

Agenda Item	9
Report No	HCW-16-23

Committee: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Date: 24 August 2023

Report Title: Residential Children's Services & After Care Services

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the delivery of the Council's Residential Children's Service and After Care provision for the period 2022/23. The report highlights the complex factors that result in young people being placed in residential care. The key cultural and system ingredients that promote good outcomes, linked to high quality residential care, are highlighted, including the foundations of care **where voice, rights and loving, stable relationships are nurtured**. For some young people, residential care is a **positive choice** where talents, strengths and aspirations are realised.
- 1.2 Residential care is not a separate entity but is completely integrated within Children's Services and has an extremely important part to play in Keeping the Promise, and our Highland Families 1st Strategy - **to safely maintain as many Highland children within their families and their Highland communities**. The report details our transformation of Residential Care. Our aim to contract, shift and pivot resources to the community, focused on trying to prevent the need for residential care through the provision of intensive community and family support. The report details the many strands of a complex system of Highland Council Residential Care working across an Alliance of 3rd Sector Partnerships - all pulling together to keep Highland families together and connected. Home to Highland is also a critical part of the overall strategy and collectively we are evidencing that Families 1st is achieving impact, at pace, noting:
- the lowest numbers of (HC) 'beds' in residential care (30% reduction).
 - the lowest numbers in purchased independent care out with the Highlands (53% reduction of which 42% has been from 2021-2023).
 - the lowest numbers in Secure Care (81% reduction).
 - the lowest total numbers of Children Looked After (20% reduction).
- 1.3 Residential Care is a Registered Service subject to Care Inspection scrutiny. This report highlights that a significant improvement journey has taken place with increased leadership scrutiny and accountability to ensure all residential care in

i. 30% 2021 - 52 beds to 36 2023/24

ii 53% Baseline 41 to 19 July 2023

iii 81% highest 11 to 2 July 2023

iv 20% Scottish Government Children Looked After Social Work Statistics 2021/22 published 2023

Highland is aiming for excellence. We are proud to note that one of our Houses, Ashton, was graded as Excellent with others also achieving Very Good and Good. Likewise, our 3rd Sector Houses have consistently been graded as Very Good.

- 1.4 Finally, a summary of After Care Services and Continuing Care Services is also detailed. While we acknowledge our significant improvement, we know we are on a journey and intend to build self-evaluation into all parts of our service. This includes After Care Services, which as a model has been in place for over a decade. This shall be subject to review in 2023/24.
- 1.5 This report looks forward with a relentless focus to **Keep the Promise**, with positivity that we are moving in the right direction, with acknowledgement of the strengths and talents of our young people, as we pledge to hear their voice, respect their rights, and protect their relationships (as captured in our Highland STAR). Importantly, none of this could be achieved without acknowledging our compassionate and committed workforce and leadership within residential care, of which we express our gratitude for the immensely important work they do.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Note and scrutinise the content of the report which aims to offer transparency and accountability for Highland Council's Residential Services.
 - ii. Agree an annual report be presented to Committee from the Residential and Aftercare Service to enable continuous scrutiny and assurance of improvements to the service.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – There are no resource implications from this specific report. The report outlines our redistribution of resources within the context of our strategic Family First strategy.
- 3.2 Legal – **The Children (Scotland) Act 1995** is the basis of legislation which outlines our duties to accommodate young people. **The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009** is an important operational piece of legislation in the Scottish looked after system. **The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014** introduced a range of significant reforms across children's services. These include corporate parenting duties to meet the needs of care experienced people. The Act also sets out and extends the age of eligibility for aftercare support for young people leaving care to 26; and introduces 'continuing care', providing care leavers up to the age of 21 with the opportunity to continue with accommodation and support they were provided with immediately before they ceased to be looked after.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – Young people who come into care are often from families in communities where Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation scores high in terms of poverty and inequality.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – Connecting young people to their families in their local communities can reduce the travel and costs associated with having to travel out with the Highland area.

