

**To:** Council

**On:** 30 September 2021

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**Report by:** Chief Social Work Officer

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**Heading:** Annual Report of the Chief Social Work Officer 2020/21

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. The Chief Social Work Officer provides an annual update report to Council in Autumn each year. The requirement for every local authority in Scotland to appoint a professionally qualified Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) is set out within Section 3 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The particular qualifications are set down in regulations and this is one of a number of statutory requirements which local authorities must comply with. In Renfrewshire Council the role of the Chief Social Work Officer is held by the Head of Childcare and Criminal Justice.
  - 1.2. The annual reports of all CSWOs are submitted to the Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor at the Scottish Government in order that a national overview report can be produced.
  - 1.3. The report provides a summary of activity relating to the role of the Chief Social Work Officer during 2020/21.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that elected members:
  - Note the key activities outlined in this report;
  - Note that the report will be submitted to the Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor at the Scottish Government; and
  - Agree that the next update to Council will be presented in Autumn 2022

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### **3. The Chief Social Work Officer**

- 3.1 The principal role and purpose of the Social Work service is contained within the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, which gave local authorities the responsibility of “promoting social welfare”. The Social Work Service has a statutory duty to provide care and protection to the most vulnerable people across Renfrewshire, often meaning that many of our service users do not engage with us on a voluntary basis. The role of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) is critical in terms of achieving this purpose.
- 3.2 The CSWO is a ‘proper officer’ in relation to the social work function: an officer given particular responsibility on behalf of a local authority, where the law requires the function to be discharged by a specified post holder.
- 3.3 The qualifications of the CSWO are set down in regulations and stipulate that the postholder must be a qualified social worker registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. The CSWO must be able to demonstrate extensive experience of operational and strategic management at a senior level within social work or social care services.
- 3.4 The overall objective of the CSWO is to provide professional advice on the provision of social work services to elected members and officers; advice which assists authorities in understanding many of the complexities which are inherent across social work services. The CSWO should also assist authorities in understanding the key role that social work plays in contributing to the achievement of national and local outcomes, to improving local performance and in terms of the management of corporate risk. The key aspect of this locally has been the provision of an annual report to Council, and these, along with CSWO reports from other local authorities, are now being used nationally to create an overview report.
- 3.5 The scope of the CSWO role covers all social work and social care services, whether provided directly by the local authority, or in partnership with others. Where these services are purchased or commissioned from external providers, the CSWO has responsibility to advise on the specification, quality and standards of services commissioned. The environment in which social work services operate is much more complex than when the Act established the role, and current guidance reflects the increased strategic nature of the role, and the particular functions in relation to Integration Joint Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships.
- 3.6 The CSWO has a range of other responsibilities relating to the promotion of values, standards, and leadership.

- 3.7 Social work services have a statutory duty to provide care and protection to the most vulnerable people across their local authority area. A significant proportion of service users do not engage with the service on a voluntary basis. Access to the majority of services is assessed on the basis of need, and social work staff work in partnership with individuals, carers, families and communities to meet this need within the resources available to the service and partner agencies.
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#### **4. Local Governance Arrangements**

- 4.1 Within Renfrewshire Council the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice also acts as Chief Social Work Officer. As well as the responsibilities associated with the directorship, as CSWO he retains professional leadership for adult social work and social care services delivered by the HSCP.

- 4.2 The CSWO has a number of general and specific duties, including:

- (i) Providing regular reports to elected members on the key activities and role of the Chief Social Work Officer.
- (ii) Leading for Social Work on the Renfrewshire HSCP Executive Governance Group and the Integration Joint Board
- (iii) Reporting directly to the Education and Children's Services Policy Board and Renfrewshire Council.
- (iv) Being a member of the Council's Corporate Management Team and the Chief Officer's Group and reporting directly to the Chief Executive and senior elected members.
- (v) Representing services and the council more widely, at a local, regional and national level.
- (vi) Chairing the twice-yearly meeting of all social work managers from both Children's Services and the HSCP.
- (vii) Providing advice on social work issues to the Chief Officers' Group
- (viii) **Specific Duties**  
In relation to specific duties associated with the position, the CSWO within Renfrewshire Council acts as:
  - Final point of appeal in relation to Adoption and Fostering decisions
  - Recipient of all Mental Health and Adults with Incapacity Orders, and Guardianship cases
  - Decision maker in relation to Secure Care applications for Children

(ix) Management of Risk

The Chief Social Work Officer is accountable to the Chief Executive, the Corporate Management Team and the Council as part of the Chief Officers' Group which manages public protection risks on a partnership basis. Heads of Service have responsibility for the management of risk within their respective service areas.

