

East Ayrshire

Children and Young People's Services Plan 2026-2029

Children at the Heart of East Ayrshire: Delivering Better Futures Together

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Foreword

Welcome to the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan 2026-2029. This Plan reflects the collective commitment of Community Planning Partners to work together to improve outcomes for children and families in East Ayrshire.

For most children, childhood is a time of growing and learning, supported by their families and the community around them. For others, the impacts of poverty, inequality, poor mental health, trauma, adverse childhood experiences and additional support needs can make it harder to thrive.

In East Ayrshire we want all of our children and young people to grow up feeling loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential. We recognise that investing in children and young people is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of East Ayrshire.

Against a backdrop of sustained financial pressures and widening inequalities, we are committed to working collaboratively to prevent, reduce and mitigate the impact of poverty and disadvantage on children, young people and families. By providing the right support at the right time, promoting early intervention and prevention, and creating opportunities for children and young people to flourish, we can improve outcomes across their lives, strengthen families and communities, reduce inequalities and build a more resilient and prosperous East Ayrshire for future generations.

Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has provided a robust evidence base for the strategic priorities described in this Plan. The Needs Assessment brings together a wide range of data and evidence, including the views, experiences and aspirations of our most valued partners, East Ayrshire's children, young people and families.

Building on the progress of previous plans, and guided by The Promise, GIRFEC and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), our Plan sets out our ambition to create a nurturing, inclusive and rights-respecting environment where every child and young person has the opportunity to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included, and able to reach their full potential.

Children's rights, wellbeing and voices remain at the centre of everything we do and I want to take this opportunity to record my thanks to all those who have contributed to the preparation of this Plan. Through strong partnership working, we are committed to delivering high-quality, integrated services that support children, young people and their families to thrive.



Joseph McLachlan
Chief Executive, East Ayrshire Council

Introduction

The East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan 2026-2029 sets out how Community Planning Partners will work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children, young people and families over the next three years.

The Plan responds to:

- Continuing impacts of poverty and inequality
- Increased complexity of family support needs
- Growing demand for mental health and neurodevelopmental services
- The need to fully implement The Promise
- Children's rights duties under UNCRC incorporation
- The requirement to provide integrated, preventative and rights-based services

The Plan will focus on themes developed through engagement with children, young people and families as well as our children's service practitioners, and it strengthens the focus on prevention, participation and early help.

Strategic context

The Plan contributes directly to:

Strategic framework

The strategies, policies and legislation outlined below provide the wider strategic context relevant to this document and have been considered in assessing and prioritising key areas of focus.

- East Ayrshire Community Plan
- East Ayrshire Council Strategic Plan
- Children and Young People's Act 2014
- The Promise
- Getting it Right for Every Child
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024
- Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017
- Bringing Hope, Building Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-2031

Our vision and commitment

Overarching vision "East Ayrshire's vision for their children is that all children and young people grow up **loved, safe** and **respected** so that they **realise their full potential**."

Our commitment

This Plan reflects our commitment to:

- **Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)**
- **The Promise**
- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**
- **The National Performance Framework**
- **Whole Family Wellbeing**
- **Community Empowerment**
- **Prevention and Early Intervention**
- **Reducing Inequalities and Child Poverty**



GIRFEC Alignment

The East Ayrshire Children's Services Plan 2026-2029 is firmly rooted in the principles of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). Through its five strategic priorities, the Plan seeks to improve outcomes across all SHANARRI wellbeing indicators, ensuring children and young people are Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included. The Plan promotes early intervention, prevention, participation, partnership working and whole-family support, enabling children and young people to grow up feeling loved, safe and respected and able to realise their full potential with a focus on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities for all children and young people.

Keeping The Promise

In East Ayrshire, partners are embedding Promise principles through a whole-family, trauma-informed and rights-based approach to service delivery. This includes strengthening early intervention and prevention, listening to the voices of children and young people, supporting families to stay together where possible, and improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people. These priorities align closely with our wider ambitions to tackle inequalities, improve wellbeing and ensure children receive the right support at the right time.

The East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan 2026-2029 is a key mechanism for delivering The Promise locally. The Plan recognises that children and families should receive the right support at the right time, with help available as early as possible and within their communities. Through whole-family support, rights-based practice, participation, trauma-informed approaches and collaborative partnership working, we will continue to redesign services in ways that reflect the principles of The Promise.

We will prioritise keeping families together where it is safe to do so, strengthen support for care experienced children and young people, promote loving and nurturing relationships, and ensure that children and families are active partners in decisions that affect them. Our ambition is that every child in East Ayrshire experiences the care, support, respect and opportunities they need to thrive.



Participation, voice and children's rights

East Ayrshire is committed to ensuring that children's rights are at the heart of all planning, commissioning and service delivery. The incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law has provided a significant opportunity to embed a rights-based approach across the Children's Services Partnership and wider Community Planning Partnership. Through our commitment to Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), The Promise and the Whole Family Wellbeing approach, we are working together to ensure that all children and young people are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Children's rights are increasingly informing strategic decision-making, service design, workforce development and performance improvement, ensuring that the best interests of children are a primary consideration in all that we do.



A key focus of our approach is ensuring that children, young people and families have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Through mechanisms such as the Children and Young People's Cabinet, the VOiCE participation framework, Rights Respecting Schools, Care Experience Cabinet and a range of local engagement activities, children and young people are helping to influence policies, services and community priorities. We recognise that realising children's rights requires more than compliance; it requires a culture where children's voices are listened to, valued and acted upon. As we develop our new Children's Services Plan, we will continue to strengthen our understanding and implementation of children's rights, ensuring that services are inclusive, responsive and accessible to all children and young people, particularly those experiencing poverty, disadvantage, care experience, disability or other forms of inequality. Through this commitment, we will continue to build a partnership approach that enables every child in East Ayrshire to thrive and achieve their full potential.

The East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan will inform the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) priorities for the Children and Young People's Services Plan 2026-2029, providing a strong evidence base for understanding local need. Partners have adopted the national VOiCE platform for all communication and engagement with children and families. This planning and recording software assists individuals, organisations and partnerships in designing and delivering effective community engagement. This framework supports consistent, meaningful participation and demonstrates how the feedback influences planning, policy and practice.



National Performance Framework alignment

Scotland's National Performance Framework outcomes underpin all that we do in East Ayrshire and directly aligns with the priorities and outcomes shared by local partners to ensure our children grow up loved, safe and respected.

The East Ayrshire Children's Services Plan 2026-2029 contributes significantly to this framework, particularly the National Outcomes for Children and Young People, Human Rights, Health, Education, Communities and Poverty. Through a rights-based, preventative and whole-family approach, the Plan supports improved wellbeing, reduced inequality, increased participation and better outcomes for children, young people and families across East Ayrshire.



Working in partnership

Partnership working is central to achieving our shared vision for East Ayrshire's children, young people and families. By working collaboratively across services, communities and sectors, we can ensure that children and young people are safe, healthy, respected, included and supported to reach their full potential.

Through our Community Planning Partnership arrangements, the Children and Young People's Integrated Children's Services Leadership Groups and Child Protection Committee (CPC) provide strategic leadership and collective responsibility for planning, delivering and continuously improving services for children, young people and families.

