

Midlothian Integrated Children's Services Plan 2026-2029

Picture of four smiling children waving paint spattered hands, in paint spattered clothing.



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Foreword

Delivering meaningful change for children, young people and families requires a shared commitment across all our services, communities and partners. This Integrated Children's Services Plan sets out our collective priorities for 2026-2029 and reflects our ambition to work together in a way that is purposeful, responsive and focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for every child, young person and family.

The development of this plan has been shaped by local intelligence, service data and, most importantly, by the views, experiences and feedback of children, young people, families, practitioners and partner organisations. Their insights have helped us to focus on the challenges facing our communities, recognise where progress has been made and identify where we must focus our efforts. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and lived experience throughout this process.

This plan reinforces the importance of honest partnership communication, true collaborative planning and shared accountability. No single organisation can effect meaningful or lasting change alone. The outcomes we seek depend upon our ability to work together, maintain trusted relationships and take collective responsibility for supporting children and families across all aspects of their lives.

While this plan provides a framework for action, we recognise that it is part of a larger, long-term ambition. We hold true that our vision remains that 'all children and families are supported to be the best they can be'. And that this will be achieved through a nurturing, respectful and collaborative approach that promotes wellbeing, equity and inclusion.

That vision has shaped our plan to focus on children being safe, connected and supported as they grow and develop. Together, we will continue to build stronger foundations for the future and deliver positive change for children, young people and families in Midlothian.

Yours sincerely,



Rebecca Hooton

Chair of the Midlothian Getting It Right for Every Child Partnership

Our Plan – the Governance

The Community Planning Partnership

Community planning strives to improve people's lives by using all available resources, as outlined by the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015*. The Community Planning Partnership membership of key statutory and Third Sector organisations from across Midlothian work together to plan services that will deliver better outcomes for people.

This Plan was developed by the Getting it Right for Every Child Board, which forms part of the Community Planning Partnership, and includes representatives from a wide range of organisations working with children and young people across Midlothian.

The Board meets quarterly and has direct oversight, through regular progress reports, of the four subgroups charged enacting our plan so that we can work towards achieving our four priorities which are:

- Grow & Thrive– I get the support I need, when I need it, to help me grow and thrive.
- Safe & Connected – I feel safe, connected and valued where I live, learn and play.
- Included & Respected – I am listened to, respected and have my rights upheld.
- Informed & Supported – I have access to information and support when I need it.

The Board also submits an Annual Report to Scottish Government detailing activities and progress.

Our Vision

Our vision is for children and young people in Midlothian to have the best possible start in life and live safe, healthy, active, happy, and independent lives.

Structure of our Community Planning Partnership

How we work together

Midlothian Community Planning Partnership Board is supported by:

- Citizens Panel & Direct Experience Panel
- Community Planning Partnership Working Group

Below the Panels and the Partnership Working Group sit 10 Thematic Groups (these may change as our new Single Midlothian Plan is developed):

- Midlothian will be Healthier.
- Midlothian will be Safer.
- Midlothian will Get It Right for Every Child.
- Midlothian will Strengthen its Community Learning and Development Partnership.
- Midlothian will be Greener.
- Midlothian will have a Wellbeing Economy and be Better Connected.
- Midlothian will Work Towards Reducing Poverty.
- Trauma Informed Practise Steering Group.
- Resettlement Steering Group.
- Equally Safe Steering Group.

Picture below of Midlothian Community Planning Partnership logo which is a circle containing a representation of blue sky and green hills with the letters MCPP written across them, and the words Midlothian Community Planning Partnership written around the outside of the circle, and the words 'a great green place to grow' written below.



Our Principles

This plan is built around these five core principles that guide everything we do together, from agreeing our priority areas for action to ensuring we maximise the value of partnership working.

1. We will work together across our partnership

We will ensure that all objectives involve working together in partnership, making best use of our collective skills and knowledge and the influence that combined service provision can have to address complex social issues.

2. We will prioritise early action and prevention

Our priority is to address problems before they become crises, allowing our resources to be used more effectively. When need is identified, we will react promptly and endeavour to provide the right services at the right time, with the knowledge that early intervention and support leads to better outcomes.

Through a range of universal and specialist services, we will ensure that every child and young person has access to opportunities that will allow them to explore and fulfil their potential.

3. We will respect the rights of children and young people

We will ensure children and young people have their rights protected and their voices heard. Children, young people and their families are best placed to determine what they need to live healthy and happy lives. We will ensure that they are involved in co-designing solutions that support their needs.

