

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL
LEARNING AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE

3 MAY 2023

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SERVICES FOR CHILDREN,
YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

Report by Executive Director (Education and Children's Services)
(Report No. 23/131)

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 On 31 January 2023, a report was presented to the Perth and Kinross Council's Extended Leadership Team (ELT) which highlighted significant financial pressures within Services for Children, Young People and Families (SCYPF), brought about as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report outlined those circumstances and sought approval to request the creation of an earmarked reserve to provide additional financial support to manage the impact of COVID-19 on children and their families and to help reduce the need for residential care placements. This request was approved at Council on 1 March 2023 ([Report No. 23/72 refers](#)). This report provides the context for the financial pressures, describes how funds will be utilised throughout 2023-2025 and outlines the anticipated outcomes.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
- Notes the content of this report and supports the process to achieve the proposed outcomes; and
 - Approves that progress on the position of the Residential Care Budget and wider (SCYPF) Budget continues to be reported to the Finance & Resources Committee within the Revenue Monitoring Report.

3. STRUCTURE OF REPORT

- 3.1 This report is structured over the following sections:
- Section 4: Background
 - Section 5: Proposals
 - Section 6: Expected Outcomes
 - Appendices

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a notable increase in the numbers of young people demonstrating extremely high levels of risk-taking

behaviours, emotional harm, drug and alcohol use and expression of suicidal ideation.

The risks presented by many of these young people was so high that they could not have been placed, safely, within a Kinship or Foster Care placement and a residential placement was the only option.

Between November 2021 and January 2022, a series of unplanned residential placements pushed the costs above that of the allocated 2021-22 budget and this has continued throughout 2022 and into 2023. This situation is replicated across Scotland and was raised as an issue with the Scottish Government at the Chief Social Work Officers' meeting on 12 January 2023, and in subsequent meetings with members of Social Work Scotland at which, all local authorities are represented.

- 4.2 The financial pressures identified at this time were specifically within the Residential Care Budget, the funding for the REACH (Resilient, Engaged, Achieving, Confident, Healthy) Team and from the creation of temporary posts within SCYPF. Inflation on the costs of residential care placements has also impacted negatively on the budget (the additional inflation costs charged to Perth and Kinross Council for residential care totalled £127k in 2022-23). Projections for the Residential Care Budget indicate that it will take a number of years to recover from the impact of COVID-19, and as such, there was a projected overspend of £1.502m in 2022/23, £1.152m in 2023/24 and £167k in 2024/25.
- 4.3 The staffing challenges within the REACH Team have also compounded the capacity to respond to the needs of young people aged 12-16 years of age and who are 'on the edge of care', eg from January 2022, long term sickness absence of a number of social workers and being unable to fill a maternity cover post (no applicants) resulted in the social work resource in the REACH Team being depleted by 50%. This ultimately resulted in two permanent vacancies and this situation was only alleviated in April 2023 when staff finally started in the posts which had been vacant.
- 4.4 The complexity of case work for social work staff across the whole service, and the priority to respond to child protection concerns, prevented any internal moves of appropriately qualified staff during this time. In addition, there were few options to refer on to other specialists or to third sector partners for support because of a lack of capacity across the statutory and voluntary sector. This was further compounded by staff turnover which also left teams across SCYPF under pressure and impacted their ability to support the needs of vulnerable children and young people. This is, in part, due to temporary contracts being offered as permanent funding has not been made available for additional posts and this has taken place at a time when there is a simultaneous, national recruitment challenge for qualified Social Workers.
- 4.5 The REACH Team budget of £1.536m has been funded, partly, by a £380k annual contribution from the REACH reserve for the last four years as agreed by Council in 2017 ([Report No. 17/262 refers](#)). In 2016-17, the Residential

Care Budget overspend totalled £850,710 and following the creation of the REACH Team in 2017, alongside supports from other services, resulted in sequential reduction in overspends each year, delivering an underspend of £499,218 in 2020-21.

From April 2023, it had been anticipated that the £380k required to maintain the REACH Team would be funded from the Residential Care Budget. However, as noted previously, this reduction has not materialised.

The Finance & Resources Committee will be provided with updates on the position of the Residential Care Budget and wider SCYPF Budget within the Revenue Budget Update report.

- 4.6 In September 2020, additional temporary funding approved by Council ([Report No. 20/173 refers](#)) from the REACH Reserve was used to backfill posts in Social Work Fieldwork Teams so that permanent funding could be transferred to create the COPE Team (Children and young people who are Open cases to social work and need Planned interventions at Evening). The COPE Team provides weekend and evening support services to vulnerable families helping avoid crises. During the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Perth and Kinross Council's Gold Command also approved the recruitment of two additional temporary social workers to provide additional capacity to meet the increasing demand on services. A temporary Child Protection Case Conference Co-ordinator had also been recruited to ensure a consistent response to the management of child protection. To retain these essential posts for 2023/24, funding was also requested.