Partners across East Ayrshire remain committed to strong and effective collaboration, building on established relationships and shared successes to deliver better outcomes. Through integrated planning, joint commissioning, shared learning and coordinated service delivery, we are strengthening our ability to respond to emerging needs and address inequalities at the earliest opportunity.

We recognise that no single agency can achieve these ambitions alone. By listening to children, young people and families, our staff, working alongside communities, and maximising our collective expertise, resources and capacity, we will continue to deliver person-centred, trauma-informed and rights-based services that improve lives and create lasting change.

As we implement this Children's Services Plan 2026-2029, we will further strengthen partnership approaches, ensuring that resources are used effectively, services are connected around the needs of children and families, and our collective efforts deliver sustainable improvements in outcomes across East Ayrshire.

East Ayrshire's children and young people's population at a glance in 2025/26

Total population



24,223
Children and young people aged 0-18



13,580
Households with dependent children

School roll



East Ayrshire Council **15,772**
Primary **8,404**
Secondary **6,785**
Special **583**

Children and young people requiring intensive support



Children on the Child Protection Register
110



Referrals to Social Work
7,045
increase of 33.2%



Children Looked After and Accommodated
426



Referrals to Trauma Informed Contact and Care (TICC)
88
relating to 175 children and young people



Young Carers
2,500

Children experiencing vulnerability

Poverty

16.7% Children and young people living in relative poverty (AHC)

60% Children living in relative poverty in lone-parent households

23% Children in receipt of free school meals

Housing

153 16-24-year-olds with homeless applications

13 Children in temporary accommodation

Health

22.1% Babies exclusively breastfed at 6-8 weeks

Almost 1 in 4 Children identified with at least one developmental concern before school entry

34% Children with speech, language and communication concern

Mental Health

417 Accepted CAMHS referrals for children and young people

17.8% Of CAHMS referrals were for suicidal ideation

436 Neurodevelopmental referrals for children and young people (a 23.9% increase from 2024/25)

43.3% Neurodevelopmental referrals from children and young people aged 5-11

69 Children and young people under 10 accessing School Wellbeing Service

933 Children and young people over 10 accessing School Counselling

Schools

31.9% Pupils with ASN across all sectors

89.1% Pupil attendance across all sectors

93.3% School leavers entering a positive destination

78.1% Looked after leavers entering a positive destination

Key developments across children's services from 2023-2026

Understanding what has worked well, where challenges have emerged, and what we have learned provides an important foundation for where we go next. The lessons from our previous Plan provide a basis for future action, ensuring that we focus our collective efforts on where we can make the greatest difference.

Collaborative Leadership Review update

The strategic review of collaborative leadership across children's services in East Ayrshire in 2023/24 explored drivers and barriers to successful multi-agency partnership working for children's services, with a focus on facilitating change and delivering optimal outcomes for East Ayrshire's children. The findings from the review resulted in a series of recommendations being developed, highlighting themes around structures and governance; communication and data sharing; planning, budgets and decision making; engagement and participation; and relationships and behaviours.

The transition from the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to the Integrated Children's Services Group represents a significant step forward in ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people in East Ayrshire. An Executive Leadership Group for Infants, Children and Young People was created, chaired by the Chief Executive, with representation from senior leaders across the Community Planning Partnership to ensure robust governance of all children's services' activity moving forward. By adopting a more integrated and outcome-focused approach, the Integrated Children's Services Partnership now has the potential to transform service delivery and create lasting positive impacts for our infants, children and young people.



Children at Risk of Harm inspection

The Joint Inspection of Services for Children and Young People at Risk of Harm in East Ayrshire took place between September 2024 and March 2025. The inspection looked at the difference the Community Planning Partnership is making to the lives of children and young people and their families, taking account of the full range of work within the area

The inspection findings were published on the Care Inspectorate website on 15 April 2025. You will also find on the website a short video which was produced by young inspection volunteers to explain our findings to children and young people, but which will make useful viewing for anyone interested in the outcomes of the inspection.

Inspectors gathered and reviewed evidence to provide a formal evaluation of quality indicator 2.1: impact on children and young people. The evaluation of the quality indicator was good, and the inspection highlighted many areas of strength. Overall, the inspectors recognised that the work of partners was making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people at risk of harm. It also identified a few areas for improvement to maximise wellbeing and ensure that children and families consistently have experiences and outcomes which are as positive as possible.



Early intervention and prevention

East Ayrshire Council, supported by the Community Planning Partnership, has prioritised investment in prevention so that people, including children and young people, can thrive and lead inclusive, fulfilling lives within our communities. To support this ambition, the Council established the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund in February 2024 to change demand and direct expenditure that would limit future service demand.

Through this fund, approximately £4 million is allocated each year over a ten-year period to support early intervention and prevention initiatives. In its first two years, the fund has delivered significant investment focused on children and young people. This includes measures to tackle child poverty through Fairer Futures Partnerships; the provision of free and subsidised school meals; expanded speech and language therapy for infants and early years; additional out-of-school support for those with additional support needs; and extending clothing grants to include 3 and 4-year-olds.



ASN summer supports

In 2024, East Ayrshire Council allocated £150,000 per annum over four years to support ASN summer provision. This enabled a shift from a previously externally commissioned model to an in-house service led by an executive leadership group and supported by a multi-agency implementation team. The programme was designed to be child-centred, inclusive and responsive, with a focus on children with disabilities. The planning shaped through engagement with parents, carers and young people ensured it reflected their needs and preferences.

The 2025 ASN summer programme was delivered over four weeks across four of our schools and showed strong engagement, high attendance levels and a wide range of activities, including additional residential and targeted support opportunities. Provision was delivered in familiar settings by known staff, supported by additional recruitment from East Ayrshire Leisure Trust, helping to create a safe and supportive environment.

While evaluation identified areas for improvement, the programme demonstrated strong outcomes and provides a solid foundation for continued development of a sustainable, responsive in-house model.

Speech, language and communication

The Roots Team has secured funding from the Council to deliver a three-year project aimed at promoting interaction and communication skills from pre-conception to 30 months, with a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention. Taking an upstream public health approach, the project seeks to ensure that every child has the best possible start in speech, language and communication. This will be achieved through a blend of universal and targeted interventions that empower families and professionals with evidence-based training and coaching.

Alongside this, the team is sharing clear and impactful public health messaging to encourage responsive interaction from birth, while strengthening partnership working across health, education and the third sector. A consistent focus will be placed on embedding practical communication strategies into everyday routines and ensuring access to high-quality information. Continuous use of quality improvement tools will help measure impact, support sustainability, and ensure responsiveness to the specific needs of East Ayrshire while aligning with national priorities.

Childhood poverty

Child poverty remains a significant and persistent challenge in East Ayrshire, shaping both the scale and complexity of need experienced by children, young people and their families. With around 16.7% of children aged 0-15 living in poverty, many households continue to face financial hardship linked to low income, unemployment, insecure work and the ongoing cost of living pressures. Poverty is often concentrated within particular localities, leading to inequalities in access to opportunities, health outcomes and overall wellbeing. These circumstances can affect children's ability to fully realise their rights, including their right to an adequate standard of living, education, health and participation in everyday life.