- 3.5 Risk – Research has shown that outcomes for children who have been cared for by public bodies have been poor; Highland is committed to working towards significantly improving these outcomes by Keeping the Promise. Contraction of residential homes and shifting support to families in the community, must be achieved as safely as possible balancing risk and need. Residential care is **one** option to help keep young people safe and for a small minority of young people, residential care can be a positive option.
- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - none
- 3.7 Gaelic – Within our residential homes we support young peoples’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including the cultural needs of our young Gaelic language speakers.

4. Background

4.1 Highland Residential Care

- 4.1.1 Residential care is required predominately for secondary age young people who have often experienced abuse and neglect, including the breakdown of care within family settings, e.g., parents, kinship and foster care. Young people in residential care have experienced significant adversity and trauma in their lives, which can impact on mental and physical health, educational outcomes, identity, relationships and belonging. Young people in residential care can also be at particular risk of community harms associated with going missing, offending, and criminal and sexual exploitation. It is important to emphasise that in Highland many young people have talents, strengths and aspirations of which can be realised through safe, loving and nurturing relationships with staff in residential care.
- 4.1.2 Contemporary residential care does not pretend that it is a ‘family’ as full recognition is always given to children’s heritage and birth family, yet care is intended to be ‘family-like’ in the sense that it aims to provide children with a secure, nurturing home where they experience warm, authentic care with residential workers. Many young people report that their residential experience does *‘feel like a family’* in Highland. Their voices and lived experiences are the foundations of all care in Highland as we pivot everything we do to, Keeping the Promise.
- 4.1.3 Residential care has been the subject of various inquiries and investigations into concerns about its role and abuse in care; the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry that begun in 2015, remains ongoing. This form of care is often perceived as the *‘last resort’*. However, numerous national enquires have reached the conclusion that residential care is a ‘positive choice’ and the right option for some children and young people (Independent Care Review, 2020; Kendrick, 2013). Crucial to this form of care is caring and nurturing staff who can provide qualitative, stable and persistent caring relationships within a homely environment (Kendrick, 2013). Key to achieving this is the culture of the establishment; values that uphold children’s rights and are therapeutic; good quality planning and decision-making, for individual children and the service as a whole; placement stability; non-stigmatising and child-informed rules; and appropriate staffing arrangements, stable staff groups and supportive staff teams (Care Inspectorate, 2019b; Kendrick, 2013; The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2018; Together Scotland, 2019).

4.2 Families' 1st Strategy & Residential Care

- 4.2.1 Highland Council have a responsibility to ensure services are planned and commissioned to fulfil statutory duties meeting the needs of children in Highland. This includes the strategic planning of residential care services.
- 4.2.2 Residential care is a fundamental plank of the Children's Services strategy to safely maintain as many children as possible with their families within the Highlands. The Families 1st Strategy was presented to Committee in February 2023 ([here](#)). This strategy is underpinned by GIRFEC and The Promise with a particular focus on supporting families at the earliest point to try to avert the need for crisis intervention, often described as late intervention, which can mean the breakdown of family care, and poorer outcomes for children. Late intervention is also more costly placing major pressure on Children's Services budgets not just in Highland but across the UK.
- 4.2.3 Some children cannot safely remain at home often linked to high-risk parental vulnerability e.g., substance use, chronic mental health, domestic abuse, and child abuse. Additionally, some young people are at risk from complex community harms, notably, child criminal and sexual exploitation. Families' 1st has a strong focus on ensuring when it is not safe within parental care, extended family networks must always be explored and supported to protect children's sense of belonging, connections and identity. Of note, our Family Group Decision Making Team went live in June 2023 with the sole purpose of empowering families to make safe Family Plans within the family network.
- 4.2.4 For a small minority of children and young people, family-based care (parental, kinship and fostering) does not meet their complex needs. Therefore, residential care is a positive option for the 'critical few'. The Families 1st Strategy has sought to shift spend into more intensive community-based services and aims to reduce the need for residential care in Highland, focused on a safe planned contraction of residential care.
- 4.2.5 Of significance, in 2022/23 we removed **12** 'beds' by closing **2** children's houses (Inverness, Leault & North, Avonlea) linked to concerns about the quality and standards. The Families 1st Strategy aimed for a contraction of residential care with redeployment of staff and resources to more community-based supports. Therefore, closure was not necessarily out of sync, but planning was expedited at pace to respond to the complexity of issues.

