



Child Protection Committee

Annual Report 2024-25

(Covering period 01.8.2024 – 31.07.2025)

Priorities 2025-26

(Covering period 01.08.2025 – 31.07.2026)

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Executive Summary

The Child Protection Committee (CPC) is a multi-agency partnership dedicated to protecting South Ayrshires children and young people from abuse and neglect.

In 2024–25, the CPC continued to strengthen governance, improve practice, and enhance visibility and engagement with communities and professionals across South Ayrshire. The work of the CPC is guided by clear vision, mission, values and aims centred on collaboration, child-centred practice, and continuous improvement.

The CPC operates under the oversight of the Public Protection Chief Officers Group (COG) and contributes to the wider Children's Services Planning Partnership. Strong relationships with NHS Ayrshire & Arran, Police Scotland, Education, Social Work, and third-sector partners underpin its work.

The year saw a review and refresh of Ayrshire Child Protection Procedures, the continued strengthening of Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) processes, pre-birth pathways, and responses to online harm.

The launch of the GIRFEC Webpage improved access to guidance and supported the "Team with the Family" approach. Language changes in child protection practice were implemented to align with The Promise and to reduce stigma, for example "Child Protection Assessment" now replaces "Child Protection Investigation".

De-registration Guidance was introduced to ensure consistent post Child Protection Register support. A 'Multi-Agency Escalation Policy' established a clear route for resolving professional disagreements.

A 'Complex Case Oversight Model' is being developed to improve multi-agency scrutiny and planning for long-term or recurring cases.

National frameworks, including those on Child Criminal Exploitation and Care and Risk Management (CARM), were adopted to strengthen responses to high-risk behaviours.

Practice Improvements saw additional Police staff recruited to Child Protection, Education participation in IRDs, and Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) practice continued to evolve, with disclosures increasing to 88%.

The CPC undertook thematic reflective reviews, implemented new pan-Ayrshire Learning Review Guidance, and progressed improvement actions relating to pre-birth processes, multi-agency integration, record-keeping, and safer sleep guidance.

Audit activity included IRD audits, Child Protection Referral audits, contextual safeguarding analysis, and AYRshare usage reviews.

Findings confirmed generally strong decision-making and there were no cases where children were left at significant risk. Areas for improved information sharing, summarisation, and consistency were also identified.

Training delivery and workforce development expanded significantly, supported by a comprehensive needs analysis. Accreditation was extended to Level 2 Child Protection and Working with Neglect, complementing existing accredited Child Sexual Exploitation training. Over 100 multi-agency practitioners attended face-to-face training, with high satisfaction ratings. NHS Level 3 training reached 410 staff, and e-learning compliance remained strong. New bespoke programmes were also developed.

Progress continued on enhancing child protection visibility through updated website content, animations, child-friendly materials, and community engagement events. Flyers, posters and QR-coded resources were widely distributed, though social media expansion remains work in progress.

CPC priorities for 2025–26 include strengthening branding and child-friendly communication, developing a comprehensive communications plan and migrating online guidance to the Right Decision Service, implementing an Ayrshire approach to child sexual and criminal exploitation, enhancing use of AYRshare and continuing multi-agency audits.

The CPC will also create a refreshed Improvement Plan incorporating learning from recent reviews. It will support the implementation of the South Ayrshire Missing Person Protocol and the Child Poverty Plan, and welcomes developing an experience-based Child Protection Training Pathway to transform workforce learning.

From the statistics produced in the report we can highlight Strong performance in practice timescales and threshold applications.

Child poverty remains slightly higher than national averages, with substantial locality variation. Registrations are rising, notably within pre-birth, but long-term system stability is improving. Older children are under-represented on the Child Protection Register (CPR) relative to investigative activity. Looked after Children rates have decreased faster than national comparators. Re-registration rates are extremely low, suggesting durable improvements in Safe & Together and Signs of Safety practices.

- Absolute child poverty: **10.8%** (national: 10.4%).
- Relative child poverty: **13.5%** (national: 12.9%).
- Locality variation: **Highest in Ayr North** (absolute 16.4%, relative 21.8%).
- Children on the CPR: 42 children from 22 families. This shows an **annual rise** from 25 children from 12 families.
- There were **68 New registrations**, comprising of 20 pre-birth, 21 aged 0–4, 20 aged 5–11, 7 aged 11+.

- Only **1 child** was re-registered after 12 months, there were 4 re-registrations however all were families moving into South Ayrshire.
- **No children** were on the CPR for more than 2 months, and these figures reflects improved effectiveness of interventions and Signs of Safety practice.
- There was a **92%** Conversion from Child Protection planning meetings (CPPM) to registration indicating an appropriate use of thresholds.
- Domestic abuse remains the most common vulnerability factors at registration with **18.7%** of cases (up from 17.7%). The number of child concerns recorded rose dramatically - **+190%** (from 70 to 203 year-on-year).
- Compliance With National CP Timescales remains high, with occasional delays for information quality, not performance failure. Initial CPPMs: consistently above 80% median. Pre-birth CPPMs, Core Groups and First Reviews improved to **100% compliance**.
- Despite increases in SCRA referrals the numbers remain **below annual averages**, reflecting long-term decline linked to early intervention work.
- Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRD) **activities are rising** once again.
- This year also saw the **highest recorded Police CP concerns**.
- Per 1000 population, South Ayrshire had a reduction in 0–17-year-olds, from 2018 (**17.9%**) to 10.3% last year.
- **20%** of our Looked After Children are looked after at home, with clear movement towards increased local authority fostering, reduced private agency use, stable residential and secure placements, and strong kinship care.

South Ayrshire CPC

Background

The South Ayrshire CPC is a multi-agency partnership responsible for delivering continuous improvement in protecting children in South Ayrshire. The work includes the design, development, publication, implementation and evaluation of child protection policies and practice across the area.

As detailed at Appendix 1 of this report, the CPC comprises of membership and participation from people with skills and experience throughout a range of services, and agencies including amongst others, Children and Families Social Work, the Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS, Education, Police, Alcohol & Drug Partnership (ADP), Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), and the third / voluntary sector.

The CPC considers and evaluates information from a variety of sources including the production of a quarterly data report, the data from the Child Protection Register, SCRA, Learning Reviews, formal inspections of Children's Services, case file audits and national developments.

The CPC is committed to its responsibility to keep children in South Ayrshire safe from harm, whether abuse or neglect has or is likely to take place. It has an obligation to promote awareness of child protection to the South Ayrshire communities, and to broadcast good practice within and across agencies. Alongside this the CPC is leading on training and development, helping to make South Ayrshire the best place for children and families. It matters to us that all young people are listened to, and get the chance to grow up loved, safe and respected.

The functions of the CPC are continuous improvement, strategic planning, public information, and communication. This work is reflected in local practice and aims to meet local and national needs in keeping children safe.

The engine room to deliver these objectives are the three CPC subgroups - Management Information, Evaluation & Improvement sub-group (MIEI), Learning and Development subgroup, Communication and Engagement subgroup, with all three comprising of representatives from across South Ayrshire services including Children with lived experience, Housing, Education, Voluntary Action South Ayrshire (VASA), SCRA, Quality Assurance, Social Work, Policy Implementation, NHS, Corporate Parenting, Children & Families, Procurement, and Planning & Performance, Legal & Licensing.

We continue to focus on developing a model and process for engaging with communities and professionals across South Ayrshire by providing clear public information and engaging at community events, including information on how to report child protection concerns.

This year included:

- [Child Protection Assessment - for children and young people](#)
- [Child Protection Assessment - for parents and carers](#)
- [Child Protection Registration - for children and young people](#)
- [Child Protection Registration - for parents and carers](#)

Work also involves updating the Child Protection Website in consultation with our partner agencies. You can visit the website at:

- <https://hscp.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/ProtectingYoungPeople>

Vision, Mission, Values and Aims

The following vision, mission, values and aims, guide the work of the CPC and have been designed to have a positive impact on the quality of child protection work, the outcomes delivered for children and their families and provide an effective framework for service delivery.

Vision Statement

The South Ayrshire CPC is committed to working together to protect South Ayrshire's children from abuse and neglect.

Mission Statement

It is everyone's job to make sure that children in South Ayrshire are safe from abuse and neglect.

We will strive to ensure that the protection of children is a responsibility that is shared by all our staff and with the community.

Values

- Respect
- Equity
- Child-centred
- Collaboration

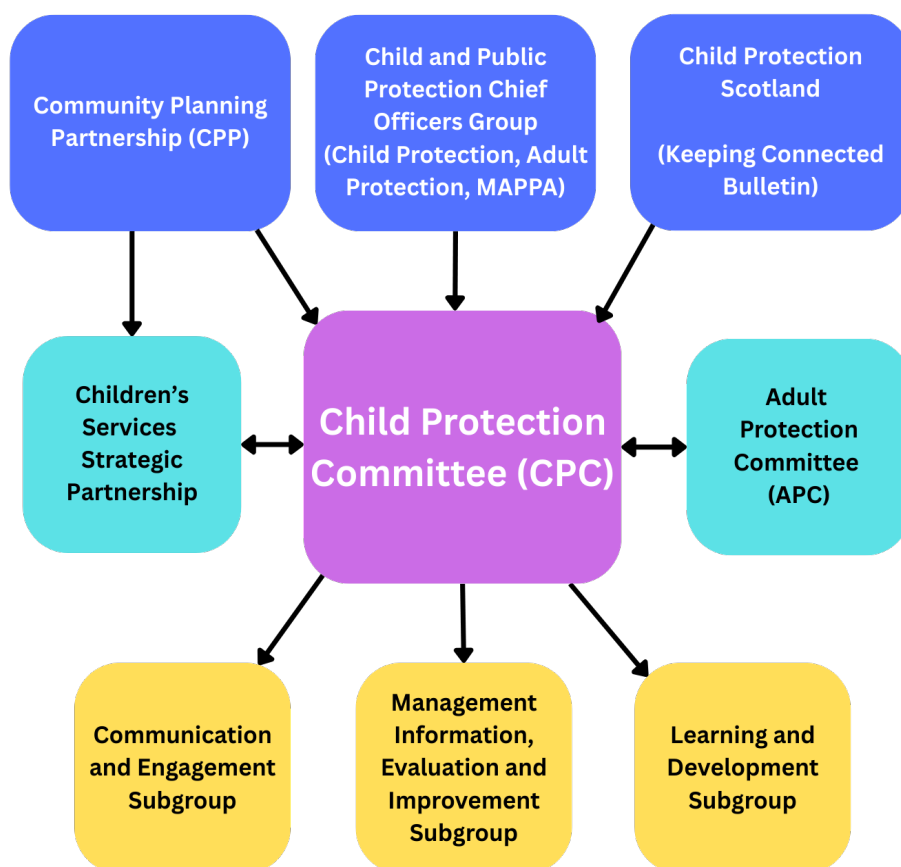
Aims of South Ayrshire CPC

The aims of the CPC are to ensure:

- Children are protected by timely and effective action.
- Children are listened to and respected.
- Children understand what to do if they are concerned about their own or others safety and protection from abuse and neglect.
- Our staff are confident and competent in protecting children from abuse and neglect.
- Agencies, individually and collectively, demonstrate leadership and accountability for their work and its effectiveness in keeping children safe from abuse and neglect.
- The public understand what to do if they are concerned about the safety and protection of children from abuse and neglect.
- Collaboratively we ensure continuous improvement by evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of our services.
- We provide an integrated approach to identifying, intervening, and providing ongoing support to protect children at risk of harm from abuse and neglect.

Leadership, Governance and Accountability

Local Governance Arrangements



In principle, the CPC is viewed as a subgroup of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) under the directive of the Child Services Planning Partnership (CSPP), which has overall responsibility for producing the integrated Children & Young Peoples Services Plan which you can access [here](#). The CPC reports annually to the CSPP and influences this report.

In addition, the South Ayrshire CPC works in partnership with both North and East Ayrshire's CPCs to encourage, where practicable, a comprehensive approach to policies, practice, and peer development.

Recent examples of this include revision of Child Protection Guidelines and revising the Ayrshire Learning Review Guidance.

The CPC also maintains close dialogue on a national basis with CELCIS (Centre for excellence for children's care & protection) and are active participants within the CPC (Scotland) Arena.

This year the CPC welcomed the introduction of the Scottish Government Child Protection Webpage, bringing together links to child protection publications on one national webpage to make it easier to find related documents.

The link for this collection is [Child protection guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-protection-guidance/pages/introduction.aspx)

Chief Officers Group

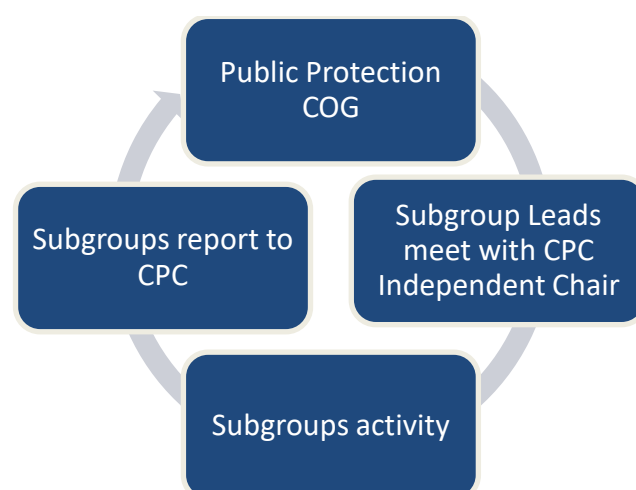
The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland requires that each CPC be governed by a Public Protection Chief Officers Group. (COG). The COG comprises the Chief Executives of South Ayrshire Council, NHS Ayrshire & Arran and the Ayrshire Commander for Police Scotland. The COG is responsible for the leadership, direction and scrutiny of South Ayrshire Public Protection Services including the CPC.

The CPC reports developments to the COG every three months and is one of several key foundations which are obligated to report. The others include:

- South Ayrshire Adult Protection Committee (APC).
- South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP).
- South of Scotland Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- South Ayrshire Suicide Prevention Oversight Group.
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

The COG drives forward an extensive work plan and routinely evaluates CPC tasks to ensure there is a clear focus on continuous improvement and accountability.

How the CPC subgroups integrate into CPC & COG reporting mechanisms are detailed below:



Child Protection Activity

National Child Protection (CP) Procedures 2023 – Revised 2025

A Pan-Ayrshire review of multi-agency child protection practitioners' procedures was carried out producing a refreshed version, aligning with national maternity pathways and child protection guidance in Scotland. Updates included the streamlined processes and integrated guidance for Interagency Referral Discussions (IRD) and pre-birth procedures, Online Harm Reference – Including online harm in some of the noted definitions. Education and Early Years should attend IRDs when appropriate, and recommendations of peer group /contextual IRDs for a more comprehensive safeguarding approach.

GIRFEC South Ayrshire Webpage Launch

We were excited to support the launch of the new webpage dedicated to Getting it Right for Every Child in South Ayrshire:

<https://hscp.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/GIRFEC>



In South Ayrshire, we are committed to offering the right help at the right time to our infants, children, young people, and families, guided by our 'Team with the Family' approach. 'Team with the Family' is the single planning process in South Ayrshire keeping the child at heart, while considering their wellbeing within the context of their whole family.

The new webpage is designed to provide you with information and guidance to support your understanding of GIRFEC and how you can apply the approach in your own role.

Our Stories

The CPC continues to develop ways to bring in the voices of children with lived experience in a way that is comfortable for them while ensuring that these inputs can provide context to the policy decisions that are made by CPC partners. We have a standing agenda item, "our stories" and encourage members to identify and contribute to the project.

This year we were again visited by Aberlour who presented a story which detailed foster carers, young peoples and families' experiences of South Ayrshire permanence processes and services.

Sam's Story - A before and after journey through child protection in South Ayrshire.

Poppy's story, which related to Lived Experience of Child Protection in South Ayrshire. This highlighted the experience of the Child Protection process that was put in place for an unborn child.

The Champions for Change, South Ayrshire's Champions Board told us how language creates realities at a meeting with Senior Leaders. They challenged the CPC and invited ideas on how the CPC could use these insights to better safeguard children.

Lucy's story which was produced for the CPC and was initially aired on World Social Workday. Several videos from staff / care / lived experienced adults & children were produced for this international event.

