

Falkirk Children's Services
Planning Partnership

Integrated Children's Services Plan

Annual
Progress Report
2024/2025



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Foreword

Welcome to Falkirk's Children's Services Planning Partnership annual report.

Falkirk's Integrated Children and Young People's Services Plan 23-26, sets out our collective vision and aims based on a refreshed joint strategic needs assessment. Together with NHS Forth Valley and our strategic partners we have set out how we would deliver services to ensure that all our children and young people grow up to be safe, loved and respected to reach their full potential.

Throughout 2024/25 as a Partnership, we have continued to work together and sought to strengthen our approaches, building on the work undertaken towards embedding the principles of Whole Family Wellbeing, The Promise and GIRFEC underpinned by UNCRC and Children's Rights. We have a renewed focus on participation and engagement with our children, young people and their families to ensure that their voices are heard and kept at the heart of all that we do.

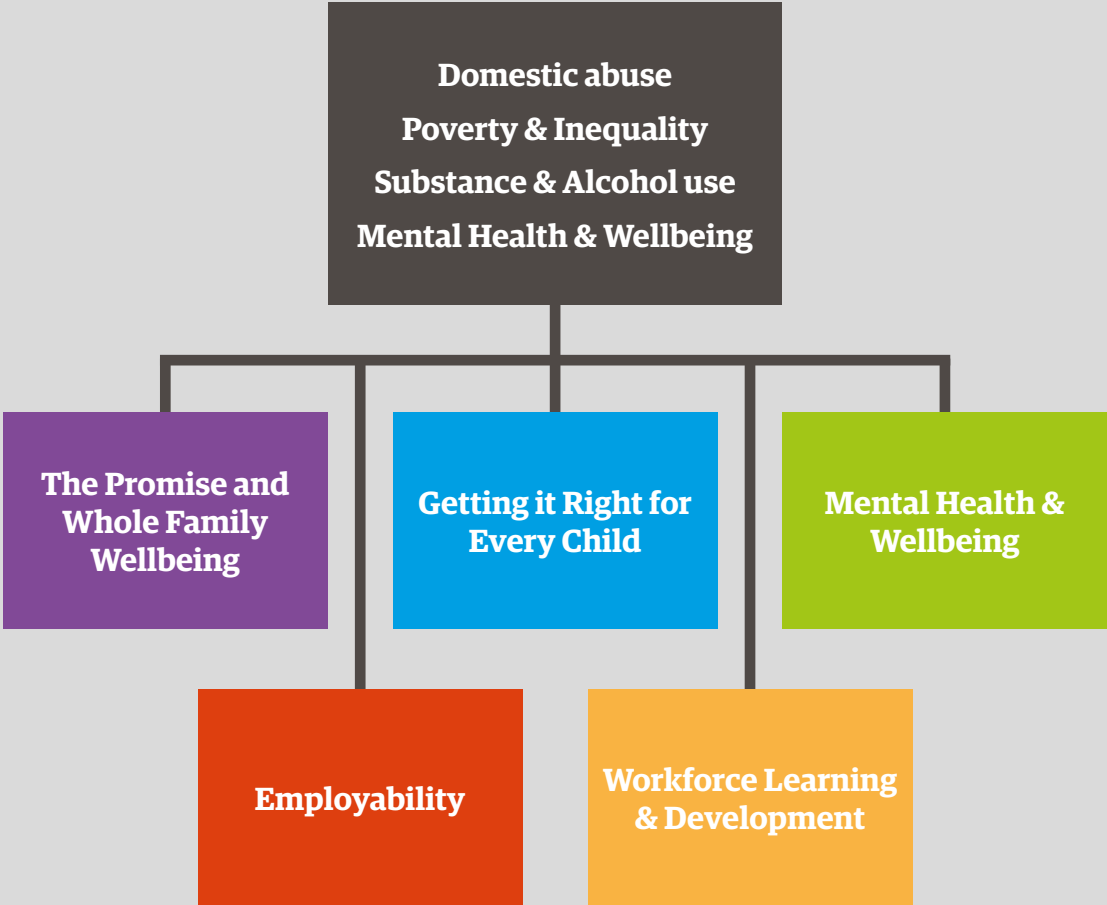
We are delighted to share with you the progress that has been made over the past year and throughout the report we have detailed some of the successes and highlights in relation to achieving our vision and goals. We hope that you enjoy reading this report.



Councillor Cecil Meiklejohn

Leader of Falkirk Council and
Chair of Falkirk Community Planning Board

Our Key Priorities Delivered Through our Workstreams.



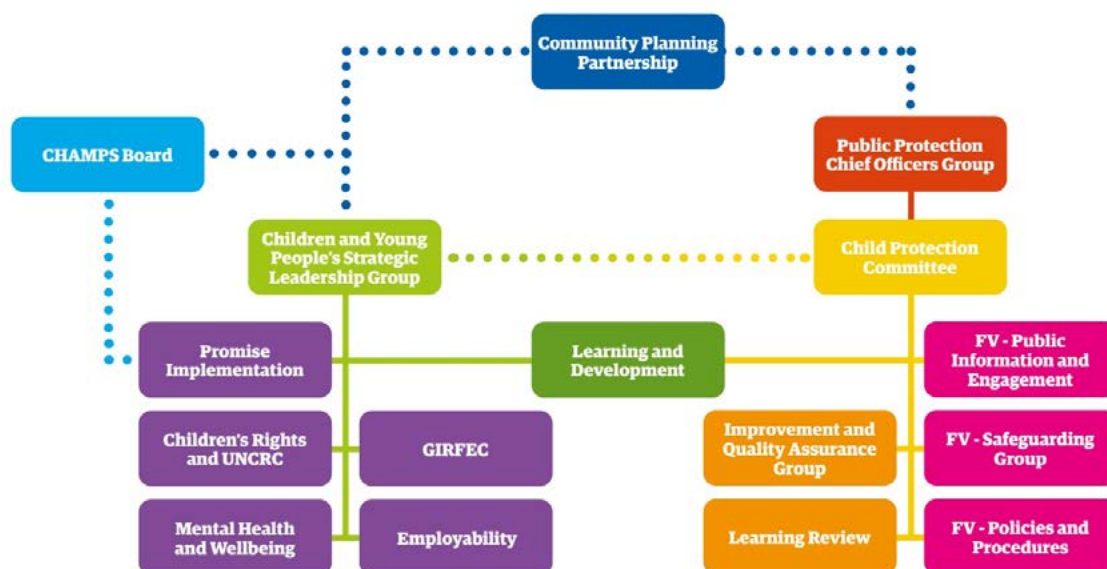
Introduction

Falkirk Children and Young People's Strategic Leadership Group is made up of our partner agencies and shares collective responsibility for improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families within Falkirk. Every three years we produce our Integrated Children's Services Plan which outlines our key priorities and sets out how we will work together to improve outcomes.

This is our second annual report of the 2023-2026 Plan which details the progress of our joint efforts in addressing our key priority areas and cross cutting themes. The work of each of the priority areas is progressed through our multi-agency subgroups.

- The Promise and Whole Family Wellbeing
- Getting it Right for Every Child
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Employability
- Workforce Learning & Development

The structure chart below outlines the governance arrangements for our children's services planning partnership.



Our Priorities

At a local level, the Partnership has identified our priorities through a refreshed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), taking into consideration the post pandemic context. The JSNA has highlighted the challenges faced by some of Falkirk's children, young people, and families/carers, which for them continue to be significant.

Our Outcome Focused Plan

Our Falkirk Integrated Children's Services Plan is underpinned and informed by the key objectives set out in the National policy drivers; GIRFEC, The Promise, UNCRC and Whole Family Wellbeing. The Partnership has agreed an outcomes focused plan with our commitment to delivering on the priorities identified within the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. We have concentrated on those identified priorities where joint action and delivery is needed to achieve the greatest impact. Each of these are outlined as key priorities for action and intervention to improve and promote best outcomes for our children, young people, and their families.

Quality Indicator 1.1 indicates the following priorities for Falkirk:

- Domestic abuse
- Poverty & Inequality
- Substance & Alcohol use
- Mental Health & Wellbeing

The priorities are being progressed through five workstreams:

- The Promise and Whole Family Wellbeing
- Getting it Right for Every Child
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Employability
- Workforce Learning & Development

Within the Plan there were initially six workstreams including Children's Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC. However, on the 16th of January 2024, Royal assent was granted for the UNCRC Bill meaning it is now officially an Act.

This marked the continuation of the journey towards true and meaningful transformational change for children, young people and their families/ carers. A 'child rights-based approach' means putting children's human rights at the heart of everything we do and to reflect this it was decided that Children's Rights and UNCRC should be embedded across each of the workstreams and not a standalone workstream.

Within each of the following sections we are proud to provide evidence, and impact of the work being done across the partnership and how this relates to our four key priorities this year.

The Promise Implementation

Corporate Parenting, Family Support and Whole Family Wellbeing

The Promise (Independent Care Review 2020) highlighted that, “Too often support comes too late. Services must wrap around families before they reach crisis”. Our Promise Implementation Team work creatively and collaboratively across the partnership, to support projects with a particular focus on early intervention.

The Promise Implementation (Corporate Parenting, Family Support and Whole Family Wellbeing)

In Falkirk we are committed to delivering on the principles of the Promise to ensure that our care experienced young people have the best possible outcomes in life and that the voice of lived experience is central to co design and co production of services.

To Make it Happen We:

Involve Falkirk’s Children and Families and the Partnership workforce in deciding our priorities moving forward in our work to realise the Promise within the Falkirk area.

Develop and adapt our approaches as we progress in our work, taking account of the feedback we receive from Falkirk’s children and families and the Partnership workforce, as well as emerging guidance and advice from COSLA, Scottish Government, The Promise Scotland, and the Care Inspectorate.

Make data driven/ evidence informed decisions. Taking a Service Design (Co-design) approach to our thinking and methodology.

Shift towards a preventative/early intervention approach to underpin our work with regards to service design and funding bids, with investments made now being justified by costs avoided into the future.

How Will We Make it Happen?

Feedback loop of what children and families in Falkirk tell us in terms of what is effective in meeting their needs.

Adoption and use of the Promise Mapping tool which outlines all action required under Plan 21-24. This can help evidence progress for Falkirk and how Falkirk compares nationally with other local authorities in relation to progress complying with The Promise.

