



south ayrshire
health & social care
partnership

Child Protection Trend Analysis

South Ayrshire

Date: November 2022



Child Protection Activity in South Ayrshire: An Overview

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The South Ayrshire Child Protection Committee and Chief Officers Group are asked to consider this, the second report, as an analysis of child protection trends in South Ayrshire from November 2021 – November 2022.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Child Protection Committee and Chief Officers Group are asked to consider the contents of this report and to assure themselves that the current Child Protection approach and processes to protect children at risk of significant harm in South Ayrshire are robust and being utilised appropriately. This is particularly appropriate, given the low numbers of Children in South Ayrshire who are subject to Child Protection registration.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Child Protection Committee asked in September 2020 for assurance that the number of children on the Child Protection Register is appropriate and justifiable.

A previous report was provided by Mark Inglis in October 2020, written by Children Services Service Manager Aileen Barker. The Child Protection Committee minutes from this input at the CPC are recorded as; ***“No questions or observations were made. P Martin thanked colleagues for this paper, which he found helpful. It pulled together a couple of issues that had been reflected on as a committee.”***

Following this report and the subsequent continued low number of children on the South Ayrshire Child Protection Register, there was a further request for assurance as to whether the numbers of Children on the Register were appropriate or whether there were systemic concerns that the CPC/COG needed to be aware of.

This resulted in a report written by Mark Inglis in November 2021 entitled; ***“Child Protection Trend Activity in South Ayrshire; An Overview”***.

Minutes from the CPC dated 30 November 2021 capture that the CPC Chair, Professor Paul Martin, described the report as ***“an excellent piece of work”*** and Chief Social Work Officer at the time Scott Hunter ***“acknowledged the quality of work and analysis”***.

This same report was given to COG and the minutes of 21 December 2021 state; ***“Mr Inglis shared the presentation (CP trends paper and presentation) and ran through the slides advising that if read alongside the performance report it gives the full picture of our understanding of where we are in South Ayrshire in terms of child protection. COG acknowledged the value of this piece of work which shows a confidence and assurance of where we are and suggested this be brought to COG on an annual basis to underpin the performance report.”***

The current report is written in response to the request from the South Ayrshire Child Protection Committee and Chief Officers Group. The COG have asked for an annual update on Child Protection trends and assurance on the processes and procedures and the effectiveness of these to keep children safe from the risk of significant harm.

This report should be read with a number of other reports in mind, namely; **The South Ayrshire Child Protection Committee Annual Report 2021-22, The South Ayrshire Parenting Promise and the Children Services Planning Partnership Annual Report 2021-22.**

4. REPORT

4.1 The following report is an update on the number of children in South Ayrshire who have been placed on the Child Protection Register.

The following table is taken from the Childrens Social Work Statistic updated on 6 April 2022 and the Comparator Child Protection Dashboard 2020-2021.

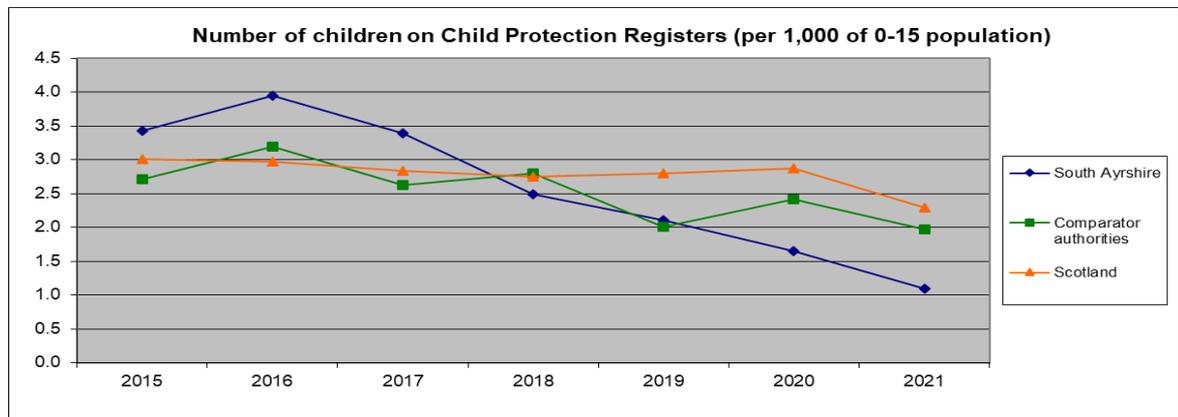
The chart below (1) reflects that South Ayrshire has 1.1 per 1000 Children aged between 0-15 who are on the Child Protection Register and how this compares with South Ayrshire's Benchmark Authorities;

