



Agenda Item 8

Progress on Scrutiny Panel Recommendations for Looked After Children

Falkirk Council

Title: Progress on Scrutiny Panel Recommendations for Looked After Children
Meeting: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 6 June 2019
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a summary overview of the work resulting from the recommendations of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Panel which concluded in November 2016.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the progress made across all of the Scrutiny Panel recommendations (Appendix 1).**

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2016, a Scrutiny Panel was established to consider the outcomes for Looked After children. The process comprised of a series of meetings, visits and presentations including discussions with advocates and Looked After children and young people. The meetings and presentations were designed to give Members a complete picture of what services are delivered to Looked After children, how services could be improved, and to listen to the views of young people regarding what was important to them.
- 3.2 The scope of the Scrutiny Panel was appropriately varied, considering numerous elements that impact on the outcomes for care experienced children and young people. The process followed guidelines and allowed all Members to participate in the work of the Panel, hear evidence and arrive at conclusions. The Panel's conclusions were grouped under 4 headings:-
- Earlier Intervention;
 - Balance of Care;
 - Corporate Parenting; and
 - Transitions and Aftercare.
- 3.3 Under each of the headings, there were a number of recommendations including specific recommendations for Children's Services and the Children's Commission.

- 3.4 The meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 17 November 2016 approved the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel and referred them to the Executive for approval.

4. Considerations

- 4.1 The conclusions and recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel were included within an overarching plan of work resulting from the Joint Inspection in 2016 and the Strategic Service Review of Children & Families Social Work. Themes from all 3 scrutiny processes were consistent and facilitated opportunities to drive transformational change and service re-design in the endeavour to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people (including those on the edges of care). The work plan largely sits within the 5 year Closer To Home Strategy which evolved from the Strategic Service Review.

Strategic Service Review of Children & Families Social Work

- 4.2 A Children & Families Strategic Service Review Group was established in 2016 to consider all the factors which relate to a legacy and increasing overspend position. The Strategic Service Review Group met regularly for almost a year. It was chaired by the Head of Planning & Resources, Children's Services. The Director of Development Services attended meetings as a critical friend and there were representatives from Finance and other Service areas. As one of 3 Strategic Review Groups across the Council at that time, a significant focus of the activity was to determine financial savings in the future.
- 4.3 The most valuable outcome of the Strategic Service Review process is the clear and compelling evidence that the current position cannot continue. We know from 2 extensive reviews of every Looked After Away From Home child that very few children/young people could be returned home from residential care; the vast majority are in established, permanent, alternative care settings. Disrupting settled care provision does not support better outcomes for young people. The focus of future activity is to establish a shift towards prevention and community-based supports and resources. The context and the need for change has been strongly proven and a 5 year Strategy has been developed to organise the activities required to improve outcomes and ensure services are sustainable in the future.

Closer To Home Strategy

- 4.4 The key principle of the Closer To Home Strategy (Appendix 2) is that children and young people, wherever possible, should be brought up within the environment of their own family. Where parents are unable to provide direct care, every effort should be made to maintain the child or young person within the family network. When it is assessed as necessary to provide alternative care, this should be provided locally, as close to home as possible.

- 4.5 The overarching aim of this 5-year Strategy is to reduce reliance on external foster and residential care, thus improving outcomes for Looked After children and young people. Closer To Home puts the strengths and capacities of children, parents and families at the centre of Children's Services. It concentrates on the need to work closely with public, private and third sector partners to focus services towards prevention. It is our intention to ensure targeted, family-based interventions; seek to safely sustain children at home or in kinship care. We must develop impactful, outcome focussed support right across the lifespan, from pre-birth to age 26.
- 4.6 The Strategy is owned by Children's Services as a whole system and has been shared across other Service areas and partners. The aims of the Strategy are easy to understand and to articulate. The Children & Families workforce is fully engaged and eager to make the changes needed. Over the last 18 months, Social Work teams have numerous examples of putting the family focussed core elements of the Strategy into practice.
- 4.7 The Strategy is underpinned by a detailed action plan and project management schedule (Gantt chart). There are a range of projects which relate directly to internal/external pressures and drivers. Governance of the strategic projects is managed via the Children's Services Change Board, the Council of the Future Board and the Closer To Home Strategic Oversight Group. Other areas of work relating to the Scrutiny Panel report to the Children's Commission Leadership Group.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Panel process included a series of meetings, visits and presentations including discussions with advocates of Looked After children and young people themselves. There was wide consultation of the Closer To Home Strategy.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 The main pressure areas relate to the purchasing of fostering and residential placements from external providers; spend on residential schools has decreased but this has shifted costs to other provision.
- 6.2 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 has brought new duties and increased existing legislation and guidance in relation to GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) and Corporate Parenting; widening responsibilities across all Community Planning partners.
- 6.3 For Children & Families Social Work staff, this means extended responsibilities in relation to:-