Feedback from children and families and the Partnership workforce. Decisions made are grounded in what Falkirk children and families/ the partnership workforce/ emerging research and evidence in the field tell us.

Gearing our services to reduce dependency on more specialist/ crisis driven approach in line with the ask of the Promise to have more services based on the principles of early intervention.

How Are We Doing Meeting Our Outcomes?

Worked alongside a parents focus group for four years, doubling its size, and supporting them to form a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation and secure a town-centre family space. The charity will continue their work alongside all services supporting families.

1088% increase in the reach of Falkirk Champs over five years, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and extended families.

Majority representation (63%) of those with lived experience of care systems on the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding panel.

Throughout the year, The Promise Implementation Team have contributed to national and local events in relation to The Promise, WFWF, GIRFEC, UNCRC and Youth Justice.

To date 250 families have directly benefitted from WFWF-funded, whole-family, early intervention or preventative support targeted at those in and around care systems (as of March 2025).

Surveyed 237 members of the workforce and 39 (and counting!) young people with care experience for our Falkirk Family and Friends plan.

Working to improve data accuracy through mapping the process of a child being recorded as looked after or care experienced across systems.

Children's Rights and Falkirk Champs

This year the Promise Implementation Team have continued to focus on putting the voice of children and young people at the centre of our work. In practice, that looks like:

- Young people with care experience are at the centre of our Whole Family Wellbeing Funding panel.
- Falkirk Champs are key participants in Falkirk Family and Friends meetings, (Corporate Parenting Board) providing updates and challenge to the group.
- Advocating for long term partnership funding to ensure sustainability of the Champion's board.
- Amplifying the voice of care experience via supported attendance at the Community Planning Partnership.
- Funding the Champs, to work with Care Experienced Ambassadors in schools and Unaccompanied asylum seekers, to amplify the voice of, and connection between, young people with care experience in Falkirk.



Lots of what is funded through Whole Family Wellbeing Funding aims to protect children's right to be raised safely within their families and communities. This includes:

- Breathing Space, which offers a comfortable space designed for and by young people, to prevent escalation of crisis within families and the justice system.
- Family Directed Support, a true partnership approach between the Social Work Initial Response Team and families.
- Establishing community-led, accessible places families can go to if they need support.

The Team represent the partnership at national UNCRC events, produce child friendly versions of documents, and put children's rights to education, good health and health services, recovery from trauma, and to relax and play, at the heart of the Falkirk Family and Friends plan and WFWF allocation.



Whole Family Wellbeing

This year, the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Panel awarded a further £639k across 12 tests of change. Our funding panel was primarily comprised of representatives from Champs and Get to Focus, a group made up of parents and carers (63%), putting lived experience and local knowledge at the heart of the funding process.

Key achievements include:

- 19 parents and 18 children have received art-based therapeutic support in a local community setting. This support was targeted at parents with very young children (0-3 years) and focused on developing healthy attachment and providing connection.
- Increasing the capacity for FDAMH (Falkirk's Mental Health Association) to deliver counselling to more than 200 extra people a year. This is aimed at young people who are not engaged with school, or for whom school is not a suitable or comfortable place to access counselling. Between March 2024 and March 2025, 63 young people attended 447 WFWF-funded counselling sessions, and 106 family members attended a further 664 WFWF-funded sessions. FDAMH were also successful in receiving funding to develop and run information and peer support sessions for parents/carers who are looking after a young person struggling with their mental health.
- Falkirk Champs facilitated opportunities for families around young people with care experience to spend quality time together doing fun, nurturing activities. So far there have been 11 events and nine families taking part. This takes a trauma healing approach and focuses on supporting significant relationships for young people through fun and connection.



- The Champs have significantly increased their membership from around eight young people five years ago, to today capturing the voices of almost 100 children, young people and their families. They continue to expand their reach through their partnership with care experienced ambassadors in schools and their new Amigos group (unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people).
- Establishing a hub of family support in Sealock Infinity Centre in Grangemouth (formerly Beancross and Newlands Community Centre). Since January 2025, the hub has supported over 30 families on a 1-1 basis and more within group settings, surpassing initial annual estimates.
- The Children and Families Social Work Initial Response Team have kept children safer through co developing plans that are led by families and resourced through WFWF. For example, support in the form of a cleaner, a skip and additional storage was provided from the WFWF, significantly reducing neglect concerns for those children.
- The creation of a trauma-informed “Breathing Space”, designed by young people from the Champs and Inside Out, to be used in times of crisis to prevent or delay escalation through Social Work and Justice systems.

Falkirk Family and Friends

- This year, the group focused on developing and publishing their 2024-2027 Plan. Key achievements under the plan priorities include embedding training on Corporate Parenting and trauma across the Partnership, improving how we capture and respond to the voice of lived experience, and establishing a Family Firm.
- To establish an accurate baseline of the efficacy of existing work, we surveyed strategic leads, frontline workforce, and young people with care experience. We asked questions about understanding of the Promise and Corporate Parenting, and the impact of local services in improving the lives of care experienced young people in Falkirk. Using these responses, we identified priority areas for improvement. So far, we have had survey responses from 18 strategic leads, 241 members of the workforce, and 66 young people the young person's survey will stay open throughout June 2025.
- We agreed a shared definition of care experience for use across the Partnership. Our definition was subsequently recommended nationally by Social Work Scotland.
- We established a core data set to evidence the Partnership's progress towards implementing the Promise.

Get to Focus - Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Get To Focus are a group of parents and carers, some of whom can be seen enjoying a day out in this photograph, with lived experience of child protection systems. As a partner group key to implementing the Promise, their contribution this year has been significant. They have driven recommendations presented to the Child Protection Committee in 2020 by forming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, enabling them to proceed with:

- Developing a community-owned town centre space for families.
- Sense-checking and ensuring jargon and acronym free communication between services and families. Examples of work include; designing project guidance for the Initial Response Team before piloting Family Directed Support; contributing to a Children and Families Social Work charter; and presenting at national Learning Into Action event about the importance of voice.
- Participation on the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding panel.
- Peer-led support and recruitment to the group.
- Presenting and contributing to local and national Promise events, demonstrating the positive impact of the voice of lived experience.
- Widening their network to include Falkirk's local private sector, to ensure positive connections as they take ownership of the town centre space.



Case Study

Mum A was involved in child protection services from the minute her first child was born almost 16 years ago. In her experience, in the absence of immediate danger to her and her family, little support was offered. Plans made were often ineffective, and Mum A's frustration meant that relationships with school and social work were strained.

Through Mum A's involvement with a group of parents, making time to reflect on and share her lived experiences, she recognised how important her voice was for services seeking to support families. This empowered Mum A to work with social work, co-designing projects and share her insights. This humanised her interactions with staff, giving her a greater understanding of the shared stresses and barriers and, most importantly, the ways forward.

Mum A has developed real solutions for herself and others through sharing her voice. Being validated in her experiences has positively impacted her family and has empowered her to action change for others.

Doing the Money Differently to Transform the Capacity of the Strategic Leadership Group

Following our Partnership 'Doing the Money Differently' session in May 2024, the Promise Implementation Team developed a communications strategy to promote the Promise across the Partnership. We also implemented the Family Directed Support test of change.

Further work with the Strategic Leadership Group to encourage greater transparency and sharing resource is ongoing. This remains a significant challenge.

Promise Metrics

The Promise Scotland have called for data to be experiential and joined up, and to move away from snapshots of data that we know is incomplete. In-line with this move, while we continue to monitor a suite of measures associated with keeping the Promise, we will no longer include the Promise Metrics in this document as they are not a true picture of how we use data to shape our priorities and monitor our progress. Instead, we have included metrics associated with our activity, and qualitative data produced by our communities of interest.

"Whether the overall numbers of children and young people in the 'care system' go up or down, what Scotland really needs to be sure of is that every single child and young person is in the best place for them, with the care they need. That requires a shift away from counting numbers to meeting needs; and perceptions that any movement in numbers upwards or downwards are 'positive' or 'negative'."

Fraser McKinley- CEO The Promise Keeping the Promise: Local Perspectives Report. May 2025

Next Steps

- Increasing the capacity for transformation of the Children's Services Planning Partnership. An extra year of WFWF was confirmed as the Children's Services Strategic Leadership Group began to consider the strategic priorities for 2026-2029. We hope to use WFWF to resource an idea devised and supported by all in the Partnership once shared priorities emerge.
- Improving systems and processes around capturing data on care experienced young people: We have started mapping the process of how and where we record a child becoming looked after in Falkirk. This is the first step towards evaluating the efficacy of these processes, with the aim that accurate data capture will be faster and easier.
- We will open Whole Family Wellbeing Funding for a third round of applications, whilst continuing to support and evaluate the existing tests of change. We expect the fund to open from June to August 2025.

Getting it Right for Every Child



GIRFEC Inspired artwork created by Bo'ness Public Primary School children.

Our national GIRFEC framework is aimed at tackling inequalities by ensuring that all children and young people receive the right support at the right time for as long as it is needed. Addressing inequalities is a key priority for the partnership and throughout 2024/25 our GIRFEC Subgroup have continued to build on the success of previous years and collectively focused on embedding the principles of GIRFEC across the partnership.

Promotion of GIRFEC and child centred working, considering the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators helps our practitioners to understand the complex interplay of our priority areas for families and how professionals can most effectively work together to achieve the best outcomes we can for children. The examples provided will highlight how we are doing this in practice.

This has involved a variety of single and multi-agency activities which continue to place children, young people and their families/carers at the heart of all we do. We will always seek opportunities to maximise participation and engagement wherever possible to ensure that the voice of the child guides everything that we do.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

We aim to improve outcomes for families through a collaborative approach when delivering services underpinned by the principles of GIRFEC. This will focus on providing early and effective intervention, through delivery of a planned and co-ordinated, rights-based approach.

To Make it Happen We:

- Establish and promote a common understanding of wellbeing across the Children's Services Planning Partnership and promote the GIRFEC principles and refreshed materials.
- Ensure that the GIRFEC principles are firmly embedded in practice so that children in Falkirk grow up to be loved, safe and respected.
- We will ensure that our policies, procedures, and guidance are updated to reflect the GIRFEC refresh.

How Will We Make it Happen?

- Facilitate GIRFEC refresh multi agency training provided across the partnership.
- Gather feedback and learn from children, young people, and parents/carers on their views of how they feel loved, safe, and respected and able to reach their full potential.
- Gather feedback from staff to assess how training and other sharing of information has impacted on their practice.