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**5. Activities of the Chief Social Work Officer 2020/21**

- 5.1 The report attached as Appendix 1 summarises the key activities of the Director of Children's Services in his capacity as Chief Social Work Officer in Renfrewshire during 2020/21. It does not provide an exhaustive description of the full range of duties and responsibilities undertaken but seeks to provide a broad overview of the CSWO role and, for this year, the particular challenges of operating during a pandemic. This report and its appendices will be submitted to the Office of the Chief Social Work Officer to inform a national overview report.
- 5.2 The next report on the activities of the Chief Social Work Officer will be submitted to the Council in Autumn 2022.
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**6. Overview of activities within social work services**

- 6.1 Services continued to operate during the pandemic, with public health measures in place in line with the rules governing national lockdowns and local restrictions. Child protection registrations remained fairly stable throughout the year and in line with previous years. Adult protection referrals were slightly lower during the first lockdown than the comparable period in 2021, but this was short-lived and might be attributable to normal levels of fluctuation. Justice services did have a reduction in demand in some areas whilst courts were closed, and where appropriate, staff were redeployed to support the wider crisis response work.
- 6.2 The CSWO has a range of statutory duties which are detailed in Appendix 1 to this report; that appendix also includes more detail of demand and provision in those areas.
- 6.3 Statutory functions in respect of children encompass looked after and accommodated children, child protection, work with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and work with young people who offend and are subject to secure orders. As part of a long-term plan to reduce the use of residential services for looked after children, two of the council's children's houses were decommissioned in 2020/21, having become surplus to requirements as more family settings are used. The implementation of The Promise will help shape future service developments within Children and Families Social Work, but will also influence some aspects of social work delivery for adults where this intersects with services for children and young people.

- 6.4 Day to day management of adult social work services is delegated to Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership. The CSWO retains a professional advisory role in relation to these services and continues to have statutory duties within adult social work. The Renfrewshire Adult Protection Committee is responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring the strategic approach to the management of the protection of vulnerable adults in Renfrewshire in terms of the Adult Support & Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. There continues to be high demand for work related to the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, and this has been complicated by the extended closure of courts across Scotland. More detail is included in Appendix 1.
- 6.5 The Criminal Justice Service supervises a range of community-based requirements on offenders, provides reports to Courts and the Parole Board, manages a service for sexual offenders, and operates a range of statutory and voluntary services to support female offenders. The Unpaid Work service has been significantly impacted by Covid-19, with public health measures reducing the capacity of the service for a prolonged period. More generally, the court closures led to a temporary reduction in report requests and in new orders commencing; as courts return to normal, the service can expect a large increase in new activity as backlogs are cleared.

### **Key Priorities in 2021/22**

- 6.6 Based on an assessment of internal and external factors the CSWO has identified key priorities for the year ahead:
- Effectively discharging our public protection role and working with partners to ensure that vulnerable children and adults live as safely as possible within local communities;
  - Continuing to respond to the particular challenges related to the pandemic and its management;
  - Continuing the implementation of The Promise;
  - Responding to the findings of the Feeley Review on Adult Social Care;
  - Supporting the wider Council to deliver on the priorities set out in the Social Renewal Plan and the Economic Recovery Plan;
  - Continuing to ensure strong and positive links between Children's Services and Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership;
  - Implementing a new social work case management system within Justice Social Work

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### **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** – None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None

3. **Community Planning** – The report details the progress made by the service to protect vulnerable children and adults, reduce offending behaviour, increase community safety, and promote early intervention, independent living and wider health improvement. It highlights partnership working, details the measures which ensure the workforce is skilled and effective and highlights achievements in relation to support to communities, customer service and consultation.
4. **Legal** - None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** –  
The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – None
9. **Procurement** –None
10. **Risk** - Risks related to the management and delivery of social work services are closely monitored and are included within both the Children's Services Risk Register and, where appropriate, the Corporate Risk Register.
11. **Privacy Impact** – None
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – None
13. **Climate Change** - None

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## List of Background Papers

"The Role of the Chief Social Work Officer – Guidance Issued by Scottish Ministers"  
Paper to Education and Children Policy Board, 18 August 2016

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JT/LF  
21 September 2021

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# Annual Report of the Chief Social Work Officer

## 2020/21

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.”

