Date	4 February 2026
Agenda Item	08

Report to: West Lothian Integration Joint Board

Report Title: Chief Social Work Officer Annual Report 2024/25

Report By: Chief Social Work Officer

Summary of Report and Implications	
Purpose	This report: (tick any that apply).
	- seeks a decision ☐
	- is to provide assurance ☐
	- is for information ☑
	- is for discussion ☐
	To present to the Integration Joint Board the annual Chief Social Work Officer report for the period 2024/25. The report provides an overview of social work and social care services over the reporting period.
Recommendations	It is recommended that the Board: 1. note the contents of the Chief Social Work Officer's annual report 2024/25 2. note that the report was presented to West Lothian Council on 18 November 2025 3. note that the report has been submitted to the Scottish Government Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor
Directions to NHS Lothian and/or West Lothian Council	A direction is not required.
Resource/ Finance/ Staffing	None
Policy/Legal	No new implications; Equality Impact Assessments will be applied to specific commitments where appropriate.
Risk	No new risks have been identified
Equality, Health Inequalities, Environmental and Sustainability Issues	The report has been assessed as having little or no relevance with regard to equality or the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a result, an equality impact assessment has not been conducted.

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC

Strategic Planning and Commissioning	The services covered by the report contribute to the delivery of the Strategic Plan Outcomes.
Locality Planning	The services covered by the report contribute to the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.
Engagement	The report has been considered at the meeting of West Lothian Council on 18 November 2025.

Terms of Report

1. Background

1.1 The West Lothian Integration Joint Board (IJB) is responsible for the strategic planning and delivery of adult and older people social work and social care services. The remit of children's and justice services covered in this Chief Social Work Officers (CSWO) report does not fall under IJB governance.

1.2 The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 requires local authorities to appoint a single Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). The CSWO role was established to ensure the provision of appropriate professional advice in the discharge of a local authority's statutory functions. The legislation governing the delivery of social work services requires the Chief Social Work Officer to exercise a general level of oversight.

1.3 The Scottish Government published national guidance for local authorities on the appointment and responsibilities of Chief Social Work Officers, including related reporting arrangements. The arrangements in West Lothian are consistent with the guidance. There is requirement for CSWO annual reporting and the report at appendix 1 to this report fulfils this requirement.

2. Service Overview

2.1 The role of council social work services is to support, care for and protect people of all ages. Services, directly provided or purchased, are designed to promote safety, dignity and independence. Services also contribute to community safety by reducing offending and managing the risk posed by known offenders.

2.2 Services are delivered within a framework of statutory duties and powers imposed on the council. Services are required to meet national standards and to provide best value.

3. Chief Social Work Officer Duties

3.1 The role of the Chief Social Work Officer is to provide professional governance, leadership and accountability for the delivery of social work and social care services, whether these be provided by the local authority or purchased from the third or private sectors. The CSWO should assist the local authority and partners in understanding the complexities and cross cutting nature of social work service delivery. This includes in relation to particular issues such as corporate parenting, child and adult protection and the management of high -risk offenders.

3.2 In addition, there are a small number of duties and decisions that relate primarily to the curtailment of individual freedom and the protection of both individuals and the public, which must be made either by the Chief Social Work Officer or by a professionally qualified social worker to whom responsibility has been appropriately delegated.

3.3 The council's scheme of delegation provides for senior social work staff to make certain decisions on behalf of the local authority in specific areas including adults with incapacity, mental health, all areas of public protection and risk management, secure care, emergency placement of children and adoption of children.

4. Chief Social Work Officer Report

4.1 The Chief Social Work Officer annual report provides an overview of the role and responsibilities of the Chief Social Work Officer and outlines the governance and accountability arrangements in place in West Lothian.

4.2 The report also includes an overview of service quality and performance, resources and workforce.

4.3 CSWO annual reports are completed based on a template agreed with the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser to Scottish Government.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The CSWO report for the period 2024/25 sets out areas of positive social work and social care performance and impact and also notes where improvements are planned or in progress.

5.2 The significant financial challenges experienced during the reporting year are set out in the resources section of the report.

5.3 The position in relation to workforce is detailed with more stability noted.

5.4 The findings of a national Care Inspectorate review of social work governance and assurance completed in the reporting period are noted in the report. One of the key review messages for national consideration is the risk social work services face of being unable to fulfil statutory duties in some areas as a consequence of enduring financial pressures and levels and complexity of demand.

5.5 The challenges and risks in relation to future performance of social work services, taking account of the above context, are noted in the forward-looking concluding section of the CSWO annual report.

References:	None
Appendices:	1: Chief Social Work Officer's Annual Report 2024/25
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Appendix 1

CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER
ANNUAL REPORT
2024/25

West Lothian Council

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Introduction

I am privileged to present the West Lothian Chief Social Work Officer report for 2024/25.

The report provides an overview of social work and social care services in West Lothian and section 2 in particular sets out detail in relation to the delivery of services and performance.

Despite the many challenges experienced over the year, there has been strong performance. One of the most significant of the challenges has been the budget and financial position detailed at the resources section of the report. The unprecedented high levels of budget pressures in both children and adult services largely relate to commissioning services to meet the needs of individuals with increased demand, increased levels of complexity and also increased costs of care.

Overall the workforce position remains stable with ability to recruit to vacant posts. Managing increased levels of risk and complexity alongside managing and supporting the newly qualified social worker workforce in some of our teams does present challenge. We continue to benefit from offering student experiences to social workers in training and from offering opportunities for newly qualified workers to start their professional careers in West Lothian.

Taking account of all the above circumstances, our social work and social care employees, managers and teams have shown great resilience over the year and high levels of commitment to their professional standards and values.

At points throughout the report there is reference to the scale of pressure and risk that our social work teams are working within and the likelihood of this challenge increasing looking forward.

The annual report also highlights the many positives that remain around social work practice in West Lothian. Despite the challenges ahead, the report contains examples of practice and improvement that should give encouragement and motivation to the workforce and future workforce to join in the experience of working in our services and making a difference to the lives of people being supported.

The work of the social work and social care workforce is appreciated and formally noted in this annual CSWO report.

Jo MacPherson

1. Governance, accountability and statutory functions

During the reporting year, the Care Inspectorate completed a national review of social work governance and assurance and reported in May 2025 highlighting that overall social work leaders worked effectively within often complicated governance arrangements and noting that these arrangements were well understood by staff. Overall, social work assurance was found to be mostly effective.

The review findings also noted 3 high level messages for national consideration. Social work services were finding the ability to match supply with demand exacerbated by increased levels of complexity, meaning that social work was at risk of being unable to fulfil its statutory duties in some areas. Workers were concerned that relationship-based practice is being replaced by "transactional" or "episodic" engagement with people and children using services. The Care Inspectorate noted that a national approach is required to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector. The Care Inspectorate also referenced that social work sustainability is particularly impacted by the enduring financial position and change is needed to support the vital role of social work services.

For West Lothian, the risks to delivery of statutory functions as a result of the ongoing budget position set against the local context of increased demand and complexity was highlighted clearly in my last CSWO annual report. Whilst statutory functions have been delivered over the reporting year, looking ahead the risk remains and increases as opportunities for efficiency and transformation diminish year on year and financial pressures increase. These are key challenges facing the CSWO in terms of responsibility and accountability for practice and these are unlikely to diminish.

There have been no changes to West Lothian social work governance and accountability arrangements over the reporting year and these are set out below.

Social Policy (social work and social care services) and locally managed health services are planned and carried out by the council, NHS Lothian and the West Lothian Integration Joint Board (IJB) under the partnership umbrella of the West Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Decision-making and statutory responsibility for service delivery remain with the council, health board, and IJB. Adult and older people social work and social care services functions are delegated to West Lothian IJB. Children and families and justice social work fall under West Lothian Council governance arrangements. These arrangements are longstanding, well established and understood.

The statutory CSWO role is delegated to me alongside the management position of Head of Social Policy. This is set out in the council's Scheme of Delegations to Officers.

The CSWO is required to report annually to council and the arrangements set out here form the basis of the annual report. The CSWO also reports annually to the IJB. The CSWO is by statute a non-voting member of the IJB. The CSWO has a defined role in professional and clinical and care leadership and contributes to IJB Health and Care Governance systems.

The CSWO remains a member of key decision-making teams and groups both within the council, the IJB, other multi-agency and public protection partnerships and Chief Officer Group. There are a number of approaches in place to ensure monitoring of statutory and non-statutory decision-making aspects of the remit which have been delegated on a day-to-day basis to managers across the council as well as processes to establish assurance on the quality of social work and social work practices.

2. Service Quality and Performance

2.1 Service Wide

Complaints Management

There is senior management and CSWO oversight of all complaints where any element has been partially or fully upheld to identify learning and improvement actions. There is regular public reporting on complaint management performance. The most common factors contributing to complaints being upheld relate to issues of communication and service standards. Stage 1 complaints saw a 69.8% compliance rate, improved from 65.7% in 2023/24. Stage 2 complaints saw a drop to 56.8% compliance from 73.5% in 2023/24, although 70% of cases escalated and then resolved at stage 2 were concluded within timescale.

Social Care Recording System

During this period, a new system for social work case recording and case management has been introduced. Significant work has been undertaken to prepare for implementation. This has been a challenging process with a growing appreciation that the service underestimated the scale of input and resource required. Focus remains on ensuring the new system is used effectively to lessen burden on practitioners and managers by reducing use of multiple systems and improving data reporting.

Contract Monitoring

A significant proportion of social care services for adults and older people in West Lothian are commissioned. A service Contract Monitoring Framework provides a consistent approach for monitoring of externally purchased care and support.

There is regular public reporting through governance processes on social work contract monitoring and a business support team in place to undertake contract and commissioning activities.