Table/Chart 1

Number of Children on Child Protection Register (per 1,000 of 0-15 population) - 2021

<u>Local Authority Benchmark comparators</u>	<u>Rate per 1,000 children</u>
South Ayrshire	1.1
Angus	1.3
Dumfries and Galloway	1.5
Scottish Borders	1.8
Highland	2.5
Argyll and Bute	2.5
Comparator average	2.0
Scottish average	2.3
Local Comparators LA	
East Ayrshire (for local context)	3.4
North Ayrshire (for local context)	5.2
Signs of Safety Local Authorities	
East Ren (Signs of Safety LA)	0.4
East Lothian (Signs of Safety LA)	1.5
D & G (Signs of Safety LA & LGBF)	1.5

Chart 1 (a)



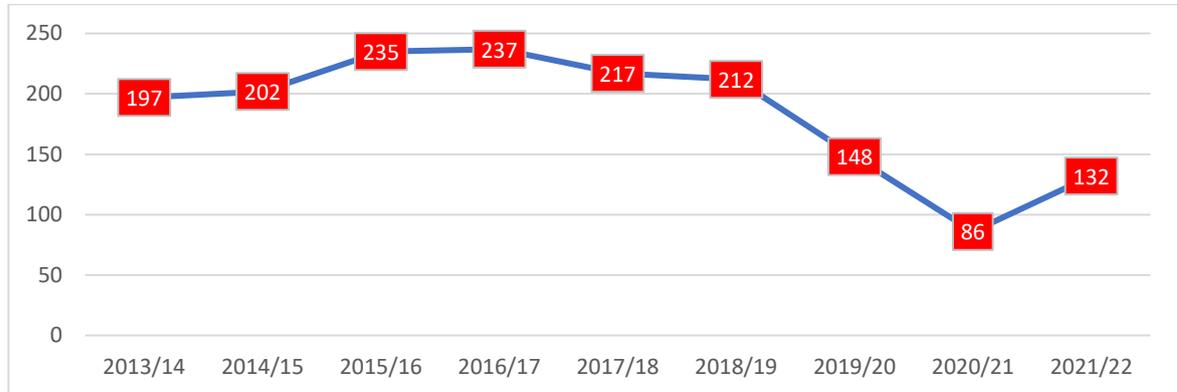
- The above reflects a consistent reduction in the number of children on the Child Protection register from its peak in 2016 where the South Ayrshire ratio was at its highest of 3.9 per 1000, to the present recorded data of 1.1 in 2021.
- While it is clear that the number of South Ayrshire's children on the Register is low in comparison with her neighbouring Ayrshire authorities, in comparison with similar Local Authorities, it is not significantly out of synch with the likes of Angus and Dumfries and Galloway as seen in the table above.
- Also, in comparison with the other Scottish Local Authorities like East Renfrewshire, East Lothian and Dumfries and Galloway who have fully embraced and implemented the Signs of Safety. The ratio on children on the Child Protection Register in South Ayrshire appears consistent with the ratio in these Local Authority areas reflecting culture change which a strength-based approaches like Signs of Safety promotes.

Child Protection Alerts

A child protection 'alert' is raised when the decision is made to investigate under the auspice of child protection. It ensures core agencies (Health, Education and Police) and out of hours social work services are aware a child is subject to active investigation in relation to a child protection concern and can respond accordingly.

