



Falkirk Child  
Protection Committee

# Falkirk Child Protection Committee

Annual Report  
2022-2023



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# Introduction

I am pleased to present the Annual Report for Falkirk's Child Protection Committee which covers the academic reporting period from August 2022 to July 2023.

The report provides an overview of the role and functions of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) and the inter-agency work undertaken to help protect Falkirk's children from abuse and neglect over the last 12 month period. It also covers a number of the challenges and successes and concludes with an outline of the opportunities ahead.

From a national and local perspective, the implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2021), The Scottish Child Interview Model, Bairns' Hoose, embedding the UNCRC into legislation and the continued implementation of the Promise principles will continue to be priorities and form a significant part of our continuous improvement journey. Whilst these transformational priorities will undoubtedly strengthen our practice and procedures helping us protect children and young people we cannot ignore the additional pressure implementation adds to our finite inter-agency resources in the coming year.

The CPC will continue to provide strong and collective leadership to support the strategic and operational work across Falkirk and Forth Valley. We value and support the ongoing dedication shown by all agencies in their endeavours to protect children from harm in the face of significant adversity and help to strengthen Falkirk's status as a safe place for children to grow and develop.

**Alan Small**  
**Independent Chair Falkirk CPC**





**“Children in Falkirk  
will grow up loved,  
safe and respected  
so that they can  
realise their full  
potential.”**

# Falkirk's Demographics and Background

Falkirk is located in the heart of Scotland, located between Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is home to the world-famous Kelpies, The Falkirk Wheel and the Antonine Wall.

Falkirk's population has steadily increased since 1998 and is approximately 160,560; the 11th highest of all 32 council areas in Scotland.

[Source - National Records of Scotland](#)

Population levels are expected to continue growing and increasing life expectancy is likely to impact services provided by partners in several areas. The under 5 age group has shown a decrease since 2013, while those aged 5-11 have increased, creating greater demand for school places. The increase in Falkirk's elderly population will impact on services, particularly health and social care.

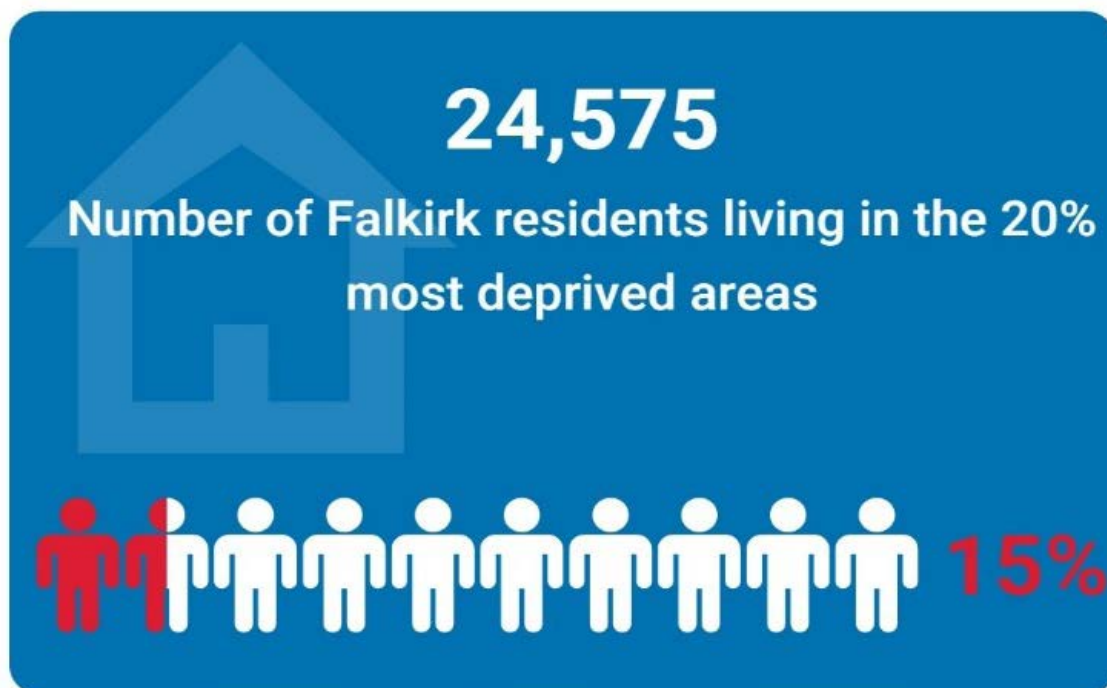
[Source - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Falkirk, 2021](#)

## **Impact of Poverty**

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020, published by Scottish Government, is a tool to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. Multiple deprivation is made up of separate domains, income, employment, health, education, access, crime and housing.

The SIMD measures relative deprivation and does not provide information on absolute levels of deprivation. Deprived does not just mean "poor" or "low income" but can also mean that people living in these areas have fewer resources and opportunities, health and education outcomes or poor access to services.

Areas that fall in the 20% most deprived areas should be areas in which resources are targeted. 15% (24,575) of Falkirk residents live in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. This places greater demand on local services and resources and highlights the need for effective inter-agency partnerships to reduce the impact of deprivation on children, young people and families.



Source - [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2020](#)

The latest data available to us includes child poverty statistics from 2021/22 [Source: <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty>]. According to these figures there were 7771 (25.3%) children living in poverty in 2021/22, an increase from the last statistically reliable year of 7686 (24.8%) in 2019/20.

Falkirk North and Grangemouth have the greatest percentage of children living in poverty. This has remained the case for the past 3 years. However, child poverty is an issue across all wards in Falkirk

Source: [Falkirk's Child Poverty Action Report, 2023-2024](#)

### **Why is this important?**

We know that children and young people can be at risk of harm in any social economic setting, that poverty is not necessarily a precursor of abuse or harm which can and does also occur in affluent areas and households. However, environmental factors such as poverty must be considered as part of a holistic approach to assessing children's needs as it can contribute to a child's experience of adversity and increase levels of vulnerability to harm.

## **Covid-19 and Cost of Living Crisis**

The impact of the rise in living costs and legacy of Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated already challenging living conditions for many and has had a disproportionate impact on the vulnerable and marginalised children and families in our communities.

We have seen dramatic increases in the prices of essential items such as food and fuel, with low-income families struggling now even more than before. Children and families living in poverty are increasingly vulnerable and at increased risk of harm as a consequence. Additional demands have subsequently been experienced by the workforce and we have seen this impact on recruitment and retention across partner agencies.

In Falkirk we have a Child Poverty Action Plan which focuses on tasks and outcomes to help tackle the impact of poverty for our children and young people. [Towards a Fairer Falkirk](#) is the strategy for the Falkirk Community Planning Partnership which aims to mitigate against the impact that poverty has on individuals, families, and communities in our area.





# The Child Protection Committee - Function and Governance

Falkirk's Child Protection Committee (CPC) is a locally based, inter-agency strategic partnership. It is responsible for developing, implementing and improving our Child Protection strategy across and between agencies and the local community.

The Committee aims to support staff and members of the public in the collective endeavour to make Falkirk the best place in Scotland to grow up and to keep all children safe from abuse and neglect.

The CPC members hold senior roles in their organisation and have particular responsibility for child protection. Members include Education, Social Work, Housing, NHS Forth Valley, Police, Third Sector and Scottish Children's Reporters Administration.

The CPC has an independent chairperson and meets six times per year. It reports to the Public Protection Chief Officers Group who have clear responsibilities set out in the [Protecting Children and Young People: Child Protection Committee and Chief Officer responsibilities](#) published by the Scottish Government in February 2019. The Child Protection Committee recognises its responsibilities in the [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland \(2021, updated 2023\)](#) and fulfils these functions through its structure and Business and Improvement Plan.

## **The key roles of the Child Protection Committee are:**

- Public information, engagement and participation
- Strategic planning and connections
- Continuous improvement

## **Public Information, engagement and participation**

This encompasses how we engage with the public, families, children and young people. Key messages include helping the public understand that all adults play a role in keeping children safe from harm. The aim of this approach is to:

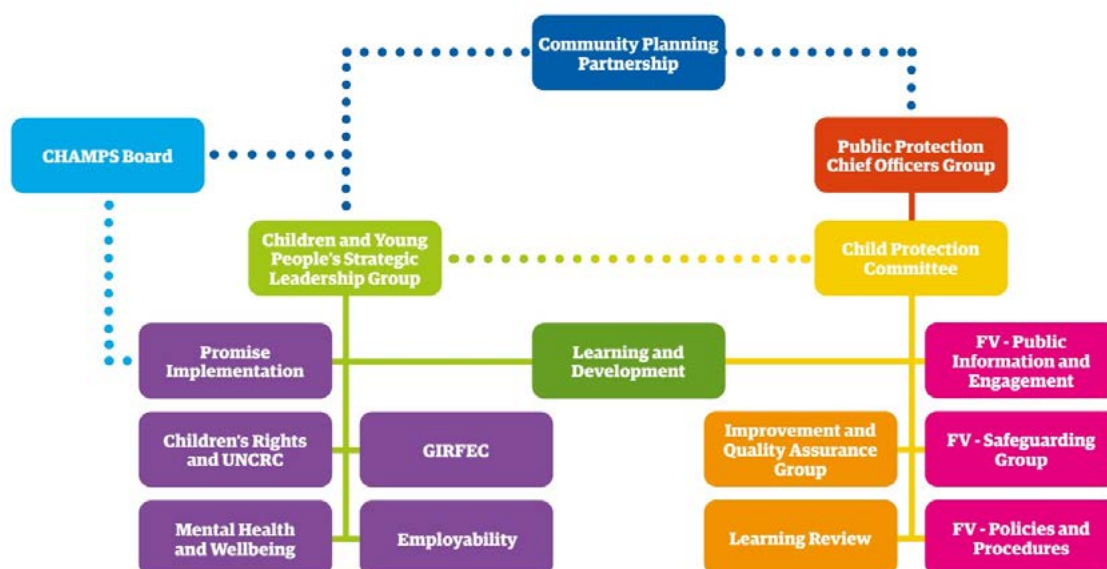
- Raise awareness about child abuse and neglect
- Ensure information is available to the public about what to do if they have a concern about a child who may be at risk of harm.