2.2 Children and Families

In terms of general overview, children's social work services are managing significant levels of demand and complexity. In line with strategic direction, there has continued to be significant focus on supporting families and preventing care away from home for children and young people. There is strong performance presented in this section on the range of family support activity ongoing. This includes work in partnership with the third sector, for example, Family Group Decision Making. Where children cannot be supported at home, we have continued to be focused on supporting kinship networks more effectively and increasing our foster care capacity. Excellent work has been done to generate increased levels of enquiry about foster care and we are optimistic that the impact of this will support children's outcomes significantly looking forward.

Significant social work and senior leadership focus is targeted on reducing the numbers of our children who move to residential care out with West Lothian. This is an area of practice challenge due to increased complexities experienced by children, young people and their families and also an area of significant financial pressure. We have prevented many children with complex needs moving to external residential resources but we are sometimes not able to, due to the levels of risk involved. The costs of commissioned external residential care is very significant, presenting a real risk to financial stability with a significant overspend experienced in this area over the reporting year. There have been challenges in finding secure care for children and also on moving on some of our children from secure care to appropriate resources. Our services have responded with flexibility and creativity when required to identify bespoke arrangements to support children at very high risk in the community where its assessed alternative resources are needed but not immediately available.

There has been a re-commissioning of accommodation and support services for young people leaving our care which has had positive benefit on our ability to support young people moving on.

As always there has been strong multi-agency partnership working focused on the protection of children and continuous improvement. Social work is central to multi-agency quality assurance and evaluation work in this area. There are practice challenges that emerge from assurance and self-evaluation activity and our continual focus is on how we support and embed improvement.

We have continued to have a clear focus on improvements to engagement, participation and rights-based work.

Children's Rights, Participation and Advocacy

Significant progress has been made by our multi-agency Children's Rights Working Group. A fixed-term Participation and Engagement post was established in January 2025 to further support practice. Work has continued to expand the Children's Rights Network. Five events were held over the reporting period including a youth-led workshop identifying key themes: bullying, discrimination, school attendance, mental health, and gender-based violence. As part of the 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence, young people also participated in a march and rally, and led a Youth Space 101 takeover to raise awareness. Children's rights training and briefings have been delivered across services and for elected members, supporting integrated impact assessments and strengthening rights-based decision-making. Work started to develop a child-friendly complaints process aligned with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and SPSO guidance. Children and young people are co-designing the process using Microsoft Sway to capture their views.

There has been focus during 2024/25 on increasing participation of children and families in review processes. Participation rates have ranged from 92–100% over the last two years. A graduate researcher, in collaboration with 45 children and young people, reviewed "My Planning Meetings" to improve understanding and engagement. Recommendations include improving meeting information and offering greater flexibility in format and timing. A multi-agency group will co-design and test a revised review meeting approach. The Independent Reviewing Officer service is a key partner in this improvement work.

Who Cares? Scotland continues to provide independent advocacy for care-experienced children and children involved in the child protection system, supporting their understanding and voice in planning. *Having Your Say*, West Lothian's participation group for care-experienced children and young people, produced its annual newsletter and engaged with services on mental health, LGBTQi+, and bereavement. The group will mark its 25th anniversary with a celebration in October 2025 during Care Experience Week. A drop-in group for unaccompanied asylum -seeking children, supported by the Throughcare and Aftercare service and Participation and Engagement Worker, meets fortnightly. The group promotes the Youth Voice Charter, strengthens connections, and supports young people in understanding their rights under the UNCRC.

Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

Throughout 2024/25, the WFWF Operational Project Group has continued to strengthen collaboration across funded projects, promoting the sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources. Regular in-person development sessions have been held, enabling projects to better understand each other's remits and identify opportunities for collaboration to deliver holistic, whole-family support. A quarterly newsletter has also been introduced to share updates, referral pathways, and key achievements with partners and service users.

Inclusion and Support Service

In relation to this internal earlier help service, this year has seen a strengthening of the vulnerable pregnancy pathway involving a joint approach from the Inclusion and Support Service and the social work duty and child protection team. This service works with families at the antenatal stage of pregnancy where vulnerabilities and risks are identified to ensure that appropriate levels of support can be provided for families at the earliest possible stage. A range of promotional work with universal health partners has raised awareness of this pathway.

The three main reasons for referral of children and families to the Inclusion and Support Service during 2024/25 were school attendance support, emotional regulation support particularly for children who have either been diagnosed or are waiting for a neuro diverse diagnosis as well as mental wellbeing support with regard to anxiety, self- harm and/or suicidal thoughts.

The service has worked alongside education partners in developing the Inspire Learners Pathway which is individualised, needs-based and supportive, focused on building bespoke packages of support around a child or young person who, for a range of different reasons are struggling to engage with their learning and there is a risk of them disengaging from education and not having a positive destination.

In terms of performance data, the Inclusion and Support Service has impacted positively in terms of earlier intervention with an average this year of 97.7% of families not going on to require intensive support within 6 months of the Inclusion and Support Service ending their support.

Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing

The West Lothian Mental Health Oversight Group provides strategic, multi-agency leadership for children and young people's mental health services and reports to the Children and Families Strategic Planning Group. The work of the group is important in terms of strategic leadership and coordination as highlighted in last year's annual report, West Lothian is committed to providing a range of timely, accessible mental health support.

This includes Listen and Link**,** a self-referral phone line providing immediate support. The Inclusion and Support Service (ISS) and Roots offer drop-in and direct individual/family support through partnership approaches. A 24/7 text and call service (Voice) for children and young people with signposting to long-term support. 44% of users identify as LGBTQi+. Common concerns include low mood, suicidal ideation, self-harm, stress, and relationships. Self-Directed Support continues to be used to empower families to manage their own care budgets and select tailored supports. Uptake has increased by 155% in year two, with an 11.4% decrease in cost per young person.

Social work support for Children with a Disability and Their Families

The social work Child Disability Service provides support for children with a disability and their families, including completing assessments under Section 23 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, as well as Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements under the Carer (Scotland) Act 2016. Where eligible, families may receive Self-Directed Support (SDS) funding, with the service working closely with them to identify personalised outcomes.

In September 2024, the Child Disability Service employed an Early Intervention Family Support Worker through funding from the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, with the aim of providing timely, effective support for families. Of the 35 families receiving this support, 5 no longer required a full assessment due to successful early interventions. The Child Disability Service continues to offer group and outreach support, with over 70 children supported by various programs through Action for Children and Branch Out Together. Additionally, 78 children attended school holiday provisions over Easter provided by Action Group, Branch Out Together and Simply Play.

A key area of development is to increase numbers of parent carers accessing Adult Carer Support Plans, including parents of children without a formal disability diagnosis or affected by disability but who are still eligible for support. Plans are underway to enhance staff training across social policy teams to improve awareness and access to Adult Carer Support Plans.

For Young Carers in general, this year has seen extensive partnership working with social work teams, Carers of West Lothian and Education Services resulting in 288 young carers having the opportunity to complete a Young Carer Statement. A key development is the increase in the number of Young Carer Statements being progressed, largely driven by improved referral pathway introduced during this period.

The Child Disability Service, in Partnership with Carers of West Lothian, delivers a young carer sibling group for children known to the Child Disability service. Following the success of this group in 2024, with 14 monthly attendees, it has been extended to include two monthly groups for primary-aged children, and a new group for secondary-aged young carers. Feedback from both young carers and their families has been very positive.

"The group helped my child feel less isolated and realised there are other young carers just like him. My child has a better understanding of why his older sibling with special needs need more care and support when indoors and outdoors"

Children at Risk of Becoming Looked After

During 2024/25, 86% of children supported by our Families Together service offering intensive support, who were assessed as being at high risk of being placed away from home, avoided this. The service is frequently involved with families who have multiple concerns or vulnerabilities adding to the complexity they are experiencing. Families Together have remained involved when young people have entered care and have been successful in supporting some children to return home after short periods and to sustain kinship arrangements. The service has also sustained a high number of children at home.

A Children's Resources Panel approach has been introduced and developed during 2024/25 with the remit of quality assuring assessment and care planning for children and young people, through visible leadership that promotes operational change to Keep The Promise. The Panel comprises social work group managers and a Children 1st service manager to consider planning for individual children and families, to ensure matching to the most appropriate resource. Outcomes of the panel have included utilising interventions from internal resources across the service. Further positive impact is increased focus on concurrent and future planning, with the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) service taking a number of new referrals directly from the meetings.

Looked After and Care Experienced Children and Young People
Progress on Keeping The Promise in West Lothian

West Lothian continues to make positive, collaborative progress. The Promise Informed Persons (PIP) Leads Network has grown its multi-agency membership. Key achievements include strengthened local networks, shared best practices and ongoing workforce development. In March 2025, Promise Scotland hosted a Promise Learning Collaborative in West Lothian, spotlighting the Kinship Care Service—delivered in partnership with Children 1st —for its innovative approach and enhanced support for kinship carers.

Corporate Parenting Plan

The West Lothian Corporate Parenting Plan 2023/26 sets out the vision for children and the priorities and actions to deliver on these.

One of the key commitments in West Lothian's Corporate Parenting Plan is to reduce the number of care arrangement moves experienced by children and young people who are looked after away from home. In terms of impact, there has been a significant reduction of children and young people who have experienced more than 1 move, from 60 children/young people during 2021/2022 to 28 during 2024/2025. There has also been a reduction in the number of children/young people experiencing more than 2 moves. There has been a combination of factors contributing to this downward trend in terms of services developments and practice. These include increased available support for kinship carers by the Kinship Service, recruitment and training activity within the Family Based Care Service, support offered to care arrangements by Families Together, the introduction of visiting practice standards and the increased use of Family Group Decision making.