Due to the nature of these stories, they are stored on an internal platform. If you would like to view any of these stories, please get in touch at: cpc@south-ayrshire.gov.uk

Child Protection Language Update

The CPC was delighted to support changes to terminology within child protection practice in South Ayrshire.

National guidance and local practice developments, and discussions with lived / care experienced children have highlighted that the long-standing term "Child Protection Investigation" carries criminal and forensic connotations. These are inconsistent with a relationship based and family focused approach. As a result, the preferred terminology has shifted to "Child Protection Assessment."

Similarly, we will no longer refer to "Looked After Children" commonly referred to as "LAC" meetings, and LAC plans, replacing the terminology with the Child / young person's name, for example "Glen's meeting", "Violet's plan".

These changes improve clarity, reinforce compassionate and proportionate practice, which supports alignment with The Promise.

De-Registration Practitioner Guidance

The CPC endorsed multi-agency De-Registration Practitioner Guidance. This followed on from CPC findings from a self-evaluation exercise undertaken in January 2023, which identified the need for clearer and more consistent practice during the critical period after a child's name is removed from the Child Protection Register. (CPR)

The update reflects national expectations set out in the National Child Protection Guidance, which requires that when a child is no longer considered at risk of significant harm, their name is removed from the register at a review Child Protection

Planning Meeting (CPPM), but ongoing support must continue through the Child's Plan.

It introduces clearer standards for Recording decisions during the de-registration process, frequency of visits to children during and following de-registration, processes for de-registration when a child is subject to looked-after proceedings, support for families.

The new guidance promotes high-quality, measurable improvements in safety and wellbeing for vulnerable children and was developed collaboratively by a multi-agency review team involving Social Work, Health, Education, and strategic planning partners.

CPC Improvement Plan

The CPC Improvement Plan reflects a well-advanced programme of work, with the majority of tasks complete or on track. This annual report alludes to substantial improvements having been made in, visibility and public engagement, training and workforce development, governance, quality assurance, and data processes. All activities detailed in this report are recorded within the Improvement Plan.

Remaining work largely relates to longer-term system developments, ongoing audits, and areas requiring cross-partnership alignment or infrastructure support.

A significant proportion of actions reflect effective multi-agency collaboration and a sustained focus on strengthening child protection practice, visibility, and governance in South Ayrshire.

Our CP website is fully operational, including animations explaining reporting processes and support pathways. Flyers, posters, and QR-coded resources were produced and widely distributed across events and training environments.

Broader social media expansion (e.g. TikTok) remains limited due to current viability constraints.

A Training Needs Analysis was completed. Our Quarterly reporting aligned to national minimum dataset, shaped by CELCIS inputs.

Interagency Guidance - Age of Criminal Responsibility

The Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019 (ACRA) raises the age of criminal responsibility from 8, to 12. This reflects Scotland's commitment to a rights-based, welfare-focused approach for children involved in serious harmful behaviour.

The CPC supported and endorsed Pan-Ayrshire ACRA Interagency Guidance (2023)

The guidance outlines how agencies across Ayrshire such as Police, social work, Health, Education, and others—must work together in an integrated, trauma-informed, child-centred manner.

Its Core Principles put children first, avoiding criminal language or framing, recognising that children who cause harm may also be at risk or have been harmed.

It reinforces close interagency collaboration and ensures our responses must be compassionate, proportionate and effective, grounded in UNCRC, GIRFEC, national and Ayrshire Child Protection Guidance.

We recognise children who cause harm often have complex trauma, adversity or unmet needs, requiring coordinated support across services. The ACRA IRD is the central interagency decision-making process, adapted to the child's developmental and communication needs, underpinned by trauma-informed, rights-respecting principles and held as early as possible. It determines Immediate safety and wellbeing actions, whether an Investigative Interview is required, and supports contingencies if child protection concerns emerge. The child receives information on purpose, rights, and possible outcomes.

Complex Case Oversight Process

The CPC are developing a process to ensure effective multi-agency review and scrutiny of complex cases - including children who have been on the Child Protection Register (CPR) for more than a year.

This multi-agency model will bring a new approach to the oversight of complex cases, and the Child Protection Register in South Ayrshire. It should also allow agencies to work together to identify potential solutions to improve outcomes for children and families.

A bespoke membership oversight group would consider complex cases, the views of the child and family, undertake the role of 'critical friend' and provide advice and guidance to those managing the case.

For example, the group could have oversight of children who have been on the Child Protection Register for more than one year, children who return to the CPR within 12 months and can consider other complex cases at the request of operation managers.

The group will support those involved with the child and family to consider the support that has been provided to date and identify alternative approaches. The oversight group will also consider emerging trends in relation to children remaining on the Child Protection Register for a significant period and will make recommendations to CPC in relation to this. Work continues to establish this concept.

Multi-Agency Escalation Policy

The CPC endorsed a Multi-Agency Escalation Protocol providing for the first time a structured framework to ensure that when professionals disagree about risk, thresholds, decision-making, or required actions, the issue is resolved in a timely, proportionate, and accountable manner. It is designed to prevent unresolved disagreements from delaying or compromising the safety of a child or young person.

It reinforces that the wellbeing and safety of the child is paramount, and that professional challenge is welcomed, embraced and is an expected and essential part of effective child protection practice.

The protocol applies to all agencies involved in safeguarding children in South Ayrshire and aligns with national guidance, including the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland and the GIRFEC practice model.

Disagreements may arise around issues such as IRD outcomes, thresholds for action, medical assessments, the need to move a child to safety, the adequacy of a protection plan, or decisions regarding service continuation. Not all scenarios are listed; the protocol is intentionally flexible.

Its core principles outline child safety is paramount and must never be compromised by professional dispute. Constructive challenge is a core part of safeguarding practice and should be encouraged. Respect, openness, honesty, and collaboration underpin all escalation activity. Clarity of roles and responsibilities helps reduce disputes.

Scotland's Framework for Practice on the Criminal Exploitation of Children (2024)

The CPC welcomed this national, multi-agency approach to recognising, assessing and responding to child criminal exploitation, emphasising that exploited children must always be treated as victims of abuse rather than offenders.

It consolidates guidance, legislation and best practice into an accessible tool for practitioners, outlining key indicators of exploitation, the complexity of grooming, the need for early identification, and the importance of contextual safeguarding and GIRFEC-aligned assessment.

The framework promotes a welfare first, trauma informed, rights-based response, supported by effective information sharing, disruption of perpetrators, and strong multi-agency coordination. This is supported with practical tools such as screening checklists, self-assessment frameworks and clear pathways for intervention.

Care & Risk Management (CARM)

CARM provides a consistent, accountable framework that places the child's safety, rights and development at the centre of risk management practice across South Ayrshire.

Governance of CARM sits with the CPC, which oversees quality assurance and ensures that incidents involving further harm are reviewed for potential learning or significant case review.

The CPC reviewed this revised guidance which provided a structured, multi-agency process for assessing and managing children and young people (aged 12–17) in

South Ayrshire whose behaviour presents, or may present, a risk of serious harm to themselves or others.

Rooted in the Whole System Approach, FRAME risk practice (Framework, Risk Assessment, Management, Evaluation), Child Protection Guidance and The Promise, CARM emphasises a child-centred, rights-based and trauma-informed response. This balances risk reduction with opportunities for growth, participation and support.

CARM is initiated through a Child Protection Referral and an Initial Referral Discussion (IRD), which determines whether CARM, Child Protection procedures, or a social work-led assessment is required. Where CARM proceeds, a formal meeting is convened, bringing together the relevant agencies of social work, police, health, education, residential care, and supports for the child and family to share information, assess risk, and establish a coherent plan.

The CARM process focuses on robust risk management strategies, including monitoring, supervision, intervention, scenario and contingency planning, and victim safety planning. These strategies must be regularly reviewed by a Core CARM Group, which meets at least every four weeks, ensuring the child and their parents/carers remain fully involved.

Exit from CARM is guided by the principle of minimum intervention, with decisions informed by reductions in risk, increasing protective factors, and evidence of the child's growing capacity to manage their behaviour.

Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRDs) - Police

The Ayrshire Police Division operates an established and effective IRD process. IRDs are primarily managed by dedicated IRD staff during standard business hours (8am – 5pm).

Outside of these hours, multi-agency discussions occur immediately with Police and Social Work Out of Hours Standby to determine necessary safeguarding measures until a formal, well-attended IRD can be scheduled. This approach ensures experienced child protection professionals are involved and the child's safety is prioritised.

To meet significant and increasing demand (A 18% rise in IRDs from 2024 to 2025 across Pan-Ayrshire), Ayrshire Division has recently increased IRD staffing by adding an IRD trained Detective Constable and a research officer.

All IRD trained officers have completed the Signs of Safety training, as well as developing and participating in the IRD multi-agency training.

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) / Joint Investigative Interviews (JII)

A Joint Investigative Interview is undertaken by a police officer and social worker. It is defined as a formal, planned interview with a child, carried out by staff trained and competent to conduct it, for the purposes of obtaining the child's account of events (if any) which require investigation.

The CPC recognises that social work and police services across Ayrshire have shown significant commitment to ensuring that there is investment in the quality of interviewing and questioning of children who have been harmed or have witnessed such distress. This is a trauma informed approach to Children who have experienced (or have witnessed) suffering from someone who have harmed them.

At this time there is no fixed site for SCIM interviews, however, work is ongoing within an East Ayrshire location to develop the site that will be accessible for all Ayrshire children for this purpose.

The team delivers trauma-sensitive joint investigative interviews for children and young people in Ayrshire, using SCIM trained interviewers. They conduct routine monitoring and evaluation of the entire investigative process, including interview planning and decision-making. This ensures a balance between preparing the child, accounting for their individual needs, and capturing the best possible evidence for both child protection and justice purposes.

Over recent years, we have noticed the quality of professional practice has improved, particularly concerning the interviewing of younger children and those with additional needs. This enhancement has resulted in an increased proportion of clear disclosures during interviews, rising from 82% in 2023 to 88% in 2024. This positive trajectory is currently being sustained through 2025.

The SCIM Team are testing various methods of gathering feedback from children, young people, and their families. Based on this feedback, the practice will be continuously refined from initial contact, the notification of concern through to the Initial Referral Discussion (IRD) and interview ensuring it remains trauma-sensitive and streamlined. The SCIM team and Police IRD desk are co-located, facilitating easier decision-making and communication.

Children First assist with the capturing of the views of the child, utilising their 'changemaker' group to provide feedback of their experiences and learning that can help develop the interviewers and the interview spaces. There are three Children First staff members in Ayrshire, trained in recovery, advocacy, and trauma, who provide increased awareness of the support needs of children, young people, and their families.

Following interviews, children, young people, and their families are offered holistic, trauma-sensitive support, ensuring that their experiences within the child protection and justice processes are more rights-based and child-centred.

We currently have two new members of staff (one police officer and one social worker) currently on the JII SCIM training course and we hope to have an additional police officer commence training in 2026 to enhance resilience in future resource planning.

Child Criminal Injuries Claims

The CPC recognised the importance of ensuring that children who are victims of, or witness violent crime are supported to access the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, as required by the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland. A bespoke South Ayrshire practice note was created, developed through a multi-agency short-life working group emphasising that all practitioners involved in Child Protection must be aware of compensation entitlements and proactively consider whether any child they work with may be eligible to apply, ensuring consistent understanding and practice across the workforce.

The note also underscores the legal obligations on Local Authorities: failure to make a claim, or accepting an inadequate compensation offer on a child's behalf, could result in liability.

Overall, the report strengthens local practice by ensuring practitioners understand their responsibilities in supporting children to obtain compensation aligned to national guidance and safeguarding duties.

Inter-Agency Referral Discussions – Education

The CPC supported amendments to practice guidance outlining how Education services in South Ayrshire should participate in IRDs when a Child Protection concern arises. This formally aligns our procedures to the local and national Child Protection Guidance, as we recognise that Education and Early Learning Centres as essential IRD contributors when they hold relevant information or have raised the initial concern.

The presence of Education offers significant benefits, including bringing detailed knowledge of the child, their behaviour, and family context to support robust risk assessment. This ensures timely awareness within the school or nursery of emerging child protection concerns, supporting shared understanding of IRD outcomes, actions, and safety planning.

Overall, the guidance aims to strengthen multi-agency collaboration, improve the quality and timeliness of information sharing, and enhance outcomes and safety planning for children and young people across South Ayrshire.

Educational Safeguarding

South Ayrshire schools continue to demonstrate strong safeguarding practices with high staff confidence and positive inspection outcomes. Continuous improvement efforts focus multi-agency collaboration and embedding GIRFEC principles.

Annual compulsory safeguarding training was delivered to school staff. The annual confidence survey results improved across all areas:

- Knowledge of child protection: **82%** strongly agree (up from 79%).
- Awareness of reporting procedures: **96%** strongly agree.
- Recognition of abuse indicators: **81%** strongly agree.

His Majesty Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspections ensure high standards of education for children and young people, identifying strengths and areas for improvement in our schools. Alongside evaluative activity in assessing schools' learning, teaching, and attainment – schools are also evaluated on Safeguarding (2.1) and Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality, and Inclusion (3.1).

Inspections were conducted in 6 locations in session 2024/25, with 1 secondary school and 5 primary schools inspected. All HMIE inspection reports for South Ayrshire recorded 'no significant areas for improvement' with the Local Authority in relation to safeguarding or wellbeing.

Additionally, internal Child Protection and Safeguarding visits are led by South Ayrshire Child Protection and Wellbeing Officers for Education. Visits are conducted as per the rolling programme visit calendar, where schools receive the same support as when an HMIE inspection notification is received. 2024/25 saw 23 visits consisting of 3 Early Years Centre, 18 primary and 2 secondary schools. This was a slight increase from session 2023/24 where 21 visits were conducted.

To assist Schools / EYC prepare for inspections Education Safeguarding team piloted a Self-Evaluation Toolkit in 2024/25, which has been well received by both schools and inspectors. The findings are detailed below.

Studies have shown that school attendance levels are closely linked to wellbeing. In recognisance, efforts continued to improve school attendance, concentrating on refining methods for tracking and monitoring attendance. Effective analysing and utilising of data helped to identify early warning signs allowing for early support to be provided.

2024/25 saw primary schools reach 93.5%, an increase of 0.8% from the 2023-24 session. The attendance rate at our secondary schools increased by 1.7%, rising from 86.7% in 2023-24 to 88.3%. These improvements have brought our overall attendance rate to 90.9%, a notable milestone on our path to improvement.

Persistent Absence (PA) tracking was introduced as a new measure this session. PA is the percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of sessions. Our overall PA rate stands at 29.1%, while the national average is 29.3%. This will remain a focus moving forward.

The Education Safeguarding team undertook evaluation of local child protection processes in 2024/25. This work sought to reassess the potential discrepancy observed between a perceived high level of child protection concerns in schools, and the low rate of referrals to the Children's Reporter (SCRA) from Education. The work also reassessed education staff confidence in local child protection procedures.

A multi-agency action plan, agreed by the CPC, was created to support in addressing areas for improvement – this action plan was fully completed in session 24/25. This will be repeated in 2025/26 to ensure continuous improvement.

Priorities for 2025/26 include:

- Maintain robust safeguarding training and school visit programme.
- Continue AYRshare audits and promote best practice in medication management.
- Strengthen Prevent awareness and compliance.
- Support multi-agency training and GIRFEC initiatives.
- Expand education involvement in IRD processes.
- Roll out new training on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Positive Masculinity, and Misogyny Awareness.
- Partner with Education Scotland and Thriving Communities to extend Mentors in Violence Prevention.

NHS Ayrshire & Arran Public Protection

NHS Ayrshire & Arran's (NHSAA) continues in their commitment to protecting children, young people, and adults through a rights-based, collaborative approach aligned with the Once for Scotland Public Protection Assurance and Accountability Framework.

Key personnel are active members in the CPC. NHSAA has an Associate Director of Nursing in Public Protection. She takes the professional lead in supporting health's contribution to safeguarding and is central to clinical and care governance processes for public protection. NHSAA has an identified Lead Child Protection Paediatrician who supports clinical responsibilities around child protection. She is also a new member of the CPC.

The Public Protection Executive Governance Group (PPEGG), chaired by the Executive Nurse Director, provides strategic oversight. In its first full year we saw NHSAA achieve 78% compliance across eight national standards and 56 sub-standards.

Multi-Agency Collaboration is sustained with CPC and IRDs. 892 IRDs involving 1,697 children were recorded, reflecting improved early identification and response.