4. We will reduce inequalities

We will work to ensure fair and equitable access to health and wellbeing services and support for children, young people and families. We will work in partnership to plan and deliver services in proportion to need within local communities.

5. We will use data to inform our actions

Taking a data-driven approach will enable us to make informed decisions that focus on addressing the areas of greatest need within in our communities. We will measure the impact of our work to ensure we are meeting our objectives and adapt our approach where necessary.

Our Plan – the Engagement

The plan is informed by and structured around:

- The priorities highlighted in national policies.
- What our key strategic and service delivery partners have told us is important
- The voices, needs and experiences of local children, young people and families.
- What our Children & Families Joint Strategic Needs Assessment data reveals about the local picture.

Our process

Between October 2025 and March 2026, we held three Reflection and Planning workshops for Getting it Right for Every Child Board and subgroup members as well as representatives from the wider community. People from 32 different organisations and departments attended, giving us the opportunity to bring together their knowledge, evidence, expertise and experience to shape our four new priority areas outlined on page 3, and identify high level outcomes and actions related to them.

Conversations and decisions across the three workshops were informed by engagement and consultation activities with children, young people and families, undertaken by participating partners, including:

- Insights from the Youth Hackathon that took place in partnership with Midlothian Youth Platform (an independent and youth-led organisation involving young people aged 12 -21) and the Community Planning Partnership.
- Feedback from families supported by Home Link Family Support.
- Recommendations from the Peer Research project - Our Stories: Voices of Midlothian Families.
- Recommendations from Sexual Health Services for Young People in Midlothian - Views and Perspective of Stakeholders: A Qualitative Study, 2023.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Strategic Framework, NHS Lothian 2025 (A sample of children and young people from Midlothian and the wider Lothians).
- School H&WB Improvement Research Network pupil mental health survey 2024. 3737 S1 – S6 pupils took part from all 6 Midlothian secondary schools, a response rate of 63%.

Our commitment

Four subgroups will take our work forward, developing detailed action and delivery plans which the Board will monitor and review on a quarterly basis to ensure progress against achieving our outcomes and addressing our priorities.

The Getting it Right for Every Child Board, in working to develop this plan, has made a commitment to identifying long-term outcomes within each of our four priority areas, to span a 9-year period, equating to three Integrated Children's Service Plan cycles.

Key Policy Drivers

In developing our plan, we considered priorities from a wide range of national strategies and local plans that share priorities for improving outcomes for children, young people and their families, including but not limited to those listed below.

National strategies

- Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 - duty on local authorities and health boards to work together to reduce child poverty.
- National Performance Framework - requirement to tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.
- GIRFEC Principles – requirement to address inequalities and to act when a child's development is not progressing as expected.
- The Promise - calls for early intervention and support that puts children first and helps families stay together.
- UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024: children's rights legislation.

- Equally Safe strategy (2023) – a whole-system approach to prevent/eradicate violence against women and girls.
- Population Health Framework (2025–2035) - collective approach to improving Scotland's health and reducing health inequalities.
- Early Child Development Transformational Change Programme (2023) - improving early child development by focusing on prevention and the importance of pre-birth and early years.
- Realising the Ambition: Being Me – guidance to mitigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences.
- National Principles of Whole Family Support (2022): promotes preventative, strength-based support to address inequalities.
- Developing the Young Workforce - Scotland's youth employment strategy.

Local plans

- Corporate Parenting Plan 2023-2026.
- Child Poverty Action reports.
- Community Learning and Development Strategy 2024-2027.
- Children's Rights and The Promise progress reports.
- Education Service Plan 2025/26.
- Place Service Plan 2023-27.

Our Plan – the Evidence

Our population of children and young people

The National Records of Scotland population estimates from June 2024 show that our population rose from 80,950 in 2001 to an indicated **98,260** in 2024. The growth since 2014 has been primarily driven by migration from within Scotland, with only around 2% of newcomers accounted for by international migration, and less than 1% by people moving here from the rest of the UK. Whilst just 10 other local authority areas have smaller populations, Midlothian does have the second fastest growing number of residents, behind only Glasgow, and is the single Scottish Council area where births outnumbered deaths for the year June 2023 to June 2024.