- Kinship Care;
- Continuing Care (up to age 21);
- Aftercare (up to age 26); and
- Corporate Parenting.

6.4 Scottish Government has included additional funding for some of these responsibilities, but the actual costs incurred are much higher than the Government's contribution. Given Falkirk has a legacy position of high numbers of children/young people accommodated in external provision, the financial impact of continuing care and aftercare is considerable. As young people remain in placement for longer, local provision is less available. The current overspend in Children & Families Social Work matches the spend on continuing care. Plans are in place to reduce the overspend and deliver significant future savings via Closer To Home.

Resources

6.5 In order to safely support changes in practice and ensure that alternatives to expensive external foster and residential care are available, additional resources are required. Closer To Home is an established Council of the Future project and is managed through the Council of the Future governance framework. A successful funding bid to the Council of the Future Change Fund supported a range of preventative spend actions to ensure children, in the future, are kept closer to home. The costs of these activities have been factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan and will continue to be tracked as part of the Council of the Future governance arrangements.

6.6 We aim to reduce the projected overspend and also generate savings as the costs of these Closer To Home initiatives replace the more expensive cost of children in external placements. This will be achieved through:-

- commissioning family support within the third sector based on gaps identified within current provision;
- procuring support for supported accommodation resources in 2 Falkirk locations; these are appropriate alternatives to continuing care;
- ensuring a preventative spend budget is in place to resource creative solutions which contribute towards early intervention; and
- procuring a specialist resource to redesign the marketing of foster care recruitment using digital approaches.

Legal

6.7 There are no resulting legal implications from this report. Statutory duties are undertaken as appropriate.

Risk

6.8 Risk management strategies are in place as appropriate.

Equalities

6.9 No EPIA has been completed.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.10 Not applicable.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Significant progress has been made on the Scrutiny Panel recommendations and these are intended to improve outcomes for Looked After children and young people. Changes to practice and processes are pivotal to the success of Closer To Home. Progress relating to transformational change is monitored via appropriate governance frameworks around Council of the Future.

Director of Children's Services

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Progress on Scrutiny Panel Recommendations for Looked After Children

Appendix 2: Closer To Home Strategy

List of Background Papers

- (1) Scrutiny Committee 17 November 2016: Scrutiny Panel Conclusions and Recommendations – Outcomes for Looked After Children
<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=12937>
- (2) Executive 21 March 2017: Development of a Family Firm Approach
<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=13393>
- (3) Executive 13 March 2018: Provision of Housing and Support for Care Leavers
<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=14434>

- (4) Education Executive 26 March 2019: Foster Carer Recruitment
<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=15784>

PROGRESS ON SCRUTINY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

9 MAY 2019

RECOMMENDATION – EARLY INTERVENTION

10.3 Relationships between young people and those involved in their care are key to developing positive outcomes. The principles of Relationship Based Practice therefore need to be developed and embedded by all relevant professionals.

Update:

Relationship Based Practice (RBP) is a fundamental element of the Closer To Home Strategy. In March, the Children & Families Social Work conference focussed on the importance of relationships. Principles of RBP are understood and being embedded in Health, Education and other Services.

10.4 The named persons in all services are appropriately trained and supported to recognise the specific needs of Looked After children and young people in order to lift their aspirations and improve outcomes, especially in education.

Update:

Named persons have received a programme of training. Given the turnover in staffing annually, this requires to be regularly revisited.

Promoting health outcomes for all Looked After children remains a priority for NHS FV.

