

Report prepared by
Fife Council Research & Insight Team



Marmot Gaps

Final Report

November 2025

Topics: Economy, Education and Skills, Environment, Equalities, Health and Wellbeing, Housing and Community, Population

Introduction

The [Fife Strategic Assessment 2024](#) highlighted that Fife continues to face key challenges, These are historic, longstanding issues that take time to turn around. The Plan for Fife has a strong focus on reducing inequalities, and although some areas have shown improvements, inequalities in Fife persist and are widening.

The strong theme of inequality indicates value in taking a whole system approach to shape investment, redesign opportunities and resource allocations as part of collaborative programme to 2027.

The 2010 Marmot Review of health inequalities in England concluded that reducing inequality would require action on six policy objectives (since expanded to eight).

The eight principles are:

1. Give every child the best start in life
2. Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives through education and life-long learning
3. Create fair employment and good work for all
4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
7. Tackle discrimination, racism and their outcomes
8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together

A Marmot place is one which has a significant commitment to tackle health inequalities through action on the social determinants of health - the social and economic conditions which shape our health - and has strong and effective plans and policies to achieve these reductions in health inequalities.

Based on the eight principles, Marmot Places develop and deliver interventions and policies to improve health equity; embed health equity approaches in local systems and take a long-term, whole-system approach to improving health equity.

The Plan for Fife priorities and the Marmot principles, while formulated from different perspectives, have a great degree of overlap:

- a focus on opportunities for all;
- good work,
- tackling poverty;
- prevention and early intervention;
- environmental sustainability; and, above all,
- reducing inequality and promoting fairness.

To inform leadership discussions about the development of a new plan for Fife from 2027, for each of the Marmot principles we consider why this matters, what the current picture is for Fife, what the gaps would suggest the short / long term focus should be, and what indicators we might want to track.

1. Giving every child the best start in life

Why this matters









- The foundations for human development are laid in early childhood, which is why giving every child the best possible start in life is so important for future health.

Fife overview

- Wide inequalities are evident among children and young people in Fife across a range of health outcomes and health behaviours.
- Children in the most deprived areas of Fife, and across Scotland, have poorer health outcomes and health behaviours including lower rates of being breastfed, poorer dental health and lower levels of healthy weight than those living in least deprived areas.
- 18% of children are living in relative poverty in Fife (before housing costs), above the Scotland rate of 16.3%.
- Teenage pregnancies have been continuously declining over the last 20 years, although the rate in Fife continues to remain above the Scotland level.
- Fife has higher rates of smoking in pregnancy.
- Fife has higher rates of maternal obesity.
- Infant immunisation uptake rates at 24 months are below Scotland.
- While the percentage of children with developmental concerns at 27–30 month review has risen post-pandemic across both Fife and Scotland, the Fife rate remains higher (18.2%). In most deprived areas of Fife, 26% of children have developmental concerns, compared to 11.2% of children in the least deprived areas.
- Children in Fife have poorer dental health at P1 and P7.

Focus

- Maternal health
- Improving early child development
- Improving health outcomes for disadvantaged children

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
Women smoking during pregnancy	22.8%	2.1%	11.6%			9.6%
Early child development concerns	26.0%	11.2%	18.2%			17.5%
Child dental health in primary 1	59.1%	85.2%	73.1%			76.0%
Child healthy weight in primary 1	71.3%	79.5%	74.7%			76.5%

2. Enabling children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives through Education and life-long learning

Why this matters

- Educational attainment is closely related to health, and inequalities in attainment translate into inequalities in health.
- Inequalities in achievement are related to a variety of forms of disadvantage, including: poverty, additional support needs, care experience. These are also closely linked to engagement and health and wellbeing.
- Inequalities in health and wellbeing that begin at school age are likely to persist and influence health at all ages.