Key messages include helping the public understand that all adults play a role in keeping children safe from harm.

## Strategic planning

The work of the Child Protection Committee is aligned with wider children services planning in Falkirk, links which are vital to designing and delivering effective services for children. We keep the ‘big picture’ in mind and work closely with all strategic groups to ensure our services are connected and aim towards our shared vision of supporting and protecting Falkirk’s children.

To support the work of the Committee, six operational subgroups report directly to the Committee. Three of these groups are Forth Valley (FV) wide.



**Table 1. illustrates the reporting structure for the Children's Services Planning Partnership subgroups.**

A restructure of the subgroups reporting to the CPC was approved on 6th December 2022 with the aim of improving productivity and efficiency across the Forth Valley partnership. This change was in response to concerns over the volume of groups, workforce pressures and reduced capacity resulting in low attendance at groups and workplans not being progressed.

As agreed by CPCs in Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling, seven sub-groups merged into three over-arching Forth Valley groups. The new structure is detailed above and is included in Falkirk’s Staff [Handbook](#).

# Continuous Improvement

Falkirk CPC is committed to continuous improvement through quality assurance and self-evaluation. This is a rolling process through which the CPC and partners can develop an understanding of how well we are doing as a partnership and to identify the best ways to improve our joint services for children and families.

The Committee has an overview of the quality of the work being carried out to protect children in our area. It uses data, self-evaluation and scrutiny to identify any trends, patterns and practice that impact on keeping children safe.

Our approach to self-evaluation and improvement focuses broadly on the answers to three key questions; underpinned by the Care Inspectorate's Quality Improvement [Framework](#) (Care Inspectorate: November 2022):

1. How good are we now?
2. How do we know?
3. What we plan to do next?

In addition to utilising The Care Inspectorate Quality Framework for audit purposes, we also use the National Guidance for Child Protection Committees Undertaking Learning Reviews in Scotland (2021) to guide and inform our inter-agency Learning Review activity. Our work is underpinned by legislation and guidance including the new National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2021, updated 2023) and GIRFEC.

Falkirk's CPC remains focussed on 6 key themes for our improvement work:



Our model of improvement is based on the Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) Cycle. Our Improvement and Quality Assurance Group have oversight of this work and use a variety of methods and tools to do this.

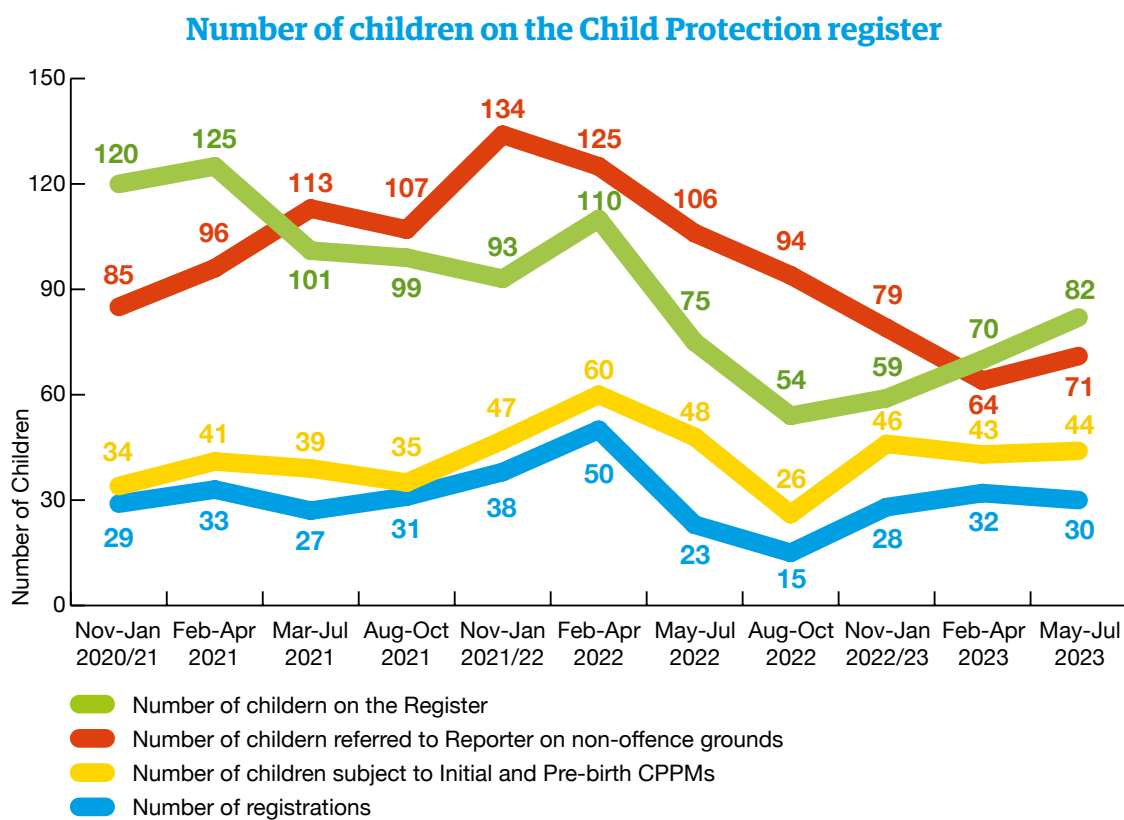
We know that continuous improvement must be meaningful and make a difference to keeping children safe. It therefore needs a collaborative approach, and we endeavour to involve families, children and young people, partner agencies and staff.



# The use of Data and Self Evaluation

Falkirk's CPC considers key child protection data on a quarterly basis through the use of the National Minimum Dataset for Child Protection Committees in Scotland. This data is further scrutinised by the PP Chief Officers Group.

Below is the published data for Falkirk for the reporting period of August 2022 - August 2023. Highlighted are key areas of Child Protection Registrations, Initial and Pre-birth child protection planning meetings and categories recorded for registration.



We have over 28,000 children living in Falkirk. In April 2022, 110 of these children were subject to child protection plans and this figure significantly decreased to 54 in October 2022. This change was noted by CPC and scrutiny work undertaken to assist our understanding of the reasons for this change.

Several contributing factors were identified in Falkirk which included:

- The **'Best Practice in Child Protection Improvement Project'**.
- Improvements in the facilitation of Child Protection Planning Meetings (previously known as Case Conferences).

- An enhanced inter-agency understanding of static and dynamic risk factors (and categorisation of risk).
- Improvement work undertaken by Falkirk's Review Officers around inter-agency risk thresholds and consideration given to de-registration when statutory measures are in place.
- In addition, a national trend was noted by Scottish Government in the first quarter of 2022, highlighting a decrease in child protection statistics across Scotland.

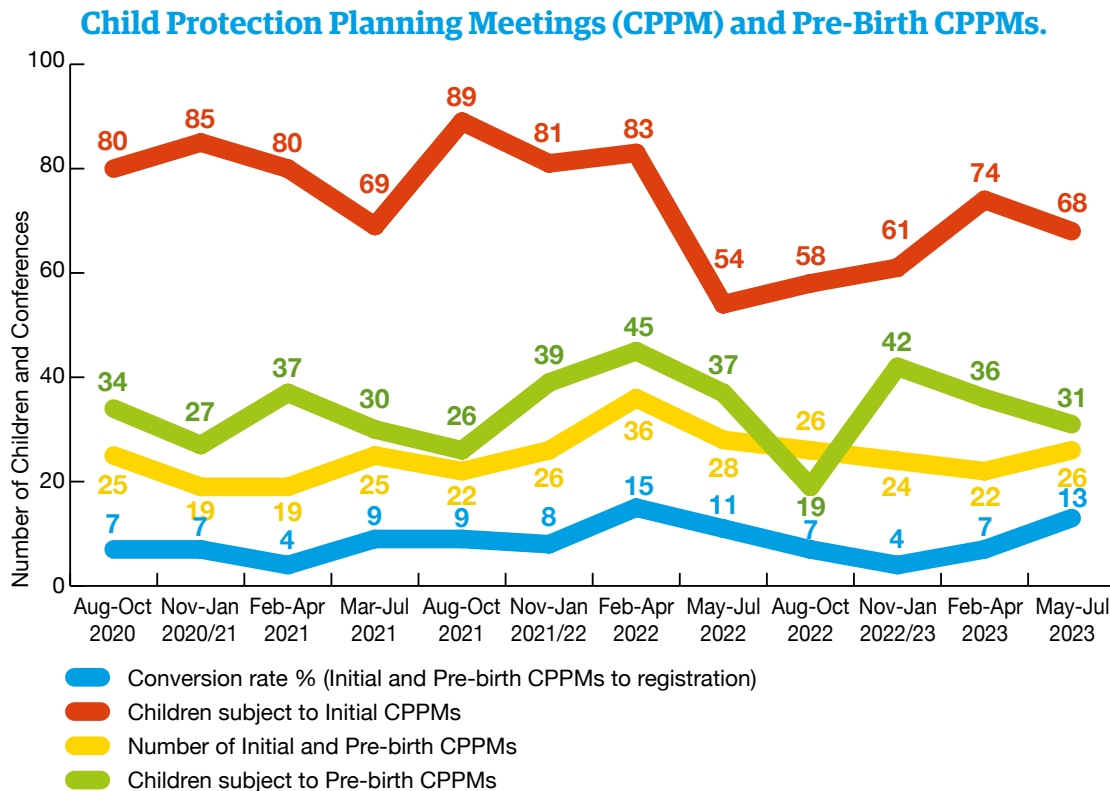
At the end of July 2023, 82 children had a child protection plan in place. This is an increase since the previous reporting period of August 2022 (of 75) and brings Falkirk above the national average of Child Protection Registrations in Scotland; Falkirk's child protection rate increased to 29 per 10,000 children (6.5% higher than the national average of 23 per 10,000 children).

When patterns of **increasing Child Protection registrations** are identified, the CPC undertakes scrutiny work to help develop an understanding of the changes and to consider any emerging issues and any inter-agency strategic or operational actions required to mitigate future risk.

The number of children subject to **Child Protection Planning Meetings (CPPMs) and Pre-Birth Child CPPMs** has decreased slightly from 48 in July 2022 to 43 in July 2023.