How Are We Doing Meeting Our Outcomes?

Our workforce is all accessing our GIRFEC refresh training.

We are focusing on relationships and promoting a positive culture through our Keeping the Promise.

We are listening to staff feedback to plan our next events.

We are continuing to update our policies and procedures to align with GIRFEC.

We are placing voice and a commitment to children's rights at the centre of our service design and delivery in line with our current priorities.

Our current work is proving to have a positive impact in supporting us to make progress within our 4 priority areas. However, we have identified that there is work still to be done especially in relation to supporting the Partnership to respond most effectively to neglect and this is acknowledged in our Next Steps.

Keeping the Promise

On the 8th October 2024 Children and Families social work held an event to promote our Closer To Home strategy, underpinned by the principles of The Promise. As the photographs capture, this was a well-attended, interactive day. We were joined by the Champs to help us to understand what is important to them and to hear the voice of lived experience to help shape and guide our practice and services. We are currently developing another event to engage our partnership colleagues.



All the activity supported by the GIRFEC subgroup have Children's Rights at the heart of everything we do. The test of change projects has been co-designed with children, young people and their families/carers, with their voice and other rights such as Article 39, Article 15, Article 9, Article 19 as the main drivers.

Our Child Care Review teams have redesigned minutes and plans to focus more on child centred language and a greater focus on capturing children's views.

The Learning and Development team are continually reviewing and updating the multi-agency and single agency training to ensure staff are confident and competent in upholding and promoting children's rights.

Schools within Falkirk are proud to be working towards or have achieved Right's Respecting School awards. The Inclusion and Wellbeing Service has also achieved the Keeping the Promise Award. In Falkirk, we strive to ensure that our policies and procedures are aligned with and reflective of the current national guidance. Examples of how we are doing this is evidenced within our new Secure Care Accommodation Procedures.

There is a real emphasis on hearing the voice of the child within our Initial Referral Discussion (IRD) child protection processes. It is essential that the child's views, wishes and feelings are considered. The IRD should clearly show: What is known about the child's perspective, if the child's views are not yet known, how and when they will be sought, any barriers to hearing the child's voice. There is guidance available to support staff with this. The 7-minute briefing on page 23, was shared across the partnership to help the workforce prepare and respond to the introduction of the UNCRC (Incorporation)(Scotland) Act 2024.

Our Police Scotland Colleagues in Falkirk have also developed an internal awareness package, comprising of a 9-minute video detailing the UNCRC's purpose and its implications for policing, has been disseminated across the organisation. This training has achieved an average completion rate of 89.3%, reflecting significant progress in educating officers and staff about children's rights. To ensure a child-rights-focused approach, Police Scotland has also created specific roles such as a Children's Rights Officer and Child Engagement Officers. These positions are tasked with integrating children's rights into policies and practices and developing a National Children's Participation and Engagement Model. This model aims to involve children and young people meaningfully in decision-making processes, including during Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA).

NHS Forth Valley HEART (Hearing, Engaging, Acting and Responding Together) group has been developed to lead NHS Forth Valley at all levels of the organisation and in all services, in the engagement and involvement of children and young people to co-design health and care services that recognise, respond, and respect their rights and in accordance with GIRFEC, UNCRC and The Promise.



UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

7-minute briefing



1

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 is a landmark piece of legislation that embeds children's rights into Scots law.

What does it mean for us?

- **Legal Protection:** The Act makes it unlawful for Public Authorities to act in a way that is incompatible with the UNCRC requirements, ensuring that children's rights are respected and protected in all areas of life.
- **Empowerment:** Children and young people can now challenge decisions by public authorities in Scottish courts if they believe their rights under UNCRC have been breached.
- **Accountability:** Public authorities are required to take proactive steps to ensure their policies and practices are compatible with UNCRC.

2

Understanding the UNCRC and the Act

- **Overview:** Familiarise yourself with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the legal obligations under the 2024 Act.
- **Key Point:** It is unlawful for Children's Service's and our partner agencies to act in ways that conflict with children's rights.

3

Identify Relevant Rights

- **Focus Areas:** Children's Rights are indivisible, but pay particular attention to core articles such as:
 - **Article 3:** Best Interests of the child
 - **Article 12:** The child's right to be heard
 - **Article 19:** Protection from harm
 - **Article 39:** recovery from trauma
 - **Summary of the full act**
[UNCRC summary-1.pdf](#)
- **Application:** Use these rights as the foundation for decision-making and service planning.

4

Act Compatibly

- **Policy Alignment:** Ensure that all your policies, procedures and service delivery methods are fully compatible with UNCRC principles.
- **Everyday Practice:** Embed a rights-based approach in both formal and informal interactions.
- **Documentation:** Maintain detailed records that highlight how children's rights have been integrated into your practice.
- **Self-Audit:** Regularly review your decisions and actions to ensure they reflect what is in the child's best interests, individually and collectively as a Team Around the Child.

5

Listen and Involve Children

- **Participation:** Actively engage children in conversations about matters that affect their lives.
- **Voice:** Children have the right to express their views in matters that affect them.
- Build child participation into your practice by meaningfully consulting them in the decision making process.

6

Use Statutory Guidance and Resources

- **Resources:** Consult the Scottish Government's statutory guidance and related training materials. Here are some links to these –
 - [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024 - part 2: statutory guidance](#)
 - [Resources | Improvement Service](#)
 - [Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework | Together Scotland](#)
 - [summary of UNCRC statutory guidance](#)
 - [UNCRC Guidance summary](#)
- **Support:** These resources are designed to assist you in navigating at times, complex situations and ensure the Act is implemented properly.

7

Know Your Accountability

- **Legal Responsibility:** Be aware that children, families and advocates have the right to challenge decisions in court if they believe a child's rights have been compromised.
- **Transparency:** Maintain clear and transparent practices to uphold accountability.

Who Cares? Scotland & Quarriers

Falkirk Council currently commissions Who Cares? Scotland and Quarriers to provide a children's rights and advocacy service to children and young people up to the age of 26 years (if care experienced), who are normally resident in the Falkirk Council area. In addition to the ongoing support they provide to existing cases, Quarriers accepted 98 new referrals during this reporting period and Who Cares? Scotland accepted 76 new referrals. Following the recent implementation of the UNCRC into legislation, it is likely that universal awareness of Children's Rights, and referrals for advocacy support will continue to increase. It is therefore important to continue to have this support provision available in the local area. Quarriers work closely alongside Who Cares? local advocacy service to ensure that, together, the rights of children who are looked after are maintained and upheld and all children and young people have support from either service when they need it.



Who Cares? Scotland is a national organisation. Alongside direct support to young people, Who Cares? have supported Falkirk's care experienced young people to engage in wider opportunities and activities including:

- Supported employment opportunities for care experienced young people.
- National support helpline.
- Rolling activity programmes throughout the school holidays.
- Care Experienced week, Christmas Day dinner and Carelidh dance.
- Quarterly magazine, 'Speakout' also mailed to all members of Who Cares? Scotland.

Alongside direct delivery of support to young people, Quarriers continues to promote the knowledge and implementation of children's rights across services in the Falkirk area. This helps to support delivery of the key priority areas outlined within the Integrated Children's Services Plan, and of the Rights Respecting Schools Awards across Education in Falkirk.



Quarriers also continues to support Falkirk Council with wider developmental activities to support the rights of children in the area. In this reporting period Quarriers has:

- Supported the local authority with the implementation of the UNCRC bill.
- Delivered training on Children's Rights to foster carers, residential staff and supported accommodation providers. The service has also been supporting the residential homes to get ready for the incorporation of the UNCRC and ensuring they are a Rights Respecting home.
- Worked in partnership with Forth Valley colleagues and young people to develop a Forth Valley Youth Voice Charter alongside Education Scotland and worked with Children's Services to develop Falkirk's Youth Voice.
- The service has two strategic leads who support Falkirk Schools to progress with their Rights Respecting Schools accreditation.
- The service continues to support the Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament. They consult with children and young people in Falkirk to hear what issues they are facing and how they can support in having their voices heard at a local and national level.
- The service has a representative on the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention monitoring group within Falkirk Council Residential homes.
- The service has been involved in the Language Leaders group which focusses on changing language within Children's Hearings to have a more positive impact.
- The service worked in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland on the consultation of the Care Leaver Payment.

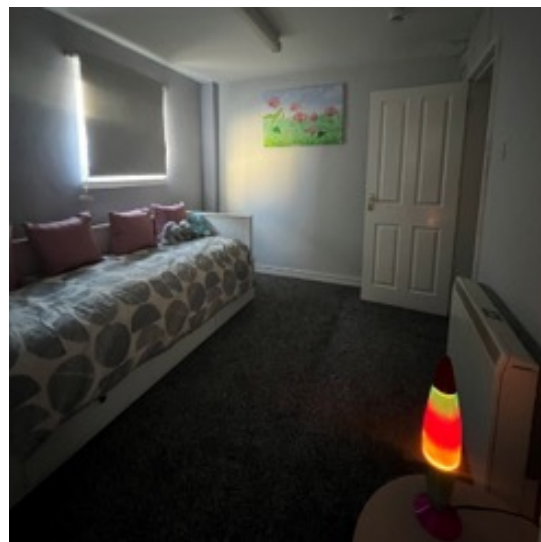
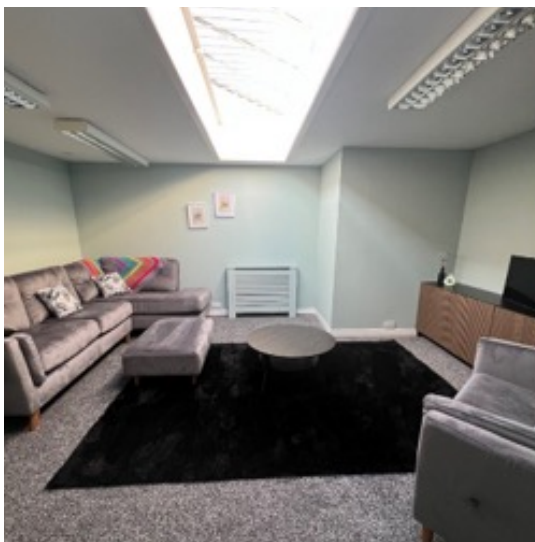
'Breathing Space' - Test of Change

Breathing Space is part of our efforts to deliver the Promise in Falkirk and exists to offer out-of-hours support to children and families when they need it most.

