other children.

The biggest challenge facing the fostering sector is the retention and recruitment of high-quality foster carers who can meet the needs of children in care.

In addition, the fostering service has not accommodated any young people over the age of 12 since 2020. There is lack of capacity or pool of carers who have been assessed/approved to provide care to teenagers and the current enhanced carers are at capacity and placement limit.

Due to capacity issues and lack of recruitment of carers willing to care for children over the age of 12, fostering services have become a resource mainly for children under 12 and any enquiries/alerts for older children for a fostering placement from the community can't be resourced, with a reliance on them being accommodated in residential care. The service is reporting challenges with resourcing external fostering provision due to them also facing significant challenges with recruitment.

The Scottish Government are acutely aware of the foster carer crisis, there is much work in progress by the Scottish Government who formed a group around a year ago on the back of the staying together and connected implementation group and all the gaps identified in achieving the sibling's legislation (The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021). The Scottish Government are currently consulting with practitioners, through two Association Fostering Kinship and Adoption Forums and carers currently and there are a number of key areas that are likely to be taken forward with a focus on both recruitment and retention.

There were only 196 applications to Foster across Scotland in 2023, a 4.8% decrease from the previous year and the lowest in 6 years, research by The Fostering Network has indicated 12 per cent of foster carers retire or leave every year and that another 500 foster families are required across Scotland.

## Factors impacting on Recruitment/Retention:

- Increase in home/agile working and spare room used as an office.
- Inflation/Cost of living crisis/allowances – NAHSCP paid higher than National Minimum allowances Scottish Government introduced – apart from 16plus – Flat rate £400 per week.
- New minimum allowance unlikely to have a significant impact in recruitment/retention.
- Financial risks associated with fostering (secure employment & pension), no income if no children in your care.
- Fostering not financially viable if only have one child at £400 per week, annual income of £20,800 (tax free).
- Fewer young people leaving home lack of spare bedrooms.
- Carers retiring, age and stage of life, carer burnout.

In light of these challenges, in retaining and recruiting foster carers and the impact on children when family-based care is not available, this is an area of significant concern to the HSCP and the current fostering schemes will be reviewed to consider allowances, contractual short breaks, training and support within the workstream and recommendations made to the Programme Board to support the retention and recruitment of foster carers within North Ayrshire.

## **2.5 Transformation Programme – Brighter Pathways**

There are concerns that lack of local placement availability necessitates children being placed out with their local area and is an increasing concern that the level of displacement will grow further due to lack of local options and capacity.

The current situation with regards to care options and alternative resources for children and young people is very challenging and there is a need for transformational change and to consider different models to support and care for young people and consider re-modelling of current resources with a view to having alternative options for young people moving on from care and to create capacity in the residential houses to prevent children being placed in high cost external resources.

The current position within North Ayrshire is that there is a lack of alternative options to support young people's transition from residential care to supported care and semi-independent living and them requesting continuing care is an option of choice due to lack of alternative resources/options.

The Brighter Pathways Programme Board has been established. There is a shared awareness with regards to the current pressures and a commitment from all corporate parents and key stakeholders to contribute to the work of the project to deliver services differently and for children and young people to have access to the appropriate resources and supports into adulthood.

The work of the Brighter Pathways programme board will be closely aligned with The Promise development plan and the work of the Corporate Parenting Steering Group which is responsible for overseeing the six Corporate Parenting duties and each corporate parent upholds the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of Care Experienced people.

The transformational change and service developments will be delivered through establishing focussed workstreams to support the Brighter Pathways Programme Board with a focus on the following areas:

1. Housing and Throughcare:

Review the current housing protocol for care leavers and pursue alternative accommodation options to support and prepare young people to transition from residential care to live independently in the community. The workstream will consider the use of supported care and look at models of supported accommodation.

2. Fostering and Kinship

Address the challenges around recruitment and retention of foster carers and a review of current fostering schemes and how we can support and sustain children in family-based care with foster carers and kinship carers and prevent placement disruption and children being placed in internal and external residential care.

3. Education including Residential School Placements

Review the current educational provision for looked after children and to ensure children who are looked after are provided with the appropriate support to sustain them in mainstream education and to prevent additional pressure on their carers/placement if require to be out of school.