There was a downward trend in the total number of West Lothian children looked after over the six years to 2023/24, with a 29% reduction from 427 children at March 2018/19 to 304 children at 31 March 2024. The numbers have stabilised during 2024/25 and the number of looked after children in West Lothian at 31 March 2025 has increased by 7% overall from the same point in March 2024. Nationally, the trend is a gradual reduction in the number of children who are looked after. The total number of children looked after in West Lothian at 31/03/2024 and 31/03/2025 by age group, balance between community and residential settings is detailed in the table below.

Looked After Children												
	Under 1		1-4		5-11		12-15		16+		Total	
	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25	23/24	24/25
At Home with parents	0	0	4	4	15	9	14	15	2	4	**35**	**32**
Away from home – Community setting	4	11	49	55	87	95	63	60	31	23	**234**	**244**
Away from home – Residential setting	0	0	0	0	2	4	19	18	10	8	**31**	**30**
Secure care	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	4	**4**	**4**
Supported Accommodation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	**0**	**12**
Total	**4**	**11**	**53**	**60**	**104**	**108**	**97**	**93**	**46**	**51**	**304**	**323**

Kinship Care

Significant progress has been made in strengthening kinship care supports to promote family-based care and prevent breakdowns. Children living within their kinship network now account for 42% of all away from home care arrangements. In terms of key achievements over the year, we have seen a higher number of kinship care assessments completed enabling more families to access support. A peer support group was launched, providing networking and information-sharing opportunities. A revised Kinship Care Policy was approved. There has been enhanced use of Family Group Decision Making and completion of tailored support plans.

Foster Care

Efforts to increase fostering capacity have yielded strong results with a substantial rise in fostering enquiries from 11 in 2023 to 54 in 2024. Six fostering households were approved in 2024, compared to three in 2023. We have seen increased applications, with approximately 10 assessments in progress and due for panel review in 2025. Five preparation group sessions were delivered in 2024, two so far in 2025, with record attendance.

Residential Care

Improvements in staff development and youth engagement continue to enhance residential services locally with strengthened child and adult protection training and refresher training on the National Missing Persons Protocol. A weekly Youth Group established by young people is now in place leading to co-produced wellbeing spaces and collaboration with DASAT (Domestic and Sexual Abuse Team) on healthy relationships. There will be a rollout of Trauma Informed Parenting training in 2025 to further embed trauma-informed practice.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children remains a priority. We have experienced reduced arrivals of unaccompanied children in 2024/25 and now have more tailored accommodation and

services based on individual assessments. Biannual multi agency meetings ensure joined-up support across services. A 2025 summer programme was co-produced with young people, including ESOL classes, mental health support, and cultural dialogue.

Permanence and Adoption Service Developments

West Lothian's Adoption Service received a steady number of enquiries during the reporting period resulting in the approval of three adopter households. A further three families have completed assessments. The service continues to prioritise the recruitment of diverse adoptive households, with focused efforts on sibling groups and children of varying ages and backgrounds.

Post-adoption support has been strengthened in response to service user feedback. A monthly support group for existing adopters and regular drop-in sessions across West Lothian have been introduced. The service has also enhanced support for indirect contact between adopters and birth families, with positive feedback from both groups. Life story work remains a focus, helping children develop meaningful personal narratives. A comprehensive adopter training programme is in development. The first session on Trauma-Informed Parenting was held in April 2025, with further training supported by a new partnership with Adoption UK. Adopters have responded positively to the improved access to support and a single point of contact.

Collaboration with the social work Permanence Co-ordinator and Legal Services has improved the timeliness of adoptive placements, reducing delays and supporting direct petitions. The service is currently supporting 11 children through the family finding process.

The table below sets out activity in relation to the registration of children for adoption in West Lothian from 2022/23 onward.

Adoption	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Children registered for adoption	9	6	12
Children matched with adopters	5	8	8
Children registered for permanence order with authority to adopt	5	3	3
All children under age 12 registered for permanence (excludes kinship/residence orders)	13	15	4

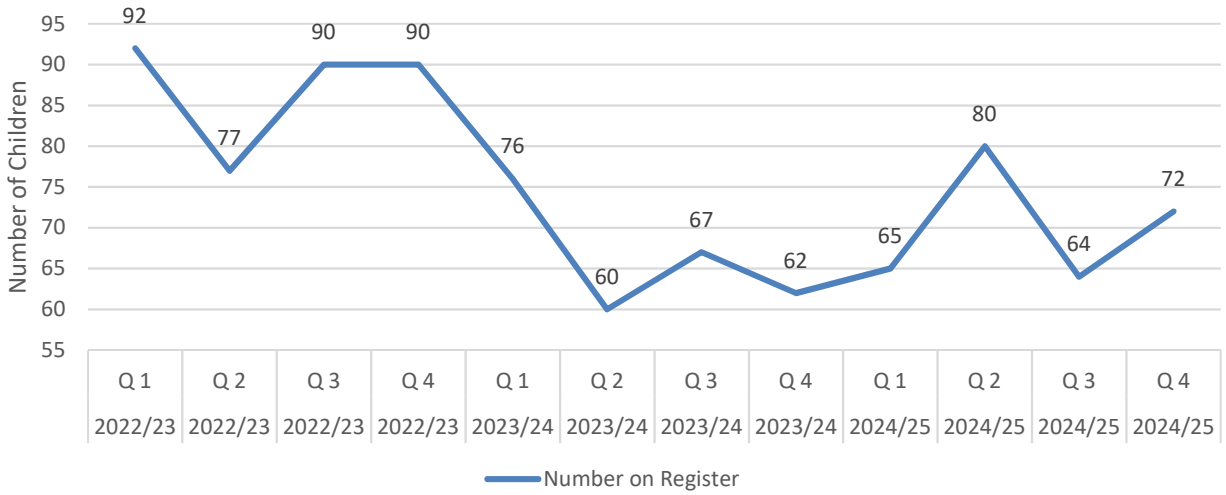
Continuing Care, Moving on and Aftercare

New arrangements were established in January 2025 following re-design of accommodation and support services for all West Lothian's care leavers. This has resulted in increased resource capacity, including accommodation with on-site support and independent tenancies, providing a stepping stone for young people to develop the life skills necessary to live independently. Increased capacity is supporting better planning for transitioning young people from care arrangements in West Lothian or returning to West Lothian to more independent living, with tailored support.

Protecting Children

Child Protection Data

Child Protection data is collated nationally from 1 August to 31 July. The latest national data (23/24) shows the West Lothian rate of Inter-agency Referral Discussions (IRDs) per 1000 of 0-17 population is higher than the Scottish average and higher than two of the Lothian authorities with the same Child Protection procedures. The rate per 1000 of Pre-birth and Initial Child Protection Planning Meetings (CPPMs) is lower than the average in Scotland but higher than two of the local authorities with the same Child Protection procedures. The number of children on the Child Protection Register has declined over the last few years, however due to the small numbers of children involved this can fluctuate significantly.



The Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) is fully embedded and is the only joint investigative interviewing approach now used in West Lothian. SCIM data is reviewed on a quarterly basis with partners across the Lothians to consider trends and a SCIM practitioner forum is well established, promoting learning and sharing of practice. SCIM is closely aligned to the Bairns' Hoose developments and partnership with Children 1st to enhance therapeutic supports.

Quality Assurance and Self Evaluation

The QASE subcommittee is responsible for audit and evaluation of multi-agency child protection work using the CPC's Quality Assurance and Self Evaluation Framework. A management Information Group meets to analyse child protection data on a quarterly basis to identify trends or variances requiring further assurance activity. Activity is tailored in response to themes identified. These most commonly emerge following single agency audit activity, IRD Review Group feedback, practitioner's feedback, from children and their families and from independent reviewing officers. In addition, points from learning review processes (local and national) and trends identified from analysis of child protection data may also trigger self -evaluation activity.

Child protection practice developments and improvements

In response to issues identified from audit activity, guidance for practitioners on the topics of Challenging Conversations and Professional Curiosity were published on the Child Protection Committee's website. Under Age Sexual Activity Guidance and the CSE procedure and guidance were updated and published.

There has been focus during 2024/25 on strengthening assessments and planning. There has been a refresh of GIRFEC guidance to clarify responsibilities, with focus on a child-centred, strength-based approaches. Issues around GIRFEC implementation have been identified through learning review processes thus the continuing focus on improvement. A GIRFEC practitioner forum is well established and will support improvement. This provides opportunity for practitioners and managers from all agencies to network and to share information on their roles to promote increased understanding. Independent Reviewing Officers are supporting the commitment to strength-based approaches in Child Protection Planning Meetings, with the aim of improving the experience of families involved and outcomes for all.

An IRD review group with senior representation from social work, police and health services meets fortnightly to review all IRDs to quality assure, identify themes, and report to the CPC. An IRD working group has been established to promote working relationships and improve practice.

Bairns' Hoose

West Lothian received funding from the Bairns' Hoose Development Fund to support development of the aims and principles of the Bairns' Hoose model during 2024/25. In partnership with Children 1st, a Bairns' Hoose coordinator and recovery workers, alongside partners, have established the project and are working directly with families to provide routine access to pre and post interview support, including through court processes. There has been engagement with children, young people and their families on an individual basis and through groups, with those involved with West Lothian Bairns' Hoose and a wider group of young people and their families to learn from experiences. Early messages include the need for more accessible information for families in relation to processes for parents and carers to equip them in supporting children and young people and this is being progressed. West Lothian made a further application and has been awarded funds to continue the work and to support ongoing development during 2025/26.

Missing Young People

The Missing Young Persons Group continue to work collaboratively to reduce missing incidents involving vulnerable young people in West Lothian through targeted, coordinated interventions. The group includes internal services and external provider partners. A Missing Young Person's Protocol is fully embedded in practice to guide consistent responses across agencies and refresher training was undertaken during March and April 2025. Recent funding secured from the National Missing Persons Coordinator will support efforts targeting young people missing from home or education and enhance return discussions and responses for children experiencing care.