Definition of social work agreed by the International Federation of Social Workers, 2014



## **Chief Social Work Officer – Renfrewshire**

### **Introduction**

I'm pleased to present the annual Chief Social Work Officer report for Renfrewshire for the period April 2020 to March 2021. The Chief Social Work Officer is a "proper officer" in relation to the social work function of the local authority. As such, the Chief Social Work Officer is given particular responsibility on behalf of the local authority in respect of social work functions and also the authority to discharge some functions in law on an individual basis.

This report provides an overview of social work and care activity during a period where the whole country was impacted for significant periods due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this annual report I attempt to demonstrate the commitment of social work and care staff to ensure that those who were most vulnerable to the challenges posed by the pandemic were supported and the care they required was delivered. The delivery of care was impacted by the restrictions of the pandemic however staff from social work and care remained on the front line throughout.

I want to take the opportunity to express my thanks to social work and care staff for their ongoing commitment to those who required support over the past year.

In discharging my role as Chief Social Work Officer, I'm supported in Children's Services by the Director, the Social Work Children's Services Manager and the Criminal Justice Services Manager. Within the Health and Social Care Partnership I'm supported by the Chief Officer and the Heads of Service. I want to acknowledge their support in helping me address the delivery of social work and care services in Renfrewshire.

This report doesn't detail all of the social work and care activity within Renfrewshire, but rather serves to provide an overview of services.

John Trainer  
Chief Social Work Officer  
August 2021

## **Governance and Accountability**

In Renfrewshire, social work services for children and families and criminal justice social work services are delivered by Children's Services. Social work and care services for adults are delegated to and delivered by Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership. Each local authority is required to appoint a Chief Social Work Officer, an officer with an appropriate social work qualification, to oversee the functions of social work. As social work and care services for adults are delegated, as Chief Social Work Officer I have oversight of how the delegated functions are delivered and I'm active in the Renfrewshire Health and Social Care governance arrangements.

As the Chief Social Worker in Renfrewshire, I have operational responsibilities in my post as Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice and line managed in that post by the Director of Children's Services. In the role of Chief Social Work Officer, I provide professional advice on social work functions to the Chief Executive, the Corporate Management Team and elected members. I also provide professional advice on adult social work and care to the Chief Officer and Senior Management Team of Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership and to the Integrated Joint Board.

The role of CSWO was originally designed to provide professional advice on social work services to elected members and council officers, in order to assist local authorities in understanding the complexities inherent in social work and social care services. The growing incidence of strategic partnerships across the public sector, whether legislated for or developed through good local joint working, adds a level of complexity to the role of Chief Social Work Officer.

As CSWO I'm a member of the Council's Corporate Management Team and of the Chief Officers Group. I have a key role in multi-agency public protection arrangements and as such I'm a member of the Child and Adult Protection Committees, I co-chair the Gender-Based Violence Strategy Group and a member of the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership.

As Chief Social Work Officer I report to elected members, primarily through two Policy Boards and the Integration Joint Board. The Education and Children's Services Policy Board has the remit for matters relating to Children and Families Social Work and the Communities and Housing Policy Board has the remit for Justice Social Work as part of its overall responsibility for community justice in Renfrewshire. All matters pertaining to Adult Social Work and Social Care are dealt with by the Integration Joint Board, which has representation from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's Board as well as elected members.

During the initial period of the pandemic in March 2020, with the Chief Officer and Head of Health and Social Care from Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership I established a daily monitoring process to assess the risks in care homes for older adults (both internal and those run by independent providers) and ensured a multi-agency response to the challenges faced by that sector. This model was replicated by other local authorities and health and social care partnerships across the country.

In assessing and supporting the social work and care staff to deliver the best services possible and to make the biggest difference for those who need social work and care support I regularly meet with managers and front-line staff to discuss their work.

In addition, regular performance reports are considered at strategic meetings to allow the identification of challenges in delivery and to find solutions to unblocking these for staff and those who need access to services.