Across Ayrshire there were 150 Child Protection Medical Examinations, including assessments for non-accidental injury, neglect, and child sexual assaults, ensuring timely care.

NHSAA continue to provide an advice and support service. This year saw an increase by 36.6% (2,748 calls), indicating greater engagement. Most of the advice and support calls were related to harm. The top 3 reasons for Child Protection calls relates to non -Engagement with Services, Domestic Abuse and Neglect.

Overall NHSAA continues to strengthen governance, training, and multi-agency working, reaffirming its responsibility to protect the most vulnerable and drive continuous improvement.

Infant Mental Health - The use of Early Attachment Tools

Recognising that early caregiving experiences are critical to infant brain development, and attachment difficulties in infancy can contribute to later mental health challenges, the CPC monitored the progression and development of practice to strengthen infant mental health and early attachment assessment within Health Visiting practice. Two evidence-based tools were explored to support early identification of attachment difficulties between infants and their caregivers.

The Early Attachment Observation (EAO) Tool, developed jointly by Infant Mental Health and Health Visiting services in Leeds, designed for universal use at the 6–8-week Health Visitor contact. This provides a standardised attachment-informed assessment framework and implementation across Ayrshire is under exploration.

The Infant Mental Health Observational Indicator Set – “Red Flags” Tool was developed by NHS Lanarkshire to complement the Universal Health Visiting Pathway. It Identifies age-specific indicators of potential concern (0–18 months). Evaluation of its early impact was progressed during this year with ongoing collaboration with the NHS Ayrshire & Arran Infant Mental Health Consultant Clinical Psychologist with continued support to Health Visiting teams in identifying and responding to infant mental health needs.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse

It is worth noting in this annual report that for the first time the CPC discussed and participated in the national debate around a proposal to introduce mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse (CSA). The question had gained urgency following the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England & Wales of 2022, which recommended mandatory reporting, and subsequent UK Parliamentary proposals are progressing toward legislation.

Key issues examined include the diversity of mandatory reporting models internationally. The likelihood of a significant increase in child sexual abuse referrals and corresponding increases in workload for police, social work and therapeutic services underpinned by the need for a national training programme to support consistent practice and improve recognition of child sexual abuse.

The CPC noted that current reporting processes and vetting procedures to protect children are far better than in the past, as more information on the details were required before a more defined view could be offered. Consideration was given if we should only be reporting on CSA or if we should consider a wider view on online harm, exploitation or broadly all Child Protection concerns. Should the onus of reporting on the practitioner, service or wider organisation were also considered. More information on these developments is anticipated.

General Practitioner Guidance

The CPC recognised and supported the roll out of guidance for General Practitioners (GP) and primary care teams on their responsibilities in child protection within Scotland. This Highlighted their key role in early identification, prevention and response to concerns about harm. It reinforced that GPs and practice staff are uniquely positioned to notice early indicators of risk within families due to their ongoing relationships with children, parents and carers and are vital safeguarding partners. Our own HSCP Clinical Director is a new member of the CPC.

The briefing emphasises the importance of accessible learning resources, including the National Guidance, GP safeguarding hub, CPC Scotland publications and NHS eLearning programmes, all aimed at strengthening practitioner confidence and competence.

The overall aim is to ensure consistent, effective child protection practice across South Ayrshire by strengthening GP knowledge, accountability and multi-agency collaboration.

Learning Reviews

Protecting children and young people is the principal element of the multi-agency CPC and it is responsible for deciding whether a Learning Review is warranted and, if so, for agreeing how the review is conducted. The CPC will keep the Chief Officers Group (COG) advised of all cases referred for a potential Learning Review and will report their recommendations on these matters to the COG for consideration and ratification.

The overall purpose of a Learning Review is to bring together agencies, individuals, and families in a collective endeavour to learn from what has happened. This allows

us to improve and develop systems and practice for the future and thus better protects, children and young people.

The CPC contributed to the commissioning and creation of new Pan-Ayrshire Learning Review Guidance. The was reviewed and now incorporates the role of the Child Death Review Group (CDOP), 16 and 17year olds transitioning from child to adult, commentary on “reflective sessions” and “an alternative learning approach’. This notifies the Care Inspectorate, governance of data and a more a defined feedback process, including for the first time a “ Staff Wellbeing” referral section.

We carried out Thematic Reflective Reviews exercise of three referrals we had previously received - Children C, Child D, and Child E. These sperate review processes identified similar themes including culture, cross-service information sharing and dissent, integrated chronologies and significant life event summaries, AYRshare use and participation, processes for raising concerns, and developing a risk sensible practice.

Twelve suggested topics for improvement would then be incorporated in the CPC Improvement plan. This would provide transparency, verification, and scrutiny of activities. The CPC recognised the challenges around information sharing had been identified in previous audits and reviews and enhancing multi-agency protocols was ongoing. The importance of a multi-agency approach cannot be underestimated. To support this a Complex Case Process, Dissent Policy with Escalation and Data Protection Policies are discussed in this annual report.

The final conclusions and proposed Improvement Action plan for Child A was also reviewed by the CPC. The primary focus of this Learning Review was on pre-birth processes, inclusiveness and rational of decision-making, support for Child A from discharge but also included engagement of services with mum. Could or should support offered be better? would that have influenced a different outcome? There were 12 learning points and 6 recommendations on an improvement action plan. This action plan is being led by the lead officers for Adult Support & Protection and Child Protection with the focus in Chid Protection being: National Review of Practice, Guidance and Advice on Safer Sleeping, enhanced multi-agency integration and information sharing, training around language and record keeping, developing a multi- agency IT system, fair and equal access to services, and professional curiosity training. The progress in these areas is detailed in this report.

During this year the CPC received two other referrals for Learning Review considerations – information was gathered from across services and reflections on involvement with services were considered. Neither case proceeded to a Learning Review at this time.

Training Delivered

During the reporting period, all Child Protection learning and development opportunities were informed by a comprehensive training needs analysis and systematically promoted through the annual Public Protection training calendar. This

approach was designed to enhance accessibility to learning opportunities and support staff, practitioners, and teams in effectively planning to meet their identified learning needs. In this reporting period, we extended the availability of learning to include dedicated spaces for South Ayrshire foster carers.

Course	Number of Courses	Participants	How likely are you to recommend this event to others (Scale 1-10)
Child Protection Level 1	5	64	9.32
Child Protection Level 2	4	38	9.48
Child Sexual Exploitation	3	27	9.25
Working with Neglect	1	9	8.77

As part of our ongoing commitment to offer the highest standard of child protection learning opportunities for our staff and practitioners, and to reflect the Health and Social Care Partnerships membership status as a provider of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accredited courses, we extended our provision of accredited child protection courses this year.

Child Protection Level 2 and Working with Neglect underwent a rigorous independent assessment process to join Child Sexual Exploitation as a CPD accredited course. Several bespoke programmes were delivered to support child protection learning, these included:

- Four bespoke sessions in partnership with South Ayrshire Council Legal Services and NHS Ayrshire and Arran's Consultant Paediatricians to support the learning of our Newly Qualified Social Workers in Children and Families Services.
- A Public Protection learning programme for staff in our Children's Houses.
- A bespoke input to the Newly Qualified Social Worker Group.
- A bespoke input to the Pan-Ayrshire student group.

Moving forward and in collaboration with CELSIS, our child protection learning provision will continue to develop with work currently taking place to offer *Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour in Children and Young People* as part of our core child protection training.

Some Feedback highlighted:

- *"I found it helpful for the training being interactive and being able to use the learning to think about the case study. This helped me consolidate the learning from the day and put it into practice"* Working with Neglect (04.02.2025)
- *"Engaging and informative; excellent case study and gave me an opportunity to link in with other professionals."* Child Protection Level 2 (08.05.2025)
- *"Facilitator was really thorough in her knowledge of CSE and really up to date in current support services as well as studies and research on current statistics."*

NHS Ayrshire and Arran delivered mandatory training seeing **410** staff complete Child Protection Level 3 training.

E-learning compliance for Level 1 was above **80%** across all areas.

Pan Ayrshire UNCRC principles were integrated into service planning; Children's Rights Champions were appointed across directorates.

Advocacy and Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA) were strengthened.

CPC Priorities 2025-26

We will assess our branding by engaging with and making it more relatable to children with the production of associated advertising materials.

Work continues on an overarching communications plan, identifying a robust communications model. The creation and wider dissemination of CPC newsletters, Child-friendly literature and animations, assessing blogs/vlogs and public access to CPC training. With this in mind we hope to migrate online CP Guidelines to Right Decision Service offering a centralised, accessible, and compliant system for hosting guidance for staff and the public.

An Ayrshire response to child sexual exploitation to include child criminal exploitation is planned.

We will continue to focus on AYRshare use and its implementation. Audit programmes will continue and include a multi-agency audit focusing on Children who are or were on the Child Protection Register and assessing Children in the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference Process (MARAC) and we will continue to develop the Tracker and single point of access for all child protection policies.

The CPC will create a new Improvement plan to strengthen practice, including activities arising from the Children C, D, and E thematic review, such as updates to dissent and escalation policies.

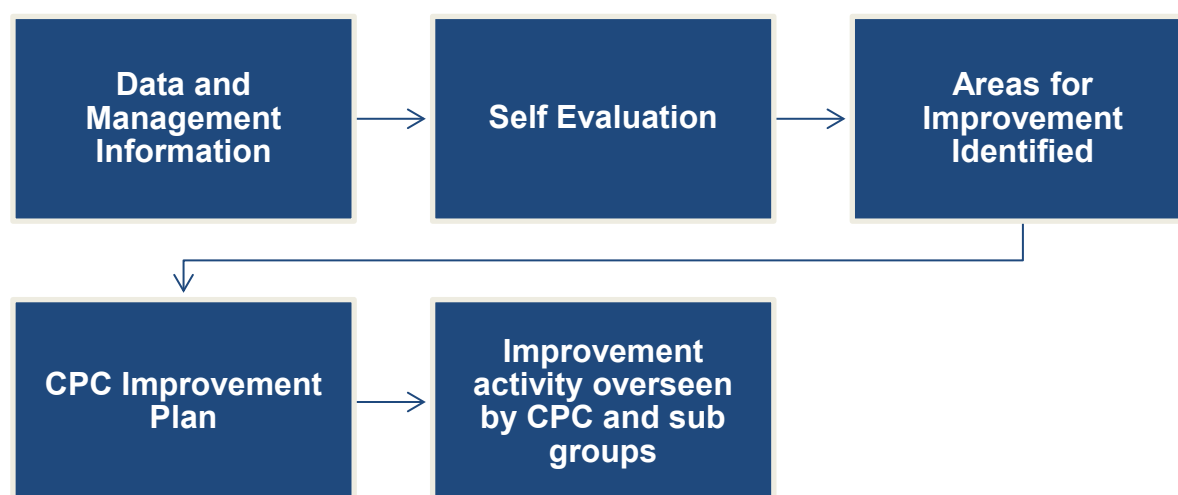
Through Police partners we receive standing updates on missing children within South Ayrshire. The CPC will support the production of the South Ayrshire Missing Person Protocol & Implementation Plan. The CPC will continue to support the South Ayrshire Child Poverty Plan.

As well as supporting and developing Ayrshire IRD training the CPC will support an innovative plan to create a Child Protection Training Pathway, developing an experiential pathway for child protection learning and development in South Ayrshire. It is an innovative transformative process to change the delivery model with an emphasis on staff self-ownership of learning.

Quality Assurance & Self Evaluation

Continuous improvement in child protection is underpinned by robust self-evaluation. It is a reflective process which enables the CPC and Community Planning Partners to understand how well they are protecting children, understand what is working well and identify areas for improvement.

CPC's quality assurance activity is underpinned by robust data collection and analysis. The process is set out below:



This year saw several audit activities.

Contextual Safeguarding Audit

The CPC commissioned an audit of contextual safeguarding referrals. **13** new referrals relating to Contextual Safeguarding or Non-familial Harm were identified with all children resided in South Ayrshire and were aged 1–15 years, with 8 females and 5 males.

Incidents reviewed predominantly involved sexual harm, with all but one referral containing a sexual element. Presenting concerns included sexual assault, inappropriate communication from adults, sexualised behaviour by peers, online exploitation, and vulnerability within peer networks. Police remained the highest source of referrals. There was no geographical pattern across referrals, and in all cases, the children were living at home at the time of concern.

Of the 13 referrals, only a small number progressed beyond initial screening. Several cases resulted in 'No Further Action' where children were adequately supported or where concerns did not meet thresholds. Others involved IRD, Joint Investigative Interview (JII), initial assessment, or allocation to social work teams. In two cases, pairs of children were exposed to the same incident simultaneously. Stranger-perpetrated harm and peer-on-peer harm emerged as the most common themes.

Compared with a previous audit, the age profile has shifted downward, from ages 12–15, to ages 11–14. While advice and guidance remain common, there has been a noticeable increase in more formal interventions such as child protection consideration, JII, and allocation. Referrals also now arise from a broader range of services.

The CPC recognised that a contextual safeguarding approach to non-familial harms should be integrated into our training and policies rather than being treated as a standalone approach. To support this, we need to raise awareness of non-familial harm and the contextual safeguarding approach across our services. Briefing sessions will be developed and delivered by the Child Protection Lead Officer. CELCIS have developed learning and development materials on harmful sexual behaviour. The Public Protection Training Officer and Child Protection Lead Officer attended the "Train the Trainers" session. This training will be adapted for a pilot program within South Ayrshire, and dates have been set for this to be co-delivered.

The CPC also noted The Child Sexual Exploitation course is part of our training calendar and incorporates the contextual safeguarding models. The Pan Ayrshire Training and Development group had drafted a Child Sexual Exploitation Guidance; however, this has been reviewed and requires further work. A Policy Audit Review Group is being established, and as policies are identified for review, the updates should ensure that they capture non-familial harm, including online harm, and support the contextual safeguarding approach.

Inter-agency Referral Discussions & Child Protection Referral Annual Audits

Like previous years The CPC continued to seek assurances around the processes and decisions around Inter Agency Referral Discussions (IRD) taking place in South Ayrshire, supporting, and encouraging IRD audit activity, and assessing Child Protection referrals that were not deemed necessary for IRD. The findings of both audits were reported on an annual format this year.

The purpose of the audit activity was to test the competence of the inquiries made into a child(ren)'s circumstances, the decision making as to the level of support required, the analysis of risk. Its purpose was to also identify any training and development issues arising across the multi-agency partnership in respect of those matters being raised and referred into social work as 'Child Protection.'

The multi-agency team auditing referrals and IRDs comprises of: service manager, Children and Families social work, Police representative, Public Protection Unit, Child Protection Advisor, Health, Child Protection Lead Officer, Child Protection Officer, Education.

The audit tool itself is based on the Care Inspectorate's scaling in offering evidence of self-evaluation and continuous improvement around how well partners are working together in assessing and responding to risk.

Following each Audit, a findings report is collated and shared across participants to give a summary of themes and support learning & development.

The Inter-agency Referral Discussions Audit examined the quality and effectiveness of multi-agency decision-making for children and young people subject to child protection concerns.

The IRD Audit Group comprised of representatives from social work, Police, Health and the Child Protection Lead Officer and met every eight weeks to review a sample of IRDs.

Findings indicate generally strong levels of confidence in decision-making: 85% of IRD decisions were judged to be correct, and no cases were found where poor practice had left a child at significant continued risk. Contributions from Education and Children and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS) were consistently highlighted as helpful, while information from Police and Health were at times overly detailed and complex with acronyms.

The audit identified recurring issues including missing key information, unclear plans for providing family feedback, and insufficient consideration of risk to other children in the household. Variability in the quality of shared analysis was also noted. 58% of IRDs were assessed as good or very good overall, with the remainder described as adequate, weak, or incomplete while there was evidence of inconsistent decision-making on medical examinations and Joint Investigative Interviews (JIIs). The report emphasises the need for improved summarisation of information, stronger multi-agency analysis, and clearer documentation of risk impact.

To address these findings, ongoing development work is underway, including the creation of a local IRD recording system, Pan-Ayrshire training for operational managers, and additional audit activity focusing on conversion rates from IRD to Child Protection Investigation.

Overall, the audit findings support confidence in the IRD process in South Ayrshire while highlighting areas for improvement, particularly in administrative completion, information quality, and risk analysis. This helps ensure that children and young people continue to receive timely and proportionate support in response to risk of harm.