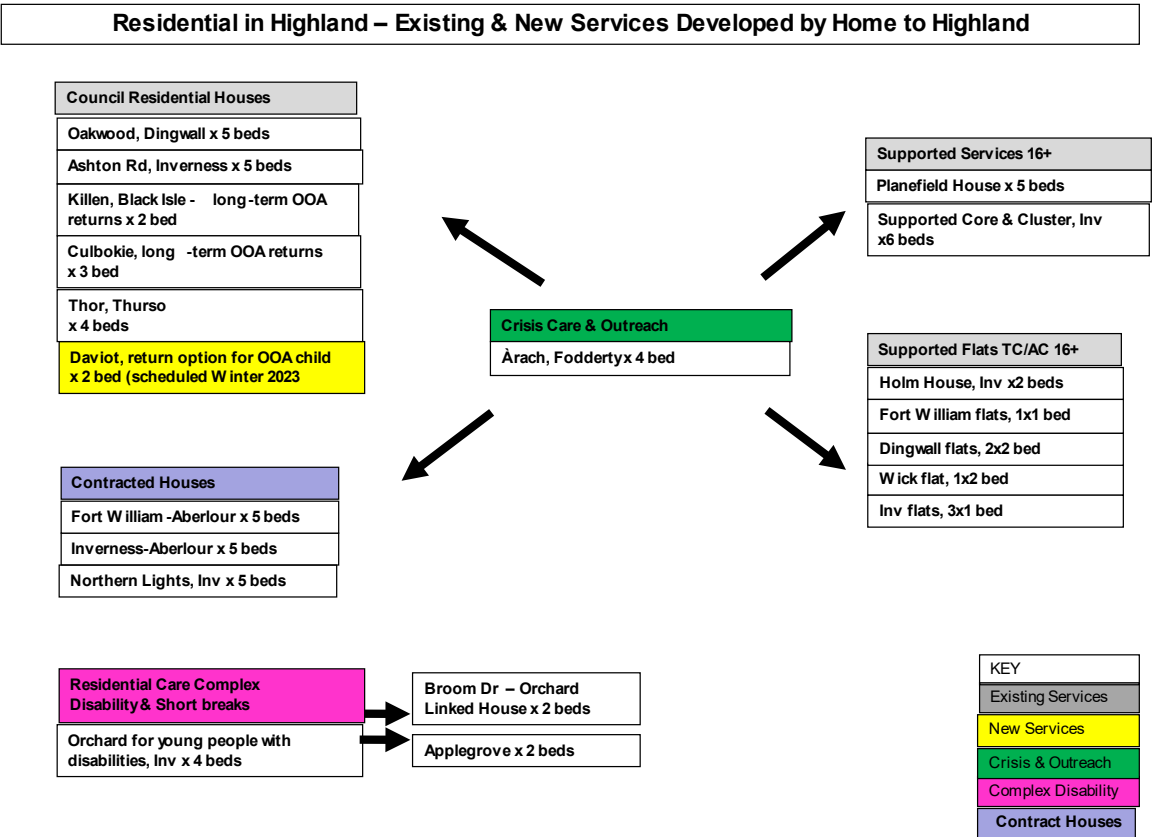
5. Highland Residential Homes

- 5.1 Highland Council now has **9** residential care homes, plus, the Orchard which is a specialist provision that provides residential care for children with complex disability needs and short breaks (respite). Thor House previously focused on provision for children with complex disability but during COVID the demand shifted to meet the needs of children requiring residential care. This report focuses on our 'mainstream' residential homes and not our specialist provision through the Orchard. **6** of the Houses are Highland Council direct provision and **3** are commissioned through 3rd sector partnerships with Barnardo's and Aberlour. All Highland Houses are based on a model of small therapeutic homes with a consistent care team aiming for continuity of care.
- 5.2 Residential Care in Highland is aiming to be underpinned by The Promise with an emphasis on ensuring the voices of young people, and respecting their rights, ideally

shaping care with a more codesigned method of planning and delivery. Across the residential service there has been on-going investment in trauma informed approaches. In conjunction with our CAMHs (child and adolescent mental health, colleagues) training has been delivered across all our houses in the ‘foundations of care’ which is based on Dan Hugh’s theories of **PACE**:



5.3 Map of Houses



6. **Arach House**

- 6.1 The model of residential care has been developed in 2022/23 as part of the Families 1st Strategy to build more intensive community support into the system. **Arach is at the centre of our residential care system.** The model offers a combination of residential emergency care and community-based outreach to families in need.
- 6.2 Community outreach is through our newly forming HOST Team (Highland Outreach Support Team) which shall provide intensive wrap around care, including evenings and weekends, to ensure families get the help when they need it most. In addition, support staff in Wick (redeployed from Avonlea) have been leading the way, innovatively testing a community model that's producing promising results.
- 6.3 The aim of Arach is to prevent the need for residential care, or to provide brief crisis residential care to support a safe return home with immediate or extended family; or if this is not appropriate, to carefully match young people into one of our Highland Homes. Careful matching is critical to prevent young people in crisis entering other young people's homes impacting on the overall group living experience.
- 6.4 **Snapshot Arach, July 2023:**

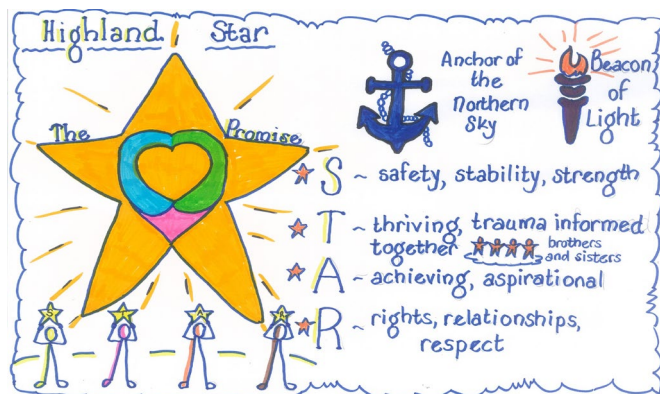
Of the **10** admissions to Arach this year (2023) **4** have returned to live with their families, **1** has gone to foster care and **2** transitioned to our Highland Homes. We shall continue to gather data and evaluate the impact of Arach as the service develops.

7. **3rd Sector Partnerships – the Alliance**

- 7.1 Aligned to the HOST model, and Families 1st Strategy, is our 3rd sector partnerships, through our strategic commissioning arrangements. Two of our Aberlour Houses are also shifting their model of residential care in Highland, and have in tandem developed the Sustain Plus Model, which combines residential care with intensive outreach family support. Additionally, partnership with Action for Children provides an Intensive Support Service (ISS) for young people who are posing a significant risk to self and others and may be at risk of Secure Care. Barnardo's have also supplemented their residential care homes with the additionality of the Rise Project, which specifically supports young people, families and carers with concerns around exploitation.
- 7.2 Highland Council and the 3rd sector partnership have formed an Alliance to enhance the services they provide and to bring additional resource and funding to the Highlands. This has led to significant developments in Highland, as detailed above, including in the pipeline and about to go live, the Anchor Outreach Hub based in Inverness City Centre, which will focus on community-based supports to vulnerable young people who congregate in the City Centre. This Hub has been set up as a safe space for young people at risk and in crisis.
- 7.3 These developments 'in-house' through Arach and the 3rd sector Alliance now means community supports, including intensive family support models, have a reach across Highland. These services have been developed within the existing financial envelope

as part of our Families 1st Strategy seeking to transform the way we deliver, and fund crucial services, strongly aligned to Keeping the Promise, keeping children safe, and keeping them within their Highland communities.