Safe and Together

The Safe and Together domestic abuse-informed framework used in West Lothian prioritises keeping children safe and with their non-abusive parent, while holding perpetrators accountable. In September 2024, West Lothian launched a month-long awareness campaign to strengthen implementation, including drop-in sessions and training opportunities. Between September and December 2024, six 90-minute briefings were delivered for social work and multi-agency partners, covering core principles and key concepts. In November 2024, a 'Core Four' training session for 20 practitioners was delivered as well as a one-day overview for 12 practitioners focused on enhanced assessment, partnership, and case planning.

West Lothian MARAC

The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in West Lothian discussed 247 cases in 2024–2025 – an 8% increase from the previous year. MARAC is the established model for responding to high-risk victims of domestic abuse, ensuring risk-led, multi-agency action to protect individuals. During the same period, 333 children were also discussed within the MARAC framework.

Domestic and Sexual Assault Team (DASAT)

DASAT, a local authority service supporting adults and children affected by gender-based violence received 1,824 referrals in the reporting year, marking a 13% decrease from 2023/2024. 98% of adults and 99% of children reported feeling safer as a result of intervention and 0% of women supported by the Almond Project reoffended during or within 6 months post-intervention.

DASAT delivered a range of training sessions for partners during the reporting period strengthening inter-agency collaboration and enhancing professional confidence and competence. Survivor-led service development was strengthened with peer support central to empowering individuals with lived experience. Self-Directed Support continues to offer flexible, personalised therapeutic options for women and children, enhancing choice and control. Nurture Groups for Children have also been delivered for children *aged 4–7*, a 6-week programme exploring emotions, identifying safe people, and managing worries and for children aged *8*-12: an 8-week programme addressing emotional resilience, self-esteem and healthy relationships.

Children and Families 2024/25

Early Intervention Inclusion and Support Service

97.7%

of families not moving on to more intensive support within 6 months of ISS support ending

Mental Health Support

36,601

visits to mental health webpages

Early Intervention Family Support

98%

of families did not require more intensive supports due to successful early interventions

Child Disability Service

70

children have accessed various programs through Action for Children and Branch Out Together

Families Together Intensive Support Service

86%

of children avoided care who were assessed as being at high risk of entering care

VOICE

44%

of the texters reaching out to Voice are from the LGBTQI+ community

Kinship Care

42%

of children cared for away from home are with Kinship Carers

Fostering Approvals

100%

increase in Fostering Households approved

2.3 Adults and Older People

In terms of overview, the reporting year has been an incredibly challenging one for adult and older people social work services. This is mainly due to unprecedented levels of budget pressure largely as a result of provision of commissioning services to meet complex need and demand. Pressures across all areas were experienced but particularly so in supporting adults with learning disabilities. Alongside delivery of a complex set of agreed budget savings, the requirement to identify actions to mitigate the scale of the emerging pressures has been very challenging for the social work service.

A significant review and redesign project was set up to establish a multi- disciplinary single point of access and locality multi-disciplinary team approach for 2025/26. Significant budget savings are attached to this redesign work and the impact of this on social work's ability to deliver statutory functions will be kept under close review and scrutiny. Practitioners and frontline managers have been positive about the potential benefits for practice and the meeting of individuals outcomes the new multi-disciplinary model has the potential to bring. The teams have demonstrated commitment to collaboration, a willingness to learn from one another, a drive to find smarter, more effective ways of supporting service users and patients.

The Care Inspectorate completed a progress review of adult support and protection in West Lothian following on from the full inspection of 2022, which found weaknesses in key processes. The findings of the review inspection process were positive and validated positive impact of the improvement work that had been underway from the first scrutiny process. The self-evaluation of the APC and social work services and the finding of the progress review inspection were compatible with a clear future improvement plan in place. The increase in numbers of adults now attending their case conferences is very positive and a welcome development.

Excellent work has continued and delivered access to care at home support for people in West Lothian with low levels of needs that our commissioned services are unable to meet. There have been challenges in the supply of some resources, such as care homes for older people but toward the end of the reporting period there has been some easing of this unmet need trend.

There is an established carers strategy implementation group driving forward improvement activity and exploring reasons, developing actions to address why customer feedback from West Lothian unpaid carers shows low levels of satisfaction.

Our Mental Health Officer team has had a positive year in terms of staff retention with good impact on performance.

The sections below also detail positive work by our care homes collaborative team, supporting the care home sector for older people in West Lothian. The team have achieved positive result and these are noted in this section

Redesign of Social Work Services

The reporting year has seen a full-scale review of adult and older people's social work teams to support the development of a multi-disciplinary integrated delivery model to meet local needs within the East and West Localities of West Lothian.

This work has provided significant transformational opportunities, which has necessitated baselining, review activity, careful planning, testing and execution. Significant budget savings have underpinned this work and a high risk to delivery of statutory functions identified in the risk and impact assessment. The risks have been assessed and mitigations through the review process put in place. The impact of this transformation and budget saving measure on social work performance and delivery of statutory duties will be closely monitored moving forward. The team are currently developing performance data to ensure there are measurable indicators of outcomes supporting identification of areas of challenge that require further refinement and supporting identification of any emerging risk.

Services for Adults with Disabilities

West Lothian continues to make progress in delivering the expectation of the national Coming Home Implementation report, which aims to reduce out-of-area placements and long hospital stays for adults with learning disabilities and complex care needs.

West Lothian's supported living development in Pumpherston continues to expand, with more individuals now successfully settled in their own tenancies. Planning is underway to ensure all remaining tenancies are occupied by end 2025. Those already living in the development continue to experience improved quality of life, with increased independence, social engagement, and positive feedback from individuals and their families and carers.

Work is underway to de-register seven care homes to homes of multiple occupancy enabling adults to become tenants in their own right, offering a more personalised and rights-based model of care, aligned with the principles of Coming Home.

The Dynamic Support Register continues to be an essential tool for identification and response to the changing needs of individuals. It enables services to act quickly and proactively, ensuring people receive the right support at the right time and are considered for local options as they become available.

Supporting and modernising day support and opportunities has continued over this reporting period with a number of supported volunteering opportunities and a range of community provisions.

A 'How Are We Doing Questionnaire' carried out in Feb 2025 based on the Care inspectorate quality framework themes, resulted in the three day services having good to excellent scores across 97% to 100% of service users and carers. Feedback was also received from this process for areas for improvement for the coming year. The customer satisfaction surveys carried out from April 2024 to March 2025 reflected a similar level of satisfaction with 99% of service users and carers rating the service received overall as good to excellent.

Progress has also been made in improving transitions from children to adult social work services. This has included the agreement of a revised transition policy providing information on key milestones for young people during their final two years of formal education. To support implementation of the policy, a Quick Guide and a formal Transitions Pathway have been developed. These tools are designed to ensure clarity and consistency for practitioners, young people, and their families. Planning is underway for the launch of Compass App, a digital tool providing accessible information for young people and their families, and the Transitions Pathway at a Transitions event September 2025, co-ordinated by Carers of West Lothian, in collaboration with the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Adult Support and Protection

Key Performance Data

There was change to the national reporting of Adult Support and Protection data in 2023/24 with the introduction of the National Minimum Dataset. This was further developed in 2024/25 with 'Phase 2' introduced April 2024. Whilst there has been change in the categories reported on, there are some comparisons that can be drawn from previous years' data.

During the reporting period there has been a decrease of 12% in the number of Adult Support and Protection referrals compared to the previous year. A number of factors have contributed to this, including local changes to recording of welfare concerns. The conversion rate from referrals to completion of a duty to investigate has increased with 84% of referrals received resulting in an initial inquiry being progressed as opposed to 73% in 2023/24.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Adult Protection Referrals	1,656	1385	1212
Adult Protection Inquiries (DTIs)	*	1017	1014
Inquiries WITH Investigatory Powers	*	229	412
Inquiries WITHOUT Investigatory Powers	*	762	599
Referral to Inquiry Conversion Rate	*	73%	84%
Inter-agency Referral Discussions (IRDs)	171	142	96
Inquiry to IRD Conversion Rate		14%	9%
Adult Protection Case Conferences (this includes Adult Protection Case Conference Reviews)	147	128	97

***Data collection in this category did not commence until 2023/24**

Over the reporting period, there has been a decrease in the number of Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs) undertaken, with 46 (32%) fewer IRDs taking place in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. A potential contributory factor to this is the embedding of revised Codes of Practice which allow for initial inquiries to be undertaken with or without investigatory powers. The number of inquiries conducted with the use of investigatory powers increased by 183 (80%) in this period compared to the previous year. This suggests the use of investigatory powers at the initial inquiry stage of the ASP process is allowing for a more robust assessment to take place at an earlier stage and the requirement for initiating an IRD reduced. The downward trend in IRDs is under consideration at the multi-agency Quality Assurance subcommittee to provide assurance that decision-making at the initial inquiry stage is robust and that opportunities to progress an IRD have not been missed.

Large-Scale Investigations (LSIs)

Over the reporting year there has been one Large-Scale Investigation in relation to an independent care at home provider. The LSI concluded after ten weeks when it was agreed there was evidence that risk of harm had reduced and the provider had implemented the requirements for improvement.

Care Inspectorate Joint Inspection Progress Review

At end July 2024, the Care Inspectorate issued notification of intention to lead and undertake a joint review of adult support and protection in West Lothian. This followed an initial inspection which completed September 2022. Findings from the progress review were published November 2024. Of the five priority areas for improvement identified during the 2022 inspection, four were found to have made significant improvement. These areas concerned social work management of the initial inquiry process, management of risk for adults at risk of harm, processes for adult protection investigations and social work operational management oversight and strategic governance of adult protection practice. Some evidence of improvement was found in relation to representation of the lived experience of adults at risk of harm and their unpaid carers at the APC.