All staff undertaking health needs assessments have appropriate training and support to recognise the specific needs of Looked After children and young people. This includes the specialist nurse for Looked After children, health visitors, school nurses and paediatricians.

The specialist nurse for Looked After children contributes to the academic training of school nurses, which supports the ongoing transition of school nursing in line with the Scottish Government Refocused School Nurse Programme. In NHS FV, newly trained Public Health School Nurses are assuming responsibility for the health needs for school aged children and young people, who are Looked After At Home and in kinship care.

Health plans are generated for all Looked After children and shared with lead professional.

10.5 Mental health services are aligned to meeting the needs of Looked After children and that these are provided appropriately.

Update:

In Falkirk, the mental health needs of Looked After children are met via universal and targeted services. Our Named Person service ensures any concerns for wellbeing can be addressed early on, and that assessment of needs is carried out with a family to develop a child's plan when required.

Our Health Visiting Pathway ensures any additional needs or concerns are identified quickly. The routine assessments identify early concerns regarding behaviour and parents are offered places on the NHS evidence based Psychology of Parenting Project (PoPP). PoPP is recognised in Scotland's Mental Health Strategy as an early intervention for mental health concerns in infants. Parenting support for those on the edges of care is currently being tested as part of the Falkirk MHWB Delivery Plan.

Falkirk Community Planning Partnership is committed to Falkirk becoming a trauma informed area and plans to train all staff across the lifespan are being developed via the SOLD Falkirk MHWB Group. We have developed a trauma service for children and families in response to identified needs. This is delivered by Aberlour. Schools deliver Personal and Social Health Education (PSHE) from 3-18 years. The PSHE Curriculum delivers on the Curriculum for Excellence Experience and Outcomes that every child should have in relation to their mental health and emotional wellbeing. In addition to core education and curriculum, national attainment monies and Pupil Equity Funding are being targeted to support many of our Looked After young people, or those on the edges of care to improve their mental health and general wellbeing.

Where universal supports are not able to meet these needs, young people have access to specialist support via NHS Forth Valley CAMHS and our Looked After Children's Psychologist, jointly funded by NHS and Falkirk Council. CAMHS offer consultation time to Social Workers to discuss concerns, child's plans and also attend TAC meetings where appropriate. Transitions work between adult and children's services is being developed with a particular focus on mental health and substance use.

Mental Health and Wellbeing continues to be a priority in our Service Plan and Integrated Children's Services Plan (CPP). We are continuing to make best use of the data we have to co-ordinate services and configure them to meet identified needs. The aim of the Falkirk MHWB Group (SOLD) is to develop framework for mental health from universal to targeted needs, that meets the needs of all young people and families, including our Looked After children.

10.6 Attainment is a priority, particularly for Looked After children including those Looked After At Home through promoting attendance and engagement in learning. To achieve this:-

- **a practice model is developed to assess the improvement in learning that has been achieved during the period of being Looked After;**
- **an educationally rich care environment is put in place for all children Looked After Away From Home.**

Update:

Schools are regularly made aware of the importance of supporting Care Experienced children and young people to attend schools and the positive impact this has on attainment. Schools track and monitor this closely. A regularly review school level data is now embedded as a specific aspect of all improvement visits to schools.

Foster care and residential settings are aware of the importance of supporting children and young people in their learning. Services and foster care houses have internet access which can be utilised for homework. Tutors are organised if required.

In 2018 the Scottish Government announced 3 year funding to support attainment and learning for Looked After children and young people, up to the age of 26. This funding is to be allocated by the Chief Social Work Officer in conjunction with consultation with the Champion's Board. The funding is being utilised, with consent from the Champion's Board, in a variety of ways and is in addition to Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Several temporary posts have been created to locate Social Workers within schools; they will provide support for Looked After children at home and in school, this is intended to increase attendance and improve educational outcomes. Funding is being used to bring a mentoring project to Falkirk; this has been a successful approach elsewhere in the country. This is to raise the aspirations of Looked After children and contributes to our Family Firm goals.