The Annual Child Protection Referral Audit tested the competency of inquiries made into a child's circumstances, the decision making, analysis of risk in cases not progressing to IRD assessed 20 child protection referrals. **60%** (16) had adequate to excellent information, **55%** provided relevant information and this was an improvement on last year's findings. **60%** of respondents agreed that the outcome of a referral was appropriate.

However, the audit found **20%** (4) of the referrals should have gone to IRD, **5%** outlined a split decision with services and although there was improvement in information quality, significant gaps remained. Despite this no child had been left with significant risk.

5 actions were listed as a result of the audit and CPC agreed with the decision to widen the assessment of referrals across all teams.

AYRshare Development and Audit

AYRshare is the information sharing platform for all children's services and agencies in Ayrshire to share plans and significant events on all children/young people where there is a Team with the Family as part of the child's pathway.

It is mandatory that members of the Team with the Family share appropriate and proportionate information to protect children/young people and ensure their wellbeing needs are being met.

We received an audit of AYRshare a pan Ayrshire multi-agency information-sharing system, and its interface with our local systems.

South Ayrshire staff accessing the system increased in the last year while children's cases and chronology entries show positive growth. This was essential for identifying patterns of concern and positive changes.

There are plans to strengthen AYRshare with a focus on education capacity, reducing duplications, embedding contextual safeguarding and child protection within chronologies.

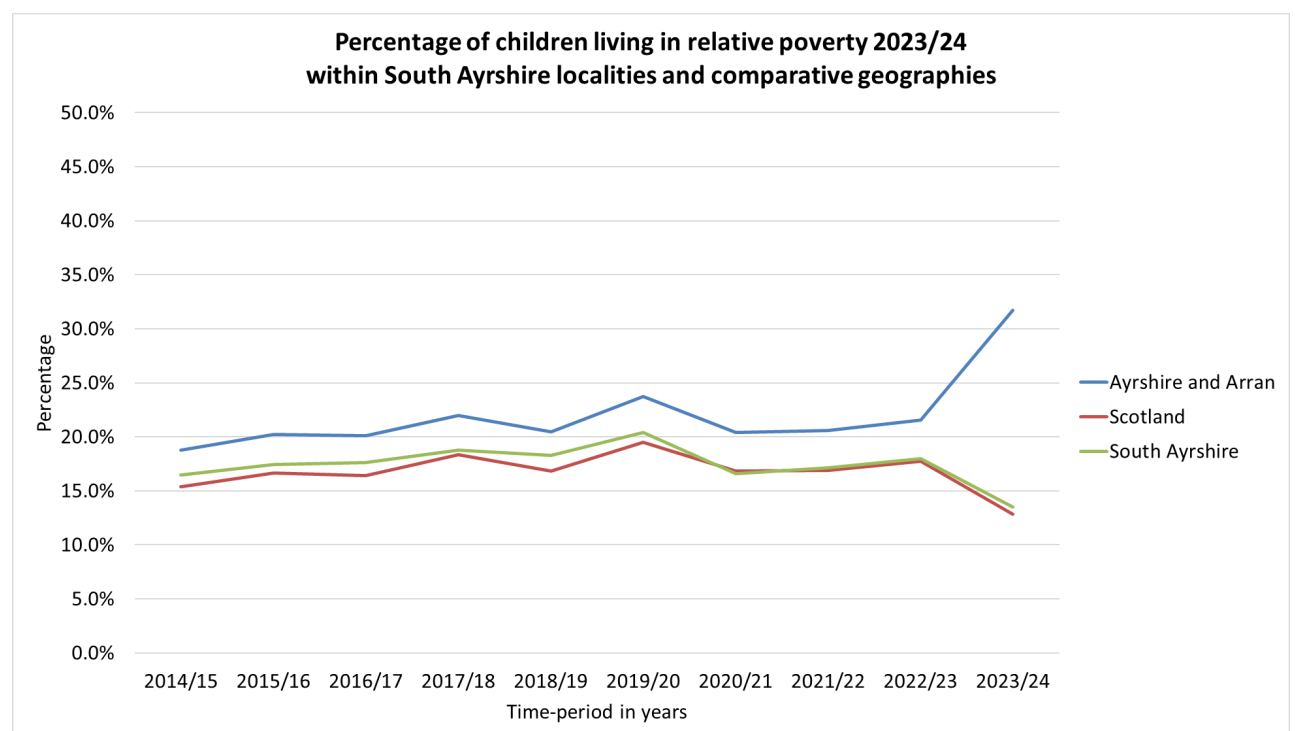
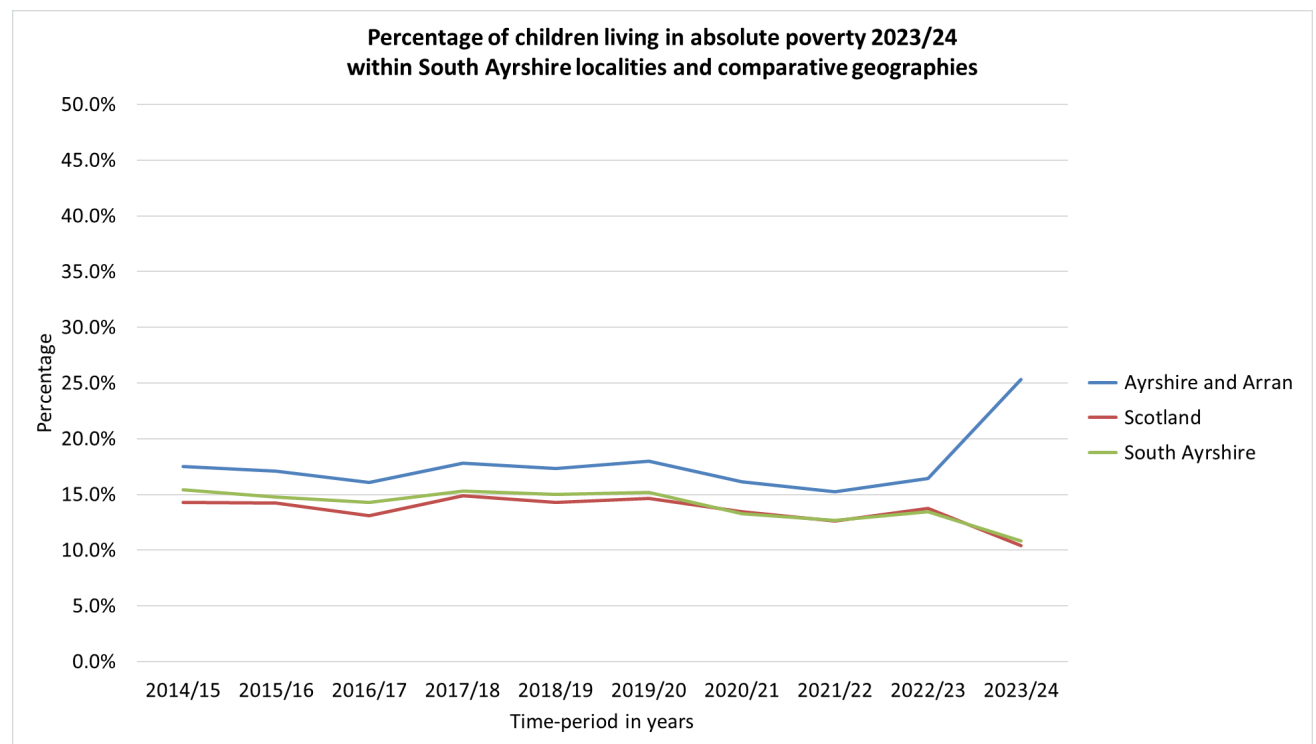
Plans to appoint AYRshare Champions in all teams for support and change management, aligning use with GIRFEC training and UNCRC principles.

Future audits and development group meetings are scheduled for 2025/26.

Child Poverty

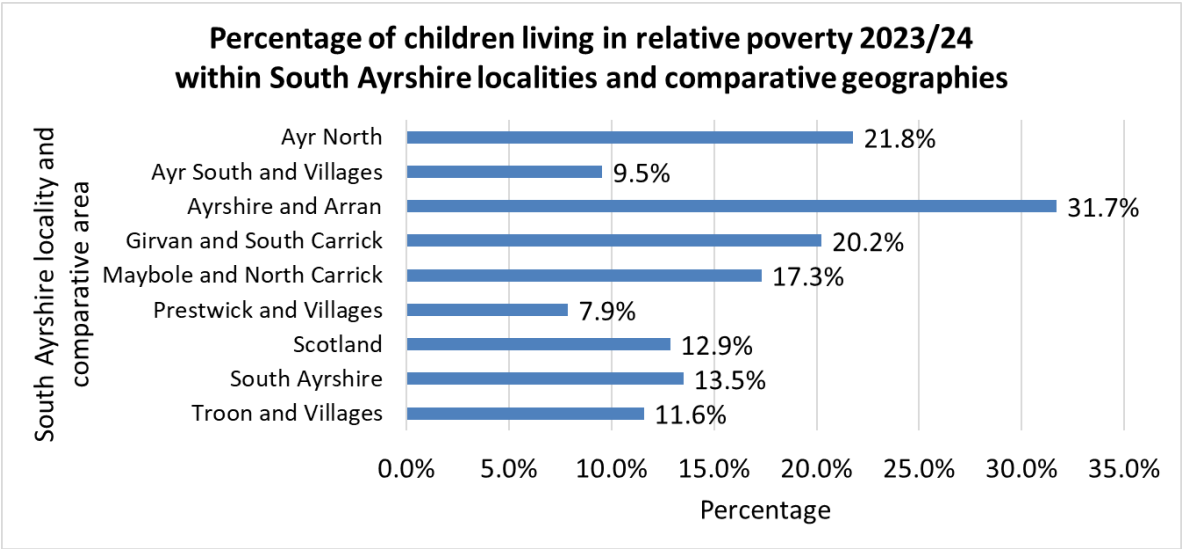
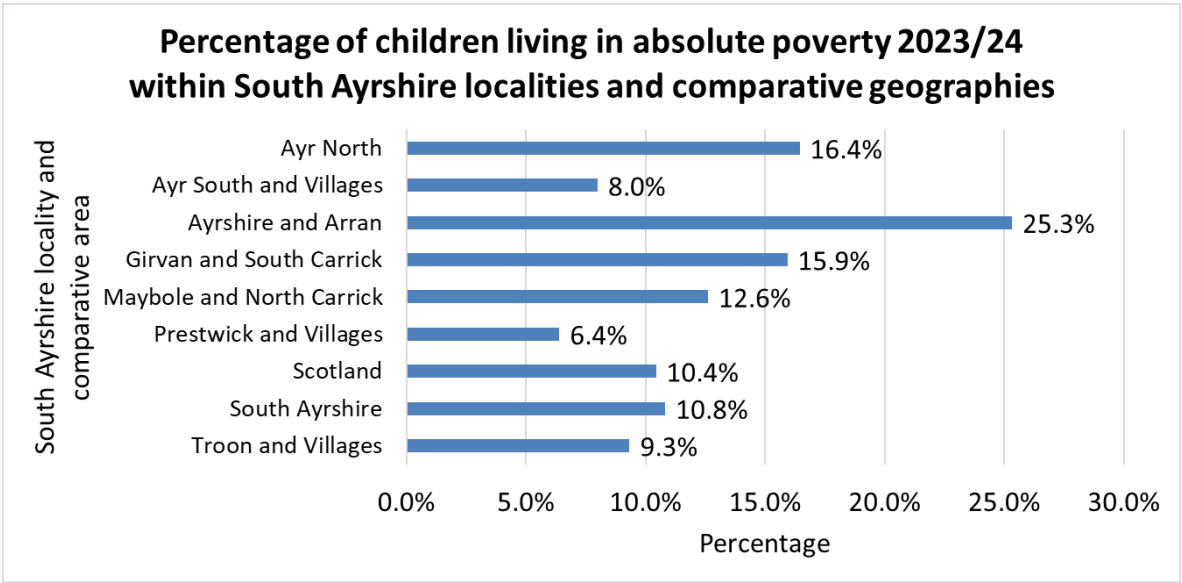
In 2023/24, data tells us that **10.8%** of children in South Ayrshire are living in absolute poverty (nationally 10.4%) with **13.5%** of children in South Ayrshire living in relative poverty (nationally 12.9%). Due to figures having been updated by the DWP

in March 2025 to take account of the Scottish Child Payment, the data is not comparable with previously produced statistics.



This data has been further broken down into South Ayrshire localities where we see that children in the Ayr North locality have the highest percentage of absolute poverty at **16.4%** and relative poverty at **21.8%**. This is followed closely by the Girvan and South Carrick and Maybole and North Carrick localities, similar to the

previous year. Data charts below show the data Nationally, within Ayrshire and Arran and locally.

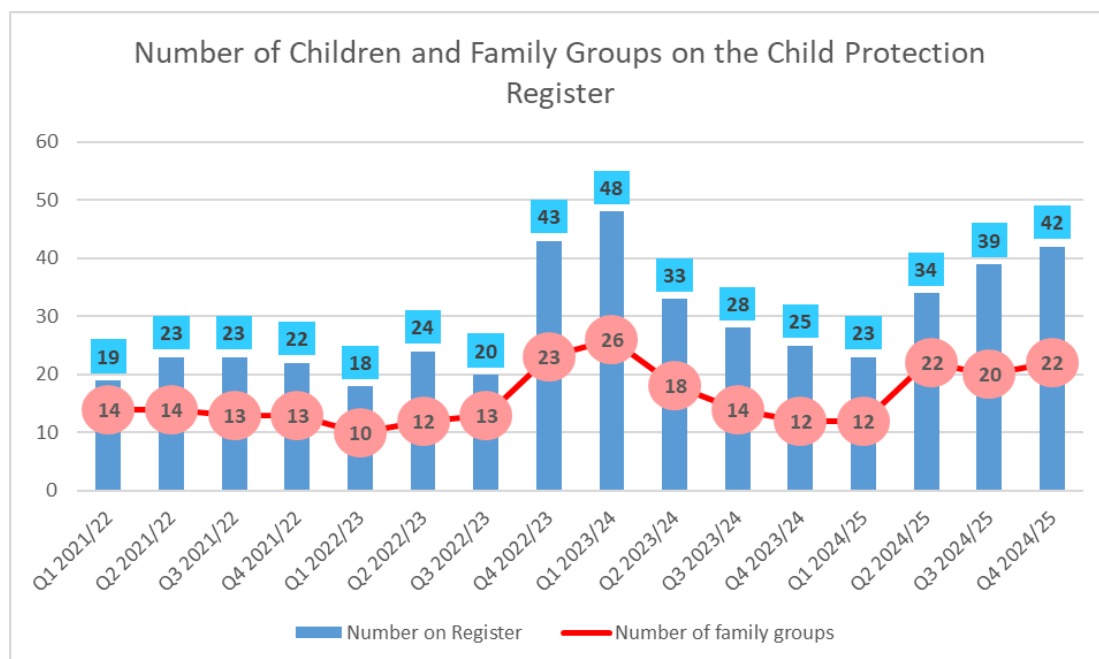


Child Protection Trends 2024-25

The CPC continues to monitor performance information through the Minimum Dataset for CPCs. A monthly child protection dataset has been submitted to Scottish Government.