Overall, the progress report highlighted significant progress in relation to key processes from the inspection of 2022. The joint inspection team commented on positive culture change in the partnership's approach to Adult Support and Protection which was reflected in feedback from practitioners and managers during focus groups.

Some ongoing areas for improvement were identified through the progress review and these were related to IRDs, chronology quality and delays to the allocation of some initial inquiries. These areas for improvement were areas that the Adult Protection Committee had identified in its improvement planning.

Mental Health

Section 32 of the Mental Health Care & Treatment (Scotland) Act 2003 places a statutory duty upon local authorities to appoint a sufficient number of Mental Health Officers (MHO) within their area to appropriately discharge the functions of Mental Health Officers.

A duty Mental Health Officer is available 24 hours a day across the whole council area with this service being provided by a dedicated MHO Team, a small number of satellite MHOs working in social work practice teams and an out-of-hours MHO service provided via the social work out of hours service.

Workforce planning remains an important issue for the West Lothian MHO service in line with the national MHO age demographic. A further two MHO trainees successfully completed their training in the past year, although one left soon after successfully qualifying.

Waiting times for the allocation of MHOs to prepare statutory reports in relation to applications under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 have improved in the past year. There continues to be significant demand in relation to local authority responsibilities related to the supervision of Welfare Guardians with approximately 460 cases being supervised by the MHO team.

There remains a full-time MHO employed at the Integrated Discharge Hub at St John's Hospital to assertively progress Guardianship applications, offer advice and guidance in relation to lawful discharges and improve practices in relation to hospital discharges. This role continues to be well-received. Work is ongoing related to introduction of improved recording practices and of audit procedures related to hospital discharges where an issue related to 'mental incapacity' has been identified. The Mental Welfare Commission (MWC) data indicates that West Lothian performs well in relation to the timescales from Guardianship Orders applications being made to being granted with 66% being granted within a month presently in comparison to a national average of 39%. The following table indicates assessments undertaken in terms of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000.

	2022/23	**2023/24**	**2024/25**
New Guardianships Granted			
Private	91	102	119
CSWO	28	25	36
Total	119	127	155
Existing Guardianships			
Private	371	372	375
CSWO	77	78	84
Total	448	450	459
New Intervention Orders			
Total	4	12	16

The following table indicates assessments undertaken in terms of the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003.

	2022/23	**2023/24**	**2024/25**
Emergency Detention Certificates – Sec 36 (with MHO consent)	47	50	45
Short term Detention Certificates – Sec 44	193	204	215
Compulsory Treatment Orders (new applications)	50	47	52
Assessments (Sect 86, 92, 95, SCRs)	448	484	501

Alcohol and Drug Services (Adults and Children)

The National Records Service (NRS) 2024 annual statistics on drug-related deaths records 1,017 deaths across Scotland attributed to the direct effects of drug misuse. This represents a decrease of 155 deaths (13%) compared to 2023 and is the lowest annual total recorded since 2017. However, the rate of drug misuse deaths remains significantly higher than at the start of the data series in 1996. In West Lothian, 22 drug misuse deaths were recorded in 2024, matching the lowest figure previously reported in 2017 and 9 less than in 2023. While the reduction is notable, every loss of life is so significant. The 2024 data on alcohol-specific deaths records 1,185 deaths across Scotland, a 7% decrease from 2023 and the lowest since 2019. In West Lothian, there were 41 alcohol-specific deaths in 2024, down from 43 the previous year, equating to a rate of 18.2 deaths per 100,000, below the national average of 20.9. Over the five-year period from 2020 to 2024, West Lothian's average rate was 20.9, compared to Scotland's overall rate of 21.9.

The ADP Delivery Plan 2024/28 was developed in the reporting year. The development was informed by consultation with partners and lived and living experience communities, before going through the relevant governance processes and entering the implementation phase.

An ADP Chairs group has been established with priority leads to track and monitor implementation of the ADP Delivery Plan and to share learning and best practice.

The Prevention and Early Intervention workstream carried out a range of activities in 2024/25. A workforce survey was carried out with over 100 responses, largely from Education and Third-Sector colleagues.

The Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards annual submission was submitted on 14 April 2025. The Benchmarking Report was published in May 2025 and West Lothian achieved RAG green status across MAT Standards 1-10. Significant work was undertaken to increase engagement with lived and living experience communities. 74 online survey responses were collected in 2024/25, alongside participation from 23 people across two Café Consultation events in March 2025.

National focus on increasing the number of Residential Rehab placements being offered as a treatment option has seen an increase in West Lothian residents attending Residential Rehab. An Additional Placement Fund was put in place in 2024/25 and utilised for West Lothian citizens.

West Lothian has a range of funding streams aimed at providing support for children, young people and their families affected by problematic substance use, some of which are linked together through a Whole Family Public Social Partnership, currently being independently evaluated. This evaluation is part of a range of pre-commissioning activities related to developing service specifications for the Children and Parental Substance Use Contract, which is due for commissioning in 2026.

The ADP will continue to track and monitor progress across the partnership via the Delivery Plan. Key next steps include the development of a Public Health Approach to Justice workstream, CAPSU commissioning and the delivery of the first West Lothian Recovery Week.

Supporting Discharge from Hospital

Over the reporting year there has been a continued improvement focus on hospital admission avoidance and early supported discharge. Social work teams in the community and hospital setting have worked closely to make best use of resources to secure improvement.

There has been continued capacity from the external market to meet care at home need resulting in a fall in unmet need levels and wait times to secure a care package, both in the hospital and the community.

In contrast to improvements in relation to those delayed awaiting a care at home service, there have been challenges over the reporting period in securing sufficient care home places to meet demand.

This trend is particularly acute for individuals awaiting specialist dementia care. Since the beginning of 2025 this position has improved.

There are clear arrangements in place for monitoring the delayed discharge position and unmet need, including daily oversight within the St Johns Hospital team and twice weekly meetings of a resilience group chaired by senior leaders. This is complemented by weekly unmet need oversight arrangements for care at home and for care home provision to ensure ongoing risk and improvement activity is closely monitored. West Lothian have seen improvement from Jan 2024 to March 2025 in the number of individuals whose discharge from hospital is delayed.

Care Homes

There are 17 Care Homes within the West Lothian area, providing placement to residents who require either nursing or residential care. Three of those care homes are operated by the Health and Social Care Partnership and report near 100% occupancy year-round. The remaining independent sector providers make available a percentage of beds that are accessible to the partnership for allocation under the National Care Home Contract Rate.

All care homes within West Lothian are supported by The Collaborative Care Home Team comprising nursing and social work staff. Over the past 12 months the team have supported the successful transition of a number of individuals from both community and hospital settings to care homes, working collaboratively with the care homes to ensure the needs and outcomes of residents are fully met. A particular success has been the securing of care home placements for individuals who had been experiencing prolonged stays in a hospital setting. The team have completed over 1,300 comprehensive reviews that place residents' wellbeing at the heart of care planning. The proactive model ensures every new resident receives a thorough health assessment within six weeks, while annual reviews support positive outcomes for long-term residents. Monthly hospital presentations for care home residents have reduced by 55% from January 2024 to March 2025 and demonstrates positive impact of proactive care planning and post-discharge support. Close partnership working with care homes has continued to support stability across the sector with no care home being subject to a Large-Scale Investigation in the last 12 months.

The CSWO, Chief Nurse and senior officers continue to meet to receive feedback from the collaborative care home team on any issues and risks and positive developments relating to care homes provision for older people in West Lothian.

Care at Home

West Lothian IJB Strategic Plan 2023/28 promotes a ‘Home First’ approach, supporting the shift to more integrated health and social care systems supporting service users, families and carers to ‘live well’, remain independent and, where possible, self-manage their own health and wellbeing.

This ambition is underpinned by the Scottish Government’s ‘Getting It Right for Everyone ‘(GIRFE) model of health and social care which aims to support people from young adulthood to end of life. This GIRFE approach adopted by WLHSCP underpins the delivery and improvement of the 9 national health and wellbeing outcomes.

Care at home services provide vital personalised care to enable people to continue to reside in their own home for as long as possible. The purpose of the service is to ensure quality of life for individuals and enable individuals to retain independence for as long as possible.