In July 2023, 71 children were **referred to Scottish Children's Reporter Association (SCRA) on non-offence grounds**, the first increase during a single quarter since January 2022. However, this represents a significant reduction in referrals to SCRA on non-offence grounds compared to the beginning of this reporting period; in July 2022 106 children were referred to SCRA on non-offence grounds. Learning and development work is being undertaken alongside SCRA to support partnership working and knowledge and understanding of referral criteria which necessitates that a referral is made if a child is (a) in need of protection, guidance, treatment, or control and (b) it might be necessary for a Compulsory Supervision Order to be made in relation to the child.

The CPC recognises the importance of the workforce having the knowledge and confidence, in relation to how and when, to make referrals to the Children's Reporter which are timeous, proportionate and in line with the GIRFEC approach and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Ongoing monitoring, review and support will be undertaken with SCRA, who are an integral partner in Falkirk's CPC.



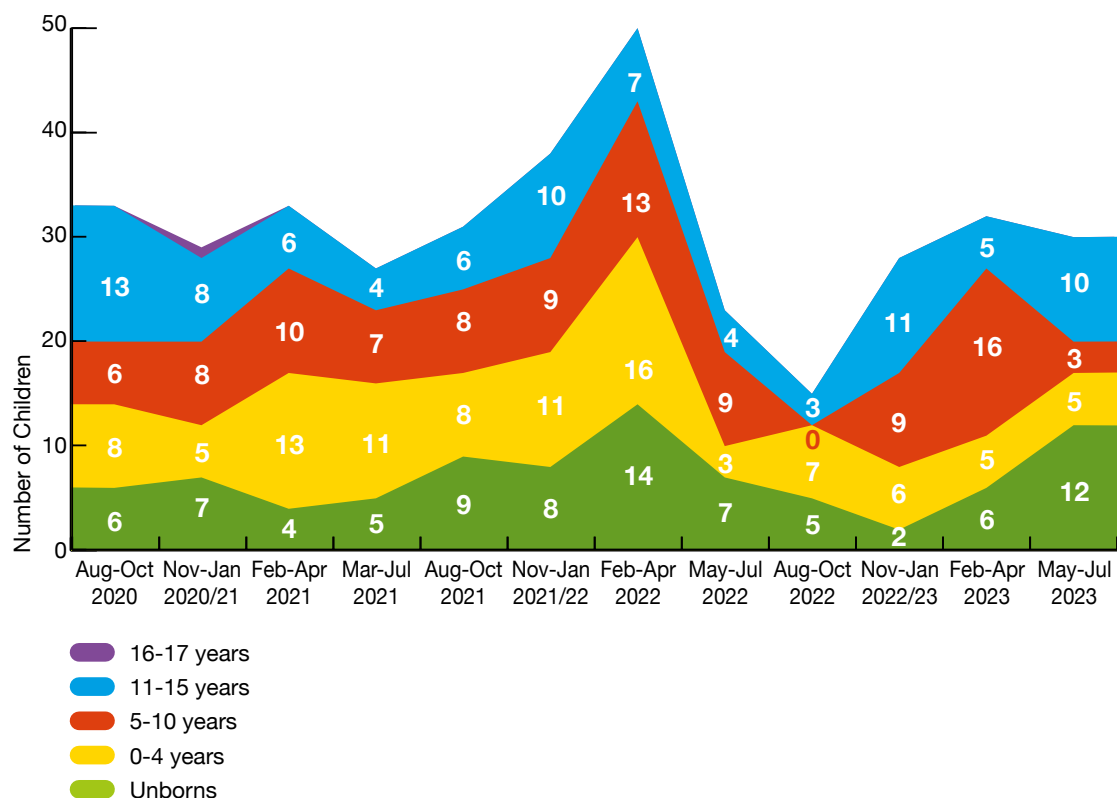
The number of **children subject to CPPMs** has fluctuated during the reporting period, decreasing from 37 to 31 between July 2022 and July 2023. This was slightly lower than the three-year average of 33.

The number of **children subject to pre-birth CPPMs** has increased to 13 from 11 across the reporting period; the highest figure reported since July 2022 and higher than the three-year average of 8.

Overall, the **conversion rate** (CPPMs held which led to registration) in July 2023 was 68%. This is below the three-year average of 74%. The conversion rate for pre-birth planning meetings was 92.3%, with a 58.1% conversion rate reported for initial planning meetings. The average conversion rate for the 2022/23 reporting period is 65%. The reduced conversion rate may be attributable to the work of the ‘Best Practice in Child Protection Improvement Project’ which aimed to enhance our inter-agency risk assessments and understanding of risk thresholds, as noted earlier.

The Improvement and Quality Assurance Group of the CPC has been tasked with undertaking scrutiny work to help the Committee develop an understanding of the reasons for the increasing number of child protection registrations and any correlation in the reduction in conversion rates.

## Characteristics of our Children and Young People at Registration



The CPC has considered the data in relation to the characteristics of children made subject to child protection registration. In July 2023, 3 (10%) of children registered were aged 5-10 years. This is the biggest share of newly registered children in this age group over the last 3-years.

10 children (33.3%) were registered aged 11-15 in July 2023. This is over double the proportion from July 2022 when 4 children were registered.

12 (40%) unborn children were registered in July 2023. This is the highest proportion of unborn children registered in a single quarter since July 2022. The CPC has considered that this may be attributed to the inter-agency improvement work undertaken in developing a vulnerable pregnancy pathway to assist in identifying unborn children at risk of significant harm; including a Pre-Birth Assessment tool and Guidance document and the excellent partnership working between agencies with the Midwifery services, including the specialised Willow team.



## Concerns recorded for Children and Young People at Registration

From the available data, there were 20 concerns for **domestic abuse** in July 2023, representing 67% of referrals. Domestic abuse is the area of concern most often recorded as the reason for children being placed at significant harm and in need of a child protection plan in Falkirk.

Falkirk's **Gender Based Violence Partnership** develops local strategy and action plans on how we will work in Falkirk towards elimination of all forms of gender-based violence. It is recognised that no one agency can provide the solution and we need a community wide response so that everyone can challenge every aspect of [gender based violence](#).

We developed our Equally Safe Partnership in response to data about the prevalence of domestic abuse in Falkirk. [Equally Safe Falkirk](#) is a Partnership between Barnardo's, Aberlour and Falkirk Council. The Partnership works together to help families to heal from Domestic Abuse and improve family functioning. They give survivors and children a voice and help them stay safe, and work with those who cause harm to understand the impact of their behaviour.

Between October 2021 and September 2022, the Equally Safe service supported 75 adult survivors of domestic abuse and 164 children. The development of this service is a further example of high-quality strategic and operational leadership.

One survivor accessing the service said, "I feel safe to speak about my story with no judgement".



Falkirk's [Caledonian System](#) is an integrated approach to address domestic abuse perpetrated by men towards a female partner or ex-partner. It works with men convicted of domestic abuse related offences to reduce their reoffending and improve the lives of women, children and the men through the provision of integrated services.

Organisations across Falkirk and Forth Valley also took part in [16 Days of Activism](#) against gender-based violence, between 25th November and 10th December 2022. A series of Community Based Events have been organised during '16 Days' to raise awareness of these issues and the resources available in the local area. Events included:

- Launch event at Forth Valley College, followed by a walk at the Kelpies that will be lit up for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.
- Stalls and informative sessions at the libraries across the Falkirk Council Area.
- Stalls at Alloa Spiers Centre.
- The screening of "She Said" at The Hippodrome, a Cinema in Bo'ness.
- The "Violence Unseen", a Zero Tolerance Exhibition at Stirling Bus Station.
- Pop-ups at the University of Stirling

The 2nd highest recorded concern in July 2023 was for **parental mental health problems** (57%). This figure has decreased from 69% since the previous quarter and from 70% in July 2022. Scrutiny work is being undertaken to assist the CPC to understand the changes in child protection statistics in relation to children being at risk from parental mental health concerns and in light of the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and well-being and parenting capacity, to ensure appropriate supports are accessible to parents timeously.

There were 16 concerns recorded for **parental drug misuse** in July 2023 (53%), the highest since January 2022. Partnership working continues to be promoted by the CPC alongside [Falkirk's Alcohol and Drug Partnership \(ADP\)](#) to consider the interface between adult care and protection services and children's services to ensure the right support is in place at the right time for parents to help mitigate risks posed by parental substance use. Further information on the [Falkirk ADP Delivery Plan](#) is available online by accessing the link.

The number of concerns recorded in July 2023 for sexual abuse was 10%, Child Sexual Exploitation 10% and emotional abuse 33%.

All other registrations have decreased since the last quarter. The largest reduction occurred in the Neglect categorisation, moving from 66% in April 2023 to 27% in July 2023; a decrease from the beginning of the reporting period which was 39% in July 2022. Health and Social Work practitioners in Falkirk are encouraged to work together with families to identify, manage and reduce the risk of neglect using the [Neglect Practice Toolkit](#).

## **Scottish Children's Reporter Administration Data**

The CPC reviews data on the number of children and young people referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Association (SCRA) and numbers of Child Protection Orders (CPO) granted in Falkirk. As noted earlier, the number of children referred to the Reporter on non-offence grounds increased to 71 in July 2023 from the previous quarter however this represents a significant reduction from 106 referrals in July 2022. Scrutiny work is being undertaken by the partnership to understand these changes and any necessary improvement work.

The Improvement and Quality Assurance group has identified a reduction in the number of children referred to the Reporter from a Child Protection Planning Meeting in the quarter ending July 2023; the lowest number over the 3 year period. Further scrutiny work is being undertaken to develop an understanding of the reasons for these changes alongside the Falkirk's Review Team who are responsible for chairing CPPMs.

The number of children referred on offence grounds was 28, a slight decrease from 32 in July 2022. The number of CPOs issued in the last quarter of the reporting period, July 2023, was 6.

## **Child Protection Process Timescales**

The wider workforce capacity issues have led to some key performance indicators not being met, including expected timescales for multi-agency meetings.

Despite meetings not being held on time, as a mitigation, the Child Protection Committee has sought assurance from partner agencies that contingency measures are put in place at the Inter Agency Referral Discussion stage, including Interim Safety Plans, which remain in force until a CPPM is held to consider child protection registration and future multi-agency plans required to mitigate risks.