As we enter 2021/22 in addition to supporting business as usual and Covid recovery work, a priority for me will be responding to the Scottish Government's Consultation on a National Care Service. The proposals contained within the consultation would have a considerable impact on the social work and social care workforce as well as on people who use these services and will need a considered response.

## **Service Quality and Performance**

As a statutory service, social work provision continued throughout the pandemic and the various phases of restriction, though these restrictions did necessitate a shift in how some services were delivered. Many of the social work services are delivered by locality teams in Renfrewshire or by one of the specialist services.

In addition to the locality and specialist services the council and Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership operates 23 services registered with the Care Inspectorate – four children's houses, three care homes for older adults, five day services for older adults, five day services for adults with learning disabilities, one day service for adults with physical disabilities, one residential respite service for adults with learning disabilities, Care at Home Service, Fostering and Adoption Services, and a housing support service for care leavers.

The Care Inspectorate undertakes regular inspections of all registered services and indicates a formal assessment of the standard on a graded scale. The Care Inspectorate grades are:

- Unsatisfactory – major weaknesses
- Weak – important weaknesses
- Adequate – strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- Good – important strengths with some areas for improvement
- Very Good – major strengths
- Excellent – sector leading

The Care Inspectorate generally reviews the following areas when undertaking inspections by assessing:

- How well people's wellbeing is supported?
- How good is the leadership of the service?
- How good is the staff team?
- How good is the environment?
- How well are care and support planned?

Not all of the registered services in Renfrewshire have been inspected over the past twelve months because of the impact of the pandemic. Most of the registered services in Renfrewshire have been graded as good or very good at their last inspection.

As Chief Social Work Officer I have procedures in place for reporting to elected members should any care service receive an assessment of Weak or Unsatisfactory for any element. None of the recent inspections have required these procedures to be initiated as no service has been graded weak or unsatisfactory.

The following pages set out the performance of each of the three main areas of social work practice in Renfrewshire during 2020/21. This includes information about how the service responded to Covid-19 and the additional challenges which arose from delivering services during a pandemic.

## **Statutory Service Provision: Adult Social Work and Social Care**

In Renfrewshire, the delivery of adult social work and social care services is delegated to Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership. Mainstream social work services are delivered on a locality basis by two teams – one covering Paisley and the other covering the rest of the local authority area. As Chief Social Work Officer I provide professional leadership and advice to senior officers in RHSCP and to the wider social work and social care staff in adult services.

Throughout the period covered by this report social work and care staff in Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership continued to deliver services to those most in need. There were, as a result of the restrictions required by the pandemic significant changes to how some services were delivered.

The three care homes, Hunterhill, Montrose and Renfrew continued to operate throughout the pandemic with staff having to work to ensure that those who live in the homes had as close to a normal experience as possible whilst managing the risks and restrictions in place. The care staff worked closely with staff from environment and infrastructure to deliver care and support to the residents. Staff from other areas of adult services including day care also supported the operation of the care homes.

The care at home staff continued to work in the homes of individuals throughout the pandemic. There was pressure on care at home at various points in the pandemic however staff rose to the challenge to ensure those who needed services received them.

There was considerable impact on day care services as a result of the pandemic. The imposition of stringent lockdown restrictions meant that day care services closed for a significant period of the lockdown. Staff developed a range of additional supports for those who previously accessed day services including arranging online programmes and activities.

Adult social work staff in the localities and specialist teams in the main worked from home during the pandemic. Through much of the period covered by this report the locality teams provided a duty response from offices where possible. Much of the contact with those needing services was on an outreach basis using technology for assessment purposes.

The volume of adult protection work continues to increase, and Renfrewshire received 3483 adult welfare concerns and 1325 adult protection referrals in 2020/21; these are increases of 12% and 10% on the previous year and are the highest numbers since 2016/17. The number of AP investigations resulting from referrals has been fairly stable – 100 this year compared with 97 last year and 102 in 2018/19. The number that have progressed to a case conference is showing a year-on-year increase and was 51 in 2020/21 (31 in 2018/19 and 41 in 2019/20).

Additional operational guidance on adult support and protection was implemented in light of the pandemic and the potential for increased risk of harm to vulnerable individuals. The Renfrewshire Adult Protection Committee (RAPC) stepped up a sub-group which met fortnightly initially (moving to monthly when appropriate) to provide additional strategic and operational oversight of this area of work.

Adult Support and Protection was the subject of a joint inspection (by the Care Inspectorate, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Healthcare Improvement Scotland) in early 2020. The pandemic caused this activity to be halted before all work was completed but the inspection team were able to provide feedback which has now informed an improvement plan which will be overseen by RAPC.

During the year, three large-scale investigations were carried out in private sector care homes across Renfrewshire, as a response to concerns raised by HSCP staff and by the Care Inspectorate. Enhanced governance arrangements and safeguards were put in place in these three establishments.

Adults with Incapacity work remains a significant demand pressure, and the situation in Renfrewshire reflects the national picture of having to manage an increasing number of guardianships and supervise private guardianships. The granting of a guardianship is a complex legal process involving several agencies and professionals; the closure of court services in 2020 has brought additional delays. Orders where the Chief Social Work Officer is appointed Welfare Guardian rose in recent years, from 79 in March 2015 to 116 in 2020; on 31 March 2021 there were 108 such orders existent in Renfrewshire. Each order requires a qualified social worker to act as the "nominated officer" on behalf of the CSWO for day to day management of the case. In addition, there are in excess of approximately 435 private welfare guardianship orders running throughout Renfrewshire. These require a minimum of one statutory visit by a guardianship supervisor after being granted.

The MHO Team continued to experience a high volume of their routine work, alongside the need to support the broader social work Covid response. In 2020/21, there were 64 applications for Compulsory Treatment Orders, MHO consent for 24 emergency detentions (72-hour detention for assessment), 162 short-term detentions (28 days for assessment and treatment) and 153 Mental Health Tribunals in respect of 104 people. The service also manages 'Restricted Patients' who come under the control of Scottish Ministers

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, 138 individuals had an open involvement with the Integrated Alcohol Team and 680 individuals had an open involvement with Renfrewshire Drugs Service. The Renfrewshire area continues to have a high number of drug- and alcohol-related deaths relative to other council areas. In 2019, the Council and partners established an Alcohol and Drugs Commission to investigate underlying causes and make recommendations for improvement; more information on the work of the Commission can be found on its website.

## **Statutory Service Provision: Children and Families Social Work**

Renfrewshire Council operates a locality-based model for mainstream Children & Families Social Work, with four teams based across the three largest towns in the area. Specialist teams provide focused support in the areas of Fostering and Adoption, Kinship Care, Residential Services, Pre and Post Birth Team Throughcare, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Children with Disabilities, and the Whole Systems Team who support children and young people involved in the justice system.

There was a fear that the pandemic and the consequent restrictions would impact significantly on social work services through a reduction in children being referred (because they were no longer visible to universal services); an increase in domestic violence and greater risk because women were less able to leave an abusive household; and the longer-term impacts of prolonged stress arising from lockdowns, job losses and ill health.

As a frontline protective service, Social Work staff continued to operate throughout the national lockdowns and the different phases of restrictions. Whilst offices were completely shut for a few weeks, staff moved quickly to reopen an office as a base to support the work of the service. During times when public health advice was constantly changing, staff continually adapted their approach to ensure that children and young people remained safe and supported.

Teams quickly found creative solutions to the challenges of carrying out statutory duties in a world of restrictions. Families were supported to contribute to meetings virtually and where they did not have the technology to allow this, social work staff would go to their homes and provide the technology so that their voice could be heard in relation to decisions about their children. Other staff met with children and young people outdoors to minimise the risk of infection whilst still ensuring that the child or young person had the opportunity to speak with their worker alone. Our Women and Children First service, which works with women and children experiencing gender-based violence, ensured that service users had their own mobile phones and arranged meetings away from the family home.

Family contact visits did stop for several months during the first national lockdown and this had a considerable impact on children, young people and their families. Our foster carers helped fill that gap, arranging video calls and text messages between children and families in order to maintain that connection whilst face to face meetings were not allowed. Showing their usual high levels of care and compassion, foster carers put their fears about their own health aside to ensure that children could see their birth families when restrictions allowed. When contact was able to restart, our staff organised outdoor activities so that families could safely meet wherever possible.

Our staff remained a constant in the lives of children and young people who needed support and protection during times when many other services had to withdraw either because of national policy, a need to redirect staff to other services or concerns over the risk to staff during some phases of the pandemic. This was particularly challenging for the families of children with additional support needs who rely on universal services for a degree of respite and for other supports. Social work staff continued to make home visits, putting their own concerns about the risk of Covid for them and their families aside in order to make sure our most vulnerable children were safe.

The dedication and commitment of residential staff during the pandemic cannot be overstated. Staff rearranged working patterns and often put their own needs aside in order to maintain a loving and safe home for the young people in our children's houses. Social distancing concerns became less important than providing a hug for someone who needed that extra bit of care. The ethos of the service has been summed up by a senior manager thus: "The world changed outside but not inside for our young people." Children's houses in Renfrewshire remained a family home for our young people.

Our Throughcare Team supporting young people at Charleston Square and in our satellite flats changed how they engaged with young people to reflect the additional isolation and vulnerability that lockdown brought. Individual and small group support moved outdoors and provided an opportunity for new skills to be developed, including learning to cook on the barbecue, working in the garden, exercise classes and drumming workshops. One of the cooks from our residential team provided home cooked food as well as teaching sessions, recipe cards and ingredients so that our young people had access to fresh food and were able to further develop their skills.

One of the challenges during the period, and one that remains to some extent, was the closure of other services, particularly the courts and Children's Hearings. These closures had a knock-on effect across Children & Families. The timescales for Children's Hearings doubled, which impacted on decision-making and on the implementation of Child's Plans. The closure of courts created delays in adoption processes. Perpetrators of gender-based violence were no longer remanded in custody, creating an additional risk for women and children who had survived that violence.

Staff have demonstrated incredible resilience over the last eighteen months. They have continued to carry out statutory duties even at increased risk to themselves. There have been cases of workers undertaking home visits where there are positive Covid cases in the household, because their primary concern was the welfare of the children in that household. Social work teams organised supermarket vouchers, deliveries of nappies and baby milk at times of empty supermarket shelves, provided tablets and dongles to families to keep them connected, all on top of their day-to-day work.

Training had to move online and though the training team provided excellent online resources, there are areas of work where in-person training will always be preferable. The implementation of a new case management system had a significant impact on the amount of time staff had to dedicate to training as well as to familiarising themselves with new processes once the system was implemented.

The additional weekly reporting required from all local authorities created a further resource pressure. A new requirement to have weekly contact with all children subject to a Child's Plan took the element of individual judgement and risk assessment out of the hands of practitioners to some extent, with contact having to take place weekly even where a child was in a safe and stable placement. This contact, and the recording which went alongside, reduced the capacity of staff to undertake more in-depth work on other cases.

A primary concern during lockdown was whether child protection referrals would fall as engagement with services such as health and education was paused. In Renfrewshire, there was a slight drop in referrals in the first few weeks of lockdown but numbers quickly returned to normal levels.



Information on referrals, investigations, conferences and registrations continued to be monitored by the Child Protection Committee. During 2020/21, there were 125 new registrations and 142 deregistrations, and there were 71 children on the register as of 31 March 2021. The biggest areas of concern remain domestic violence, parental mental health problems, and parental drug misuse. There were 15 Child Protection Orders granted during the year, slightly lower than figures in the previous two years. Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee and its subgroups continue to meet virtually and a new business plan (delayed to allow staff to focus on the Covid response) will be completed shortly.

Renfrewshire has consistently had a rate of looked after children which is higher than the national average. Children's Services has implemented a targeted programme of work to reduce that number over the last decade, with our looked after child population dropping by 17% in that time. There has been a reduction in the use of residential placements and an increase in the use of local authority foster care and kinship care. As of 31 March 2021, Renfrewshire had 594 looked after children, of whom 93% were placed in a family setting. Nine children were adopted during 2020/21. The use of secure placements continues to be low, with 4 new placements commencing in 2020/21.

During 2020/21 Renfrewshire Council and its partners began implementing a programme of work based on The Promise. The service has adopted a new approach to supporting children and young people to have their say in decisions affecting them. Called 'Your Voice, Your Way' the project spoke with children and young people, with carers and with practitioners to develop new resources which help children and young people have their say in ways and at times that work for them. This has been rolled out to all Children & Families Social Work staff.

The RADAR service supports children and young people aged 12-21 whose alcohol and/or drug use is impacting on their wellbeing, and had 57 service users at the end of March 2021, of whom 30 were 16 or under. The service has a holistic approach and works flexibly and intensively with young people to address the causes as well as the impact of substance use.

The Whole Systems team works with young people either involved with the justice system or at risk of becoming involved. Where a person aged under 21 is made subject to a community sentence or is released from custody on licence, the Whole Systems Team undertakes supervision, rather than Justice Social Work. This allows for a continuity of support from Children's Services, who will work closely with justice colleagues as well as with the RADAR service and the Throughcare Team, with whom they are co-located.

High levels of alcohol and drug use within the local population continues to pose a major risk for children and young people in Renfrewshire and drives much of the social work activity. Renfrewshire's Alcohol and Drug Commission has made a number of recommendations to help address this issue and social work will play a significant part in progressing this work, which has a strong recovery focus.

Emotional and mental wellbeing had already been identified as a risk factor for children and young people prior to the pandemic, and there is evidence to suggest this has been exacerbated. Work is already well progressed within Renfrewshire to establish a new service which can offer holistic and family-based mental health support.

## **Statutory Service Provision: Justice Social Work**

Justice Social Work services were heavily impacted by Covid-19 restrictions and continue to be more impacted than other social work services due to changes/delays in court processes and to the challenges in providing an unpaid work service with strict public health restrictions in place. Much of Justice Social Work is an office-based task, to enable intervention within a confidential setting.

Creative solutions were required in order to maintain services which would normally involve in-person contact for individual interventions and groupwork. Home-based work was provided to suitable unpaid work clients to enable them to continue with their order, and created other activity interventions which could be undertaken technologically, all of which allowed some individuals to complete the order within the original timeframe. Groupwork services made use of technology where this was appropriate and resumed face-to-face services with smaller groups as soon as risk assessments allowed this to be done safely in line with public health restrictions.

The government decision to extend the timescale for all orders with an unpaid work requirement is currently being mitigated by the lower number of new orders being made, and the lifting of social distancing requirements will increase the working capacity of the unpaid work team and allow hours to be completed. This will be supplemented by third sector provision. However, justice social work services across Scotland are likely to experience additional resource pressures as court services return to normal and staff manage new report requests and orders alongside those delayed by the pandemic.

This impact of court closures is clearly demonstrated in the volume of court work undertaken during the year and in the reduced number of new orders imposed by courts. The service completed 360 CJSW reports in 2020/21 compared with 966 in 2019/20. The number of new Community Payback Orders was 218, compared with 561 in 2019/20. (Please note 2020/21 data is provisional). Tables 4 to 8 in the appendix show trends in the last decade in relation to orders and requirements.

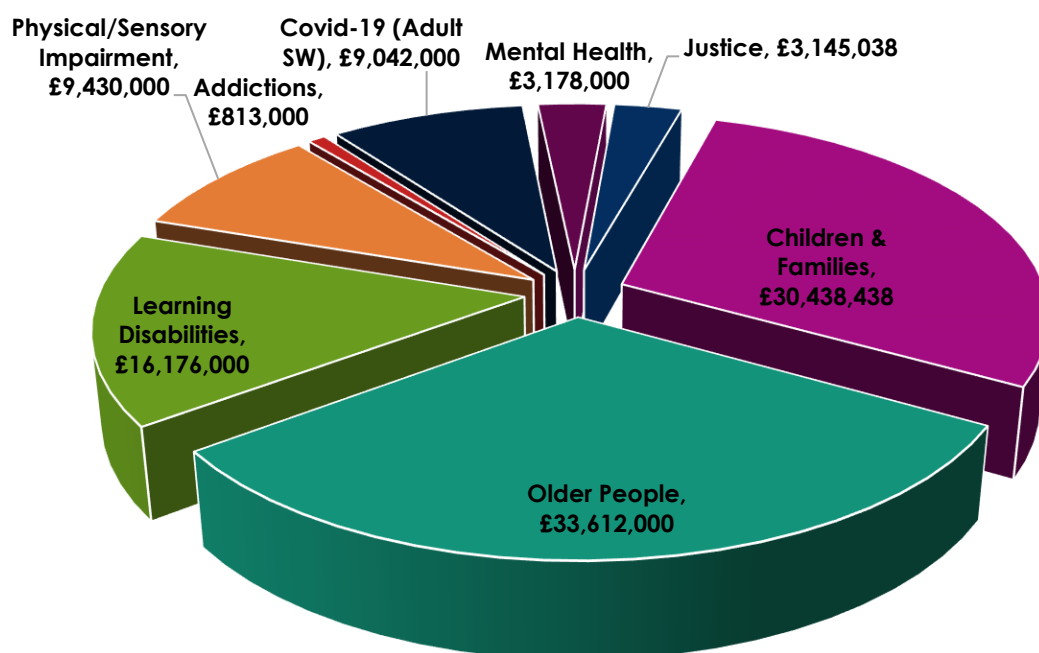
As well as the closure of courts, processes were implemented to allow a small number of individuals to be released early from prison at the start of the pandemic. Justice Social Work provided a Voluntary Throughcare service to support people with the transition and ensure they were able to access the vital services needed on their return to their communities. This service is offered to all individuals in Renfrewshire released from short custodial sentences.