The space was created following identification of a gap in how we support children, young people and their families in a more trauma informed way at times of crisis.

Breathing Space has been funded by the Scottish Government's Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to help implement the Promise in Falkirk. The idea is to provide a trauma-informed environment for young people and their families to work through difficulties they may be having out of hours. The intention is that Breathing Space will delay and or prevent young people from becoming accommodated and allow them to remain with their families in their local community wherever this is safe to do so.

Breathing Space will be a welcoming and comfortable environment for young people to be in while services work together and alongside families, in planning a safe return home, or if this isn't possible, to start planning for alternatives. Breathing Space has been co-designed with young people from Children and Young Peoples Centre for Justice, Inside Out from YOI Polmont and Falkirk Champs. Feedback from children, young people and adults who have accessed the space has been overwhelmingly positive so far.



Photographs of our 'Breathing Space':

Hear what Liam has to say about our new space that was co-produced with care and justice experienced young people via this link... [Breathing Space Feedback](#) Hear what Liam has to say about our new space that was co-produced with care and justice experienced young people... Brea...

'Cash First' Test of Change

There is currently a test of change, supported by the WFWF Team, running within the Initial Response Team (IRT). This project allows the team to provide families with timely financial assistance for items/activities. This aligns with the principles of GIRFEC by placing the child or young person and their family at the heart, and promoting choice, with full participation in decisions that affect them.

Presenting Need	Desired Outcome	Solution Identified by the Family
"Mum and her two children experienced domestic abuse and mum struggling to go places due to her anxiety and mental health. Lack of family support in close proximity."	"Mum and children to have a positive experience together and feel confident and supported outside their safe space at home."	Train tickets were purchased for the family to allow them to enjoy a holiday at their maternal grans in England.
"Family home unclean and extremely cluttered impacting on safe family functioning"	"For the family to be living in a safe, clean, functioning home environment with improved parental mental health"	The fund provided two skips, some new bedroom furniture for the children, waterproof mattress and a washing machine,
"Child struggling with his emotional well-being and waiting for CAMHS and other trauma services for a long period. Parent feeling that he child unsupported by MH services."	"Child to receive a therapeutic service to support emotional well-being. Parent to feel that her child is being listened too and being supported".	Equine therapy is being paid for via the fund for the child.
"House fire damaged daughter's bedroom. Bedroom furniture needed replaced."	"For the family to be living in a safe, clean, functioning home environment."	New underlay, carpets, curtain poles and curtains were purchased for the family.



"feel valued and trusted as a parent, and that there is an understanding that we can make the right choices for our family."

"If there is an understanding that by empowering parents, it will build their capacity and motivate them to make change."

"This could have far reaching benefits to the whole family, in terms of, relationships, learning and social interactions."

Feedback provided from families.

Trauma Informed and Responsive Services

Work is underway to ensure appropriate governance structures for driving trauma informed and responsive change are in place. Falkirk Council and HSCP have been working with key partners across Forth Valley to ensure a collaborative approach to driving meaningful trauma-informed change. Following extensive efforts, a new vision and action plan has been agreed by the Forth Valley Trauma Informed and Responsive Steering Group. Development sessions are also planned for Falkirk's Trauma Informed and Responsive Implementation Group to further support the embedding of trauma informed and responsive practice, systems and processes throughout Falkirk. It is anticipated that these developments will be key to providing ongoing strategic direction and ensuring the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed approaches across Falkirk and Forth Valley.



Training and development opportunities continue to be available at the trauma informed, skilled and enhanced practice levels. In addition to the available e-modules, face to face training is also widely available. Participants report feeling that they are equipped with tangible skills and knowledge that they can utilise in their daily work. Importantly, evaluations also evidence an increase in confidence, with practitioners able to identify meaningful changes they intend to make to enhance their trauma informed and responsive practice. Trauma Informed Support and Supervision training has been delivered to those in supervisory roles. Feedback included finding the learning valuable, particularly in helping them to better understand and support the wellbeing of their staff and teams. 'Community of Practice' sessions take place every 2 months, with the aim of supporting staff to further embed the trauma learning through the sharing of learning/ resources; having themed discussion sessions; and being a place for peer support and case discussion. Feedback from staff who have attended has been positive with staff highlighting the importance of having protected in-person time for connection and reflection.

Rights Respecting Schools

A high number of Falkirk schools continue to work towards the achievement of their UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Awards. So far 10 % of schools have achieved Bronze, 53% have achieved Silver and 32% have achieved their Gold award. The only school yet to be registered is currently being supported through this process and we are excited to celebrate their award soon. Whilst the award provides a structure for schools to work within, the main body of this work relates to schools providing nurturing and pupil centred learning environments that are underpinned by Children's Rights.



The celebration of pupil success and sharing of pupil experiences is widespread within Falkirk and is often linked to Children's Rights from the UNCRC. This helps develop understanding of Children's Rights across the local authority and allows young people and their families to make the links between their educational experiences and their rights.

A key strand to the embedding of rights respecting practices within schools has been continued professional learning opportunities for staff members across school communities. Staff have engaged in training in relation to 'Rights Language' and have also developed knowledge on how to embed Children's Rights within the curriculum. This work has helped to establish positive pupil-centred cultures across our schools and furthermore, has ensured that the language used to engage with young people and families is underpinned by an understanding of Children's Rights.

Support for Children, Young People, Families & Carers Affected by Alcohol and Substance Use.

Tackling the impact of alcohol and substance use is a key priority for the partnership. We are addressing this through the work of our Alcohol and Drug Partnership and AXIS service.

Falkirk Alcohol and Drug Partnership

Falkirk Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) plans local support services, informs prevention, education, and licensing decisions. It challenges stigma and promotes understanding of the issues which can prevent people from accessing help and support.

For every person who has a difficulty with drugs or alcohol, findings demonstrate that on average 11 other people are affected by harms associated with a loved one's substance use.

Falkirk ADP is committed to supporting families and young people whose lives are impacted by their own, or others, substance use and in addition to contributing to the Children & Young Person Leadership Group, works with several organisations to deliver these services as well ensuring strategic priorities are aligned across key partnership areas.

As part of a wider system of care, Falkirk ADP commissions and works with services to deliver family focussed interventions across Falkirk. These services provide individual and group support sessions in Falkirk and surrounding areas to people whose loved ones are using substances and to those who are adult children of people who have used substances. This support is varied and delivered in partnership with other services across the HSCP landscape. During the reporting period, 58 referrals were made to this service, and 67 families were actively being supported. These referrals came from a wide variety of sources including third sector and mental health services across Falkirk.

As part of its strategic priorities, the ADP has also been working closely with Falkirk's social work colleagues to identify potential ways to give care-experienced young people who have been affected by their own or a parent's substance use opportunities to contribute to the ADPs strategic vision. This includes the potential development of a Young Person's Advisory Panel to compliment the work already being done by our Lived Experience Panel. Additionally, in partnership with the Falkirk Health Improvement Team, and Stirling University, the ADP has been working with local education leads to develop a programme for young people and children within a school setting. This work is ongoing and intended to compliment the existing curriculum and provide content to promote confidence in drug prevention skills to support healthier and safer choices.

AXIS

Falkirk Council commission the Barnardo's Axis Service which seeks to reduce risk and harm to young people, families and communities by providing support to young people up to the age of 19 (or 26 if care experienced) who are experiencing difficulties related to substance use. The service provides medium to long term harm reduction support for young people which is focused on their individual needs. Referrals to this service are accepted from a range of sources, including education, social work, self-referral and the Early & Effective Intervention (EEI) Panel. Occasionally early intervention referrals are made by NHS Forth Valley Emergency Department to provide short term support or one-off advice to young people who have presented to the Emergency Department following experimental substance use. Awareness raising and training sessions are also delivered to partners across universal and targeted services. Axis is currently supporting 102 young people, 73 of these being new referrals during this reporting period. 21 of these young people are care experienced.

Support for Children, Young People, Families & Carers Affected by Gender-Based Violence.

We know from research that ensuring a consistent, trauma informed, rights-based response to domestic abuse across all our services and partner agencies improves child safety, support for non-offending parents and perpetrator accountability (Mandel, 2014 and Humphreys et al., 2019). This also reflects the work of our gender-based violence partnership focusing on prevention, response and addressing root causes. This includes empowering women and girls, challenging harmful gender norms, improving access to services for survivors, and ensuring greater accountability for perpetrators.

The Safe & Together model is a proven framework that helps child protection systems address domestic abuse while keeping the children safe and supporting the non-offending parent. This improvement plan is designed to integrate the safe and together principles ensuring a holistic family centred approach. As part of the Improvement and Quality assurance group's on-going audit plan, a multi-agency audit of the Safe and Together approach (Children subject to Child Protection Registration) took place over two days on the 3rd and 4th October 2024. The Care Inspectorate self-evaluation tool was adapted for the purposes of the audit, to allow gathering of information relating specifically to the Safe and Together model. The outcome of this audit generated a number of actions. For example a few of these are noted below:

- There is refreshed focus on re-engaging with survivors and perpetrators who have engaged with interventions to reduce risks to help us measure impact and inform next steps.
- Strengthen the work force knowledge, participation and processes with existing MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) arrangements and referral routes.
- Strengthen the voice of children, young people, families and carers in assessment and planning for those affected by gender-based violence.
- Review our current policy and guidance to identify opportunities to further align or work with the Safe & Together principles.

Through the delivery of multi-agency training aimed at embedding the Safe & Together approach, we are focused on addressing the impact of domestic abuse for our children and young people by encouraging an increased focus of work with the non-abusing parent to keep children and young people safe. In Falkirk we are committed to ensuring that all our staff, across all departments receive Safe & Together training appropriate to their roles to ensure our entire workforce are competent, confident and have the relevant training, and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities for child wellbeing and protection.

When working with children, young people, families and carers, with their consent we often refer individuals experiencing gender-based violence to services such as Committed to Ending Abuse (CEA) and Equally Safe so they can access a safe, compassionate space to receive support, advocacy and maximise safety, wellbeing and help families heal from domestic abuse and improve family functioning.

Updated Policies and Procedures.

We have updated our Forth Valley GIRFEC guidance and launched a training video to support staff to implement GIRFEC approaches within their day-to-day practice both of which inform our multi agency GIRFEC training. During the reporting period 103 staff have attended this across the partnership.