Child Protection Register

As of 31 July 2025, in South Ayrshire, there were a total of **42** children from **22** family groups on the Child Protection Register. This is a significant increase from 31 July 2024 when 25 children from 12 family groups were on the Child Protection Register

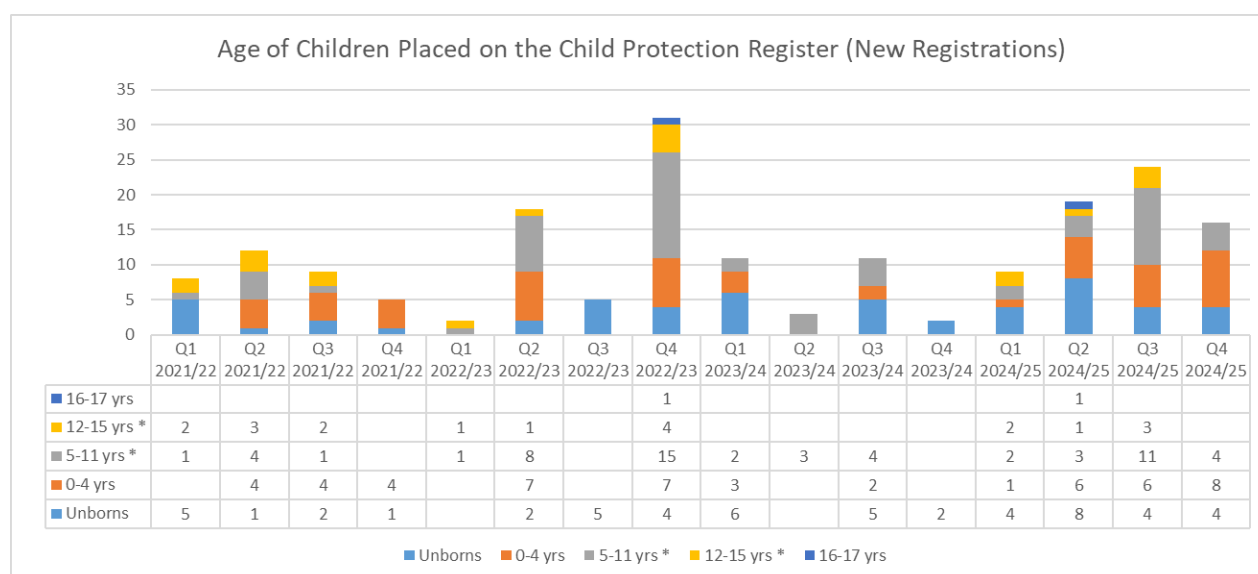


Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

Children are placed on the Child Protection Register when there are significant concerns for their safety. Children on the register will be the subject of close monitoring and support with a multi-agency plan to effect changes to reduce risk. If the risks to a child cannot be managed with their remaining at home, alternative care arrangements are considered. Once it is assessed that the level of risk has reduced sufficiently, the child's name will be removed from the Register.

Age of Children and Young People at Registration

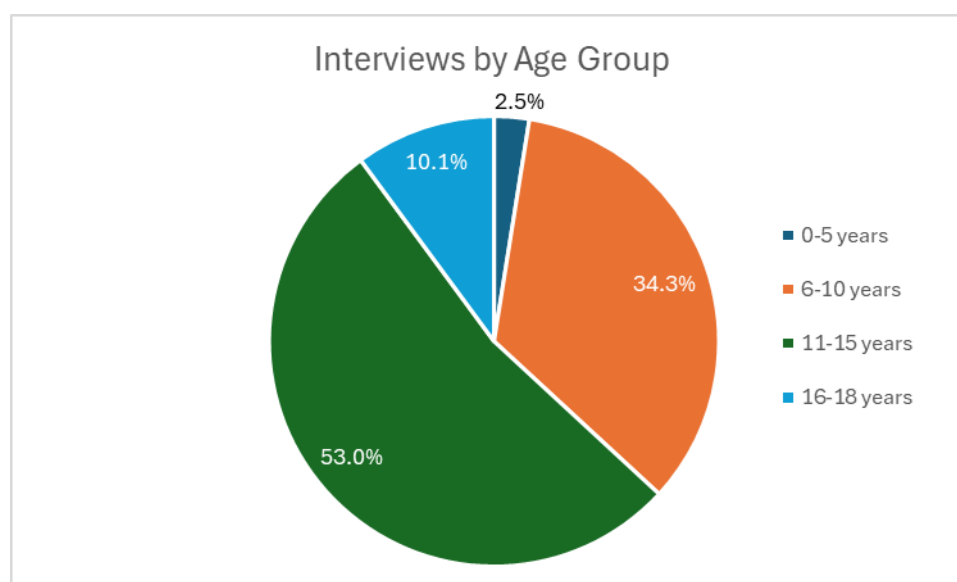
The graph below shows the age profile of children placed on the Child Protection Register each quarter from July 2020 to July 2025.



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

In the reporting period of 2024/25, **68** children have been added to the Child Protection Register of which 20 are pre-birth, 21 are aged 0-4 years and 20 are aged 5-11 years. There have been 7 children aged 11 years plus added to the Child Protection Register in this reporting year compared to 0 in the previous year.

The Joint Investigative Team quarterly report shows that over the past year; the highest number of children interviewed across Ayrshire was in the 11-15 age bracket. In the last quarter, **61%** of interview were in the age range of 11-15 and **3%** were in the 16-18 age range. Although this is data from across all the Ayrshires, it indicates that there is significant concern for those aged 12+ that is not being reflected in the age range of children placed on the Child Protection Register. The implementation of a contextual safeguarding approach may assist in addressing this imbalance, but further audit work around understanding of exploitation may also be helpful.

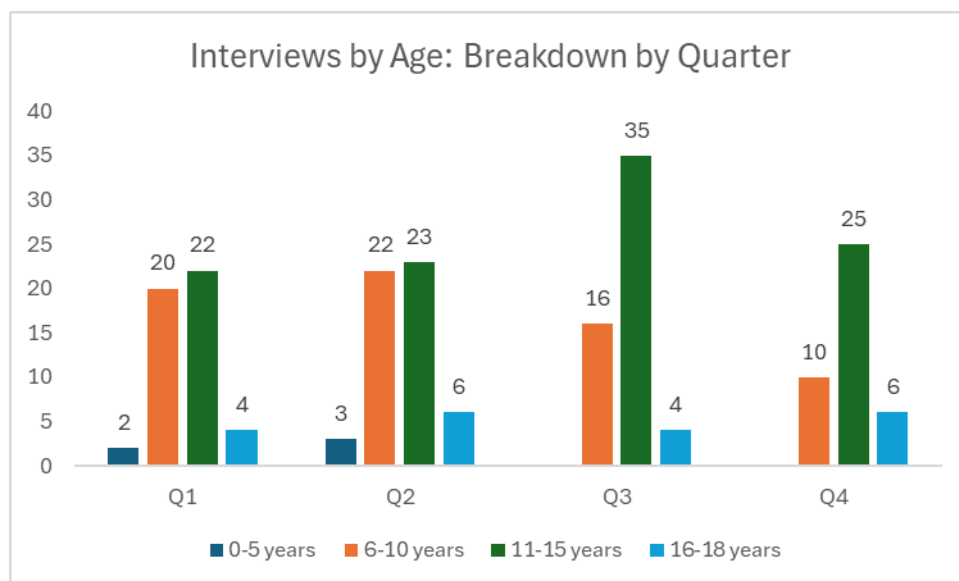


Source: Ayrshire SCIM Annual Report 2024-25

The 11–15-year age group accounted for just over half of all children and young people interviewed (**53%**), followed by the 6–10-year age group at **34.3%**. Smaller numbers of children and young people in the 0-5- and 16-18-years age group were present in this reporting period, totalling at 5 and 20 respectively.

The number of children aged 0-5 interviewed has notably decreased from the 23 recorded in the previous year, reducing this age group share of interviews to **2.5%** from 9.5%.

Figures in each quarter were consistent with the overall age ratio expected, however Q3 and Q4 saw significantly higher numbers of children and young people in the 11-15 years compared to all other age categories, and no interviews held with children aged 0-5 years.



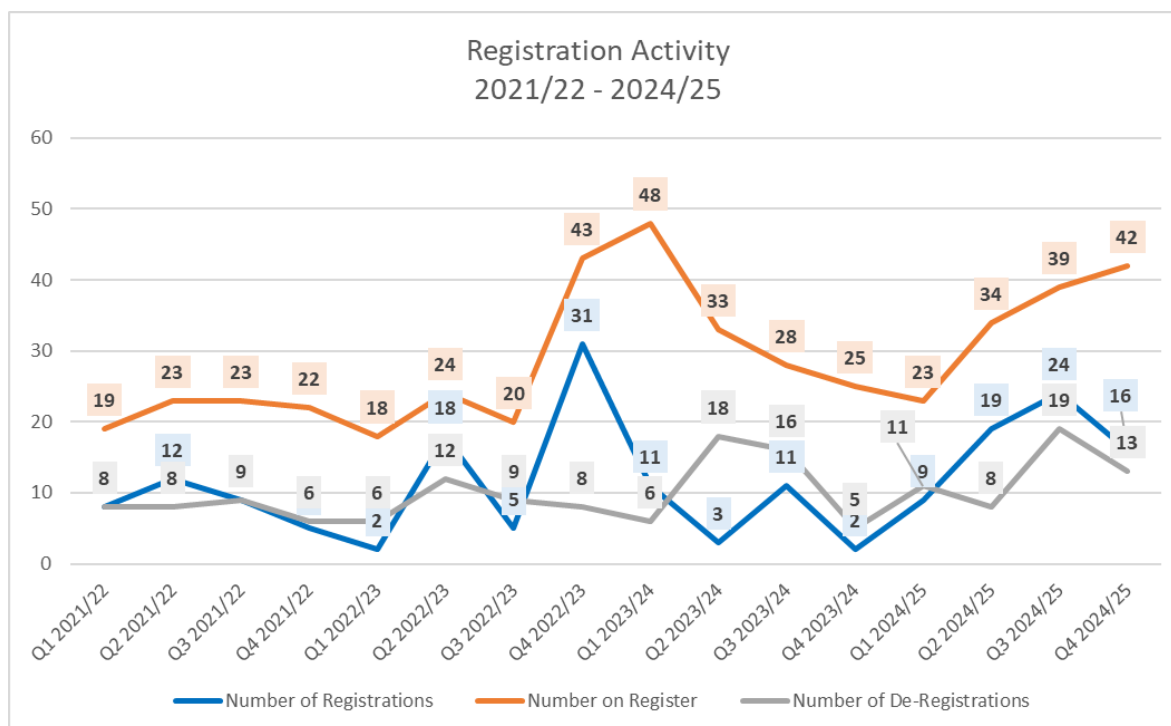
Source: Ayrshire SCIM Annual Report 2024-25

It is also worth noting that over the past year, 20 out of the 68 (29%) of new registrations were for unborn babies. This may indicate increased use of IRDs to consider pre-birth referrals, as per new National Child Protection Guidance; however, the pre-birth assessment process has been refined and will be presented at the CPC in early 2025-26. It provides earlier support to families in pregnancy and will hopefully result in a decrease in unborn babies being placed on the Child Protection Register moving forward.

Work will continue to improve the recording of interview data, monitoring of delays and interviews that do not proceed. From Q1 of 2025/26 data on referrals received to the team will also be included in reporting in order to capture the volume of referrals received and to highlight any areas where improvements may be required to ensure interviews progress.

Registration Activity

Fluctuations in the number of children and family groups on the Child Protection Register are expected, reflecting the nature of risk and the responsiveness of multi-agency decision-making. Over the reporting period, while quarter-to-quarter numbers have varied, there has been a gradual decline in registrations overall. This longer-term reduction may indicate stronger early intervention and more effective use of preventative measures, helping to address concerns before they reach the threshold for formal child protection processes.



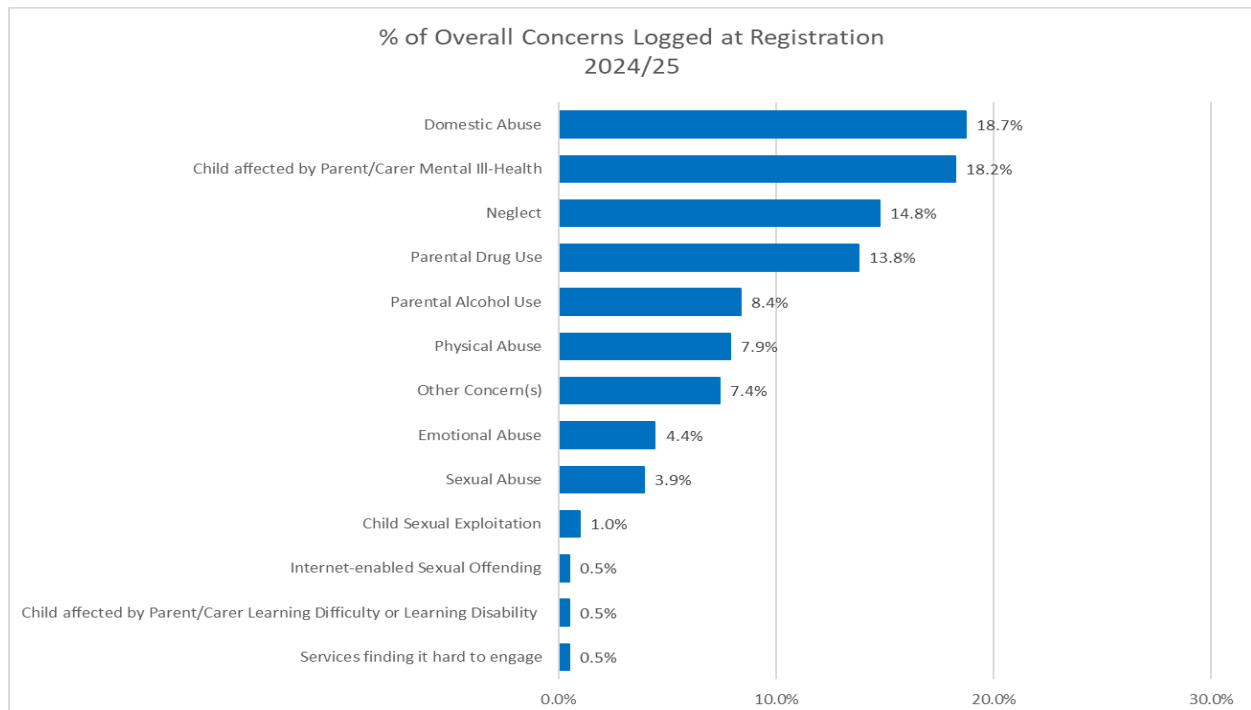
Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

In operational terms, the variation in child and family group numbers suggests a mix of case types. Some quarters reflect larger sibling groups being registered together, while others involve individual children. Monitoring both child and family group data remains important to understand demand on services and the structure of casework. De-registration patterns provide useful insight into the flow of cases and the impact of planning. Where de-registrations are relatively high, this may reflect successful multi-agency work to reduce risk and build safety around children. Equally, slower de-registration in some quarters can be linked to case complexity, where ongoing support is needed beyond the initial intervention period.

The comparison between new registrations and de-registrations helps build a picture of overall system movement. A relatively balanced flow suggests stability, while any sustained increase or decrease prompts a closer look at underlying factors — whether that's increased identification of need, delays in case progression, or successful early resolution. Recent data shows some of the lowest registration levels in the full reporting period, both in terms of individual children and family groups.

Practitioners continue to work across services to ensure that decisions around registration are based on sound assessment, clear risk indicators, and a shared understanding of when formal child protection processes are required. Ongoing monitoring of this data, alongside referral rates, caseloads, and early help activity is supportive of this work, and ensures that resources remain focused on those who need the highest level of protection.