The impact of child poverty is wide-ranging and interconnected. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health, reduced educational attainment, and limited access to social, cultural and recreational opportunities. Families often face additional pressures such as housing instability, food insecurity and increased stress, which can in turn affect relationships and family wellbeing. We understand that family circumstances differ, and some families may face increased financial pressures, particularly families with a disabled child, lone parent families, families with a child under one, larger families and minority ethnic families. In East Ayrshire, these challenges are further compounded by wider socio-economic factors, including rurality in some areas and the long-term impact of deprivation in others. As a result, addressing child poverty requires a coordinated, multi-agency response that recognises both immediate needs and the underlying causes.

East Ayrshire Council and its Community Planning Partnership are actively working to tackle child poverty through a range of strategic and locality-based approaches. The Anti-Poverty and Inequalities Strategy 2025-2030 and the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, alongside the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and locality plans, have provided a framework for targeted action, focusing on early intervention, prevention and whole-family support. Investment in initiatives such as family support hubs, community anchor organisations and employability programmes funded by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and Fairer Futures Partnership aims to provide practical support, improve financial inclusion and strengthen resilience within communities. There is also a clear emphasis on ensuring that services are accessible, joined up and responsive to the lived experience of families.

Tackling child poverty in East Ayrshire is closely linked to the delivery of children's rights under the UNCRC. Ensuring that children have what they need to live well, feel safe and thrive is central to the partnership's approach. Moving forward, continued focus on reducing inequalities, strengthening early intervention and ensuring that children and families are actively involved in shaping services will be key. By aligning resources, improving data sharing and maintaining a strong focus on prevention, East Ayrshire aims to mitigate the impacts of poverty and create the conditions for all children and young people to reach their full potential. The East Ayrshire Local Child Poverty Action Plan sits within the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Strategic Plan 2026-29, and the update provided under Priority 2 of this report represents our Local Poverty Action Plan update report for 2025/26. Key indicators within the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan Annual Report 2025/26, particularly in relation to economic growth, are also relevant to this work.



Fairer Futures Partnership

The Fairer Futures Partnership between the Council and the Scottish Government continues to play a pivotal role in tackling poverty and inequality, with a renewed focus on embedding preventative, community-led approaches. Recent updates highlight strengthened collaboration across partners, including local authority services, health, education, and third sector organisations, to ensure a coordinated and targeted response to the needs of children, young people and families. The partnership, involving Centrestage, Yipworld and the Zone, has prioritised data-informed decision-making to better understand the drivers of poverty locally, enabling resources to be directed where they can have the greatest impact. There is also an increased emphasis on aligning activity with national priorities, including The Promise and the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, ensuring a consistent and strategic approach.

Progress has also been made in expanding community-based supports and enhancing access to early help for families experiencing financial hardship and wider vulnerabilities. Initiatives such as income maximisation support, family wellbeing services, and inclusive community programmes are being further integrated to create a more seamless system of support. Importantly, the partnership continues to prioritise the voices of people with lived experience, ensuring that services are shaped by those who use them. This ongoing development reflects a shared commitment across partners to deliver sustainable change, reduce inequalities, and improve long-term outcomes for children and young people across East Ayrshire.

Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) allocation has provided a significant opportunity to deliver early, relationship-based support that strengthens families and improves outcomes for children and young people. By investing in preventative approaches, the WFWF has enabled services to shift from crisis response to early intervention, ensuring that families receive the right help at the right time. This includes enhancing multi-agency collaboration across health, education, social work, and the third sector to deliver coordinated, person-centred support. A focus on building resilience within families, addressing inequalities, and promoting emotional wellbeing will help children and young people to feel safe, nurtured, and able to reach their full potential.

Through this funding, East Ayrshire is well positioned to further develop holistic, whole-family models of care that recognise the interconnected needs of parents, carers and children. Initiatives such as family support models delivered from hubs in communities, community-based services, and trauma-informed practice will help services to strengthen protective factors and reduce the need for more intensive interventions.



Successes from the five priority areas 2023-2026

Priority 1: Children and young people feel respected, listened to and influence change

Successes include:

- Increased participation opportunities
- Greater use of youth voice in planning and consultation
- Embedding children's rights across services
- Improved awareness of UNCRC principles

Children's rights are increasingly embedded across East Ayrshire, with participation and co-production shaping service planning, improvement and decision-making. The introduction of the VOiCE framework has strengthened and standardised how children, young people and families are engaged, ensuring their views inform future priorities and service design.

The East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Cabinet continues to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to influence local decisions, contributing directly to Council and Community Planning discussions. Participation has supported young people to develop confidence, leadership skills and wider opportunities in education, employment and civic life.

Rights-based practice is well established across education, with all schools having a Rights Lead and 15 schools achieving Gold, 21 Silver and 22 Bronze Rights Respecting School Awards. This has strengthened children's participation, inclusion and voice within school communities.

Across Early Childhood Centres, children actively influence their learning and play environments, with inspection findings highlighting strong rights-based practice, nurturing relationships and positive wellbeing outcomes. Children and young people are also helping to shape environmental initiatives through engagement with Community Waste Officers, ensuring their views contribute to local service improvements and community action.







VOICE

Priority 2: Reducing the impact of social and economic poverty

Successes include:

- Increased uptake of welfare advice and financial support
- Delivery of anti-poverty initiatives through schools and communities
- Stronger links between family support and poverty reduction activity
- Multi-agency work aligned to child poverty priorities

East Ayrshire has taken a whole-system, early intervention approach to tackling child poverty by embedding poverty reduction across children's services planning, governance and investment decisions. Through collaborative use of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, Early Intervention and Prevention Fund, and Pupil Equity Funding, partners have focused on income maximisation, reducing the cost of the school day, improving access to food, clothing and transport, and supporting parents and young people into education, training and employment.

The Welfare Rights Service has helped families maximise income, increase benefit uptake and access financial support, strengthening financial stability and wellbeing for households experiencing poverty.

Key achievements include providing universal free primary school meals and half-price secondary school meals; extending clothing grants to eligible 3 and 4-year-olds (£708,680 awarded to 3,524 children); and delivering targeted financial inclusion support that generated over £1.5 million in financial gains for families. Employability programmes, Skills and Learning initiatives, and parental employment pathways have improved positive destinations for young people and increased opportunities for families to move out of poverty.

Alongside this, schools, health services, housing and community partners have worked together to remove financial barriers to participation, strengthen family wellbeing, prevent food insecurity, and provide early help for vulnerable families. Housing Services have strengthened homelessness prevention through the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, supporting more families to remain in their homes and reducing the number of children experiencing homelessness or living in temporary accommodation. This has helped minimise disruption to family life, education and wellbeing. This integrated approach supports The Promise, reduces inequalities and helps children and young people achieve better outcomes.





Welfare Rights Service

Priority 3: Children and young people feel safe

Successes include:

- Continued improvement in child protection partnerships
- Strengthened trauma-informed practice
- Better coordination of services supporting vulnerable children
- Greater focus on early help and prevention

East Ayrshire has continued to strengthen its approach to keeping children and young people safe through collaborative, rights-based and trauma-informed practice.

The Child Protection Committee has enhanced child protection arrangements through workforce development, multi-agency training and improved participation, ensuring children's views are heard and influence decision-making. Work to address child exploitation, contextual safeguarding, and violence against women and girls has strengthened awareness, early identification and access to support.

The implementation of Signs of Safety and Healing and the Safe and Together Model has embedded strengths-based, child-centred and trauma-informed approaches across services, improving assessment, planning and support for children and families.