Renfrewshire Community Justice are active partners in the Renfrewshire Local Employability Partnership and Invest in Renfrewshire provided continued funding for our Just Recovery initiative. This ensures specific support for individuals with convictions to be supported in overcoming specific barriers to education, employment and training. As part of our employability work, staff were provided with training sessions explaining changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and how to support service users to disclose convictions appropriately. The Just Recovery initiative also benefited from funding from the Scottish Government's Challenge Fund to support activities tackling problem alcohol and drug use. Pathways into addiction services for people involved in the justice system are being mapped and this will help us improve support to service users living in or returning to Renfrewshire. We have created a new post to take forward this work.

## Resources

The chart below shows the breakdown of expenditure on social work by Renfrewshire Council and Renfrewshire in 2020/21/. As in previous years, the largest area of expenditure is on services for older people, followed by services for children and families. Funding for Justice Social Work comes directly from the Scottish Government by means of a grant.

The adult services elements contains a separate entry for spend directly related to Covid-19 measures, and this was just over £9 million, or 9% of all social work and social care expenditure for the year.



There have been significant pressures on services during 2020/21 and Renfrewshire Council has ensured that appropriate funding has been allocated to children and justice social work. Funding for adult social work and care has been enhanced in the period 2021/22 by additional funding from the Scottish Government to support the challenges posed by the pandemic.

## **Workforce**

The largest change impacting the workforce in 2020/21 was the necessity of home-based working for some of the time, even for frontline services. Some minimal use of office space became possible by the end of April 2020 but staff continue to have a hybrid model of working, moving between working at home, working in the office and out in the field. The dedication, compassion and resilience of our staff throughout the year has been extraordinary and has ensured that our most vulnerable residents have been kept safe and supported despite the extra challenges everyone has experienced during the pandemic.

In previous years, this report has highlighted the challenges of recruiting and retaining residential staff. During 2020/21, the number of council-run children's houses was reduced from six to four, and a new staffing model implemented. The new model should reduce the use of overtime and agency staff, ensure more staff are available at key points during the day and evening and most importantly, help the service deploy staff in a way that allows more time to spend on building relationships with the young people living in the houses.

A transformation programme (part of a wider council programme) which began in 2019/20 was paused during the pandemic and has now restarted. Any service redesigns arising from that programme may lead to changes in the shape of the workforce.

Children and Families Social Work implemented a new case management system in 2020. This project had been planned for several years and a decision was taken to continue with the roll-out as planned, given the stage the work was at when restrictions began. This necessitated a complete shift in the planned training for staff, which had to be moved from face-to-face sessions to online learning based on videos and virtual drop-ins. Staff showed considerable resilience in managing the transition alongside 'business as usual' and the additional pressures arising from the pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic there have been pressures experienced in residential care homes for older adults and in the care at home service. There have been challenges in recruitment on an ongoing basis, particularly in care at home, but across most social work and care services over the period of the pandemic. These issues aren't unique to Renfrewshire and are being experienced across the Country in other local areas and in the independent sector.

“The reward of gratitude is a star in dark skies.  
You cannot always help but trying is the crux.  
I well remember that old alky Bill  
Who shared his hovel of a house with others;  
They held him prisoner among the litter  
Of needles and syringes and empty bottles  
Waiting to be smashed on social workers.  
Another place for Bill? - possible,  
But he's a bloody mess from fights at the moment.  
We don't give up, that nothing is easy  
Makes it even better not to give up.  
Everyone alive is subject to change.  
Hope lies where you least expect it.”

From Brothers and Keepers by Edwin Morgan