In an overall picture of decreasing numbers of children and young people in Scotland over the last two decades (c41,000 fewer 0–15-year-olds in 2024 than in 2004), Midlothian is an outlier, with the second highest percentage of young people aged 0 – 15 years at 18.9% of the population, only East Renfrewshire is higher. More than a quarter (27.7%) of Midlothian residents are under 25. Source: [Mid-2024 population estimates - National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#).

Data from the 2022 Census shows 28,803 children and young people aged between 0 to 26 years living in Midlothian; 5555

aged 0 to 4, 13680 aged 5 to 16, 1936 aged 17 and 18, and 7632 aged 19 to 26. Of the population aged 0-26, 48.6% are female, 51.3% are male.

Population changes over time

National Records Scotland projections suggest the population of under 18-year-olds will increase by around 2000 from 2025 – 2043, the under 26 population will increase by 4133 over the same period. Source: [Population Projections for Scottish Areas 2018-based - National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#)

The evidence provided over the coming pages informs our priorities and is drawn from a wide range of sources, including population and service data, lived experiences, views and perceptions of children, young people, families and those working across Midlothian, all brought together in the Midlothian Children & Families Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, written in 2025 and available on request. Together, these sources help us understand current needs, experiences and the issues that matter most locally.

Priority 1. Grow and Thrive: I get the support I need, when I need it, to help me grow and thrive.

Local data tells us

Midlothian's growing child and young person population means the need for children's services and support is likely to continue increasing.

Poverty remains a significant issue; End Child Poverty estimates that one in four Midlothian children live in income-deprived households. Poverty is strongly linked to poorer outcomes across health, development, and education.

Patterns of inequality can also be seen across a range of maternal and child health indicators, with outcomes often varying according to levels of deprivation.

Teenage pregnancy rates are falling across Scotland and Lothian, but rates in Midlothian remain persistently higher than Lothian and Scottish averages.

The percentage of babies who are exclusively breastfed at 6–8 weeks of age has steadily increased since 2011/12. However, breastfeeding rates remain consistently higher in the least deprived areas of Midlothian than in the most deprived areas.

Domestic abuse features in a quarter of child protection registrations and parental mental health is the most common factor associated with child protection concerns. Supporting maternal mental health is important for both women's wellbeing and children's outcomes.

Healthy weight levels in children and young people are declining and rates of overweight and obesity increasing, with one in five children experiencing overweight or obesity. Additionally, more than half of pregnant women are living with overweight or obesity which can affect both maternal and child health.

Local early childhood development data shows that while rates of developmental concern remain below the Scottish average, more children are being identified with developmental concerns, particularly relating to speech, language and communication and gross motor skills. Children living in the most deprived areas are disproportionately affected.

Mental health and wellbeing concerns are evident, with data showing that girls and non-binary young people report higher levels of low mood and greater pressure from schoolwork.

Children and young people experience long wait times for a neurodevelopmental assessment or related Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services treatment, and demand continues to grow, this is partly linked to increased awareness and understanding of neurodivergence.

While attainment in literacy and numeracy for pupils with additional support needs continues to improve, a gap remains compared to pupils without additional support needs. Educational inequalities are also evident in patterns of school exclusion and attendance, with boys and children from more disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected. Persistent absence increases significantly during secondary school and is more common among children living in deprived areas.

Children, young people and their families tell us

Young parents, particularly those who are isolated, and especially young fathers feel they would benefit from more targeted support, preparation and inclusion. Barriers to accessing services, including appropriate opening hours and eligibility criteria, also need to be addressed.

Parents and young people described needing easier access to mental health and trauma support, and a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention rather than crisis response. Families expressed often finding support services difficult to navigate. They wanted greater collaboration between health, education, children's services and community organisations to provide joined-up support.

Our partners tell us

Supporting parents is central to supporting children, particularly where mental health, substance use, poverty, trauma and inequality affect family wellbeing. Pregnancy and preconception are key opportunities for early intervention, prevention and safeguarding. Gaps remain locally in support for young parents, migrant families, women affected by domestic abuse, violence or birth trauma, and fathers and young men.

Voice and lived experience of children and young people should be prioritised and resourced in service design and delivery.

Research tells us

The evidence consistently highlights the importance of the early years in shaping children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Children are more likely to thrive when they experience warm, nurturing and responsive relationships that help build secure attachments and support healthy development.

Research also shows that identifying concerns early and providing timely, trusted support gives children, young people, and families the best opportunity to achieve positive outcomes. Early intervention can prevent difficulties from escalating and improve long-term health, wellbeing and developmental outcomes.