RECOMMENDATION – BALANCE OF CARE

10.8 Undertake a review of Falkirk Council foster carer provision with a view to increasing the number of care placements available. This review would include the following:-

- **Consideration of the outcome from work streams from the National Review of Foster Care, which are expected to report in the near future.**
- **Review fees and allowances for foster carers, noting that the outcome of the National Review of Allowances may impact on this.**
- **How to use creative and innovative ways to engage with prospective foster carers**
- **Support for foster carers.**

Update:

- The National Review of Foster Care Allowances has not reported to date.
- The Education Executive agreed proposals to increase foster carer fees (26 March 2019).
- Although retention of carers is strong and the Council consistently recruits a minimum of 5 new carers each year, our carer population is ageing and current recruitment rates only maintain a standstill position of around 60 households. The Council is not managing to attract sufficient new enquiries, and many local residents are attracted to voluntary and independent providers who provide more dynamic advertising and quicker responses to enquiries.

To meet demand for placements and the goals of the Closer To Home Strategy, the Council requires to attract a minimum of 30 additional foster carers over the next 5 years. To achieve this, a dedicated and competitive recruitment focus and marketing strategy has been developed.

Along with Procurement colleagues, a quick quote tender process was progressed to recruit a marketing firm to take this forward, maximising use of social media and ring-fenced recruitment capacity. It is a key component of Closer To Home to ensure services are sustainable in future. Part of this work includes ensuring that the Fostering team develops the marketing skills to continue this work beyond the contract period, supported by an additional 0.5 FTE recruitment support post at a cost of £26,000 per annum.

The Council of the Future Change Fund supported this work with an investment of £50,000.

- Support for foster carers is critical; not only does it support the carer in their challenging role, but it supports the child in placement, reducing risk of breakdown and moves. Support is highly regarded by carers and we regularly receive good feedback about what is provided. In order to ensure support remains at a high level, additional staff are being recruited to the Fostering and Adoption team to match the new recruitment levels.

10.10 Investigate and report back to Members on the potential for spend to save proposals in regards to providing more local provision for those children currently Looked After outwith of the Falkirk Council area.

Update:

The Strategic Service Review investigated the potential for spend to save proposals in regards to providing more local provision for children Looked After outwith the Council area. An extensive review of all placements highlighted that the majority of young people in external placements were in the right place, and moving them would impact negatively on their outcomes. Rebalancing care in Falkirk is focussed on developing more Falkirk based family based opportunities, either in foster care or kinship placements. Creative self-directed support type solutions to support children to remain at home with their natural families (when safe and appropriate to do so) is now established practice.

The development of 2 locally based accommodation services is underway, which will support young people to return to Falkirk.

RECOMMENDATION – CORPORATE PARENTING

10.11 It is recommended that the proposals for the Champions Board are approved and that the Executive Group of the Community Planning Partnership agree a reporting framework for taking forward actions within individual organisations.

Update:

A reporting structure was agreed as part of the report establishing the Champions Board. The outputs of the Board will be presented to the Community Planning Partnership Executive Group, who oversee delivery on issues raised at the Board and ensure all key partners were delivering appropriately. To date, the Champion's Board has reported to the Children's Commission Leadership Group.

RECOMMENDATION – TRANSITIONS

10.13 Children's Services and Corporate & Housing Services report back to Members before the end of March 2017 on the provision of housing and support for children leaving care. This report will include how to overcome the challenges of providing accommodation, the potential for a protocol for housing options, the need to continue support and how this is provide, the role and remit of the leaving care service and how we provide support to older young people in line with our new obligations.

Update:

As requested, a report was taken to the Executive in March 2017, followed by a follow-up report on 13 March 2018 which included detail re the Housing Options Protocol for care experienced young people. The Protocol supports the development of housing and support options for care leavers and ensure early identification and interventions where there are difficulties. The Protocol provides guidance on Falkirk Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility for Falkirk's care leavers, and outlines the strategic and operational arrangements between Services. It is underpinned by the principles of Corporate Parenting and was informed and agreed by the Champions Board.

Two supported accommodation services for care experienced young people are in development and will be operational later this year:-

- a 3 bedded, first stage interdependence resource, providing a high level of support as an alternative for young people who might otherwise opt for Continuing Care;
- an 8 bedded, second stage resource, providing single accommodation with less intensive levels of support for young people who are closer to managing independent living.