# Progress of Improvement Work

This section provides an overview and examples of how inter-agency partnership working within Falkirk, and across Forth Valley, has endeavoured to meet the quality indicators set out in the Care Inspectorate Framework for children in need of care and protection (2022), broadly structured around Falkirk CPC's six key themes of improvement work:

- 1. Risk and Need**
- 2. Development**
- 3. Resource**
- 4. Involvement**
- 5. Self-evaluation**
- 6. Policy and Guidance**

These themes are not mutually exclusive and are woven through each section.

## Key Theme 1: Risk and Need

Assessment and planning of risk and need is timely, proportionate, and integrated within the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) continuum.

### Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

Falkirk's CPC, informed by the work of the partnership's [GIRFEC subgroup](#), has considered the refresh of the GIRFEC guidance launched by Scottish Government in September 2022 which strengthens the values and principles of GIRFEC, underpinned by the UNCRC, and ensures policy and practice is aligned to fulfil children's rights.

A new Forth Valley GIRFEC group has now also been established to build on the excellent work by the Falkirk group to progress this work pan Forth Valley.

The CPC promotes early intervention through multi agency working at an early stage as a key priority. When it is identified that children and young people may require additional support(s), a Team Around the Child meeting is held to share information and work alongside families utilising a strengths-based approach, promoting resilience and working together to improve outcomes for Falkirk's children.

Effective and consistent implementation of the new guidance, and alignment with the updated National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2021), has been achieved across the Children's Services Planning Partnership via our inter-agency GIRFEC subgroup which is responsible for driving forward this agenda.

As part of informing the workforce a programme of learning events were undertaken throughout the year to ensure the guidance was embedded in practice and service delivery. Through the implementation of Scotland's National Performance Framework, we are working together to deliver The Promise within the principles of GIRFEC by ensuring that all children and families have access to the right support when they need it, for as long as it is needed. For most children their needs will be met by their parents, families and community resources in health and education. For those children who require additional help, we aim to provide this based on the principles of early and effective intervention delivered through a planned and coordinated rights-based approach.

The voice of the child and their views are at the heart of our decision making and we seek to remove barriers to active and meaningful participation with families. One way in which we achieve this is through the Family Group Decision Making model which provides support to families to be inclusive and active in the decisions that affect them. This has been successful in promoting choice and encouraging families to share their views and opinions.

Multi-agency GIRFEC training has been rolled out across Falkirk. This has included an external trainer providing GIRFEC Refresh sessions in early 2023, attended by 50 staff in person. In addition, online sessions were delivered to a wider audience in a partnership approach by Falkirk Council's Children's Partnership Coordinator & GIRFEC Lead and Educational Psychology team. There are plans to deliver GIRFEC Re-fresh sessions to the inter-agency workforce in Falkirk across the next reporting period of 2023-24.

The Promise Roadshow training was also attended by 537 practitioners, raising awareness of the importance of early intervention, children's rights, listening to voices of children and young people, keeping children within their families when it is safe to do so and the scaffolding of help, support and accountability.

### **New Integrated Lead Professional Assessment and Plan**

Following the Best Practice in Child Protection Improvement Project in Falkirk in 2021, the partnership developed one [Integrated Lead Professional Assessment and Child's Plan](#) which includes a child's chronology and action plan. This new approach was developed in consultation with children, young people, families and the workforce and rolled out on 1st April 2022; replacing our previous Integrated Assessment Framework paperwork.

As part of a planned, incremental roll out, the new approach was introduced to Children's Social Work teams in the first instance, with a view to extending this to other agencies following a period monitoring and review. The new Assessment and Plan can be located on Forth Valley's public facing Practitioner Pages.

The Assessment and Plan equips our workforce with the necessary tools to strengthen the quality of assessments of risk and need, encouraging more analysis and evidence based practice. It places children, young people and families at the centre of assessments and decision making. Sections have also been incorporated for brothers and sisters' views and family time / contact. Children's Social Work will be implementing a new IT system that will further strengthen the approach to assessment which will be reviewed by the service

## **Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD)**

In Falkirk, the Inter-agency Referral Discussion (IRD) remains the key inter-agency vehicle for risk information sharing, risk assessment, analysis and decision-making, following a reported concern about abuse or neglect of a child or young person.

Falkirk CPC, in partnership with CPCs in Clackmannanshire and Stirling, is developing joint [IRD guidance](#) to help facilitate consistent approaches to child protection concerns across the localities.

In June 2022, Falkirk adopted the electronic Interagency Referral Discussion (eIRD) system. eIRD is a dynamic electronic recording system which enables Police, Health and Social Work to enter information into the same system; facilitating decision making based on information gathered as an assessment progresses.

The eIRD system has facilitated effective and timeous information sharing, decision making and implementation of safety plans to protect at risk children and young people. Initial feedback has been positive however it is recognised that ongoing review, training and support will be required to ensure eIRD is successfully embedded in daily practice.

The IRD subgroup, which falls under the thematic 'Safeguarding' subgroup of the CPC, monitors the progress of IRDs and provides the CPC with updates.

In addition, the Initial Response Team (IRT), initially set up in June 2021 as a test for change, has been extended in recognition of the positive impact on service delivery. Since the introduction of IRT, the available data indicates improved response times for all children who have contact with Social Work, leading to more timeous responses to all child protection concerns.

## **Pre-birth pathway**

Falkirk's CPC has continued to work with partners across Forth Valley to embed the Forth Valley Pre-birth pregnancy Pathway into practice. The pathway aims is to ensure there is a clear process for the assessment of vulnerable unborn babies. It includes a pre-birth assessment tool and guidance for lead professionals undertaking assessments of unborn babies who may be at risk of harm.

An audit to scrutinise whether pre-birth pathways and integrated assessments are being utilised is currently being planned and led by Falkirk CPC's Improvement and Quality Assurance Group.



## **Intensive family support**

Falkirk's intensive family support service provides effective and flexible crisis intervention with very vulnerable families involved with social work services. A new referral pathway was established for families in crisis to access intensive family support from council and voluntary sector providers. Data is being gathered to identify trends and gaps in service provision. The purpose of the pathway is to prioritise referrals and capture themes/trends and service gaps. This is a partnership approach involving Includem, Sustain (Aberlour) and Falkirk Council and part funded as a test for change through Whole Family Well-being Fund.

## Key Theme 2: Development

Our aim is that staff groups in children and adult services have appropriate knowledge, skills and learning opportunities underpinned by the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) approach.

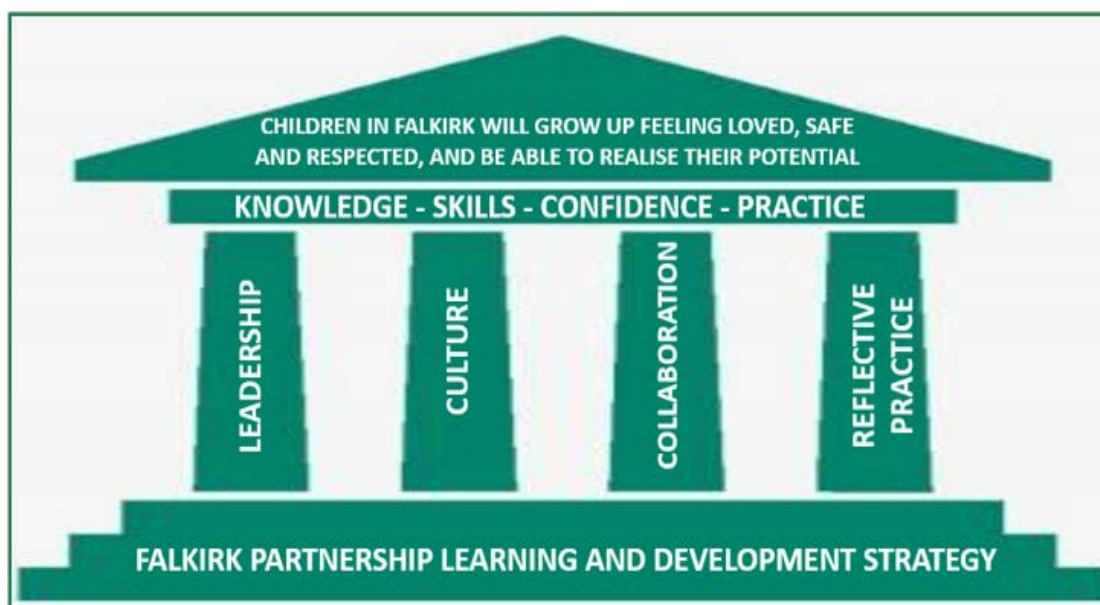
Falkirk CPC's multi-agency **Learning and Development group** lead on single and inter-agency training programmes to ensure we have a skilled and competent workforce.

Falkirk Community Planning Partnership and Child Protection Committee **Learning & Development Strategy and Framework** was launched in June 2023. These documents outline our approach to multi-agency workforce development. They support standardisation and have been designed to achieve culture change with opportunities to enhance confidence and competence across our multi-agency workforce. Learning activities are designed to impact practice when supporting children, young people, and their families.



The **Strategy** is supported by pillars of **leadership, culture, collaboration,** and **reflective practice**. We aim to create and sustain a learning culture providing conditions that demonstrate our workforce are valued and supported to apply their learning.

Falkirk's Learning and Development **Framework** outlines how Learning and Development activities are planned, delivered, and reviewed. We have agreed practice levels aligned to those adopted by NHS Education for Scotland (NES): "**Informed,**" "**Skilled,**" "**Enhanced,**" or "**Specialist.**"



Actions arising from Learning Reviews and local quality assurance exercises sit at the heart of our learning and development programme and activities. A significant development area post-pandemic is nurturing cross-service relational based practice through locality focused learning and ‘in-person’ activities. We require to achieve a better understanding of practitioner and service roles which will support improved communication amongst our multi-agency partners: **‘Joint learning leads to effective joint working’**.

In the past year we have taken steps to address local learning review actions outlined below:

- Raising awareness of the prevalence of substance use in the Falkirk area.
- Addressing the challenges of assessing the risk of parental substance use- the impact of substance use on parenting and decision making.
- Recognising the complexity of mental health and substance use.
- Increasing knowledge and skills in collating and presenting evidence, making referrals to, and engaging with the Children’s Reporter.
- Increasing knowledge about legal processes, focusing on assessments rather than thresholds and improved decision making.
- Raising awareness about the National Trauma Training programme and taking a Trauma Informed Approach
- Improved understanding of trauma and support for parents who have experienced trauma in their lives.

Our initial planning of a seminar series approach to addressing learning actions required to be revised due to the significant challenges facing the multi-agency workforce post-covid, including the impact of cross-service recruitment and retention issues, budget constraints and increased and sustained sickness absence. This impacted on operational presenters as well as intended training participants. This led to a different approach being taken.

Learning actions have been incorporated into our local programme in the delivery of several activities:

- **Safe and Together CORE multiagency training.** While this model directly addresses domestic abuse, the learning also allows the workforce to take account of: -:
  - The intersection and complexity of mental health and substance use.
  - Taking a trauma informed approach when undertaking a holistic assessment with all families.
  - Developing knowledge and skills in presenting evidence collated to present at formal meetings to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children.
- **Multi-agency practice learning sessions:** GIRFEC: Solution Orientated Child's Plan. This includes:
  - Current developments across the Promise, GIRFEC and Child Protection
  - Using a Solution Orientated approach within Child's Plan meetings.
- **Mock hearings and the role of the Children's Reporter.** This includes:
  - Knowledge about legal processes, referrals, collating and presenting evidence and decision-making.

Other opportunities to access quality learning while taking account of the demands on service delivery were identified. Online learning is promoted provided by [Scottish Drugs Forum](#), [NES National Trauma Training programme](#) and [NES Mental Health Improvement and prevention of self-harm and suicide resources](#). Our strategy supports opportunities for self-directed and online learning alongside the importance of accessing skilled level 'in person' learning.

In March 2023 the newly appointed Trauma Informed Policy Officer commenced work alongside local Trauma Champions and workforce development leads to develop a Falkirk Trauma Informed strategy and tiered training framework. The postholder is currently working with a wide range of services across Falkirk's Community Planning partnership. This work includes:

- conducting tests of change, including a focus on workforce wellbeing.
- engaging with people who wish to inform local culture, systems, and practice change through sharing their lived experience.
- supporting teams to walk through their service delivery using the Trauma Informed lens tool to identify improvement actions and training needs.
- informing the delivery of learning and development activities using all the above.

### **Development - Workforce Survey**

As part of our continuous improvement work in 2022, the Partnership undertook a staff survey which provided a rounded picture of the health of the Children's Services Planning Partnership. Whilst the workforce recognised some of the macro issues over which they have little control which impacted on families, for example the cost-of-living crisis and post pandemic recovery, the collective responses provided an encouraging view on the progress of work being undertaken.

Across the workforce, staff were asked their view on whether 'the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people at risk of harm are getting better' and 'the GIRFEC approach is having a positive impact on the lives of children and young people at risk of harm at we work with', both statements were met positively with two thirds of staff responding that they agreed or strongly agreed.

62 % of staff agreed/strongly agreed when responding to 'I am confident that effective intervention processes are in place to prevent or reduce incidences of accumulating signs of child abuse, neglect or exploitation'.

An overwhelming 95% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that 'I have the knowledge, skills and confidence to assess the risk and needs of children and young people that they work with'. When asked 'I know the standards of practice expected of me' 98% agreed/strongly agreed with 82% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they received 'regular supervision or opportunities to speak with their line manager and get support from colleagues to achieve high standards of practice.'

86% agreed/strongly agreed to 'having the learning and development opportunities to increase confidence in working with children at risk of harm'. 89% reported they were "proud of the contribution that they made to improve the wellbeing of children and young people at risk of harm and their families".

69% agreed that "leaders have a clear vision for the delivery and improvement of services we provide for children and young people at risk of harm".



### **Staff Handbook**

In response to the staff survey the partnership developed a Staff Handbook for the CSPP workforce to illustrate and contextualise the 'bigger picture', provide detail around the key priorities and outline how individual partners come together to progress a shared agenda.

The Handbook supports the workforce to understand leadership vision and the priorities of Falkirk's Children's Services Planning Partnership and how these are influenced by national policy and local implementation.

Access our staff Handbook [here](#)

### Key Theme 3: Resource

We will have an effectively resourced child protection system and pressures are mitigated.

#### Workforce Reports & The Risk Register

The enduring impact of Covid-19 and subsequent effects of the cost of living crisis continue to place increased demands and pressures on the workforce and partnerships. Recruitment and retention issues are being experienced across Scotland and by Falkirk's partnership agencies. In terms of working with communities, the risk is that we may not share information with children, families and the public in a timely manner leading to under reporting of child protection concerns and an impact on collaborative working, resulting in more siloed practice.

As part of the partnership's strategic response, each agency now provides **workforce reports** to CPC for joint consideration, assessment and planning. The purpose of these reports is also to obtain assurance of plans to **mitigate risk** from an inter-agency perspective. Falkirk's CPC introduced a '**Risk Register**' in February 2023 as a standing item on the CPC agenda. This is an evolving and dynamic tool, subject to ongoing review.

Through the workforce report, the CPC receives regular updates from each agency on workforce capacity to understand the impact on children. Alongside this, agencies are working together to streamline workloads and consider more efficient ways of working. Information is shared with the Chief Officers Group (COG) to escalate concerns and is recorded in the COG risk register as a result. The Public Information and Engagement subgroup continues to monitor all information that is available to the workforce, children, families and the public. Within this group, any concerns regarding under reporting of concerns for children's safety or welfare can be raised and escalated to CPC for consideration.

#### Staff well-being

In addition to the impact on children from recruitment and retention challenges, through analysis of the risk register, the CPC acknowledges the impact on the childcare workforce. Staff wellbeing and mental health are impacted due to the complexity of work and demands. It is recognised that children may be further harmed if staff do not have the skills, confidence and resilience to manage caseloads and risks associated. To mitigate this risk factor, the CPC considers the workforce reports and impact on both staff and children.

Supervision models are in place to support staff wellbeing and the use of agency/bank staff is in place to mitigate the gaps in service delivery. Recruitment and retention strategies are ongoing across the partnership with the workforce data shared with COG to provide assurance of the mitigations in place.

To reduce the impact of staffing challenges, agencies are working in partnerships to highlight the most vulnerable children including children who are impacted by Domestic Abuse. The Education Service has taken the lead role in monitoring the children highlighted and escalating risks when required. An example of an issue being escalated is the impact of the decision to prioritise child protection work. Due to limited staffing, this has impaired the ability of teams to undertake early and effective interventions as desired. Early risk factors can escalate leading to child protection measures which otherwise could have been managed earlier. The mitigations in place for this are for agencies to share information timely and continue to communicate when they are concerned about a child.

### **CPC membership - new appointments**

In the latter part of the reporting period of 2022-23, the partnership was successful in appointing to two key positions which are integral to the functioning of the Child Protection Committee. New Data Analyst, Stuart Brown and Lead Officer for Child Protection, Tony McLaughlin, joined us in April 2023.

### **Review and streamlining of CPC sub-structure**

As noted earlier in the report, the CPC acknowledged the external time and resource pressures increasingly being placed on the professionals and wider system. Inter-agency partners shared concerns in relation to the volume of inter-agency groups they were required to attend, related workforce pressures and reduced capacity resulting in low attendance at groups and workplans not being progressed.

In response, the CPC initiated a review of the subgroups and reporting systems. Following a Forth Valley wide, inter-agency consultation period, a new approach was developed which involved seven sub-groups merging into three over-arching Forth Valley groups.

The new structure was agreed by CPCs in Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling and approved on 6th December 2022. The aim of the new, streamlined structure is to improve productivity and efficient use of resources across the Forth Valley partnership.

The new structure is detailed above and is included in [Falkirk's Staff Handbook](#).





## Key Theme 4: Involvement

Children and their families are involved in decision making and service design and their expectations met.

### Public Information and Engagement

The CPC have been working in partnership with communities through a range of activities to ensure members of the public and the children and families we support are fully informed of their rights, have their views heard and are aware of local and national priorities.

Examples of this include promoting the national Child Protection Committee Scotland 'Speak Up' campaign which was developed to promote children's rights and raise awareness of where children can access support if they are experiencing child abuse and/or neglect. Feedback from partners noted how powerful this message came across.

Our inter-agency, **Forth Valley Public Protection, Information and Engagement (PPI&E) Group** was established in April 2023 as part of the restructure of the joint working groups across the Forth Valley CPCs. It was agreed this group would align the separate groups of Child Sexual Exploitation, Practitioner Pages and Public Information and Engagement (PI&E). The rationale for this realignment was that each of the workplans of the previous three working groups shared the common theme of awareness raising and engagement.

The group met for the first time in April 2023, coinciding with the appointments of three new Lead Officers for Child Protection in Clackmannanshire, Stirling and Falkirk. Engagement activity with children and families is channelled through the CPC Business Plan and discussed within the Improvement and Quality Assurance Subgroup.

The groups have spent time reviewing the awareness and engagement work previously undertaken by the partnership and updating the terms of reference, group membership and chairing responsibilities.

In the 2022-23 period, the workplans have included the following:

**Public Information and Engagement** - Exploring opportunities to engage with children, young people and the public, including joint opportunities with Adult Protection Committee (APC) for any engagement with the public and workforce. How we co-deliver and co-design services with children, young people and families. Link have also been developed with the Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) to consider opportunities for engagement and includes co-facilitating Learning Sessions through SLG or the Learning and Development subgroup.

**Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)** - The CPC have worked with partners to continue raising awareness of Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation (CSE/CCE) to all parents/carers and the public. Through working alongside parent councils and pharmacy leads, the CPC has successfully promoted Barnardos CSE/CCE materials to all parent councils in Falkirk which has been disseminated within their areas and pharmacy leads encouraged to disseminate the information across every pharmacy in Falkirk.

Other areas of ongoing work include exploring how we can reach the nighttime economy, including licensed premises and taxi firms, and seek to raise awareness of CSE.

**Forth Valley's Practitioner Pages** is an online resource bank for multi-agency staff who work with children, young people, adults and families across Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

This is also a public facing site, accessible to members of the public and is utilised to share relevant policies, procedures and guidance to assist in the identification, reporting and response to concerns for the safety and welfare of children across Forth Valley.

Our Forth Valley inter-agency PI&E subgroup is reviewing and updating these pages to make them relevant and more user friendly and accessible to both the workforce and public. The CPC recognises that a number of existing documents will need to be aligned with the updated National Guidance for Child Protection 2021. Any policies and procedures requiring updating are reported to the Forth Valley inter-agency Policies and Procedures group as necessary.

## **Child protection processes**

Children and families are involved at various levels during assessment and intervention stages involving our multi-agency teams across Falkirk. Our partnership endeavours to ensure the voices of children and families are heard and they are included in decision making forums which affect their lives.

Building on an initial increase in families attending Child Protection Planning Meetings during the pandemic, following the introduction of online meetings (81%), **the Reviewing Officers Team** have continued to engage with families before every Child Protection Planning Meeting to ensure their views are heard and encourage participation in decision making forums. The **increase in parents/carers taking part** in reviews has continued with the most recent multiagency file audit finding 87% of parents/carers continued to attend Multiagency Planning Meetings for their child. In conjunction

with this, another change in Child Protection practice is during all Child Protection Planning Meetings, every child will be offered advocacy and consideration for a referral to **Family Group Decision Making** as part of the Child's Plan. This change has been well received as families are welcoming the opportunity to create a family plan that meets their needs whilst reducing risk.

Led by the Review Team, the CPC plans to improve how children and families are included in our child protection processes and to develop how we gain feedback from children and young people, how we structure reviews, increase participation, and write children's plans.

To assist their participation in child protection processes, we also have **information leaflets** available describing the child protection planning meeting process. An area of development work is around improving the quality of this information to include details about children's rights and how children and young people can be involved in planning and decisions about their future. Invite letters do highlight right to advocacy/sign posting to relevant services.

### **Children and young people's views**

Children and young people are offered a variety of ways to share their views including advocacy, viewpoint, resources such as 'three houses' and 'all about me' as well as wellbeing web, talking mats and direct conversation. All agencies seek views on sharing of any individual person's details/data in line with national guidance and a proportionate information sharing approach. Obtaining and sharing children and young people's views is always carried out in a **trauma informed** way. The experiences within child protection planning meetings are that professionals are very clear about the impact of children's lived experiences and tailor the interventions accordingly.

Police Scotland and Social Work have adopted a trauma informed approach to vulnerable witness interviewing. National training courses are delivered to practitioners to upskill. These procedures will be revised and reviewed upon the implementation of the **Scottish Child Interview Model**.

## Falkirk's Reviewing Team

**Engagement and involvement** of children, young people and their views is a key area of Falkirk Council's Reviewing Team's development plan. Over the next 12 months, the team will focus on:

- Making links with Champions Board, children's houses, children's rights and viewpoint developers to create feedback loops and develop a suite of leaflets, material and information for children and young people.
- Link with groups such as Equally safe and GIRFEC group to develop channels for involving families in the CP process and gaining their views.
- Creating a system of obtaining regular feedback from families on experience of child protection process, areas to improve and their rights as a parent/carer.
- Develop lunch time 'drop in sessions' monthly named 'bring a piece' where good practice examples are shared with teams and what worked well. Engagement with children, young people and families will regularly feature in this as a theme and any learning.
- Improving quality of Child's Plan's, written for the child and using child centred language as part of introducing child centred case recording and a review of how reviews are structured.

As part of Falkirk's CPC's commitment to improving levels of public information and engagement, we have endeavoured, with our Forth Valley partners, to listen to the views of our children, young people and families to help us think about what we can do better and to inform how service design and delivery.

Falkirk's **'Family Learning Project'** has been facilitated by Community Learning and Development and following the development of our Promise Implementation team, has developed further momentum. This group offers parents/carers an opportunity to have their views heard and to be involved in co-designing the child protection system. There is much to be excited about the future of this group and how it may contribute to future service developments.

Children and families across Forth Valley have told us the following, providing a powerful insight into **'What works for children and families across Forth Valley'**. Our aim going forward is to raise further awareness, within our workforce and across our partnerships, of what matters to our children, young people and families and to encourage child centred, relationship based approaches that protect, empower and strengthen our communities.

## What works for children and families across Forth Valley'

<p><b>Treat us with respect and fairness</b></p> <p><b>Personalise your approach</b></p> <p><b>Consider accessibility needs</b></p> <p><b>Value and show interest in our opinions</b></p> <p><b>Actively listen</b></p>	<p><b>Be understanding and take us seriously</b></p> <p><b>Give us time to think and share</b></p> <p><b>Make it meaningful</b></p> <p><b>Take action and give feedback</b></p>
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The Promise also tells us that children and young people need and want: "to grow up loved, safe and respected so we can realise our full potential"

### What Forth Valley families have told us:

"I just wanted to be part of the discussion and not part of their problem"

"I had never felt so powerless, and I was their mum"

"I wouldn't know who to ask for help, outside family and friends"

"I felt that I couldn't protect my son once the system took over"

### What helps - views of Families in Forth Valley:

A consistent person to approach across services (a person, not a team)

To tell their story once

To know where to go in a crisis

Time to build trusting relationships with service staff

A safe space to meet other parents/families

To be listened to

To not feel judged

### Importantly, the children and young people told us how being listened to makes them feel:

"Being listened to makes me feel happy because I feel I am not useless"

"Being listened to is nice because it makes you feel included in your community"

"Like you're actively trying to arrange something for the better"

### We also asked them how they know they are being listened to:

"I know when I'm listened to when the changes I want are being talked about"

"Actions actually being taken"

Source: Falkirk's Family Learning Project; Falkirk's Youth Voice Charter and input from Stirling CPC

## Celebrating wider partnership achievements

The CPC is also informed by wider work undertaken by the partnership, including by our **Children's Rights & Engagement subgroup** which leads on embedding and delivering a rights-based approach across Falkirk. They have developed and established training for community planning partners workforce on UNCRC implementation. To help to inform this subgroup members and young people have:

- Carried out a baseline survey of community planning partners knowledge of UNCRC
- Developed training materials for use with community planning partners
- Developed digital training on UNCRC and Children's Rights part of all new Falkirk Council employee's induction training
- Co-designed, with Falkirk Champions Board, webinars on the Promise and UNCRC

The Group have worked with children and young people to promote Falkirk's approach to support the engagement and participation in co design and co-production of services. For more information, please refer to our '**Delivering Children's Rights in Falkirk report 2022-23**'.

Falkirk's Children's Services Planning Partnership has also worked with children and young people to develop **Falkirk Youth Voice (FYV)**. FYV will provide a range of youth participation opportunities to children and young people living within the Falkirk Council area so that they can influence public decision making at a local, regional, and national levels. Children and young people have developed a Falkirk Youth Voice Charter which is being shared widely across the partnership to help build knowledge and understanding of all agencies working with our children and young people of the importance of rights respecting approaches.

## Key Theme 5 - Self-evaluation

Child Protection system to be continuously evaluated and for quality improvement approaches to make an impact.

### Continuous Improvement

To continuously improve, we need to know what progress we are making and what impact our work is having on our children and families. Falkirk CPC considers self-evaluation as a critical and ongoing activity that helps develop a better understanding of how **good the partnership is now**, to help us consider **how we know**, the evidential base for our assessment, and to help inform **what we plan to do next** to improve services for our children and young people.

Our Child Protection **Improvement & Quality Assurance sub-group (I&QA)** continues to scrutinise data sets and identify trends or anomalies within the data that may indicate a change in the levels or types of risks experienced by Falkirk's children. Scrutiny activity has been able to identify where there has been improvement and good practice as well as areas that require to be strengthened further.

Our I&QA Group utilises a variety of methods and tools as part of the scrutiny process; including the use of data, surveys, single and multi-agency audits and through learning reviews. Some examples of our self-evaluation activity over the reporting period include the following:

#### Staff survey

As detailed, earlier in this report (under Key Theme 2), our staff survey undertaken was one of the methods of self-evaluation utilised by the partnership which has helped to inform the work of the CPC to ensure we understand what is required to support and promote a competent and capable workforce.

#### Multi-agency audits

In August 2022, a **multiagency audit was** undertaken of child protection referrals to examine their quality, whether processes were robust and how many resulted in child protection investigations.

The audit findings were that 75% of referral information was assessed as good, 20% of referrals did not follow process and 5% of referrals led to a Child Protection Planning Meetings. The findings were shared with the Forth Valley GIRFEC group to inform training and strengthen practice.



## January 2023 inter-agency file audit

A comprehensive inter-agency file audit was undertaken in January 2023, reviewing records for 20 children in Falkirk. The sample for the audit was similar to the 2019 file audit, and included children subject to child protection investigations, children on the CP register or children removed from the CP register and children Looked After at home. The audit considered the children's cases over the last 2 years.

**Investigations** - 70% of cases progressed to an investigation. Children's views were considered in 43% of the investigations and 86% of parent's views were considered. During investigations relevant information was shared in 100% of cases, though 29% was noted to be partially. 100% of investigations took place within agreed timescales. (Total cases in this category 14)

**Initial Response To Concerns** - In 95% of cases, concerns for the child were shared without delay and in 100% of cases, relevant information was shared by partners (although in 10%, this is noted to be partial information). Overall, the initial multi agency response to concerns in 18 out of 20 cases was noted to be good or above (2 excellent, 12 very good, 4 good), 3 cases were noted to be adequate.

**Initial Referral Discussions (IRD)** - 57% of cases proceeded to IRD, 75% of these were held within timescales and 67% had a clear written record of decisions and next steps.

As the audit reviewed the last 2 years, it predates the implementation of the eIRD system and process. For future audits, we will ensure eIRD records are downloaded from the shared platform and added to the child's electronic file.

**Investigations** - 70% of cases progressed to an investigation. Children's views were considered in 43% of the investigations and 86% of parent's views were considered (though 29% is partial/not all parents of the children). During investigations relevant information was shared in 100% of cases, though 29% was noted to be partially) 100% of investigations took place within agreed timescales. (Total cases in this category 14)

**Legal Measures/Emergency Protection and Interim Safety Plans** - In 12 out of 13 cases legal measures/emergency measures were considered and 11 out of 12 children had interim safety plans put in place. The overall quality of follow up to concerns were rated good or above in 9 cases and 5 cases rated as adequate.