FV GIRFEC Refresh Guidance March 2025 Training Video

We have a Forth Valley Policies, Procedures and Protocols group who work hard as a multi- agency across the partnership to continuously develop our policies and procedures when required. For example, we are currently in the process of finalising a new policy and procedure documents in relation to how we best support our unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children and young people.

NHS Forth Valley Care Experienced Children and Young People's Guidance was developed in partnership with local authorities. Our care experienced service is underpinned by a public health approach to tackle health inequalities through promotion of good health and prevention of ill health for care experienced children and young people. In addition to working with colleagues from a wide range of NHS settings, the health visitors, family nurses, school nurses and keep well nurses work in partnership with colleagues from other agencies.

The Falkirk CHAMPS were involved in the design of this guidance and provided valuable feedback on how they would like their care experienced health service to be delivered.

Forth Valley Scottish Child Interview Team

The Scottish Child Interview Model is a new trauma informed approach to Joint Investigative Interviews of children and young people, who are or may be victims or witnesses of/to abuse and harm. This is a Scotland wide change and our Forth Valley Interview Team came into force in February 2024.

Forth Valley Child Interview Team is led by a Social Work Team Manager and a Detective Sergeant from Police. The team consists of four Social Work Advanced Practitioners and Four Detective Constables who undertake the majority of Forensic Joint Investigative Interviews in Forth Valley, with the aim to undertaking all interviews of children who may have experienced or witnessed harm. To date the team have provided inputs to partners across forth valley including Social Work, Education, Health and Police, as well as the CP key processes training to continue to embed the new model and practice. Practitioners are subject to regular self-evaluation and manager evaluation for quality assurance and supporting continued good practice. Engagement with children has been overwhelmingly positive regarding their experience of the new model.

The team were recently recognised for their good work at the Forth Valley Divisional Commanders Award-Greatest Contribution to Policing Award, for their outstanding contribution and dedication in relation to the introduction and implementation of the Scottish Child Interview model.

Falkirk Family Support Panels

In Falkirk we continue to strive towards offering timely, responsive, accessible family support and we have created a multi-agency early intervention family support panel (partnership).

Since the referral pathway was created in June 2024, 450 families have been supported via this new process. A breakdown of referrals received by quarter is noted below.

Jun-Jul-Aug	127
Sep-Oct-Nov	94
Dec-Jan-Feb	87
Mar-Apr-May	142
TOTAL	450

There is also a new single point of referral for Intensive family support from our in-house Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS) and the Aberlour Sustain Service. These higher tier supports are accessed via social work referrals.

Next Steps

There is a new GIRFEC Lead in post and the agreed priorities will be:

- Update the Falkirk Council website, Practitioner Pages and the GIRFEC Pathway, to reflect the work of GIRFEC. This will include a multi-agency and co-production element.
- Planning is underway for a Partnership event in Autumn 2025 with a focus on Keeping the Promise.
- Continue to strengthen and embed relationships with partner agencies, including third sector.
- Refresh of Forth Valley Team Around the Child Guidance and supporting materials.
- Revisiting our Neglect Toolkit and training materials to focus on awareness raising and improving practice.
- Our aim is to develop a Rights Respecting award like the Rights Respecting School award. We would create criteria with assessment outcomes, looking at areas such as staff training, environment, procedure, and the experiences of children and young people. We hope to include young people in this award, potentially looking at having young people involved in the assessment and accreditations. The award would recognise the organisation's achievement at putting the UNCRC into practice.
- NHS Colleagues will continue to increase our service user feedback across all universal children's services. This will help us to identify our areas of strength and areas for improvement and development.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Supporting mental health and wellbeing is key when considering the interplay with our other current key priorities. Research shows that poor mental health increases the risk of gender-based violence, child protection concerns being raised and difficulties with substances and alcohol. For example, GIRFEC, reinforced through guidance such as the National Guidance for Child Protection require the multi-agency to consider the corrosive effect poverty can have on mental health and wellbeing. The examples provided below show how, working with the GIRFEC principles, we are striving to improve mental health and wellbeing through early, co-ordinated support to help create a holistic approach, thus creating environment where children and young people are more likely to thrive.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

We aim to reduce the likelihood of children and young people experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing and increase the capacity of our workforce to support those who are in need.

To Make it Happen We:

Alongside our partners we will continue to develop our services to ensure that our children and young people have access to the right support at the right time.

We will promote the services available and ensure good communication across the partnership.

How Will We Make it Happen?

- Use our data to develop or change our services as required, to ensure they continue to meet the needs of children and families.
- Extend opportunities for feedback from our children, young people, and families to help us improve service design and delivery.
- Review the universal provision in schools through the Personal and Social Education programme.
- Continue to work closely with colleagues from health, education, social work, and the 3rd sector.

How Are We Doing Meeting Our Outcomes?

Services continue to evolve and develop to meet the needs that we recognise by analysing available data.

Wait times for CAMHS continue to improve.

There are now more services available out with traditional officer hours via digital supports and flexible evening and weekend appointments from community services.

Good working relationships across services have led to a positive move towards a joined up single point of access' system.

In Falkirk we are working hard to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. In 2025/26 several areas of our action plan were progressed and the key activities this year so far have been:

Single Point of Access and Children's Rights

In June 2024, the Falkirk Children and Young People's Mental Health Group established a project funded through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, to explore the introduction of a Single Point of Access for the Mental Health and Wellbeing supports. Falkirk Council provides and commissions services to support children, young people and parents/ carers. The aim of the project was to explore the best way for children, young people and their parents/ carers to access Mental Health and Wellbeing supports when and where they need it and avoid them having to share their life experience multiple times.

The Discovery and Research Phase started with a multi-agency event. Data from the day was analysed and informed the planning for further stakeholder engagement. The project team carried out desk top research of established Single Points of Access from across the UK and visited Scottish examples.

Between November 2024 and March 2025 stakeholder engagement was completed using 4 questionnaires: Young Peoples, Parents and Carer, Workforce Who Provide Supports and Workforce Who Request Support. The data from these was analysed and synthesised and the main findings to the Falkirk Children and Young People's Mental Health Group.

The decision has now been taken that this work should progress with a 'Single Point of Access' system being implemented in Falkirk. A series of actions have been agreed to take forward some key priorities, including:

- Permissions for leadership within each organisation involved
- Completion of an Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessment
- IT System development to support the referral/request for support system
- Further engagement with key stakeholders
- Development of a shared referral/request form.

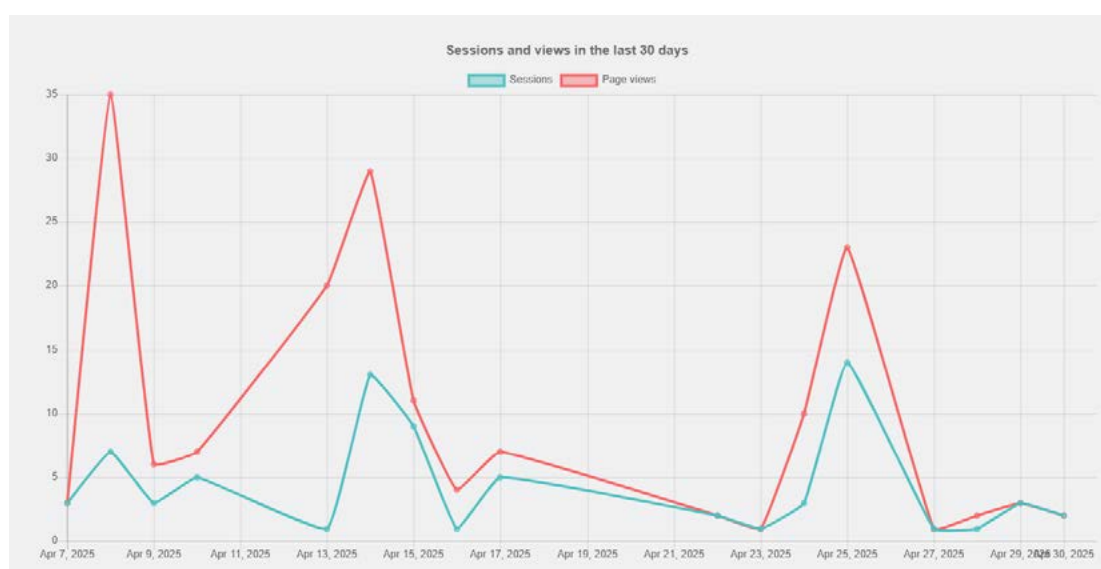
Inclusion Worker Recruitment

Barriers to children and young people's attendance and engagement at school continues to be an issue nationally (Scottish Government, 2023). In Falkirk we are committed to taking action to understand the issues and respond meaningfully. For 2024-25 a new pilot involving a team of inclusion workers who operate between schools and homes will support a targeted approach to non-attendance. Training and support around mental health and wellbeing has been provided to this team to aid their work and they have been thoroughly briefed on the services available to aid them with this work.

Year Group	2022/23- Attendance <50% No. of young people	2023/24 <50% No. of young people	2024/25 (As of April) <50% No. of young people
P1	6	6	6
P2	4	4	7
P3	8	9	8
P4	10	11	10
P5	18	16	15
P6	17	20	20
P7	33	36	26
S1	23	27	31
S2	68	64	52
S3	111	93	65
S4	96	56	71
S5	51	43	58
S6	30	26	51
Total	475	411	420

Self Help Information

Partners have worked to develop the offer of quality assured self-help tools for young people and their families.



We monitor access to self-help support accessed through our Falkirk Community Mental Health and Wellbeing website. We often see spikes in accessing following targeted work through professional learning or social media campaigns.

Decider Skills for Parents/Carers and Wider Communities

After a successful roll-out of training across education, family support, health and third sector workforces we have begun to develop sessions to inform and upskill parents/carers around the use of this CBT approach for emotional regulation. The 12-skill programme helps teach children, young people and adults to recognise their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours, enabling them to monitor and manage their own emotions and mental health. This programme is also offered in partnership with Skills Development Scotland with young people accessing their support.

Commissioned Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports.

In Falkirk we are aware of the ongoing pressures facing CAMHS colleagues. However, we are also listening to national research, and what children, young people and their families/carers and professionals who know them best are telling us locally. Therefore, we have been working hard with our voluntary/third sector Partners to commission services to help meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of our children and young people.

1) Outcome Measure: Health and Wellbeing Census self-reporting by young people

Baseline data for our outcome measure was gathered in the 2022 Health and Wellbeing national census, the next data uplift for this was postponed by Scottish Government for the 2024-25 session.

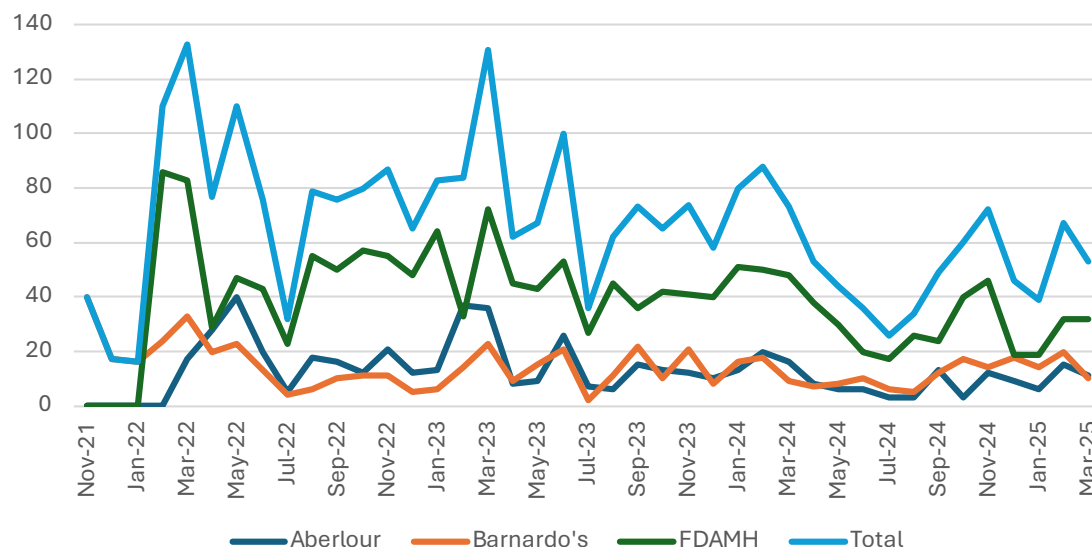
The Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) have been designed to be self-completed. The 14-item scale WEMWBS is very simple to score. The total score is obtained by summing the score for each of the 14 items. The scoring range for each item is from 1 – 5 and the total score is from 14-70. Using WEMWBS the top 15% of scores range from 60-70 and the bottom 15% 14-42. WEMWBS has a mean score of 51.0 in general population samples in the UK.

Year Group	Average WEMWBS Score	Average Female WEMWBS Score	Average Male WEMWBS Score
S2	46.94	43.99	49.98
S3	45.63	42.56	48.72
S4	45.99	43.98	48.11
S5	45.25	42.56	47.84
S6	45.68	43.15	48.95

WEMWBS= Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

2) Process Measures: Tier 2 Community Mental Health Wellbeing Service Referrals and CAMHS

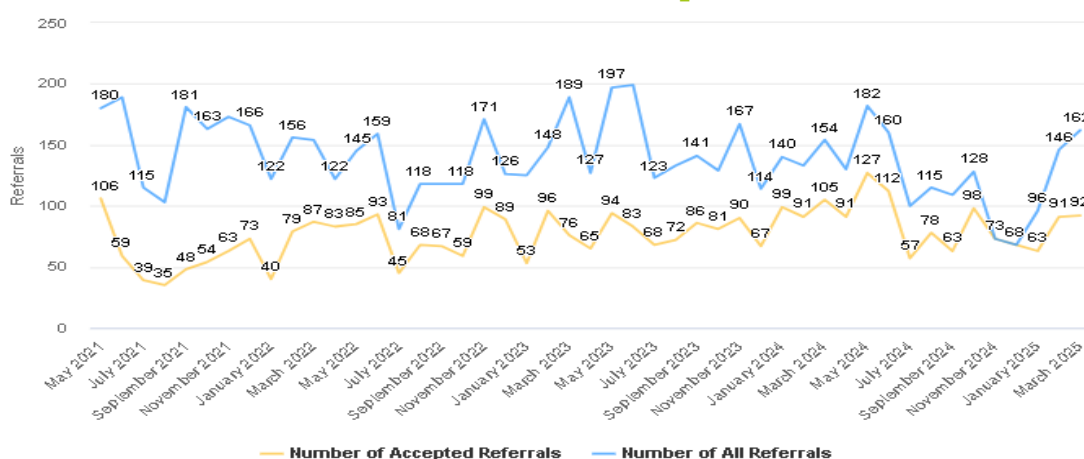
CMHWP Tier 2 Services (2022-2025)



In the past 12 months our tier 2 Community Mental Health and Wellbeing services have averaged 50 referrals per month. We are now in the third year of commissioned services with our partners at Aberlour, Barnardo's and FDAMH to deliver Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing and Emotional Distress services. Digital supports have also been renewed for a further year from March 2025. There have been significant increases in the demand for online support from parents and carers via our Togetherall partnership.

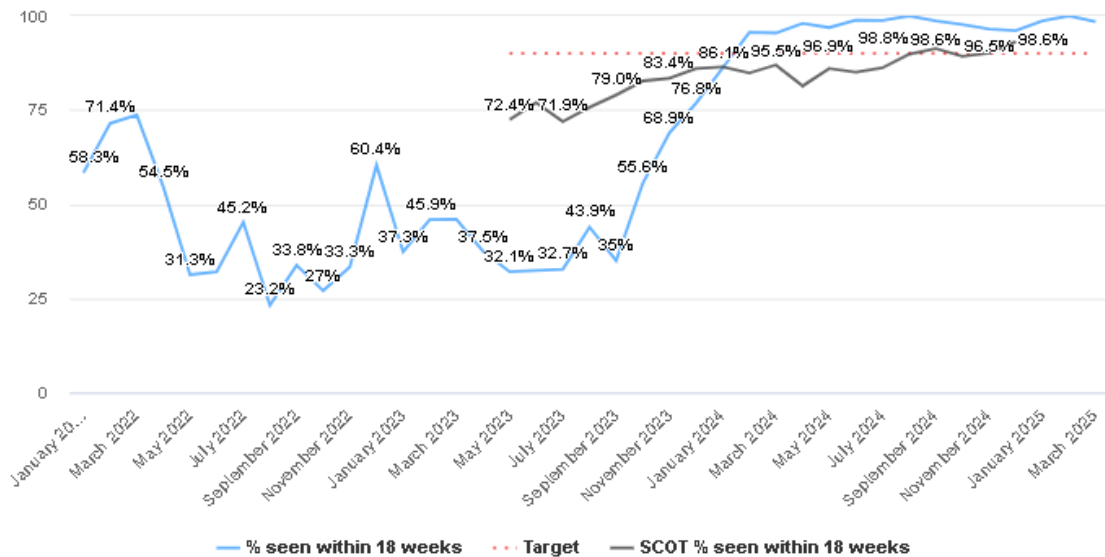
The age ranges for these provisions are: Aberlour 5–12-year-olds, Barnardo's 5-24 year olds (26 of care experienced) and FDAMH 13–24-year-olds (26 if care experienced).

CAMHS Referrals Graph



CAMHS referral numbers also remain high and the dips in numbers mostly occurring in school holiday months of April, July and December.

Process Measure: Wait List Times



Forth Valley CAMHS continue to exceed their 18 weeks to treatment target since February 2024 and have been above the national average since January 2024.

Staff Practice

In the last session we have progressed with tasks around consistency of language used around mental health and wellbeing. In addition to agreeing definitions for key terms and presenting issues, we have ensured that we all now use the terms: Informed, Skilled, Enhanced and Specialist for labelling workforce development opportunities.

Whole Systems Approach

A multi-agency planned event for education staff took place on Friday 6th June. Workshops and keynotes have been jointly created by education, health and third sector colleagues around the theme 'Making Anxiety Manageable'. These include theory on interventions, practical approaches to supporting at an early intervention and clinical level and ideas from other local authorities. The event was then followed by a mental health and wellbeing marketplace that was open to all partners where we had stalls sharing supports and services available locally and nationally.

Advice for Families and Carers

Through the Falkirk Community Mental Health and Wellbeing site we have strengthened the offer of support and advice for families and carers. News items are shared for all key partners, and the self-help and signposting information is regularly checked and updated.

Next Steps

Having now taken the decision to progress with creating a 'Single Point of Access' for requests for mental health and wellbeing support for children, young people and parents, our main activities will be related to the following priority actions:

- Permissions for leadership within each organisation involved.
- Completion of an Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessment.
- IT System development to support the referral/request for support system.
- Further engagement with key stakeholders.
- Development of a shared referral/request form.

Employability

Employability plays a crucial role in the partnerships aim of tackling poverty and inequality. Recent Scottish Government policies and independent research consistently highlights that training and employability, particularly through integrated, person-centred approaches is a powerful tool for addressing the complex needs identified within our priority areas. Strategies like No One Left Behind, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (Scottish Government, 2022) and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Scottish Government, 2023) all emphasis the importance of joined up services that connect employability with recovery from trauma and wellbeing. Independent research from organisations like IPPR Scotland and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reinforce that employability interventions not only foster financial independence but also improve mental health and disrupt cycles of exploitation and poverty. Structured employment such as the Scottish Drug's Forum's National Traineeship Program has been shown to be transformative for individuals with lived experience of addiction (Scottish Government, 2023)



Employability

Our aim is to increase the engagement of our young people in education, training, apprenticeship, employment, or volunteering, with particular focus on those young people identified as our priority groups. In addition, we plan to implement a more robust co-design and co-production model that will inform, enhance, and focus services on meeting the needs of the individual.

To Make it Happen We:

Will focus on:

- All young people (aged 12 to 24)
- Care experienced young people (under 25 years) and care leavers (up to 26 years)
- Young people with additional support needs (ASN)
- Most disengaged (aged 12+)

How Will We Make it Happen?

- Improve against current Participation Measure data towards or above Scottish average of 92.7% (Falkirk 91.5%).
- Improve educational outcomes and attainment for care experienced young people.
- Improve post-schools' outcomes for young people with ASN, aiming to close the gap on participation rates and improve employability outcomes to age 24 and beyond.
- Close the participation gap between those in the 20% most deprived areas and 20% least deprived areas – in 2022 the Scottish average for 16–19-year.

How Are We Doing Meeting Our Outcomes?

Scottish Annual Participation Measure figures remain unchanged (Aug 2024) with Falkirk reporting an improvement of 0.3% at 91.8%.