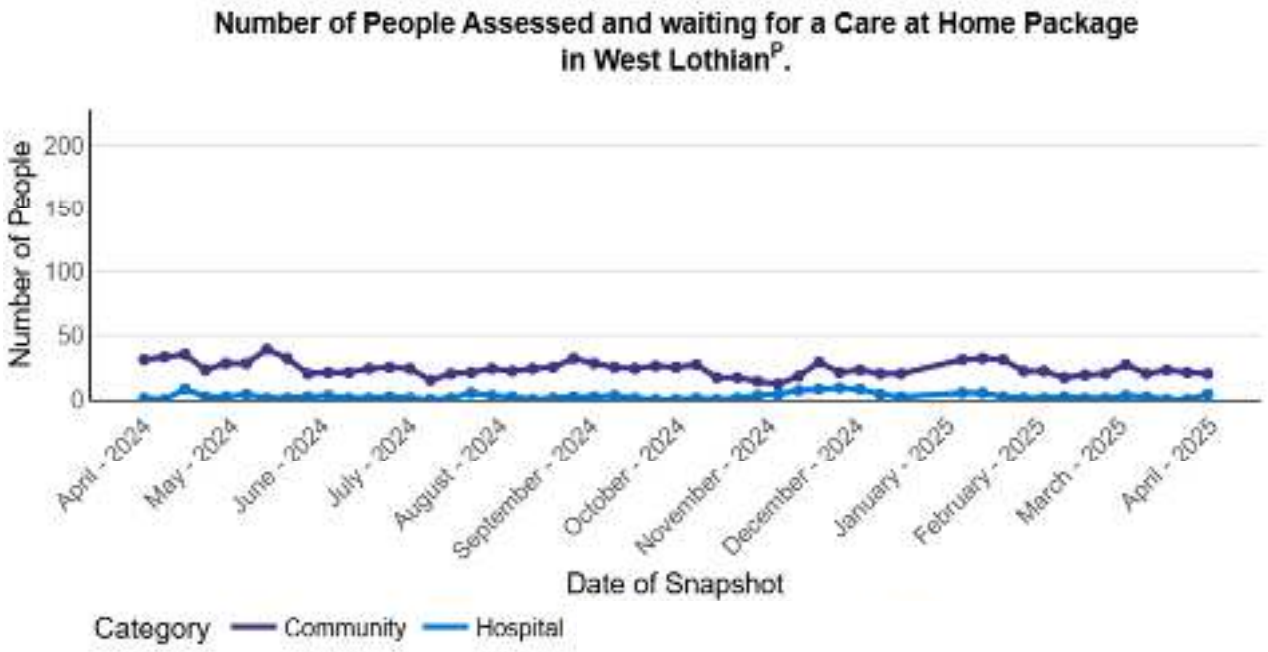
Care at Home Oversight and Assurance

A multi-disciplinary care at home oversight and assurance group chaired by a senior social work manager meet to analyse data, identify any emerging issues, monitor unmet need and drive forward improvement activity. There is engagement with all care at home stakeholders to understand challenges and support the supply of care in the independent sector. Implementation in October 2023 of the current care at home framework incorporates strengthened care at home contract quality

assurance monitoring arrangements. The dedicated care at home contracts officer role continues to develop effective contract quality assurance processes, ensuring that appropriate contract monitoring is in place. This includes performance relating to electronic call monitoring, complaint management and feedback from those in receipt of services.

Positive results have continued to be achieved with West Lothian maintaining low levels of unmet care at home need over the reporting period, including low numbers of people delayed in hospital who required a care at home care package.

Analysis of the period April 2024 to March 2025, provided below, evidences that the number of individuals awaiting a care at home package in a hospital or community setting during the reporting year has been maintained at low levels in comparison to previous years.



Self-Directed Support (SDS)

Social work staff are actively involved in national SDS workstreams. Feedback and learning from this engagement helps shape improvements to local processes to streamline approach and delivery of SDS in line with the West Lothian SDS improvement plan.

Work has continued with In Control Scotland focused on improvements to address key barriers to effective SDS practice. Following development sessions an action plan was devised with a key focus on improving information and support in relation to understanding SDS and options available.

During February 2025, members of the SDS board undertook a self-evaluation exercise. The purpose was to review progress made locally against local and national improvement plans. This self -evaluation exercise included employees, unpaid carers and stakeholders. The process highlighted the positive steps taken towards improving SDS practice in West Lothian. In particular, improvement of accessible SDS information for the people of West Lothian was noted via the updated Health and Social Care Partnership website. Further resources were created to support staff learning and development through a dedicated SDS channel on Microsoft Teams for staff to share information, ask questions and access resources. The group identified areas for improvement including, further work focused on preparing people for assessments.

Digital and Technology Supporting Care

A TEC 1st approach plays a key role in developing a range of options to support the care needs of both adults and older people as well as contributing to IJB budget savings.

There continues to be focus on supporting individuals who are in receipt of telecare support to transition to new digitally capable equipment to support the analogue to digital shift being driven by all telecom providers.

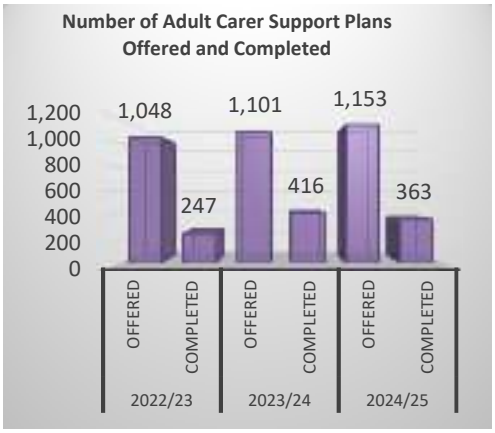
There are a wide range of activities being progressed with teams to ensure the use of technology enabled care continues to be central to assessment and review activity. This includes a focus on social work practice teams, the reablement service and the integrated discharge hub at St John's Hospital. Good links have been created with the Digital office and other HSCP's providing valuable information supporting improvement focused benchmarking activity.

During October 2024, to raise awareness of available technology, the Home Safety Team launched a 'SpookTECular' journal over three weeks, highlighting new technology and signposting to high street technology to raise awareness and showcase how individuals can access many different pieces of equipment. The links provided a fun way to learn how technology can support people to live independently at home. Each link also provided a case study to highlight the benefits for individuals and families. Alongside this, staff held pop up events at a variety of Partnership Centres and also in a supermarket foyer to allow engagement with members of the public and discuss how the service may benefit them. These events were positively received.

Support for Unpaid Carers and Young carers

The West Lothian Carers Strategy 2023/2026 sets out the vision for unpaid Adult and Young Carers in West Lothian. The Strategy details plans to achieve agreed aims and priorities to ensure carers physical and emotional health and wellbeing is supported, that breaks from caring are available and that young carers are supported to be children first. The strategy is underpinned by an improvement plan which has four priority areas: Recognising, Valuing and Involving Carers, Health and Social Care Support, Social and Financial Inclusion, Young Carers. Information in relation to young carers developments can be found section 2 of the report

During this period 1,153 adult carers were offered an Adult Carer Support Plan which is consistently higher than the target of 1,000 and of those 363 (31%) chose to complete a plan which is a reduction of 12.7% on the previous year. Analysis has been undertaken to try and understand the reasons why many carers chose not to complete a plan when it is offered. Changes have been made to the social work recording system to add a drop-down menu of reasons to collect the data of why carers do not complete a plan. Collating this data will assist in further understanding how to support and engage with carers at the time of any assessment either for themselves or their cared for individual. Increasing the number of ACSP's completed will be a key focus in the 2025/26 improvement plan.



Adults and Older People 2024/25

2.4 Justice

In terms of overview, Justice social work have continued to provide strong services and interventions over the reporting year with key contributions to partnership working around MAPPA and risk management. The service has responded flexibility and robustly to any developments that have emerged over the year including earlier release of some prisoners and legislative changes in relation to the detention of young people. The service has a clear commitment to improvement and a review of unpaid work approaches has led to improvements in performance.

Youth justice services spanning children and justice have been planning and responding to the changes brought by the Care and Justice (Scotland) Act 2024. A new service has been developed to support contextually based interventions for children and young people in conflict with the law or at risk of becoming in conflict with the law and potentially exposed to exploitation. The Early and Effective Intervention Service continues to have a strong and positive impact and detail of developments and performance are set out in the section below.

In terms of governance, responsibility for community justice in West Lothian lies with the Community Planning Partnership. The Community Justice Partnership leads the implementation of the local community justice agenda, aligned to the national Community Justice Strategy. This includes advancing the four national aims, delivering on key priority actions, and adhering to the national performance framework.

In line with the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, statutory partners are required to publish a Community Justice Outcome Improvement Plan (CJOIP) for each local authority area. This plan sets out how partners will work collaboratively to reduce reoffending. The Community Justice Partnership is currently in process of refreshing its CJOIP.

Justice social work services continue to play a vital role, focusing on statutory responsibilities related to the assessment, supervision, and management of offenders. The services also support the development and implementation of the 'Whole System Approach' for young people at risk of becoming involved in offending. In addition to statutory duties, justice services provide early intervention and prevention programmes to help individuals avoid initial or further contact with the criminal justice system.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), which are governed by national legislation and guidance, are in place for managing registered sex offenders. These arrangements are well established in West Lothian. Justice Services, Police Scotland, and health services act as the key responsible authorities under MAPPA. Over the past year, training and development opportunities have been provided to support new justice staff and partners in understanding and applying MAPPA protocols. Annual MAPPA training is coordinated on behalf of Lothian partners to promote consistent, informed practice.

The Care inspectorate undertook a national review of Justice Social Work, Self Evaluation of Performance, Quality and Outcomes during the reporting period. West Lothian completed a structured self-evaluation template supporting the national review. There were no specific findings for individual areas. The review sought to build on previous scrutiny activity. There was focus on evaluating the extent to which justice social work services were able to evidence performance, quality and outcomes in relation to community-based sentences. Factors that impacted justice social work services' ability to confidently and robustly demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of community support and supervision were considered.

Justice Developments and Improvements

Nationally Diversion from Prosecution use has increased overall for adults and young people in line with the aims of "The Vision for Justice in Scotland".

In West Lothian there has been a 13% increase in assessments undertaken and a 40% increase in commencement of cases over the reporting period.

Over the reporting period, the youth justice team have been adjusting to the changes brought by The Care and Justice (Scotland) Act 2024 including all young people under age 18 being brought within the scope of the children's hearings system and removing detention in young offenders' institution for young people displaying high levels of risk. This has resulted in national challenges around the availability of spaces in secure care when required, resulting in young people being supported through the Care and Risk Management (CaRM) process in the community until secure care spaces have become available

An early intervention initiative, the *Assess and Connect Team (ACT)*, launched on 1 November 2024 to support children and young people aged 10-16 years who are in conflict or at risk of being in conflict with the law. The team's aim is to address emerging concerns, such as antisocial behaviour and vulnerability to exploitation, by disrupting these patterns early and helping reconnect young people and their families with Universal Services. Since its launch, ACT has received approximately 65 referrals, with 82% of these referrals originating from educational settings. Performance indicators have been developed to not only measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the service, but also to identify areas for development providing valuable insights that support continuous improvement and the enhancement of service delivery. The team has adopted Outcome Youth Star to track progress and outcomes which will support performance management ongoing.

In addition, the service is working in partnership to identify and support children aged 8-11 years who are below the age of criminal responsibility but who may require a whole family, early intervention service. The Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) service continues to perform well with 95% of young people aged 12-17 years not going on to be referred to Youth Justice Services within the following 12 months. This consists of data from the previous year as the reporting takes place 12 months in arrears to allow monitoring of the young people over the intervening 12 months.

Community Payback Order's have increased over the reporting period and risk and complexity levels have also increased due to many serious historical offences being processed by the Court following a backlog. To manage those cases related to domestic abuse offences, additional group work has commenced. Justice social work staff are trained to deliver Up2U, a programme for people who use domestically abusive behaviours in their relationships with sessions delivered in small group settings or one to one. The approach seeks to reduce the incidents of domestic violence preventing repeat cycles. Justice Services work closely with colleagues in the Domestic and Sexual Assault Team to ensure victim impact is retained within risk management.

	At 31 March 2023			At 31 March 2024			At 31 March 2025		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
CPO Requirement for Supervision	265	46	311	251	46	297	353	55	408
CPO with a Requirement for Unpaid Work	227	24	251	223	27	250	244	29	273
Drug Treatment and Testing Orders	14	1	15	13	1	14	9	3	12
Number of Individuals Subject to Statutory Through Care	178	3	181	191	6	197	191	7	198

West Lothian Council Justice Service are contracted to provide the statutory Prison Based Social Work Service within HMP Addiewell. This includes assessments for parole, life licence and managing sex offenders returning to the community. This resource has recently been increased due to the movement of some categories of serving prisoners throughout the prison estate that require additional statutory input by Prison based Social Work. This has resulted in an increase in Parole Hearings, Risk

Management meetings and Integrated Case Management. Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025 will require prisoners serving less than four years custody to be released after serving 40%. In addition, as a consequence of the national prison overcrowding position, West Lothian worked in partnership to secure planned returns to the community for those prisoners being released early.

One of the key ongoing projects during the reporting period, which continues to deliver significant benefits to the community, is the Community Payback Unpaid Work Bike Project. This initiative involves the donation of refurbished bicycles to individuals in need across the community, enabling the project to have positive social impact. The project is funded through proceeds from the scrap metal recycling programme with unwanted bicycles, donated from across West Lothian, collected and brought to the Unpaid Work unit. There, individuals subject to Community Payback Orders dismantle the bikes, with all reusable materials being recycled. The money raised from the recycled metal is accumulated throughout the year and reinvested back into the community. In the reporting period £1647.00 was donated to the community which is a 36% increase on the amount donated from the year before. In partnership with the local bike library, staff have been trained to meet recognised bike recycling standards. This certification enables the Unpaid Work team to not only salvage parts but also fully rebuild functional bicycles.

The *Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2019* introduced bail with electronic monitoring (EM) nationally from 17 May 2022. The Act allows Electronic Monitoring Orders (EMOs) to be imposed as a condition of bail, either alone or alongside a period of supervision. In the reporting year, national efforts focused on joint EMO/supervision assessments, particularly where bail was opposed by the Procurator Fiscal. West Lothian Justice Services completed 408 such assessments, resulting in a 120% increase in Bail Supervision Orders. Courts also imposed more EM-only bail orders, alongside standard bail conditions, informed by the assessments submitted.

The overarching aim is to reduce remand use where there is no imminent risk of harm. Of the 408 assessments, 57 individuals were remanded due to offence seriousness or non-compliance history. A new case management and recording system was introduced in April 2024, enabling improved reporting.

Bail assessments are now a core activity under the Section 27 grant. Further changes are anticipated in May 2025 with the *Bail and Release from Custody Act 2023*, requiring sentencers to explain decisions when refusing bail. This will necessitate initial bail screening for all individuals appearing from custody or on undertakings with 1,350 people appearing at Livingston Court from custody during the reporting period. Use of supervised bail for young people has also increased, aligning with the Whole System Approach as an alternative to remand.

West Lothian Justice Services continues to collaborate with the Wise Group's online life-skills learning platform, offering individuals on community sentences access to relevant modules that support rehabilitation and desistance. Sessions run six days a week in the morning, afternoon, and evening, covering 18 topics such as wellbeing, employability, and financial inclusion. In 2024/2025, there were 322 new referrals, with 1,505 sessions attended, generating 3,294 hours of Other Activity credited toward Community Payback Unpaid Work and Other Activity Orders.

Recommendations from an internal unpaid work review have been effectively progressed throughout the reporting period, resulting in meaningful changes to service delivery, staffing structures, and the organisation of squads. As a result, the percentage of community-based orders supervised by the justice service that are successfully terminated has risen from 80% to 88%. The key focus of the changes is to increase performance which should support timeous completion of orders. The service will continue to embed these changes and closely monitor their impact. Improvements have been supported by an expansion of the workshop resource increasing the range of projects that will benefit the community. This expansion has also included additional group work space including the UP2U

Domestic offending programme, and opportunities for ACT to explore different approaches to working with young people and opportunities to expand partnership working. Change Grow Live are facilitating a drug rehabilitation programme for those on community sentences supported by external Corra funding.

Alongside the review of Unpaid Work, West Lothian Justice Services initiated and are currently involved in a proof of concept with Improvement Scotland to identify a digital solution to unpaid work squad and personal placement management. This is a complex activity which requires significant risk management. The concept is currently being considered in terms of potential for a national framework for delivery.

Justice 2024/25

Almond Project

0%

of women were convicted of further offences during intervention or 6 months after

Community Payback Orders

85%

of under 21 year olds with a successful termination

Unpaid Work

£1,647

donated to charities as a result of bikes recycled

Community Payback Orders

95%

Criminal Justice Social Work Reports delivered to Court on time

Early and Effective Interventions

95%

of 12 to 17 years did not become known to the Youth Justice Team within 12 months of engagement

Bail Supervision Orders

120%

increase in Bail Supervision Orders

Life Skills Learning Platform

1,505

sessions attended

Life Skills Learning Platform

3,294

hours successfully completed on the online skills platform

3. Resources

The year has seen the most complex financial and resource challenges experienced by social work services in West Lothian since I became CSWO in 2019. Detail and context are set out below.

In terms of financial strategy, West Lothian Council has a medium-term financial plan informing the planning and prioritisation of future service delivery, strategic planning and commissioning. Financial planning assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis to take account of events such as changes to funding levels, economic forecasts, care demands and policy decisions impacting on the delivery of social work services.

In February 2024, the current revenue budget strategy was agreed covering the four years from 2024/25 to 2027/28, with a detailed budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26. For the four-year period, there was a forecast budget gap of £38.0 million, with savings proposals of £28.5 million identified and allocated to services. Social Policy has been allocated a savings target of £9.2 million over the four-year period, with £2.8 million of budget savings delivered in 2024/25. This figure includes savings agreed by the IJB in terms of its budget setting process, in relation to delegated adults and older people social work and social care services.

There is a remaining budget gap, currently estimated to be £9.5 million for the council over the four-year period, for which it is expected that Social Policy will be required to identify further savings. Savings proposals to meet this budget gap will be put to public consultation by West Lothian Council and IJB during 2025/26.

Plans for delivery of savings to address the budget gap for the period up to 2025/26 were agreed by West Lothian Council and by West Lothian IJB in February and March 2024.

All budget savings proposals are prepared by and risk and impact assessed by the senior management team and Head of Service (CSWO), and mitigation measures taken to manage risks and impact.

In terms of agreed budget savings for the reporting period, for children's services, key focus remained on reducing the numbers of children and young people placed in external residential settings. There has been priority focus on developing further West Lothian foster care resources to reduce the numbers of children moving to commissioned foster care and embedding our newly developed internal adoption service. The service has also continued to review all commissioned services, grant funding arrangements to ensure these are reprioritised in line with key strategic aims and objectives. To achieve this multi-year budget savings measure, there has been detailed engagement by commissioning officers with a range of third sector providers and review of children's social work expenditure on transport.

There have been positive results in terms of enhancing the foster carer position for West Lothian with increase to enquiries and recruitment, increased use of kinship care and our new adoption service supporting the approval of adoptive families. There has also been action to secure the provision of more local family based short breaks opportunities for children with a disability.

Overall, this work is intended to reduce reliance on external placements for children in favour of family based and other local support, which will promote better outcomes with reduced expenditure. This area of transformational activity continues to present challenges, as noted in the overspend position for 2024/25, albeit planned service developments have not had the opportunity as yet to impact on the pressures.

In proportion to budget size, the savings programme for Adults and Older People Services has required an extensive package of planned savings measures, many spanning multiple years. This year has also seen requirement to identify mitigating actions in year to try to reduce the scale of emerging budget pressures.

A review of all adult and older people social work services took place in 2024/25, resulting in a redesign of the overall structure and a move to a locality based multi-disciplinary model. This programme of change has involved significant budget savings. The impact of this reform will be closely monitored to ensure any adverse effect on capacity to address statutory duties is identified and responded to.

Review of a number of internal services took place in 2024/25 to deliver more financial efficiencies. This included reviewing internal support at home services and commissioning more care at home support from the external market. This approach of shifting to more commissioning of social care has been in place for a number of years to address delivery of financial efficiencies. The reporting year saw full savings from the closure of an internal care home and commissioning of equivalent levels of care. Due to the scale of budget savings and pressures, further review of Housing with Care services and Day Services for adults with learning and physical disabilities have taken place which involved organisational change for employees but protected existing levels of service. A review of a residential provision for adults with learning disabilities was also completed and delivered a modernised model of care in keeping with people's needs and achieving an agreed savings plan.

There has been a strong focus on review of high cost packages of care and ensuring that all alternatives to formal care have been fully explored. It has proven possible to safely adjust some care packages following detailed and robust re-assessment and review. The scale of the pressures experienced in year have led to senior management involvement in enhanced control and authorisation of all packages of care.

Technology Enabled Care continues to be a key focus, with the use of assessment tools and devices informing care plans, supporting independence and providing a more sustainable footing for managing future demand.

As noted, the financial year 2024/25 was an extremely challenging one for social work services. Net expenditure for the year was £140.566 million, which represents an overspend of £6.855 million on allocated resources. This level of overspend is unprecedented over recent years.

The overspend in Adult and Older People Services was £5.476 million, which was mostly due to increasing demands for commissioned services across all service user groups. The growth in demand for services has outpaced the resources available and this represents a significant pressure and risk area for the council and the IJB.

The overspend in Children and Justice Services was £1.379 million, which was due to increasing costs related to external residential placements. This does not represent an increase in numbers of children placed but was due to increasing levels of risk and complexity and the requirements for additional supports and costs for children living in external placements.

Within the context of demand and complexity, the management of recurring demand led budget pressures presents a significant challenge looking forward, alongside the requirement for delivery of agreed savings plans.

From 2018/19 and my period of being in role, social work and social care services have reviewed and re-designed services to deliver significant levels of budget reductions. Local policy and practice changes have been introduced to support a more financially sustainable social work and social care service. Transformation activity has been progressed across all social work specialisms.

The challenges and risks involved in identifying future alternative approaches to reduce expenditure cannot be overstated.

4. Workforce

Staff wellbeing has continued to be a key priority over the reporting period. We have reviewed our Supervision Policy to ensure it is trauma-informed and places staff wellbeing at its core. As part of this, the policy now includes the implementation of wellbeing plans, with support provided to assist with their rollout. The Four Pillars of Wellbeing toolkit is promoted with all staff to support positive outcomes for wellbeing.

Children's Services continue to work closely with the Scottish Government Trauma Responsive Social Work Service, with a particular focus on promoting wellbeing among leaders. In addition, a proof-of-concept digital innovation pilot was undertaken to explore the use of Artificial Intelligence. One of the key aims was to reduce administrative burden and, in turn, improve workforce wellbeing. Notably, 90% of participants in this pilot reported an improvement in their wellbeing. Across all services there is a strong focus on supporting employees to remain well at work and reduce the incidence of absence due to ill health.

West Lothian Council has invested in a number of ways for training and awareness raising of issues relating to equality and diversity. This includes the delivery of the equality and diversity training as part of corporate induction, E-learning and face to face courses for employees and managers regarding mental health and unconscious bias online training. Those undertaking recruitment and selection processes, are asked to complete the module as a supplement to recruitment and selection training.

The Council have committed to development of an Advancing Race Equality Action Plan, expected to be approved Autumn 2025. In support of providing a positive employee experience and creating a more diverse and inclusive organisation, the council is establishing an employee equality network which will raise awareness of equality issues and help people across the organisation to better understand the experiences and challenges faced by their colleagues. The Network will be launched Autumn 2025. Social work services will be involved in the Network.

The council's Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Framework 2025/2029 reflects a commitment to fulfilling both statutory duties as well as proactively meeting the needs of the diverse community the council serves. The Framework includes a suite of Equality Outcomes which are intended to reflect the council's approach to the mainstreaming of equalities into the delivery of council services but also to address the most significant inequalities emerging from local evidence and involvement activities that could have the greatest positive impact.

In terms of workforce, the HSCP workforce plan has been updated, highlighting key achievements, developments, and planning progress over the past year. As services face ongoing pressures, workforce planning remains critical. This includes collaborative efforts with partners to address cross-cutting workforce challenges, develop leadership, support workforce wellbeing and resilience and improve access and inclusion across the sector. Overall for social work and social care services, the workforce position in terms of recruitment is stable with ability to recruit to vacant posts.

There have been some challenges for justice social work services to recruit experienced social workers but largely across all other teams we are able to recruit to vacancies.

We welcome newly qualified social workers to our teams and profession and are very mindful of the profile of increased complexity of need and demand that applies across all the social work specialisms and acknowledge the balance of experience in teams can be of significance to the management of complex demand and impact on employee wellbeing.

We continue to promote careers in social work and social care. Business support officers attended a number of recruitment events over the reporting period. These engagements promoted available job opportunities and provided interview practice and confidence-building for attendees.

Thirteen social work student placements were hosted by our teams during the reporting year. In addition, one employee began a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work via the Open University, supported through Scottish Government match-funding. The student is currently on placement in the Duty and Child Protection Team and enjoying this experience. We have supported two social workers to complete the Mental Health Officer Award. Despite the financial pressures of the year and resultant impact on training, social work has continued to invest in postgraduate education, supporting workforce development and critical service delivery with priority given to postgraduate courses in Adult Support and Protection, Child Welfare and Protection and the Practice Education Award.

Since implementing the mandatory Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year in July 2024, six NQSWs have been supported within West Lothian Council. Four have now passed the mid-year review. We also look forward to welcoming newly appointed staff who will commence their own Supported Year. We continue to work closely with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and others to improve implementation and delivery of the Supported Year and its associated learning activities.

Social Policy's SQA Centre supported SVQ qualifications over the year. The team has expanded with the addition of a new assessor, and a further cohort of candidates commenced in April. Collaboration with West Lothian College has strengthened, offering high-quality placements to seven Health and Social Care students pursuing Foundation Apprenticeships and HNCs. These placements provided valuable experience across a range of services including residential and day services, the Reablement service and Home Safety Service.

"Together we have supported students to gain experience working in residential care homes and, more recently, within Reablement and the Home Safety team. These experiences have been invaluable in building students' confidence, skills, and resilience in the social care sector. The amazing staff within these services have generously shared their expertise and passion for the people they support."
– West Lothian College

To embed a culture of continuous learning, a range of online learning resources are promoted for social work and social care staff. These include a dedicated intranet learning hub, an online prospectus, and a Microsoft Teams channel, which provide streamlined access to professional development resources—from induction content to specialist and mandatory training. The Learning and Development MS Teams channel, with 222 members complements the intranet resources by offering real-time updates on policy, legislation, good practice, and innovation. The training prospectus supports varying staff schedules and ongoing feedback from internal surveys and ensures content remains relevant and engaging. Training programmes have supported priorities such as permanency planning, coercive control, and public protection. The first cohort of Safe and Together training was delivered for 20 practitioners during the 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence, with additional one-day overview sessions offered. Practitioners reported improved confidence, changes in recording documentation, and enhanced approaches. Alongside 90-minute Safe and Together briefings, ongoing support includes quarterly champions meetings, practitioner forums, access to resources from the Safe and Together Institute, and case consultation opportunities. Feedback has been highly positive, with additional learning scheduled for 2025.

Training in Adult Support and Protection also progressed, including refresher sessions for Council Officers. In recognition of National ASP Awareness Day, two themed sessions were held in 2024

(focused on general ASP awareness and sextortion) and 2025 (focused on financial harm of older adults). Attendance was high, with contributions from Police Scotland, the Office of the Public Guardian, and the Department for Work and Pensions. Sessions were well-received and are available for replay via the West Lothian Public Protection website.

Child Protection Training took place for Children's social work services to complement multi-agency training and learning opportunities already in place. The program ran for 3 days in September 2024 and was repeated across 4 days in February 2025 following participant feedback. The comprehensive content of the program and the opportunity to share learning with colleagues received positive feedback. With the rollout of the new social work case management platform in April 2024, dedicated training in chronology and case recording continues to be provided. This is expected to strengthen consistency and enhance practice standards.

In response to staff feedback, three full-day self-harm awareness sessions were delivered by Penumbra Mental Health and accessed through the Self Harm Network Scotland, with 44 practitioners attending. Further sessions are scheduled for late 2025.

In collaboration with the Thistle Foundation, a three-day workshop on Good Conversation training was completed with practitioners who are working to further imbed personal outcomes and asset-based approaches into their practice. The course helped practitioners orient their assessments and support plans toward individual strengths, networks, and aspirations. A working group is now supporting the integration of this learning across the service.

Trauma training continues to be delivered across a wide range of service areas as part of our commitment to embedding trauma-informed practice. Three additional staff have completed Trauma Skilled Training for Trainers, joining a multidisciplinary training team comprising colleagues from social policy, education, business support, educational psychology and customer and community services. This team meets regularly to reflect on practice and tailor sessions in collaboration with service managers to ensure training is both bespoke and aligned with trauma-informed principles.

Notably, the Trauma Responsive Social Work Service pilot is progressing well, involving 100 frontline staff in a comprehensive programme that includes trauma training, reflective supervision, power-sharing, and coaching. Additionally, the Alternative Care Trauma Training pilot has been launched for foster carers within the Family Based Care Service, receiving excellent feedback.

5. Looking ahead

Despite the real challenges of the reporting year, the annual CSWO report evidences positive social work performance and impacts aligned to clear strategic vision and direction. The commitment of social workers at all levels to improve remains strong and provides assurance for the future.

Looking forward, the most significant challenge to continuing positive performance is the ongoing financial position with diminishing opportunities for positive transformation or redesign.

Due to the increased risks this presents, the CSWO will ensure arrangements in place in relation to CSWO assurance of social work practice are as robust as they can be.

A key strength has always been the workforce and peoples flexibility and creativity in the face of new demands or emerging issues and risks. This remains a key and critical asset for the future.