**Initial Multi-Agency Meetings** - Children were noted to have contributed to their meetings in 50% of the cases and parents contributed in 87% of these. 80% of meetings made clear decisions and 80% were held within timescales. 100% of initial meetings had a written record.

The overall quality of initial multi agency meetings were rated as good or above for 13 cases and 2 cases were rates as weak.

**Assessment, Planning and Reviews** - 90% of children in the sample had an assessment. Of the 18 children with assessments, 2 were rated excellent, 7 very good, 8 good and 1 adequate.

90% of cases had a chronology (35%) noted to be single agency. 13 out of 18 were rated good or above, 3 were adequate and 2 rated as weak.

100% of children had a plan and the quality of the plans were rated good or above in 17 out of 20 cases, the other 3 noted to be adequate.

The overall rating for the quality of reviews were good or above in 16 out of 18 cases.

**Impact Of Work with Children And Families** - 95% of children had the opportunity to develop a relationship with a key member of staff (19 out of 20 cases). 95% of parents had an opportunity to build a relationship with a key member of staff but in 20% of cases it was not with all parents.

The overall rating for how well children were listened to, heard, and included was 14 cases good or above (6 very good and 1 excellent), 2 cases were noted to be adequate. 2 were rated as weak and 1 was unsatisfactory.

The overall rating for how well parents were listened to, heard, and included was 17 out of 19 cases were good or above.

In the evaluation of the effectiveness of work carried out to reduce the risks of abuse and/or neglect to the child, 13 cases were rated as good or above (2 excellent, 5 very good). 5 were noted to be adequate and 1 case weak.

In the evaluation of the effectiveness of the work carried out to reduce the risks of the child harming themselves or others, 5 cases were rated as good or above, 4 rated as weak (9 cases in this category).

For risks in the community, 6 cases were rated good or above, 2 cases adequate and 1 weak. (9 cases in this category).

**Supporting Children During Covid 19 Pandemic** - The quality of contact between the child and key professionals throughout the restricted period was evaluated and 6 cases were rated by auditors as very good, 4 good, 3 adequate. 2 cases were rated as weak and 1 unsatisfactory.

Overall, the effectiveness of the partnership's response to ensuring the child has been protected from harm and their wellbeing needs have been met during the restricted period was rated as 2 excellent cases, 5 very good, 7 good, 1 adequate and 1 unsatisfactory.

**Additional Question Added To Audit Template** - Does the recording give you a sense of the child and their lived experience? 16 replies were given to this question and 50% (8 cases) assessed that there was a sense of the child and their lived experience in the records.

### **Implications for CPC/Falkirk**

The report was discussed at the Improvement and Quality Assurance Group and CPC and next steps agreed in terms of further areas of scrutiny, how the information is shared, and good practice celebrated and how improvement actions are taken forward.

This audit has been part of a rolling programme of self-evaluation and the findings will help contribute to our continued development and progress. It is of note that work has been undertaken in areas including assessment, planning and reviews and the outcome of the audit demonstrates improvement in practice since the 2019 audit

### **Comparative analysis**

The Improvement and Quality Assurance group were tasked with undertaking further scrutiny work following the case file audit in January 2023. A report with a summary of the key findings was presented to the CPC on 7th March 2023.

The findings of the case file audit undertaken in 2019 (base line data) was compared with the findings of the 2023 file audit. It should be noted that the sample size varied (36 in the first audit, 21 cases in the second audit) and the Care Inspectorate audit tool changed between both audits, so the questions asked were slightly different. This resulted in the data not always being directly comparable. **Of the comparisons that could be made, notable improvements were identified in the 2023 audit.**

The 2019 audit highlighted a range of improvement areas including multi agency assessment, chronologies, and child's plans. Below details the improvements noted in these areas:

### **Assessment**

In 2019, 66% cases had a written assessment and in 2023 this was up to 90% of cases. There is no 2019 data on the quality of assessments. In 2023, Of the 18 children with assessments, 2 were rated excellent, 7 very good, 8 good and 1 adequate.

### **Chronologies**

In 2019, 72% of cases had a chronology and 57% of those chronologies were rated as adequate or less. In 2023, 90% of cases had a chronology and 72% of those were rated as good or above.

### **Child's Plans**

In 2019, 66% of cases had a child's plan and just over 70% of the plans were evaluated as good or above. In 2023, 100% of cases had a child's plan and 85% of the plans were evaluated as good or above.

### **Deeper Dive**

**In the 2023 audit, no cases were highlighted as concerning or weak overall.** We did however take a 'deeper dive' into a small number of cases which had been rated as weak or unsatisfactory for a certain question or area of practice. These included: -

- Children's Views and barriers to these being sought.
- Clear decision making and any barriers to this.
- Impact on children identified as a risk to themselves or others. (These were not CARM cases, they related to mental health and self-harm)
- 2 cases where chronologies had been rated weak or unsatisfactory.
- 3 cases that had been rated weak or unsatisfactory for their contact with a key professional during covid.
- 2 cases where the multi-agency assessment was rated as excellent.

The findings of the further scrutiny work were shared at the Improvement and Quality Assurance Group. The following was agreed:

- There is improvement work underway in these areas already through the Child Centred Case Recording Group, the Forth Valley GIRFEC group and the Learning and Development Group.
- Health (via the school nursing service) and Education are working together to consider supports for young's people's mental health and wellbeing.
- There is a multi-agency practitioners forum coming up which will focus on Self Harm.
- Feedback will be given to practitioners about the assessments rated as excellent and cases above that were subject to further scrutiny.

## **Key Theme 5 (continued) - Self-Evaluation via Learning Reviews & Child Death Reviews**

### **Falkirk CPC Inter-Agency Learning Review Group**

Falkirk Learning Review Group was established at the request of Falkirk Child Protection Committee (CPC). The purpose of the group was to oversee learning from Initial Case Reviews and Learning Reviews. The Terms of Reference for the group has been updated in accordance with the revised National Guidance for Child Protection Committees Undertaking Learning Reviews (2021).

The overall purpose of a Learning Review is to bring together agencies, individuals, and families in a collective endeavour to learn from what has happened in order to improve and develop systems and practice in the future and thus better protect people. A Learning Review is a multi-agency process for establishing the facts of a situation where a child has died or been harmed significantly, within an child protection context, in order to learn lessons on how to better protect those at risk in our community. They are a critical part of the continuous improvement of practice and processes.

During 2022/23, the Learning Review Group received three notifications of cases to be considered for Learning review. This has resulted in the Falkirk CPC commissioning two Learning Reviews (in Jan 2022 and March 2023). The 3rd notification was deferred due to significant similarities with an ongoing Learning Review.

The key findings and improvement strategies are considered by Falkirk CPC and the Public Protection Chief Officers Group. Subsequent multi-agency improvement actions are then driven via the subgroups of the CPC, including the Learning & Development Group and the Improvement and Quality Assurance Group which monitors and reviews impact.

### **Forth Valley Inter-Agency Child Death Review Group**

Following the publication of the National Hub for Reviewing and Learning from the Deaths of Children and Young People in 2021 (Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate), Falkirk joined with partners to develop a Forth Valley Inter-Agency Child Death Review Group.

The group is led by Forth Valley Consultant Paediatrician and Child Death Review Lead and is made up of key representatives from across NHS Forth Valley services, CAMHS, Police Scotland, Scottish Ambulance Service and Lead Officers from Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire CPCs.

We are working together to:

- Ensure that the death of every child in Forth Valley Scotland is subject to a quality review.
- Develop methodology/documentation to ensure all deaths of children and young people that are not subject to any other review, are reviewed through a high quality and consistent review process, and
- Improve the quality and consistency of existing reviews.
- Improve the experience and engagement with families and carers.
- Channel learning from current review processes across Scotland that could direct action to help reduce preventable deaths. Our multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach focuses on using evidence to deliver change, and ultimately aims to reduce deaths and harm to children and young people.

Falkirk's CPC wants to ensure the death of every child and young person is reviewed to an agreed minimum standard. Reviews should be conducted on the deaths of all live born children up to the date of their 18th birthday, or 26th birthday for care leavers who are in receipt of continuing care or aftercare at the time of their death.

The Child Death Review group has developed a structure and process for reviewing the deaths of children and young people across Forth Valley which aligns to the national guidance in order to enable good practice and lessons to be reflected and shared at a national level.

## **Key theme 6 - Policy and Guidance:**

Effective policy and guidance in place for best practice.

Our Inter-Agency Forth Valley **Policies, Procedures and Protocols Group** was established to monitor and to have oversight of all child protection policies, procedures and protocols across Forth Valley; including reviewing and updating existing policy and guidance and considering any emerging issues requiring strategic, inter-agency direction.

This group is led by the Lead Officer Child Protection and the group consists of key members from partner agencies across the Forth Valley CPCs, Forth Valley Health Board, SCRA, Police Scotland and the Third Sector.

### **Forth Valley Implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection (2021)**

The Scottish Government published new National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021, replacing the 2014 version. The guidance describes the responsibilities and expectations of everyone working with children and young people, families and carers in Scotland. It sets out how agencies should work together to protect children and young people from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Falkirk's Child Protection Committee (CPC) has worked with strategic partners across Forth Valley to progress the implementation of the national guidance at a local level; a collaborative approach with Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils, Forth Valley Health Board, Police Scotland and Third Sector to ensure a joined up approach to the care and protection of children in our area.

The Forth Valley Policies and Procedures Subgroup (made up of key representatives from the respective CPCs) was stood down and replaced by the Forth Valley National Guidance for Child Protection Implementation Group, overseen by the Independent Chair of Falkirk's CPC. This group has established a workshop approach to re-freshing and developing Forth Valley's Inter-Agency Child Protection Guidance to ensure this aligns with the national approach and is cognisant of local needs and services.

The aim of the local guidance is to reflect the key aspects of the national guidance, outlining how agencies should work together with parents, families and communities to prevent harm and to protect children from abuse and neglect. It will emphasise that 'everyone has a role in protecting children from harm'.