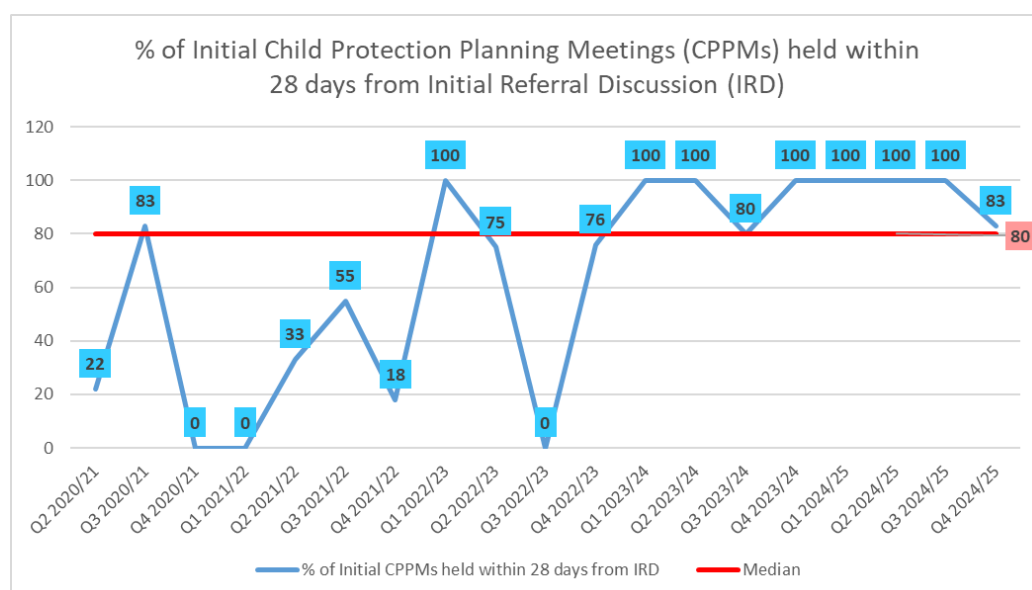
Vulnerability Factors and Impacts on/abuse of the Child



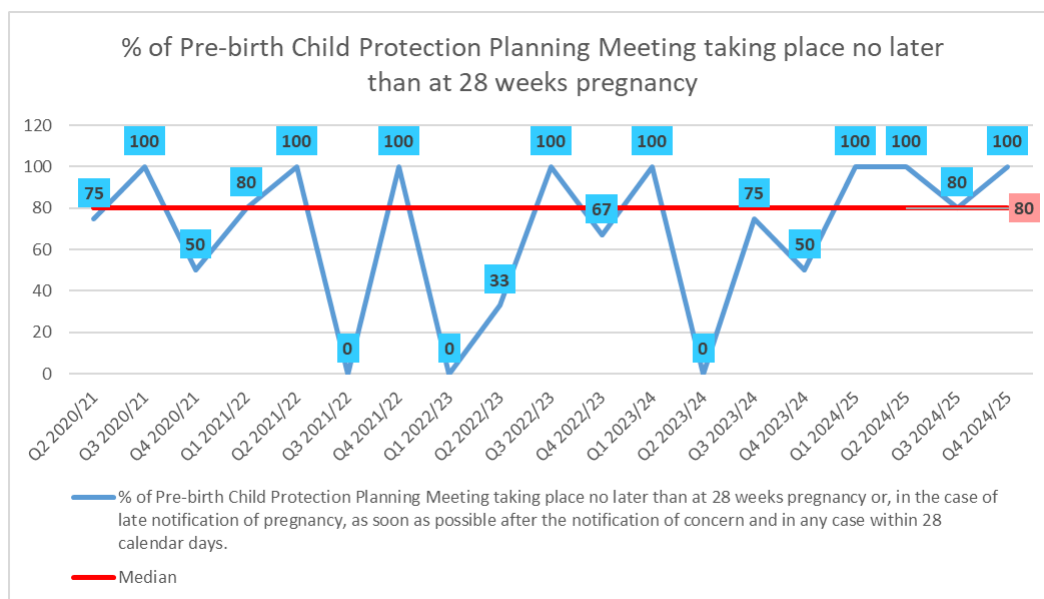
Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

Domestic abuse remains the leading concern in 2024/25, with 18.7% recorded as a concern at registration, up from 17.7% in 2023/24. In 2024/25, recorded concerns at registration rose by 190%, increasing from 70 in the previous year to 203. In 2024/25, registrations rose by 159% to 70, up from 27 the previous year.

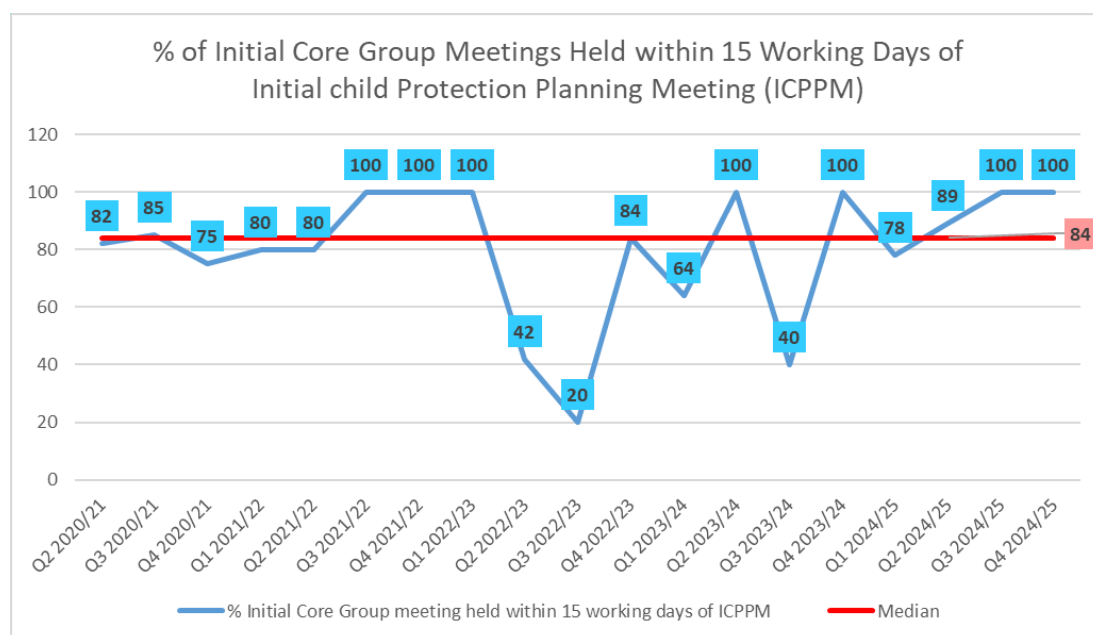
Timescales in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (Percentage within Timescale)



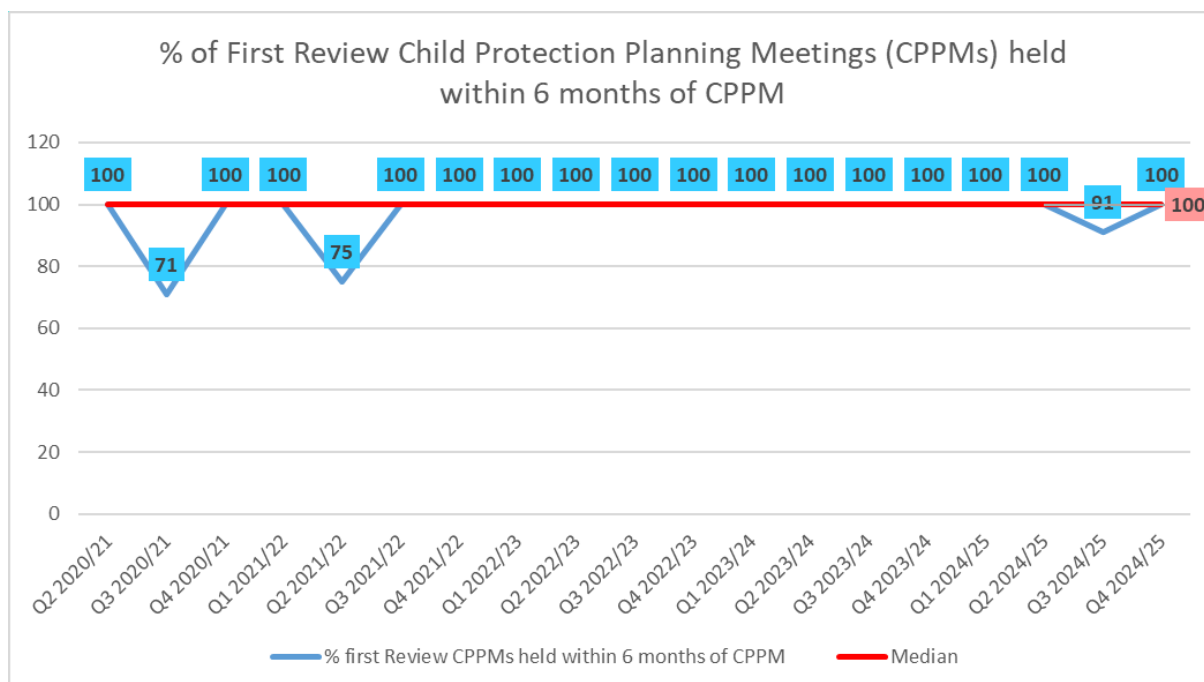
Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

Timescales for initial Child Protection Planning Meetings (CPPM) remain high and have been consistently above the median of 80% over the last year. Pre-birth CPPMs performance improved to **100%**, up from 80% in Q3 24/25, aligning with the local median of 80%.

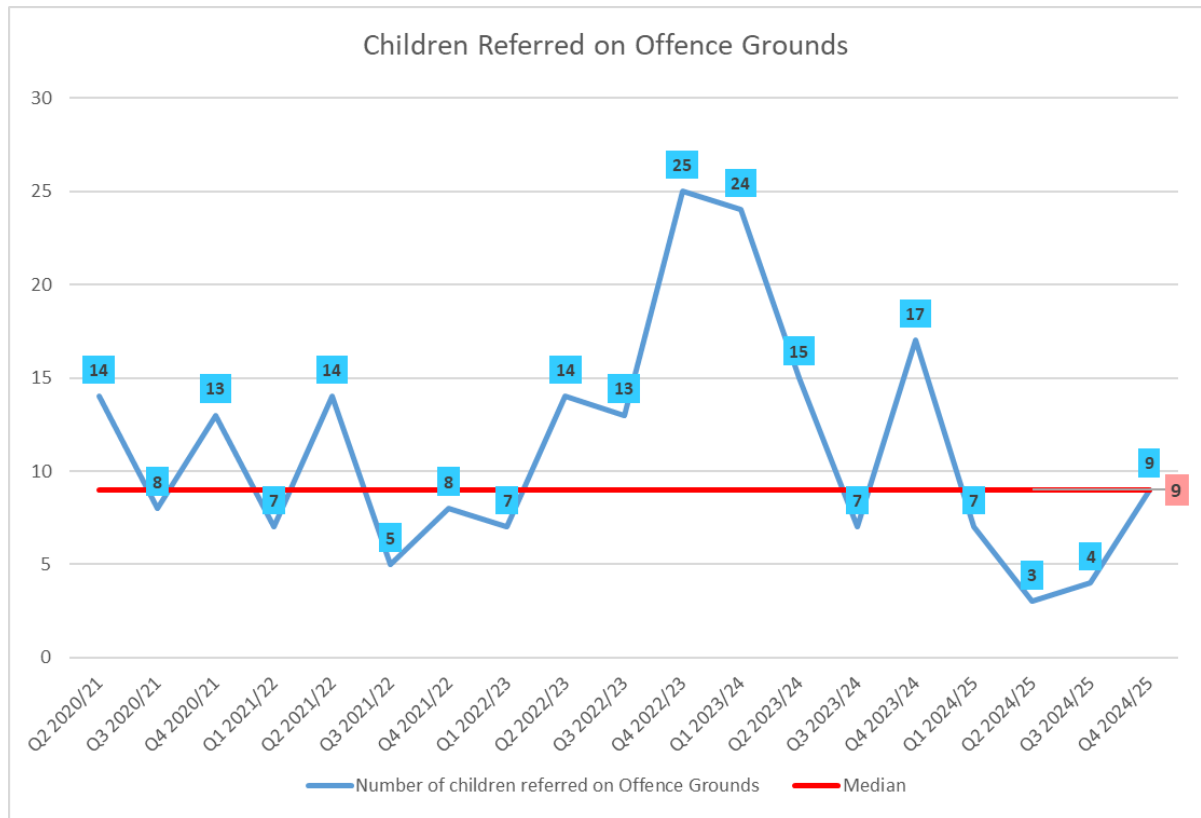
It can also be seen that the core group timescales were back to **100%** after the noted drop in Q1 and Q2 24/25.

First review CPPMs returned to **100%**, recovering from a dip in Q3 24/25.

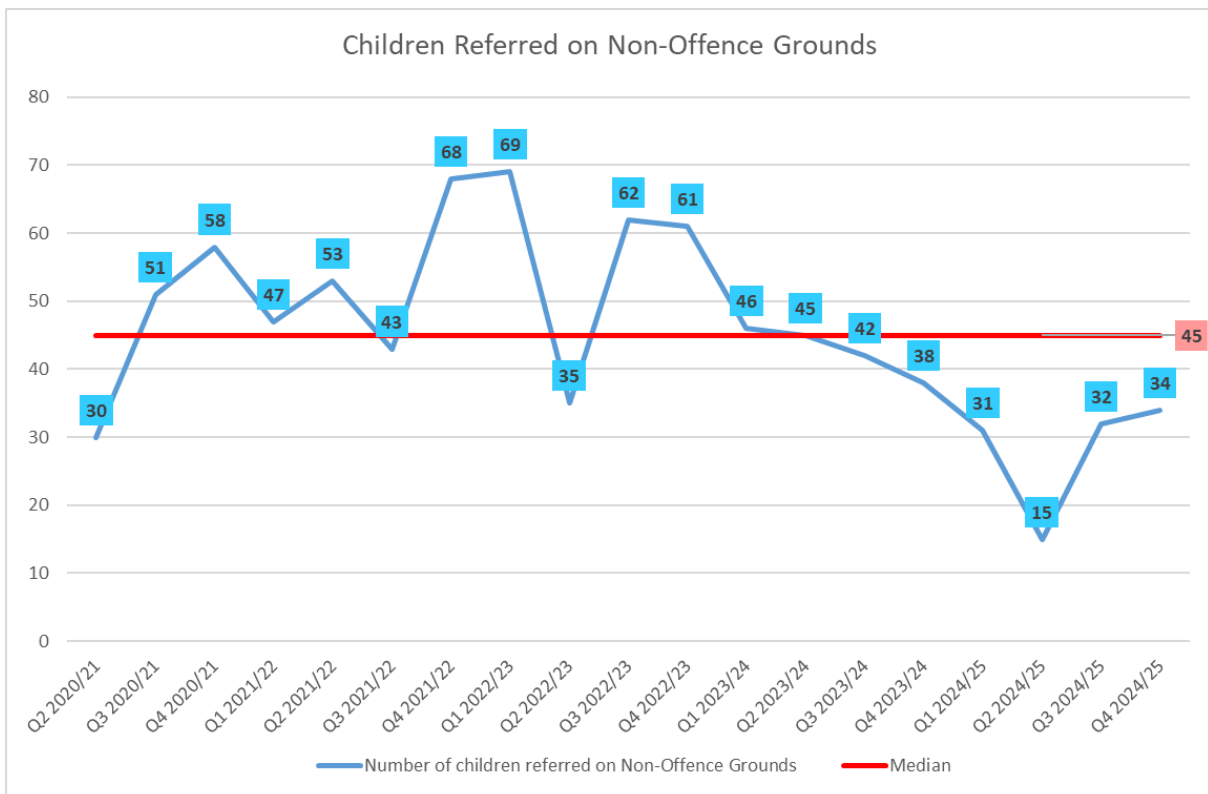
Overall compliance with child protection timescales remains high and indicate that families are receiving a timeous response when there are concerns about risk of significant harm to a child. Operational teams continue to monitor timescales closely, while also recognising the importance of flexibility in response to complex or evolving circumstances.

In the small number of instances where meetings are not held within the target timescale, this is often due to the need to gather robust and comprehensive information to ensure that risk is fully understood, and that decision-making is well-informed. These delays, while rare, reflect a commitment to prioritising the quality and integrity of child protection planning over process-driven compliance.

Children Referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)



Source: SCRA



Source: SCRA

In Q3, there was an increase in the number of children referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) on both offence and non-offence grounds. Referrals on offence grounds rose slightly from 3 in Q2 to 4 in Q3. This upward trend continued into Q4, where referrals more than doubled to 9 representing a **125% increase**.

Referrals on non-offence grounds also saw a significant rise in Q3, increasing from 15 to 32, which equates to a **113% increase**. Although this figure remains below South Ayrshire's local median of 45, a benchmark not met in the past 18 months, the increase is a positive development. In Q4, non-offence referrals rose modestly again, from 32 to 34. These increases are reassuring, particularly in light of previous concerns raised at the Management Information Evaluation and Improvement (MIEI) Subgroup regarding a downward trend in referrals.

Practitioners across South Ayrshire continue to focus on early intervention and prevention, supporting children and families before concerns reach the threshold for formal referral. This is reflected in the steady five-year decline in non-offence referrals, alongside the development of more joined-up, community-based approaches across Education, Social Work, Health, and Police Scotland.

The overall reduction in offence-related referrals is a positive trend, potentially reflecting the impact of preventative work with young people, including diversion from prosecution and targeted interventions within schools and communities. However, it remains essential to keep this under review, especially in the context of ongoing pressures linked to poverty, mental health, and family breakdown.

Operationally, teams are continuing to monitor referral patterns and consider how they relate to wider data - such as social work caseloads, child protection activity, and the volume of early help support being provided. There is recognition that a lower number of referrals is not inherently positive or negative; what matters is that children's needs are being identified and responded to appropriately.