Chart 2

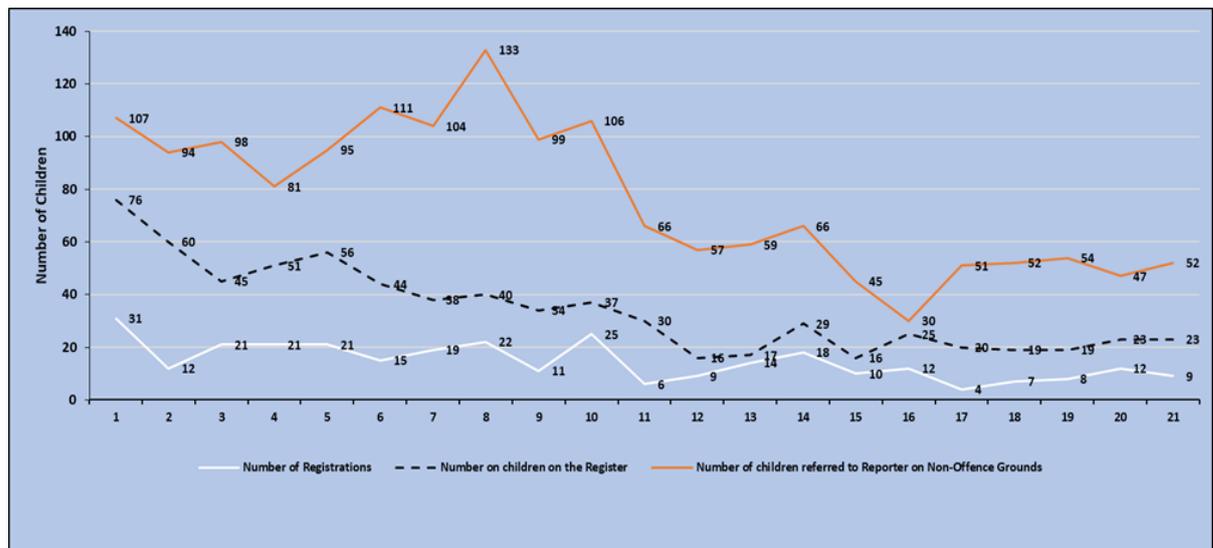
Annual Child Protection Alerts New 2013/14 to 2021/22



The above reflects that there has been a 35% increase in Child Protection alerts over the past year. This could reflect the coming out of lockdown and children returning to School and being more “seen” in their communities. There has also been more of a targeted approach to raising awareness of how to raise a child protection concern as well as a focus on taking through to Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs), for those children who merit it. This has all contributed to an increase the raising number of Child Concern alerts.

Chart 3

South Ayrshire CP Registrations and Referrals to the Children’s Reporters Administration



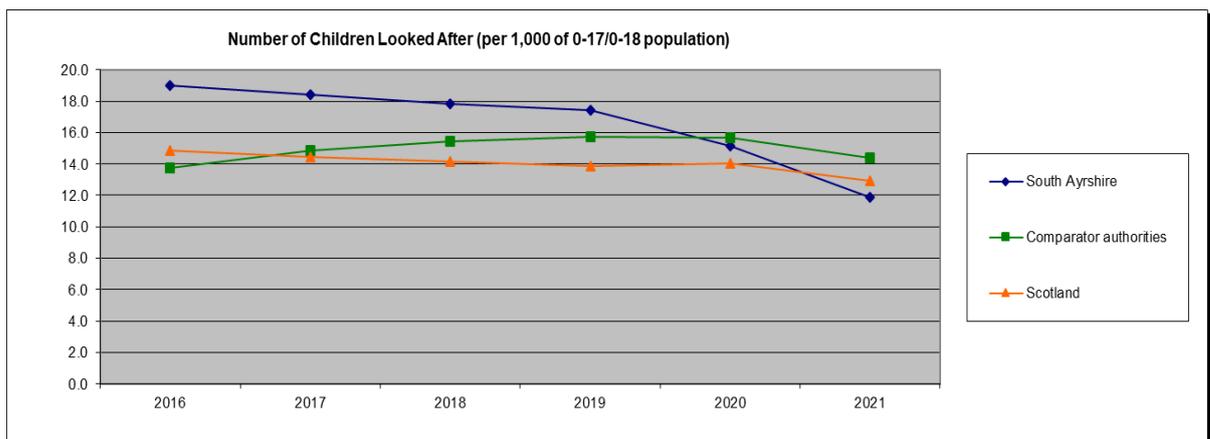
- The number of child protection registrations in South Ayrshire has remained consistently low over the past nine recording Quarters, however, shows a significant reduction from when records began when 76 Children were on the Register.

- Also, of note is the similar trend in reduction in the number of children referred to the Children’s Reporter from a high of 133 in Q2 18/19 to a low of 30 in Q2 20/21, this being a 78% reduction in referrals to the Scottish Children’s Reporters Authority. It is however of note that the routes into these processes are not the same and do not necessarily reflect the same children and young people.
- The last five reporting Quarters also reflects a levelling from the referrals to SCRA to a more consistent number, at around 51 per quarter.

The above could indicate that the cultural change, which is evident within South Ayrshire through the adoption of the Signs of Safety approach and the implementation of **The Promise**, has had equal effect on how ALL children are supported and cared for so that only those children and families who require these important, but intrusive protective approaches are experiencing them. Other children and families in South Ayrshire are, instead, worked with through strengths based, relation and collaborative care planning, as found in the Signs of Safety and the Promise.

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”***

Chart 4

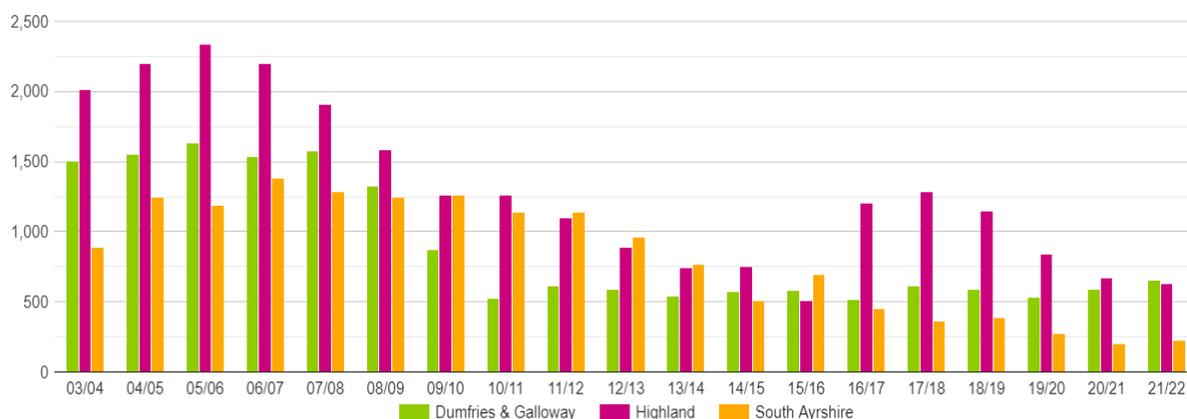


Table/Chart 5

Local Authority Benchmark comparators	Rate per 1,000 children
South Ayrshire	11.9
Angus	11.6
Dumfries and Galloway	12.1
West Dunbartonshire	26.8
Argyll and Bute	10.3
Comparator average	14.4
Scottish average	12.9
Local Comparators LA	
East Ayrshire (for local context)	16.8
North Ayrshire (for local context)	20.7

Chart 6

Children Subject to Scottish Children’s Reporters Authority (SCRA)



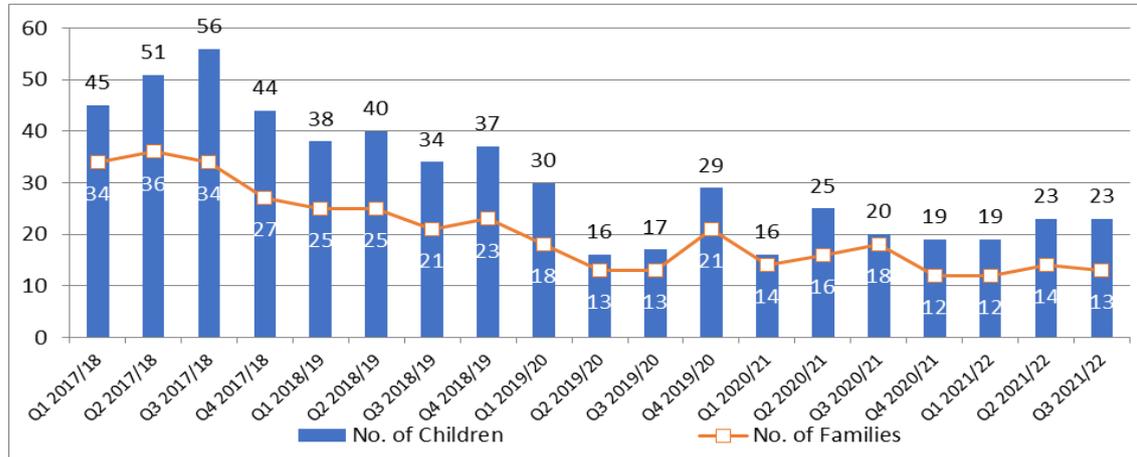
The above chart reflects that there is clearly a cultural change in South Ayrshire with less children referred to the Children’s Reporter and a reducing number of children being placed on Compulsory Supervision Orders and classed as being Looked After and Accommodated as a result.

The comparison with two of South Ayrshire comparator sites places this in further context, where in 2015/16 South Ayrshire had higher numbers than the other two areas referred to the SCRA. In 2021/22 South Ayrshire is significantly referring less children to the SCRA, by a percentage this is 64% less children referred to SCRA than the two comparator Local Authorities. It is hypothesised that this is due to the preventative and early intervention approaches being used and the evident culture change, which has been driven by the implementing of The Promise and the Signs of Safety in working with children and families.

Children and Family Groups placed on the Child Protection Register

Below (Chart 7) is the trend for South Ayrshire families who have children who are placed on the Child Protection Register by quarter.

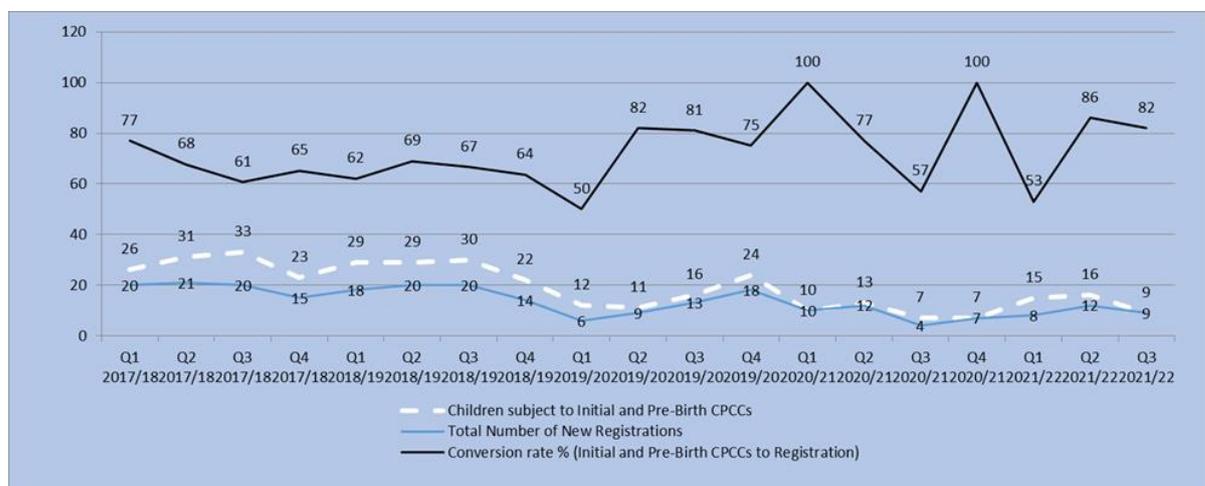
Chart 7



The number of children and families on the Child Protection Register has been consistent for the past two and a half years. It is important to acknowledge that the number of children on the Child Protection Register cannot be understood as either a positive or negative thing, however scrutiny of the Register and numbers on it is essential for assurance of processes and systems. In making sense of the numbers, the Child Protection Committee requires to fully understand the overall changing landscape in South Ayrshire and assure itself that the right children requiring access to the correct support and protection are getting access to this when they need it.

Chart 8

Conversion rate of CPCC's to Registration quarterly trends



- The conversion rate of children being taken to Child Protection Case Conference and who then become registered remains high at 82%. This reflects that the vast majority of children who were taken to Case Conference were the correct children requiring the need of care and protection that being registered brings, due to being at risk of significant harm.
- This is important as it means that children and families not requiring this level of support or response are not being unnecessarily drawn into intrusive and statutory interventions if more proportionate and strengths-based approaches can be used instead.
- This aligns very much with the Christie Commission where there is a focus on People, Prevention, Partnership and Performance. The current data indicates a preventative approach is now evident in South Ayrshire through working with families and children in partnership with improved outcomes for children and families. The application of the findings of The Promise has also enabled this approach, with the views of children and families continually informing how we deliver care and supports.

Table/Chart 9

Timescales for re-registration

Re-Registrations	2019/20				2020/21				2021/22			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
3 months	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	
6 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
12 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	
24 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

- It is of note, that over the last eight Quarters only three children have 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 families wellbeing and safety without the need for further interventions.
- There are currently only two children from two families who have been on the Child Protection Register for more than 12 months. This has been subject to peer review and the reasons for Registration deemed to be still applicable.
- The Child Protection Committee and Chief Officers Group should be assured that there have been very few re-registrations following a child/children being de-registered and that peer review of Registration is in place as a check and balance of the decision making.
- De-registrations are also likely to increase with the impact of Signs of Safety practice. That said, it is important that the CPC understand the reasons for re-registration within an 18-month time frame and that learning and improvement activity is implemented as a result.

Chart 10

From Registration to De-registration to Registration again – a reflection on the effectiveness of interventions

	Duration between previous De-Registration and Re-Registration											
	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups	Children	Family Groups
Dates	Under 12 Months		12-18 Months		19-24 Months		Over 2 Years		Transfer In / Temp Reg		TOTALS	
01/08/2021-31/07/2022	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	2
01/08/2020-31/07/2021	4	3	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	1	9	6
01/08/2019-31/07/2020	0	0	4	1	0	0	7	6	1	1	12	8
01/08/2018-31/07/2019	0	0	4	2	3	2	8	4	1	1	16	9
TOTAL	5	4	8	3	3	2	20	13	4	3	40	25

The above chart on re-registration following de-registration over the past four 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.

This has gone from a high in 2018/19 of 16 children re-registered from 9 families to a low in 2021/22 where only 3 children were re-registered from 2 families.

This could indicate 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.

Scottish Child Interview Model/Joint Investigative Interview Pan Ayrshire Approach

South Ayrshire has contributed equally to the establishment of the Ayrshire Joint Investigative Interview (JII) Team which went live in practice with the Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) on 18 July 2022.

A joint investigative interview is undertaken by a police officer and social worker and is defined as:

“...a formal, planned interview with a child, carried out by staff trained and competent to conduct it, for the purposes of eliciting the child’s account of events (if any) which require investigation.”

The national guidance for child protection in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021) states that the purpose of an investigative interview is to:

- Learn the child’s account of the circumstances that prompted the enquiry
- Gather information to permit decision-making on whether the child in question, or any other child, needs protection

- Gather sufficient evidence to suggest whether a crime may have been committed against the child or anyone else
- Secure best evidence as needed for court proceedings, such as a criminal trial or a children's hearing proof

In March 2015 [The Evidence and Procedure Review \(2015\)](#) recommended that:

“... consideration is urgently given to the development of a new, structured scheme that treats child and vulnerable witnesses in an entirely different way...There must be sufficient investment in the quality of interviewing, questioning, and examination applying the highest international standards and requiring appropriate training and qualification (p37).”

South Ayrshire along with the two other Ayrshires and Police Scotland have shown significant commitment to ensure that there is investment in the quality of interviewing and questioning of children who have been harmed.

It is important to reflect upon this, so that while there remains a focus and commitment in South Ayrshire to prevention and early intervention, when the need arises for children to be given the best possible child protection service to support them in a trauma informed way through the interview process, then the New Ayrshire Joint Investigative Interview team approach provides the best evidenced nurturing approach for children.

Team leader for the JII team in another Scottish Local Authority said about the approach;

“The best thing about the new model is the depth of research and knowledge gained to ensure every child is afforded the most trauma free experience during the contact they have with the JII Team”

As of the 28 September 2022 there have been 50 referrals received by the Ayrshire JII Team between 18 July 2022 and 23 September 2022. 30 joint interviews have been completed with 8 pending completion and 12 not being progressed to joint interview post referral.

To date there have been four referrals for South Ayrshire children and 2 children who had completed interviews from the new Pan Ayrshire Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM). These numbers are very low for South Ayrshire, however there were a further 37 children considered for Inter-agency Referral Discussions (IRD) in the same timeframe outwith of the SCIM model (see the below attachment of an audit on IRD completed in South Ayrshire).

This will be the same for East and North Ayrshire; there is not currently capacity for the Pan Ayrshire JII model to take on all IRD's, but the numbers reflect the full picture of children considered for Interagency Referral Discussions due to child protection concerns being identified.