Fife overview









- In 2025, there were more presentations per pupil for stages S4 and S5, reflecting encouragement of a more ambitious presentation policy for learners in Fife.
- The average number of passes and awards per pupil also increased in both stage S4 and S5.
- Following a fall in S4 attainment in 2024 in Fife and across Scotland, measures of cumulative S4 attainment for SCQF levels 3 and 4 saw significant improvements.
- S4 attainment at SCQF level 3 (an area of particular strength in Fife over several years) has returned to a level that significantly exceeds national attainment in any previous year.
- S4 attainment for SCQF level 4 has returned to a level broadly in line with Fife and national outcomes prior to 2024.
- S4 attainment for SCQF level 5 also saw improvements.
- Across a range of measures of cumulative attainment in stages S5 and S6, attainment for SCQF level 6 (Highers) also saw a general improvement. This reverses a declining trend since 2021 in Fife, which mirrored a declining trend in attainment across Scotland as a whole.
- The attainment gap is still apparent at all levels of qualification - and it widens with increasing SCQF difficulty.
- Attainment is linked to school attendance which has been declining since 2014/15. The fastest rate of decline has been for those with support needs related to family and mental health issues. These groups have also seen a significant increase in numbers.
- The number of Fife pupils that require additional support in schools has increased significantly with the rate in secondary schools approaching 50%.
- Mental health is a significant issue for young people and referral rates for support remain above pre-pandemic levels.
- There is a significant variation in achievement between disadvantaged groups and others (e.g. SIMD Q1 vs SIMD Q5, LAC vs non-LAC). This is true for both Fife and Scotland.

- Despite continuing widening of the attainment gap, Fife's Positive Destinations for school leavers is at the highest level in 15 years (95.6% compared to 95.7% for Scotland), and has now reached the same level as the Scottish average.
- 94.1% of school leavers were in a positive follow-up destination compared to 93.1% for Scotland.
- Looking more broadly at the participation of 16 to 19 year olds in Fife, 90.8% are participating in education, employment or training, compared to 92.7% for Scotland (Annual Participation measure, 2024).
- A lower proportion go on to education (68.1% compared to 71.2% for Scotland) and a higher proportion go on to employment (20.6% compared to 19.6%) or training and development (2.1% compared to 1.9%).
- A smaller proportion of Fife's population is of working age.
- Significant proportions of the working age population in Cowdenbeath, Kirkcaldy and Levenmouth have no or low qualifications
- Fife has a lower level of graduates in its workforce than Scotland
- In 2024, 45.8% of employed people in the region were in 'higher-level' occupations (lower than Scotland, 49.2%). 'Mid-level' occupations accounted for 27.9% of the workforce (higher than Scotland, 27%). Around 26.3% of people were employed in 'lower-level' occupations (higher than Scotland, 23.8%)

Focus

- Improving attendance
- Closing the attainment gap

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
School attendance	85.7%	93.1%	89.6%			90.3%
School attainment (One or more Higher at S5)	26.9%	68.6%	46.9%			53.6%
School attainment (5 or more awards at level 5)	41.0%		59.0%			67.0%
School attainment (5 or more awards at level 5)	16.0%		32.0%			39.0%

3. Creating fair employment and good work for all

Why this matters

- Unemployment and poor-quality work, with low pay, excessive hours and, insecurity contribute to poor health; conversely, good quality work can be protective of health.

Fife overview







- During the 12 months to March 2025, an estimated 75.1% of people aged 16 to 64 years in Fife were in work. This was fractionally lower than the employment rate during the same period the previous year (75.4%), but 3.5 percentage points higher than the rate prior to the pandemic in 2019/20 (71.6%).
- Fife's employment rate has been higher than the Scottish rate since 2023/24
- In the 12 months to March 2025, Fife's unemployment rate was higher than the previous year but lower than prior to the pandemic in 2019/20. It was also higher than the unemployment rate for Scotland as a whole. An estimated 6,600 people aged 16 and over were unemployed in Fife over this period.
- In all parts of Fife, with the exception of North East Fife, 16-24 year olds had the highest rate of people claiming out-of-work benefits of the three main working age groups. In the Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath Areas, the 16-24 age group's claimant rate was the highest of all age groups in Fife.
- An estimated 49,000 people in Fife, one fifth or 21.6% of the area's working age population, were 'economically inactive' during the year ending March 2025. This is fewer people than both the previous year (49,600) and prior to the Covid pandemic in 2019/20 (56,600).
- More people are economically inactive due to long-term ill health than before the pandemic.
- 43.5% of those who were economically inactive in Fife (an estimated 21,300 people) were aged 50-64; over a third (17,100) were aged 25-49 years; and a fifth (10,600) were aged 16-24 years.
- In May 2025, there were an estimated 159,498 payrolled employees in Fife, 1,290 or 0.8% fewer than the same period the previous year (May 2024).
- The number of payrolled employees in Fife fell by -0.1% (or 230 jobs) between April and May 2025.
- Whilst there are more businesses and jobs in Fife than 10 years ago, the number of both fell between 2020 and 2022.
- Seven sectors have a location quotient of over 1, suggesting that Fife has a specialisation in them (Manufacturing; Construction; Wholesale & retail trade; Transportation & storage; Information & Communication; Education, health & social work; and Arts, entertainment & recreation).
- A large proportion of jobs are within the public sector.
- Fife's job density is lower than that for Scotland as a whole (fewer jobs per resident of working age).