East Ayrshire's Whole System Approach to youth justice has continued to deliver positive outcomes through prevention, diversion and early intervention, helping children remain safely within their communities and reducing involvement in formal justice processes.

As a corporate parent, East Ayrshire has strengthened support for care-experienced young people through the Moving On, Continuing Care and Aftercare Service, providing accommodation, continuing care, aftercare and support into adulthood. High-quality support has also been maintained for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, ensuring access to care, education, health services and community opportunities.

Children affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation have benefited from enhanced prevention, protection and recovery services, while ongoing work to improve digital safety has increased awareness of online risks and strengthened safeguarding arrangements.

Together, these achievements demonstrate East Ayrshire's commitment to protecting children through early intervention, strong partnership working and meaningful participation, helping children and young people to grow up safe, nurtured, respected and included.





Priority 4: Children and young people have the best start in life and achieve their potential

Successes include:

- Continued investment in early years
- Partnership work supporting school attendance and inclusion
- Expansion of family-centred approaches
- Ongoing improvement in educational support pathways

Partners across East Ayrshire have continued to work together to improve outcomes for children and young people through early intervention, prevention, inclusion and reducing inequalities.

The Family Nurse Partnership, Health Visiting and School Nursing Services have provided targeted support to children and families, improving early childhood development, health, wellbeing and family resilience. Early years programmes, including The Roots Project, Chatting Together and CLAN, have strengthened speech, language and communication development, supporting children to achieve their full potential from the earliest years.

Educational attainment has continued to improve, with progress in literacy and numeracy in primary schools. Targeted support and inclusive approaches have helped more children and young people engage in learning, attend school and achieve positive outcomes.

Partners have also expanded opportunities for skills development, employability and work-based learning. Through vocational learning, employability programmes and improved access to work experience, young people, particularly those facing additional barriers, have been supported to build confidence, develop skills and move into positive destinations.





Priority 5: Mental health and wellbeing

Successes include:

- Increased wellbeing support in schools and communities
- Enhanced collaboration between education, health and third sector partners
- Development of preventative mental health approaches
- Improved access to targeted supports

Improving mental health and emotional wellbeing remains a key priority for East Ayrshire. Partners have continued to invest in prevention, early intervention and timely support, helping children, young people and families access the right help at the right time.

Significant progress has been made through support for Young Carers, investment in Infant Mental Health, and expanded access to digital wellbeing services such as Kooth, improving emotional wellbeing and reducing barriers to support.

The Neurodevelopmental Programme Board, Educational Psychology Service, and school-based wellbeing services have strengthened support for children and young people with additional needs, improving early identification, inclusion and access to appropriate interventions.

The School Counselling Service and Under-10 Wellbeing Service have continued to provide accessible early support, while improvements within CAMHS have reduced waiting times and strengthened access to specialist mental health services.

Together, these achievements demonstrate East Ayrshire's commitment to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing through accessible, person-centred support, helping children and young people build resilience, improve emotional wellbeing and achieve their full potential.



Shifting resources towards prevention and early intervention

East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan recognises that achieving better outcomes for children, young people and families requires a continued shift in resources towards prevention, early intervention and whole-family support. This approach reflects our commitment to the principles of GIRFEC, The Promise, the UNCRC and the requirements of Children's Services Planning, ensuring support is available as early as possible and within communities before difficulties escalate into crisis.

Over the last three years, partners have increased investment in preventative services through a range of local and national funding streams, including the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund, Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and Fairer Futures Partnership initiatives. These investments are enabling a gradual redesign of services to strengthen community-based support, reduce fragmentation and improve the experience and outcomes of children, young people and families.

Our approach involves directing resources towards interventions that are evidence-based, relationship-focused and delivered as close as possible to children's everyday lives.

Examples include:

- Development of Family Hubs within communities to provide accessible, integrated support for children, young people and families.
- Expansion of whole-family support services that help families access the right support before difficulties escalate.
- Increased investment in speech, language and communication development during the earliest years of life.
- Enhanced emotional wellbeing and mental health supports delivered through schools and communities.
- Targeted poverty prevention and financial inclusion services aimed at reducing the impact of child poverty.
- Continued investment in parenting support, infant mental health and family relationship interventions.
- Strengthening community capacity through partnership with the third sector and local communities.

Through these investments, we expect to reduce future demand for more intensive and costly interventions by:

- Supporting more children to achieve developmental milestones before school entry.
- Focusing on early intervention and prevention to reduce increased unmet need.
- Reducing the need for child protection and crisis responses where earlier support can safely meet need.
- Improving school attendance, inclusion and educational engagement.
- Strengthening emotional wellbeing and resilience.
- Reducing the long-term impact of poverty and inequality on children's outcomes.

The Family Hub model will represent the most significant example of this strategic shift over the lifetime of this new Plan. Through investment of £3 million from the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund, Family Hubs will provide accessible, coordinated support within communities, using a "no wrong door" approach that connects families to the right help at the earliest opportunity. This investment seeks to reduce service duplication, improve access to support, and decrease reliance on crisis-driven responses.

To ensure resources continue to be directed where they can achieve the greatest impact, partners will use East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan findings, performance information, service evaluation evidence and the experiences of children, young people and families to inform future commissioning and investment decisions. We will routinely review whether resources are contributing to improved outcomes, reducing inequalities and supporting a sustainable shift towards prevention across the whole children's services system.

"The Prevention Investment Journey 2026-2029" shows



Monitoring our shift towards prevention

Over the lifetime of this Plan we will monitor progress through a range of indicators including:

- Numbers of children and families accessing early intervention services
- Uptake of Family Hub and whole-family support services
- Reductions in escalation to statutory and crisis services
- Improvements in developmental, educational and wellbeing outcomes
- Reduced inequalities for priority groups
- Feedback from children, young people and families on their ability to access help earlier and closer to home

Throughout the lifespan of this plan, we expect a greater proportion of investment, workforce capacity and partnership activity to be focused on prevention, early intervention and community-based support, ensuring that more children and families receive the right help at the right time and that fewer require intensive statutory intervention.

Children and Young People's Services Plan and emerging challenges for 2026-2029

Purpose

Using evidence to inform commissioning and investment decisions

The East Ayrshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) provides the evidence base for strategic planning, service redesign, commissioning and investment decisions across children's services. By bringing together population data, performance information, service demand trends, stakeholder insight and the voices of children, young people and families, the JSNA enables partners to identify current and emerging needs and target resources where they are most likely to improve outcomes.

The findings of the JSNA have directly informed the priorities and actions within this Children and Young People's Services Plan. In particular, evidence relating to child poverty, developmental concerns, increasing demand for mental health and neurodevelopmental support, educational inclusion, family wellbeing and child protection has shaped both our strategic priorities and our planned areas of investment.

Partners are committed to ensuring that commissioning decisions are evidence-led and focused on improving outcomes for children, young people and families. Information from the JSNA will be used alongside performance data, service evaluations, financial information and lived experience feedback to support decisions about:

- Investment in new preventative and early intervention services
- Redesign of existing services to better meet local need
- Identification of gaps in service provision
- Targeting resources towards communities experiencing the greatest inequalities
- Development of community-based models of support, including Family Hubs
- Commissioning of third sector and specialist services
- Review of existing programmes to ensure they continue to deliver positive outcomes and value

This work will support partners to make informed decisions on service planning, resource allocation and early intervention approaches that will improve outcomes and directly shape the development of the Children and Young People's Strategic Plan 2026-2029.

Context

The East Ayrshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment brings together data, evidence and lived experience to help Community Planning Partners understand the needs of children, young people and families, and target resources where they will have the greatest impact.

The evidence demonstrates that poverty and inequality are key drivers of poorer outcomes across health, education, wellbeing, safety and life opportunities. These challenges are often interconnected and cumulative, with children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances experiencing multiple barriers that can persist throughout childhood and into adulthood.

While significant inequalities exist across East Ayrshire's communities, outcomes are not predetermined. The evidence highlights the critical role of partnership working, prevention and early intervention in improving life chances and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

What is our local data telling us?

The JSNA identifies a number of interconnected challenges affecting children, young people and families across East Ayrshire:

- Significant inequalities exist between communities, with poverty, neglect, deprivation, rural isolation and limited access to services contributing to poorer outcomes.
- Population changes, including declining birth rates and a reducing child population, are reshaping demand for services, particularly in rural areas.
- Child poverty remains a major concern, affecting over 4,200 children, with many families experiencing financial insecurity and increased reliance on welfare support.
- Child protection concerns are increasing, with domestic abuse, substance misuse and neglect continuing to have a significant impact on children's safety and wellbeing.
- Almost one-quarter of children have identified developmental concerns before starting school, particularly in speech, language and communication.
- Demand for mental health and wellbeing support continues to increase across all age groups.
- In line with the national picture, there has been an increase in identification of children with Additional Support Needs (ASN).
- School attendance remains a priority area of focus.
- Poorer health outcomes are evident from pregnancy through childhood, including higher rates of smoking during pregnancy, premature births, lower breastfeeding rates and poorer child dental health compared with national averages.

What is the impact?

The evidence shows that poverty, poor health, educational disadvantage and family adversity are closely linked and have lasting effects on children's outcomes. Without early support, these factors increase the likelihood of poorer physical and mental health, lower educational attainment, reduced employment opportunities and greater demand on public services.

Children's outcomes are strongly influenced by family circumstances, particularly during periods of transition or crisis. Tackling the root causes of inequality and providing timely, coordinated support are therefore essential to improving outcomes and reducing long-term demand on services.

Improving outcomes for priority groups

We recognise that some children, young people and families experience greater levels of disadvantage, inequality and vulnerability, which can affect their wellbeing, life chances and ability to realise their full potential. Through this Plan, we will place particular focus on improving outcomes for priority groups, including children experiencing poverty, care experienced children and young people, children with disabilities and additional support needs, young carers, children affected by trauma, domestic abuse or parental substance use, children at risk of harm, and those living in rural or disadvantaged communities.

We will work collaboratively across services to ensure support is accessible, coordinated and tailored to individual needs, with early intervention and prevention at the heart of our approach. Through the principles of GIRFEC, The Promise and the UNCRC, we will listen to the voices of children and families, strengthen whole-family support, remove barriers to participation and opportunity, and target resources where they can have the greatest impact. By focusing on reducing inequalities and improving access to health, education, wellbeing and community support, we aim to ensure that every child and young person in East Ayrshire is loved, safe, respected and able to thrive regardless of their circumstances.

We will monitor outcomes for priority groups through disaggregated performance data and feedback from children, young people and families to ensure that progress is reducing inequalities and delivering meaningful improvements in their lives.

Our response

East Ayrshire Community Planning Partners are committed to working together to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. This requires a continued focus on prevention, early intervention and targeted support, particularly during key life transitions and for those experiencing the greatest disadvantage.

The following strategic priorities have been developed from the evidence from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and from engagement with children, young people, families and our children's services practitioners. They will provide a clear framework for action and performance monitoring throughout the Children and Young People's Services Plan 2026-2029.

Strategic Priorities:

- Priority 1: Reduce Child Poverty and Inequality
- Priority 2: Give Every Child the Best Start in Life
- Priority 3: Improve Mental Health and Inclusion
- Priority 4: Keep Children Safe and Strengthen Families
- Priority 5: Build Resilient Communities Through Early Intervention and Accessible Services

Strategic Priorities 2026-2029

Priority 1: Reduce Child Poverty and Inequality

Our aspiration is: Fewer children and families experiencing poverty and inequality.

Key actions and areas of focus

We will:

- Work collaboratively to focus on early intervention and prevention, targeting resources towards families experiencing the greatest levels of deprivation.
- Improve financial wellbeing by increasing access to welfare rights advice and income maximisation support.
- Maximise uptake of Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grants and other financial entitlements.
- Reduce the cost of the school day and remove financial barriers to participation in education, sport, leisure and community activities.
- Improve educational attainment for children affected by poverty.
- Provide targeted support to priority family groups experiencing financial hardship.
- Use data and intelligence to identify inequalities and direct support to communities with the greatest need.

Measures we will use to evidence our progress

- % of children and young people living in relative poverty.
- Number of families accessing welfare rights services.
- Value of financial gains secured for families.
- % uptake of Scottish Child Payment.
- % of school age children registered for free school meals.
- Increase in school attendance rates across all sectors, particularly pupils in SIMDQ1.
- Increase attainment of pupils in SIMDQ1.

The outcomes we aspire to achieve

- Working collaboratively, we are reducing the impact of social and economic poverty on our children and young people.
- Our children, young people and families receive the financial support they are entitled to and experience reduced poverty.
- Our children, young people and families have improved access to opportunities and services.
- Our children, young people and families have access to affordable, nutritional food.
- Children and young people from deprived communities experience improved educational outcomes and increased attainment.
- We have improved life chances for our children and young people.

Priority 2: Give Every Child the Best Start in Life

Our aspiration is: More children achieving their developmental milestones and being ready to learn.

Key actions and areas of focus

We will:

- Improve maternal, infant and family health through effective antenatal and postnatal care and support.
- Strengthen early attachment and parent-infant relationships to support healthy development.
- Enhance maternal mental health support and improve access to specialist services where required.
- Deliver evidence-based parenting support programmes that build confidence and resilience within families.
- Promote healthy child development and identify developmental concerns at the earliest opportunity.
- Improve children's speech, language and communication skills through early intervention and support within homes, communities and educational settings.
- Ensure children are healthy, confident and ready to learn.

Measures we will use to evidence our progress

- % reduction in smoking during pregnancy.
- % of babies born a healthy weight.
- % increase in babies exclusively breastfed.
- % reduction in children with at least one developmental concern at all reviews.
- % reduction of speech, language and communication concerns.
- % uptake of parenting programmes.
- Maternal mental wellbeing measures.

The outcomes we aspire to achieve

- Our families receive timely support during pregnancy and infancy.
- Our families have improved parental confidence and attachment.
- Our children and young people achieve developmental milestones.
- Our children have improved speech, language and communication in the early years.
- Our children and young people have improved lifelong health and wellbeing outcomes.

Priority 3: Improve Mental Health and Inclusion

Our aspiration is: Improved mental health, wellbeing, inclusion and educational outcomes.

Key actions and areas of focus

We will:

- Promote positive emotional wellbeing and resilience through universal, targeted and specialist supports.
- Strengthen mental health prevention and early intervention services to ensure children and young people receive the right support at the right time.
- Deliver whole-school and community approaches that support wellbeing, inclusion and achievement.
- Improve attendance for all children and young people.
- Reduce exclusions and barriers to participation in education and community life.
- Continue to support children and young people with Additional Support Needs to enable them to reach their full potential.
- Create opportunities for children and young people to participate in employment, training, recreation and community activities.

Measures we will use to evidence our progress

- Number of children and young people accessing mental health support.
- % increase in school attendance rates across all sectors.
- School exclusion rates.
- % of annual participation (in education, training or employment) – 16-19 years.
- % of all school leavers in positive destinations.

The outcomes we aspire to achieve

- Our children and young people can access support earlier.
- Our children and young people attend school regularly and are engaged in learning.
- Our children and young people feel included, supported and able to participate.
- Our children and young people have improved emotional wellbeing and resilience.
- Our children and young people experience fewer crises and receive the right support before needs arise.
- Our children and young people have improved mental health and wellbeing.
- Our children and young people achieve their potential, thrive and reach sustainable positive destinations.

Priority 4: Keep Children Safe and Strengthen Families

Our aspiration is: More children growing up safe within supportive family environments.

Key actions and areas of focus

We will:

- Protect children and young people from harm through effective safeguarding and child protection arrangements.
- Strengthen the early identification of neglect, risk, vulnerability and emerging family difficulties.
- Deliver whole-family support that promotes family wellbeing, resilience and positive relationships.
- Improve responses to domestic abuse and reduce its impact on children, young people and families.
- Strengthen support for families affected by alcohol and drug use.
- Embed trauma-informed and relationship-based practice across all children's services.
- Increase access to parenting support, family support and intensive interventions that help families remain together safely and prevent escalation to crisis.

Measures we will use to evidence our progress

- % reduction in child protection registrations.
- % of children re-registered on child protection register within 12 months.
- Number of families receiving early intervention support.
- Domestic abuse notifications involving children.
- Substance misuse-related family support activity.
- % reduction of re-referrals to services.
- Number of children who remain safely at home.

The outcomes we aspire to achieve

- Our children, young people and families receive the right support from services before the point of crisis and require less statutory intervention.
- Our children and young people experience positive family relationships and families are more resilient.
- Our children and young people have reduced exposure to neglect, domestic abuse and substance use.
- Our children and young people grow up safely within nurturing, supportive family environments.
- Our children, young people and families require less statutory intervention.
- Our children and young people tell us that they feel safer in their community.

Priority 5: Build Resilient Communities Through Early Intervention and Accessible Services.

Our aspiration is: Earlier access to support through resilient communities and preventative services.

Key actions and areas of focus

We will:

- Develop Family Hubs as accessible community-based models of support for children, young people and families.
- Increase the availability of early intervention and preventative services across East Ayrshire.
- Improve access to services through local delivery, outreach and integrated partnership working.
- Reduce barriers created by rurality, transport challenges and digital exclusion.
- Build community capacity and strengthen local assets that support children and families.
- Improve support during key transition periods, including early years, school transitions and transitions into adulthood.
- Increase opportunities for participation, co-production and community involvement in service planning and delivery.

Measures we will use to evidence our progress

- Number of families supported by the Family Hubs.
- Number of families reporting that they can access support locally, when and where they need it.
- Reduction in escalation to statutory services.
- Reduced digital exclusion, ensuring all our children and young people can engage fully in digital learning at school and in their communities.
- Increase in community-led initiatives.
- Improved wellbeing scores during transition periods.

The outcomes we aspire to achieve

- Working collaboratively, we have reduced barriers for children, young people and families to access timely, preventative support when they need it.
- Our children, young people and families have an increased awareness of the services available.
- Our children, young people and families feel supported and connected within their communities.
- Working collaboratively, we have increased support during key transition points for our children, young people and families.
- Our children, young people and families experience fewer instances of neglect and crisis, reducing the need for intensive support.

You said, we did: how children, young people and families shaped this Plan

Listening to and acting upon the views of children, young people, families and practitioners has been central to the development of the East Ayrshire Children's Services Plan 2026-2029.

Through engagement activities including the Children and Young People's Cabinet, Care Experience Cabinet, VOiCE participation exercises, school engagement, consultation with families, and feedback from sessions held with practitioners across children's services, partners identified a number of key themes which have directly informed the priorities and actions within this Plan. We are committed to continuing this dialogue throughout the lifetime of the Plan to ensure services remain responsive to the needs and experiences of those who use them.

Children and young people said:
Poverty and the rising cost of living are making it harder for families to meet basic needs and for children to participate fully in school and community activities.

We did:
Made reducing child poverty and inequality our first strategic priority, strengthening welfare rights support, financial inclusion services and poverty prevention initiatives, as well as taking action to reduce the cost of the school day and improve access to opportunities.

Children and young people said:
Children, young people and families need support earlier, before difficulties reach crisis point

We did:
Increased our focus on prevention and early intervention through the investment of the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund, the expansion of whole-family support and the development of Family Hubs and stronger community-based services.

Children and young people said:
Mental health and emotional wellbeing continue to be significant concerns for children and young people.

We did:
Invested in a dedicated priority focused on improving mental health, learning and inclusion, expanding access to school counselling, wellbeing supports, neurodevelopmental pathways and early intervention services.

Children and young people said:
Families want services that are easier to access, better connected and less confusing to navigate.

We did:
Developed our "no wrong door" approach across services and with the Family Hubs to provide integrated partnership working, bringing services together around the needs of children and families.

Children and young people said:
Children and young people want to feel listened to and have a genuine influence on decisions that affect their lives.

We did:
Strengthened participation through the Children and Young People's Cabinet, Care Experience Cabinet, Rights Respecting Schools and the VOiCE framework, while embedding children's rights and participation throughout service planning and delivery.

Children, young people and families said:
Children and families want to feel safe, supported and able to access help when family circumstances become difficult.

We did:
Invested in family support, trauma-informed practice, child protection arrangements, domestic abuse responses and early help services to keep children safe and support families to stay together where appropriate

Children, young people and families said:
Communities are an important source of support and should play a greater role in helping children and families thrive.

We did:
Established a dedicated priority focused on building resilient communities, improving access to local services, strengthening community assets, and increasing opportunities for participation and co-production.

What we spend on services for our children and families in East Ayrshire

In 2025/2026 the total spend for children's services in East Ayrshire across Education, Social Work, NHS and our commissioned services with the third and independent sectors amounted to in excess of £241 million.

A breakdown of expenditure in relation to children and young people's services is below. It should be noted that whilst Education, HSCP, and SDS can better demonstrate how much they spend, other services are less able to provide this information comprehensively as their core business is not exclusively targeted towards children and young people. In view of this, they proportioned their budgets in an attempt to illustrate how much of their overall budget is dedicated to services for children and young people.

Children and families service spend		
East Ayrshire Council	Education Services	£175M
	Skills Development & Employability Service	£2.350M
	Early Intervention and Prevention	£0.570M
	Children and Young People's Mental Health	£0.957M
East Ayrshire H&SCP	Children and Families Services	£23.390M
	Specialist Children's Services	£6.775M
Ayrshire and Arran NHS	Children Health Visiting	£4.744M
	Children's and Young People's AHP Services	£0.797M
Community Planning Partners and Partner Agencies	Ayrshire College	£20.1M
	Ayrshire 360	£6.607M
Total		**£241.290M**

Our commitment for 2026-2029

Our priorities for change

East Ayrshire's Children's Services Partnership is committed to improving outcomes for children, young people and families through a relentless focus on prevention, early intervention and reducing inequalities. Our priorities have been shaped by local need, national policy, the voices of children and families, our children's services practitioners and evidence of what works from well tested models across the authority. We recognise that increasing levels of poverty, complexity of need, mental health challenges and educational barriers require a coordinated and integrated response. Through this Plan, we will focus our collective efforts on ensuring children are safe, healthy, included, achieving, nurtured, active, respected and responsible, with support available at the right time and in the right place.

What we will do differently

To improve outcomes and respond to increasing demand, we will continue to transform the way services are designed and delivered. We will shift further towards preventative, relationship-based approaches, strengthen whole-family support and improve how partners work together around the needs of children and families.

Through initiatives such as Family Hubs and community-based support networks, we will reduce fragmentation, simplify access to services and ensure families experience a coordinated response. We will place greater emphasis on listening to children and families, acting on their feedback and involving them in decisions that affect their lives.

Turning ambition into action

This Plan sets out how partners across health, education, social work, the third sector, communities and wider public services will work together to deliver meaningful change. We will translate our collective ambitions into practical actions, measurable outcomes and clear accountability. By using data, evidence and lived experience to inform decision-making, we will target resources where they can make the greatest difference and ensure progress is regularly reviewed and reported.

Delivering on our promise to children and families

Children, young people and families have told us they want services that are accessible, responsive, compassionate and joined up. We are committed to delivering on that promise by ensuring support is centred on strengths, relationships and individual needs. We will continue to uphold children's rights, promote participation and ensure families have a voice in shaping services. Our approach will focus on helping families thrive, reducing barriers and providing support before challenges escalate into crisis.

Creating opportunities, improving lives

Every child and young person should have the opportunity to achieve their full potential regardless of their background or circumstances. Through this Plan, we will work to reduce inequalities and improve life chances by supporting educational attainment, health and wellbeing, inclusion, employability and positive destinations. We will strengthen support for vulnerable children, young people and families, creating opportunities that build resilience, aspiration and long-term wellbeing.

From vision to impact

Our vision for children and young people will only be realised through tangible improvements in their everyday lives. We will focus on delivering measurable outcomes that demonstrate real impact for children, young people and families. By working collaboratively across agencies and sectors, sharing resources and building on strong community assets, we will create sustainable change that improves experiences, outcomes and opportunities across East Ayrshire.

Our commitment to East Ayrshire's children and young people

We are committed to ensuring that every child and young person in East Ayrshire has the best possible start in life and the opportunity to grow up loved, safe, respected and supported. As partners, we will work together to protect children's rights, promote their wellbeing and respond effectively to their needs. Grounded in the principles of GIRFEC and The Promise, our commitment is to provide compassionate, coordinated and inclusive services that enable all children and young people to flourish within their families, communities and schools.

Governance, monitoring, evaluation and reporting progress

Evaluating the impact of the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan is a shared responsibility across all Children's Services Planning Partners. Robust performance management and continuous improvement will be central to ensuring that we deliver positive outcomes for children, young people and families across East Ayrshire.

To support this work, East Ayrshire will utilise the Performance & Risk Integrated System Management (PRISM) to capture, monitor and evidence service improvements and progress against agreed priorities. This will provide a consistent approach to recording improvement activity across partnership services, enabling partners to track actions, measure impact, and identify emerging challenges or opportunities.

In addition, consideration will be given to developing a performance dashboard to provide real-time visibility of progress against the Children and Young Peoples Services Plan through PRISM. The dashboard will bring together key performance indicators, outcome measures, and improvement activities, allowing partners, managers, and governance groups to monitor delivery, identify trends, and support data-informed decision making.

In line with our statutory duties, the Children's Planning Partnership will publish an Annual Performance Report, demonstrating progress towards achieving the actions, outcomes, and targets set out within this Plan. This report will draw upon information captured through PRISM, data presented within the Power BI dashboard, and wider performance information from across the partnership.

The Children and Young People's Services Plan will be delivered through established governance arrangements, with thematic planning groups working to create clear delivery plans that outline measurable actions, timescales, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. The Chairs and Co-Chairs of these groups will provide regular updates to the Integrated Children's Services group, highlighting achievements, progress against priorities, and any barriers impacting delivery.

The Executive Leadership Group for Infants, Children and Young People will scrutinise performance information, challenge areas where progress is limited, and support collaborative problem-solving to address any issues that arise. This approach will ensure accountability, maintain focus on outcomes, and promote a culture of continuous improvement across all partner organisations. See governance structures within Appendix 2.

A suite of key performance indicators will be agreed across the partnership to measure progress towards our local priorities and contribute to Scotland's wider national outcomes. These indicators will enable us to assess whether improvements are being achieved, identify areas of strength, and target support where further development is required.

However, quantitative data alone cannot fully demonstrate the success of the Plan. We are committed to regularly engaging with children, young people, families, carers, and communities across East Ayrshire to understand their experiences and perspectives. Their feedback will remain a critical measure of our success and will help us determine whether the changes we are making are having a meaningful impact on their lives.

Over the lifetime of this Plan, we will strengthen opportunities for participation, co-design, and ongoing dialogue with those who use our services. Particular attention will be given to ensuring that the voices of children, young people, and families experiencing poverty, disadvantage, trauma, or complex challenges are heard and reflected in service development and improvement planning. By combining performance data, improvement methodology, and lived experience, we will ensure that services across East Ayrshire remain responsive, effective, and focused on delivering the best possible outcomes for all children and young people.

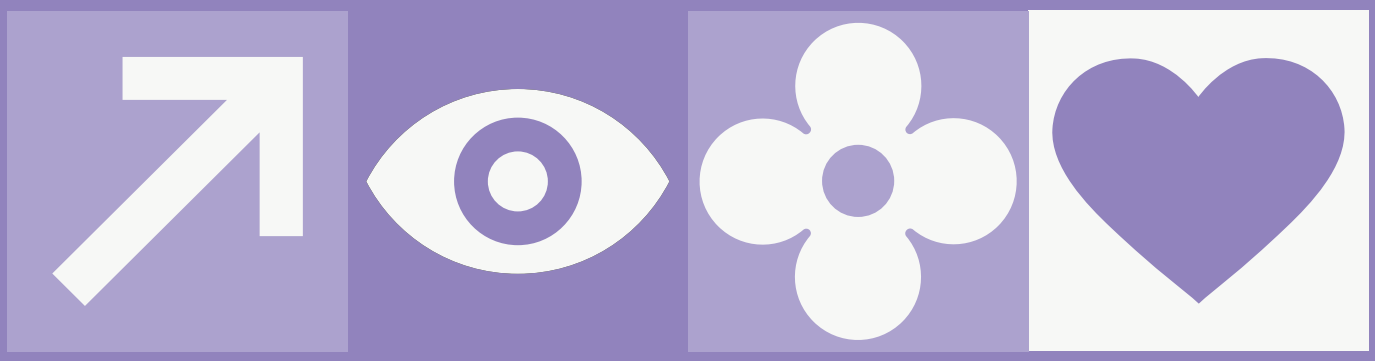
Continuing the conversation

This Plan is not the end of the conversation. Throughout 2026-2029, we will continue to engage with children, young people, families, carers and practitioners to understand what is working, where improvements are needed and how services can better meet local needs. We will use the VOiCE framework and a range of participation approaches to ensure feedback continues to shape decision-making, service improvement and future planning across East Ayrshire.

By 2029 we will have:

- Reduced the impact of child poverty
- Improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes
- Strengthened whole-family support
- Embedded children's rights in all services
- Delivered more preventative and community-based support
- Progressed implementation of The Promise
- Ensured children and young people are central to decision-making

Together, we will make East Ayrshire the best place for children and young people to grow up, thrive and succeed.



The last word

In the previous 2025-26 term, I had the privilege of being the Children and Young People's Cabinet vice-chair. This allowed me to network and meet a variety of people who all had one goal in common: to create a better community through listening and respecting young people.

This year, I am stepping into the role of chair. A role in which I hope to help the passionate and talented young people of our Cabinet to strive and give them the opportunities, share their opinions and highlight the thoughts of young people all around East Ayrshire. We have decided to focus on social media, a subject prevalent in the conversations and everyday life of the young people in our communities. Through this, we hope to bring light to the unknown dangers and unacknowledged benefits of social media, and most importantly, the safety precautions you can take when using these platforms. It is heartening to know that the new Children and Young People's Services Plan has a focus on children and young people feeling safe and having access to help when they need it. We as a Cabinet can draw attention to issues that young people face, but we need your help to influence change across East Ayrshire.

Over my time in Cabinet, it has been amazing to see the growth in our members and the number of services and organisations who want to work with young people to ensure that their opinions are taken into consideration and that they are set up for success.

We, as a Cabinet, are so grateful for the opportunities that we have and the conversations that we have a seat at. And hopefully, our work and collaboration with everyone can influence others to adopt this approach and improve outcomes for all children and young people. Because, at the end of the day, we are all working towards one goal: a better community for all.

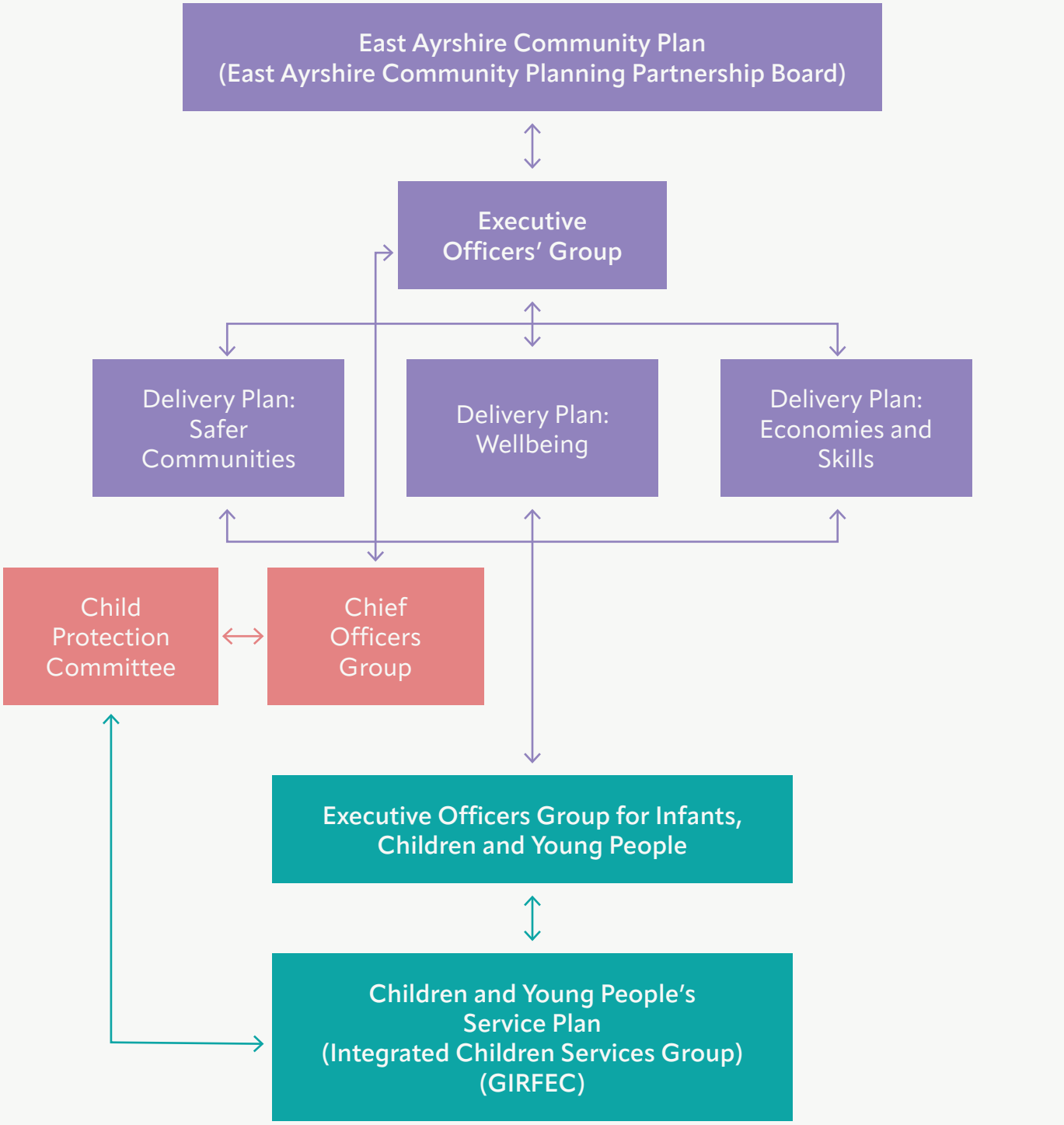
One final note: remember that engagement with young people isn't always easy, but it is always worth it!

Abigail
Chair of East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Cabinet

Appendix 1: Our Strategic Landscape for Children's Services

National Performance Framework	Community Planning Priorities	Children and Young People's Service Plan	Other Children's Services Plans
Children and Young People	Economy and Skills	Priority 1: Reduce Child Poverty and Inequality	East Ayrshire Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2024-27
Communities			East Ayrshire Child Poverty Action Plan 2026-2029
Culture	Safer Communities	Priority 2: Give Every Child the Best Start in Life	Ayrshire 360 Strategic Framework 2026-2036
Economy			NHS Ayrshire & Arran Child Poverty Action Plan 2026
Education	Wellbeing	Priority 3: Improve Mental Health, Learning and Inclusion	Integrated Children's Services (GIRFEC) Action Plan
Environment			Education Service Improvement Plan 2024-2027
Fair Work and Business			Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan
Health		Priority 4: Keep Children Safe and Strengthen Families	HSCP Strategic Plan
Human Rights	Including cross-cutting themes of tackling inequality; early intervention and prevention; lifelong learning, and ensuring that the strengths and opportunities within communities are maximised		Community Learning & Development Plan 2024-2027
International		Priority 5: Build Resilient Communities Through Early Intervention and Accessible Services	Child Protection Improvement Plan
Poverty			UNCRC Implementation Plan

Appendix 2: Governance of the Children and Young People's Service Plan



Key

East Ayrshire Public Protection	East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Integrated Service Planning	East Ayrshire Community Planning

East Ayrshire

Children and Young People's Services Plan

2026-2029

East Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir an Ear