IRD Audit Report - 21
09 22.docx

Functional Family Therapy and Intensive Family Support

South Ayrshire has invested further in supporting children to remain at home with specialist support services which support families at a time of crisis. The Intensive Family Support Service and the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) team are two examples of this. These services engage with families at a point of crisis when the likelihood of escalation through the care system is moderate to high. Through direct evidence-based interventions which are family-centred and relational, the teams can support families to live together, through times of stress and dysfunction towards a more supportive and nurturing family experience. Functional Family Therapy is a family based intensive intervention programme that builds on the existing strengths within family relationships. The interventions range from 12 to 30 sessions in the family home over a three to five-month period. The intensity and duration are dependent on the levels of risk that the young person is deemed to be exposed to.

Out of the 26 families referred to the Functional Family Therapy team, 92% engaged and completed the programme. 97% of those who completed the programme remained at home, 95% of those still remain at home. 95% of young people have remained within their mainstream local school.

What parents have told us:

"I feel FFT is helping myself and kids in a lot of ways. It has given me the tools to cope with arguments and it is helping us all without problems. I am a lot calmer in dealing with situations and the skills have really helped me and my family."

"The feelings of failure as a parent on starting with this service are quickly put at ease. The relationship between myself and my daughter has improved dramatically, and we were left with coping mechanisms to deal with any issues that arise..."

Initial Case Reviews, Significant Case Reviews and Learning Reviews - a comparison

The below (Chart 11) reflects information from the Care Inspectorate in regards to Learning Reviews, which were historically called either Initial Case Reviews or Significant Case Reviews.

These are reviews which are instigated at the point where there has been a significant incident of harm or death to a child and where there is likely to be local and national learning as a result of the event.

Chart 11

CPC/Public Protection Area	YEAR										
	2018 (from 1 April)		2019		2020		1 Jan 2021 – 31 March 2021		1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022		1 April 2022 – 26 October 2022
	ICR only	SCR	ICR only	SCR	ICR only	SCR	ICR only	SCR	ICR only	SCR	Learning Review
Angus	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A & B	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (proceeding)
D & G	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (proceeding)
Joint EA & SA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EA	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (proceeding)
Highland	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	0
NA	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (not proceeding)
Scottish Borders	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (not proceeding)
South Ayrshire	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (proceeding)

The chart reflects that South Ayrshire is comparable with national and local bench marking in terms of ICR, SCR and Learning Reviews. It shows that there are not any more or less Learning Reviews taking place in South Ayrshire than the comparable local authorities. The above also indicates that when there is the justification to do so, that South Ayrshire are as likely to initiate a Learning Review as the other comparable areas named.

Conclusion

The above data provides an overview of South Ayrshire's Child Protection registrations for the year 2021-2022 in comparison with her comparator local authority sites.

The data for this year reflects that South Ayrshire has the lowest ratio of Children on the Child Protection Register in the Local Government Bench Marking comparisons. However, this has not always been the case as was clear over a three-year period from 2015 to 2017 where South Ayrshire had a higher proportion of children per 1,000 on the Child Protection Register. When South Ayrshire are compared with other Scottish Local Authorities who have implemented the Signs of Safety framework, then South Ayrshire is in a similar range of children per 1,000 on the Child Protection Register.

While it is important that Child Protection figures are scrutinised and efforts are made to understand the reasons for the change in Child Protection figures over the past few years, particularly when they are an outlier within the LGBF data.

It is hypothesised that this change in data is as a direct result of a concerted effort among partners to apply more “Christie like” principles in building partnerships with people to be more preventative in our approach, and then using data to reflect whether this has been successful or not.

The implementation of the Promise and its findings and the application of the Signs of Safety, along with the continued investment in Family Function Therapy has significantly driven and contributed to cultural change in how we protect and care for Children in South Ayrshire. This has resulted in a more “risk sensible” approach to keeping Children safe from harm (Professor Eileen Munro used the term “risk sensible” opposed to risk taking behaviours or risk aversion).

The principles underpinning the New Child Protection Guidance state that; ***“The most effective protection of children involves early support within the family, before urgent action is needed and purposeful use of compulsory measures are necessary. If children do require placement away from home, real protection involves attuned, trauma informed and sufficiently sustained support towards reunification, or towards an alternative secure home base when this is not possible.”***

There is a strong emphasis in South Ayrshire on prevention and early help approaches which stops families from being unnecessarily drawn into child protection processes. This is a positive and needs to be celebrated, at the same time, the Child Protection Committee and Chief Officers Group are asked to remain curious around the findings in this report and apply appropriate scrutiny to ensure that there is not an overly optimistic view of the change in Child protection figures.

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