



SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE BOARD
EDUCATION, SPORT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

25 NOVEMBER 2024
26 NOVEMBER 2024

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Report by Chief Social Work Officer

PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Comhairle with the Annual Report of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) on the statutory work undertaken during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Chief Social Work Officers are required to submit an annual report to the Scottish Government covering the range of statutory responsibilities that sit with the Chief Social Work Officer.
- 2.2 This Report sets out the detail of social work and social care activities during the reporting period. The Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report is a mean of reporting on the delivery of social work services for local authority areas, highlighting key activities, developments and challenges.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2023/24.**

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Appendix: Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2023/24
Background Papers: None

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	n/a
Legal	n/a
Staffing	n/a
Assets and Property	n/a
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	n/a
Equalities	n/a
Corporate Strategy	Ensure those in need receive the care and support they need to live safe, healthy and independent lives.
Environmental Impact	n/a
Consultation	n/a

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Chief Social Work Officers reports give an overview of social work and social care in Scotland by Local Authority area. The social care landscape is marked by several significant pressures, including an ageing population, increased demand, rising complexity of needs, social care cost escalation, workforce shortages, evolving legislation, pandemic effects, and the cost-of-living crisis, disproportionately impacting the most disadvantaged communities.
- 5.2 Across the service landscape, recruitment and retention difficulties persist. Services experience prolonged high vacancy and sickness absence rates, impacting statutory social work services. Workforce planning is becoming increasingly complex due to new structures and integration models, with varied responses to challenges across different localities. This Report details strategies, challenges, and responses to identify future demands and solutions in workforce planning.
- 5.3 There are a number of significant pressures facing social work: an ageing population, increased demand for services and workloads, increased complexity of need, rising costs, workforce shortages, new legislation and policy developments, the continuing effects of the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis on our communities. Those living in the most disadvantaged circumstances are being hardest hit. These factors are all having significant implications for delivery.
- 5.4 Of note is an increase in referrals generally and in particular a growth in new referrals, and demand for support with trauma and mental health conditions. Factors giving rise to particular pressures include Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) requiring support, an increase in adult and child protection work, the shortage of long term/permanent foster carers, and a general increase in work across Justice services, with an accompanying rise in complexity.
- 5.5 Within the body of this Report, Social Work Scotland's Setting the Bar report is referenced and which evidences the need to train and employ more social workers, provide better support throughout careers, and commit to investment in the profession. There are not enough suitably qualified and experienced Social Workers and Social Care workers at a national level which the Outer Hebrides is experiencing at a local level. Reports indicate sustained problems around recruitment and retention across all areas in the sector, with mixed success in addressing them i.e. our Care at Home Service.

- 5.6 The national landscape continues to be shaped by legislative and policy developments such as the National Care Service, The Promise and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, which impact on how services are delivered. Demands for new initiatives outstrip financial and human resources, with savings impacting upon core services. In addition, short-term funding makes attempts to meet local needs difficult

CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The 2023/24 Chief Social Work Officer Report differs little from other recent reports in terms of the pressures on services and lack of optimism in terms of the situation improving anytime soon. The profession continues to exist in a time of uncertainty. While recognizing the financial pressures on the Comhairle the Report highlights the extent of the impact on social work services, the significant risks these pressures present to vulnerable children and adults, the lack of resilience within particular workforces i.e. qualified social workers involved in public protection and what actions could be taken to improve the situation, such as investment in a trainee program.