5. PROPOSALS

Action Taken

- 5.1 The Chief Social Work Officer Report 2022 ([Report No. 23/40 refers](#)) considered the impact of COVID-19 and noted that recovery and renewal had not been possible to achieve due to complex needs and exceptionally high demand, which has not abated during 2022-23. It has been acknowledged that there has been no national funding specifically allocated, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to recruit staff to SCYPF. Consequently, to meet the longer-term staffing issues to enable the needs of children and young people to be appropriately supported, a request to seek additional funding was considered at the ELT and subsequently ratified at Council on 1 March 2023.
- 5.2 The total funding requested and approved is detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1

	23/24	24/25	TOTAL
Resource Requirements:	£'000	£'000	£'000
Residential Care Budget Projected Overspend in 2023/24 & 2024/25	1,152	167	1,319
Shortfall in running costs for the REACH TEAM	380		380
Funding for SW Post and back fill of COPE Team Posts from 1/4/23 to 31/3/24	232		232
Funding for temp SW Posts & CPCC Post from 1/10/23 to 31/3/24	94		94
	1,858	167	2,025

6. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 The approval of additional funding to provide the costs of residential care in 2023-24 ensures that we are fully supported to bring costs within budget.

The requirement for residential care remains unpredictable with many decisions regarding the appropriate use of residential care being made by the Children's Hearing or Court with which we must comply.

However, with key resources once again in place, noted in the organisational chart (Appendix 1) which outlines the interface of child protection social workers, the COPE Team and the REACH Team working in collaboration with other services, efforts can be made to improve the resilience of families and maintain young people within their communities, for as long as this remains safe and secure.

- 6.2 A third of young people from Perth and Kinross, who are currently in residential care, are scheduled to return home or move to independence over the summer of 2023 with appropriate support from the REACH Team and our Throughcare/Aftercare Team. This work is monitored very closely and will not only provide improved outcomes for the young people but will reduce the overall costs of residential care.
- 6.3 The provision of additional funding to secure fixed term posts to help manage the demand for support are scheduled to cease in March 2024. This will mean the reduction of one Child Protection Case Conference Co-ordinator, two Social Workers and four Senior Social Care Officers. The management team within Services for Children, Young People and Families are actively reviewing staffing levels and scrutinising every vacancy to ensure that this meets essential need before it is advertised. In addition, a revised service structure has enhanced the provision of an immediate response to maximise opportunities for earlier support.
- 6.4 The legacy of COVID-19, and the associated staffing concerns, makes it complex to predict future need. Every effort will continue to be made to support children and young people to remain with their families, this will not always be possible to achieve. The fixed term posts have been established to help manage demand and improve capacity to respond to need which has risen exponentially over the last two years. The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund also provides opportunities to help mitigate demand and to expand early help from the commissioning of third sector resources and to enhance preventative services. It is anticipated that high levels of need will not be abated within a year. However, the availability of the additional staffing will support efforts to moderate demand and stabilise service provision over the forthcoming year. The situation will be kept under continual review with the budgetary position being reported, as it has been, to Finance and Resources Committee.

Author

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Approved

Name	Designation	Date
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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes/None
Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement	None
Corporate Plan	None
Resource Implications	
Financial	Yes
Workforce	Yes
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	None
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	N/A
Strategic Environmental Assessment	N/A
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	N/A
Legal and Governance	N/A
Risk	N/A
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	None
Communication	
Communications Plan	N/A

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 This section sets out how the proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens.
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

This report relates to Objective No. (i) and (iv).

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This section sets out how the proposals relate to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Objectives:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens.
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

This report relates to Objective No. (i) and (iv).

- 1.3 The report also links to the Education & Children's Services Vision, Values and Priorities in respect of the following key Priority area:

- Best Start

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 Perth and Kinross Council approved the creation of an earmarked reserve to support the work of Children, Young People and Families Service in managing the impact of COVID-19 on higher levels of need and to reduce the number of residential care placements ([Report No. 23/72 refers](#)).

This reserve will be used over financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25 as per the table below:

	23/24	24/25	TOTAL
Resource Requirments:	£'000	£'000	£'000
Residential Care Budget Projected Overspend in 2023/24 & 2024/25	1,152	167	1,319
Shortfall in running costs for the REACH TEAM	380		380
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Funding for temp SW Posts & CPCC Post from 1/10/23 to 31/3/24	94		94
	1,858	167	2,025

The Finance & Resources Committee will be provided with updates on the position of the Residential Care Budget and wider Services for Children, Young People and Families Budget within the Revenue Budget Update report.

Workforce

- 2.2 N/A

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 N/A

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.

The proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

The proposals have been considered under the Act; however, no action is required as the Act does not apply to the matters presented in this report. This is because the Committee are requested to note the contents of the report only and the Committee are not being requested to approve, adopt or agree to an action or to set the framework for future decisions.

Sustainability

- 3.3 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 the Council also has a duty relating to climate change and, in exercising its functions must act:

- In the way best calculated to delivery of the Act's emissions reduction targets.
- In the way best calculated to deliver any statutory adaption programmes.
- In a way that it considers most sustainable.

- 3.3.1 Not applicable.

Legal and Governance

- 3.4 N/A

- 3.5 N/A

Risk

- 3.6 N/A

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with ECS Finance colleagues and Education & Children's Services Senior Management Team. The context for this report has been reviewed at the Extended Leadership Team.

External

- 4.2 N/A.

5. Communication

5.1 N/A

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

2.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (and not containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

3. APPENDICES

3.1 Appendix 1 – Services for Children, Young People and Families
Organisational Chart