Work is ongoing to ensure that thresholds are well understood across services, and that routes into support remain clear and accessible. The partnership remains committed to Getting it Right for Every Child, with a strong emphasis on timely, proportionate responses and integrated planning that places the child's wellbeing at the centre.

Together with the Ayrshire Police, SCRA are commencing a pilot introducing a Children's Reporter into the Ayrshire Police Risk and Concern Hub.

This is a fundamental step in strengthening how Police and SCRA work together to identify children who may require compulsory measures of supervision. The Reporter will be integrated into daily discussions, case reviews, and decision-making processes. Their presence will provide immediate professional advice on thresholds, ensuring that referrals are accurate, proportionate, and supported by high-quality information.

The embedded model hopes to influence how complex cases are approached within the Hub. When officers review incidents involving domestic abuse, repeat missing

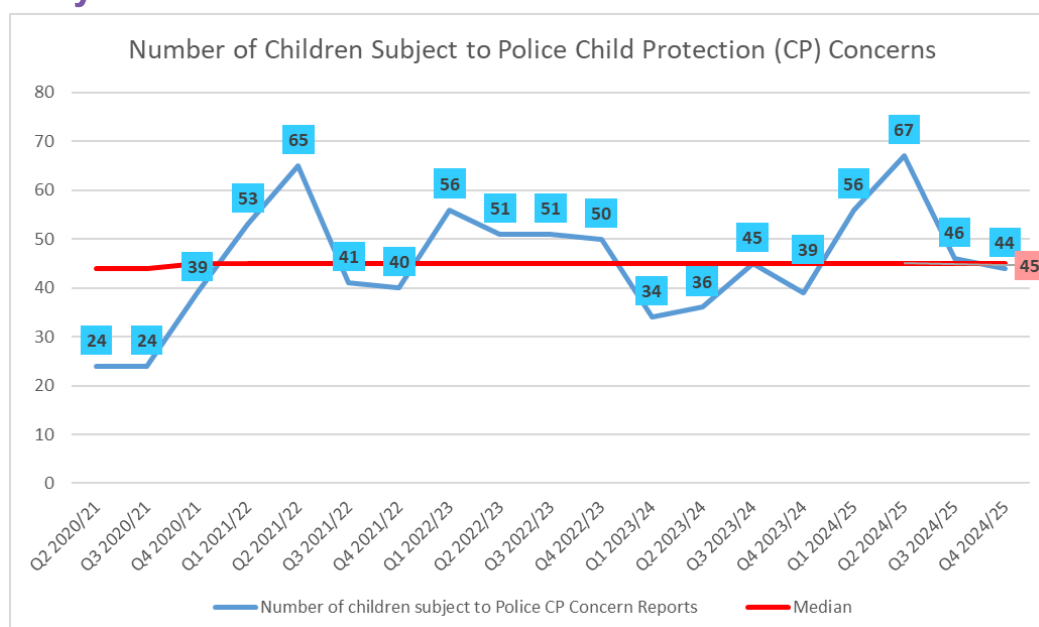
episodes, or escalating vulnerability, the Reporter will offer real-time guidance. This will reduce delays, increase consistency, and ensure that patterns of cumulative concern are identified earlier. The process will also be supported by a more structured approach to assessing risk, allowing the Hub to intervene sooner when required.

Alongside the embedded Reporter, a phased training programme was rolled out across Ayrshire, delivered to front-line officers in Ayr. This first phase focused on improving understanding of the Children's Hearing System, what the Reporter requires in a referral, and how officers can better articulate risk, chronology, and impact. Initial feedback has shown increased confidence among staff and notable improvements in the clarity and quality of information provided.

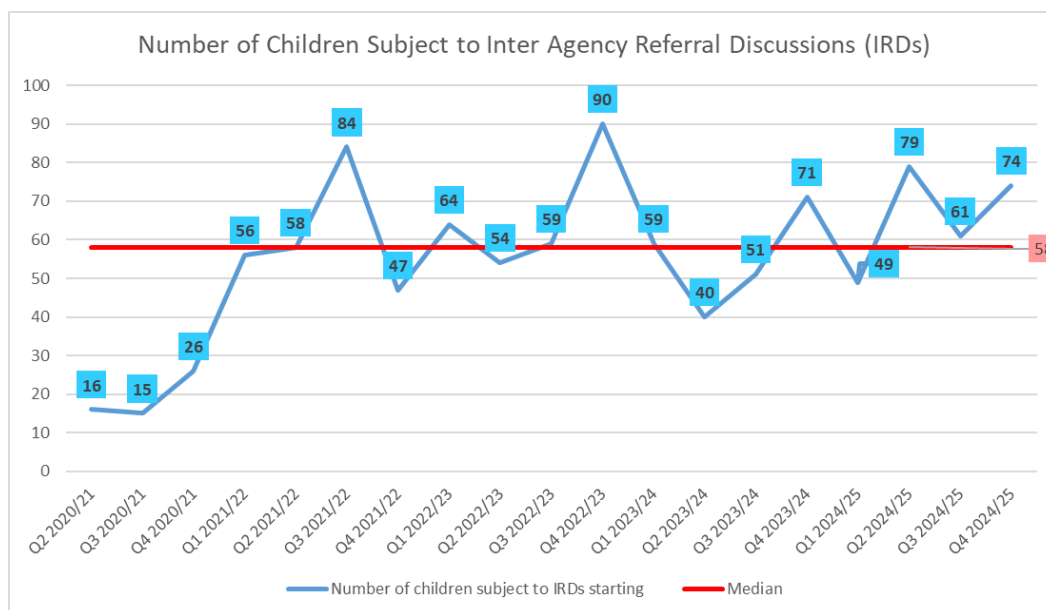
The next stage of implementation will involve establishing a group of SCRA champions across Ayrshire. These champions will provide resilience and ensure that knowledge is embedded beyond the pilot period. Their role will be to support colleagues, deliver local inputs, and maintain the improved standard of referrals as everyday practice.

The impact of the project has already been positive. The direct access to Reporter expertise has helped ensure earlier intervention in several high-risk situations and brought clearer expectations for both agencies. Staff now have a better understanding of thresholds, cumulative harm, and the importance of evidence-based referrals. The partnership model has also strengthened the quality of discussions within the Hub, ensuring that decisions are more child-centred and consistent approach to child protection across Ayrshire.

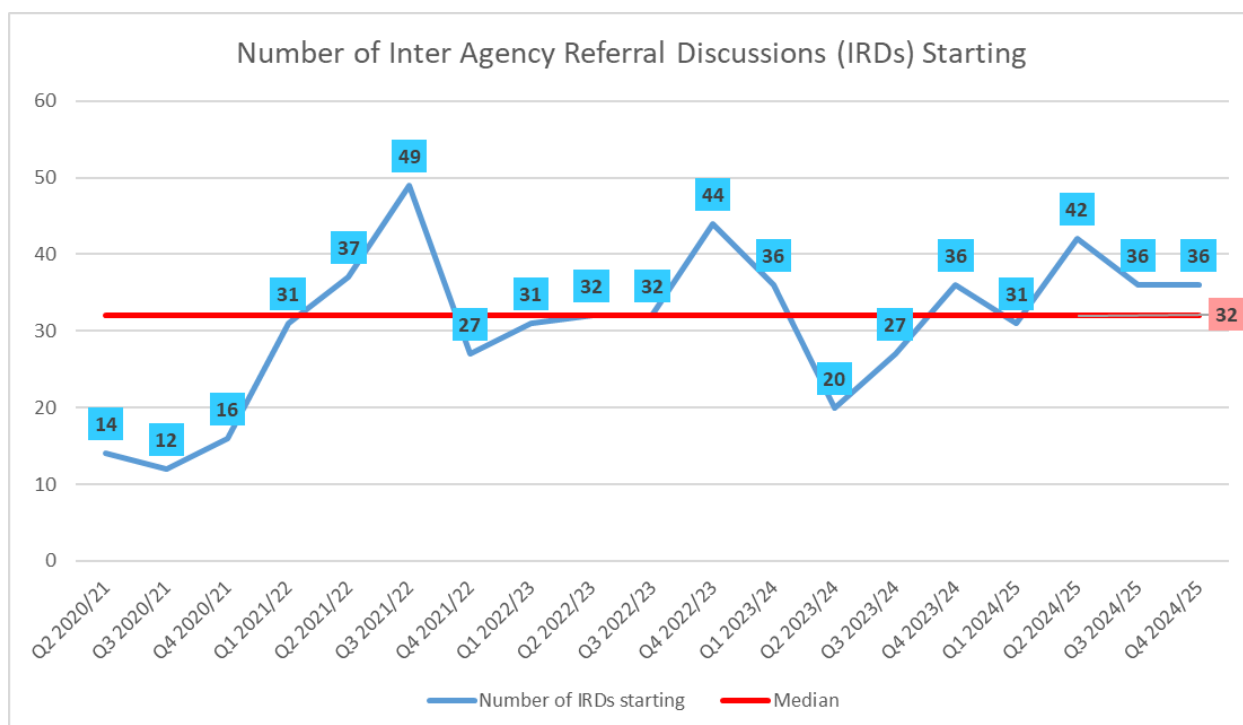
South Ayrshire IRD



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)



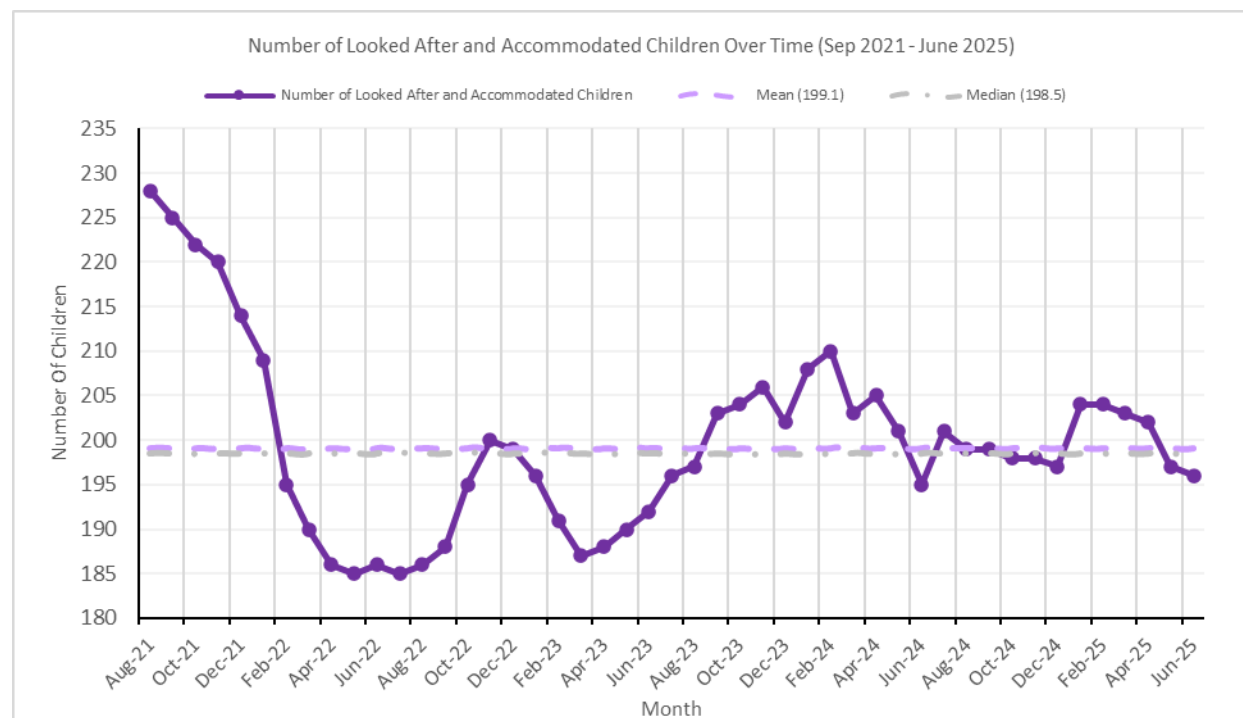
Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

Looking back to 2020/21, the number of children subject to police child protection concerns was relatively low, with just 24 cases recorded in both Q2 and Q3. This was followed by a sharp rise in Q1 and Q2 of 2021/22, peaking at 65 children in Q2. The trend continues to fluctuate throughout the timeline, with another significant spike in Q2 2024/25, reaching the highest recorded figure of 67 children. The reasons behind this peak have been discussed at the last two MIEI group meetings, where it was felt that contributing factors included police training, the clearing of a backlog by the national unit, and changes in the DADAS process. Q3 and Q4 of 2024/25 show a downward trend, with referral numbers down to 44 aligning closely with the median line of 45 children.

Since Q2 2020/21, there has been a steady rise in the number of children subject to IRD's. A significant peak occurred in Q3 2021/22, where 84 children were referred. This was followed by a brief dip to 47 in Q4 2021/22, bringing the figure back in line with the median. The highest recorded number appears in Q4 2022/23, with 90 children subject to IRD. In 2023/24, the trend stabilised, with 59 children in Q1, 51 in Q2, and a drop to 40 in Q3. However, the most recent year show increases, with 71 in Q4 2024/25, 49 in Q1, and another notable peak of 79 in Q2 2024/25.

Monitoring these trends is essential for understanding demand and ensuring timely, coordinated responses across agencies. Currently, there are two recurring IRD audits in place, and an additional audit is underway focusing on IRDs that did not progress to a Child Protection Alert. Alongside this audit work, IRD training is being developed.

Looked After Children in South Ayrshire



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

Looked After and Accommodated Children – Over time (Sept 2021 – Jun 2025)

The overall number of Looked After and Accommodated Children (LAAC) in South Ayrshire has fluctuated over the past four years, peaking at 228 in August 2021, declining through 2022, then gradually increasing again to a high of 210 in February 2024, before stabilising at 196 in June 2025.

Looked After Children (Rate per 1,000 Population) Family Group Comparison

South Ayrshire has made significant and sustained progress in reducing the rate of looked after children aged 0-17, falling from 17.9 per 1,000 in 2018 to 10.3 per 1,000 in 2024 - a reduction of 43% over six years.

This downward trend is markedly steeper than that of both Scotland and the comparator authorities, whose rates have remained relatively stable. In 2020, South Ayrshire's rate was above both the national and comparator averages. By 2022, it had fallen below both - and it remains lower than Scotland (11.8) and the comparator average (12.1) as of 2024.

This improvement reflects a strong local focus on prevention and early intervention, with effective multi-agency working to support families at an earlier stage. A shift towards relationship-based practice, alongside increased use of family-led support and kinship care, has helped reduce the need for formal care placements.

While there has been a modest rise since 2022, the overall trajectory continues to reflect positively on South Ayrshire's commitment to supporting children to remain safely at home wherever possible, and to providing proportionate, strengths-based support when care is needed.

Ayrshire Comparison

As of 31 July 2024, South Ayrshire recorded 336 looked after children, a reduction from 346 in 2023. This represents a 2.9% decrease over the year and continues a steady downward trend, reflecting the ongoing commitment to early intervention, family support, and implementing the principles of The Promise. South Ayrshire's efforts to strengthen community-based alternatives to care, particularly through enhanced family support services and trauma-informed practice, are contributing to fewer children requiring formal care arrangements.

When benchmarked against neighbouring authorities:

- East Ayrshire saw an increase in looked after children, rising from 420 in 2023 to 436 in 2024 (+3.8%).
- North Ayrshire recorded a slight decrease, from 488 to 478 (-2.0%).

While all three Ayrshire authorities face similar socio-economic challenges, South Ayrshire is the only one to show a more marked reduction in the looked after population over this period. This may indicate that local strategies around prevention and early intervention are having a stronger impact. Continued evaluation will be important to ensure these trends reflect improved outcomes for children, not just shifts in service thresholds or care arrangements.

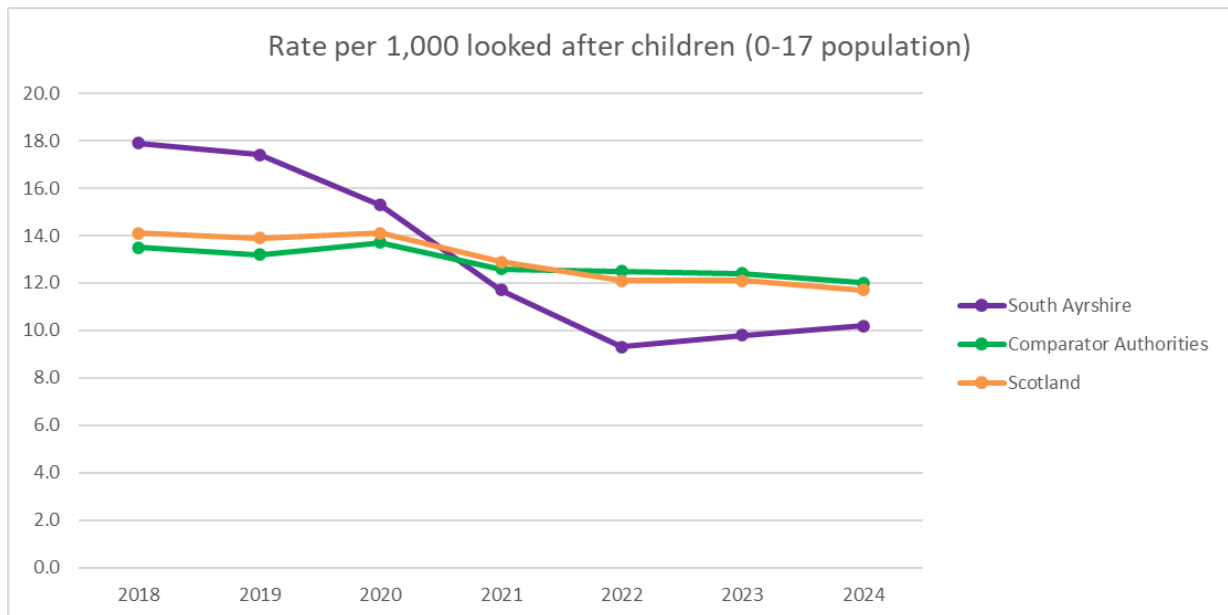
In South Ayrshire we have **20%** of our Looked After Children looked after at home, which is lower than the Scottish average. However, due to our approach of working with families without the necessity of a Statutory Supervision Order from the Children's Hearing (when appropriate), we have far more children "living at home

with parents” than ever with support from Social Work and partners. This is done through assessment process which is mindful of Children’s Rights, The Promise and Whole Family Wellbeing, and our application of the Signs of Safety.

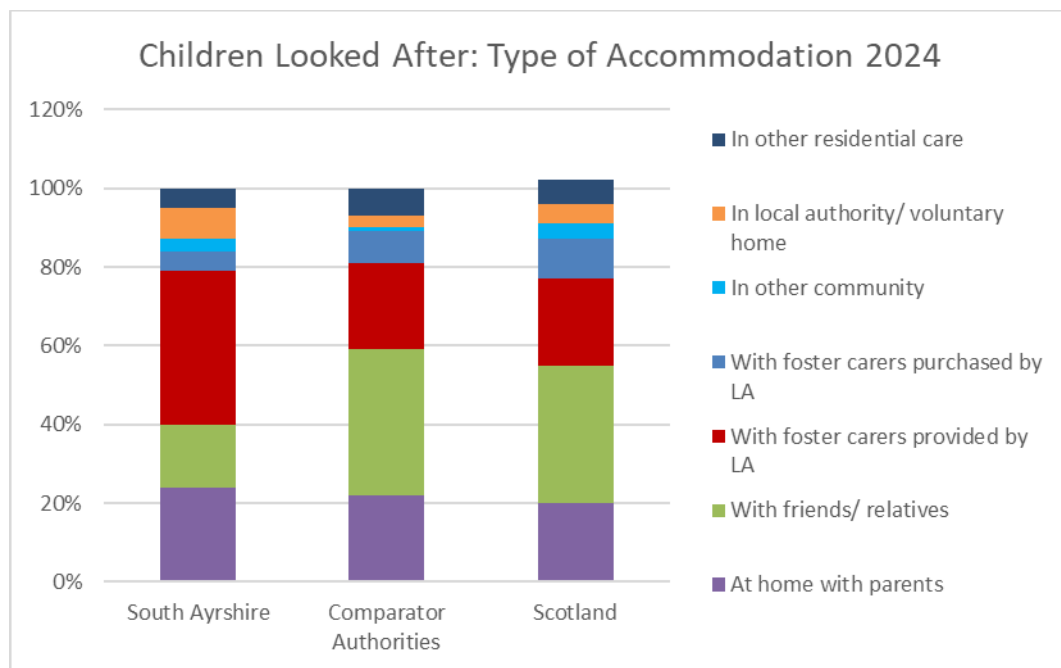
Over the reporting period, looked after children in South Ayrshire have been supported across a range of placement types, with a general emphasis on family-based and in-house care. With the investment and application of early intervention/prevention approaches, South Ayrshire have witnessed a reduction in Looked After Children Numbers. However, the overall numbers of children and families whom South Ayrshire support remains around the same at around 1200. The below data, reflects the "no order principle" and minimal necessary intervention, with many children and their families working with the service toward agreed improved outcomes in wellbeing and protection. These are children who remain cared for at home by parents and carers with some HSCP support, but not within the formal SCRA or care system.

- At Home with Parents: Numbers declined from 52 to **43**.
- With Relatives or Friends: **Consistently stable** (median = 29), reflecting the continued strength of kinship care.
- Local Authority Foster Care: Increased from 75 to **85** (median = 79).
- Private Foster Agencies: Gradual reduction from 9 to **6** (median = 8), showing reduced use of external providers.
- Prospective Adopters: Stable early in the year but fell to 3 by June (median = 6).
- Residential Placements: Fluctuated slightly (9–12), remaining steady overall (median = 11).
- Secure Accommodation: Very low and stable (1–2 placements), used only where necessary (median = 2).
- Local Authority Children’s House: Rose slightly towards year-end (median = 10), suggesting increased utilisation.
- Voluntary Children’s House: Very limited use (median = 2), consistent with previous patterns.
- Other Community Placements: Declined sharply early in the year and remained low (median = 1).

Overall, the data reflects a stable care environment with continued prioritisation of family-based placements and local provision, aligned with local and national objectives.



Source: Population figures source: NRS mid-year population estimates for 2016-2022
 Scottish Government CLAS Returns
 Looked after children's statistics 2024: local authority benchmarking tool



Source: Population figures source: NRS mid-year population estimates for 2016-2022
 Scottish Government CLAS Returns
 Looked after children's statistics 2024: local authority benchmarking tool

Rate per 1,000 of Children who are Looked after and accommodated:

Local Authority Benchmark Comparators	Rate per 1,000 children
South Ayrshire	10.2
Clackmannanshire	21.2

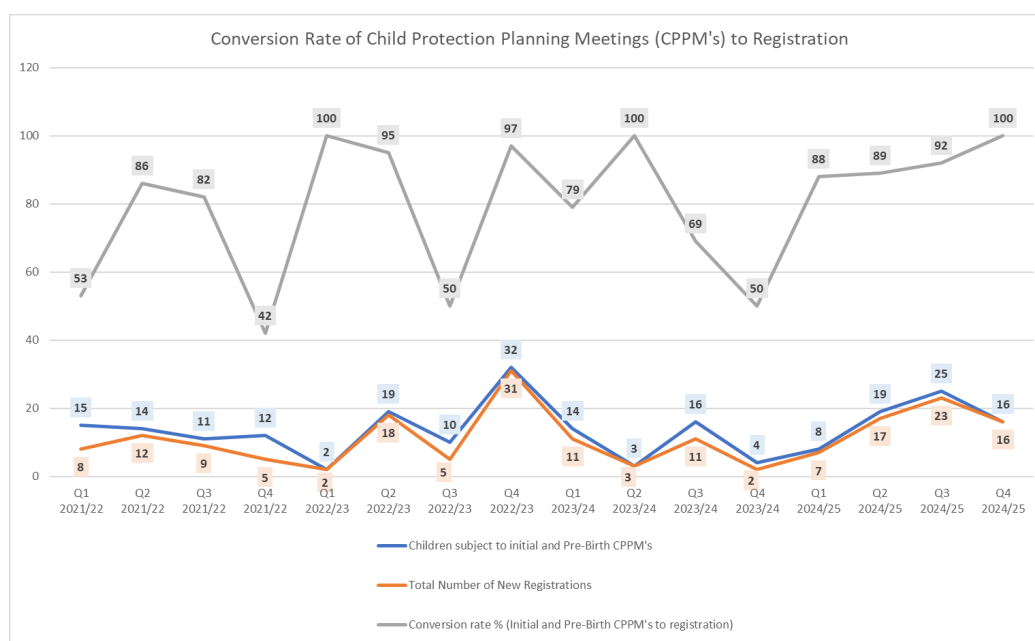
Dumfries and Galloway	13.8
Falkirk	11.6
Fife	10.4
Renfrewshire	17.9
South Lanarkshire	11.0
West Lothian	8.2
Scotland	11.7
Local Comparator LA	<u>Rate per 1,000 children</u>
East Ayrshire (for local context)	17.1
North Ayrshire (for local context)	16.9

Source: Population figures source: NRS mid-year population estimates for 2016-2022
 Scottish Government CLAS Returns
 Looked after children's statistics 2024: local authority benchmarking tool

The approach to early intervention and prevention means that **82%** of South Ayrshire Social Work caseloads are supported on a non-statutory basis and **18%** are Looked After and Accommodated.

It is important to place the above changes alongside the Care Inspectorate Report of a joint inspection 2016 which reflects; *"Reducing referral rates to the children's reporter as a percentage of the population of young people aged 8-16 years provides a helpful indicator of the effectiveness of early intervention. In South Ayrshire, referral rates while also reducing, were significantly higher suggesting that more needed to be done at an earlier stage to prevent difficulties from arising or getting worse"*.

Conversion Rate of CPPM's to Registration Quarterly Trends



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

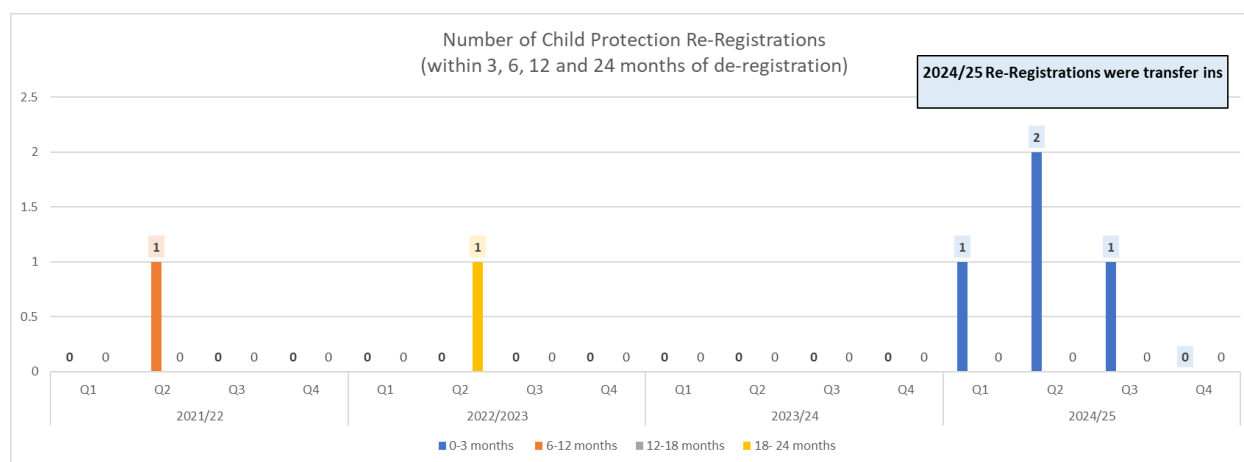
The conversion rate of children taken to Child Protection Planning Meetings who subsequently become registered is **100%** as at Q4 2024/25, or 92% when averaged across the full year. This demonstrates that the vast majority of children brought to Case Conference were appropriately identified as requiring care and protection due to being at risk of significant harm.

This is an important indicator of effective practice, as it shows that children and families who do not require such an intrusive level of statutory intervention are not being unnecessarily drawn into formal processes. Instead, more proportionate, strengths-based supports are being used where appropriate.

This approach is strongly aligned with the principles of the Christie Commission, with its focus on People, Prevention, Partnership, and Performance. Current data suggests that a preventative, “risk-sensible” model is now clearly embedded within South Ayrshire. This has enabled more positive engagement with children and families, improved partnership working, and better outcomes overall.

The implementation of learning from The Promise has further supported this shift, ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of children and families continue to shape how care and support are designed and delivered.

Timescales for Re-registration



Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

It is of note, that over the last three reporting years, one child has been subject to re-registration after a 12-month period, suggesting that families are receiving the correct support and interventions in the most part, enabling and empowering them to improve their family’s wellbeing and safety without the need for further interventions. The 4 children who have been re-registered over the course of the reporting period 2024/25 were transfer-in cases from other Local Authorities.

There are currently no children who have been on the Child Protection Register for more than 12 months. This compares to 8 children noted in the previous report.

From Registration to De-registration to Registration again – A Reflection on the Effectiveness of Interventions

Annual Stats	Duration between previous De-Registration and Re-Registration									
Years	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups
	Under 12 Months		12-18 Months		19-24 Months		Transfer In		TOTALS	
01/08/2023-31/07/2024									0	0
01/08/2022-31/07/2023					1	1			1	1
01/08/2021-31/07/2022	1	1							1	1
01/08/2020-31/07/2021	4	3					2	1	6	4
01/08/2019-31/07/2020			4	1			1	1	5	2

Source: CareFirst (case management system, South Ayrshire Council)

The above chart on re-registration following de-registration over the past five years reflects an improving picture of a significant reduction in the number of children and family groups who are re-registered following previously being de-registered.

We reported 0 re-registrations in 2023/24, and this remains the case for the 2024/25 reporting year. The 4 re-registrations recorded in 2024/25 all relate to transfer-ins rather than genuine re-registrations.

This indicates that with the use of the Signs of Safety approach, that child protection interventions are more effective at enabling and empowering families and family networks at managing the identified risk factors. With families being more enabled to manage risk and promote child wellbeing, there are less children being identified as requiring to be placed on the Child Protection register for a further period within two years.

Appendix 1: CPC Members 2024-2025

Title	Organisation
Independent Chair	South Ayrshire CPC
Head of Children's Health, Care and Justice Services	South Ayrshire Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP)
Chief Social Work Officer	South Ayrshire HSCP
Lead Officer, Child Protection	South Ayrshire HSCP
Associate Nurse Director for Public Protection	NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Detective Superintendent	Police Scotland, Ayrshire Division
Detective Chief Inspector	Police Public Protection Unit
Assistant Director	South Ayrshire Educational Services
Link Inspector	Care Inspectorate
CPC Minute Taker	South Ayrshire HSCP
Third sector Coordinator	Voluntary Action South Ayrshire (VASA)
Senior Policy Officer	South Ayrshire Housing
Co-ordinator, Legal & Licensing Services	South Ayrshire Council
Trauma Informed Practice Officer	South Ayrshire Council
Senior Manager. Planning, Performance and Commissioning	South Ayrshire HSCP
Lead Officer for Alcohol & Drug Partnership (ADP)	South Ayrshire HSCP
Lead Officer for Adult Support & Protection	South Ayrshire HSCP
Corporate Parenting Lead Officer (Champions Board)	South Ayrshire HSCP
Service Manager, Practice Development	South Ayrshire HSCP
Public Protection Practice Development Officer	South Ayrshire HSCP

Lead Officer for Business Intelligence	South Ayrshire HSCP
Data Performance Assistant – Planning & Performance	South Ayrshire HSCP
Lead Officer for Children's Services Planning and Performance	South Ayrshire Educational Services
Child Protection & Wellbeing Officer	South Ayrshire Educational Services
Senior Manager, Children's, and Justice Localities Services	South Ayrshire HSCP
Clinical Midwifery Manager Public Protection Women and Children's Services	South Ayrshire HSCP
Lead Nurse for Child Protection	South Ayrshire HSCP
Associate Nurse Director	South Ayrshire HSCP
Locality Reporter Manager	SCRA
Child Health Commissioner	NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Senior Manager, Children's Health	South Ayrshire HSCP
Communications Officer	South Ayrshire HSCP
Service Manager, Thriving Communities	South Ayrshire Council
Senior Manager Children's Services	South Ayrshire HSCP