- Job densities are lowest in the Cowdenbeath and North East Fife UK Parliamentary Constituency Areas.
- The Mid-Fife and Glenrothes UK Parliamentary Constituency Area has the highest number of jobs per working age resident in Fife.
- The number of accredited real Living Wage Employers has increased.
- Whilst the proportion of jobs paid below the real Living Wage has fallen and is at its lowest level, it is still higher than the national rate.
- Fife earnings remain lower than the national average earnings.
- In 2024/25, a total of 6,302 people were supported through Fife’s employability programme.
- 2,177 (42.2%) participants achieved a positive outcome, including 1,014 who completed accredited training, and 682 who progressed to full-time employment.
- While Kirkcaldy area had the highest number of people supported (1,562), the Levenmouth area had the best outcomes (49.3% achieved positive outcomes).
- The City of Dunfermline (31.7%) and Cowdenbeath (37.0%) areas had lower proportions of people achieving a positive outcome through employability programmes.

Focus

- Opportunities for young people
- Economic inactivity

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
Age participation 16–19-year-olds	Not available		91.4%			93.3%
Claimant rate 16–24-year-olds	Not available		3.8%			3.4%
Economic inactivity rate	Not available		21.9%			23.1%

4. Ensuring a healthy standard of living for all

Why this matters

- Poverty damages health in a number of ways, from reducing access to healthy and nutritious food and good quality, sufficiently warm housing, to restricting opportunities to engage fully with society and directly causing physiological stress and harming physical health







Fife overview

- As at 2024, 11,038 children in Fife (18.0% of those aged under 16) are living in relative poverty before housing costs. 8,925 children (14.6%) are living in absolute poverty before housing costs. Both are above the Scottish rates of 16.3% and 13.2% respectively.
- Although child poverty levels in Fife remain above Scotland, Fife has seen a slightly larger decrease in the rate of children living in relative poverty (-1.7 percentage points) compared to Scotland (-1.5 percentage points) between 2023 and 2024.
- Poverty rates vary across Fife, with relative child poverty (before housing costs) being highest in Kirkcaldy Central, Buckhaven, Methil and Wemyss Villages, and Kirkcaldy East. It is lowest in Inverkeithing and Dalgety Bay, and St Andrews.
- 30.2% of children living in the 20% most deprived areas are in relative poverty, compared to 7.1% of those living in the 20% least deprived areas of Fife.
- Fife has higher rates of domestic abuse than Scotland.
- After falling significantly in 2021 and 2022, the number and rate of people claiming out-of-work benefits in Fife remained fairly steady throughout 2023 and 2024.
- In June 2025, Fife's claimant rate was 3.3% with an estimated 7,585 people claiming out-of-work benefits in the region.
- Fife's claimant rate has been below the 2019 pre-pandemic rate of 3.8% since September 2022. Fife's claimant rates are consistently higher than for Scotland as a whole, but below UK rates.
- Fife's male claimant rate (3.9%) is significantly higher than the female rate (2.6%).
- The 25-49 year old and 16-24 year old age groups had the highest average claimant rates (3.9%).
- The Kirkcaldy Area, Levenmouth and the Cowdenbeath Area had the highest numbers and rates of people claiming out-of-work benefits and North East Fife had the lowest.
- In all areas, claimant rates were lower than a year ago apart from in the Kirkcaldy Area and Levenmouth.
- The real level of unemployment in Fife is 6.8% compared to 6.4% for Scotland (2022). This takes account of both unemployment benefit claimants (8,770) and hidden unemployment, those on incapacity related benefits (6,900).
- Fife has the 3rd highest rate of underemployment in Scotland.

Focus

- Overarching priority - Breaking the cycle of poverty
- Increasing income from benefits and employment

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
Claimant rate (working age)	Not available		3.4%			3.1%
Domestic abuse	Not available		127.9			116.3
Children in relative poverty	30.2%	7.1%	18.0%			16.3%

5. Creating and developing healthy sustainable places and communities

Why this matters

- Healthy and sustainable places support good mental and physical health. This requires access to safe green spaces, clean air, opportunities for active travel, good quality housing and a range of amenities and community resources.









Fife overview

- 94% of adults rate their area as a good/very good place to live (Scottish Household Survey).
- 70% of adults in Fife visit the outdoors once or more times a week. This varies from 74% for adults in good / very good health to 37% for adults in bad / very bad health.
- 72% of adults live within 5 minutes walking distance to the nearest green or blue space (68%, Scotland).
- 44% of adults in both Fife and Scotland use the nearest green or blue space every day or several times a week.
- 72% of adults in Fife are satisfied with their nearest green or blue space, and this varies from 60% in most deprived areas, to 85% in least deprived areas of Fife.
- Some of Fife's town centres have low and/or falling vacancy rates, while there are high and rising vacancy rates in other town centres in Fife.
- St Andrews, Burntisland and Inverkeithing have the lowest vacancy rates of Fife's main town centres.
- The highest vacancy rates are found in Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Lochgelly and Kincardine.
- Dunfermline saw the proportion of vacant floorspace increase significantly between 2020 and 2024 while Cowdenbeath, Kirkcaldy, Burntisland and Inverkeithing saw rates decrease.
- Fife has higher rates of asthma patient hospitalisations.
- Mental health continues to be a growing concern, with increased prescribing of medication for anxiety, depression, and psychosis across Fife areas.
- While Fife has a similar level of Mental wellbeing (WEMWBS) to Scotland, this has declined over time. People living in the 20% most deprived areas of Fife have lower wellbeing scores.

Focus

- Reducing loneliness
- Improving mental health and wellbeing
- Active travel to work
- Regenerating town centres

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
Adults feeling lonely in past week	Not available		36.3%			23.0%
Mental health (prescriptions for anxiety and depression)	27.9%	16.4%	22.2%			20.9%
Active travel to work	Not available		10.2%			15.4%
Town centre vacancy rates	Not available		18.8%			12.3%

6. Strengthening the role and impact of ill health prevention

Why this matters

- A social determinants approach to prevention involves examining the 'causes of the causes' of ill health. Ill health prevention and good health promotion are necessary for both social justice and cost-effectiveness in the healthcare system.

Fife overview









- There have been improvements in overall health outcomes over the past two decades but recently there has been a decline in key indicators.
- In Fife, life expectancy is decreasing, with men living shorter lives than females (76.7 for male life expectancy and 81.1 years for female life expectancy).
- Over the last fifteen years, the health inequality gap in life expectancy has widened. Men in the most affluent areas of Fife will live, on average, 13.9 years longer (was 10.7 years) than men in the most deprived areas, while for women the difference is 10 years (was 6.3 years).
- Healthy life expectancy in Fife remains lower than the national average for both males and females. Men in Fife have a healthy life expectancy of 58.7 compared to 59.6 in Scotland. Females have a healthy life expectancy of 58.7 years compared to 60 in Scotland.
- In Fife, over the period 2021-23, there were 3,505 avoidable deaths (320.3 per 100,000 population). Of these, 1,128 (102.7 per 100,000) were treatable (causes of death that can be mainly avoided through timely and effective healthcare interventions) and 2,377 (217.6 per 100,000) were preventable (causes of death that can be mainly avoided through effective public health and primary prevention interventions).
- In Fife, the two leading groups of causes of ill-health and early death are cancers, and cardiovascular/heart disease, accounting for almost 50% of the total burden of health loss.
- Among all cancers, the most prevalent type in Fife is lung cancer.
- Fife has lower uptake of the HPV vaccine in both S1 females and S1 pupils.
- Fife has higher rates of alcohol-related and drug-related hospital admissions
- Fife has higher rates of emergency in-patient hospitalisations.
- Emergency admissions among older adults are also notably higher, reflecting the growing burden of chronic illness and an ageing population.
- Hospital admissions for chronic conditions like COPD, coronary heart disease (CHD), and asthma remain high which creates pressures on health services.
- There is an increasing reliance on unpaid carers.
- Health challenges are not evenly distributed with stark contrasts across localities.
- People in North East Fife area have the best overall health outcomes, with low levels of long-term illness and higher satisfaction with healthcare services.
- In contrast, people in Levenmouth and Cowdenbeath areas face the most severe health inequalities, with high rates of long-term conditions, mental health issues, and providing intensive amounts of unpaid care.

- Projections indicate a significant rise in chronic conditions across Fife by 2044. Diabetes, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and atrial fibrillation are all expected to increase by over 30%, with cancer cases projected to rise by 22%.
- These trends underscore the urgency of shifting toward preventative care and addressing the social determinants of health - such as poverty, housing, and education - that underpin many of Fife's health inequalities.











Focus

- Preventing and managing chronic conditions
- Reducing emergency admissions

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
Adults with a limiting long-term illness	Not available		41%			36%
Emergency patient hospitalisations	Not available		7975			7242.5
Emergency admissions, aged 65+ years	30662.5	19812.6	25019.2			23998.6
Multiple emergency hospital admissions, aged >65 years	Not available		5006.2			4807.2

Overarching long-term indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland	
Deaths, under 75 years	709.5	240.6	440.2			447.7	
Life expectancy in years	Females	76.9	85.1	81.1			80.8
	Males	71.5	82.4	76.7			76.8
Healthy life expectancy in years	Females	49.6	71.3	58.7			60.0
	Males	47.7	70.8	58.7			59.6

7. Tackling discrimination and exclusion

Why this matters

- Pre-existing health inequalities, including those related to ethnicity, were exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19.



Fife overview

- In 2023, 11% of adults in Fife reported that they experienced discrimination and 8% reported that they experienced harassment in the last 12 months. Both of these are more common in Fife than in Scotland (7% discrimination, 5% harassment).
- 15% of disabled adults reported that they experienced discrimination, and 10% reported experiencing harassment, again higher than Scotland.
- Across Scotland some equality groups were more likely than others to report discrimination or harassment, such as: ethnic minorities (17% discrimination, 16% harassment), persons with a disability (12% discrimination, 7% harassment), people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual (23% discrimination, 14% harassment), and young people aged 16 to 24 (13% discrimination, 8% harassment).
- At least 1 in every 10 people that reported discrimination, said they perceived it was due to one of the following reasons: their sex or gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, accent, mental ill-health, and other health problems or disability.
- At least 1 in every 10 people that reported harassment, said they perceived it was due to one of the following reasons: their sex or gender, ethnicity, nationality, mental ill-health, and other health problems or disability.
- Fife's overall gender pay gap is lower than that for Scotland as whole.

Focus

- Tackling discrimination

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
Adults experiencing discrimination in past year	15.0%	4.0%	10.5%			6.9%

8. Pursuing environmental sustainability and health equity together

Why this matters

- Clean air, adequate water, a stable climate and access to green spaces are all prerequisites for good health. Climate change is likely to damage mental and physical health in a number of ways, and the burden is likely to fall on the most deprived.
- Efforts to mitigate climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions can have co-benefits for health and health equity. Equity needs to be taken into account when planning and implementing green policies, to ensure that it is not the worst off who also bear the costs of remedying the problem.







Fife overview

- 75% of adults in Fife believe climate change is an immediate and urgent problem (SHS).
- The total number of people employed in the sectors that will make a significant contribution to Net Zero in Scotland was estimated to be 679,200 in 2024.
- The Fife region was estimated to account for 6% of Scotland's total (or 42,000 people).
- Of the sectors of most importance to the transition, Construction (31%) and Manufacturing (with Engineering) (31%) were the largest employing sectors in the region.
- Out of the 11,100 job postings in Fife between January and June 2024, over a third of them, 4,200, were for green jobs (37.8%). This was a lower proportion of green job postings than the Scottish average (42.3%).
- Fife was one of only 3 local authorities in the UK to see an increase in greenhouse gas emissions 2019-2020.
- CO₂ emissions per capita increased slightly 2019-2020 due to an increase in emission.
- Fife has higher rates of people living within 500 metres of a derelict site.

Focus

- Reducing carbon emissions
- Ensuring a just transition
- Community resilience to climate change

Indicators

	Most deprived	Least deprived	Fife	Fife Trend	How Fife compares	Scotland
CO ₂ emissions area wide per capita	Not applicable		7.76			4.59
CO ₂ emissions area wide: emissions within scope of LA per capita	Not applicable		4.56			4.04
CO ₂ emissions from transport per 1,000 population	Not applicable		32.67			28.67

About this report

Fife Council Research and Insight Team works on prioritised projects to deliver strategic insight for the Council and community planning partners in Fife.

We aim to deliver engaging high-quality general insight for those involved in delivering public services across Fife.

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Important Notes on this Report

1. This report is intended as a prompt piece to inform leadership discussions about the development of a new plan for Fife from 2027.
2. The Marmot principles, developed by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, provide a framework for reducing health inequalities through action on the social determinants of health.
3. Across the UK, the Marmot principles are being embedded into the core functions of councils and their partners in more than 40 places
4. For each of the Marmot principles, we consider: why this matters, what the current picture is for Fife, what the gaps would suggest the short / long term focus should be, and what indicators we might want to track.
5. The indicators in this report are drawn from the [Population Health dashboard](#) which has been developed to support the ambitions of Scotland's Population Health Framework, and the Collaboration for Health Equity in Scotland by providing access to the latest data on population health outcomes and inequalities.
6. The indicators are structured around the "Marmot Eight" principles as laid out in the Institute of Health Equity's work on [Marmot Places](#) .