Latest Scottish Government data published in February 2025, shows that at 96.3%, Falkirk is 0.6% above the national figure of 95.7%.

Skills Development Scotland Annual Participation Measure figures show a 1.5% year-on-year increase in participation rate for local 16-19 year olds who identify as disabled.

Participation gap stats also show an improvement of 1.9%.

Falkirk Council Employment and Training Unit (ETU) adopts a Right's Respecting approach across all its work with young people in line with the UNCRC. ETU delivers a universal service to local young people who are unemployed or under-employed in a non-discriminatory way. It works proactively with and seeks referrals from a wide range of partners including Youth Justice, Social Work Services, Resettlement Team, CLD, Falkirk

Champs, Throughcare and Aftercare Care Team, ASN Transitions team, Central Scotland Regional Equality Council, Barnardo's, Education and wider Children's Services. ETU services are designed to be as accessible as possible, delivered in a person-centred way, to best meet the needs of the young person. All staff are trained in trauma-skilled practice. Ben Richardson, supported by the ETU can be seen in the photo he provided enjoying his role as Apprentice Civil Engineering (construction operations), Roads Services with Falkirk Council.

Summary of Key Accomplishments for 2024/25

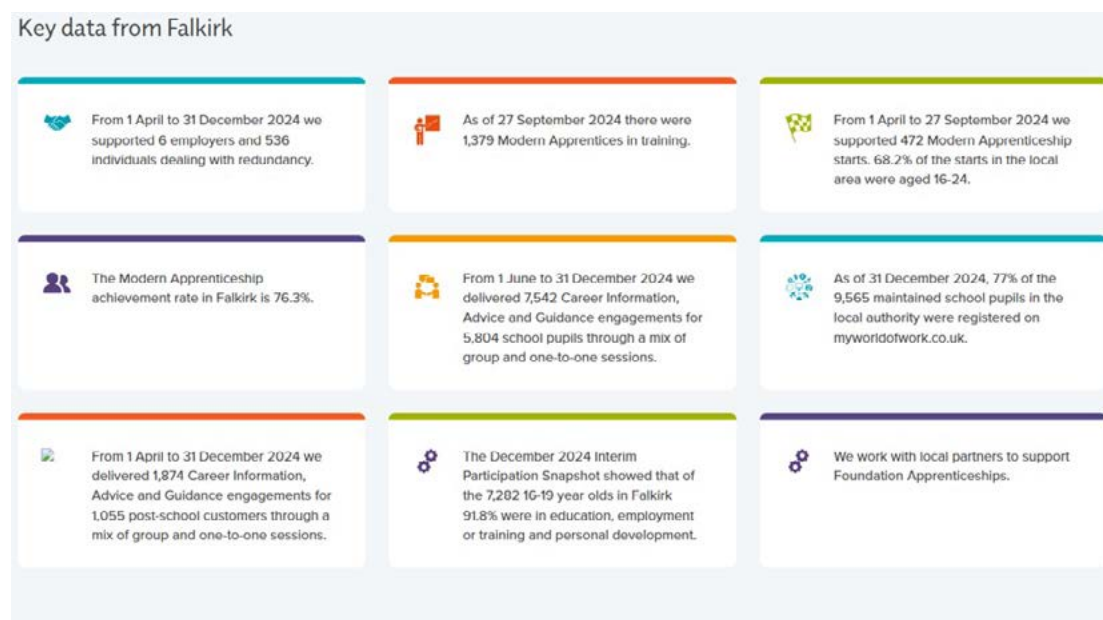
Improving Positive Outcomes for All Young People Aged 12+

Scottish Government (SG) data, published in February 2025, shows that 95.7% of leavers were reported to be in a positive post-school destination (2023/24 cohort). In Falkirk the figure is 96.3%. 0/6% above the national figure. Locally, this is an improving figure, with Falkirk now ranked 11th out of 32 local authority areas.

Improving data sharing continues to be a key focus. It is recognised as a key enabler of ongoing tracking and monitoring of local young people to ensure equity of access to relevant support and opportunities, with the aim of improving sustainable outcomes for all. The improved figures, as published by SG (above), is an indication of the improvements being achieved, as well as a commitment by our partners to continue to drive these outcomes. We are committed to reflecting on outcomes to evaluate and develop services when required.

The Annual Participation Measure (APM) reports on the education and employment activity of 16–19-year-olds in Scotland. It is the source of the Scottish Governments National Performance Indicator “Percentage of Young and adults (16-19) participating in education, training and employment”. The APM (published in August 2024) is 92.7%. By comparison, the Falkirk LA figure is 91.8%.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Data Relating to Falkirk Shows:



In 2024-25, The Employment and Training Unit (ETU) supported 394 young people aged 16-24 (26 if care experienced), providing the broadest range of employability support from key working in schools through to progression into jobs and modern apprenticeships.

Of this number:

- 151 reported having a learning disability, learning difficulty, autism spectrum condition or other developmental disorder.
- 92 have a mental health condition expected to last 12 months or more.
- 31 are care experienced.

Some Key ETU Achievements Across the Year Include:

- 85 young people supported into work.
- 100 young people progressed into a modern apprenticeship.
- 13 participants supported to access FE/HE.
- 158 individuals gained at least one certificated qualification.

Looking specifically at training provision delivered by ETU, in partnership with a range of providers, 2025-26 offered the following training options:

- 24 vocational programmes including Business Administration, Hospitality, SIA Security, Customer Service, Warehousing and Roads Pre-apprenticeship.
- 52 certificated core skills provisions covering Communications, Numeracy, ICT, Working With Others and Problem Solving – all of which are essential elements in helping young people progress into vocational opportunities.
- 67 certificated work-based qualifications including REHIS Health & Safety in the Workplace, Manual Handling and Food Hygiene.
- 12 CSCS training programmes across the year – with 12 training places offered at each provision.

For those participants who may be further from the labour market, ETU also delivered:

- 18 barrier removal programmes including Managing Stress and Anxiety and Building Confidence and Self Esteem.
- 3 Basic ICT training programmes.
- 7 MyBNK sessions aimed at providing young people with good, basic financial savvy around managing their own money, opening bank accounts and paying bills.
- Housing Tenancy support sessions for those 16–24-year-olds who are exploring their own tenancy.

Keeping The Promise - A Pilot with Care Experienced Young People

Working in partnership with The Kings Trust and Falkirk Council Children's Services, Go! Youth Trust piloted a 12-week programme geared at Keeping The Promise for Falkirk's care experienced young people. Seven young people engaged with the programme and received support through a blend of 1:1s and small group work over 12 weeks. Measurable outcomes include all seven young people sustaining this programme, with three achieving an SCQF Level 4 Personal Development and Employability Award. In addition, three were supported into further education at Forth Valley College.



Case Study

School was a difficult time for B, due to experiencing bullying and struggling with anxiety she stopped engaging in class and eventually was put onto a reduced timetable. By the end of fourth year, B was ready to leave school. She left with no qualifications and no idea what she was going to do. B struggled to find work once she left school and, due to her lack of qualifications, began to feel hopeless with no direction. When her sister was referred to Go! Youth Trust, B went along to see what it was all about.

After a one-to-one with a youth worker, B signed up for ETU support and started the 12-week Team programme to help her develop and improve her confidence and soft skills. Since then, she has successfully completed a work placement supporting summer activities with young people aged 10–15 years old now works full time with Go! Youth Trust as an Assistant Team Leader. B is looking forward to future opportunities to make an impact in the lives of young people. Her efforts were recently recognised as she won the L'Oréal Paris Rising Star Awards at Scottish King's Trust Awards.

Facilitating College Progressions and Monitoring Progress to Improve Outcomes

In 2024/25 Forth Valley College (FVC) launched a suite of fully funded online courses, primarily targeted at senior phase pupils who may be disengaged with school/not on full timetables, as an option to maintain engagement in learning activity and support positive post-school transitions.

This year also saw more regular and standardised data sharing for those school leavers who progress to full time programmes at FVC. Weekly attendance data is shared with school deputy heads, and SDS in-school advisers. Priority groups are highlighted, e.g. students who have disclosed ASN/CE/caring status etc, enabling early identification of any emerging issues around attendance. This allows school staff to provide direct support which may involve engaging with the young person to understand the barriers to college attendance, encourage improvements, and/or explore alternative destinations.

Propel Programme

Falkirk Council Local Employability Partnership (LEP) co-commissioned, co-designed and funded the Propel Programme being delivered by Go! Youth Trust (GYT) which supports young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training, or who's status is 'unknown'.

Provision started in September 2024, with 210 'unknown' status young people referred by March 2025. Of these, 144 have engaged with the service (68.5%). Early signs are encouraging, with 7% confirming they are currently in education, 28% in employment and 5% are engaged in training. For those not currently engaging with any post-school employability support, Propel provides ongoing engagement and youth work, with the key aim of facilitating a warm handover into the most suitable local employability provision from across all subgroup and wider LEP partners.

The positive effect of the Propel Programme has already been demonstrated and reported in the Interim Annual Participation Measure (APM). In the December 2024 APM, Falkirk reported 3.1% of 16–19-year-olds with an 'unconfirmed' status. By comparison, the previous year's Interim APM figure (Dec 2023) was 4.0% for the same age group.

Steps to Resilience and Moving on Up

In 2024/25, Link Living delivered its Steps to Resilience programme to school pupils aged 14 to 15 years, focussing on those who were either non-attenders or at risk of becoming non-attenders due to anxiety. This forms part of the overall partnership approach aimed at helping young people remain engaged with school and progress into a positive destination post-school.

Moving on Up is a post-school, Stage 1 programme providing a trauma-informed approach to support 16–19-year-olds and can often form a positive next step for those who struggle to maintain attendance at school.

The course focuses on mental health, well-being, and personal development with activities and SCQF qualifications adapted to meet the needs of each group of young people.

Initial findings of Moving on Up over three years of delivery, show that more than 30% of participants have been care-experienced and 80% have been neurodivergent. Design around new provision will take this into account and work closely with previous participants on co-production.

Go! Youth Trust

During 2024-25, Go! Youth Trust delivered its Thrive programme, supporting young people with mental health challenges which has led to social isolation and high anxiety. 90 young women were supported through the programme in 2024/25 either through one-to-one mentoring, peer support and small group work. The young people also engaged in trips, visiting local businesses such as cafes, theatres and shops. GYT worked in partnership with New Look to hold a closed door, neurodivergent friendly shopping session where young people were given special offers and discounts as well as a shopping voucher to purchase clothes.