4. Internal Children's Houses – Model of Care

Review the current model of care within the four children houses and the changing demographic and increase in young people over sixteen. Consideration will be given to is the current model providing the necessary support to young people to increase capacity for independent living.

5. Early Intervention and Crisis/Intensive Support Pathways

Map out the current supports from early intervention to crisis and intensive support to identify if there are any identified gaps in service provision to support children and families and to ensure that the services and interventions are targeted appropriately to provide early help and more intensive support to prevent children requiring alternative care.

6. Strategic Needs Assessment/Data/Workforce

Explore the current and future demographic and data to inform future resources and staffing levels. The work stream will project and model likely future need of care setting for children and young people.

7. Best Practice Models and Research

This workstream will scope out current models and approaches currently utilised and undertake research and benchmarking with other areas and consider new ways of working to support children and families.

### **3. Proposals**

3.1 The role of the Programme Board is to provide strategic leadership and oversight to the programme of work, in addition, the Programme Board will:

- Inform, engage, and take collective action on key issues identified.
- Own and be accountable for the delivery of agreed actions.
- Resolve strategic issues and remove barriers.
- Ensure all members have a shared situational awareness.

- Support the work of the project groups and allocate resource where required, and as appropriate.

### 3.2 The anticipated outcomes of this work are :-

- To improve local resources and range of choices for young people leaving care.
- To improve long term outcomes for young people/ care leavers.
- Review current service provision to ensure it meets current context, changing landscape and demographic of young people and families.
- Support innovation in supporting children to remain in family-based care, with parents, foster carers or kinship carers.
- Review and analyse the effectiveness of the preventative, early intervention and community-based supports for children, young people and families.
- Review the model of support and alternatives for UASC/Trafficked young people.
- All care experienced children and young people in North Ayrshire grow up feeling loved, safe and respected so they can realise their potential.

### 3.3 The Project Board will be tracking the progress of work plans or developments within the workstreams.

There will be analysis of data and a needs analysis to project future demands for supports and services and how services need to be delivered. This will be an ongoing process that will review all young people within internal and external residential resources and their pathway to a supported community-based alternative or independent living.

## 4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

### Financial

4.1 As part of the programme of work there will be recommendations for short term investment and future re-alignment of financial support in specific areas with a view to longer term financial sustainability for the IJB and local authority. As noted whilst financial outcomes are not the main driver for the change programme which is focussed on quality outcomes for young people and families, there is an underlying overspend of over £5m in external residential placements which requires to be addressed, recognising the work and time required to make the changes required the IJB provided for an additional £4m of resource as a budget pressure in 2024-25 to support this cost pressure with an expectation of this reducing over time.

### Human Resources

4.2 Any possible impact on staff due to re-modelling or service redesign will be explored fully in the workstreams and project board, affected staff and Human Resources will be consulted.

### Legal



4.3 There is legislation and policy that govern looked after and care experienced children and young people and the programme of work will adhere to the legislative frameworks and relevant policies and regulations.

Legal services will be consulted on any legal matters that arise throughout the programme of work.

### **Equality/Socio-economic**

4.4 The aspirations of the Programme Board are in line with the vision of The Promise to address the inequality of outcomes experienced by our children and young people who have been or are in the care system. If the ambitions of The Promise are realised, not only will there be improved outcomes but also a reduction, and ideally, an elimination of the inequity that exists between care experienced children and young people and children and young people with no experience of care.

### **Environmental and Sustainability**

4.5 None.

### **Key Priorities**

4.6 The work of the Programme Board fully aligns and supports the work of the Councils strategic plans:

- The Promise – Plan 21-24.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Kinship Care Strategy.
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC).
- North Ayrshire Councils Corporate Parenting Plan 2023-2026.
- Children's Services Plan 2023 -26.

The proposal and recommendations support the spirit of The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which outlines the need for appropriate accommodation for young people over 16 years of age, to support them to prepare for independent living.

### **Community Wealth Building**

4.7 None.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 Throughout the programme of work there will be ongoing consultation and collaboration with service areas, national bodies, third sector colleagues and consultation and co-production with service providers, young people, families, and carers.

Caroline Cameron  
Director, HSCP

For further information please contact **Elizabeth Stewart, Head of Children, Families & Justice**, on [estewart@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:estewart@north-ayrshire.gov.uk).

## **Background Papers**

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