10.14 A proposal for a “family firm” is brought forward by the end of March 2017 for the Council in the first instance, but with a view to extending this to other public sector agencies if appropriate. This proposal will be presented by the Children’s Commission.

Update:

A report was taken to the Executive in March 2017 to update Members on developments of a “Family Firm” approach within the Council and with partners, to support and encourage young people who are, or have been, Looked After, into employment. Members agreed to an approach rather than a set pathway, and agreed a “map” of what this should include – a menu of work opportunities and experiences alongside supported employability opportunities and priority for certain roles. Recent developments are allowing active progress, making the approach a reality:

- MCR pathways, which provides dedicated mentoring and support to Looked After children from S1, is being planned to start in Falkirk in August 2019. This will be the foundation of support related to being “work ready” for our Looked After children and young people.
- Funding recently awarded from the Life Changes Trust over 3 years will support the addition of a Family Firm Co-ordinator and care experienced trainee. These posts will focus on developing opportunities in the Council and with partners for our young people across the Council, and will work closely with MCR pathways.
- Foundation apprenticeships are being rolled out across Falkirk Council schools in partnership with SDS and Forth Valley College. Looked After children will have priority and we are working on guaranteed modern apprenticeship progression for those completing the relevant foundation apprenticeship or equivalent.
- Care experienced young people have “guaranteed interview status” for Falkirk Council jobs.

10.15 A scoping exercise is undertaken and the results reported to the Children’s Commission Leadership Group to identify the issue and challenges in relation to the level and range of support available to young people who have left care and are at risk of entering the Criminal Justice system.

Update:

An initial scoping exercise was undertaken and a test of change was trialled where a Criminal Justice post was located within the Leaving Care team on a temporary basis. This provided opportunities for learning and further data analysis is being undertaken, taking account of the increasing frequency of young people being referred to SCRA from Court. Funding to support an approach over the next 2 years has been identified; data and learning from the test of change will determine how to locate this resource to have greatest impact on care leavers.



Closer To Home - better outcomes, sustainable services

APPENDIX 2

make it happen

Falkirk Council

Our Ambitions

- 1.Safely reduce the number of children looked after away from home
- 2.All our children, including the most vulnerable, will achieve in learning, life and work
- 3.Families will be central to decision making and planning for their children

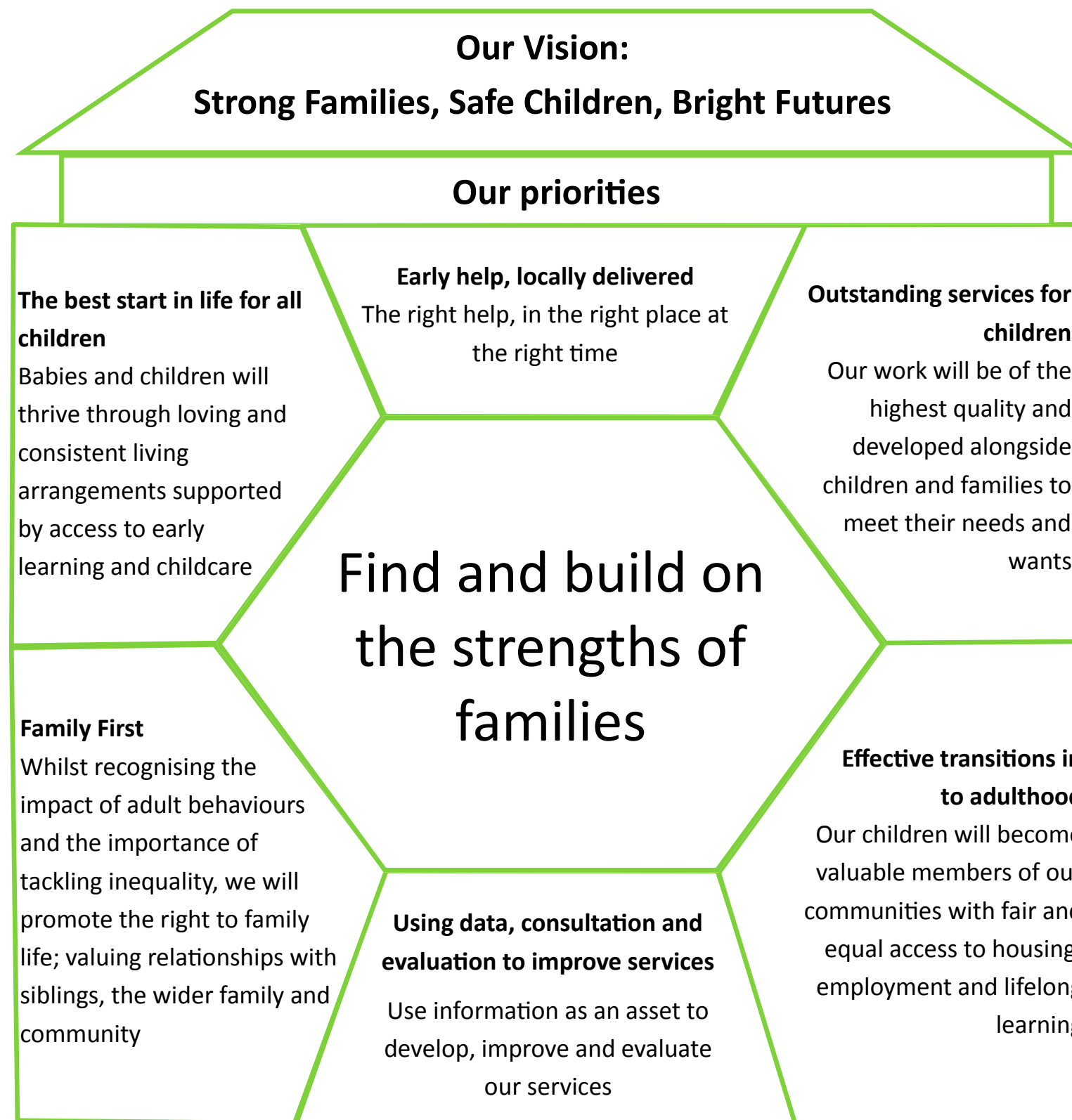
Our Approach

- 1.Support families to care safely for their children at home or within the wider family network
- 2.Identify risk and provide support as early as possible to minimise any child's exposure to harm
- 3.Identify local care placements where children can't remain safely within their own family
- 4.Support children, young people and families for as long as needed
- 5.Search for and build on the strengths of families and allow them to flourish
- 6.Children attend local schools
- 7.Provide our workforce with the time and tools to make and sustain trusted relationships with families
- 8.Nurture children's development with increased early learning and childcare provision
- 9.Work in a timely, innovative and solution focused manner to prevent relationship breakdown within families
- 10.Our vision, strategy and plans will be consistent with our partners and the wider council
- 11.Target services to reduce attainment gaps and enable our children and young people to realise their potential through and beyond school
- 12.Know what we have done and how it has made a difference
- 13.Our children will be included and engaged in all aspects of life and their wider community

Falkirk Council Children's Services:

A 5 year strategy to deliver better outcomes for children and young people who are on the edges of care or care experienced

PHASE 1 - 'Moving Closer to Home'



GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD (GIRFEC)

Phase 1 - Closer to Home Projects

Family Support Services

- Falkirk will have less than 10% of looked after children in residential placements

Foster Carer Recruitment

- We will recruit an additional 30 foster carers over the next 5 years

Supported Accommodation Options for Care Leavers

- Care leavers will have more housing and support options enabling good transitions to adulthood

Procuring for the Future

- Targeted services will be developed and commissioned to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people

Family First Approach

- By offering financial support, the Council aims to empower families to make the right choices

Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE)

- Permanent placements will be found for children who need them

Best Practice in Child Protection Systems

- Best practice in child protection and risk management arrangements

Children's Services Related Projects

Inclusion Review

- Working with families and partners to meet the changing needs of children and young people in Falkirk schools.

Early Learning and Childcare Expansion

- Opportunities provided by early learning and childcare expansion will be fully maximised to engage with families of very young children

Social Work Information System (SWIS) Replacement

- The replacement Social Work Information System will free staff to spend more of their time with families
- Use local and national data to evidence interventions, improve our services and engage with our communities
- Understand the experiences of service users and actively consult with them to develop and improve