The localised Guidance will be for partner agencies across Forth Valley and should be read in conjunction with the guidance available within individual agencies, including: Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council, NHS Forth Valley, Police Scotland, Third Sector Partners and Scottish Children's Reporters Administration.

The guidance promotes the integration of child protection within the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) continuum, a strengthened focus on children's rights, engagement and collaboration with families and on building on existing strengths. It highlights the need to consider wider, structural factors and the importance of holistic and contextual approaches to safeguarding.

In line with the national guidance, Falkirk's CPC has driven forward continuous improvement in child protection policy, processes and practice in key areas, including:

- Improving inter-agency responses to child protection concerns through a review and update to Forth Valley's guidance on Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRD).
- Falkirk is leading on the establishment of the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) in Forth Valley; a trauma informed and children's rights approach to child victims and witnesses.
- Analysis of the requirements of Bairns' Hoose national standards and delivery of trauma-informed support, justice and recovery for children who have experienced trauma.

Falkirk's CPC will continue to review, monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of implementation in our area through quality assurance and improvement work and the use of self-evaluation tools; which remain subject to external scrutiny by Scottish Government, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) and the Care Inspectorate.

### **ForthValley Safeguarding approach**

As part of the restructure of the Forth Valley CPC groups, a thematic 'Safeguarding' approach was established which incorporated a range of inter-agency working groups set up to progress workstreams relating to Missing Persons, Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRD), Bairns' Hoose and the Scottish Child Interview Model.

## Missing Persons Short Life Working Group

Missing People is delivering a project in partnership with Scottish Government, to support the implementation of The National Missing Persons Framework in local areas across Scotland. In the project's fourth year, 2022-2023, they are working with Forth Valley and a number of other areas. As part of this project, they have identified existing good practice and working with partners to identify where practice can be developed further.

In Forth Valley, the work includes collaboratively developing current policies and protocols around Return Discussions; reviewing and improving information sharing; assisting with training to local professionals working in the field; sharing best practice and learning around the implementation of The National Framework and building awareness of support services available for missing people and their families.

The Missing People Framework also deliver opportunities for professionals involved in preventing and responding to missing incidents and these have been shared across our networks, including:

- A free to access, online professional's forum to network with other professionals from across Scotland, discuss local issues, and share best practice around missing
- National conference
- Access to an online Good Practice Toolkit, available at: [www.missingpeople.org.uk/for-professionals/services-for-professionals](http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/for-professionals/services-for-professionals)

The project team mapped and reviewed current policies, guidance, and practice in Forth Valley to gain an understanding of the excellent work already being delivered to support missing persons and their families.

Findings and recommendations from this review process, undertaken with key partners, were shared at the Forth Valley Review Findings & Recommendations Meeting. This meeting allowed the Missing People's Framework to clarify key areas, provide an opportunity for further input from local partners, and consider and agree on areas of support to be delivered in the final stage of the project.

A Short Life Working Group, involving partners from across Forth Valley, was established and is in the process of refreshing our existing approach. An inter-agency Missing People protocol is being developed and will be made available via our Practitioner Pages once complete.

## **Inter-Agency Referral Discussion**

A Forth Valley Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD) working group was established to review and update our existing child and adult IRD guidance and to align this with the updated national child protection guidance; including changes in approach to child protection timescales, improvements in child centred language and consideration of responses to different age groups (including pre-birth and 16 + age groups).

The draft guidance is being considered by Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire CPCs and will then be submitted to our respective Chief Officer Groups for ratification. The IRD Review Groups have met twice monthly and considered future quality assurance approaches, including dip sampling by CPC locality. The finalised guidance will be made available on our Forth Valley Practitioner Pages [here](#).

Multi-agency IRD Practitioner Forums are held on a regular basis in Falkirk, chaired by our Lead Officer for Adult Support and Protection, providing an opportunity to obtain the views of the workforce and offers space for reflection on what works. Any emerging issues or suggested improvements to our systems are then fed into our IRD steering group for further consideration and implementation as necessary.

As noted earlier in this report, we successfully implemented the new electronic system of recording inter-agency referral discussions (eIRD) across 2022/23. This followed scrutiny of our IRD activity which identified the need for a robust and evidence-based recording of multi-agency child protection decision-making.

## **Scottish Child Interview Model**

The Scottish Child Interview Model for joint investigative interviews is a trauma informed, best practice model which seeks to secure best evidence for court processes, and to inform assessment of risk to the child and other children.

Falkirk CPC is an integral member of two groups established to progress the implementation of this model across Forth Valley - the Strategic/Oversight Group and the Implementation Group.

This is a Scottish Government mandated project, which provides no financial support or budget beyond training, the Strategic Group have commenced a costings review to understand and establish the funding requirements for all agencies to implement this project.

The training for staff will commence in November 2023, with a potential go-live date at the end of February 2024. The cost of the training is funded by the National Team.

There are many financial factors to be considered and overcome by the Strategic Oversight Group due to the lack of budgetary support and the current financial climate for all agencies. A scoping exercise has begun to map out all the expected costs of this project across all agencies, but also to determine any efficiency savings that can be introduced before the project goes-live.

Finding a location of where the team will be co-located proved a challenge for all agencies, especially with decreased estate footprints and on-going re-structures within agencies. The Strategic Oversight Group has established that the Scottish Child Interview Model team will be co-located and based in Falkirk (location still to be determined) and will operate on a regional basis.

This project is still in the initial stages, however has strict timescales to meet in terms of recruitment and training commitments. Challenges around co-location and budget are being considered by the Strategic Oversight Group. It has been recognised that this is a mandated project from the Scottish Government and will be planned and implemented in the best way that suits Forth Valley, taking forward learning from other Local Authority areas who have the model in place.

Consideration is also being given to how the Barnahus/Bairns Hoose approach may be taken forward within Forth Valley and exploring potential locations for undertaking Scottish Child Interview Model interviews of children.

### **Bairns' Hoose**

Scotland's Bairns Hoose approach is based on an internationally renowned model first developed in Iceland, called Barnahus. At the heart of the Barnahus is a trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary approach which unites services for child victims and witnesses, and their families, to ensure that the rights of children to justice, care and protection are upheld.

An inter-agency Forth Valley Bairns' Hoose Group was formed to scope the likely requirements for Bairns' Hoose pan Forth Valley, led by a Service Manager from Falkirk Council's Children's Services and joined by key members from partner agencies.

The group is exploring the inter-agency capacity and potential to develop a Forth Valley approach to Bairns' Hoose, and considering the request

by Scottish Government for areas to submit applications to become 'Pathfinder' sites as they progress towards operating as Bairns' Hooses.

The group will also consider the national Bairns' Hoose Standards being developed and any programme and project management approaches required. The group continues to liaise with Scottish Government and awaits further information on the process of the Pathfinder process.

This current phase includes an assessment of what resource, workforce development and infrastructure, and physical sites/refurbishments will be needed to develop Pathfinders into Bairns' Hooses.

### **Contextual safeguarding**

Falkirk's CPC recognises that more work can be done to embed a contextualised safeguarding approach. The partnerships acknowledges the importance of the use of a contextual safeguarding lens and that this complements the existing GIRFEC approach, including the use of the National Practice Model to ensure holistic approaches to assessment and intervention which consider the child's wider world, environmental factors and non-familial risk.

In Falkirk, Police Scotland continue to share intelligence with relevant Social Work managers. The Integrated Assessment Framework is utilised to undertake a holistic approach to assessment and intervention (available online via our shared, public facing 'Practitioner Pages'). Strategic planning and outreach work with young people in the community was undertaken in 2022/23 involving the Go Youth Trust and a final report is available. This was a pilot on hot spots and involved collaborative work with police which utilised data on offending and developed mapping to target effective supports to manage and reduce future risks of harm.



# Opportunities and Future Priorities

Despite the challenging context, we are proud of the commitment and resilience of our services and communities in continuing to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and to work together to protect children from harm.

Falkirk CPC recognises that physical and emotional safety provide a foundation for wellbeing and healthy development. There are collective responsibilities to work together to prevent harm from abuse or neglect from pre-birth onwards, including safe transitions of vulnerable young people towards adult life and services.

The Child Protection Committee (CPC) remains committed to improving the well-being and safety of all children across Falkirk. We will continue to nurture and promote the shared vision of everyone working together to help children to grow up loved, safe and respected so they can realise their full potential.

The main priorities of the CPC in 2023-24 are detailed in our Business & Improvement Plan for 2023-26 and will include the following key activity areas:

- **Forth Valley Inter-Agency Valley Child Protection Guidance** - Implementation of the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 and related workstreams.
- An inter-agency **self-evaluation** of the status of the implementation of the National Guidance in Falkirk for consideration by Scottish Government, CELCIS and the Care Inspectorate.
- **Joint working with our Adult Protection Committee** to consider how we can improve the interface of adult and child protection activity; including learning and development needs of our workforce, transition planning, responses to young people and adults aged 16 + who are at risk of significant harm to themselves or others and the impact of the current cost of living crisis.
- **Continuous improvement** work will consider outstanding audits of our Safe and Together approach, scrutiny work around our child protection data and a review of children subject to child protection registration over 12 months.
- **Learning Reviews** - consider the findings from the recent Learning Review in Falkirk and develop an improvement plan. We will also consider how we can absorb learning from external reviews /national findings.

- **Learning and developmental** needs of our workforce including the roll out inter-agency Key Processes training and creating opportunities for our workforce to come together to share information, learn and reflect on practice.
- Continued alignment of our child protection work with the values and ambitions of other policy streams including **GIRFEC, The Promise and a Children's Rights** based approach.
- Consider developmental work to enhance inter-agency **information sharing protocols** across the key agencies involved in child protection in Falkirk to ensure necessary, relevant and proportionate information with partners to enable effective decision making.
- Improvement work to enhance the **participation and engagement** of children, young people and their families in decision making which affects their lives and also in a consultation capacity in relation to the design of our child protection services.



For further information regarding the Child Protection Committee, you can contact the Lead Officer for Child Protection.

Contact: 01324 506070

If you are concerned about the safety of a child in Falkirk, call

**Initial Response Team (office hours)**

01324 506070

**Police**

101

**Out of Hours Social Work Emergency Duty Team**

01786 470 500

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