Priority 2. Safe and Connected: I feel safe, connected and valued where I live, learn and play.

Local data tells us

Midlothian's growing population of children and young people highlights the importance of safe, supportive communities and opportunities for connection and participation.

Children's experiences of safety vary across Midlothian. In the Playing Outside survey most children and young people (90%) said they played outside several times a week, but over half (53%) reported only feeling safe *sometimes* or *never*.

Local data also shows that young people aged under 21 are less satisfied with their communities and feel less safe there than adults. There is also evidence that suggests they have fewer designed places and spaces to spend time recreationally than children aged 12 and under.

Patterns of inequality can be seen in children's experiences of school exclusion and attendance with boys and children from more disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected. Persistent absence increases significantly during secondary school and is more common among children living in deprived areas. School attendance also declines from S2 onwards, with children and young people living in the most deprived areas much more

likely to experience persistent absence than their peers in the least deprived areas.

The impact of domestic abuse remains a significant concern. National projections suggest that the number of children and young people affected by domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence is likely to increase, highlighting the continued need for preventative approaches.

Children, young people and their families tell us

Parents highlighted the importance of free and accessible groups, activities and creative opportunities that help families build relationships, strengthen communication and spend time together. Cost, limited availability and transport challenges were identified by parents as key barriers to taking part.

Feedback from children and young people highlighted feeling safe, feeling connected and having a sense of belonging as key priorities. They told us that having opportunities to build positive relationships, feel part of their communities and access safe spaces where they can spend time and do things they enjoy is important to their wellbeing.

Our partners tell us

Strengthening joint working on community safety and bridging the gap between universal and statutory services is central to supporting children and young people to feel safe and connected. Accessible opportunities for children and young people to play, socialise and participate in their communities, both

independently and with support where needed is important, as is ensuring children and young people are meaningfully involved in decisions about the places and spaces where they live, learn and play.

Trauma-informed and relationship-based approaches remain important in creating environments where children and young people feel safe, supported and able to thrive. Building on existing good practice across education and wider services could support more consistent and preventative approaches.

Accessible family and youth provision, community spaces and inclusive opportunities for participation were seen as important elements of a preventative approach to supporting healthy growth, strong relationships and positive outcomes.

Research tells us

Research shows that positive outcomes are more likely when children grow up in safe, supportive environments and have access to opportunities and places for learning, play and development.

As children and young people grow, evidence shows they are more likely to thrive when they are engaged in learning, have positive relationships with peers and trusted adults to help them navigate risks and to be a source of support when challenges arise.

The wider evidence highlights the importance of access to safe places to play, quality green spaces, transport, local services and welcoming community environments. It also emphasises the value of environments that support healthy choices and reduce exposure to harm. These factors can strengthen connection, resilience and wellbeing, improve outcomes and help reduce inequalities over the longer term.

Priority 3. Included and Respected: I am listened to, respected, and have my rights upheld.

Local data tells us

Midlothian is home to a growing and increasingly diverse population of children and young people, highlighting the importance of inclusion and respect for all.

The rate of children looked after in Midlothian has steadily declined over the past decade. In July 2024, 219 children and young people were looked after in Midlothian, including 37 children aged under five. Care experienced children and young people continue to experience poorer outcomes than their peers across a range of indicators.

Census data shows that at least 617 young people aged 16–24 in Midlothian identify as LGBTQ+. National evidence shows that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience poorer health and wellbeing outcomes. Local survey data also highlights differences between groups of young people, with non-binary respondents reporting higher levels of low mood, loneliness, self-harm and pressure from schoolwork.

The number of young carers known to services has increased substantially, from 49 in 2023 to 125 in 2025, highlighting the significant caring responsibilities undertaken by some children

and young people. Caring responsibilities can affect children's wellbeing, participation and opportunities to engage fully in school and community life.

The proportion of children and young people from minority ethnic communities has also increased. In 2024, 8.5% of school-aged children and young people were from minority ethnic communities, compared with 5.7% in 2020.

Midlothian schools recorded 342 children and young people from armed forces and veteran families in 2024. These children can experience frequent moves and repeated transitions between communities and schools, which can affect their sense of belonging and inclusion.

In 2023–24, 18 young people aged 16–17 presented as homeless. Limited local housing availability can result in prolonged stays in temporary accommodation. Such housing insecurity can affect wellbeing and children and young people's ability to participate fully in their communities.

Children, young people and their families tell us

Children, young people and families want to be listened to, respected and involved in decisions that affect their lives. They highlight the need for meaningful and ongoing opportunities to influence decisions in schools, services and communities, with clear evidence that their views lead to action and change. We must ensure care experienced children and young people are listened to and have meaningful influence over decisions that affect them.

A consistent message was the need for services to work together more effectively. Young people described frustration with repeating their experiences to multiple professionals.

Schools were seen as important partners in helping families access appropriate support at the earliest opportunity.

Our partners tell us

We must strengthen the voice, participation and influence of children, young people and families in decisions that affect their lives, including shaping service design and delivery. We must also improve how we demonstrate that their views lead to meaningful change. For care experienced children and young people, we need to ensure they are listened to, involved in decisions about their lives, and are supported to have their rights upheld.

Improving access to timely, inclusive and coordinated support remains a key priority. Earlier intervention, stronger multi-agency working and more joined-up pathways are needed to reduce barriers and improve positive outcomes.

Research tells us

The evidence highlights the importance of children and young people being listened to and meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives. This can strengthen wellbeing, confidence, resilience and belonging.

Early access to trusted adults and coordinated support can reduce the impact of adversity and improve outcomes, particularly for children and young people who may experience disadvantage, discrimination, care experience, disability, neurodivergence, poverty or other barriers to participation and inclusion.

Priority 4. Informed and Supported: I have access to information and support when I need it.

This subgroup differs from the other three as its function is to underpin them and provide governance an element of governance to related projects. We expect that the role of this group will evolve over 6-9 months.

Partners, children, young people and their families tell us

Families report that navigating services and finding information about areas such as money, housing, benefits, mental health and tenancy rights can be difficult. Clearer communication, proactive outreach and better promotion of available support can help assistance reach families more quickly and reduce barriers to getting help. Ensuring that families are informed and supported contributes to stronger family resilience and creates the conditions for children and young people to be healthy, secure, and able to grow and thrive.

Local data and research tell us

Average waiting times for an initial Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services assessment can be lengthy, so timely support during the waiting period remains an important component of meeting the needs of children, young people and their families.

Information and support help children and young people to grow and thrive by ensuring that they, their families and carers can access the right information, advice and support at the right time.

Easy and timely access to reliable information can help families understand their options, build confidence in supporting their children, and seek help earlier when concerns arise.

Children and young people are safer and better connected when they can access trusted information and appropriate support. Data shows that providing the right, timely support can be challenging within current resources and children and young people can experience long waits for some assessments and specialist services, driven in part by increased awareness and identification of needs such as neurodivergence.

As children and young people grow, reliable information and support helps them build the knowledge, confidence and relationships needed to navigate challenges safely. Access to trusted adults, reliable information and responsive support services enables young people to make informed decisions, manage risks and maintain positive connections with their peers, families and communities.

Improving how information about available support is organised and shared, so that children, young people, families and workers can more easily understand what help is available and how to access it.

Our Plan 2026 - 2029

Subgroup	Outcome	Actions
Grow & Thrive	I will get the support I need, when I need it, to help me grow and thrive.	• We will develop and implement a multi-agency approach that enables children, young people and families to access the right support at the right time through integrated prevention, early intervention and targeted support pathways. • We will identify and implement evidence-based approaches to support developmental milestones. • We will develop and operationalise our Neurodevelopmental supports.
Safe & connected	I feel safe, connected and valued where I live, learn and play.	• We will coordinate, promote and safeguard spaces and opportunities which strengthen connection and reduce the escalation of need. • We will create a shared culture of connection and belonging where discrimination and exclusion are challenged. • We will strengthen community, family and peer support networks.
Included & respected	I am listened to, respected, and have my rights upheld.	• We will embed the voices of all children & young people (including infant voice) across every area of our work. • We will progress areas for collaborative action to strengthen children's rights & the delivery of the 5 foundations of the Promise. • We will demonstrate how Promise & Corporate Parenting plans consider the needs/rights of care experienced children & young people in the delivery and improvement of services.
Informed & supported	I have access to information and support when I need it.	• We will make it easier to get the help and support children, young people and families need by developing our Central Point of Access. • We will provide a local source of information and advice shaped by what children and young people tell us is important. • We will improve the way we communicate with children, young people and their families by developing our digital communication pathways.