Through the Thrive programme 21 young people have received qualifications around Health Eating, Numeracy and First Aid Mental Health.

ETU - Supported Employment Service and Mental Wellbeing Provision

Falkirk Council ETU launched a co-commissioned Supported Employment Service during 2024/25, delivered by Enable Scotland. Aimed specifically at participants who have a learning disability, learning difficulty or autism, the service provides one-to-one, person-centred support helping individuals to work towards achieving sustainable employment.

Numbers of neurodiverse participants accessing ETU support has more than doubled since 2023/24, and ETU is keen to offer appropriate service provision to facilitate the best possible outcomes and close the disability employment gap. This supports one of the key aims of the employability subgroup around improving post-school outcomes for young people with ASN.

In addition, ETU has launched a mental wellbeing provision for those young people who have identified mild to moderate mental health issues as a barrier to their progression towards employment. Numbers of ETU participants experiencing mental health issues has also doubled year on year, making these some of the hardest to reach young people an identified priority for Employability Subgroup members.

Jobcentre Plus - An Inclusive Approach to Broadening Reach

The team at Jobcentre Plus (JCP) continues to look at ways of broadening its reach and providing a truly inclusive and accessible service. In 2024-25, some of its targeted activities, addressing Employability Subgroup priorities included:

- Advisers in two local GP practices to help customers access JCP services, including Disability Employment Advice.
- Youth Coaches, delivery of Youth Hub at Forth Valley College.
- Autism Accreditation for all Work Coaches.
- Work Coaches have been trained in Mental Health awareness.
- Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for care leavers.
- Civil Service Care Leaver Apprenticeship – promoting positive discrimination for one of our identified priority groups.
- Flexible Support Fund to support customers with travel, training, childcare costs and any other barriers.
- Allocated specific times at JCP recruitment events according to age or customer vulnerability.
- Staff wear lanyards with either Disability Confident or neuro-diverse to help customers access specialist support.

Next Steps

Planned activities and service provision for 2025/26 includes:

- Forth Valley College Transition to College Pilot – non-certificated course aimed at enhancing transition to college and ultimately supporting higher retention when they secure a place on a certificated programme.
- SDS 16+ Participation Portal – will facilitate data sharing across employability subgroup members. It aims to provide the intelligence needed to allow local employability partners to provide tailored support to young people when they leave school, specifically targeting those who are not moving on to learning or work.
- Care Leavers Event October 2025 – a working group has been set up to facilitate with Falkirk Champs providing direction around themes, as well as co-production of event.
- Propel – further maturity of the programme targeting those harder to reach young people who are in a negative or unknown post-school destination with referral and warm handovers into local employability services to improve outcomes.
- Employment and Training Unit delivery of a range of employability supports and services designed to meet the needs of local young people, as well as meeting national targets. New provision includes a Green Skills paid traineeship programme, Healthcare Academy and Sporting Chance pre-employability programme, as well as further development of work with Falkirk Champs.
- LinkLiving is currently working to re-design its Moving on Up programme, based on participant feedback. Changes will include a group work element as well as providing greater 1:2:1 support.
- Collaborative work with Falkirk LEP partners to continue to increase referrals, co-working and build on the no wrong door approach.

Workforce Learning & Development

Training and upskilling the workforce across the partnership, and wider council plays a pivotal role in improving outcomes across all our priority areas. This improves early intervention, enhances multi-agency collaboration and strengthens safeguarding. It equips professionals to better support vulnerable children and young people, leading to improved outcomes, reduces inequalities and develop trusted relationships between families and services supporting them.

Workforce Learning & Development Across the Partnership

We aim to effectively implement the multi-agency Learning & Development Strategy that supports our workforce to be confident and competent in their practice.

To Make it Happen We:

Launch of the Learning & Development Strategy.

Develop a Communication Strategy that supports participation, engagement, and full implementation.

Develop a mechanism for two-way communication with each subgroup.
Undertake a training needs analysis informed by the subgroup's objectives.

Develop an Annual Programme of multi-agency Learning & Development.

Provide skilled level, in person, learning & development opportunities to establish a solid foundation of joint learning across the workforce.

Develop a locality-based model of learning & development delivery.

Develop & embed peer group reflective support and supervision.

How Will We Make it Happen?

Delivering outcomes focused learning & development opportunities
Feedback from across the workforce through:

- Audit & Dip Sampling
- Case Studies
- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Supervision/ 1-1 Meetings
- Data collection

How Are We Doing Meeting Our Outcomes?

Learning & Development Strategy updated in June 2024 to include Scotland's National Framework for Child Protection Learning & Development 2024 and Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model.

Training Needs Analysis undertaken with multi-agency services.

Multi-Agency Learning & Development activities planned to take account of feedback from Training Needs Analysis and learning outcomes from Learning Reviews.

Data collated at multi-agency learning sessions to capture the range of agencies, job roles who attend; to measure changes in staff's confidence and knowledge.

Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group members are also represented in other strategic working groups to allow for cross fertilisation overarching Falkirk's community planning partnership's strategic objectives.

Falkirk's Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group

Summary of Key Accomplishments for 2024/25

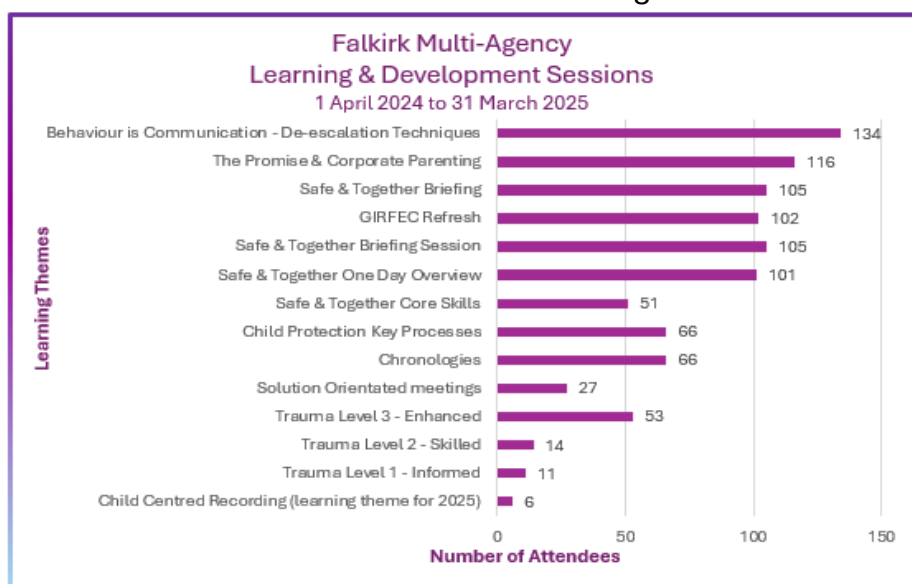
- Falkirk's Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group continues to be guided by its updated Learning and Development Strategy and Framework. In continuing to develop staff skills, knowledge, competence and practice across Falkirk's Community Planning Partnership, we committed to undertaking Training Needs Analysis (TNA), which took place in May 2025.
- The Training Needs Analysis allowed us to ascertain multi-agency training priorities for the following 6 months, in the next 6 -12 months period and then beyond 12 months. The responses from 48 different services gave the Workforce Development Team an indication of what learning themes were a priority for the workforce.

Of the 41 different learning themes that were raised within the TNA, we can address the Top 10 highlighted themes as a priority in the immediate 6 months:

1.	Trauma Informed Practice for Team Development	
2.	Behaviour is Communication – De-escalation Techniques	
3.	Child Protection Key Processes	Training has been delivered to multi-agency staff teams in 2024/25
4.	Trauma Skilled Practice for customer facing roles/roles with direct and frequent contact with people who may be affected by trauma	
5.	Keeping the Promise / Corporate Parenting	
6.	GIRFEC Refresh	
7.	Use of Chronologies	
8.	Child Centred Recording	
9.	Understanding Child Development Stages - Attachment & Nurture	Training was planned and designed and began in 2025/26
10.	Harmful Sexualised Behaviour - Children & Families focus	

In addition to the Top 10 themes noted above, multi-agency staff also delivered on an additional 15 learning themes in 2024/25 as we have continued to prioritise other learning themes out with the TNA top 10 priorities. This is in response to additional learning needs being highlighted

as part of Learning Reviews and /or local and national priorities, e.g. domestic abuse training (Safe & Together), Keeping the Promise / Corporate Parenting. The Workforce Development Team can collate data on the training that they co-ordinate and/or deliver. This table contains information on the numbers of staff who attended the various Learning Sessions in 2024/25.



Embedding Children's Rights/UNCRC

Various learning and development activities inevitably will link with each other, there will be cross over themes that will reinforce professional practice. At the core of each learning activity are the rights of children and young people. In delivering learning sessions, facilitators make clear reference to the UNCRC (Scotland) Act 2024 and challenge the workforce to consider how they can consider this in the context of their job role.

Facilitators learn from attendees what is taking place in the different services and agencies in relation to how children rights and their voices are taken into account. They will then share these examples within other learning sessions to further enhance staff's knowledge and skills .



Case Study

'In-person multi-agency' learning and development activities continues to be raised as a highlight for staff being able to jointly learn together for the benefit of joint working leading to improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Examples of feedback from multi-agency staff who have attended themed learning sessions:

Behaviour is Communication: De-escalation Techniques

The course enlightened me in how much I use strategies with clients / service users in the workplace without realising that I do. It was helpful learning to put a name to the strategies as this will give me confidence to continue. (Third Sector Mental Health Support Worker)

I now have a bigger bank of strategies to try with the children and others (Primary School teacher)

Behaviour is Communication: De-escalation Techniques

Reinforced the importance to do a chronology to assess risk, need, and inform a case management plan (Justice Social Worker)

I now feel able to practice new techniques with confidence (Support for Learning Assistant, High School)

Child Protection Key Processes

I will be more confident giving advice and support to the team in which I work. (Ministry of Defence Mental Health Lead)

There were things I didn't know, and I was surprised to realise how much I have learned (Children & Families Social Worker)

Next Steps 25/26

- Increase learning and development activities to reflect the priorities within Training Needs Analysis, Learning Review recommendations, local and national priorities.
- Increase staff resources by supporting multi-agency staff in training delivery.
- Develop a Learning Passport that will allow staff to capture their learning. how this applies to their professional practice and how this improves outcomes for our communities.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