- 7.4 This vision is crystalised in our Highland Outcomes STAR, as below.



8. Home to Highland

- 8.1 A fundamental part of the Families 1st Strategy is our Home to Highland Team, which was initially set up in 2018 to deal with the spiralling costs of children being placed in residential care, often out of area, through purchasing independent residential care and Secure Care across Scotland. Local Authorities have to purchase residential care for two key reasons: lack of sufficient local resources and extremely high-risk complexity of need, resulting in a breakdown of local care options. Most young people in these specialist placements have had multiple placement moves which compounds the complexity. Purchasing independent residential care is extremely high cost resulting in millions of pounds having to be spent on a small group of children. These placements are becoming even more costly linked to significant inflationary uplifts and the cost of living. The biggest budget challenge in Children's Services across the UK (not just Highland) is having to 'spot purchase' independent residential care, including Secure Care.
- 8.2 Families' 1st, underpinned by Home to Highland is 'turning the tide'. We currently have the lowest numbers of young people in residential care in our Highland Homes, in many years. We have the lowest numbers in Secure Care with at one point no young person in Secure Care, but at the time of writing, we now have **2**, which remains the lowest number in several years. We now have the lowest total numbers of children in purchased independent residential care at **19** (from high point of 41). Out of those 19 we have the lowest numbers placed out with the Highlands at **14**. Out of the total figure of 19, Home to Highland is carefully planning to return **9** young people to the Highlands in 2023. It is important to state all planning is done with the views, voice and choices of the young people at the centre.
- 8.3 The Promise aspires to such placements becoming obsolete, and while this is a huge ambition, Highland is moving in the right direction. A full evaluation of Home to Highland, with a focus on the outcomes for young people, including their views and experiences, with analysis of the budget savings and cost avoidance, is planned for 2023, led by the Programme Manager overseen by the Head of Children's Services.

9. Care Inspectorate

- 9.1 The Care Inspectorate is responsible for inspecting standards of care in Scotland. All Children's Houses must be Registered with the Care Inspectorate with a named Registered Manager responsible for each House. Inspectors use quality frameworks to evaluate the quality of care during inspections. In 2018 the inspection methodology changed to reflect the Health and Social Care Standards and to provide more transparency of the process. There is also a greater focus on the impact and experiences of young people living in residential care. Key questions about the difference a care service makes to people's wellbeing are at the heart of the process.
- 9.2 All inspections stopped during COVID until the inspection regime was reinstated in 2021/22. Notably, of concern, post COVID inspections under the new methodology resulted in some of the Houses being downgraded from previous inspections. For example, Houses that were previously inspected as good and very good were graded as adequate or weak. Adding to this there were some concerns and complaints about quality and standards in two Houses (Avonlea and Leault) that emerged in 2021 from staff and adults who were previously care experienced. Both Houses latterly went through planned closures as they were not meeting the expected standards of quality of care.
- 9.3 The combination of emerging concerns, resulted in the newly appointed Executive Chief Officer & CSWO, commissioning a Highland Independent Review of Residential Care of Highland Council provision. This was an extensive review that commenced in 2021 and concluded in 2022 with a presentation to Committee by the author, Fred McBride, May 2022. The report identified strengths in residential care, highlighting that the system was 'safe', was not in 'crisis' but rightly identified areas for improvement and development.
- 9.4 The then newly appointed Head of Service took forward the recommendations of the report and with the Residential Resource Manager, developed a Delivery Plan from the Independent Review, but also added improvements actions, based on dialogue with staff and young people, with a particular focus on children's rights, voice and participation. This Delivery Plan was tracked and monitored. Care Inspectorate activity evidenced significant improvement particularly in 2022/23 with one House achieving Excellence and others achieving Very Good and Good. Each House now has a post inspection improvement plan ensuring that residential care in Highland is continuously improving, ultimately aiming for excellence in residential care. Leadership focus, support, accountability and scrutiny shall remain a high priority.

9.5 Table - Highland Council Care Inspection Gradings

2022/23	Young people feel safe, loved and achieve	Leadership and meet needs	Overall grade
Ashton House	6 (Excellent)	6	Excellent - 6
Oakwood	4 (Good)	4	Good - 4
Arach	4 (Good)	3	Adequate - 3
Thor House	5 (Very Good)	4	Good - 4
Killen	5 (Very Good)	N/A	Very good - 5
Mainstay	4 (Good)	3	Adequate - 3
Orchard	No inspection has been undertaken since 2019		
Leault	2 - 2021 inspection was Weak; insufficient progress made; service closed October 2022		
Avonlea	1 (Unsatisfactory)	2 (Weak)	Unsatisfactory – 1

			Closed Sept 2022
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Care Inspection grades for the 3 Houses commissioned through Aberlour and Barnardo's in 2019, 2021 and 2023 were all graded as 5 – Very Good.

10. Through Care & After Care (TC&AC)

- 10.1 In Highland the provision of statutory TC&AC Services has been provided by commissioning of Barnardo's, Springboard Service, which has been in place for about ten years. The service is provided by a team of 9 FTE project staff and supported by a senior worker, team manager and admin worker. Springboard report they are supporting **164** young adults out of a possible **331** in total who could be accessing the service. The disparity between the number of young people being provided a service reflects the young people who have chosen not to engage with after care, mainly as they have returned to family, as many young people do, or come through foster care and do not feel they wish or require this support. The other main group are those who have used the service and then moved on, including moved out of the area.
- 10.2 TC&AC Service has a duty to provide advice, guidance and assistance to care leavers age 16 to 25 (with discretion beyond 25). Such support should be based on the holistic needs, wishes and aspirations of the young adult and should ensure a graduated transition based on needs and choices. TC&AC support begins with the young person agreeing to engage with the Springboard Service and in shaping their Pathway Plan. It is imperative that the Residential Care Team and the young person's Social Worker, based in the Family Team, are all actively involved in supporting the young person's Pathway Planning. Support is relationship based with a focus on key needs e.g., safety, housing, education, career, health, family and friend networks, financial support, budgeting, managing your home, managing risks, and supporting overall wellbeing.
- 10.3 There are a range of housing support options for young adults, e.g., core and cluster (grouped tenancies/flats), supported accommodation with keyworkers in house, young person's own home with outreach support. All these services are provided by 3rd Sector partners.
- 10.4 More contemporary thinking in the provision of TC&AC services is not to aim for independence, as very few people are totally independent, but rather the aim is to promote and enable a 'safety net' of support around the young adult to achieve interdependence, which is about building positive, supportive **networks** based on connections to people and place.
- 10.5 The Springboard Service has not been inspected by the care inspectorate since February 2019 when they achieved a grading of 4 – Good.
- 10.6 A formal review and evaluation of the Springboard service through a strengthened commissioning cycle, is planned in 2023/24 to ensure this model of provision is providing the best possible outcomes, while ensuring the broadest reach of support, for care experienced young adults in Highland. The voices of those with lived experience of the service shall be instrumental in the evaluation alongside understanding those young adults who choose not to engage with the service.
- 10.7 Continuing Care rights enable young adults who are provided with accommodation the right to request to remain in that accommodation, based on a welfare assessment

of need. Highland Residential Care Houses continue to try to fully support continuing care rights, as we do in our registered Fostering Service, and while in most cases this is the right thing, there is no doubt this places pressure in the sufficiency of residential care options for children entering the care system. This is not just a Highland challenge but a major pressure across the care system in Scotland.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 This report details the significant contribution of residential care and its important role in Keeping the Promise combined with Families 1st. Early indications are extremely positive with more young people remaining at home across the Highlands. The service is changing, transforming and shifting to continuously improve in providing high quality residential care, for the critical few, while at the same time being at the centre of highly relational, strengths based, community outreach family support across the Highlands, through a strong Alliance with 3rd Sector Partners - all pulling together collectively behind the Families 1st Vision and The Promise.

Designation: Head of Children and Justice Social Work Services

Date: 6th August 2023

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Background Papers:

Appendices: